

LGBTQ CENSUS ADVOCACY, 1990-2017

1990 Census:

- In 1990, the Census Bureau added an “unmarried partner” category to the “relationship to householder” question in order to capture the increasing number of couples who were living together without getting married. This created “[a visible record](#) of same-sex couples for the first time in U.S. history.”
- In 1990, the National LGBTQ Task Force [launched a campaign](#) urging people in same-sex couples to check the “unmarried partner” box on the 1990 Census. The campaign was also intended “to increase public awareness of the question and pressure the Census Bureau to be more sensitive to gay and lesbian concerns.”
- Unfortunately, in data files available to the public, the Bureau recoded the gender of couples that indicated they were in same-sex couples. Basically, the Bureau treated these entries as if they were in error – recoding the gender of one partner so that the couple showed up in data files as a different-sex couple. At the time, the Bureau defended this action as necessary because they couldn’t quantify the number of these entries that were actually erroneous entries, despite being aware of the public education campaign.

2000 Census:

- In 2000, the Census once again had an “unmarried partner” category as part of its “relationship to householder question.” The National LGBTQ Task Force and other organizations pressed the Bureau to stop recoding the gender of same-sex partners in public use data. The Bureau agreed. However, they did recode same-sex couples that checked “married partner” to “unmarried partner.” Once again, the Bureau argued that they couldn’t be sure how many of the entries were actually erroneous entries. Still, same-sex couples were finally visible in the Census!
- The Task Force published “[The 2000 Census and Same-Sex Households: A User’s Guide](#),” which helped advocates understand the data collected through the Census and to use it in their advocacy. The Task Force and the National Black Justice Coalition also partnered to publish “[Black Same-Sex Households in the U.S.](#)” using these data.

2010 Census:

- In 2009, the LGBTQ advocates met with Census Bureau staff to discuss a “get out the count” effort for the LGBTQ community. Advocates and the Bureau committed to work together, and soon after a number of organizations launched the “[Our Families Count](#)” campaign.
- As a part of this effort, the National LGBTQ Task Force launched its “[Queer the Census](#)” campaign, which aimed to educate the public about the continuing lack of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) questions on the Census. Hundreds of thousands of people engaged with the campaign, writing op-eds, speaking out on the growing Facebook platform, and attaching “Queer the Census” stickers to their Census forms.

- After the Census was conducted, advocates kept up the pressure by sending petitions to the Census Bureau and HHS asking those agencies to begin adding SOGI to federal surveys, including the Census.

2011:

- LGBTQ researcher Gary Gates of the Williams Institute was appointed to serve on the Census Bureau’s Scientific Advisory Committee, where he provided advice to the Bureau on methodological issues related to the Census and American Community Survey.

2014:

- In early 2014, advocates had the opportunity to push forward their goal of including SOGI questions on the American Community Survey – the ongoing portion of the Census – when the Bureau began engaging in a content review for the survey. The National LGBTQ Task Force organized a sign-on letter urging the Bureau to include sexual orientation and gender identity questions on the survey, and presented the comments at a public meeting of the Bureau’s National Advisory Committee, which prompted the committee [to recommend inclusion of sexual orientation questions](#) in the ACS to the Bureau.
- In September 2014, Federal agencies collaborated to publish “[Improved Measurement of Household Relationships in Federal Surveys](#),” which outlined best practices in measuring same-sex households.
- Later that year, National LGBTQ Task Force staffer Meghan Maury and Stuart Michaels, a research scientist at NORC who focuses on LGBTQ data collection, were selected to be part of the Census Bureau’s [National Advisory Committee](#) on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations. In that capacity, Maury and Michaels have ensured that LGBTQ issues are consistently included in recommendations to the Bureau on conducting a successful Census.

2015:

- Maury and Michaels participated in a working group as part of the NAC addressing the needs of Hard to Count populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income people, people experiencing homelessness, and LGBTQ people. That working group provided a number of recommendations to the Bureau, including how to better count the LGBTQ population.
- In conversations with the Bureau, the National LGBTQ Task Force learned that - pursuant to the controlling statute (13 U.S.C. §141(f)(1)) - the Bureau would be presenting a report to Congress in 2017 laying out the topics to be included in the 2020 Census and the American Community Survey.
- As part of these conversations, the Bureau explained that the content of the report to Congress is primarily dictated by the needs of federal agencies. Ensuring that federal agencies understood the programmatic need for SOGI data and articulated that need clearly to the Census Bureau would be critical to getting SOGI included in the report to Congress.

2016:

- Throughout the year, the National LGBTQ Task Force worked with the Center for American Progress to ensure that federal agencies understood the programmatic need for SOGI data and included SOGI data collections in their consultations with the Census Bureau. Several agencies

did so, including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

- Though the Census Bureau did not publicly commit in 2016 to adding SOGI to the report, we understand that requests by federal agencies are a central part of the decision-making process.
- National LGBTQ Task Force staffer Meghan Maury was tapped to lead the National Advisory Committee's working group on Partnerships and Communications, which provides regular feedback to the Bureau on its communications and partnerships strategy.

2017:

- In late March, the Census Bureau presented their report on "Subjects Planned for the 2020 Census and American Community Survey" to Congress. Tucked in an appendix was a reference to "proposed" sexual orientation and gender identity questions. However, the body of the report did not reference inclusion of these questions or mention that the questions had been considered for inclusion. The Bureau released a statement explaining that the topics had been included "in error."
- The Bureau immediately issued a revised version of the report, which omitted sexual orientation and gender identity from the appendix.
- The National LGBTQ Task Force, Center for American Progress, the Williams Institute, and others used the initial report and its revision to draw attention to the decision made by the Bureau.
- CRITIQUE: Unfortunately, some media outlets issued stories calling this "fake news," saying that because the questions weren't included in the 2010 Census or previous versions of the ACS, they couldn't be "erased" from the 2020 Census or ACS. Still, public mobilization around the Census was strong and thousands were educated about the lack of SOGI data collection in federal surveys.

What happens next?

- Congressional oversight hearings: In addition to the CJS Appropriations oversight hearing on May 3, 2017, we are hopeful that future Census Bureau oversight hearings will provide an opportunity for members of Congress to question the Census Bureau on how this decision was made and whether there is, in fact, a legal or programmatic need for these data.
- Continued advocacy to include SOGI questions in the ACS/Census:
 - Congress could pass legislation mandating inclusion of SOGI questions on the ACS. Given the current makeup of Congress, getting legislation passed that includes this mandate could be a difficult strategy to pursue.
 - In many legal contexts, the term "sex" has been interpreted to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Similarly, existing Census topics could be interpreted to include SOGI. If this is the case, the Census Bureau could still move forward with proposing SOGI questions for the ACS when it presents its questions to Congress in 2018.
- A revitalization of LGBTQ "get out the count" efforts in anticipation of the 2020 Census, building on public sentiment that LGBTQ people want to be counted!

For more information on this topic, please contact:

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