



# Report in Brief

March 24, 2020

## Background

For 2020, the Census Bureau (the Bureau) plans to conduct a decennial census that is more automated, modern, and dynamic than prior ones—including innovative ways of optimizing self-response by an estimated 143 million U.S. households to reduce the need for expensive Nonresponse Follow-up visits. The Census Questionnaire Assistance (CQA) operation will contribute to increasing self-response by providing telephone assistance to U.S. households.

The CQA operation for the 2018 End-to-End Census (E2E) Test was comprised of two telephone-based components: (1) inbound operations to assist households with completing their 2020 Census questionnaires and (2) outbound operations to verify the accuracy of participant's responses. During the 2017 Census Test (2017 Test), only inbound operations were performed.

## Why We Did This Review

Our audit objectives were to determine how previous internal assessments informed the operation, how the CQA contract was planned, and how its costs were managed. Specifically, we sought to (1) determine whether the Bureau (a) implemented effective internal controls for controlling the cost of the CQA contract and (b) sufficiently supported the workloads and cost drivers used to estimate the CQA contract cost; and (2) determine whether the Bureau will be able to inform the 2020 Census CQA operation by utilizing lessons learned during the 2010 Census, the 2017 Test, and the 2018 E2E Test.

## U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

### 2020 Census: The Census Bureau's Oversight of Contractor Performance During the 2018 End-to-End Test's Census Questionnaire Assistance Operation Was Deficient in Some Areas and Did Not Implement Some Lessons Learned for the Operation

OIG-20-022-A

## WHAT WE FOUND

Our testing did not identify significant deficiencies in the Bureau's internal controls over how CQA contractor invoices are processed. Our testing of a sample of monthly contractor invoices from July 2016 to July 2018, specifically for labor charges and overhead costs, found that the costs charged were in line with the contract's negotiated rates. Additionally, the Bureau was generally able to support the workloads and cost drivers for the CQA contract costs based on an independent government cost estimate dated February 18, 2016, which was prior to the contract award. We found that key assumptions such as contact center employee labor, facility space costs, workspace allocations, staffing ratios, and the number of calls received per customer service representative, were supported. However, we found issues with the internal controls used to manage the CQA contract, specifically performance, and the resolution of lessons learned from previous tests.

Specifically, we found the following:

1. The Bureau did not fully implement high-impact lessons learned from the 2017 Test.
2. The Bureau's oversight of the CQA contractor's performance was deficient in some areas.

## WHAT WE RECOMMEND

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

1. Review and implement high-impact lessons learned from the 2017 Test and 2018 E2E Test prior to the 2020 CQA operation.
2. Revise the award fee plan of the CQA contract to ensure compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation and Office of Management and Budget requirements to incentivize the contractor's performance.
3. Develop a process to verify the accuracy of the contractor's daily operational reports.