

Nation

Study details aid based on Census

Data used to spread \$1,469 per person

By Haya El Nasser
USA TODAY

Financially battered states get about 20% of their money from federal funds, so they're paying special attention to the Census this month. The more people are counted, the more money they'll see.

The Census Bureau began sending 120 million letters Monday to alert people that the 2010 Census form will arrive in their mailboxes next week. As the word spreads, a study out today details how \$447 billion in federal aid was distributed to states, counties and cities based on population data.

In fiscal year 2008, 215 federal programs used Census data to guide the distribution of about \$1,469 a person, according to the report.

"Given the fiscal crisis that states are experiencing these days, they have a particular

Assistance programs

The five largest federal assistance programs in fiscal year 2008 from which the distribution of funds was based on Census data:

Funds (in billions)



Source: Brookings Institution
By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

interest — even greater than normal," says Andrew Reamer, a fellow at the Brookings Institution. Reamer compiled the first ranking of states, counties and metropolitan areas and the amounts of federal money they received based on Census population counts.

The Census count costs more than \$14 billion but will be used to dole out close to \$5 trillion over 10 years, Reamer says.

"It's a huge return on investment," he says. "It's

spending, relatively speaking, a little bit of money to make sure that the federal government is distributing a whole lot of money on a fair and equitable basis."

About 80% of federal aid based on Census data goes to state governments through a handful of large grant programs that help low-income individuals and support transportation networks.

Medicaid receives the largest amount of federal aid by far — 58% of all Census-based funding. Highway programs are the next largest recipient.

"The outsized role of Medicaid is way beyond anything else," Reamer says.

The study details Census-



For a 50-state list of federal funds distributed on the basis of Census population counts, go to census.usatoday.com

CENSUS
2010

based federal aid to the 50 states, the 200 largest counties and the 100 largest metropolitan areas.

The amount of funds distributed to communities varies widely from state to state.

State governments are the single largest recipient of Census-based federal funds. Many have varying rules for distributing the money to counties and cities.

"Some states have more generous Medicaid programs than others," Reamer says.

The highest per-capita recipients of Census-linked federal aid in 2008: District of Columbia at \$4,656 per person, followed by Vermont at \$2,874, Alaska at \$2,575 and

New York at \$2,301. The lowest: Nevada at \$742, Virginia at \$862, Colorado at \$890 and Florida at \$902.

The report is designed to help communities encourage people to return their Census forms. The population numbers also are used to allocate seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and redraw political districts.

"Making sure that every resident is counted is probably the most important thing communities can do right now," says New York State Assemblyman Phil Ramos, a Democrat who represents Long Island's Suffolk County.

"Communities of color have traditionally been undercounted," Ramos says. "Those are the higher-maintenance communities when it comes to government spending."