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2000 CENSUS

Review of Partnership Program Highlights Best Practices for Future Operations

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G A O
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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

August 20, 2001

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Dan Miller
Chairman
The Honorable William Lacy Clay, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on the Census
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
House of Representatives

To take a more complete and accurate count of the nation's population in the 2000 Census, the Bureau of the Census partnered with other federal agencies, as well as with state, local, and tribal governments; religious, community, and social service organizations; and private businesses. According to the Bureau, about 140,000 organizations participated in the partnership program, assisting in such critical activities as reviewing and updating the Bureau's address list; encouraging people—especially hard-to-count populations—to participate in the census; and recruiting temporary census employees. The program stemmed from the Bureau's recognition that a successful head count required the local knowledge, experience, and expertise that these organizations provide. The Bureau expects the program will play a key role in the 2010 Census, as well as a number of the Bureau's nondecennial surveys in the years to come.

Although a more complete picture of the results of the partnership program will not be available until the Bureau completes several ongoing evaluations of the effort, thus far, the program has generally received broad support. The Bureau and members of Congress have cited the role that partners have played in boosting public awareness of the census, while in our prior work, we noted that the Bureau aggressively pursued partnerships with local governments, community groups, and other organizations to help ensure a complete and accurate population count.

As discussed with your offices, we reviewed the 2000 Census partnership program, paying particular attention to (1) the financial and human capital the Bureau dedicated to the 2000 Census partnership effort, (2) the Bureau's guidelines governing partnering decisions and use of the Bureau's Census 2000 logo, and (3) the Bureau's tracking system used to monitor partnership engagements and measure performance. Moreover, given the Bureau's efforts to institutionalize the partnership program, you asked us to describe the Bureau's plans and to identify best practices and lessons learned from the 2000 Census for forging constructive partnership engagements that the Bureau can use to inform those plans. This report is one of several we will be issuing in the coming months on lessons learned from the 2000 Census that can help inform the planning effort for 2010.

Results in Brief

According to Bureau data, from October 1997, when the Bureau began staffing partnership positions, through September 2000, the Bureau spent about $142.9 million on its partnership program. This is about 2 percent of the estimated $6.5 billion the Bureau allocated for the census, and an average of about $1.19 for each of the 120 million households that the Bureau estimates compose the nation. Of the $142.9 million, $65.1 million (46 percent) was spent on salaries and benefits. The remainder included nonpayroll expenditures such as travel, training, supplies, and postage. The Bureau also included about $14 million of "in-kind" funding to back local partners' efforts to support the census. Partners could apply for awards of up to $2,499 to purchase such promotional items as stickers, banners, and flyers. The money was not given directly to partners. Instead, the Bureau's regional census centers purchased the items directly from vendors on the partners' behalf. However, the Bureau did not have data on how many awards were given, whom the awards were given to, the amount of these awards, and what the awards were spent on. This information is important for accountability purposes as well as for managing and assessing the effectiveness of the effort. Moreover, the lack of information is inconsistent with federal internal control standards, which require transactions to be recorded in a timely and accurate manner and be readily available for examination.[1]

The Bureau staffed the partnership program with 594 full-time positions. Of these, 560 positions were allocated to the field, while the remaining

[1] *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* (GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1, November 1999).

slots were located in the Bureau's headquarters. The number of partnership positions in 2000 was more than triple the 181 positions filled in 1990. However, partnership staff in 2000 were more thinly spread as they were responsible for working with many more local groups in 2000 compared to 1990. Local census office managers we surveyed expressed concern that the partnership staffs' heavy workload may have affected the support they were able to provide. Partnership specialists we interviewed generally did not share this view, but they did report the need for more clerical support. Local census office managers also said the reporting structure for partnership specialists, in which partnership specialists reported directly to a regional partnership coordinator, rather than to the local census office manager, may have led to communication and coordination hurdles between the partnership staff and the local census office. Headquarters officials explained that this structure was chosen so that partnership specialists could coordinate their efforts and maintain a consistent national census campaign message.

According to Bureau officials, decisions on which organizations to partner with and what events to attend were governed by unwritten guidelines and criteria. These decisions were driven by the Bureau's desire to collaborate with virtually any organization that would support the census, particularly groups with unique demographic and other characteristics of the regions. The Bureau also made the census logo available on its Internet site, and encouraged partners to use the logo to help promote the census. However, the Bureau did not have any written guidance on how partners could characterize their association with the Bureau or what constituted appropriate use of the Bureau's Census 2000 logo. This lack of written guidance thus raised the risk that (1) the Bureau might partner with organizations that could generate perceptual or other problems because their nature or actions were inconsistent with those of the census or (2) partners might misrepresent their association with the Bureau.

The Bureau has since prepared written guidelines for making decisions on partnership engagements. However, the guidelines fall short in that they still do not address how partners may (1) characterize their association with the Bureau and (2) use the Bureau's logo. The lack of guidelines governing use of the Bureau's logo is at odds with federal internal control standards that require agencies to establish control over assets vulnerable to unauthorized use.[2]

[2] GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

Although the Bureau developed a monitoring system for tracking, planning, and analyzing partnership efforts throughout the nation, it was not fully tested before it went operational because of time constraints. As a result, a number of shortcomings went undetected until the system was implemented. Bureau headquarters staff said the system was slow, cumbersome, and difficult to keep current. Because of these difficulties, the Bureau had limited real-time data on the status of agreements with thousands of partners and was unable to fully monitor the extent to which partners fulfilled their commitments. The system's shortcomings also led to inefficiencies and duplication of effort in the partnership program. For example, some partnership specialists kept separate partnership tracking systems. The Bureau has developed a new tracking system called Prisms to address the problems it encountered with its initial system.

With respect to its future plans for the partnership program, for fiscal year 2001, the Bureau has budgeted $5.4 million to support a series of workshops for partners and other interested parties on how to access and use census data. For the longer term, the Bureau plans to continue working with partners to help conduct its ongoing demographic and economic surveys and begin initial preparations for the 2010 Census. In addition, the Bureau expects to release the results of its evaluation of the partnership program, which should shed light on the program's overall impact and assess how the partnership efforts affected different populations and census operations as well as the adequacy of its partnership staffing levels. This information should help the Bureau as it moves ahead with plans to institutionalize the partnership program and prepares for the next national head count in 2010.

Our observations during the 2000 Census highlighted some best practices that appeared to be key to successful partnership engagements. It will be important for the Bureau to explore these and other best practices to help refine the partnership program and enhance its effectiveness. As shown in figure 3, best practices for partners include (1) identifying "census champions" that is, people who will actively support the census and encourage others to do so, (2) integrating census-related efforts into partners' existing activities and events, and (3) leveraging resources by working with other partners and customizing census promotional materials to better resonate with local populations. For the Bureau, best practices include (1) providing adequate and timely information, guidance, and other resources to local partners on how they can support the census, (2) maintaining open communication with partners, and (3) encouraging the early involvement of partners in census activities.

