



# Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General

February 2009



## Why We Did this Review

In November 2008 Census completed modification of the Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) contract. Under the modified contract, Census is requiring far fewer handheld units and has taken back responsibility for major tasks that had been assigned to the contractor, such as collecting data for blocks of 1,000 or more addresses and providing help desk support.

We assessed the bureau's progress in developing and implementing planned activities for the 2010 decennial address canvassing operation, and identified a number of issues that increase the potential for problems.

## Background

The mounting problems with the FDCA contract prompted the decision to abandon use of handheld computers for nonresponse follow-up while keeping them for address canvassing--the first major operation of the 2010 census.

During address canvassing, thousands of temporary decennial staff will use handheld computers to collect addresses and geographic information to update the bureau's master address file and digital maps. The bureau describes "an accurate, comprehensive, and timely [address] list" as "one of the best predictors of a successful census." This report is one of a series responding to then-Secretary Gutierrez's request that OIG review the bureau's 2010 census plans to determine high-risk areas.

View the full report at [http://www.oig.doc.gov/oig/reports/2009/OIG-19171\(web\).pdf](http://www.oig.doc.gov/oig/reports/2009/OIG-19171(web).pdf).

## U.S. Census Bureau

### ***Census 2010: Delays in Address Canvassing Software Development and Testing, Help Desk Planning, and Field Office Deployment Have Increased Operational Risk (OIG-19171)***

#### **What We Found**

The revised decennial schedule requires delivery of the improved handheld computers to early local census offices by February 3, 2009, so that temporary workers ("listers") can begin training for the April 6 start of address canvassing. But delays in software development and testing over the summer and fall have shortened the window for delivering field-ready handhelds, training users, and implementing effective help desk services. We identified the following areas of concern:

***Potential for unexpected handheld problems.*** Census missed dates for testing handheld components and the integrated system, and was left with only 8 days for field testing the entire system. This short test period increases the risk that unexpected problems may surface during the live canvassing operation, which could affect the productivity of listers and the accuracy of the results. In addition:

1. Census eliminated some hydrographic information from map files so that each region's maps could fit on a single digital card in the handhelds. But the move leaves listers with fewer reference points to guide them through assignment areas, which might make canvassing more difficult.
2. The bureau chose the Automated Listing Mapping Instrument (ALMI) to list large blocks, because these have been a problem for the handhelds. ALMI handles large data-collection tasks in some nondecennial surveys. But it defines collection areas differently from the handhelds, increasing the potential for duplicates in a decennial environment, and does not use GPS technology. In decennial field tests, canvassers had difficulty completing certain tasks using ALMI. Modifications to the large block approach based on field test results must be finalized soon to ensure the information collected is accurate and reliable.

***Short time frame for establishing help desk services.*** The bureau's decision in July 2008 to manage help desk support beginning in January 2009 left little time to plan for and establish these services by the start of address canvassing. Given the limited handheld testing and the uncertainty of their performance, solid help desk services must be in place to field potentially high call volumes and ensure a successful operation.

***Slow deployment of early local census offices.*** As of late November 2008, Census had opened only 87 of the 151 early local census offices needed to conduct address canvassing. Despite having deployed 144 offices as of early February 2009, the bureau continues to encounter delays with its rollout schedule. However, as a backup, Census will have nearby operational offices handle the canvassing preparations and workload of those not yet finished. The bureau must ensure the operational offices have the space and resources to handle the added work.

#### **What We Recommended**

We made no recommendations because of the little time Census has to complete its address canvassing preparations. But we continue to monitor how it (1) finalizes its approach to large block canvassing, (2) develops and conducts training for help desk staff, and (3) deploys local census offices while preparing to implement its contingency plans as necessary.