

Everyone needs to participate in the Census. Will there be Chinese translation help?

By Han Li (World Journal), 10/22/2019

The Census will officially debut in 2020 next year. The results of the census are relevant to congress representation, redrawing of the legislative district, and future government funding. The World Journal collects questions from the public, interviews experts, and summarizes them into the “Census Q&A” column, explaining all relevant confusions in a question-and-answer format. This is the first issue of this column.

Q: I am not a US citizen. Do I need to participate in the census?

A: Everyone living in the United States should participate in the census regardless of immigration status. Citizens, green card holders, work visas, student visa holders, and even undocumented immigrants should all be counted. The census is a statistical work on the number of people in the United States every ten years. It's written in the U.S. Constitution.

Q: What will the Census questionnaire ask me?

A: The principle of the census is to count people who live at all addresses in the United States on April 1, 2020. So the questions include: how many people live on that address on April 1, 2020, their names, gender, age, ethnicity, and whether the residents are tenants or homeowners, and residents' relationships. This census will not ask if the respondent is a U.S. citizen.

Q: What are the ways to participate?

A: There are three main ways that residents can choose to participate in the census: online, reply to the mail, and make phone calls. If no response received from the above three ways, the government will send staff for a visit in person. The census work will be carried out in March 2020, and the public does not need to make any preparation in advance now. Starting around March 12, 2020, some of the addresses will receive the invitation letter.

Q: My English is not good. Does the census have a Chinese questionnaire or translation service?

A: Some have, some don't. First, the paper questionnaire for the census does not provide Chinese version, only English and Spanish. However, the telephone call and online questionnaires both have Chinese translation. The telephone call method is available in both Cantonese and Mandarin. The online questionnaire provides both simplified and traditional Chinese version.

But all the answers should be in English language.

Q: How does the government decide which languages' translation assistance should be provided?

A: Except for the paper questionnaire, Chinese translation is available in online and phone call in the Census 2020. The Census Bureau used the five-year data from the 2016 American Community Survey to identify the most spoken languages in households that do not speak English and whose English skills are limited. According to this five-year data, Spanish ranks the first, used by most non-English speaking households in the United States. Then (in order) are Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Russian.