

Operational Issues Observed During the 2026 Census Test

REPORT NO. OIG-26-028-I

September 21, 2026





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MEMORANDUM FOR: George M. Cook
Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs,
performing the functions of the Director
U.S. Census Bureau

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Arthur L. Scott Jr.", in dark ink.

FROM: Arthur L. Scott Jr.
Assistant Inspector General for Audit and Evaluation

SUBJECT: *Operational Issues Observed During the 2026 Census Test*
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Attached is the final management alert describing the operational issues identified during our initial site observations of the 2026 Census Test. This management alert results from ongoing work on [our evaluation](#) of the effectiveness of the 2026 Census Test in validating operational, technological, and methodological innovations designed to enhance cost efficiency, data quality, and response rates for the 2030 census. We will post the management alert on [our website](#) per the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. §§ 404, 420).

Please note that we are not providing recommendations or requesting an action plan. However, any action the U.S. Census Bureau takes as a result of this alert will inform our overall report at the conclusion of this evaluation.

We appreciate your staff's cooperation and professionalism.

Attachment





Introduction

The mission of the 2030 Census Program is to determine where everyone in the nation lives, count the people at those locations, and share the results with the President, the states, and the public. On May 1, 2026, the U.S. Census Bureau began its 2026 Census Test. As part of the test, the bureau planned to conduct in-field enumeration (IFE) operations. On June 1, 2026, the bureau began its 2026 Census Test IFE activities in Huntsville, Alabama, and Spartanburg, South Carolina. This operation concluded on August 31, 2026.¹

The bureau's test was not a complete enumeration of the population, but its results will provide evidence for assessing enhancements and innovations to field infrastructure, staffing, and training. In addition, the bureau will evaluate the operational feasibility and cost of using U.S. Postal Service (USPS) mail carriers to enumerate while working mail delivery routes in Spartanburg, South Carolina (Flight A), and as temporary, part-time bureau employees while not carrying out postal duties in Huntsville, Alabama (Flight B). The bureau also hired enumerators, census field supervisors (CFSs), and census field managers (CFMs) in both locations.

In this test, both USPS and bureau enumerators visited housing units (HUs) to obtain demographic information from households that did not complete the test questionnaire online. The enumerators used bureau-provided mobile phones to record household information in an application called MOJO Casey that is connected to the bureau's operational control system. This application allows enumerators to manage aspects of their work, such as identifying addresses to visit, accessing maps to locate addresses, recording responses to the questionnaire during in-person interviews, and documenting work availability, actual time worked, and mileage expenses.

On May 7, 2026, we initiated an evaluation of the effectiveness of the 2026 Census Test in validating operational, technological, and methodological innovations designed to enhance cost efficiency, data quality, and response rates for the 2030 census. During site observations in June 2026, USPS denied us access to conduct direct observations of Flight A USPS mail carriers. On August 4, 2026, USPS granted us access, along with the U.S. Government Accountability Office, to conduct joint observations of Flight A USPS mail carriers on August 11-12, 2026. This management alert only describes the operational issues we identified during our June site visit that impact the 2026 Census Test. Appendix 1 details the scope and methodology we used to perform these on-site observations.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. [Census Takers to Start Visiting Households for 2026 Census Test](#). Accessed July 20, 2026.

Observations

During the weeks of June 15 and June 22, 2026, OIG staff observed 15 bureau-hired enumerators at both sites attempt to conduct a total of 205 interviews. We identified operational issues during IFE. Specifically, through our observations and discussions with the enumerators, CFSSs, and CFMs, we found that enumerators:

- Did not follow interview procedures
- Used their personal phones to locate HUs

➤ Enumerators Did Not Follow Interview Procedures

We found that enumerators at both test sites did not follow the bureau's IFE interview procedures, as required.² Specifically, they did not always:

- Read questions verbatim to respondents (10 instances)
- Provide an information sheet explaining the confidentiality of respondent information (19 instances)
- Leave a notice of visit (NOV) form containing the case ID number (12 instances)

Not reading questions verbatim increases the risk of inaccurate or unreliable data being collected. When enumerators do not highlight the confidentiality of responses, households may be reluctant to provide complete responses to questions or skip some questions entirely. Finally, not providing case IDs on NOVs to allow households the opportunity to fill out their questionnaires online may result in additional visits to those HUs, increasing enumerator mileage and wage costs.

➤ Enumerators Used Their Personal Phones to Locate HUs

Enumerators at both test sites entered addresses from their case list into personal mobile phone GPS applications to get directions to HUs (five instances). The MOJO Casey application on their government-issued mobile phones has a mapping feature that allows enumerators to see HU locations along with their case assignment list. However, we noted that the HU locations in the MOJO Casey application did not correspond to an actual structure on the ground or the correct address (two instances). Inaccurate HU locations generated by the MOJO Casey application may unnecessarily delay enumerators from carrying out interviews, increasing cost and impacting productivity.

² U.S. Census Bureau. 2026. "Module 11, Attempting Cases." *IFE Training Plan*. (Internal 2026 Census Test training.)

The area manager for the 2026 Census Test told us that entering an address into a personal mobile phone is not a Title 13 violation since the address is not linked to any household information. However, entering addresses into non-government-issued mobile phones results in case information being used outside the bureau's network. To encourage participation in the decennial census, the bureau needs to maintain the public's trust in the security of respondent data when conducting enumeration and provide reliable applications to ensure compliance with policies and procedures.

This alert does not include recommendations. OIG conducted additional observations during the week of August 10, 2026. Our analysis from those observations will inform the final report, including recommendations, that we will issue at the conclusion of our evaluation.

Summary of the U.S. Census Bureau's Response and OIG Comments

On August 20, 2026, we issued a draft management alert to the bureau with the option to provide comments. On September 4, 2026, the bureau informed us that it did not have comments on the draft alert.



Appendix 1. Scope and Methodology

Our evaluation objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the 2026 Census Test in validating operational, technological, and methodological innovations designed to enhance cost efficiency, data quality, and response rates for the 2030 census. To help address this objective, we carried out in-person observations of bureau-hired enumerators from June 15 through June 25, 2026, to gain an understanding of how they carried out IFE procedures. We briefed the observations in this alert to bureau officials on August 4, 2026. Further, we conducted additional site visits during the week of August 10, 2026.

To carry out our observations, we:

- Reviewed training material and completed online bureau-required 2026 Census Test enumerator and supervisor trainings.
- Reviewed 2026 Census Test operational and evaluation plans.
- Reviewed the 2026 Census Test interagency agreement between the bureau and USPS.
- Conducted observations of six bureau-hired enumerators in Huntsville, Alabama, and nine bureau-hired enumerators in Spartanburg, South Carolina.
- Interviewed three CFSs and one CFM in Huntsville, Alabama, and four CFSs and one CFM in Spartanburg, South Carolina.
- Interviewed decennial census management and field division managers.

In addition, we assessed internal controls related to IFE operational procedures to gain an understanding of them. This alert identifies specific weaknesses that we have identified to date.

We did not rely on computer-processed data; instead, we relied on information gathered during our in-person observations to support our observations and conclusions. Consequently, we did not perform data reliability procedures on that data.

This management alert is based on observations conducted in June 2026 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 conducted observations and interviews in Huntsville and Spartanburg, and interviews with bureau staff at headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, and the regional census center in Atlanta, Georgia.

We conducted this part of the evaluation in accordance with *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020) issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

REPORT

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