



Highlights of [GAO-10-132T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The decennial census is a constitutionally-mandated activity that produces data used to apportion congressional seats, redraw congressional districts, and help allocate billions of dollars in federal assistance. In March 2008, GAO designated the 2010 Census a high-risk area in part because of information technology (IT) shortcomings. The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) has since strengthened its risk management efforts and made other improvements; however, in March 2009, GAO noted that a number of challenges and uncertainties remained. This testimony discusses the Bureau's readiness for 2010 and covers: (1) the delivery of key IT systems, (2) preliminary findings on the results of address canvassing and the lessons learned from that operation that can be applied to subsequent field operations, and (3) the Bureau's progress in improving its cost estimation abilities. The testimony is based on previously issued and ongoing GAO work.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations, but past reports recommended the Bureau improve its cost estimation procedures, ensure the accuracy of its address list, and conduct end-to-end testing of IT systems. The Bureau generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-10-132T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov.

2010 CENSUS

Census Bureau Continues to Make Progress in Mitigating Risks to a Successful Enumeration, but Still Faces Various Challenges

What GAO Found

The Bureau continues to make noteworthy gains in mitigating risks and in keeping the headcount on-track, but a number of challenges remain. Specifically, over the last few months, the Bureau has made important strides in improving oversight of testing key IT systems. For example, the Bureau named a testing officer to monitor the testing of census-taking activities. The Bureau has also made progress in system testing, but faces tight timeframes in finalizing the paper-based operations control system (PBOCS), which will be used to manage field operations. If any significant problems are identified during the testing phases of PBOCS, there will be little time, in most cases, to resolve the problems before the system needs to be deployed.

Address canvassing, an operation where temporary workers known as listers go door-to-door to verify and update address data, finished ahead of schedule, but was over budget. Based on initial Bureau data, the preliminary figure on the actual cost of address canvassing is \$88 million higher than the original estimate of \$356 million, an overrun of 25 percent. A key reason for the overrun is that the Bureau did not update its cost estimates to reflect the changes to the address canvassing workload. Further, the Bureau did not follow its staffing strategy and hired too many listers. The Bureau's efforts to fingerprint employees, which was required as part of a criminal background check, did not proceed smoothly, in part because of training issues. As a result, over 35,000 temporary census workers—over a fifth of the address canvassing workforce—were hired despite the fact that their fingerprints could not be processed and they were not fully screened for employment eligibility. The Bureau is refining instruction manuals and taking other steps to improve the fingerprinting process for future operations.

GAO is unable to verify the accuracy of the \$14.7 billion estimated cost of the 2010 Census because key details and assumptions are unavailable. However, the Bureau is taking steps to improve its cost estimation process for 2020, including training its staff in cost estimation skills.

While the Bureau has taken a number of actions to mitigate risk and its overall readiness for 2010 has improved, much work remains to be done. Many things can happen over the next few months, and keeping the entire enterprise on-plan will continue to be a daunting challenge fraught with risks. High levels of public participation, and continued Bureau and congressional attention to stewardship, performance, and accountability, will be key to a successful census.