



# Report In Brief

OCTOBER 22, 2015

## Background

Immediately following the 2010 decennial census, senior Bureau officials and the 12 regional directors determined that, in order to maintain a high-quality survey operation and to proactively plan for decreased funding, a restructuring of the Bureau's regional operations was needed. To that end, a reduction in the number of regional offices and changes to the management of data collection activities would better position the Bureau to reduce costs and achieve operational efficiencies, and the realignment was scheduled for completion by January 2013.

## Why We Did This Review

We conducted this audit of the Bureau's regional office realignment and field management reforms from June 2014 to February 2015 to identify and assess the benchmarks that the Bureau is using to assess the success of the realignment effort; to assess whether or not the Bureau is achieving its cost savings and efficiency goals; and to determine the impact of the realignment on survey sponsors and customers to ascertain whether external sponsoring agencies and internal Census Bureau offices are satisfied with the survey content and design process, survey administration, data quality, cost, and other issues deemed important.

To accomplish our objectives, we interviewed management to determine if metrics were identified prior to realignment; reviewed skills of new post-realignment employees; assessed the Bureau's methods for estimating and tracking survey costs; and ascertained if staff are fully using tools to improve response rates and data collection efficiency.

## U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

### Census Bureau Realignment Did Not Fully Meet Stated Goals and Reimbursable Agreements Are Not Managed Adequately

OIG-16-004-A

#### WHAT WE FOUND

*Reimbursable agreements are not adequately managed.* The Bureau has not developed effective controls for estimating and documenting survey cost estimates and reporting anticipated and actual costs to survey sponsors. We found instances where, as noted in a prior OIG audit report, employees working on surveys may not be charging salary costs appropriately. As a result, the Bureau may be over- or undercharging survey sponsors; the process for developing survey cost estimates is not consistent; and survey sponsors are not receiving the information needed to compare costs to budgeted amounts and make management decisions, such as questioning survey costs.

*The Bureau is not monitoring survey costs and failed to research interview anomalies.* After reviewing data quality reports for all six regional offices—and conducting site visits with staff in the Atlanta and New York regional offices to assess their processes for monitoring and improving survey performance—we determined that regional office staff are not fully utilizing all tools available to reduce survey costs and improve data quality. Specifically, we found that most regional office survey statisticians are neither fully utilizing the Bureau's Unified Tracking System nor monitoring survey costs, despite performance plans that emphasize both. In addition, our review of the Bureau's FY 2014 data quality indicator reports regarding the Department of Justice's National Crime Victim Survey identified several instances where field representatives were flagged for items requiring supervisory attention, yet supervisors took no action to investigate these issues.

*The Bureau Could Not Support That Estimated Cost Savings Have Been Achieved and Did Not Develop Measureable Goals to Improve Efficiency and Data Quality.* Although the Bureau identified cost savings goals, it was unable to demonstrate that the goals were achieved. In addition, the Bureau did not document measureable efficiency and data quality goals with assumptions. Therefore, the Bureau is unable to demonstrate to survey sponsors and Congress that its realignment goals were achieved.

#### WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Director of the Census Bureau

1. implement steps to ensure that time charged by Census employees in WebTA reflects actual work performed on specific surveys.
2. develop policies and procedures, which define (a) the methods for estimating reimbursable agreement costs, (b) the level of detail required for reporting actual costs of reimbursable agreements to survey sponsors, and (c) how often cost reports should be provided to survey sponsors.
3. improve survey cost and quality monitoring by (a) establishing measurable cost and quality standards, (b) consolidating monitoring systems to avoid duplicate capabilities and reduce costs, (c) prioritizing the implementation of all surveys in the Unified Tracking System and ensuring that all regional office survey statisticians are trained on system capabilities, and (d) instituting periodic time frames for supervisory review of the cost and quality reports and taking corrective action before the next survey cycle.
4. calculate the costs of the realignment, using net change in personnel and lease costs, to confirm whether actual cost savings occurred and will continue to be realized.