Overall, it appears as though key census-taking activities, such as encouraging people to return their questionnaires, would have been less successful had it not been for the Bureau's partnership efforts. Thus, given the important role that partners are expected to play in future Bureau activities, we recommend that the Secretary of Commerce ensure that the Bureau takes steps to make the partnership program more accountable and performance-oriented. These steps include (1) completing its evaluation of the partnership program as planned and using the information to help determine its cost-effectiveness and how best to allocate program resources, (2) documenting in-kind funding expenditures and maintaining proper accounting in accordance with federal internal control standards, (3) exploring ways to increase communication and coordination between partnership staff and local census managers, (4) reviewing partnership staffing levels to make sure that the levels are sufficient to ensure the adequate provision of Bureau support to partners, (5) developing regulations specifying how organizations may characterize their association with the Bureau and use the Bureau's logo, while providing for needed flexibility, and (6) ensuring that the Bureau's new partnership tracking system functions as an effective management tool.

Scope and Methodology

To review the financial and human capital that the Bureau dedicated to the partnership program and the Bureau's guidelines governing partnering decisions and use of its Census 2000 logo, we interviewed relevant Bureau managers in both headquarters and the field and examined Bureau documents that described the partnership program's goals, budget, and decision-making processes.

To identify partnership best practices, we interviewed local government and community partners, as well as other stakeholders, in four locations across the country that either we or the Bureau identified as examples of constructive partnership programs because they had specific characteristics. These characteristics included (1) an active local or regional partnership effort, (2) an initial census mail response rate that was favorable when compared to the nation as a whole or to the location's 1990 response rate, and (3) populations the Bureau considered hard to enumerate. In addition, the sites we selected were geographically and demographically diverse, and included a large urban area (Los Angeles County), a mostly rural state (Wyoming), a medium-size city (Detroit), and three Native American tribes (the Lumbee and Tuscarora tribes in Robeson County, North Carolina, and the Catawba tribe in South Carolina). To obtain the Bureau's perspective on these engagements, as part of these visits, we met with partnership staff from 16 local census

offices and with officials at the Bureau's Regional Census Centers in Charlotte, N.C.; Denver; Detroit; and Los Angeles. Our findings cannot be projected to the partnership program as a whole.

We also included the initial results of our survey of a stratified random sample of 250 local census office managers in which we obtained responses from 236 managers (about a 94 percent overall response rate). The survey—which asked local census office managers about the implementation of a number of key field operations—can be generalized to the 511 local census offices located in the 50 states. All reported percentages are estimates based on the sample and are subject to some sampling error as well as nonsampling error. In general, percentage estimates in this report for the entire sample have confidence intervals ranging from about ± 4 to ± 5 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence interval. In other words, if all local census office managers in our population had been surveyed, the chances are 95 out of 100 that the result obtained would not differ from our sample estimate in the more extreme cases by more than ± 5 percent.

We did our audit work at the case study locations in June and July 2000, and at the Bureau's headquarters in Suitland, Md., from February 2000 through May 2001. Our work was done in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We requested comments on a draft of this report from the Secretary of Commerce. On July 17, 2001, the Secretary forwarded the Bureau's written comments on the draft (see app. I), which we address at the end of this report. The Bureau generally agreed with, or recognized the value of, our seven recommendations.

Background

To improve participation in the 2000 Census and to mobilize support for other census operations, the Bureau partnered with state, local, and tribal governments as well as religious, media, educational, and other community organizations. The partnership program stemmed from the Bureau's recognition that local people know the characteristics of their communities better than the Census Bureau and therefore know the best ways to communicate with their constituents to ensure they are counted.

To coordinate local partners' efforts, the Bureau encouraged government entities to form Complete Count Committees, which were to be made up of representatives of these local groups. The Bureau also established partnerships with national organizations such as the Mexican American

Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Congress of American Indians, and the American Association of Retired Persons. In addition, the Bureau partnered with private companies such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and the United Parcel Service.

The Bureau depended on partners to help conduct a number of census operations. Among other contributions, partners helped recruit over 3.7 million temporary census workers from March 1997 through September 2000, reviewed and updated census maps and address lists, provided space and volunteers for Questionnaire Assistance Centers and for testing census job applicants, organized promotional events, and motivated individuals to complete their census forms.

In addition, for the first time ever, the Bureau instituted a paid-advertising campaign led by Young and Rubicam, a private sector advertising firm. The campaign included both national and local census advertising, and was intended to increase mail returns from the general public, targeted audiences, and historically undercounted populations.

As part of its larger study of the outreach and promotion program, the Bureau is examining the impact that the partnership program had on public awareness and participation. The Bureau achieved an initial mail response rate of about 64 percent, 3 percentage points higher than it had anticipated when planning for nonresponse follow-up. This was a noteworthy accomplishment in light of the challenges the Bureau faced in publicizing the census and, as a result, the Bureau had over 3 million fewer housing units to follow up with than it had initially planned. However, initial Bureau data on the postcensus mail return rate—which is a more precise indicator of public cooperation—was 72 percent, a decline of 2 percentage points from the 74 percent mail return rate the Bureau achieved in 1990 (the Bureau's figures are preliminary and subject to verification upon receipt of final data).

The initial mail response rate is calculated as a percentage of all forms in the mailback universe from which the Bureau received a questionnaire. It factors in housing units that are discovered to be nonexistent or unoccupied during nonresponse follow-up. The Bureau uses this percentage as an indicator of its nonresponse follow-up workload. This differs from the mail return rate, which refers to the percentage of forms the Bureau receives from occupied housing units in the mailback universe and is calculated after the Bureau completes the enumeration process. We discuss the mail response rate and mail return rate more fully in our

forthcoming report on the Bureau's nonresponse follow-up efforts, which we expect to issue in the near future.

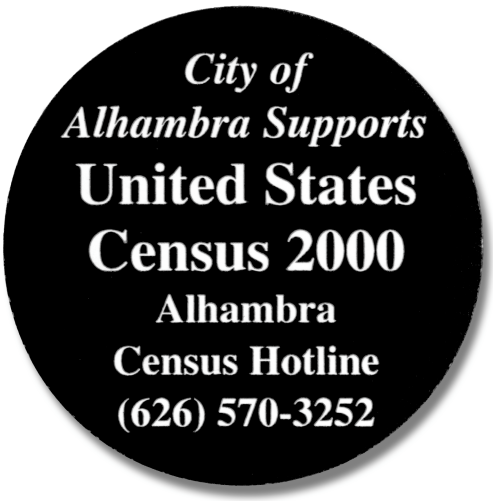
Financial and Human Capital Dedicated to the Partnership Program

The cost of the partnership program from October 1997 through September 2000 totaled about $142.9 million, or about 2 percent of the estimated $6.5 billion total cost for the 2000 Census. This is an average of about $1.19 for each of the 120 million households the Bureau estimates make up the nation.

