



**LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20191118-5a:  
Support for Austin Public Library's Assistance with the Decennial Census**

Date: November 18, 2019

Subject: Support for Austin Public Library's Assistance with the Decennial Census

Motioned By: Commission Member Smyer    Seconded By: Commission Member Williams

**Recommendation**

*Support for Austin Public Library's Assistance with the Decennial Census*

**Description of Recommendation to Council**

*Requesting that Austin City Council commend and support the Austin Public Library's efforts to assist the Austin-Travis County Complete Count Committee's efforts to ensure a complete census count in 2020.*

**Rationale:**

As a vital public space and community hub, the Austin Public Library supports and advances the City's Strategic Direction, including the following goals and metrics:

- Enhance communication and collaboration between City Council, City staff, and community members to enhance transparency, trust, and shared decision making. Ensure collaboration is strengthened by accessible, timely, and accurate information sharing. (GTW#5)
- Engage community members on the matters that impact them in ways that are timely, convenient, meaningful, and honor their communication preferences; and equip employees to better engage vulnerable and historically marginalized communities. (GTW#6)
- Create a new integrated approach to managing community members' multiple relationships with different City departments to strengthen feedback loops, build trust, and improve satisfaction. (GTW#8)
- Percentage of eligible residents who are registered to vote and who participate in City elections (disaggregated by race and geography). (GTW.E.1)
- Percentage of residents who express high levels of satisfaction with the outcomes of their engagement with the City. (GTW.E.2)
- Percentage of residents who believe Austin values dialogue between residents and government. (GTW.E.3)
- Number of [stakeholder] engagement/outreach activities by department, Council district, time and type of activity. (GTW.E.4)

These goals may be grouped under the broad definition of “civic engagement,” which centers the values of inclusion and equity in the co-creation of public understanding and public policy.

Civic engagement is a rising area of interest among many library systems, funders and national associations (e.g. American Library Association, Public Library Association, Urban Libraries Council). The high degree of public trust, strategically located infrastructure and regular access to a diverse cross-section of the public enjoyed by libraries makes them strong partners in this work.

Civic engagement is especially relevant in the context of the decennial census. The census is a massive effort to count every person residing in our nation on April 1st, 2020. The results will be used to allocate political representation, as well as billions of dollars in public and private resources over the following decade.

The City of Austin is a major partner in our local Census Complete Count Committee, which aims to ensure an accurate count by offering outreach and assistance to traditionally undercounted communities, including Austinites with low-incomes, immigrants, LEP families and others, many of whom are library patrons or reside near library branches.

Recognizing this opportunity, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and American Library Association has also formally requested the assistance of their members in carrying out the census.

In response, Austin Public Library has formed an internal staff committee to assist the Complete Count Committee. Plans being discussed include Census promotion / educational messaging in existing communications channels and events; allocation of staff time to provide mobile census outreach and access; and reservation of computer stations in some branches for patrons to complete the census online. Library branches in traditionally undercounted communities may engage in these activities or others in order to act as local hubs for census promotion and access.

The Austin Library Commission recently published a preliminary report and formed a working group to assist and support the Library’s efforts in this space. We are interested not only in the immediate opportunity that the census provides to build inclusion and equity in our city, but also the creation of durable communication channels, capacity and competencies that may be useful for future civic engagement efforts.

We believe we are a city that recognizes and supports these goals, and so request that the Austin City Council commend and strongly support the Library’s efforts to assist The Austin-Travis County Complete Count Committee in achieving a complete census count in 2020.

**Vote**

For: Chair Hanna, Vice Chair Finney, and Commission Members Dabbert, Dwyer, Pardo-Kaplan, Ramos, Self, Smyer, and Williams.

Against:

Abstain:

Absent: Commission Member Aguilar

Attest:

*Sharon Herfurth*

---