



Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General



Why We Did This Review

The Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008 gave the Census Bureau an additional \$210 million to help cover spiraling 2010 decennial costs stemming from the bureau's problematic efforts to automate major field operations, major flaws in its cost-estimating methods, and other issues. The Act's explanatory statement required the bureau to submit to Congress a detailed plan and timeline of decennial milestones and expenditures, as well as a quantitative assessment of associated program risks, within 30 days.

OIG must provide quarterly reports on the bureau's progress against this plan. This report's objective was to provide an update of activities and operations, identify budget and spending issues, and examine risks to the 2010 Census program.

Background

Since first conducted in 1790, the constitutionally mandated decennial census field activities have largely been paper based. The 2010 Census plan included significant expansion of automation, using handheld computers to verify addresses (address canvassing), conduct in-person surveys with households that did not return their questionnaires (nonresponse follow-up), and collect data from a nationwide sample to evaluate the accuracy of the decennial count (coverage measurement).

Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU) is the most expensive and labor-intensive operation of the decennial census. Increasing costs and automation problems prompted the bureau's decisions to abandon the handheld computers for NRFU and coverage measurement operations in favor of paper.

2010 Census: Quarterly Report to Congress February 2010 (OIG-19791-3)

What We Found

About 9,400 key operations and activities make up the Census 2010 program. With such a complex, time-sensitive undertaking, it remains vitally important that the Census Bureau operate efficiently and within budget. In our last quarterly report, we noted several risks to the decennial, including scheduling delays, cost overruns, and complications associated with the development of the paper-based operations control system (PBOCS).

During this reporting period, we observed the following:

- PBOCS development and testing have continued to suffer setbacks that will reduce functionality and require the development of workarounds to complete the NRFU operation. PBOCS testing is revealing more and more critical defects as it progresses. Schedule delays have hindered the development of training manuals and technical support guides.
- The bureau conducted two operational load tests of the computer networks supporting decennial operations. The tests showed that the networks and devices were able to successfully handle peak loads, but revealed PBOCS and other IT performance problems.
- While Census stayed within its budget during our review period, spending among local Census offices (LCOs) remains a concern. The Address Canvassing operation was 25 percent over budget, and our analysis of travel costs for the operation found wide disparities in wages and mileage reimbursement in some of the LCOs.
- Census has issued a revised cost estimate of \$2.33 billion for the NRFU operation. Any reductions that may be achieved in NRFU are likely to be partially offset by an estimated increase of \$137 million for the Vacant/Delete Check operation.
- Census's Risk Review Board (RRB) has taken a proactive role in overseeing risk management activities. The RRB has initiated a monthly review of the 25 identified risks on the bureau's risk register. The RRB is reviewing contingency plans for 13 of the risks. To date, the RRB has finalized four plans. These plans appear to be adequate to cover the actions Census would need to take should the risks materialize.

This report does not provide recommendations. We will forward the Census Bureau a separate document recommending that the following actions be taken:

- senior executives with the authority to set priorities—such as reallocating resources to where they are most needed, resolving conflicting priorities, and making major changes to the decennial schedule or plan—closely monitor PBOCS activities and act to expeditiously reduce operational risk;
- streamline development and testing by further reducing PBOCS capabilities to the essentials needed for the most important enumeration operations;
- focus on developing standardized procedural workarounds for PBOCS capabilities that cannot be implemented to support operations; and
- enhance technical support staff and procedures to expeditiously resolve problems in the field.