

The Census Bureau Did Not Develop a Workforce Plan to Address Field Representative Staffing Gaps

FINAL REPORT NO. OIG-25-013-I

MARCH 13, 2025



U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of Inspector General
Office of Audit and Evaluation



March 13, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Ron S. Jarmin
Acting Director
U.S. Census Bureau

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Analee Striner-Brown".

FROM: Analee Striner-Brown
Acting Assistant Inspector General for Audit and Evaluation

SUBJECT: *The Census Bureau Did Not Develop a Workforce Plan to Address
Field Representative Staffing Gaps*
Report No. OIG-25-013-I

Attached is the final report on our evaluation of the Census Bureau's recruitment, hiring, and retention of field representatives. We will post the report on [our website](#) per the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. §§ 404, 420).

Within 60 calendar days, please provide an action plan addressing the report's recommendations, as required by Department Administrative Order 213-5.

We appreciate your staff's cooperation and professionalism during this evaluation. If you have any questions or concerns about the report, please contact me at (202) 893-8759 or Division Director Amy Jones at (724) 343-6921.

Attachment

cc: Christa D. Jones, Chief of Staff, Census Bureau





Report in Brief

March 13, 2025

Background

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts more than 130 surveys of households and businesses each year. The bureau employs thousands of field representatives (FRs) to interview respondents for some of its largest surveys, including the American Community Survey (ACS), Current Population Survey (CPS), and National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The bureau's Field Division plans and carries out the field data collection program for the surveys. Regional offices are responsible for recruitment, hiring, and retention of FRs for surveys in their regions. The bureau struggles to recruit and retain FRs in some areas, resulting in high FR attrition. This has led to staffing shortfalls for the ACS, CPS, and NCVS.

If the bureau does not recruit and retain enough quality employees for FR positions, it will not have sufficient and capable staff to complete interviews and collect social and economic data the federal government, businesses, and other groups need. The bureau includes FRs in its mission-critical occupation (MCO) list. Agencies consider MCOs as core to carrying out their missions and without which they cannot complete their mission-critical work.

Why We Did This Review

Our objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies the bureau uses to support its recruitment, hiring, and retention of employees in mission-critical positions. Specifically, we reviewed staffing requirements and strategies intended to ensure the bureau recruits, hires, and retains enough FRs to collect survey data.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

The Census Bureau Did Not Develop a Workforce Plan to Address Field Representative Staffing Gaps

OIG-25-013-I

WHAT WE FOUND

We found that the bureau does not have effective strategies to address staffing gaps and high vacancies in FR positions. Specifically, the bureau did not:

- Meet its staffing goals for ACS, CPS, and NCVS.
- Implement a process to track and assess vacancy information from the regions.

Without a workforce plan, the bureau lacks a comprehensive strategy to ensure it has the necessary FR staff to help accomplish its mission of providing high-quality data. Unaddressed FR staffing gaps increase the risks of lower response rates on surveys and higher attrition of other field staff, who bear the burden of increased workloads. Developing and implementing a workforce plan for FRs will help the bureau address the issues we identify in this report.

WHAT WE RECOMMENDED

We recommended that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau develop and implement a comprehensive workforce plan for FRs that includes the following:

- Setting strategic direction.
- Conducting workforce analysis.
- Developing, implementing, and monitoring the workforce action plan to meet the bureau's workforce needs.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Background | 1 |
| Objective, Finding, and Recommendation..... | 4 |
| The Bureau Does Not Have Effective Strategies to Address Staffing Gaps and High Vacancies in FR Positions | 4 |
| A. The bureau did not meet its staffing goals for ACS, CPS, and NCVS..... | 4 |
| B. The bureau did not implement a process to track and assess vacancy information from the regions..... | 7 |
| Recommendation | 11 |
| Summary of Agency Response and OIG Comments | 12 |
| Appendix A: Objective, Scope, and Methodology | 14 |
| Appendix B. Agency Response..... | 16 |

Cover: Herbert C. Hoover Building main entrance at 14th Street Northwest in Washington, DC. Completed in 1932, the building is named after the former Secretary of Commerce and 31st President of the United States.

