



**MAKE NC
COUNT**
CENSUS 2020

Let's Talk 2020 Census: Counting Coastal NC

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THE 2020 CENSUS EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA AND ITS COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Operational adjustments resulting from COVID-19 limitations have heightened concerns in North Carolina regarding impacts on the state's 2020 Census count. The reasons for these concerns are fairly obvious – apprehension about the pandemic, interruption of programmatic follow-ups, and the public's cautious reception to interactions with others, that is to say no public events and limited in-person contacts. True for all communities, the 2020 Census management has taken steps to ensure that census enumerators will be wearing personal protective equipment to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Importantly, the operational delays provide additional time for households to self-respond to the 2020 Census. Although not expressed as often, these operational adjustments bring some distinct opportunities. For the most part, Eastern North Carolina can be seen through the lens of two communities – rural and coastal. The characteristics of these two communities are distinct and the challenges and opportunities for both are discussed briefly below. Let's revisit the numbers and why they matter.

With a 2019 population estimate of approximately 10.5 million people, North Carolina is the ninth most populous state in the country. Among its 100 counties, North Carolina has 80 rural counties, 14 regional cities or suburban counties, and 6 urban counties. North Carolina ranks second in the nation with respect to the most small towns (populations of less than 10,000).

#RuralCounts

THE NC COUNTS COALITION
and partners have identified

15 COUNTIES
with the highest risk of a
**CENSUS UNDERCOUNT –
most are rural.**

■ Rural Counties
■ Urban Counties
■ Highest Risk Counties

NC RURAL CENTER

Current demographic projections suggest that of the 15 counties with the highest rate of census undercount, most are rural. Further, of the 15 hard-to-count counties, five are in Eastern North Carolina. See map¹.

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Eastern North Carolina

Most rural area leaders understand that the 2020 Census is important for building and supporting many aspects of rural life, including the need to re-assert political representation and funding for vital needs like schools, roads, medical care, and infrastructure projects. In a number of rural communities, obtaining an accurate and complete count remains a challenge because of the distance between farms and homes; a culture related to geographic distancing; lack of high speed broadband in some communities; and a significant migrant farm-worker population. Notwithstanding these challenges, Eastern North Carolina is in a position to benefit from certain 2020 Census operational adjustments, not the least of which is time -- the time to implement additional outreach strategies.

The Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) operation is scheduled to begin August 11 and will continue through September 30th. If used effectively, NRFU provides more opportunities to identify and reach a greater number of households, particularly in hard-to-count communities. Specifically, more time will also provide greater opportunities to understand the communities to be counted, to develop 2020 Census partnerships, and to “get the word out.” The NC Rural Center’s “Get Out the Count” initiative is organized to do just that. There have been success stories in some rural communities by tying into the infrastructure of local rural communities, such as water and sewer billings; tax billings; rural health care provider services; food based services; rural resident events; and partnerships with faith-based communities.

Coastal Communities

Eastern North Carolina’s coastal communities bear some marked differences from the rest of Eastern North Carolina. There are 10 counties that border, in some part, the Atlantic Ocean². The total population of these coastal counties is 772,332, with an average population of 77,233 people per county³. Combined, these coastal communities represent approximately 7% of North Carolina’s total population⁴.

Chief among the differences is the residential housing base. Because coastal communities attract a significantly larger population of vacationers and visitors, occupancy patterns are a major component of this demographic. Translated to “census talk”, there are considerably more houses in any given neighborhood that are not occupied by permanent residents. Thus, counties with higher vacant households (vacant homes/seasonal rentals), like Dare and Hyde, will generally have lower reported

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self-response rates. True to form, Dare County has the highest percentage of vacant households in the region at 57%. From estimated vacant household data, available from the US Census Bureau, we can re-calculate the estimated self-response rate for each county. The re-calculated self-response rates present a more realistic picture of how well census collection efforts are progressing in these communities. The table below gives the housing stock breakdown per county in Eastern North Carolina's coastal communities⁵.

Percentage of Vacant Homes in Coastal Counties

County	Occupied	Vacant	Total	Vacant %
Beaufort	21,000	5,258	26,258	20%
Brunswick	56,752	35,532	92,289	39%
Carteret	28,720	21,999	50,719	43%
Currituck	9,894	4,888	14,782	33%
Dare	15,063	19,949	35,012	57%
Hyde	1,769	1,480	3,249	46%
New Hanover	98,151	15,080	113,231	13%
Onslow	66,834	13,425	80,259	17%
Pamlico	5,352	2,369	7,721	42%
Pender	22,735	6,894	29,629	23%

There are also significant differences in the employment base in coastal communities, both for seasonal and long-term employment. Seasonal employment is primarily found in segments of the economy that cater to visitors and the vacation population such as restaurants, hospitality, recreation and the like. Long term employment is concentrated in the fishing, boat building, real estate enterprises, homebuilding, landscaping, and other service industries. Since the employee base in some of these industries is reliant on populations from hard-to-count communities, strategies to reach some of these populations might include reaching out to industry associations to connect with employers, both major and not-so-large. Employers can then serve as the “trusted voice” to reach hard-to-count communities. Ideally, employers will talk with their employees, encouraging them to participate in the 2020 Census. They can provide their employees with literature that informs them about the 2020 Census and encourage them to participate. Importantly, employers become the trusted voice in communicating that the 2020 Census is important, it is safe, and it only takes a few minutes to complete.

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With respect to where one is counted, a person should be counted at his/her “usual residence.” Usual residence is defined as where a person lives or sleeps most of the time. And if a person cannot determine where he or she lives most of the time, the person should be counted where he or she was on Census Day, April 1, 2020.

In Summary

The delays and resulting adjustments in the 2020 Census operations can benefit census count efforts throughout North Carolina, and particularly in Eastern North Carolina. In reviewing the status of the operational components of the enumeration, we can assess where a specific community stands with respect to its goals and targets. Using time to our advantage, we can develop strategies to increase the count where needed. Chief among these strategies is using employers as a trusted voice for the 2020 Census. It is then particularly important to use trusted voices to reach hard-to-count communities.

¹ 2020 Census Briefings: Ensuring Rural Counts, February 2, 2020, NC Rural Center.

² Beaufort County, Brunswick County, Carteret County, Currituck County, Dare County, Hyde County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Pamlico County, and Pender County.

³ Based on 2018 American Community Survey estimate.

⁴ Mixed years of population estimates.

⁵ Based on 2018 American Community Survey estimate.

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