State Approves Budget for Library System Census Grant

The Pritzker Administration and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) awarded the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) with a $750,000 grant to encourage full participation in Census 2020 throughout the state. This week, the state approved full funding for the Census 2020: It Counts! grant.

As a Regional Intermediary for the collar counties, RAILS has been entrusted to focus on six hard-to-count populations: children younger than five years old, renters, people living close to or below the poverty line, older adults, people experiencing homelessness, and people who are young and mobile. RAILS is working with over 20 subgrantees in DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. While the subgrantees are mostly libraries, there are a few social service agencies and county-level organizations. They have all put forth unique plans involving their community partners such as early childhood centers, health clinics, and promotoras to help them achieve their goals.

Amy de la Fuente, RAILS Program Manager for the Census 2020: It Counts! grant, said, “Thousands of people come through library doors every day – especially folks considered to be hard-to-count. Young children are often undercounted for many reasons, especially babies and children who are not living with their parents such as children living with their grandparents or with a foster parent. Most of the subrecipients will focus on this hard-to-count population because the ramifications are so dire. An accurate count of young children affects the funding for public schools, hospitals, Head Start, and other community needs. If we don’t know how many children are living in the community, it’s difficult to plan for the next ten years.”

A total of $20 million has been awarded to organizations throughout Illinois making this the largest investment per capita of any state in 2019 for Census 2020.

Visit the RAILS web page on Libraries and Census 2020 for more information about how libraries can maximize participation throughout Illinois.

RAILS is a regional library system, a government agency that provides services to libraries in northern and west-central Illinois, serving approximately 1,300 private, public, school, and university library members. Their services include continuing education and consulting resources to library employees and trustees, shared catalog support, e-book services, a cultural pass program, group purchases and vendor discounts, targeted grant funding to member libraries, and more.

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