




## Census 2020: Concerns about Tribal Enrollment Question

The Census is a powerful information source that significantly influences US policy. It is the foundation of American democracy, determining the **allocation of Congressional seats** and **redistricting** of voting geographies. Nearly **\$1 billion** in annual federal resources are allocated to Indian Country based on Census data. It also serves as a foundation for governmental policymaking, as well as public policy research and program evaluation. NCAI encourages tribal nations to consider providing comments on whether the 2020 Census should include a separate question on tribal enrollment. The issue is also the subject of a pending NCAI Resolution (see below).

**Census 2020 Planning:** In 2010, American Indians and Alaska Natives living on reservations were undercounted by 4.9 percent according to the Census Bureau (see [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb12-95.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-95.html)). While the next Census is almost four years from now, the Census Bureau is making decisions now and over the next two years that could affect the official federal count of the American Indian and Alaska Native population. The Census Bureau has held numerous tribal consultation sessions on improving the count in Indian Country ([http://www.census.gov/aian/census\\_2020/](http://www.census.gov/aian/census_2020/)).

**Census Testing of a Tribal Enrollment Question:** The US Census Bureau has decided to test a question on tribal enrollment for possible use in the 2020 Census to determine a format so that the question is well-understood. Cognitive interviews are scheduled for Fairbanks, AK, Rapid City, SD, Detroit, MI, Phoenix, AZ, Kansas City, KS, and Window Rock, AZ. The proposed tribal enrollment question would be a separate question on whether a person is enrolled or not, which is different from previous decennial census questionnaires that ask each person who identifies their race as American Indian or Alaska Native to write in the name of her or his "enrolled or principal tribe." These are the three versions of the tribal enrollment question that will be tested:

### Revised Enrollment Questions for Cognitive Testing

| A  | B  | C   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1. On April 1, 2016, was Person 1 enrolled in any American Indian tribe or Alaska Native tribe, village, or corporation?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, not enrolled</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, enrolled → Print enrolled tribe(s), village(s), or corporation(s) below. ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>                 | <p>1. On April 1, 2016, was Person 1 enrolled in any American Indian tribe or any Alaska Native council, association, or community?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, not enrolled</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, enrolled → Print enrolled tribe(s), council(s), association(s), or community(ies) below. ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>2. On April 1, 2016, was Person 1 a shareholder of any Alaska Native regional or village corporation?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, not a shareholder</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a shareholder → Print Alaska Native regional or village corporation(s) below. ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> | <p>1. On April 1, 2016 was Person 1 enrolled in any American Indian tribe or Alaska Native tribe or village?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, not enrolled → Skip to question 3</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, enrolled</p> <p>2. What is the name of the American Indian tribe or Alaska Native tribe or village Person 1 was enrolled in on April 1, 2016? Print enrolled tribe(s) or village(s) below. ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>3. On April 1, 2016, was Person 1 a shareholder of an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Corporation?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, not a shareholder</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a shareholder → Print Alaska Native Corporation(s) below. ↓</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;">  <div> <p>U.S. Department of Commerce<br/>Economics and Statistics Administration<br/>U.S. CENSUS BUREAU<br/>census.gov</p> </div> <div>19</div> </div> |  |   |

Source: <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2016-05/2016-terry.pdf> 2020 Census Cognitive Interview Research on the Enrollment Question for American Indians and Alaska Natives, Response to Feedback from National Advisory Committee Members and Tribe Stakeholders, Rodney L. Terry, Center for Survey Measurement, US Census Bureau NAC Spring Meeting May 26, 2016.

**Concerns about including a Tribal Enrollment question on Census 2020:** NCAI's tribal data partners have identified **some potential issues** related to the inclusion of this question.

- The tribal enrollment questions being tested rely on a person's self-identification and do not require proof of tribal enrollment, which could lead to the collection and reporting of tribal enrollment statistics that are in conflict with tribal enrollment records.
- The determination of who is an enrolled tribal member, a tribal citizen of that tribe, is an attribute of the sovereignty possessed solely by that tribal nation and is not a matter of self-identification.
- The considerable variations in enrollment policies from tribe to tribe will seriously diminish the ability of non-tribal governments, organizations and the general public to appropriately interpret any data on tribal enrollment issued by the Census Bureau.
- It is unclear how the data collected by the Census Bureau on tribal enrollment will be used, and specifically whether it will affect the distribution of federal funding through the Native American Housing Block Grant and other funding formulas that use Census data as a part of determining need.

Eleven focus group sessions have been held with Native people. The issue has also been discussed during the tribal consultations. Opinion on the question's inclusion in the 2020 Census has been mixed. The **National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations** has voted to not support the testing of the tribal enrollment question until tribal leaders and stakeholders weigh in more on the topic.

**NCAI Resolution:** A resolution has been submitted for consideration at the NCAI Mid-Year Session, SPO-16-043, titled "**Opposing the Use of a Question on Tribal Enrollment in the 2020 Census or in the American Community Survey.**" If you as a tribal leader have input on the inclusion of this question on the 2020 Census or would like more information, the resolution will be considered during the Litigation and Governance Committee and the Jurisdiction and Tribal Government Subcommittees. To submit more detailed comments on the issue to the Census Bureau, contact Dee A. Alexander, Intergovernmental Tribal Affairs Specialist, at [dee.a.alexander@census.gov](mailto:dee.a.alexander@census.gov).

**Work of NCAI:** To address the longstanding data gaps that inhibit tribal policy-making, NCAI formed the Policy Research Center (PRC). The leadership of NCAI recognized that healthy Native communities can only be built on a foundation of reliable and accurate data. Our mission to – *Provide tribal leaders with the best available knowledge to make strategically proactive policy decisions in a framework of Native wisdom that positively impact the future of Native peoples* – requires that data is available to support tribal leaders in making and advocating for policy that best meets the needs of their communities – at the federal, tribal, and state level. In addition to protecting our sovereign rights under treaties and agreements with the United States, NCAI works to make sure the treaty and trust obligations are met by the US government, which includes accurate data on Native people for fair distribution of resources. The NCAI Policy Research Center was designated a Census Information Center in 2006. As such, we assist in disseminating Census information and data products to use for research, planning, and decision-making purposes. As an official source of demographic, economic, and social statistics, NCAI is available to provide training and technical assistance to interested data users. Contact Amber Ebarb at NCAI at [aebarb@ncai.org](mailto:aebarb@ncai.org) for more information.