

The Volunteer Approach

Introduction

This paper follows a broader paper co-authored by London Councils and GLA, and presented to the London City Charter Board. The first paper set out the importance of Census 2011 to London and how in very practical terms the GLA could complement the efforts of the London Boroughs and the Census Team at ONS, the aim being to encourage a higher response rate, especially among the hard-to-count communities of the capital. This practical approach, based around mobilising a volunteering effort and a cost-effective marketing campaign to highlight a) the importance of participation and b) where to go for help if you need it, will complement the technical work GLA will do around the 2011 Census.

The purpose of this second note is to expand on ideas presented in that first paper and to provide examples of volunteering and trusted messengers (through engaging existing community networks such as religious groups and school governors or parent associations) and broader marketing approaches (e.g. Facebook) which have been adopted elsewhere and which could be deployed here. We also note the push for greater citizen involvement at a national level and the Mayor's own emphasis on volunteering.

1) What is our Message?

Our broad campaign messages would be as follows:

- No matter who you are, it is everybody's civic duty and responsibility to participate in the 2011 census.
- It is also in everyone's interest. By taking part you help ensure fair funding from the Government for your community and the public services in your area (e.g. schools, healthcare, council services) used by you and your family. By filling in the form, you can help to improve quality of life locally.
- (Public) money is in very short supply. Having accurate information on your local population is now more important than ever in helping public services meet community need.
- Practical but important – help is at hand if you are struggling.

2) Hard to Count Groups

This exercise is not solely about improving the count in hard-to-count categories, but for reference here the Government's most recent assessment identifies the following as particularly difficult to reach:

- Renters
 - Ethnic minorities
 - Recent migrants
 - Students
 - Young adults
 - Very old
 - Single parents
 - Deprived areas
 - Unemployed
 - Non-English speakers
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3) Examples from **the US 2010 Census**

National Marketing Approaches

A number of approaches are being employed in the US to engage people in the Census. With an eye on cost-effectiveness, a number of social media routes have been used to organise broad campaign efforts:

- Facebook (to help rally friends and communities to fill in the forms).
- Youtube (latest fun and informative videos of the campaign).
- Twitter (road tour info, latest response rates).
- Flickr (showing diversity of America).

State-wide approaches

In New York, Mayor Bloomberg's website features a video from him which communicates the importance of completing Census 2010. There is also a short section explaining the benefits of completing the census form.

In California the [campaign](#)⁴ highlighted its approach: "By being informed about the Census and gaining a better understanding of the Census process, residents are more likely to respond to the census questionnaire. A state-wide effort will incorporate local knowledge, influence and resources to educate residents and promote the census through a locally-based and targeted outreach effort using "trusted messengers" in the hard-to-count communities to encourage response."

Drawing on existing Volunteers

The Census Bureau³ had an approach of partnering up with schools, in particular in areas of high under-representation, to target parents/carers and children from kindergarten through 8th grade. This was done through education of children as well as physically being present around the schools at peak times targeting parents.

Engaging Charity and Community groups

An example of an information site encouraging charities to help out in ensuring people respond can be found on the [Pennsylvania Nonprofit Law Blog](#)⁵. Here they explain how increasing the level of participation will have a positive effect on funding groups are likely to receive from federal and state government.

Similarly, an example of a way specific minority groups can be targeted can be seen here on the [Iranians Count](#)⁶ site. This site is run by a coalition of organisations representing Iranians in the US and encourages individuals to complete the form in order to give the community an enhanced voice in US politics.

¹ <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/why/index.php>

⁴ http://www.californiacompletcount.org/2010_census_explained/california_2010_census

³ <http://www.gao.gov/htext/d09525t.html>

⁵ <http://pennsylvanianonprofitlawyers.wordpress.com/2010/03/19/what-the-2010-u-s-census-could-mean-for-your-nonprofit-organization/>

⁶ <http://www.iranianscount.org/Join-Us.html>

An example of community outreach work to encourage hard-to-count communities to complete the form can be seen in this [article](#)⁷ about the state of Arizona where the Latino community has a low rate of participation. The biggest challenge mentioned is that the respondents won't trust anyone outside of their own community as one community organiser explains: "The number one issue is fear," Montoya says. "Latinos don't trust the government. They don't always understand that their information won't be shared."

Using Technology to map Progress

The Take10 map² is a feature we could utilise to possibly instil a sense of competition between areas of London. The map shows a "Mail Participation rate" which is the percent of forms posted back by households that received them. You can click on the area or your postcode to find out what the participation rate is in your area. While this is something we can easily deliver from a technical perspective, success in London is dependent on ONS releasing live data.

