



# Report in Brief

February 6, 2019

## Background

The Census Bureau (the Bureau) is constitutionally mandated to carry out a census of the U.S. population every 10 years. Prior to the enumeration, the Bureau verifies and updates the address of each housing unit in the country. In large part, the Bureau accomplishes this by conducting the address canvassing operation prior to the decennial census to refine the Bureau's address list and help ensure that the Bureau can contact every household. The address canvassing operation for the 2020 Census will verify the address and physical location of an estimated 143 million housing units within 11 million blocks.

During the address canvassing operation for the 2010 Census, nearly every block in the country was traversed by temporarily employed Listers, who compared what they saw "on the ground" to address lists generated by the Bureau's Master Address File. As a cost-saving innovation for the 2020 Census, the Bureau divided the operation into two components: in-office address canvassing and in-field address canvassing.

The 2018 End-to-End Census (E2E) Test is the last large-scale in-field test of the Bureau's redesigned address canvassing operation before the 2020 Census. The goals of the 2018 E2E Test's address canvassing operation were to (1) test the listing capabilities required by in-field address canvassing, (2) validate the creation of the workload for the in-field address canvassing operation by using in-office address canvassing, and (3) conduct a quality control (QC) operation during in-field address canvassing. The Bureau conducted the 2018 E2E Test's address canvassing operation in Providence; Bluefield-Beckley-Oak Hill (Beckley), West Virginia; and Pierce County, Washington.

## Why We Did This Review

Our audit objectives were to (1) assess the performance of in-field address canvassing operations and (2) determine whether in-office address canvassing correctly identified blocks for the in-field address canvassing operation.

## U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

### 2020 Census: Issues Observed During the 2018 End-to-End Census Test's Address Canvassing Operation Indicate Risk to Address List Quality

OIG-19-008-A

## WHAT WE FOUND

We assessed the performance of in-field address canvassing and identified multiple instances of noncompliance with in-field test procedures by Listers, Supervisors, and Managers. We also determined that in-office address canvassing did not correctly identify blocks for the in-field address canvassing operation. Specifically, we found the following:

1. In-office address canvassing did not correctly identify blocks for in-field address canvassing at the Providence test site.
2. Resolution of alerts indicating potential instances of low quality and fraud/abuse was sometimes untimely or non-existent.
3. The Bureau's ability to inform the 2020 Census address canvassing operation using the 2018 E2E Test faces some limitations.
4. The Bureau is unsure of whether 26 Listers who updated addresses were qualified.

In addition to our findings, on-site observations revealed that some Listers did not comply with in-field canvassing procedures. Noncompliance with test procedures during the operation could result in an inaccurate address list.

## WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau do the following:

1. Evaluate how the number of incorrectly categorized passive blocks will affect Census quality and how those errors may affect demographic groups.
2. Identify in-office operational errors that are causing clerks to incorrectly categorize blocks and implement procedures to prevent errors from continuing.
3. Include a nationally representative statistical sample of passive blocks in the 2020 Census in-field operation and report the estimated number of missed households.
4. Develop procedures to ensure operational control system alerts indicating risks to quality and potential fraud/abuse are resolved in time to prevent continued enumerator error and address potential fraud/abuse.
5. Assess the risks to the 2020 Census that have arisen as a result of the limitations identified during the 2018 E2E Test's address canvassing operation.
6. Determine why final training assessment documentation was missing for 26 Listers and develop a management control to ensure that (1) trainee assessments are documented, and (2) only qualified trainees are retained for a 2020 Census Lister position.