IL Department of Human Services to partner with UIC and CommunityConnect Labs to Improve Census Outreach to Hard-to-Count Communities

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CHICAGO – Building on a $29 million investment by Governor Pritzker and the General Assembly in preparation for the 2020 census, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has entered into an intergovernmental partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago's College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs to improve outreach to hard-to-count communities. UIC will have a leading role in the state's census initiative, the largest in the country this year, with 30 local community and government organizations serving as regional intermediaries for coordinated census mobilization across the state. All organizations partnering with DHS on census efforts have received funding from the department.

UIC's census team, which features experts in racial equity analysis, program management and evaluation, data analysis and visualization and community-driven participatory research, will focus on enhancing the real-time reporting, analysis and mapping of geographic coverage for the entire project. Based on initial data collected, the UIC researchers will help the regional intermediaries and partners to target hard-to-count communities, both urban and rural, across the state. UIC will develop customized online reporting and analysis tools, responsive trainings and materials tailored to HTC communities, and 2020 Census templates and action plans that will be publicly available for organizations and groups willing to mobilize their communities for outreach.

"Governor Pritzker is committed to ensuring a robust census effort that reaches every community in Illinois, especially rural and urban communities that have historically been left out of census counts," said Deputy Governor Sol Flores. "By working with

longstanding and reputable institutions like UIC, we will strengthen our ability to ensure every person in Illinois is represented in the 2020 Census."

"This is a significant investment by the state in an equity-driven census program that will assure attention is given to communities that may need more engagement and outreach, and which will produce an outcome that benefits all Illinoisans," said Kathleen Yang-Clayton, co-principal investigator on the project and UIC clinical assistant professor of public administration. "Our goal is to support IDHS and the intermediaries effectively and efficiently, while laying the groundwork for every Illinoisan to be counted, especially those from historically undercounted groups, such as minorities, rural residents, young children, and immigrants."

Dr. Yang-Clayton's team includes Austin Zamudio and Joe Wentzel, both graduates of UIC's Masters in Public Administration program, and Michael Collins, Allyson Nolde and Josh Cook, research assistants in public policy and design. Once the 2020 census is officially launched April 1, the UIC team will shift to helping regional leaders and their partners enable residents to directly respond to the census through mail, phone and online.

The UIC team also plans to host training workshops for public service-minded students at UIC to become census ambassadors to help create awareness about the importance of participating by starting with their immediate families and neighborhoods. Most student ambassadors will receive volunteer or course credit, but some may qualify for paid positions.

"By engaging students on campus and empowering them to bring reliable information about the census back into their families and communities, we are demonstrating how diversity becomes a core strength of the impact we can have," Yang-Clayton said.

The $29 million program is the largest per capita investment of any state in the nation this year, funded through the bipartisan FY20 budget. In June, Governor Pritzker signed an executive order that established a Census Office and an advisory panel to guide the public outreach.

"We believe that our reputation in working with people from communities that are often hardest to count on issues that are directly affected by federal funds including affordable housing, economic development, transportation and the environment, particularly the south and west sides of Chicago, will help all in their efforts toward a 100% count," said Janet Smith, a project co-principal investigator and co-director of the Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement at UIC.

The Urban Data Visualization Lab at UIC will support the analysis of hard-to-count populations, develop visualization tools for the regional intermediaries and partners, and co-create an online platform to help with reporting and analytical assessments to increase the impact of 2020 census efforts in our state. This work will be led by Moira Zellner, UIC associate professor of urban planning and policy and director of the lab, who is also a co-principal investigator for the project. She is joined by Ahora Zandiatashbar, a geospatial data scientist at the lab and UIC adjunct assistant professor of urban planning and policy, Jaeyong Shin and Anton Rozhkov, research assistants at the lab and doctoral students in urban planning and policy, and Dean Massey, a visiting research specialist with UIC's Institute for Environmental Science and Policy.

IDHS is also partnering with CommunityConnect Labs (CCL) to boost Illinoisans' participation in the 2020 U.S. Census via text messaging. CCL is a nonprofit that develops high-quality, affordable mobile messaging solutions that enable state and local governments and other service providers to more efficiently and effectively reach low-income and other hard-to-engage individuals in their communities.

IDHS will be launching CommunityConnect Labs' Field Staff Recruiter, HelpDesk, and Community Motivator solutions with participation from the state's Regional Intermediaries and community organizations. These mobile messaging solutions are designed to boost enumerator recruitment, answer 10,000 Census related questions, and engage residents to be counted through digital pledges and reminders leading up to the Census.

"Illinois has long been a leader among states in the use of public interest technology tools to better respond to community needs," said Perla Ni, CommunityConnect Labs' CEO and Founder. "We are gratified Illinois selected our Field Staff Recruiter, Community Motivator, and HelpDesk solutions to build trust in the 2020 count in all Illinois communities -- including and especially in traditionally hard-to-count communities -- and we look forward to working closely with the state and its partners in this vitally important effort."

CommunityConnect Labs is an innovator in the public interest technology space, founded to address the difficulties local governments and human services providers face connecting with hard-to-reach individuals in their communities. The CCL team has developed census solutions in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau and has received grant awards to support census solution development from funders including Microsoft, Twllio and Amazon. Local governments, nonprofits and funders will play a critical role in ensuring a fair and accurate count of immigrant and low-income communities in the 2020 Census. CCL has worked in 9 geographies with city and county governments on the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) phase of the

Census. CommunityConnect Labs is a member of the U.S. Census Bureau's Opportunity Project.

For more information about the 2020 Census in Illinois and a listing of the Regional Intermediaries, visit census.illinois.gov.