

LUCA Primer: The First Step In Preparing For The 2030 Census

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INTRODUCTION

Florida is one of six states to incur a statistically significant undercount during the 2020 Census. With approximately 750,000 residents missing from the census count, the State of Florida lost an additional seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, up to \$21 billion of federal funds, and the accuracy of socio-economic data used by business and community leaders to make well-informed decisions.¹


To avoid the consequences of a census undercount in 2030, the State of Florida must begin preparations for the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA).

WHAT IS LUCA?

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the census count by mailing a survey to every known home residence. The list of home residences is known as the Master Address File (MAF). Continuously, the U.S. Census Bureau updates the MAF using:

- The United States Postal Service (USPS) files;
- The Geographic Support System (GSS), which enables the U.S. Census Bureau to update addresses with satellite imagery, Geographic Information System (GIS) data, and administrative records; and
- Field operations and surveys that allow the U.S. Census Bureau to verify and refine address data.²

Three years prior to the next census count (2027), state and local governments are invited to participate in LUCA. LUCA is an initiative that allows state and local governments the ability to review the MAF addresses within their jurisdiction and recommend edits to the U.S. Census Bureau.



Florida undercounted 750,000 residents in 2020 — To avoid another hit in 2030, the state must gear up now for LUCA — the process that lets local governments fix and verify address data before the next census.

¹ Florida TaxWatch Census Institute. To learn more, visit: <https://floridataxwatch.org/Programs/Census-Institute>

² United States Government Accountability Office, 2020 Census: Actions Needed to Improve Census Bureau's Process for Working with Governments to Build Address List, October 2019.

WHY DOES PARTICIPATION IN LUCA MATTER?

If an address is not within the MAF, the resident will not receive a survey and the U.S. Census Bureau will assume the resident does not exist, limiting the bureau's ability to use data imputation to adjust for the missing respondent. Despite use of the best available data sources, the MAF is still vulnerable to errors. Specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau faces difficulties identifying:

- Internally subdivided buildings;
- Informal housing units;
- Converted garages and campers;
- Buildings without an address with the USPS;
- Entrances in obscured areas, such as alleyways.³

LUCA provides local governments with their only opportunity to fix these errors, but as a voluntary initiative, LUCA typically experiences relatively low participation rates. During the last LUCA (2017), only 21 percent of eligible governments responded. Similarly, in 2007, only 22 percent responded.⁴

Even with limited participation, LUCA responses shared invaluable insights for the MAF. In 2020, the participating governments collectively proposed 5.1 million unique addresses for the MAF.⁵

WHAT CAN THE STATE GOVERNMENT DO TO HELP?

During the 2010 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau showcased Florida for its effective LUCA preparations. For local governments with limited staffing or finances, finding the time and resources needed to complete LUCA is difficult. In 2007, the Florida Legislature created technical assistance grants to support local governments participating in LUCA. Distributed through the Department of Community Affairs, the grants could be used to hire temporary staff or purchase or lease computer equipment and software. Additionally, the State of Florida hosted a webpage that offered extensive information to guide the work of local governments. Ultimately, 54 of Florida's 67 counties provided a response to LUCA.⁶

If an address isn't on the Census list, that resident doesn't count. Hidden units, informal housing, and unlisted addresses are often missed. In 2010, Florida boosted participation with grants and support—a move worth repeating for 2030.

³ The 2030 Census National LUCA Working Group, "Preparing for LUCA: A Resource Guide for Stakeholders," June 2025.

⁴ United States Government Accountability Office, 2020 Census: Actions Needed to Improve Census Bureau's Process for Working with Governments to Build Address List, October 2019.

⁵ United States Government Accountability Office, 2020 Census: Actions Needed to Improve Census Bureau's Process for Working with Governments to Build Address List, October 2019.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Local Update of Census Addresses Assessment.

LOOKING AHEAD

Setting aside a discussion on whether the country should pursue better methodologies for counting its population, the state must do what it can to achieve a more accurate count during the next census. To prepare for LUCA, policymakers should take into consideration the following recommendations:

1. The Executive Office of the Governor should designate a liaison to coordinate between the U.S. Census Bureau and local governments. The liaison would provide support and accountability to local governments as they participate in LUCA.
2. During the 2026 Legislative Session, the State Legislature should provide an appropriation that helps local governments prepare for LUCA. This appropriation could help local governments receive training, hire temporary staff, or receive technical assistance.
3. Florida Legislators should consider requiring local governments to provide a full and complete response LUCA or at a minimum provide local governments with a financial incentive to do so.

ABOUT FLORIDA TAXWATCH

As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the taxpayers of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and analysis of issues related to state and local government taxation, expenditures, policies, and programs. Florida TaxWatch works to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government. Its research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of fiscal and economic policies and practices on citizens and businesses.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by voluntary, tax-deductible donations and private grants. Donations provide a solid, lasting foundation that has enabled Florida TaxWatch to bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the citizens it serves since 1979.

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The findings in this Report are based on the data and sources referenced. Florida TaxWatch research is conducted with every reasonable attempt to verify the accuracy and reliability of the data, and the calculations and assumptions made herein. Please contact us if you believe that this paper contains any factual inaccuracies.

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The Florida TaxWatch Census Institute delivers data-driven analysis of the 2020 Census undercount to help ensure every Floridian is accurately counted and represented in 2030. Our mission is to present the challenges and opportunities inherent in census data collection to business and community leaders. Accurate census data is vital for fair representation, proper allocation of federal dollars, economic growth, and infrastructure planning. It takes all Floridians to secure a complete count in 2030.

For additional information or to discuss our findings further please email us at info@floridataxwatch.org.

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