The partnership program was labor-intensive. In fact, Bureau spending data show that salaries and benefits accounted for the largest component of the partnership spending, totaling $65.1 million (46 percent) for fiscal years 1998 through 2000. The remainder of the spending, $77.8 million (54 percent), covered travel, shipping, postage, printing, telecommunication services, contracts, training, supplies, and equipment.

The $142.9 million also included $14 million in "in-kind" funding to support local partners' efforts to promote the census. The money was not given directly to local partners; rather Bureau regional census centers purchased the items on partners' behalf directly from vendors. The funds were used to purchase educational and promotional materials such as flyers, banners, balloons, and stickers tailored to meet the specific needs of local partners. For example, officials from the city of Alhambra, Calif., reported that the city received $2,300 of in-kind funds for the purchase of outdoor street banners in English and Chinese, and, as shown in figure 1, stickers for outgoing city mail in March and April 2000 encouraging city residents to support the census.

Figure 1: Stickers Purchased by the City of Alhambra for Census 2000 Promotion Purchased With Bureau In-Kind Funds



Source: City of Alhambra, Calif.

To receive in-kind funding awards of up to $2,499, partners were to complete applications describing how the project would encourage targeted audiences to complete their questionnaires, reduce the undercount of certain populations, or increase awareness of census activities. In purchasing goods and services from vendors, the Bureau expected regional census centers to primarily use government purchase cards. Bureau rules prohibited the funds from being used for a number of types of goods and services such as cash prizes, food, or salaries, although Bureau regional officials granted occasional exceptions.

The Bureau did not have data on how it distributed the $14 million of in-kind funding. Data were unavailable on which partners received in-kind support, how much support each partner received, and how the partners spent the money. Such information is important for accountability purposes, as well as for managing and assessing the effectiveness of the effort. Moreover, the lack of information is inconsistent with federal

internal control standards, which require transactions to be recorded in a timely and accurate manner, and be readily available for examination.[3]

Federal standards for internal control require agencies to record transactions promptly and accurately to maintain their relevance and value to management in controlling operations and making decisions. In addition, the documentation should be readily available for examination.[4] Because records were not available to census managers on a timely basis, the Bureau is inconsistent with internal control standards.

Consistent with our findings that the Bureau did not meet federal requirements for financial management and reporting of in-kind funding spending, an independent audit of the Bureau's financial management procedures found that the Bureau had "significant difficulties and delays in producing complete and accurate financial statements" for all of its expenditures.[5] The auditor's report recommended that the Bureau produce timely reports that meet the Bureau's internal, regulatory, and audit requirements.[6]

Partnership Program Staffing Levels

At its peak in fiscal year 2000, the Bureau staffed the partnership program with 594 full-time equivalent positions[7] of which 560 positions were located in the field and 34 were in the Bureau's headquarters (see table 1). The Bureau hired 665 field partnership staff, some of whom worked part-time.

[3]GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

[4]GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

[5]U.S. Census Bureau, *2000 Financial Report*, February 2001, p. 51.

[6]U.S. Census Bureau, *2000 Financial Report*, February 2001, p. 52.

[7]One full-time equivalent is one full-time person working 40 hours per week over a 12-month period, or the equivalent of that level of work.

Table 1: Number of Full-time Equivalents for the Partnership Program

Fiscal year	Field	Headquarters	Total
1998	88	22	110
1999	362	30	392
2000	560	34	594

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

The staffing level was 332 full-time partnership staff positions more than the Bureau originally planned. The Bureau received additional funding for its partnership efforts following a 1999 Supreme Court ruling[8] that prohibited the use of statistical sampling to produce state population totals for apportioning the House of Representatives.

Most of the field staff were "partnership specialists" who received special Bureau training and were responsible for mobilizing local support for the census by working with Complete Count Committees and other organizations (the qualifications and backgrounds of partnership specialists are described in greater detail later in this report). However, according to Bureau officials, the 560 field positions also included a small number of other occupations, such as those in support staff.

Table 1 also shows that the full complement of partnership staff did not come on board until after the start of fiscal year 2000 (October 1, 1999), when the Bureau filled the remaining 202 (34 percent) of the 594 positions authorized for the partnership program. Although Bureau headquarters officials recognized the benefits of hiring partnership staff earlier in the census cycle to allow them more time to learn about census operations and build local contacts, they also said the cost of doing so was difficult to justify.

Compared to the 1990 Census, the Bureau had more partnership positions for the 2000 Census, but a rough indicator of their workload—the average number of local jurisdiction Complete Count Committees they supported—suggests that partnership staff were more thinly spread in 2000. Indeed, the 560 full-time field positions filled for the 2000 Census is over three times the 181 positions filled for the 1990 Census. However, in 1990, the 181 partnership staff supported the work of 2,201 Complete Count Committees or about 12 committees per each partnership staff

[8] *Department of Commerce v. U.S. House of Representatives*, 525 U.S. 316 (1999).

position. For 2000, 560 partnership specialists were responsible for working with 11,253 committees, or about 20 committees per specialist.

The partnership specialists' heavy workload may have limited the level of support they were able to provide to individual local census offices. In our survey of local census office managers, when asked about the effectiveness of the outreach and promotion program in reaching hard-to-enumerate populations, 28 percent thought that the program needed no improvement. On the other hand, 40 percent thought that some improvement was needed, and another 30 percent thought that significant improvement was needed (2 percent of the managers responded that they had no basis on which to judge or were unsure of the effectiveness of the program). A number of respondents who saw room for improvement expressed the view that partnership specialists were too disparate to offer meaningful assistance. For example, one California manager told us, "The partnership [specialist] was stretched far too thin, and was expected to cover three counties." Likewise, a Pennsylvania manager said, "The partnership specialist assigned to the Scranton office was responsible for multiple local census offices. The [Assistant Manager for Field Operations (AMFO)] felt that the partnership specialists were spread too thin. As a result, the former local census office manager and AMFO ended up doing most of the outreach and promotion work."

For their part, while the partnership specialists we spoke to generally agreed that the Bureau hired enough specialists to carry out partnership activities, they also reported that they could have used more clerical support to help alleviate some of the specialists' administrative work, which included distributing thousands of posters and other promotional items to partner organizations and entering data into the Bureau's partnership tracking system (each regional census center typically hired four to six partnership program support staff).

