



Report in Brief

May 11, 2017

Background

The 2020 Census Address Canvassing Test was conducted August through December 2016, in parts of Buncombe County, North Carolina, and St. Louis and supervised by Atlanta and Chicago regional office staff as well as staff at Census Bureau (the Bureau) headquarters. Its primary objective was to measure the effectiveness of in-office address canvassing (IOAC) by comparing its results to the results found during in-field address canvassing (IFAC) operations. According to the test plan, the Bureau also intended to use test results to

- improve the address canvassing operation by measuring the effectiveness of (a) integrated systems, (b) field staff training, and (c) the use of new collection geography in the field to answer research questions that will inform address canvassing design decisions;
- analyze cost and quality reports;
- project the impact of the reengineered operation on various enumeration operations; and
- summarize test data to enhance future IFAC operations, including planning, quality control, and budget estimation.

Why We Did This Review

We initiated this audit in support of OIG's oversight role for the planning and implementation of the 2020 Census. The audit's original objective was to assess the risk that the Address Canvassing Test would not accomplish its stated goals. However, the *Address Canvassing Test Plan* contained no stated goals. As a result, we modified the audit objective to focus on specific test components.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

2020 Census: The Address Canvassing Test Revealed Cost and Schedule Risks and May Not Inform Future Planning as Intended

OIG-17-024-A

WHAT WE FOUND

During our fieldwork, we found that

- **IOAC will cost significantly more than initially estimated.** The Bureau's initial cost estimate was roughly \$11 million annually for FYs 2016 through 2019, totaling approximately \$44 million for the operation. However, our review indicated that IOAC will cost at least \$125 million.
- **Active block resolution (ABR) may not finish in time for the 2020 Census IFAC operation in August 2019.** Our analysis of ABR data identified a growing backlog of blocks awaiting quality control review.
- **The Bureau's controls for monitoring ABR have weaknesses.** The *2020 Address Canvassing Operational Plan* states that (1) ABR staff will record the amount of time spent on a particular assignment so the information can be used by headquarters management to monitor production rates and (2) ABR work is subject to a quality control process. While we found that the Bureau does require ABR staff to record the time spent processing blocks and currently has an ABR quality control process, we identified weaknesses in the Bureau's production and quality monitoring practices for ABR.
- **The Bureau did not achieve some of the original test objectives.** The 2020 Census Address Canvassing Test hired temporary field staff to verify addresses and maps in the test areas. Listers were managed by local supervisors who monitored their work using a tool that provided progress reports and automated electronic messages. According to the test plan, a success criterion for the test was to collect data to inform future operational planning and cost estimation activities. However, because the Bureau was not adequately prepared to utilize some of the innovative design features that it plans to implement for the 2020 Census, we identified limitations.

We also documented test limitations and risks, which are reflected in an "Other Matters" section.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

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

1. Update the *2020 Census Life-cycle Cost Estimate* to reflect more accurate IOAC cost estimates, including any plans to address the ABR quality control backlog.
2. Increase ABR production rates and reduce the quality control backlog to ensure that ABR is completed prior to 2020 Census address canvassing.
3. Create a production schedule and implement a clerk-level quality monitoring process for ABR.
4. Ensure that (a) testing activities are adequately planned and remain on schedule and (b) new design innovations are prepared to function as designed.