

How to Be Counted as an American Indian or Alaska Native

Come Census time, it's very important that every American Indian and Alaska Native person is counted -- and counted as an American Indian or Alaska Native. The way a person is counted as American Indian or Alaska Native is simply by checking off the box that says "American Indian or Alaska Native" on the Census form. The box is under the question about the person's race. For the first person in the household, it's question 9 on the form. For additional members of the household, it's question 6.

The question looks like this:

9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe. ↴

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian

Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino Vietnamese Samoan

Other Asian — Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on. ↴

Other Pacific Islander — Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on. ↴

Some other race — Print race. ↴

Saying that you're American Indian or Alaska Native on the 2010 Census form is a matter of self-identification. No proof is required. No one will ask you to show a tribal enrollment card or a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB).

Helpful Tips for Tribal People and Tribal Households:

Householder Question:

Whether a household is counted as an **American Indian or Alaska Native household depends entirely on the race of "Person 1"** -- the first person listed on the Census form. If that person says he or she is American Indian or Alaska Native, then the household will be counted as one with an American Indian or Alaska Native "householder."

Census Definition of American Indian/Alaska Native:

The Census Bureau uses the definition of American Indian or Alaska Native published by the US Office of Management and Budget (OMB): "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment."

This definition of who's Indian is quite different than the one in federal law that says an Indian person is a member of an Indian tribe. What gives American Indian and Alaska Native people special status in law is a political relationship -- as a member of a Native governmental entity -- not who one's ancestors are. Simply saying that one is Indian on a Census form does not convey any special relationship or privileges.

Percent of State Populations Living in “Hard-to-Count” Areas, by Race

Option to Check Multiple Race Boxes:

In 2000, the Census Bureau introduced a big wrinkle in the data for the Native population. Following a policy laid out by OMB in 1997, anyone filling out a Census form (or other federal form) can check off more than one box on the race question. This option to check off multiple races means that an American Indian and Alaska Native person can identify as both Native and as a member of another race, such as white, Black or Asian.

If the person checks off only the American Indian or Alaska Native box on the form, the person counts as American Indian or Alaska Native “Alone,” meaning that this is the person's only race. If the person checks the American Indian or Alaska Native box and one or more boxes for another race, the person is included in the count as American Indian or Alaska Native “Alone or in Combination” (with one or more other races.)

The Census Bureau does publish information on the “Alone or in Combination” population. However, many standard profiles of the population lump those who check American Indian or Alaska Native and another racial group into a single category as “Two or More Races,” along with all non-Indians who also report multiple races.

The only way to ensure that you are included in all the counts as American Indian or Alaska Native is to check just that one box on the form.