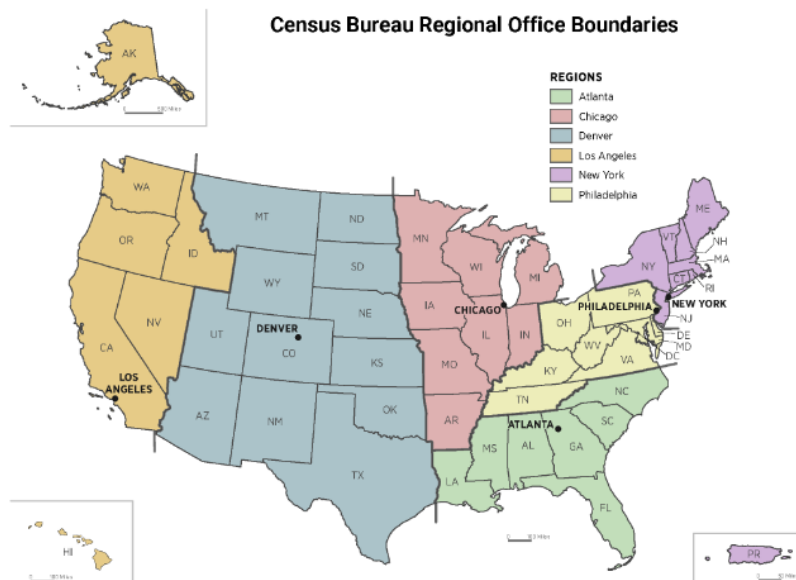
Background

As the federal government's largest statistical agency, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts more than 130 surveys of households and businesses each year. Most surveys use methods such as mail, internet self-response, and computer-assisted telephone interviewing to collect information. The bureau also employs thousands of field representatives (FRs) to interview respondents in person or over the phone to obtain data for some of its largest surveys and programs, including:

- The American Community Survey (ACS) – this is a mandatory¹ survey of households that collects information on social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics. It is a key component of the bureau's Decennial Program.
- The Current Population Survey (CPS) – this survey, sponsored jointly by the Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, provides estimates of employment, unemployment, and other characteristics of the general labor force, population, and subgroups within the population.
- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) – this survey provides national-level personal victimization and property crime rates from a general population sample.

Within the bureau's Field Operations Directorate, the Field Division plans and carries out the field data collection program for the surveys. When determining the number of FRs needed, the Field Division considers factors such as survey workload, the average number of cases an FR should complete during the data collection period, the number of FRs trained and currently working on the surveys, and the geography of the regions (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Census Bureau Regions



Source: Census Bureau website

¹ See 13 U.S.C. §§ 141, 193, 221 (amended by 18 U.S.C. §§ 3571 and 3559).

Regional offices are responsible for recruitment, hiring, and retention of FRs for surveys in their regions. Regional offices publish recruitment bulletins for FR positions, conduct interviews, and select applicants. When applicants accept job offers, they are placed in time-limited positions and provided training before being assigned to surveys. After 4 years of successful performance, an FR qualifies for a permanent appointment. To retain FRs, the Field Division advises regions to offer FRs special act awards and cash performance awards. Although the U.S. Department of Commerce's (the Department's) Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) has a recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives plan, according to Field Division management, the Division does not offer FRs other incentives because it is too expensive and would require considering additional benefits for thousands of FRs.

Despite its efforts, the bureau struggles to recruit and retain FRs in some areas due to the following factors:

- In some regions, other employers offer higher pay rates compared to the FR hourly wage. For most, FR pay is not sufficient as a single income.
- Newly hired FRs do not receive monetary incentives and are ineligible for employment benefits such as paid time off.
- FRs work part-time, not full-time.
- FRs sometimes face challenges persuading reluctant households to answer questions when collecting survey responses, which may lead to lower job satisfaction.
- FRs may experience safety concerns when visiting households in-person.

These challenges result in high attrition among FRs across the bureau.

Of the surveys that used FRs for data collection in fiscal years (FYs) 2019 through 2023, six are ongoing surveys and seven are periodic surveys.² According to Field Division management, depending on the surveys in the data collection phase, the bureau employs up to 8,000 FRs. Of the ongoing surveys, ACS, CPS, and NCVS require the majority of FRs³ (see table 1).

Table 1. FY 2023 Regional FR Staffing Average for ACS, CPS, and NCVS

| Regions | ACS | CPS | NCVS |
|--------------|-----|-----|------|
| New York | 514 | 381 | 202 |
| Philadelphia | 412 | 313 | 204 |
| Chicago | 364 | 301 | 205 |
| Atlanta | 556 | 434 | 233 |
| Denver | 700 | 467 | 221 |

² Ongoing surveys collect data throughout the year and occur every year, while periodic surveys are conducted on a one-time or recurring basis.

³ Because the actual FR staffing count varies throughout the FY, the average provides a more representative count of FRs.

| Regions | ACS | CPS | NCVS |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Los Angeles | 428 | 336 | 165 |
| Totals | 2,974 | 2,231 | 1,230 |

Source: Census Bureau staffing data

According to the Field Division's Office of Survey and Census Analytics, attrition for those surveys over the last 5 FYs ranged from 12 to 27 percent (see table 2).

