

“How can we model the behavior we seek to inspire?”

State humanities councils and age, race, and gender

"How can we model the behavior we seek to inspire? Do our boards, staff and volunteers reflect the diversity of the communities we serve? How can we be more inclusive?"

In the [January 2013 newsletter](#), [Federal/State Partnership](#) announced that each issue of the newsletter through October will address issues raised by the theme of the November 2013 [Federation of State Humanities Councils](#) conference in Birmingham, Alabama. The primary source for most of these surveys is the contextual section of councils' [self-assessment report](#). We will use examples from all [56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils](#) in this series.

This article on age, race, and gender relied heavily upon various aspects of the 2010 U.S. Census Report and uses the language of that report in its designation of racial/ethnic groups. This article first appeared in the September 2013 newsletter. Links to all the articles will be attached to the [lead article to the series](#) as they appear in the newsletter. Each will also be posted as a separate article in the [Resource Library](#).

A printable pdf of this article is attached.

Councils and race, age, and gender: State humanities councils, along with most nonprofits and other organizations, contend with issues of race, age, and gender. In the case of councils, these challenges can be seen prominently with regard to their audiences, staffs, boards, and executives. We will focus here on demographics and the impact they might have on how councils choose what audiences to serve by means of their programs.

Faced with the task of serving the population of a state or jurisdiction, councils are sometimes hard-pressed to define their audiences. An admirable but impossible goal, some councils aim to reach all the people of its state or jurisdiction. Others are concerned to reach the underserved while some operate according to the policy NEH established for councils when they were founded: to address the humanities needs of out-of-school adults. With so many definitions available, however, identifying the out-of-school adult can also be difficult.

The reality is that the majority of councils have been most successful reaching audiences of educated, economically stable older women. In contrast, the Idaho Humanities Council has recently attracted many men with its “Making Sense of the American Civil War” reading and discussion series. Reaching men, at least those of ages commensurate with councils’ women audiences, will be important for the future: the 2010 census revealed that the longevity of men aged 60-74 has increased significantly.

Young people—children, tweens, and teenagers—seem to prove easier to reach than young adults. The “Think and Drink” programs of councils in Oregon and Washington as well as the Humanities Council of Washington, DC’s “Humanitini” have, however, succeeded with young adults. In general, though, unless those in their 20s and 30s have low reading skills, they are quite likely to be the demographic least served by state humanities councils. This is especially true for parents.

Programming directed for and about various racial and ethnic groups is carried out by most councils. The [August 2013 article in this series](#) dealt with the ways councils work with indigenous peoples, for example. A number of councils carry out bi-lingual, Spanish, and multi-lingual programs, especially family reading and discussion programs. Even in a state like Maine, with the most homogeneous White population in the country, the Maine Humanities Council has effectively reached immigrant

populations. Other New England councils, such as the New Hampshire Humanities Council, have done so as well. The Kentucky Humanities Council's Prime Time program has the capacity to conduct it in several languages. Some councils have bi- or multi-lingual staff members.

A review of national and state numbers: The United States as a whole¹ is 63 percent White, 17 percent Hispanic, 12 percent Black, and 8 percent "other."² Hawaii is the state with the smallest White population (17 percent), while Maine has the largest White population (95 percent). Hawaii is 70 percent "Other" to Louisiana's 2 percent. The District of Columbia has the highest Black population (49 percent) and the Black populations of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and New Mexico are too small to be statistically significant. New Mexico, on the other hand, has the largest Hispanic population in the country and West Virginia's is too statistically small to be significant. The interactive maps on the [Kaiser Family Foundation site](#) offer a dramatic graphic view of ethnic and racial population distributions across the states.

The United States overall has become older with more than half the population older than the median age of 37.2. This is due not only to the aging of the post-World War II baby boom generation (born 1946-1964) but also to "stable birth rates and improving mortality." In the four census regions, the region with the oldest median age is the Northeast (39.2), followed by the Midwest (37.7), the South (37.0), and the West (35.6).

Although the largest age sector of the population is the 18-44 cohort (36.5 percent), it grew the least between the 2000 and the 2010 censuses—only .6 percent. In contrast, the 45-64 cohort grew by 31.5 percent and the number of those over 65 "grew at a faster rate (15.1 percent) than the population under age 45." The state with the youngest median age is Utah where nearly one-third of the population (31.5%) is under the age of 18 and 71.2% is aged 44 or less. The oldest is the state of Maine which has a median age of 42.7. In Maine, 63.4 percent of the population is between 18 and 64.³

Another shift that has taken place between the last two censuses is the increasing longevity of men. While women generally outlive men, males aged 60-74 "increased by 35.2 percent while their female counterparts increased by 29.2 percent."⁴ Nonetheless, with the exception of the states of Alaska, Hawaii, and nine other western states, the country at large is predominantly female, although, in most cases, only slightly. Of those western states, one has heard say that, from a woman's perspective, "while the odds are good, the goods are odd." The census does not document this interpretation. The average male to female ratio in the United States is 96.7 men to every 100 women.

This article includes specific demographic information that nine state humanities councils encounter. They have been somewhat randomly selected but represent most parts of the country. Of some interest is the fact that three adjoining states have been included: **Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania**. The fact that they are neighbors makes for interesting comparisons.

