



Report In Brief

APRIL 5, 2012

Background

The Census Bureau is directed by law to carry out the decennial census, which is mandated by the Constitution. Decennial census data are used to apportion seats in Congress; redraw congressional districts; and allocate hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds for state and local governments, as well as other public and private sector purposes.

For the 2020 Census, the Bureau has reorganized to improve its research and testing, as well as develop more cost-effective program processes and methods. Among the changes are a reorganization of its regional office structure, the creation of new directorates, and the launch of a new Office of Risk Management and Program Evaluation. Also, the Bureau is working to improve its cost estimation process for the next decennial census; it will update estimates as research and testing progress, so that budget requests align with decennial census requirements.

Why We Did This Review

As planning for the 2020 Census proceeds, these changes must contribute to the design research and testing needed to develop a cost-effective and high quality decennial census. This decade, the OIG plans to monitor the 2020 Census throughout its life cycle to help the Bureau achieve its goal of containing the costs of the next decennial by recommending changes to promote a more cost-effective design.

For this review, we sought to (1) evaluate the Bureau's efforts to improve the 2020 Census design, focusing on how the results of the Bureau's evaluation plans will inform the new decennial design, and (2) evaluate and monitor the implementation of the Bureau's management initiatives designed to enhance organizational change.

CENSUS BUREAU

2020 Census Planning: Delays with 2010 Census Research Studies May Adversely Impact the 2020 Decennial Census

OIG-12-023-I

WHAT WE FOUND

The Census Bureau recognizes that it must fundamentally change its decennial design to improve the enumeration quality of the 2020 Census and contain life cycle costs within its preliminary estimates of \$12.8–18 billion (nominal dollars). More specifically, the Bureau should reassess how it updates its address list, enumerates households, and utilizes field and IT infrastructure in this critical effort. The Census Program Evaluation and Experiments (CPEX) program provides lessons learned from the previous decennial that inform the next design. With the Bureau's timely completion of 2010 CPEX studies in question, we found that:

Delays In Completing 2010 Census Studies Could Adversely Impact the Bureau's Efforts to Improve the Decennial Census Design. Our review of select early 2020 Census planning efforts found that the assessments and other studies from the previous census cycle lagged behind schedule. Bureau officials stated that delays occurred because of new processes, untimely funding, and project team challenges. We found that attrition, staff reassignments, and competition for resources may have also impacted the project schedules. By February 2012, the Bureau had released 14 reports—however, according to its revised schedule, 38 reports should have been released by December 31, 2011. Delays in completing the 109 studies from the 2010 CPEX create a risk that results may not be available as inputs for the thirty-five 2020 Census research projects slated to begin during FY 2012.

The 2020 Census Requires a Comprehensive Risk Management Plan. The 2020 Census Directorate is finalizing a risk management plan to ensure project delivery on time, within budget, and with the promised functionality. The Bureau is working to integrate this plan with its enterprise risk management program and the Department of Commerce's risk management efforts, including reviews of IT and non-IT major programs. This should help the Bureau monitor 2020 Census IT development—and thus help the Bureau avoid issues, such as the cost overruns and problems developing requirements, encountered with the 2010 Census field data collection automation contract. Coordination with the Department on major IT and non-IT systems will be critical in helping to control costs and ensure that systems support mission requirements.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We have recommended to the director of the Census Bureau the following actions (which, since December 2011, the Bureau has already begun implementing):

- Prioritize further the 2010 CPEX studies, and focus program resources, to ensure that the most critical studies affecting the cost and quality of the 2020 Census are completed; and
- Improve the transparency of the 2010 CPEX program by posting study plans, expected publication dates for the 109 studies, and final reports online as soon as practicable so that stakeholders can review and monitor the Bureau's progress in redesigning the 2020 Census.