Table 2. FR Attrition for FYs 2019 – 2023

| Survey | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | FY 2021 | FY 2022 | FY 2023 |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| ACS | 15% | 16% | 19% | 27% | 24% |
| CPS | 15% | 15% | 19% | 27% | 25% |
| NCVS | 12% | 12% | 15% | 20% | 18% |

Source: Census Bureau staffing data

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines mission-critical occupations (MCOs) as occupations agencies consider core to carrying out their missions and without which the agency cannot complete its mission-critical work. The bureau follows a validation process to identify occupational series that represent MCOs for bureau operations and programs.⁴ The bureau includes FRs in its MCO list.

Leading up to the 2020 Census, the bureau faced challenges hiring for different decennial program areas. Similar issues exist in non-decennial operations, as we noted in our audit of the bureau Demographic Programs Directorate's reimbursable surveys. During that audit, bureau officials identified difficulties meeting FR hiring goals and high numbers of resignations as two of the contributing factors to lower response rates for reimbursable surveys.⁵ If the bureau does not recruit and retain enough quality employees for FR positions, it will not have sufficient and capable staff to complete interviews and collect social and economic data the federal government, businesses, and other groups need.⁶

⁴ OHRM leads the Department-wide MCO validation process and delivers instructions for bureaus and agencies to follow, but it has no formal written policy.

⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General, August 30, 2023. *The Census Bureau Needs to Improve Its Performance Management Processes and Quality Control Program for the Reimbursable Surveys Program*, OIG-23-025-A. Washington DC: DOC OIG, 7.

⁶ Other groups include, for example, academic researchers and private organizations that use data in efforts of specific interest and concern to their respective communities.

Objective, Finding, and Recommendation

Our objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies the bureau uses to support its recruitment, hiring, and retention of employees in mission-critical positions. Specifically, we reviewed staffing requirements and strategies intended to ensure the bureau recruits, hires, and retains enough FRs to collect survey data. See appendix A for a more detailed description of our scope and methodology.

The bureau does not have an adequate and effective workforce planning process in place for recruiting, hiring, and retaining FRs. We found the three ongoing surveys, which use the most FRs for data collection, fell short of FR staffing goals, and the bureau does not have documented processes and effective strategies to support its recruitment and retention of FRs. Also, the bureau did not implement a process to track and assess the quality of vacancy information provided by the regions. Furthermore, the bureau relied heavily on the regions to execute the surveys with available resources. Without a workforce plan, the bureau lacks a comprehensive strategy to ensure it has the necessary FR staff for ongoing surveys to help accomplish its mission of providing high-quality data. Unaddressed FR staffing gaps increase the risks of lower response rates on surveys and higher attrition of other field staff, who bear the burden of increased workloads. Developing and implementing a workforce plan for FRs will help the bureau address the issues we identify in this report.

The Bureau Does Not Have Effective Strategies to Address Staffing Gaps and High Vacancies in FR Positions

We found that the bureau is not effectively addressing FR staffing gaps and vacancies. The three ongoing surveys that use the most FRs for data collection did not meet staffing goals, and the bureau has no documented processes to aid in FR recruitment and retention or address FR vacancies.

A. *The bureau did not meet its staffing goals for ACS, CPS, and NCVS*

The ACS, CPS, and NCVS surveys need FRs to conduct interviews and collect survey responses each month. From FYs 2019 through 2023, we found that the bureau did not meet FR staffing goals for these surveys. Table 3 shows the FR staffing the bureau estimated it needed for each survey.⁷

⁷ Field Division staff work with survey sponsors and develop cost estimates for surveys. Those estimates include bureau-wide FR staffing projections that consider the average number of completed cases per FR and the number of available trained staff.

