



Report in Brief

JUNE 7, 2016

Background

The 2015 Census Test allowed the bureau to begin the process of developing a field operations management approach, which will make data collection operations more efficient and effective. The approach features (1) *planned automation*, such as an operational control system that supports optimized daily assignments; and (2) *available real-time data*, such as system-generated alerts that indicate to a supervisor that an enumerator's performance requires attention and a response. Because there are always households that do not respond via initial decennial census response options, the bureau must test strategies that help it effectively collect information from those households.

Why We Did This Review

We initiated this audit of the 2015 Census Test (conducted in portions of Maricopa County, Arizona) to evaluate whether changes to the bureau's 2020 Census research and testing (R&T) strategy, along with R&T delays, increases the risk that the bureau will not be able to achieve its estimated cost savings goal while maintaining the quality of the 2020 Census.

Our objectives were to assess (1) whether the bureau's reengineered and automated operational control system for managing fieldwork functioned as expected, and (2) the bureau's progress for determining whether enumerators are able to use employee-owned mobile devices (referred to as "bring your own device" [BYOD]) to collect household data, as well as the status of the bureau's efforts to overcome policy and legal issues associated with the use of those devices.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

2020 Census: The Bureau Has Not Reported Test Results and Executed an Inadequately Designed 2015 Test

OIG-16-032-A

WHAT WE FOUND

With respect to our first objective, we noted that enumerators were able to collect household data and supervisors and managers were able to use many features of the operational control system to manage and monitor workload and enumerators during the 2015 test. However, we continue to identify R&T activity delays, such as the lack of finalized reports for previous decennial census tests, which may negatively impact subsequent tests and the overall assessment of the R&T program. Additionally, the bureau did not design the 2015 test in a manner that allowed it to answer its research questions by isolating the effect of specific NRFU design options. Because some of these new nonresponse followup (NRFU) design options may not be included in the final 2020 Census design, effects on efficiency observed during the 2015 test may not be replicated in 2020. Furthermore, new innovative techniques to reduce NRFU cost lack controls, and do not always function as designed. Finally, as noted during previous audits, the bureau did not charge costs accurately to the 2015 test project code, so we were unable to identify the test's significant contracts. These findings may hinder the bureau's ability to achieve 2020 Census cost and quality goals.

Regarding our second objective: in January 2016, the bureau decided to eliminate BYOD as an option for providing enumerators with devices or smartphones. Instead, the bureau decided to implement the Device as a Service (DaaS) strategy for providing enumerators with equipment during the 2020 Census. Under the DaaS option, a single vendor—at a single cost—will supply the necessary equipment, handle all logistics, configure the devices, manage inventory, and provide technical support. Our test of the BYOD objective was complete and we identified two potential issues. However, we chose not to report any findings on this issue because the bureau will not be pursuing a BYOD strategy. Finally, in the "Other Matters" section, we bring additional observations to the bureau's attention.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau

1. analyze and document test results in a timely manner, to inform subsequent tests and ensure transparency;
2. utilize existing controls, such as oversight by the Research and Methodology Directorate, or implement new controls, to ensure that projects and tests are designed to enable the bureau to answer research questions using test results;
3. analyze (a) internal control weaknesses and (b) performance limitations of operational control system features, and make improvements during remaining 2020 Census testing activities; and
4. ensure that all contract costs are charged in accordance with cost accounting requirements, so all test costs can be correctly reported.