

## CENSUS

# Showing Communities They Count

Florida A&M University applies data for cities' benefit

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In 1790, the U.S. census was primarily responsible for the headcount of residents around measures of race, age and sex. Today, the **U.S. Census Bureau** compiles a series of complex reports. The data gathered by the Census Bureau is instrumental in determining political representation and how more than \$400 billion is distributed among thousands of local communities in the United States.

With the 2020 decennial census collection concluded, policymakers at the state and local government levels will use data for critical tasks. At the state level, for example, officials seek data to guide them in their redistricting efforts. Similarly, local government officials hope to understand better how shifts in population and demographics in their communities impact the need for services and allocation of resources.

For these policymakers and the citizens they represent, the ability to access, understand and use census data is of great importance. Nowhere is this more true, perhaps, than in the minority and historically underserved communities where this data may prove invaluable to their representatives in making their cases for more significant government and business investment. Unfortunately, these are the same communities where skepticism regarding the purpose and use of census data is at its highest and response rates are lowest.

For more than two decades, the **Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Census Information Center** has worked to reduce skepticism about the census

and demonstrate its importance to communities in their efforts to improve the quality of life. Since 2000, FAMU has participated as a member of a national data dissemination network for the Census Bureau. FAMU serves as an official source for population, housing and economic data for Florida with an emphasis on **Gadsden, Franklin, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor and Wakulla counties.**

As one of only two census information centers in Florida and 52 nationally, the FAMU-CIC's mission is to "aid in the democratization of data by helping underserved and disadvantaged populations learn how to use census data; to empower themselves." It achieves this mission by exploiting technology to disseminate data, promoting the availability of census data as an analytical tool for multiple stakeholders and providing access to data for members of the FAMU community and community-based organizations, educators, students and the general public.

Housed in FAMU's Department of History, Political Science, Geography and African-American Studies within the university's College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, the FAMU-CIC provides a space to access census data. On a for-fee basis, Center staff can assist with accessing and interpreting data to meet specific client needs using data at the most granular level available. In some instances, this assistance may include data at the zip-code level.

The Center's core staff consists of **FAMU-CIC Co-Directors Abdul Sharif and Brandon Armstrong, assistant professors**

**of political science.** FAMU-CIC staff works collaboratively with interdisciplinary faculty members from schools and departments throughout the university to conduct research and participate in activities promoting census data.

The U.S. census has changed dramatically in scope and substance since 1790. More than a simple count of residents, the census has evolved into a powerful data tool for researchers, policymakers and citizens alike. As the Census Bureau prepares to release data from the 2020 decennial census over the coming months and to update this data over the next decade, the Center will continue its mission to serve its on-campus and off-campus stakeholders by packaging census data in ways that make it – and its implications – accessible and understandable.

By partnering with researchers and organizations on and off campus, Center staff hopes to empower minority and historically underserved communities by providing them with vital data for identifying and articulating localized needs. In short, the FAMU-CIC will strive to show members of these communities that when it comes to census data, all communities count.

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