Table 3. FRs Needed for ACS, CPS, and NCVS in FYs 2019 – 2023

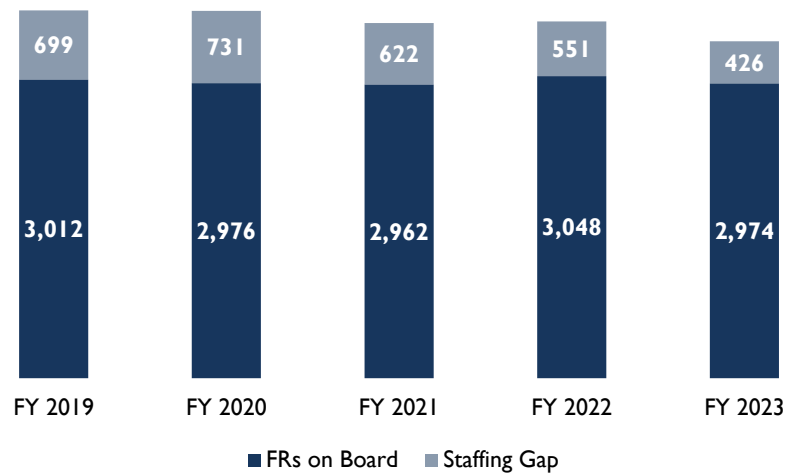
| Survey | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | FY 2021 | FY 2022 | FY 2023 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| ACS | 3,711 | 3,706 | 3,584 | 3,599 | 3,400 |
| CPS ^a | 2,777 | 2,777 | 2,777 | 2,777 | 2,777 |
| NCVS | 1,400 | 1,306 | 1,500 | 1,514 | 1,514 |

Source: Census Bureau cost estimates

^a The FRs needed for CPS remained the same for the 5-year period in part because the survey workload did not change.

We analyzed FR staff requirements and FR staff on board and computed staffing gaps.⁸ Based on our review, FRs on board fell short of the number of FRs needed, creating a bureau-wide staffing gap for each of the three surveys.

Figure 2 shows the ACS FR staffing gaps by FY. Over 5 years, the percentage shortfall averaged 17 percent.

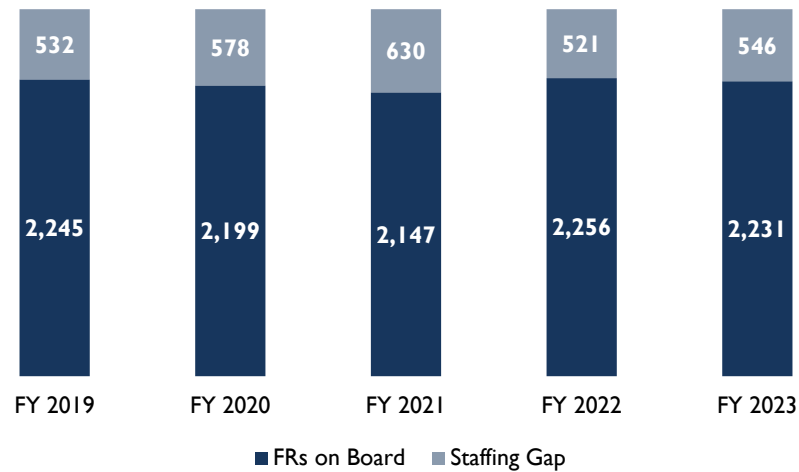
Figure 2. ACS Staffing Gap Analysis, FYs 2019 – 2023

Source: OIG analysis of Census Bureau staffing data

⁸ We obtained and accepted the bureau's staffing data as presented and did not validate it further. During interviews, Field Division management agreed with the staffing gaps we calculated in figures 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 3 shows the CPS FR staffing gaps by FY. Over 5 years, the percentage shortfall averaged 20 percent.

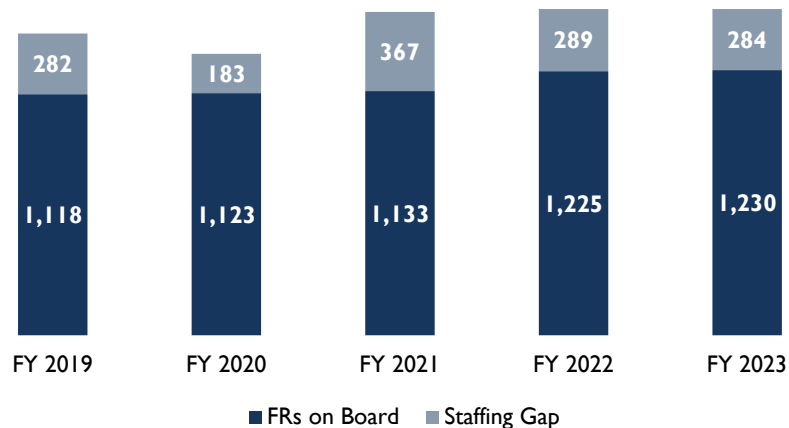
Figure 3. CPS Staffing Gap Analysis, FYs 2019 – 2023



Source: OIG analysis of Census Bureau staffing data

Figure 4 shows the NCVS FR staffing gaps by FY. Over 5 years, the percentage shortfall averaged 19 percent.

Figure 4. NCVS Staffing Gap Analysis, FYs 2019 – 2023



Source: OIG analysis of Census Bureau staffing data

One strategy regional offices use in response to high turnover and attrition includes recruiting and offering positions to more FRs than there are vacancies. Other strategies consist of current FRs working additional cases or traveling to other geographic locations

within the region and staff conducting telephone interviews or using mailings to obtain responses instead of in-person visits. In some regions, field supervisors conduct interviews and collect survey responses. However, the bureau did not provide any documentation formally describing these strategies or its assessment of their effectiveness.

