

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Census Bureau (Bureau) and U.S. Postal Service (USPS) collaborated on aspects of the 2010 Census and prior decennials, and those efforts generally went well in such areas as address list development. But both agencies face challenges: the Bureau needs to control the escalating cost of the decennial census and maintain its accuracy, while USPS must improve its financial condition.

As requested, GAO examined opportunities to enhance collaboration in such areas as technology, personnel, and facilities that could improve the cost-effectiveness of the 2020 Census and generate revenue for USPS. GAO analyzed Bureau and USPS data and documents, compared the agencies' existing collaborative efforts with prior GAO work, and interviewed agency officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends the Secretary of Commerce and USPS consider (1) expanding their current collaborative efforts to include recruiting mail carriers, including retirees, for the 2020 Census, and (2) assessing whether strategies can be developed to reduce the number of "undeliverable as addressed" census mailings. USPS agreed with GAO's recommendations. Commerce disagreed with the second draft recommendation concerning analyzing the reasons for undelivered mailings. GAO revised the recommendation to focus on developing a strategy to help reduce costs involved with processing undelivered mail.

View [GAO-11-874](#) or key components. For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov) or Phillip Herr at (202) 512-2834 or [herrp@gao.gov](mailto:herrp@gao.gov).

## DECENNIAL CENSUS

### Census Bureau and Postal Service Should Pursue Opportunities to Further Enhance Collaboration

## What GAO Found

The Bureau and USPS are expanding collaborative efforts for the 2020 Census. The collaborative efforts include a new Bureau initiative to continuously update its master address list using USPS and local address information. This could allow the Bureau to limit the size of field operations needed to develop an accurate and complete address list for the 2020 Census. The Bureau and USPS also plan to update their 1995 memorandum of understanding to, among other matters, help ensure that both agencies benefit from their collaborative efforts. Bureau officials explained that under the 1995 memorandum, the agencies' collaboration typically benefited the Bureau more than USPS. Now both agencies would like to improve each other's address and geographic information. One new effort anticipated under the revised memorandum of understanding would provide USPS with the Bureau's geographic data products and support, which USPS hopes to use to improve its mail routing and other business decisions. The revised memorandum of understanding is expected to be approved later this year.

Additional opportunities exist for the Bureau to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of USPS mail carriers, including retirees. Bureau and USPS officials agree that USPS mail carriers are familiar with their communities, so hiring mail carriers as temporary census workers could allow the Bureau to, among other things, develop a more accurate address list for the 2020 Census. However, using mail carriers to conduct census field operations at USPS pay rates would not be cost-effective. In 2010, USPS mail carriers cost on average about \$41 (city) or \$34 (rural) per hour compared to about \$15 per hour for census enumerators.

In the 2010 Census, about 19-million forms could not be delivered—also known as undeliverable as addressed mailings. The Bureau, in its comments to a copy of this draft report, provided a summary of reasons for why forms were not delivered. These reasons include the house was vacant or there was no mail box. Thus, now that the Bureau has compiled this information, it will be important for the Bureau to work with USPS to assess strategies to reduce the number of undeliverable as addressed mailings, as undelivered mail results in additional operational and waste-disposal costs for USPS and additional postage fees for the Bureau.

The Bureau works with the General Services Administration to lease space for its local offices during the census. For the 2010 Census, the Bureau leased two USPS locations for a total cost of \$330,000. While USPS officials stated that ongoing efforts to downsize the USPS could increase the availability of facility space that could be used by the Bureau in the next census, USPS hopes to sell these facilities, and it is uncertain how many will be available in 2020 (and what condition those facilities would be in if they were available).