



# Report in Brief

MAY 8, 2024

## Background

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts a complete enumeration of the resident population of the United States and its territories.

To support the national headcount in 2020, the bureau developed the 2020 Census Integrated Partnership and Communications Program. The program's goals included encouraging people to self-respond, preferably via the Internet, and raising awareness of the decennial and keeping it high throughout the entire 2020 census.

An integral component of the campaign was the 2020 Census Integrated Communications Contract (ICC), which the bureau awarded in August 2016.

## Why We Did This Audit

Our audit objective was to determine whether the bureau effectively managed selected task orders related to paid advertising for the ICC to ensure desired outcomes were achieved.

We focused on four ICC task orders, totaling \$436.5 million, related to strategy, planning, and execution of the ICC's paid advertising component.

## U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

### The Census Bureau Did Not Effectively Manage and Monitor Contractor Performance for Paid Advertising in the 2020 Census Integrated Communications Contract

OIG-24-021-A

## WHAT WE FOUND

Overall, we found the bureau did not properly administer the contract or monitor the contractor's performance in compliance with federal and departmental regulations and policies. Specifically, we found the following:

- I. Contracting officers did not ensure that the task orders included the required measurable performance standards and the methods for assessing contractor performance against standards.
- II. Contracting officers' representatives (CORs) did not follow contract procedures for reviewing, approving, and using quality assurance surveillance plans (QASPs).
- III. CORs did not receive or maintain supporting documentation for paid media invoices totaling \$363 million.

As a result, the bureau could not ensure the contractor complied with contractual requirements and could have accepted substandard performance, potentially wasting millions of taxpayer dollars. In particular, the \$363 million in payments for media services represent unsupported costs because contracting officials did not maintain the required supporting documentation in the COR files.

## WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Director of the Census Bureau ensure that:

1. Acquisition personnel, contracting officers, and CORs administer and execute contracts and task orders in accordance with federal regulations and department requirements.
2. Contracts and task orders include measurable performance standards (quality, timeliness, quantity, etc.) and the method for assessing contractor performance against standards, as required by Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) § 37.601.
3. QASPs prepared by either the government or a contractor include all work requiring surveillance and the method of surveillance, as required by FAR § 46.401.
4. CORs use all QASPs, whether contract-level or order-level, to monitor contractor compliance with the contract terms, as required by FAR §§ 1.602-2 and 1.604.
5. CORs maintain surveillance documentation of contractor performance in contract files, as required by FAR §§ 1.604 and 4.803.
6. CORs receive and maintain in the COR file documentation supporting invoice payments, as required by contract terms and the FAR.