According to management,⁹ the bureau lacks resources to attract and retain FRs due to budgetary constraints. For example, the bureau's FR pay rate is lower than other employers in some areas and does not provide benefits or permanent status until 4 years into the position. Additionally, the bureau does not provide monetary incentives for recruitment or retention, which further hinders its ability to close staffing gaps.

B. The bureau did not implement a process to track and assess vacancy information from the regions

According to OPM's *Workforce Planning Guide*¹⁰ (the *Guide*), a vacant or understaffed mission-critical occupation¹¹ will impair or have a critically negative effect on an agency's mission delivery capabilities. Therefore, agencies should obtain and review quality data to assess the organizational impact of mission-critical positions that remain vacant.

Regions do not have a consistent process to determine and report FR vacancies

We found the Field Division does not have a bureau-wide process for regional offices to follow when determining and reporting FR vacancies. Instead, the Field Division allows regions to determine their own methods for counting and verifying the accuracy of vacancies, which results in FR vacancy counts that are not comparable. We interviewed all six regions and identified differences between them in when a region counts a vacancy and how it determines the number of vacancies. We found three regions count an FR position as vacant once a recruiting request¹² is submitted, while the other three regions count it as vacant before the recruiting request is submitted. In addition, one region uses a formula,¹³ while the other five regions consider multiple factors¹⁴ to determine the number of vacancies. Lastly, the Field Division does not validate the accuracy of vacancies submitted by the regions. As a result, management lacks assurance that it has complete FR vacancy counts and quality data to evaluate and prioritize vacancies among the regions.

⁹ Appendix A lists the Field Division and regional office managers and staff we interviewed.

¹⁰ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, November 2022. *Workforce Planning Guide*. Washington, DC: OPM. Available online at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-framework/reference-materials/talent-management/workforce-planning-guide.pdf> (accessed September 27, 2024).

¹¹ Based on 5 C.F.R. § 410.201(d)(1) and the Department's MCO validation process, the bureau's Human Resources Division identified occupational series 0303, which includes FRs, as one of its mission-critical occupations.

¹² A recruiting request (Form 11-56) initiates the recruitment/selection process.

¹³ The formula divides the total workload by the number of cases the bureau expects FRs to complete during the data collection period and subtracts current FRs on board to derive the total number of vacancies. When FRs on board exceed FRs needed, the region reports no vacancies.

¹⁴ Factors include the number of FRs available to work, locations of the cases, input from regional survey managers, and professional judgment. When an experienced FR who works multiple surveys leaves the bureau, the regions may count this as more than one vacancy.

Furthermore, while the Field Division collects vacancy counts for ongoing surveys, the data it collects for most surveys is at the regional level rather than by county or a lower geographic area.¹⁵ Collecting vacancy data at a lower geographic area would allow Field Division management to identify the areas that experience significant vacancies and target recruiting and retention strategies in those areas. Limiting FR vacancy count reporting to the regional level may not provide management with needed information, such as the specific areas where FR vacancies affect survey operations. Consequently, management may not have details it requires to make informed decisions and conduct effective oversight.

The Field Division does not track and assess vacancy metrics or reduction strategies

The bureau did not centrally track staffing gaps or progress toward closing staffing gaps. As discussed previously, regional offices were responsible for tracking their own vacancies. OPM explains that “[m]etrics, benchmarks, and targets are critical to determine if an organization is strategically meeting both current and future workforce mission needs . . . [m]etrics allow agencies to engage in timely interventions, as needed, to improve performance and overall efficiency of service.” However, the Field Division does not document and analyze metrics, such as FR vacancy rates and the amount of time FR positions remain vacant. Nor does the Field Division monitor regions’ progress toward reducing FR vacancies and assess the effectiveness of strategies to minimize FR attrition.

According to the Field Division, Human Resources Division (HRD), which tracks time-to-hire metrics for the bureau, reports the length of time to fill an FR vacancy once a recruit request is initiated. However, an FR position may have been vacant for some time before that request was initiated. In addition, the Field Division does not have a single system to track the duration of FR vacancies. As a result, management lacks accurate data on the length of time it takes to fill positions or locations with persistent vacancies. Ongoing vacancies can signal to management that current recruitment strategies are ineffective and need adjustment or that the strategies do not address the root causes of the vacancies. Without that information, the Field Division lacks assurance that it meets varying FR workforce staffing needs and addresses vacancies at regional offices.

