



Report in Brief

May 9, 2022

Background

We initiated this evaluation because our prior work has identified issues related to the U.S. Census Bureau's (the Bureau's) Census Investigative Services (CIS) operations.

Each applicant selected for a Bureau job goes through an independent background check. CIS manages the suitability clearance process for all Bureau personnel and contractors by applying U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) standards, CIS procedures, and other criteria when reviewing documentation to evaluate an applicant's suitability and fitness for federal service. The background investigation at CIS usually involves two phases: (1) a pre-employment case review and suitability recommendation and (2) a post-employment adjudication, except for temporary 2020 Census employees who required limited access to Bureau facilities and systems.

The pre-employment case review is conducted by CIS and involves an analyst—either a federal employee or contractor—and a federally employed supervisor reviewing application documents for the accuracy and completeness of all required forms. Analysts make either a favorable or unfavorable recommendation regarding information contained in the forms. Supervisors either agree or disagree with the analyst's recommendation. If a favorable recommendation is approved by the supervisor, an entry on duty date is established. CIS then releases the investigative form—which is collected electronically—to the background investigations provider (formerly OPM) along with any other documentation, as required, for a background investigation. Since 2019, the background investigations have been conducted by the U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA).

Why We Did This Review

The overall objective of our evaluation was to conduct a series of reviews to determine whether the Bureau's planning and execution of 2020 Census peak operations successfully reduced the risk to decennial census data quality and costs.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

The Census Bureau Needs to Improve Management and Oversight of Vetting Employees to Avoid Hiring Unsuitable Individuals for Federal Employment

OIG-22-021-I

WHAT WE FOUND

Overall, we found that the Bureau continues to face longstanding challenges in providing sufficient governance for its personnel suitability program, which is necessary to ensure that background investigation requirements are met at its facilities. Specifically, we found the following:

1. The Bureau continues to have a significant backlog of post-employment cases requiring adjudication and the actual number of cases requiring adjudication is questionable.
2. Inadequate documentation and oversight have allowed quality problems regarding post-employment background investigations to persist.
3. CIS did not properly adjudicate results for an estimated 7 percent of temporary 2020 Census pre-employment, fingerprint-only investigations.
4. The Census Hiring and Employment Check (CHEC) system data is incomplete and, in some instances, inaccurate.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau ensure the Census Investigative Service Division does the following:

1. Update the *Project Management Plan* to include (a) periodic reconciliations between the CHEC and DCSA reports, (b) quantifiable metrics for eliminating the backlog and (c) monitoring performance against established metrics.
2. Evaluate human capital needs and coordinate appropriate resources to manage adjudication backlog workload.
3. Strengthen management oversight of the adjudication process to verify (a) stringent reviews of serious adjudication issues are conducted, (b) cases are properly completed and appropriately reviewed by secondary reviewers or supervisors and signed off, (c) documentation requirements are met and (d) internal control mechanisms required by policy are properly implemented.
4. Take appropriate actions to recommend removal of any employee deemed unsuitable for federal employment based on post-employment adjudication results.
5. Resolve inaccuracies in the CHEC system and ensure complete, accurate, and reliable data are entered in the CHEC system.