City of Boise prepares for 2020 census following remarkable growth

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau collects quantitative and qualitative data from households across the nation. This year, the census will be conducted mainly from March 12 to April 1.

April 1 is Census Day and will be observed as a national holiday. On this day, every household will have received an invitation to participate in the census. Following April 1, census takers will start visiting college campuses, senior centers and other group living facilities.

This year, the Census Bureau has introduced the option for results to be collected via an online survey for the first time since the establishment of the census in 1902. However, citizens are also able to fill out the census via phone, mail or in person.

Additional efforts will be made by local counting committees to reach people, such as homeless individuals, who are unable to utilize internet, phone or mail services.

"[The government] will be sending out U.S. Census Bureau workers to where most homeless people reside, [like]homeless shelters or a lot of places downtown," said Hailey Townsend, the communications assistant for the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho. "They're working with the city of Boise, and city of Boise Police Department to make sure that the entire population is reached."

The census collects vital information that is used to determine federal funding for the state and certain areas within the state. The majority of this funding goes towards school programs, transportation departments, hospitals, healthcare services, police and fire departments and government assistance services.

"A lot of our federal government programs are tied to population count ranges," said Jeffrey Lyons, an assistant professor at the Boise State School of Public Service. "Things like Medicaid, highway funding and funding some of our social support programs like the SNAP food program. All of those [account for]about a trillion dollars in federal funding that are in some way allocated to census count."

According to Townsend, each person counted in the census accounts for approximately $1,475 of annual funding.
In addition to funding allocation, census data also provides definitive population numbers that determine the number of seats each state will have in the House of Representatives.

In order to obtain accurate counts, citizens are required to partake in the census in the location they reside as of April 1. This information is important for out-of-state college students, as all Boise State students living in the area are required to partake in the Idaho census and should not be counted within their parents' household for their home state.

“Specifically for Boise State students, they need to be aware that their parents shouldn’t count them,” Townsend said. “Even if they’re going back to California for spring break, they count in Idaho because that is where they live a majority of the year.”

Even if a student does not consider themselves to be a permanent Boise resident and will likely relocate after graduation, each individual is essential to the count of Boise State as a whole. According to Townsend, it is still important to maintain current data in order to analyze how the population numbers fluctuate over the years, even as individual students come and go.

According to Charles Hunt, assistant professor of political science, it is important for students to participate in the census in order to achieve accurate representation in government policy.

“Older generations tend to be getting more accurate representation because they’re answering the census more, and so that provides them with more reliable representation,” Hunt said. “So it’s part of the question of equity and how the government treats different groups. Particularly for the communities that tend to get underrepresented, it’s more important than ever for them to participate in the census and participate in elections or politics in general.”

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**Ashley Clark**

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