Specialists reported to and were overseen by regional partnership coordinators and partnership specialist team leaders at their respective regional census centers. Bureau headquarters officials explained that this structure was established so that specialists could coordinate their efforts with other partnership specialists in the same area, share common problems and solutions, and convey the national census campaign at the local level. Also, some partnership specialists hired to reach out to specific ethnic groups were responsible for areas under many local census offices, making it logistically difficult to report to one local census office. For example, the tribal partnership specialist for the Charlotte Regional Census Center was responsible for a four-state area that included 40

different Indian tribes. Therefore, she reported that it did not make sense for her to report to one local census office, as the local office was concerned with only a small portion of the area the for which the specialist was responsible.

However, the local census managers we surveyed provided a different perspective of this management structure. Of the 70 percent of respondents who said the effectiveness of the outreach program in reaching hard-to-enumerate populations needed some or significant improvement, a common perception was that there were coordination challenges between the local census offices and the partnership specialists. To better integrate the local census offices with the partnership program, a number of managers suggested that the partnership specialists should report directly to local census office managers. Illustrating this viewpoint, a local census manager from Connecticut reported that there was "very poor" coordination with the partnership specialist because the partnership program was under a separate chain of command. Similarly, a local census manager in Maryland told us, "There was very little coordination between the partners and the local census office. The lack of coordination resulted in some unnecessary … duplication of effort. For example, one partner held a census awareness session in a community that had already been enumerated by census workers, negating any real need to hold such a session at that time."

According to the Bureau, it is more effective to have partnership specialists report to partnership coordinators because they are more experienced in outreach, rather than to local census office managers who are responsible for a variety of operations. Regardless of the management structure, what is clear is that more positive experiences seemed to result when local managers and partnership specialists dovetailed their efforts. For example, a Detroit manager told us that she had a "very good" experience with the partnership program in part because the local partnership specialist attended local office meetings and stayed in close communication to develop outreach and promotion strategies.

Partnering Decisions and Logo Use Were Governed by Unwritten Guidelines and Criteria

As we noted in our October 2000 report, at the time of the census, decisions on which organizations the Bureau partnered with and what events the Bureau participated in were governed by unwritten guidelines and criteria.[9] The Bureau noted that it was very difficult to have guidelines about partnering decisions because these decisions tend to be subjective, and there are difficult trade-offs involved in making partnering decisions. According to Bureau officials, partnering decisions were driven by (1) the Bureau's desire to partner with virtually any organization that was willing to support the census and (2) the specific demographic, cultural, and other characteristics of each census region.

In practice, Bureau officials said that the Bureau relied on the judgment of its partnership specialists and other field staff to determine which organizations to partner with, what events to attend, and how to make the best use of their time. However, according to the Bureau, partnership specialists' decisions were subject to supervisory review, and the Bureau had an unwritten policy not to partner with law enforcement and certain other federal agencies, such as the Internal Revenue Service, because it could give the public the impression that the Bureau was sharing information with them. In addition, according to Bureau officials, employees were provided guidance concerning the statute that prohibits federal employees from engaging in partisan political activities.

Similarly, the Bureau had no written guidelines on how organizations could characterize their relationship with the Bureau, including the appropriate use of the Bureau's Census 2000 logo shown in figure 2. The Bureau encouraged organizations to use the census logo to customize promotional and other literature, and made it available on its Internet site, but aside from stylistic guidelines, such as logo color restrictions and logo font requirements, the Bureau did not provide any guidance on what constituted proper and improper use.

[9] *Census Bureau Participation in Los Angeles Symposium, August 2000* (GAO-01-124R, October 24, 2000).

Figure 2: The Bureau's Logo as Downloaded From Its Web Site

United States
Census
2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

The lack of written guidelines raised the risk that the Bureau might partner with organizations that could create perceptual or other difficulties for the Bureau, or that partners could use the Bureau's logo or characterize their relationship with the Bureau in a way that could have a similar effect.

Better guidance could help avoid situations that might raise congressional concern such as that which occurred when the Bureau, at the invitation of one of its partners, participated in a public symposium that focused on challenges facing the African American community, including census undercounts. The event was held in Los Angeles on August 12, 2000. As we noted in our October 2000 report, the Bureau considered the request routine because it provided an opportunity to reach an audience of 1,500 to 2,000 African Americans, a hard-to-count population targeted by the Bureau. Nevertheless, because promotional material used the Bureau's Census 2000 logo, identified the Bureau as a sponsor of the symposium, and made it appear that the event was connected to the Democratic National Convention (which began in Los Angeles on August 14), members of Congress raised concerns about the Bureau's attendance.

In response to our October report, the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Census called on the Bureau to develop a written policy governing its partnership decisions and the use of its logo. In its December 7, 2000, letter, the Bureau outlined the guidelines under which the partnership program had operated and under which the Bureau believes the program has functioned effectively. The guidelines state that

when partnering with government agencies, community groups, or local individuals, Bureau officials will (1) exercise good judgment, (2) avoid the reality or appearance of impropriety or preferential treatment, (3) follow rules limiting federal employees' involvement in political activity, and (4) not partner with law enforcement and certain other federal agencies.

Although the written guidelines are a step in the right direction, they still do not address how partners may characterize their association with the Bureau, nor do they discuss how partners may use the Bureau's logo. Thus, the Bureau still faces the risk that an organization could use the partnership program in a manner that could create operational or perceptual problems for the Bureau.

Moreover, the lack of guidelines governing use of the Bureau's logo is at odds with federal internal control requirements that call on agencies to develop processes and procedures that support performance-based management and minimize operational problems. As required in the November 1999 federal internal control standards,[10] agencies must establish control over assets vulnerable to unauthorized use. Much like trademarks used by private companies, the census logo is a valuable asset in that it represents the Bureau, its mission, and its reputation. Therefore, it is important for the Bureau to safeguard its use while maintaining its flexibility and accessibility to partners.

