Sikh Coalition and the 2020 U.S. Census: Frequently Asked Questions

The Sikh Coalition values community questions and feedback on all of our programming. As we partner with the U.S. Census Bureau and undertake work to encourage Sikh Americans to be counted by the 2020 census, we want to provide you with the answers to some of the community’s most frequently asked questions about the census and the work that we plan to do.

If you have any further questions about the census or require resources or assistance in English or Punjabi, please reach out to the Sikh Coalition at community@sikhcoalition.org.

1. **What is the U.S. census?**

2. **Why does being counted for the census matter?**

3. **Is it safe to fill out the census form?**

4. **Will immigration authorities have access to my census data?**

5. **What will the census ask?**

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9. **What can I do to help others be counted for the census?**

10. **What happens if I don’t respond to the census?**

11. **I will be away from home or out of the country while the census is being conducted--what should I do?**

12. **Do I include individuals that live part-time in India or abroad in the household size question?**

13. **Will the census ask what language I speak? Is the census available in Punjabi?**

14. **Who do I contact if I have questions about completing the census?**

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**1. What is the U.S. census?** Since 1790, the U.S. Constitution has required our government to conduct a census every 10 years. The goal of the census is to count every person in the country where they live, regardless of age or citizenship status. Filling out the census is simple and safe, and it is essential to ensuring that your local community is accurately counted--and given the appropriate amount of government funding and resources as a result!

**2. Why does being counted for the census matter?** The government uses information from the census to allocate more than $600 billion worth of resources per year to communities across the country. Census data directly influences public funding for things in your community, like schools, hospitals, roads, and parks; businesses also look at the data to decide where to locate, hire, and invest. And finally, the census count also determines representation in our democracy, including
how local legislative maps are drawn, how many members of Congress your state gets, and how many electoral college votes each state casts in presidential elections. The more people who are counted, the greater voice their community has in our democracy.

3. **Is it safe to fill out the census form?** Yes! It is safe for everyone--U.S. citizens, U.S. permanent residents, recent immigrants, and undocumented persons--to fill out the census. All of your answers will be confidential. By law, the U.S. Census Bureau cannot share private information about your specific information with any government agency--it can only share statistics.

4. **Will immigration authorities have access to my census data?** Immigration authorities, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), do not have access to census data. It is against the law for the U.S. Census Bureau to share any personal information with anyone, including immigration authorities, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June 2019 that the Trump Administration would not be allowed to include a question about citizenship on the census. **If someone claiming to be from the Census Bureau asks about you or your family's immigration status, you are not obligated to answer them, and you should immediately report the incident to us by emailing community@sikhcoalition.org.**

5. **What will the census ask?** The census is very simple to fill out and doesn’t take much time. It asks how many people live in your home and whether it is rented or owned; it then asks about the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of each person in the home, and the relationship of each person in the home to the homeowner or renter. **Representatives of the U.S. Census Bureau cannot ask for social security numbers, information about citizenship, or political views; they will also never solicit fees or donations for their work. If you have been asked any of these questions, please report what happened immediately by emailing community@sikhcoalition.org.**

6. **How and when can I be counted for the census?** Beginning in March of 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau will send letters to households asking them to fill out their census forms. If those forms are not returned or the information is not submitted over the phone or online by the beginning of April, Census Bureau workers will begin going door-to-door across the country to ask the questions in person. We recommend submitting your information online because it is very easy to do! The Sikh Coalition plans to help community members submit their census information by tabling at gurdwaras across the nation beginning in mid-March; if you would like to volunteer to help, please email us at community@sikhcoalition.org.

7. **Why is the Sikh Coalition helping the community to be counted for the census?** The Sikh Coalition constantly works to elevate the profile of Sikhs in the United States, and an accurate census count is essential to ensuring that our community is appropriately resourced and accurately represented. Accordingly, we
are partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau to increase Sikh American participation in the census, ensure that resources are available in Punjabi, and serve as an information resource to Sikh communities across the nation. This is also the first step in our larger effort to increase Sikh American civic engagement in 2020, including work to come later this year to “Get Out The Vote” in advance of the presidential election.

8. **Why is “Sikh” not a category on the census form?** The current census specifically asks only about the *ethnicity* of each person in a household, rather than their *religion*. For example, the Jewish or Muslim communities are not identified on the census. It is important that your ethnicity is appropriately accounted for based on how you identify. The inclusion of a self-created category (i.e. filling in a different response) could ultimately lead to undercounting different ethnicities nationwide. Further, we recognize that some are not comfortable sharing religious information with the federal government due to instances of discrimination and government surveillance. The Sikh Coalition always advocates for Sikhs to be accurately counted as a religious group in many different ways, but the 2020 census will not accomplish this goal. Still, we will always work to ensure that our articles of faith and rights remain protected under the First Amendment.

9. **What can I do to help others be counted for the census?** The Sikh Coalition is looking for community members to help us table at gurdwaras across the country to help Sikh Americans fill out the census in a safe and supportive environment. If you would like to volunteer to help, please email us at community@sikhcoalition.org. Additionally, you can seek employment with the U.S. Census Bureau if you speak Punjabi. Again, email us at community@sikhcoalition.org for more information--and be sure to let us know if you or someone in your sangat is already volunteering or working with the Census Bureau so that we can amplify the good work!

10. **What happens if I don’t respond to the census?**
    Federal law requires that individuals who receive the census questionnaire return their answers. You can be fined a minimum of up to $5,000 for refusing to complete the census, and those who intentionally provide false answers can face a fine up to $500. Taking a few minutes to fill out the census avoids this penalty--and it also helps to ensure that your community is given the resources it needs.

11. **I will be away from home or out of the country while the census is being conducted--what should I do?** We recommend that you complete the census questionnaire online before leaving the country. If you cannot complete the census in the United States, we advise that you submit your responses on a secure internet connection to ensure that your private information is not exposed.
12. Do I include individuals that live part-time in India or abroad in the household size question? The census should be filled out in accordance with you and the members of your household’s “usual residence,” which is defined as the place where you live and sleep most of the time.

13. Will the census ask what language I speak? Is the census available in Punjabi? The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a variety of surveys and may ask about language at another time, but, the 2020 census will not ask about which language you speak. The census form itself will not be available in Punjabi, but there is a Punjabi language guide that you can use to help you complete the form; the Sikh Coalition is working to provide several other helpful Punjabi available resources.

14. Who do I contact if I have questions about completing the census? Reach out to community@sikhcoalition.org if you have any questions about the census; you can also visit our website here, or see the U.S. Census Bureau’s official guide to the census in English and Punjabi.