4) What has been done in the UK?

The Electoral Commission and the UK General Election

The Electoral Commission teamed up with Facebook ahead of the 2010 General Election to try and encourage people to register and to make it easier for them to do so. The social networking site set up a "Democracy UK" page, linking to a section of the Electoral Commission website where people can download the registration form. The Electoral Commission claims that 1.8 million people had visited the site and 375,092 downloaded forms. It said it had been particularly encouraged by the number of younger people doing so - more than 40% of those accessing forms were aged between 18 and 24, the group most likely not to register.

Of these, 13,800 were Facebook users. Everyone who logged on to his or her homepage was asked if they are on the electoral roll.

Evidence from LB Lambeth

Lambeth Council's Consultation team recently conducted four focus groups with those identified as hard-to-count (e.g. new A8 communities, black African residents, young people, shared renters) to identify barriers to participation and test some marketing messages.

Headline findings are as follows:

⁷ http://www.poder360.com/article_detail.php?id_article=4213

² <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/take10map/>

³ <http://www.gao.gov/htext/d09525t.html>

⁴ http://www.californiacompletecount.org/2010_census_explained/california_2010_census

⁵ <http://pennsylvanianonprofitlawyers.wordpress.com/2010/03/19/what-the-2010-u-s-census-could-mean-for-your-nonprofit-organization/>

⁶ <http://www.iranianscount.org/Join-U.s.html>

⁷ http://www.poder360.com/article_detail.php?id_article=4213

⁸ http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0309_census_dollars.aspx

⁹ <http://www.1824collective.co.uk/promo.htm>

- Most people stated that they probably would not send the Census form back – approx 80/20 split.

Reasons for non-response

- Lack of awareness of census. The majority of participants in the groups were unaware of the census' existence, what it was, why they were being sent it and what it was for.
- Misconceptions. Firstly, it is not compulsory. Secondly, the council/government already have the information, from tax returns/housing benefit claims etc. Why should we fill it all in again?
- Length and complexity of the form put people off, they couldn't be bothered to venture beyond the first few pages, especially when they didn't know what it was.
- Overwhelmed with forms to fill in/junk mail through the door.
- Cynicism about whether the council will actually get the money/it will translate into improving services.
- Understanding the form is a major issue if English is not your first language. Most said that they wouldn't even look beyond the form to find the translation sheet in the envelope.

Things that would encourage people to send it back

- Messages about how they personally will benefit need to be very specific to each group (e.g. improving schools for parents, improving housing for social housing tenants).
- Information about why it's important.

How could the council encourage people to fill it in

- Use schools - many (especially non English speakers) said that if their children bring something home and say it is important that they fill it in, they will.
- Lean on faith groups (e.g. pastors, catholic masses in Polish) - people trust their priest and see them as community leaders, they would fill something in if they said it was important.
- Work through tenants associations - use the active tenants on estates to encourage the more vulnerable.
- Use council buildings - get staff to prompt people when they come in for housing benefit/council tax etc, explain what census is and give them a form.

5) What we could do in London

- It would be great to have **the Mayor as a figurehead** for a Census volunteering effort (He has appeared on 'Who do you think you are' that uses census sources to trace family history).
 - Run **an online marketing campaign** deploying Facebook and Twitter and other social media to communicate the headline messages, and to encourage viral marketing.
 - Set up an **accompanying website** which monitors returned Census forms and promotes healthy competition between communities.
 - Equip and **work with the groups below to communicate key campaign messages** within their communities and to their customers. It is important to state here that we are not proposing they help fill in Census forms, but rather to **develop trusted messengers** to point people in the direction of online census form completion or towards Census surgeries which ourselves and London Councils could help to co-ordinate, drawing on the outreach efforts of the Boroughs and the ONS Census Team.
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School governors/PA representatives • Teachers (passing information through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious leaders (e.g. in mosques, churches) |
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- children)
- College tutors/heads of faculty (especially in colleges providing ESOL courses as well as other further education institutions like universities)
- Older people activity centre coordinators
- Volunteer organisation/youth club leaders
- Community healthcare workers (e.g. nurses, occupational therapists) who deal with vulnerable members of the public
- Build **support through bodies such as the London Voluntary Services Council** (who also gave evidence to the London Regional Committee Census Inquiry), Greater London Volunteering and Age UK, all of whom could market through their own networks and potentially marshal a volunteer effort. We could also seek assistance from the Private Sector.