Bureau officials believe that a set of rigid guidelines would narrow the scope of its outreach efforts and limit their effectiveness. However, the practices of other federal agencies that partner with nongovernmental entities or allow limited public use of their logos provide some useful guidance for the Bureau. For example, the National Park Service partners with authorized nonprofit organizations and other authorized individuals or entities. They in turn may raise funds from private companies for the benefit of the national park system. Although the Park Service allows businesses to publicize their support, Park Service rules prevent them from characterizing their association in such a way that suggests the Park Service uses or endorses the companies' products or services.[11]

Other federal agencies have issued regulations that control public use of their logos and symbols and specify what constitutes appropriate use. For

[10] GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

[11] National Park Service, Director's Order #21: Donations and Fundraising.

example, under regulations governing property management, the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service can authorize the use of the Forest Service insignia for noncommercial educational purposes without charge when its use is a public service that will contribute to public knowledge and understanding of the Forest Service, its mission, and its objectives. The regulations also allow the Chief to revoke the use of the insignia if it is being used in a way that is "offensive to decency and good taste or injurious to the image of the Forest Service."[12] Similar regulations control the use of the Forest Service's "Smokey Bear" and "Woodsy Owl" symbols.[13]

The Bureau's Database for Tracking the Partnership Program Had Shortcomings

In our ongoing work on performance management, we have consistently stressed that credible performance information is essential for accurately assessing an agency's progress in achieving its program goals. In cases where sufficient progress is not being made, this information can be used to identify opportunities for improvement. To monitor the performance of the partnership program and evaluate its overall success, the Bureau developed a centralized database called the Contact Profile Usage Management System (CPUMS). Specifically, CPUMS was designed to track, plan, and analyze the Bureau's partnership efforts by monitoring such information as the kinds of organizations the Bureau partnered with, the commitments the organizations made, and whether they fulfilled their commitments. Bureau headquarters officials told us that they checked CPUMS three or four times a week to get a sense of what was going on in the Bureau's regions and to determine whether targeted groups were being reached. However, several shortcomings appear to have reduced the reliability of CPUMS data and limited its use as an effective management tool.

According to Bureau headquarters officials, CPUMS was slow and not user friendly, and keeping the data current was a challenge because of data entry backlogs. These problems in turn led to inefficiencies and duplication of effort, prompting partnership specialists and regional census centers to keep duplicate tracking systems. For example, the separate partnership tracking systems confused local census managers and partnership specialists about which partners had been contacted. The Bureau did not detect many of these problems prior to the census in part

[12]36 C.F.R. part 264.

[13]36 C.F.R. parts 271 and 272.

because CPUMS was developed after the 1998 dress rehearsal for the 2000 Census and was not fully tested before it went operational.[14]

In response to the problems it encountered with CPUMS, the Bureau developed a new partnership tracking system called Prisms, which went online in mid April 2001. According to Bureau officials, unlike CPUMS, Prisms is Web-based and thus more easily accessible to partnership program staff. In addition, Prisms is to provide managers with more advanced reporting and querying capabilities.

The Bureau Plans to Evaluate and Continue the Partnership Program

As part of its efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the 2000 Census and to begin planning for the 2010 Census, the Bureau is conducting two separate evaluations of the partnership program. To get partner feedback on the implementation of the program, the Bureau mailed out a survey to 15,000 partners asking them about their experiences in obtaining promotional items, the types and value of in-kind services rendered, the specific partnership activities they conducted, and their view of the effectiveness of the overall program in reaching hard-to-count populations. According to the Bureau, this evaluation is scheduled for completion by August 2001. The Bureau is also doing an internal operational assessment of the partnership program. As part of this assessment, partnership program staff were asked about the effectiveness of the program in reaching its goals and how the program could be improved for 2010.

For the longer term, according to Bureau officials, the Bureau intends to institutionalize its partnership efforts so it can maintain the organizational relationships it developed for the 2000 Census and not have to start over when preparing for the next head count in 2010. For fiscal year 2001, the Bureau budgeted $5.4 million to support a series of "data transition workshops" for partners and other interested parties on how to access and use census data. According to Bureau officials, the Bureau wants to make census data more easily available to data users, particularly organizations that have not traditionally used census data but were very active in the Bureau's partnership program during this census. The Bureau also hopes to build on these relationships to enhance community awareness of and participation in its annual, nondecennial demographic and economic

[14]The dress rehearsal for the 2000 Census was held in Sacramento, Calif.; 11 South Carolina counties and the City of Columbia; and Menominee County, Wisc., including the Menominee American Indian Reservation. The purpose of the dress rehearsal was to demonstrate the overall design of the 2000 Census.

surveys. In addition, the Bureau hopes to engage partners to support the American Community Survey, an ongoing survey that the Census Bureau plans to use to replace the long form in the 2010 Census. Full implementation of the survey is to begin in 2003.

Best Practices for Forging Productive Partnerships

Based on our meetings with representatives of partner organizations and the Bureau, we identified a number of best practices that appear to be key to successful partnership engagements. As the Bureau assesses the 2000 effort, these and other best practices should prove valuable as the Bureau moves ahead with plans to make the partnership program permanent and gears up for the next national head count in 2010.

As shown in figure 3, we found that successful partnership engagements are the joint responsibility of both partners and the Bureau. For partners, best practices include (1) identifying "census champions"—people who will actively support the census and encourage others to do so, (2) linking census promotional and other efforts to the partner's existing activities, and (3) leveraging resources by working with other partners and customizing existing census informational material. For the Bureau, best practices include (1) providing adequate and timely guidance, promotional materials, and other resources, (2) maintaining open channels of communication with partners, and (3) encouraging the early involvement of partners in census activities.

Figure 3: Census Partnerships Best Practices Checklist

Census Partnerships
Best Practices Checklist

Partner Best Practices

- ☑ 1. Identify "census champions"
- ☑ 2. Link promotional and other support to partner's existing activities
- ☑ 3. Leverage resources by working with other partners and customizing informational materials

Bureau Best Practices

- ☑ 1. Provide adequate and timely information on how partners can support the census
- ☑ 2. Maintain open channels of communication with local partners
- ☑ 3. Encourage partners to initiate census planning activities early

Source: GAO.

Best Practices for Partners

Partner Best Practices

- ☑ **1. Identify "census champions"**
- ☐ 2. Link promotional and other support to partner's existing activities
- ☐ 3. Leverage resources by working with other partners and customizing informational materials

Identify "Census Champions"

A critical building block of constructive partnership engagements appeared to be the presence of "census champions" within local organizations. These individuals recognized the community benefits that could accrue from a complete and accurate population count, had the authority to commit their organizations' resources toward that goal, and were sufficiently persuasive to mobilize others.

Champions we encountered in the course of our work included elected officials, heads of city agencies, religious leaders, and school officials. Although each supported the census in different ways, they generally had certain elements in common. First, they viewed support of the census as an investment with a long-term payoff, as opposed to a short-term expense, and were thus more inclined to allocate time, people, and money towards the census. For example, a champion for the City of Detroit was the City Clerk. Her office led the effort in creating a Homeless Task Force to count all the homeless in the city, cosponsoring Census Town Hall meetings with the Detroit City Council, and bringing together all the elected officials in Detroit—including the Mayor, the City Council President, a U.S. Congressman, and a U.S. Senator—for a televised public service announcement and a billboard encouraging Detroit residents to participate in the census. A copy of this billboard is shown in figure 4.