The summaries of the states are organized from the youngest median age of this group, the **District of Columbia**, to the oldest, **West Virginia**. The other states are **Arizona, Alabama, Iowa, and Oregon**. The gender ratio, the number of men per each 100 women is included for each.

¹ The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Population Distribution by Race/Ethnicity, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/distribution-by-raceethnicity/>.

² "Other" includes Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Aleutians, Eskimos and persons of "Two or More Races" (<http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/distribution-by-raceethnicity/>).

³ The information in this paragraph and that above comes from *Age and Sex Composition: 2010*, U.S. Census Bureau, May 2010, page 2 (<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>).

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 4.

The **District of Columbia** (median age 33.8, gender ratio 89.5) continues to lose families and have smaller households; it now holds the national record for one-person households (48 percent). Its Black population has fallen to 49 percent, a milestone because Washington was the nation's first city to have an African-American majority. The White and Hispanic populations have increased. There has been rapid growth of the overall population, particularly of young professionals. Almost half (49 percent) of its population is ages 18-44. Its growth rate exceeded that of every state in the union.

Arizona (median age 35.9, gender ratio 98.7) has an Hispanic population almost double (33 percent) that of the U.S. population (17 percent). It is in line to become one of ten majority-minority states by 2035. The state has also experienced a decline in population growth which may be attributed to the recession but also to legislation unfriendly to immigrants. It is unclear whether the laws caused undocumented immigrants to leave or caused them to refuse to be counted in the census, but the net result is that the state is losing federal funding because of the census count.

Twenty-six percent of the population of **Alabama** (median age 37.9, gender ratio 94.3) is Black, the dominant minority. Migration of Hispanics from Mexico, Guatemala, and other parts of Latin America is growing rapidly. Other minority groups include growing Asian populations in the state's urban centers, and a small but vibrant Southeast Asian community centered on the fishing industry near Mobile. Twenty-four percent of Alabamians are under the age of 18, and 13 percent are over the age of 65.

Iowa's population continues to grow more slowly than the national average, and it lost a congressional seat following the 2010 census. City population increased whereas rural areas continued to lose; 66 of the 99 counties showed a decline in population. Iowa's population also continues to get older. The median age for Iowa in 2010 was 38.1 compared with 36.6 in 2000 and 34.0 in 1990. The gender ratio is 98.1. While the Hispanic population is only 6 percent, it has increased 83.7 percent since 2000.

The average age of an **Oregonian** is 38.4. Its gender ratio is 98. Eighty percent of its population is White and over 90 percent was born in the United states, 45 percent in Oregon. Over 55 percent of Oregonians fall into the 18-64 age cohort. In the nation at large, 2.8 percent of the population walk to work, whereas in Oregon 3.9 percent do. Twenty-one percent of the population earns between \$50,000 and \$74,999. By 2025, Oregon's population is projected to have grown by 16.3 percent. The majority of the population lives in the Willamette Valley and in the Portland metropolitan area.

Delaware (median age 38.8, gender ratio 93.9) is 65 percent White, 20 percent Black, 9 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent "Other."⁵ More than half the population lives in New Castle County, home to the largest city, Wilmington. In the north, near Philadelphia, its ethnic breakdown is 61.6 percent White, 23.1 percent Black, and 8.7 percent Hispanic. Southern rural Suffolk County is 75.6 percent White, 12.4 percent Black, and 8.6 percent Hispanic. Delaware has only .6 percent under the national average of households with at least one under 18, but it has 2.2 percent more with people over 65.

New Jersey is the most densely populated state, with 1,195.5 people per square mile (2010 census).⁶ The median age is 39 and the gender ratio is 94.8. The projected estimate is that the population will reach 9,380,200 by 2028. The elderly will be the fastest growing age group, from 13.5 percent in 2010 to 17.3 percent in 2025. New Jersey is home to one of the most racially and ethnically diverse populations in the nation. Whites currently represent 58 percent of the population and the Hispanic 21 percent. The Black population is 13 percent.

⁵ See note 2 for the definition of "Other."

⁶ The District of Columbia, not a state, has a population density of 9,856.5 per square mile. It encompasses 61.05 square miles.

Pennsylvania (median age 40.1, gender ratio 95.1) has the fourth-highest proportion, 15 percent, of adults over sixty-five, as well as slower population growth than rest of the nation. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have proven attractive to young people, stopping some of the state's "brain drain," revitalizing center cities, and gaining youth from other states. Philadelphia is more diverse than the rest of the state. The overall population of Pennsylvania is 79 percent White, 11 percent Black, and 6 percent Hispanic. Philadelphia is a "majority minority city."

The Census Bureau predicts a slight decline in **West Virginia** population over the next quarter-century, and expects it to fall to 39th in relative population rank. Its median age is 41.3, one of the highest in the country. It is 94 percent White and only 3 percent Black. In contrast to the 20.3 percent in the country at large, 2.3 percent of West Virginia's population speaks a language at home other than English. Nonetheless, the state has well-established ethnic traditions dating from large immigrations of a century ago, and there are deeply rooted Black communities in several locations.