Cause

The conditions we noted above occurred because the Bureau did not develop a comprehensive workforce plan to address FR staffing gaps for ongoing surveys and track and assess vacancy information from the regions.

The bureau does not follow OPM’s workforce planning model

One reason FR staffing gaps continue is because the bureau does not conduct workforce planning to analyze and evaluate high attrition and vacancies in FR positions, which it could

¹⁵ For CPS, the Field Division’s Labor and Crime Surveys Branch requests FR vacancy count data at lower geography levels. The data reveals areas that struggle with recruiting or retention issues—which, if unaddressed, become obstacles to completing CPS workload and raising response rates.

address through workforce planning. “Workforce planning is the systematic process of analyzing and assessing to set targets to mitigate the gaps between the workforce of today and the mission and human capital needs of tomorrow.”¹⁶ The *Guide* provides a model (see figure 5) with five elements for meeting workforce planning objectives.

Figure 5. OPM Workforce Planning Model



Source: OPM Guide

Using the model for workforce planning enables agencies to strategically meet current and future workforce needs and prevent unnecessary disruptions in maintaining a steady-state and agile workforce. It also aligns human capital needs with the agency’s strategic plan, annual budget and performance plans, human capital strategy, and operating plans.

An essential element of this model involves conducting a workforce analysis that identifies current and future skills gaps. A skills gap is the difference between current and projected workforce size and skills needed to meet an agency’s mission and achieve its goals and objectives.¹⁷ As part of the analysis, organizations assess risk and conduct forecasting to project workforce needs, develop and implement plans to manage existing staff, and consider ways to close the staffing and competency gaps.

Field Division managers we interviewed were unaware of workforce planning requirements and did not consult with HRD’s Strategic Workforce Planning Branch.¹⁸ HRD personnel we interviewed are aware of OPM’s *Guide*. As management directs, this branch can assist the Field Division in conducting workforce planning for FRs.

¹⁶ OPM, November 2022, *Workforce Planning Guide*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ HRD supports bureau offices by analyzing workforce needs and determining appropriate solutions and strategies to attract and retain a qualified workforce.

The bureau's FR recruiting and retention strategies are not effective

Instead of a workforce assessment and documented plan, current and former Field Division management described using projections, information management tools such as dashboards, and system-generated reports to monitor FR staffing. However, the records the bureau provided did not explain the actions the Field Division took to close the staffing gaps. Without a comprehensive workforce plan that contains strategies to address staffing gaps and includes human capital workforce metrics, such as the number of FRs and skills needed for the job, the bureau lacks an assessment of whether it has the right staff in the right places to achieve survey goals.

According to CPS regional survey managers, FRs complete survey workloads despite FR staffing shortages. However, through interviews with survey management,¹⁹ we determined the bureau did not establish survey response rate targets for ACS, CPS, and NCVS. When survey response rates fall below 80 percent, the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys*²⁰ require an agency to conduct nonresponse bias analysis.²¹ In the absence of bureau-documented response rate targets for ACS, CPS, and NCVS, we compared each survey's response rates, as reported on the survey sponsor's webpage, to the OMB guideline of 80 percent for the 5 years ending in 2023. Our review found that ACS did not meet OMB's response rate guideline in 2020, CPS did not meet the response rate guideline from 2020 through 2023, and NCVS did not meet the response rate guideline in the last 5 years (see table 4).

Table 4. ACS, CPS and NCVS Annual Response Rates, 2019 – 2023

| Survey ^a | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| ACS | 86% | 71% | 85% | 84% | 85% |
| CPS | 83% | 74% | 77% | 73% | 70% |
| NCVS | 71% | 67% | 67% | 64% | 63% |

Source: Survey sponsor webpages with publicly released response rates

^a Each survey completed at least one nonresponse bias analysis.

Vacancy reduction and effective oversight of the FR workforce are especially relevant due to the current environment. According to the Assistant Division Chief of Surveys, response rates have declined, and bureau budgets remain flat while inflation has increased. Therefore, ongoing surveys, such as ACS and CPS, tend to focus on managing costs and maintaining survey quality, not on FR staffing. Due to those challenges and the decreased likelihood of more resources to reach FR staffing goals, developing a workforce plan is crucial. Conducting workforce planning

¹⁹ Appendix A lists the Field Division and regional office managers and staff we interviewed.

²⁰ Office of Management and Budget, September 2006. *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys*. Washington, DC: OMB. Available online at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/omb/inforeg/statpolicy/standards_stat_surveys.pdf (accessed June 25, 2024).