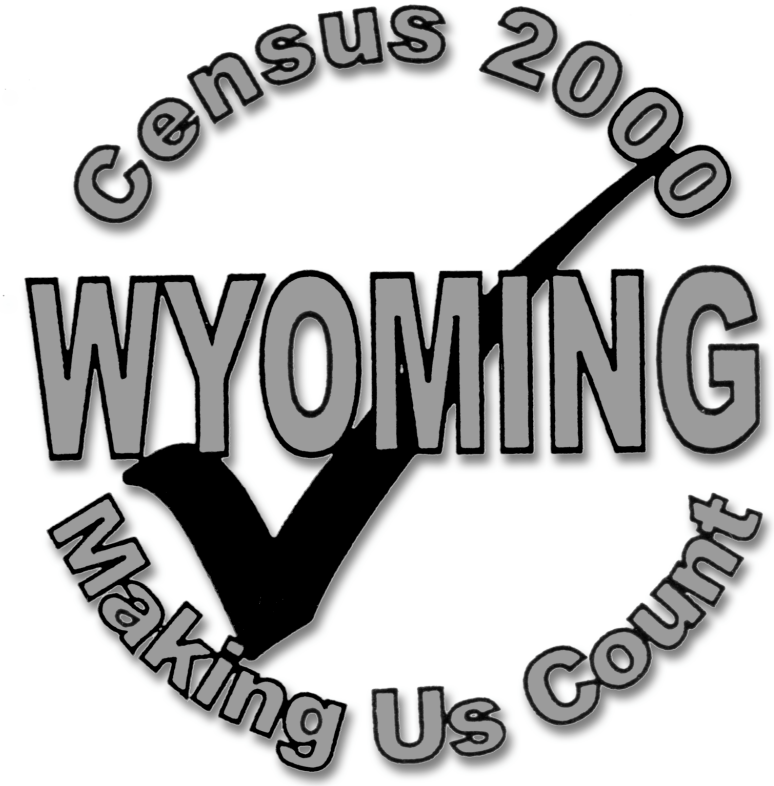
Figure 4: Detroit Billboard Showing Political Figures' Support of the Census

Source: Brogan and Partners Communications.

Second, census champions helped garner the commitment and support of other community leaders and organizations, which increased the visibility of the census still further. For example, the Wyoming Governor's liaison to the census told us that the Governor, in realizing how much the accuracy of the census affects the distribution of federal funds to Wyoming, formed a task force in early 1999 to encourage municipalities to promote the

census. The Task Force published statistical and demographic data to show Wyoming localities how much funding they might lose if all their residents were not counted. It also issued press releases about census recruiting needs, participated in American Indian pow-wows, set up questionnaire assistance centers for the Bureau, and, as shown in figure 5, developed a separate logo supporting the census.

Figure 5: Logo Developed by the Wyoming Census Task Force for Census 2000 Promotion



Source: The Wyoming Census Task Force.

In addition, census champions used their credibility within their communities to help dispel misperceptions about the census. For example, to counter a long-held belief that tribal members had nothing to gain from taking part in the census, the Chief of the Tuscarora Indian Tribe in Pembroke, N.C. decided in early 1999 to partner with the Bureau. At monthly tribal meetings he discussed how census data are used as a basis

for funding decisions at all levels of government and stressed that a complete count of the Tuscarora Indians might help them in their petition to become a federally recognized tribe.

Partner Best Practices

- ☐ 1. Identify "census champions"
- ☑ **2. Link promotional and other support to partner's existing activities**
- ☐ 3. Leverage resources by working with other partners and customizing informational materials

Link Promotional and Other Support to the Partner's Existing Activities

A second best practice that emerged from our discussions with local partners was the integration of census-related activities with an organization's day-to-day work. This allowed local partners to support the census using existing staff and other organizational resources. Further, partners said that supporting the census as part of an organization's day-to-day activities helped reduce people's fear and distrust of the census because they could see how organizations they were familiar with were already participating.

For example, as part of its efforts to help the Bureau develop a more complete address list, Los Angeles tasked employees of the Department of Water and Power, sanitation workers, as well as many other city employees to identify dwellings that the Bureau may have missed as part of its address-list development operations. These employees were selected because their work necessitated their going door-to-door, and thus they were well suited to find "nonstandard" housing units such as converted garages and subdivided single family homes. The city's Information Technology Agency developed a 10-minute video describing the importance of this citywide effort, what nonstandard dwellings look like, and how to report any findings. According to the city, over 38,000 nonstandard dwellings were confirmed by the Bureau. Locating nonstandard housing was particularly important to the city since the city believed the exclusion of these units from the address list played a significant role in Los Angeles' undercount in 1990.

Partner Best Practices

- ☐ 1. Identify "census champions"
- ☐ 2. Link promotional and other support to partner's existing activities
- ☑ **3. Leverage resources by working with other partners and customizing informational materials**

Leverage Resources by Working With Other Partners and Customizing Informational Materials

A third role for partners was enhancing the impact of their support by sharing ideas and resources with other organizations that had also partnered with the Bureau. In this way, they coordinated activities to reach more people while making more efficient use of their resources, and they avoided duplicating the efforts of others. For example, in Detroit, service providers to the homeless worked together to determine how they could best promote the census among those without residences. As a group they organized special promotional events on different nights around the city and coordinated their distribution of promotional items. One service provider organized a gospel choir concert in honor of the census, with a choir made up of homeless men, women, and children. Homeless service providers encouraged homeless persons from all over the city to participate.

Partners also leveraged their resources by customizing the Bureau's census informational materials to better resonate with local groups. Indeed, they said that incorporating symbols, images, languages, and people familiar to a particular community helped community members to identify with and be more receptive to the census. For example, a Los Angeles Korean organization developed its own census logo, as shown in the banner held by two staff members in figure 6. The organization developed brochures in Korean and tailored its census message to undocumented immigrants by emphasizing that census information was confidential by law.

Figure 6: Korean Senior Center Banner With Tailored Census 2000 Questionnaire Assistance Center Logo

Source: GAO.

Best Practices for the Bureau

Bureau Best Practices

- ☑ **1. Provide adequate and timely information on how partners can support the census**
- ☐ 2. Maintain open channels of communication with local partners
- ☐ 3. Encourage partners to initiate census planning activities early

Provide Adequate and Timely Information on How Partners Can Support the Census

A number of the partners we spoke to stressed the importance of the Bureau's providing partners with information on the census and guidance on how the partners could best lend their support. They said that this was important so that they could adequately plan for and participate in census activities. For example, to help educate the Eastern Shoshone Tribe (located on the Wyoming Wind River Indian Reservation) about census operations and the partnership program, the Bureau provided information through the Tribal Leaders' Council, an organization representing Montana and Wyoming tribal governments. According to a tribal representative, the Bureau also provided the tribe a copy of its Tribal Complete Count Committee Handbook. The 46-page handbook lays out suggested activities, including running public service announcements with voice-overs by tribal leaders and community elders, distributing census awareness materials throughout the tribe's jurisdiction, and collaborating with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to develop in-school initiatives that support the census.

