



U. S. Census Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I care about the Census?

The U.S. Census creates an essential portrait of our nation, every ten years. This data is used to determine the appropriate number of seats in the House of Representatives. It provides key population numbers for Congress and the Administration to determine how federal dollars flow to the states and the data is used by researchers, advocates and policy makers to develop reports, social service programs, and make critical policy decisions. Accordingly, the Census has a big impact on the political power and economic security of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

Since 1990, when the Census added the “unmarried partner” designation on its form, people in same-sex relationships have provided the first visible record of our partnerships in the history of our nation. This data has been very important in countering misconceptions about the LGBT community. For instance, the 2000 Census showed that same-sex couples live in nearly every county in the nation, and that Black and Latino same-sex couples are raising children at nearly the rates of their heterosexual peers, while earning lower incomes.

Is there a sexual orientation or gender identity question on the 2010 Census?

No. Two Reasons:

- (1) Questions on the Census take years to advocate for, and must be funded by the passage of legislation through Congress. We are just emerging from the anti-LGBT years of the Bush administration, when this was impossible.
- (2) There are only 5 questions on the 2010 Census. They are big, general questions that give over-arching demographic information about every single household in the U.S. They pertain to:
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Relationship
 - Tenure (rent/own your home)

While we cannot as individual LGBT people make our sexual orientation or gender identity visible on the Census form, those of us who are partnered can check the “unmarried partner” box, and those couples that have legally married can check the “husband or wife” box.

How will LGBT same-sex unmarried partners and married couples be counted by the Census?

Presently, the Census Bureau is operating under the previous administration’s interpretation of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DoMA), which does not recognize same-sex marriages for federal purposes. Accordingly, if you are an unmarried same-sex partner, the Census will record this as it has since 1990. If you have legally married your same-sex spouse in any state, and check the “husband or wife” option, the Census will erase and recode your response, reporting you as an “unmarried partner.” Additionally, this will result in any children of married same-sex partners being recorded as children of a single parent.

The Task Force is currently working with the Obama Administration to interpret DoMA more broadly. Our position is that there is no mandate in DoMA that prevents the Census from accurately recording our legal, appropriate responses to the question regarding our relationships. We expect the Census, under President Obama, to accurately record and report same-sex married couples. Look to the Task Force website for updated information on this advocacy campaign.

A note for bi-racial couples: It is not widely known that the race of the household member who fills out the Census form determines the racial designation of a family in one of the Census’ major statistical tables. Given that people of color are often undercounted by the Census, couples or families may want to consider having a person of color identify as household member #1 when filling out the form for a family.

How do I know that the government won’t use this information to target me or my family for discrimination?

The Census must ensure absolute confidentiality of these records in order to carry out its monumental task every ten years. There is no record of any LGBT individual or family being persecuted for checking the “unmarried partner” box.

If I am transgender, do I check the sex I was assigned at birth or my gender identity/expression? What if neither of these options fit my identity?

The Census asks each of us to tell the truth as we understand it. Check the box on the Census form that most closely reflects your current gender expression. The Census only provides male and female options to check, so you must choose one of these boxes.

If I am transgender, how do I record my relationship?

If you are married and consider your spouse to be your “husband or wife”, check that option. If you are in a relationship with an “unmarried partner,” check that one.

What is being done to get sexual orientation/gender identity questions on the Census or on other important federal survey instruments?

The Task Force is leading an effort among a coalition of strong advocacy partners to count LGBT people and our families in major federal data collection efforts.

Survey targets include: the longer, annual Census form, called the American Community Survey (ACS), which is mailed to 3 million homes every year and provides a much more detailed picture of a significant sample of the U.S. population; the National Health Interview Survey, a phone interview that is conducted with nearly 30,000 households annually and provides an essential snapshot of the nation's health profile and challenges.

It is important to note that while these changes will take Congressional action, our advocacy efforts are in place to push for significant advances in this critical arena. In years to come, information that is routinely available to other communities at risk for discrimination – such as data on health disparities, income, home ownership, and our family configurations – will support our struggle to secure legal and economic security for LGBT people.

When Will Census 2010 Begin?

The Census Bureau will begin mailing Census forms in March 2010 and the collection period will continue for several months.

Can Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People work for the Census Bureau?

Conducting the Census is a very large undertaking that requires huge numbers of temporary workers all over the country. For more information about working for the census, go to <http://2010.census.gov/2010censusjobs/index.php>

Resources

For additional information: www.census.gov