²¹ When response rates or other factors suggest the potential for bias to occur, conducting nonresponse bias analyses ensures that survey results are representative of the target population so that they can be used with confidence to inform decisions.

will support the Field Division in assessing the impact of FR vacancies on surveys and ensure the surveys have an accurate number of skilled people to accomplish the bureau's mission of providing high-quality data.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau develop and implement a comprehensive workforce plan for FRs that includes setting strategic direction; conducting workforce analysis; and developing, implementing, and monitoring the workforce action plan to meet the bureau's workforce needs.

Summary of Agency Response and OIG Comments

On February 5, 2025, we received the bureau's response to our draft report. In its response, the bureau concurred with our finding and recommendation and described actions it has taken and will take to mitigate the challenges of recruiting, hiring, and retaining FRs. The bureau also provided technical comments. We considered those comments, but we did not make changes to the final report.

Below are our comments on the bureau's response.

General

Bureau response: The bureau stated it has implemented processes to support recruiting and staffing, such as new reports, online applications, initiatives focused on hard-to-recruit areas, digital advertising, and data optimizations with online survey options.

OIG comment: While the bureau's new processes and tools for recruiting are commendable, they fall short of a comprehensive workforce plan. In addition to current efforts, the Bureau needs to develop a robust workforce plan that includes:

1. **Workforce Analysis:** A review of the current workforce to identify skills gaps, future needs, and areas for potential growth or decline. Workforce analysis should include:
 - a) **Risk Analysis:** Evaluating risks facing the workforce today and in the future.
 - b) **Skills Gap Analysis:** Assessing the skills and competencies of current and projected employees to identify staffing or competency gaps to ensure the bureau has a sufficient number of individuals with appropriate skills to successfully perform the work.
2. **Monitoring and Evaluating Workforce Action Plan:** Reviewing recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts to measure their effectiveness and make data-driven adjustments as necessary.

By integrating these elements into its workforce strategy, the bureau can build a sustainable, well-prepared workforce that can meet future challenges and opportunities.

Finding

Bureau response: The bureau concurred with our finding and stated that since the pandemic, the bureau is rebuilding its human capital in FR positions. To combat challenges it faces, such as wage competition and the availability of workers and the ability to reach populations, the bureau has created various tools to assist in monitoring and tracking recruitment and will continue seeking ways to make data-driven decisions about FR staffing.

OIG comments: While the bureau's creation of tools to monitor and track recruitment and its commitment to data-driven decisions are commendable steps, these efforts fall short without proper documentation and a comprehensive workforce staffing plan.

To truly address challenges like wage competition and talent availability, the bureau needs to take the following actions:

1. Document analyses: Ensure all assessments and decisions are well-documented.
2. Develop a workforce action plan: Identify intended strategies to close gaps, plans to implement strategies, and measures for assessing progress.

These steps will provide a more strategic and long-term approach to workforce management.

Appendix B contains the full text of the bureau's response. We are pleased that the bureau concurs with our recommendation, and we look forward to reviewing its action plan for implementing the recommendation.

Appendix A: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The objective of our evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies the bureau uses to support its recruitment, hiring, and retention of employees in mission-critical positions. Specifically, we reviewed staffing requirements and strategies to ensure the bureau recruits, hires, and retains enough field representatives to collect survey data. To accomplish our objective, we did the following:

- Reviewed federal regulations, standards, and guides pertaining to workforce planning:
 - 5 C.F.R. § 410.201, Responsibilities of the head of an agency, December 10, 2009
 - 5 C.F.R. Part 250 Subpart B: Strategic Human Capital Management, December 2016 (revised Nov. 9, 2018)
 - U.S. Government Accountability Office's *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, September 2014
 - OMB's *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys*, September 2006
 - OPM's *Workforce Planning Guide*, November 2022
- Interviewed Department officials and bureau personnel to gain an understanding of workforce planning for FRs, including:
 - Regional office managers and staff, including assistant regional directors, program coordinators, regional survey managers, talent outreach specialists, and administrative officers.
 - Field Division personnel, including the Chief of the Field Division, Assistant Division Chief (ADC) of Surveys, ADC for Administration, Branch Chief and Team Lead for the Oversight and Documentation Branch, Branch Chief of Management Services, Contracts and Budget Branch Chief, Survey Branch Chiefs, and Office of Survey and Census Analytics staff.
 - American Community Survey Office management, including the Assistant Division Chief of Operational and Program Analytics.
 - Demographic Programs Directorate Survey Directors.
 - HRD management, including the Chief of the HRD, ADC for Consulting Services, ADC for Human Capital Strategy and Accountability, Branch Chief over Human Capital Analytics, Recruitment Strategy and Outreach Branch Chief, and the Senior Advisor to the ADC of Staffing and Consulting Services.
 - Census Bureau Budget Division management and staff.
 - Census Bureau executive management, including the Assistant Director and Associate Director for Field Operations and the Chief Administrative Officer.
 - Department Office of Human Capital Strategy Program Manager in the Office of Human Resources Management.
- Reviewed bureau-provided FR staffing data to determine staffing gaps.

