

Executive Director's Report May 2019

Census 2020 Update

The American Library Association (ALA) and the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality recently released a new publication, [*Libraries' Guide to the 2020 Census*](#), that provides a clear and thorough informational overview of anticipated challenges faced by public libraries when working with their community partners to support the 2020 Census.

As a quick reminder, the 2020 Census survey will be administered primarily online with an option for individuals to complete the survey via telephone or paper. While movement to an online survey option does allow for cost effectiveness and a quicker method to track the overall return rate of the surveys within local communities, the online option will present challenges to residents without digital connectivity and those with limited digital literacy skills. These digital challenges, left unaddressed, could result in some communities being undercounted.

Unfortunately, greater economic and political disadvantages are experienced by communities that are undercounted during the decennial census and often directly affect these residents as well as the organizations (such as public libraries) that serve them. One of the core groups undercounted in the 2010 Census were young children (ages 0-5). This is especially true of young Black and Hispanic children who were undercounted at roughly twice the rate as young, non-Hispanic White children. Some of this undercounting occurred because many families were also unaware that children should have been included when the 2010 Census was completed. As noted in the *Libraries' Guide to the 2020 Census*: "Many programs whose funding is based in whole or in part on census counts directly impact young children's lives, including Head Start, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)." (p. 7) WLS and the member public libraries are trusted resources in communities throughout Westchester County and can play an active role in increasing awareness that all children in a household should be counted when completing the 2020 Census survey.

So what activities should WLS and public libraries plan to do now to prepare for the 2020 Census? One of the first steps is to better educate library staff members and trustees about the Census—its history, its purpose and the anticipated benefits of a successful count. Second is to complete a community needs assessment around the 2020 Census activities to predict how much additional Internet access and digital literacy support will be needed at each library. I will be working with the member libraries through the Public Libraries Directors Association (PLDA) to implement these information gathering and sharing activities over the summer.

One important question related to the 2020 Census concerns the potential inclusion of a citizenship question. There is concern that the addition of a citizenship question will further discourage many families and individuals who are in a hard-to-count group from completing the

census survey. This would likely result in a higher number of undercounted communities within Westchester County in the 2020 Census. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule on whether or not the citizenship question will be included in the 2020 Census by the end of June 2019. WLS and the public libraries will need to be prepared to address questions and concerns about the citizenship question should it be included.

The Westchester County Complete Count Committee has been holding monthly meetings and is currently exploring the question of what data is currently available and what data is needed to help the Committee ensure that every resident of Westchester County is counted in the 2020 Census. Future meetings will continue to address data availability and will begin to explore marketing and awareness strategies and key community stakeholder partnerships.

In early May I was invited to speak at the Troy (NY) Public Library by the Friends of the Troy Public Library and the League of Women's Voters of Rensselaer County about the WLS and Westchester County planning efforts to support the 2020 Census. Sharing the work that we have achieved to date with this group provided an opportunity for these three groups to more clearly identify and take ownership of the support roles that each would play within the City of Troy and Rensselaer County to ensure a more successful 2020 Census count in their communities.

Dialogue on Public Libraries

The Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries released a new report, *The Grand Opportunity: Creating Community, Equality and Innovation with Houston Public Libraries*. This report reflects on issues that were encountered across the City of Houston and throughout the Houston Public Library's (HPL) citywide system in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey's devastation and floods in 2017. The issues raised highlight the changing roles of public libraries in response to educational, economic, social and technological changes in society.

By identifying models of library innovation and strategic partnerships that are working well in Houston, the report has recommendations for how to strengthen existing HPL initiatives and proposals for advancing the development of new partnerships that tap the expertise of public libraries and their networks. The building blocks of community resilience, equity and opportunity were identified as core elements needed to support HPL's activities in family literacy, workforce development and civic engagement—and these would serve as building blocks for WLS and the member libraries as well. In the past several years, WLS's leadership in and participation with the member libraries and other strategic partners has grown stronger and has laid a good foundation in the family literacy, workforce development and civic engagement arenas.

The dialogue-based approach used to engage the participants follows the Harwood Institute's model of focusing on community aspirations to create the overall vision, identify opportunities and engage key stakeholders. Ideal for member libraries working on their long-range/strategic plans, this model looks at how the library can inspire and foster engagement both inside and outside the library's walls rather than the traditional public library's "come to me" approach to providing access to materials and services. Rich Harwood, the founder of the Harwood Institute, will be the guest speaker at the WLS Annual Meeting to be held in November 2019.

WLS Trustee Institutes

A total of 15 people attended the WLS Trustee Institute on Monday, May 20th, with Alex Cohen, Project Leader & Library Consultant of Aaron Cohen Associates (ACA), who discussed *Renovation Strategies: Design & Planning*. Alex began the discussion for the evening by asking about the critical issues that the 11 libraries represented were dealing with. The answers sparked conversation about a number of topics:

- Methodologies to assess existing conditions vs. future needs;
- Assessing the function of the space in light of library service priorities;
- Incorporating renovation projects into the library's Plan of Service;
- Understanding the 5 Modes of Learning: Reflective, Collaborative, Presentation, Social and Touchpoint

More information about the presentation will be posted shortly on the WLS website and shared via email.

Guest Speaker Robert J. Freeman, Executive Director of New York State Committee on Open Government, will be with us for the WLS Trustee Institute on Wednesday, June 12th, at the Hendrick Hudson Free Library in Montrose. Mr. Freeman has worked for the Committee on Open Government since its creation in 1974 and is New York's foremost expert on Open Meetings Law. He has created [a series of videos](#) and has taught the only course in an American law school on public access to government information. Come and have your questions answered. Invitations will go out next week and registration is available now through the [WLS events calendar](#).

Future Events

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| June 12 | WLS Trustee Institute – Hendrick Hudson Free Library (Montrose) – 6-8 PM
<i>Guest Speaker: Robert J. Freeman, Executive Director, New York State Committee on Open Government</i> |
| June 20-25 | American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference – Washington, DC |
| November 21 | WLS 60 th Annual Meeting – Place to be Determined – 8:30-10:30 AM
<i>Guest Speaker: Rich Harwood, President & Founder of The Harwood Institute</i> |

Respectfully submitted,



Terry L. Kirchner
Executive Director