



Report in Brief

April 30, 2018

Background

A large, temporary field infrastructure is required to carry out the decennial census—comprising more than half a dozen major field operations—across the United States. For the 2010 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau (the Bureau) operated 12 regional Census centers, 1 area office in Puerto Rico, and 494 local Census offices, at a cost of nearly \$331 million. Census staff selected the “area of consideration” for each field office site based on certain criteria, including placing at least one office in each congressional district and equalizing the workload for the nonresponse followup (NRFU) operation—the decennial census’ largest—among each of the 494 local Census offices.

For the 2020 Census, the Bureau only plans on opening 248 field offices (referred to as *area Census offices* or *ACOs*), thereby reducing the ‘brick-and-mortar’ footprint and associated costs required to carry out the 2010 decennial census field operations by an estimated 50 percent. According to the Bureau, increased use of technology, streamlined staffing, and the ability to work and manage remotely reduce the number of offices needed to support the 2020 Census. This change is designed to contribute to the goal of conducting the 2020 Census at a lower cost per household (adjusted for inflation) than the 2010 Census.

As with the 2010 Census, the Bureau is partnering with the General Services Administration’s (GSA’s) Public Buildings Service to search for, solicit, and acquire office space to meet its field office needs and deployment schedule

Why We Did This Review

The objectives of this audit were to evaluate (1) the criteria and process for determining the number and locations of field offices; (2) the Bureau’s plans for reducing costs associated with the fewer number of field offices as part of reengineered field operations; and (3) the planned process for collaboration between the Bureau and GSA for implementing the ACO leasing program.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

2020 Census: The Number and Location of Area Census Offices May Not Reflect NRFU Workload Demands and Will Not Result in Projected Cost Savings

OIG-18-018-A

WHAT WE FOUND

This report provides the results of our audit of the ACO space acquisition program in support of the 2020 Census field operations.

We reviewed Bureau and GSA documentation for this program, including budget estimates and projected costs, risk management plans, and tested compliance with the Bureau’s criteria for determining the number and location of field offices. We also interviewed Census headquarters and regional staff members responsible for managing ACO space acquisition, as well as the GSA managers responsible for collaborating with the Bureau regarding the program’s implementation.

We found that, while the Bureau developed a model for determining the number of ACOs, only six of the seven required criteria were defined, allowing us to test the Bureau’s compliance with them. We also found that, although the estimated workload totals and staffing ratios informing the model changed, the number of ACOs required for field operations remained the same. In addition, several risks currently jeopardize ACO space acquisition, requiring enhanced risk planning to address cost and schedule implications, and the Bureau’s initial “cost avoidance” estimates associated with the ACO space acquisition program are unsupported and unlikely to be realized.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau

1. Assess the impact the increased NRFU workload totals and enumerator ratios will have on the NRFU operation and document, monitor, and periodically validate the assumptions for ACO planning throughout the remaining 2020 Census planning activities.
2. (a) Reassess ACO space acquisition risk register items’ cost and schedule impacts and risk ratings, and create contingency plans to effectively address risks and (b) formalize the roles and responsibilities of GSA and Bureau personnel tasked with ACO space acquisition activities.
3. (a) Ensure cost reduction estimates are reasonable and supportable and (b) identify and include potential cost overruns related to space acquisition activities as part of any contingency funding for the 2020 Census.