



Highlights of [GAO-10-324](#), a report to congressional requesters.

## Why GAO Did This Study

Assessing the accuracy of the census is essential given that census data are used to apportion seats in Congress, to redraw congressional districts, and for many other public and private purposes. The U.S. Census Bureau's (Bureau) Census Coverage Measurement program (CCM) is to assess the accuracy of the 2010 Census and improve the design of operations for the 2020 Census. In April 2008, GAO recommended that the Bureau identify how it would relate CCM results—where the 2010 Census was accurate and inaccurate—to census operations to improve future censuses. Knowing where the 2010 Census was inaccurate can help inform research to improve the 2020 Census.

GAO was asked to examine (1) the status of CCM planning and (2) the effects of design decisions since GAO issued its April 2008 report. GAO reviewed Bureau documents related to CCM design and National Academy of Sciences reports, and interviewed responsible Bureau officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to improve the Bureau's use of CCM in planning for future operations, with which the Department of Commerce generally agreed. Commerce stated that it is taking action to ensure data preservation. Further, Commerce stated that although it considers a 2000 contamination study comprehensive, a new recall bias study is planned for 2010.

[View GAO-10-324 or key components.](#)  
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## 2010 CENSUS

### Plans for Census Coverage Measurement Are on Track, but Additional Steps Will Improve Its Usefulness

#### What GAO Found

Since GAO's April 2008 report, the Bureau has finalized plans for 2010 CCM goals, the timing of operations, and the types of results to be produced. Planning continues in other areas, such as developing estimation methods, evaluating the CCM program, and implementing its Master Trace Project, which would enable the Bureau to link its datasets and systems to support a broad range of research. The deadlines for some of these plans have not yet passed, but the Bureau already has default plans in place in case further changes do not occur. In mid-December, the Director decided to make some additional changes to the CCM program to improve the quality of CCM results.

GAO found that additional actions on Bureau decisions may make CCM more useful in informing Bureau decisions on future census and coverage measurement efforts:

- The Bureau's 2020 planning efforts are described in a series of decision memoranda issued in the summer of 2009. However, the Bureau has not yet taken steps to integrate CCM results with early 2020 planning to prepare for a census test in 2014. By describing, for example, what the Bureau might learn from CCM or how the results might feed into 2020 Census planning, the Bureau will better ensure that there are no gaps or overlaps in the use of CCM for early 2020 planning.
- In September 2009, the Bureau began its Master Trace Project, which is intended to ensure that its datasets and systems can be used together to support detailed research into the causes of census coverage problems and facilitate research on the possible interactions of future operations. At the time of this review, the Bureau had not yet completed an inventory of the census databases that might be of potential interest for future research, identified which archived versions might be most useful, or mapped out how they might be archived and linked. Doing this quickly will be important as the census is already underway and it will be difficult to make changes to database structures or archival and data storage plans if the Bureau's assessments determine that changes are necessary.
- The Bureau reviewed its previous decision to start CCM's Person Interviewing operation later than it did in 2000, and decided in June 2009 not to change it. However, the Bureau does not have a plan to assess the trade-offs in error between earlier and later start dates. Additional research on the trade-offs of different start dates could help the Bureau more fully understand the implications of CCM timing decisions on the resulting estimates of coverage error and better determine the optimal timing of Person Interviewing in future censuses.