



# Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General

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## Why We Did This Review

The Census Bureau—with 680 Partnership and Data Services Program (Partnership Program) staff positions established for community outreach supporting the 2010 decennial census—received \$1.0 billion in 2009 Recovery Act funds for “Periodic Censuses and Programs” and set aside \$126 million for the Partnership Program.

Approximately 3,000 Partnership employees worked in FY 2009 and 3,800 in FY 2010 (out of more than 165,000 and 782,000 total decennial employees, respectively). The Partnership program spent about \$300 million in FY 2009–2010, out of more than \$8 billion total spent on the decennial in those years.

This report examines, among other things, the relationship between Partnership staff promoting the 2010 decennial and the local Census office (LCO) managers hired to implement it.

First conducted in 1790, decennial censuses have fulfilled a vital constitutional mandate. The 2010 Census enumerated more than 300 million people. The results provide important data that will guide Congressional apportionment and redistricting, as well as the distribution of more than \$400 billion of government funding annually.

For the 2010 decennial, Census integrated 44 separate operations (totaling some 9,400 program- and project-level activities). Temporary bureau management staff ran 494 local offices and managed over 600,000 temporary workers. Additionally, Census hired Partnership Specialists who primarily recruited local partners and provided support for decennial operations. The bureau spent approximately half of its \$126 million Recovery Act Partnership Program funding to establish a new position, Partnership Assistant, to provide additional support to the program.

## Census Bureau

### ***2010 Census: Cooperation Between Partnership Staff and Local Census Office Managers Challenged by Communication and Coordination Problems (OIG–11–023–I)***

## What We Found

The Partnership Program primarily assisted decennial operations by interfacing with hard-to-count groups, populations who have historically been undercounted or traditionally have not responded well to the decennial census questionnaire (e.g., ethnic or minority populations, renters, or low-income people). To accomplish its goal, the Program collaborated with partners (including local and tribal governments, community and religious organizations, schools, businesses, and the media) in communities within a Census regional office area. Partners pledged their commitment to share the Census message and mobilized their constituents in support of the decennial count. According to the bureau, there were approximately 257,000 regional Census partners.

To connect these community partners with Census required Partnership to collaborate with LCOs. However, we found that Partnership operated independent of LCO production timelines—and the two groups experienced systemic communication and coordination problems:

- *The relationship between Partnership staff and LCO managers suffered from misunderstanding and miscommunication.*
- *LCO managers lacking good guidance about Partnership tended to hold unfavorable views of the program.*

We also examined the new, Recovery Act-funded Partnership Assistant position, finding that it added value to the program but also presented challenges:

- *The Partnership Assistants were not subject to thorough screening and were varied in their workplace skills.*
- *Greater access to equipment and systems, as well as improved training and technical support, would help Partnership Assistants improve performance.*

## What We Recommended

For subsequent decennial censuses, we recommend that the Census Bureau:

- *Specify how to align Partnership activities and objectives with LCO schedules to remedy current systemic shortcomings*
- *Ensure joint Partnership–LCO manager training as part of the decennial process*

Should the bureau retain the Partnership Assistant position in the 2020 Census, we recommend that it:

- *Refine the recruitment and hiring process (especially through more job-specific examination) and training of Partnership Assistants*
- *Provide Partnership Assistants adequate electronic resources to do their job, a key to efficient and effective Partnership programming*