- Reviewed the bureau's strategic plan for FYs 2018 – 2026 and its human capital operating plan for FY 2023 to determine whether the documents include workforce planning for field staff.

We gained an understanding of internal controls significant within the context of the evaluation objective by reviewing documentation, interviewing bureau staff, and analyzing bureau staffing data. To address our evaluation objective, we received and relied on the bureau's data. We did not test the reliability of the bureau's information systems. We consider the bureau's data acceptable for use in our report. We identified and reported on weaknesses in internal controls, as noted in the Objective, Finding, and Recommendation section of this report.

We conducted our evaluation from July 2023 through December 2024 under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. §§ 401-424), and Department Organization Order 10-13, as amended October 21, 2020. We performed our fieldwork remotely.

We conducted this evaluation in accordance with *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020) issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. Those standards require that the evidence must sufficiently and appropriately support evaluation findings and provide a reasonable basis for the conclusions and recommendation related to the objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our finding, conclusions, and recommendation based on our review objective.

Appendix B. Agency Response

The bureau's response begins on the following page.



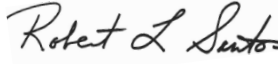
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
U.S. Census Bureau
Office of the Director
Washington, DC 20233-0001

February 5, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR:

Arthur L. Scott Jr.
Assistant Inspector General
For Audit and Evaluation
Office of Inspector General

From:

Robert Santos 
Director
U.S. Census Bureau

Subject:

U.S. Census Bureau's Response to the Office of the Inspector General's Draft Report: *"The Census Bureau Did Not Develop a Workforce Plan to Address Field Representative Staffing Gaps."*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Office of Inspector General's draft report titled, *"The Census Bureau Did Not Develop a Workforce Plan to Address Field Representative Staffing Gaps"* dated December 17, 2024. The U.S. Census Bureau respectfully submits the attached comments.

Attachment

U.S. Census Bureau Comments on the Office of Inspector General's Report: *"The Census Bureau Did Not Develop a Workforce Plan to Address Field Representative Staffing Gaps."*

General Comments:

The U.S. Census Bureau appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report and its recommendations regarding effective strategic workforce planning of 0303 Field Representatives. The findings in this report are valid. The Census Bureau is taking steps to mitigate the challenges of recruiting, hiring, and retaining Field Representatives.

While we are combatting the challenge of attrition, we continue to complete our mission critical operations. We have implemented processes to support recruiting and staffing such as our New Hire Tracking (NewHT) report, conversion to USAStaffing with online applications, recruiting branch initiatives with focused advertising in hard to recruit areas including working with Center for New Media and Promotion (CNMP) for digital advertisements, and data optimization with the transformation of surveys from paper to online options.

FINDING: The Bureau Does Not Have Effective Strategies to Address Staffing Gaps and High Vacancies in Field Representative positions.

CENSUS BUREAU RESPONSE: We concur with this finding. Until the nation experienced a global pandemic, the Census Bureau was successful at maintaining manageable attrition rates for the Field Representative (FR) position. The pandemic created uncertainty amongst many of our FRs, and those who were no longer comfortable interviewing households in person resigned their positions as the Census Bureau resumed data collection with personal visits. During the periods where the pandemic had surges, the Census Bureau continued to have FRs resign while we encountered a new challenge of recruiting and hiring applicants willing to conduct personal visits. The Census Bureau is making progress in rebuilding our human capital in the Field Representative position. However, we continue to face challenges, such as wage-rate competition and the availability of workers and the ability to reach populations in the face of national disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires. These factors continue to have an impact on our recruitment efforts. To combat these challenges, we have created various data visualizations leveraging position listings and other recruitment data for monitoring and tracking purposes. We continue to find innovative ways to help leaders make data-driven decisions regarding this critical workforce.

RECOMMENDATION: We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau develop and implement a comprehensive workforce plan for FRs that includes setting strategic direction; conducting workforce analysis; and developing, implementing, and monitoring the workforce action plan to meet the bureau's workforce needs.

CENSUS BUREAU RESPONSE: We concur with this recommendation. As an agency, the Census Bureau continuously seeks opportunities to improve the methods we employ to comply with 5 CFR 250 Subpart B. We will work with our Field Division and Human Resources Division to develop a workforce plan for the position title Field Representative within the 0303 Mission Critical Occupation.