

BRONX BEST, QUEENS WORST IN CENSUS RESPONSE

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Body

Queens has the lowest census response rate in the city, lagging almost 10 points behind the national average of 90%, while the Bronx takes first place with a 92.9% return rate, census officials said yesterday.

"Queens is the borough with the highest level of immigration, and I think that's a big problem in the levels of the census undercount," said Bryan Pu-Folkes, president of the nonprofit, Queens-based New Immigrant Community Empowerment advocacy group.

Dan Andrews, a spokesman for Borough President Claire Shulman, agreed, calling the 80.7% rate "very unsettling."

New or undocumented immigrants may fear that census information will be misused, he said. He added that the count can be hampered by extra residents staying in apartments or homes.

"We impress upon anyone who hasn't been counted to get counted and realize how vital getting an accurate count is," he said. "There's great concern about getting our fair share of federal dollars."

Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer attributed his borough's high response rate to a concerted effort by officials and community groups to improve on the 1990 level.

"It became our mantra everywhere we went, talking about cooperation with the census," he said yesterday.

Brooklyn is in second place, with an 89.2% rate of return, followed by Staten Island at 85.5% and Manhattan at 83.7%.

Tony Farthing, the director for the New York Regional Census Center, also cited Queens' ethnic diversity and immigration as reasons for the borough's lower response.

"It just makes the work a little bit more difficult," he said. "At one door, you might need one group of enumerators, and at another, you might need enumerators who speak a different language."

Overall, New York City is doing better than expected, he said.

But earlier in the day, a coalition of Latino, African-American and Asian-American groups argued that the fight to count all New Yorkers is far from won.

According to the New York City Consortium on Census 2000, the response rate in many minority neighborhoods - such as Flushing, Jackson Heights and Jamaica in Queens, central Harlem in Manhattan, central Brooklyn, and parts of the Bronx - lags behind the average.

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The coalition is urging people who have not received **census** forms or been approached by enumerators to call the **Census** Bureau hotlines to have themselves counted. The numbers are: for English, (800) 471-9424; Spanish, (800) 471-8642; Chinese, (800) 471-9401; Korean (800) 471-9131, and Tagalog, (800) 470-9897.

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