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## **[Appalachian Mayors Highlight Census Efforts](#)**

Rural mayors are ramping up their work to support the 2020 census as the first batch of mailers are set to go out this week.

Members of the Mayor's Partnership for Progress joined Development Services Agency [Director Lydia Mihalik](#), [Rep. Jay Edwards](#) (R-Nelsonville), and the Ohio Mayor's Alliance for a Statehouse news conference Tuesday to outline their goal of ensuring an accurate count in Ohio's rural communities.

"We're going to pull out all the stops," promised Athens Mayor Steve Patterson.

The partnership is a coalition of 15 mayors and city managers from southeast Ohio communities where residents may not have easy access to fill out the census online. This is the first census that will rely in part on online responses. In those rural areas, mayors urged the public to participate by mail or phone if internet service is unavailable.

On Thursday, households will begin receiving an official invitation to participate in the census with information on how to respond. Those who do not respond will receive several follow up communications and potentially a home visit over the following months.

Should door-to-door follow ups by census workers be required, Amesville Mayor Gary Goosman said elected officials can help earn citizens' trust. Senior citizens may especially be wary of door-to-door visitors, he said.

"One of the things we're going to do is be representatives of the census in all our towns," Mr. Goosman said.

Ohio is projected to lose a congressional seat – falling to 15 seats – based on forthcoming census population estimates. The count also determines Ohio's share of more than \$675 billion a year for infrastructure and other funding needs. From the local government perspective, the numbers will be used to divvy up \$1.5 trillion in state and local government funding across the country.

"The census is the most important thing we will be doing together for the next few months," Director Mihalik said. "Rural Ohio is very important to this state. We need to make sure everyone gets counted."

Among the more creative ideas, Mayor Patterson said, the city will erect a Ferris wheel that can only be ridden by those who have participated. He has also challenged Mid-American Conference schools in Ohio to match census efforts underway at Ohio University.

"Through partnership with our libraries, colleges, local businesses, foodbanks and county offices, including Job and Family Services, we want to ensure that all our residents know how vital their participation is to our communities and how they can participate," he said.

The mayors' announcement came the same day the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a "soft launch" of its [Census website](#), which offers facts and information about the constitutionally-required count and its importance.

Mayors also said they remain concerned about the potential impact of the novel coronavirus and whether it will impact census results. [Gov. Mike DeWine](#) and other state leaders continue to provide regular briefings on the spread of the virus since it was first confirmed in Ohio early this week. (*See separate story*)

Mayor Goosman said rural areas without broadband service are more dependent on door-to-door census takers.

"Depending on what stage we are at when those enumerators are going door-to-door it may be more problematic," Mayor Goosman said of the illness.

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