The partners we spoke with also noted the importance of the Bureau's deploying census information and other resources in a timely manner. This was particularly true with in-kind funding, where the partners said they needed sufficient time to apply for the support and to plan census promotional and other activities. However, in some cases, the timeliness of the in-kind funding may have fallen short of partners' needs. For example, the Bureau announced the availability of in-kind funding in January 2000, 3 months before Census Day. A number of partners we spoke with said that this left little time for them to apply for the support and organize specific events. One Wyoming social service organization—Needs Inc.—told us that it received notice about the availability of in-kind funding awards the day the applications were due. This gave the

organization a day to apply for the in-kind support and find a vendor to supply promotional items. A Needs Inc. representative told us that had the organization known about the in-kind support earlier, it would have planned more promotional activities. According to Bureau officials, factors affecting the timeliness of the in-kind support included budget-cycle delays and government credit card spending limits.

Bureau Best Practices

- ☐ 1. Provide adequate and timely information on how partners can support the census
- ☑ **2. Maintain open channels of communication with local partners**
- ☐ 3. Encourage partners to initiate census planning activities early

Maintain Open Channels of Communication With Local Partners

A second best practice emerging from our conversations with partners centered on the Bureau's establishing clear communication links with its partners, mostly through the Bureau's partnership specialists. The partners said that good communication was important for exchanging information on local enumeration conditions, such as locations of hard-to-count populations and key community contacts. In addition, clear communication links helped the Bureau to be more responsive to partners' questions about census operations. For example, a representative for the Detroit Census Task Force noted that a partnership specialist or other Bureau official regularly attended Task Force meetings to keep everyone up-to-date about available Bureau support and upcoming census operations.

To increase the Bureau's ability to identify and communicate with local partners, and to overcome the wariness certain groups had towards the government, the Bureau tried to hire partnership specialists from and familiar with the cultures and languages of the communities where they would work. In addition, the Bureau expected partnership specialists to have an understanding of the structure and function of local businesses and community organizations, as well as negotiation and presentation skills. To help ensure that partnership specialists had the information and skills with which to speak knowledgeably about Census 2000 operations and to negotiate effective partnerships, the Bureau required specialists to

complete three stages of training totaling about 25 days. Training topics included the history of the census, the Bureau's overall plan of operation, and communication and media skills, such as delivering effective presentations and developing partnerships in multicultural environments.

Our discussions with partners demonstrated the importance of this hiring and training strategy. For example, the Charlotte, N.C., regional census office hired a Native American partnership specialist who was very active in her tribe and with local Native American organizations. According to the partnership specialist, she already had credibility within the community and understood the importance of working within the tribal hierarchy to gain the trust of the tribe's chief and elders necessary to engage the tribe in promoting the census.

Another method the Bureau used to communicate with its partners was its Census 2000 Web site. The site had a link to a page devoted to the partnership program from which partners could download documents such as brochures, press releases, and newsletter articles, as well as information about census operations. A number of partners we spoke with said that they used the Web site to find information for newsletters, 1990 and current response rates, publicity messages for advertising, and school materials.

Bureau Best Practices

- ☐ 1. Provide adequate and timely information on how partners can support the census
- ☐ 2. Maintain open channels of communication with local partners
- ☑ **3. Encourage partners to initiate census planning activities early**

Encourage Partners to Initiate Census Planning Activities Early

A third role for the Bureau appeared to be enlisting the early support of partners in planning census activities. The partners we met with often told us that it takes time to develop the infrastructure to support the census at the local level, as well as to educate the community about the importance of participating in the census. In addition, several census operations that can benefit from partner involvement, such as reviewing and updating the Bureau's address list, take place several years prior to Census Day. As a

result, some partners launched their census efforts as much as 3 years prior to Census Day while others told us that their efforts could have been more effective had they started earlier in the census cycle. For example, officials in Maywood, Calif., said the city started its census efforts 3 years prior to the census, which allowed the city to budget a total of $30,000 from 1997 through 2000 to promote the census to its many non-English-speaking Hispanic immigrants. In contrast, representatives from a subcommittee of the Robeson County, N.C., Complete Count Committee told us they began their census promotion efforts in November 1999, 5 months before Census Day. The representatives explained that they felt this was too late to effectively incorporate census promotion efforts into different community events, such as Pembroke's December holiday parade.

Conclusions

A little over a year after Census Day 2000, the Bureau's partnership program is at a crossroads. The intensive effort to mobilize grassroots support for the census by engaging as many organizations and people as possible is over, and the program is focused on the lower-intensity but longer term job of sustaining those relationships. Overall, the Bureau made an extraordinary effort to fulfill the goals of the partnership program over a relatively short period. More significantly, based on our observations, it is quite likely that key census-taking activities, such as recruiting temporary census workers and encouraging people to complete their questionnaires, would have been less successful had it not been for the Bureau's aggressive partnership efforts.

Still, the full impact of the partnership program will not be known until the Bureau completes its evaluations. As it does so, it will be important for the Bureau to assess how its partnership efforts affected different populations and census operations, as well as the adequacy of its partnership staffing levels. Such information will be important for determining the cost-effectiveness of the program and for allocating resources in the years to come. Moreover, our review highlights Bureau and partner best practices and lessons learned that appear to be key to effective partnership engagements. As part of its evaluation, it will be important for the Bureau to explore these further to best apply its limited resources. In addition, the Bureau should examine ways to increase the coordination and communication between the partnership specialists and the local census office managers. By having a close relationship with the local census managers and local census offices, the partnership program could benefit from the ground-level perspective that managers have about the enumeration challenges of their particular areas.

Our review also suggests that as the program moves forward, the partnership program could benefit from tighter internal controls and a greater performance orientation in several key areas. Those areas include better documentation of how the Bureau spends its in-kind support, clear guidance on how partners can characterize their association with the Bureau and use the Bureau's logo, and a more effective information system to monitor the partnership program. Together, such improvements could help (1) increase financial accountability, (2) reduce the risk of engaging partners that might raise perceptual or other problems that could undermine the Bureau's efforts, and (3) provide program managers with better information on the status of the partnership program for more informed decisions on program performance.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To foster a more accountable and performance-oriented partnership program, we recommend that the Secretary of Commerce ensure that the Bureau take the following actions.

