

# The Currency of Our Data: A Critical Input Into Federal Funding

**353 federal assistance programs** relied on Decennial Census Programs data to distribute **\$2.8 trillion** to communities across the country in fiscal year 2021.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau inform how trillions of dollars in federal funds are distributed each year, underscoring the value of Census Bureau data and the importance of participating in surveys and the census. The Census Bureau doesn't distribute money, but our statistics help inform those who do.

In the report, "[Uses of Decennial Census Programs Data in Federal Funds Distribution: Fiscal Year 2021](#)," the Census Bureau estimated that more than \$2.8 trillion in federal funds were distributed in whole or in part to states, communities, tribal governments, and other recipients using Census Bureau data. This included approximately \$700 billion for COVID-19-related programs. For the purposes of this analysis, Decennial Census Programs data include data produced by the decennial census, the American Community Survey (ACS), geographic programs supporting the decennial census and ACS, and related programs such as the annual population estimates.

At least 353 federal assistance programs used Census Bureau data to distribute federal funds in fiscal year 2021. Some of the top programs funded healthcare, nutrition, highways, housing, school lunches, childcare, and COVID assistance.

This analysis examined seven types of federal assistance: formula grants, project grants, direct payments for specified use, direct payments with unrestricted use, direct loans, guaranteed/insured loans, and insurance.

Top 10 Largest Programs in FY 2021	
Medical Assistance Program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS])	\$568,115,846,349
Medicare Part B—Medicare Supplementary Medical Insurance (HHS)	\$395,915,112,082
Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (U.S. Department of the Treasury)	\$350,824,555,169
Medicare Part A—Medicare Hospital Insurance (HHS)	\$326,389,294,515
Education Stabilization Fund (U.S. Department of Education)	\$231,827,196,664
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture)	\$135,746,808,179
Medicare Part D—Prescription Drug Coverage (HHS)	\$98,097,289,508
Provider Relief Fund (HHS)	\$79,480,343,511
Highway Planning and Construction (U.S. Department of Transportation)	\$60,451,795,865
Supplemental Security Income (U.S. Social Security Administration)	\$55,717,174,587

## How Congress Uses Census Bureau Data

The Census Bureau provides a wealth of timely social, economic, housing, and demographic data for all congressional districts and states that can be used in drafting legislation, press releases, statements, responding to constituents, conducting legislative research, and developing grant formulas for proposed programs.

## Other Uses

Informing federal funding is just one of the many benefits of Census Bureau data.

Census Bureau data also nurture our democracy, inform decisions, and promote our economy.

Census Bureau data:

- Determine Congressional representation and are used in redrawing legislative districts.
- Provide a tool for evidence-based decision-making.
- Are used to monitor compliance with federal laws and to plan community services.
- Help businesses be more competitive and provide more local jobs.

Among those types, we included programs whose legislation clearly calls for a Census Bureau dataset or calls for a data element, such as “income,” that we could reasonably assume the program used Census Bureau data.

Census Bureau data are likely involved—but not required—in allocation decisions for many other programs, but these are not captured in this analysis.

**Participation in surveys and the census can make a difference in the federal funding a community receives.**

Participation improves the quality of the data and the decisions that affect funding for the things you care about.

Many of the people who benefit most from federal assistance programs are among the least likely to participate in the census or our surveys. When you encourage response, you help meet the needs of your community.

**The Census Bureau doesn’t distribute money, but our statistics help inform those who do.**

The government spends trillions of dollars each year, and Census Bureau data are key to ensuring that those dollars are being used effectively and equitably.

By using publicly available Census Bureau data on the nation’s people and economy, the federal government provides a broad range of assistance to state and local governments.

Federal programs fund initiatives by using population totals and social, economic, and housing characteristics to target and distribute those funds.

It’s important to note that the Census Bureau doesn’t distribute any federal funding or determine funding formulas. Our role is to provide quality data through the decennial census, ACS, geographic programs supporting the decennial census and ACS, and related programs such as the annual population estimates. Together, these data inform how trillions of dollars in federal funds are distributed each year.