- In completing the evaluations of the partnership program as planned, ensure that the Bureau managers receive the information they need to refine and develop the program and allocate resources appropriately. As part of this effort, the Bureau should identify best practices and ensure that they are incorporated into future partnership efforts.
- Document in-kind funding expenditures and maintain proper accounting in accordance with federal government standards for internal control.
- Explore ways to increase the coordination and communication between the partnership specialists and the local census office managers.
- Review partnership specialist staffing levels to make sure that the levels are sufficient to ensure the adequate provision of Bureau support to partners.
- Develop regulations specifying how organizations may characterize their association with the Bureau and how they may use the Bureau's logo. The guidance should provide for needed flexibility while informing partners that they should not characterize their association with the Bureau or use the census logo in a manner that is inconsistent with the Bureau's mission, nor should they imply that the Bureau is sponsoring or endorsing a particular activity or organization.
- Ensure that Prisms, the Bureau's new partnership tracking system, is fully tested under the operational loads expected for future operations and the 2010 Census. This should help ensure that Prisms increases the accuracy, ease of use, and utility of the Bureau's partnership program database and provides the Bureau with credible performance information necessary for monitoring, planning, and evaluating the partnership program.

- Ensure that partnership specialists, as part of their training, are made aware of the best practices of productive partnerships, and that they incorporate those practices when engaging partners in the future.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

The Secretary of Commerce forwarded written comments from the Bureau of the Census on a draft of this report. The Bureau generally provided additional perspective and clarification on several of our key points and recommendations. Further, the Bureau said it would implement three of our seven recommendations, and acknowledged the importance of three of the four remaining recommendations. The Bureau provided clarifying information for a seventh recommendation concerning the need to increase coordination and communication between partnership specialists and local census office managers, but did not directly agree or disagree with it.

The recommendations the Bureau agreed to implement included our recommendations to (1) document in-kind funding expenditures, (2) review partnership specialist staffing levels to ensure they provide needed support, and (3) develop regulations specifying how organizations may characterize their association with the Bureau.

With respect to our finding that the Bureau had no data on how it distributed $14 million of in-kind funding to local partners, the Bureau reported that its staff reviewed each expenditure and the funds "were dispersed in accordance with standards for internal control in the federal government." As we noted in our report, federal internal control standards require transactions to be recorded in a timely and accurate manner. Moreover, this information is important for accountability purposes, as well as for managing and assessing the effectiveness of the local funding of partnership efforts. In the absence of data on in-kind funding expenditures, we could not independently review the transactions.

The Bureau noted that partners assisted with the recruitment of over 3.7 million individuals to work on the census as opposed to the 2.5 million that we reported in our draft. According to the Bureau, the 2.5 million represents enumerators for nonresponse follow-up and certain other data collection operations. The 3.7 million represents field and office staff working on all operations from March 1997 through September 2000. We revised the draft accordingly.

The Bureau disagreed with our use of the ratio of partnership specialists to complete count committees as an indicator of the specialists' workload. The Bureau noted that regardless of the number of specialists or committees, partnership specialists are to offer assistance if and when needed.

We recognized the limitation of the measure and thus referred to it as a "rough" indicator in the draft. Nevertheless, the ratio of partnership specialists to complete count committees is a useful way of comparing partnership specialists' workloads from one census to another. The Bureau expected partnership specialists to provide guidance and staff support for committee activities, engaging in such tasks as providing general information and keeping committees abreast of census operations and schedules. Thus, it is likely that, overall, the greater the number of committees, the greater the demands on specialists' time.

The Bureau provided clarifying information for our findings and recommendation concerning the partnership program's management structure and level of coordination between the local offices and partnership specialists. In response, we revised the draft to better reflect the Bureau's view that it is better to have partnership specialists report to partnership coordinators rather than to local census managers, as some managers suggested in our survey. However, as we also note in the report, regardless of the management structure, more positive experiences seemed to result when local managers and partnership specialists dovetailed their efforts, hence our recommendation for the Bureau to explore ways to increase the coordination and communication between partnership specialists and local census office managers.

In commenting on our recommendation to identify partnership program best practices and incorporate them into future partnership efforts, the Bureau said it recognized the value of sharing information. The Bureau noted that throughout the 2000 Census, the Bureau's plans and activities included numerous opportunities for staff to share best practices with each other and their partners. The Bureau's efforts to share information during the 2000 Census are commendable, and it will be important for the Bureau to properly collect and summarize these data so that they can be used to inform future activities.

With respect to our recommendation concerning Prisms—the Bureau's new partnership tracking system—the Bureau responded that the system is now fully functional. We revised the draft to reflect this fact.

We are sending copies of this letter to the Chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Acting Director of the Bureau of the Census. Copies will be made available to others on request.

Please contact me on (202) 512-6806 if you have any questions. Other key contributors to this report are included in appendix II.

J. Christopher Mihm
Director
Strategic Issues

Appendix I: Comments From the Secretary of Commerce

THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

JUL 17 2001

Mr. J. Christopher Mihm
Director, Strategic Issues
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Mihm:

The Department of Commerce appreciates the opportunity to comment on the General Accounting Office draft document entitled *2000 Census: Review of Partnership Program Highlights Best Practices for Future Operations*. The Department's comments on this report are enclosed.

Warm regards,

Donald L. Evans

Enclosure

Comments from the U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau

U.S. General Accounting Office report entitled *2000 Census: Review of Partnership Program Highlights Best Practices for Future Operations*

Comments on the Text of the Report

1. Section: Page 2, Paragraph 2 – "the Bureau did not have data on how many ["in-kind"] awards were given, who the awards were given to, the amount of these awards, and what the awards were spent on."

   Comment: The Census Bureau regrets that the "in-kind" funding records were not available at the time requested. However, Census Bureau staff reviewed each expenditure and are confident that no government dollars were improperly spent. All expenditures in this program were dispersed in accordance with standards for internal control within the federal government. In addition, the Census Bureau adhered to the "Guidelines for Spending Funds and Accepting Outside Support for Census 2000," developed by the Department of Commerce. A copy has been submitted to GAO.

2. Section: Page 7, Paragraph 3—"The Bureau depended on partners to help conduct a number of census operations. Among other contribution, partners assisted in recruiting over 2.5 million individuals to work on the census."

   Comment: In fact, partners assisted with the recruitment of over 3.7 million individuals to work on the census.

3. Section: Page11, Paragraph 4, continued on Page 12 - "Compared to the 1990 Census, the Bureau had more partnership positions for the 2000 Census, but a rough indicator of their workload—the average number of local jurisdiction Complete Count Committees they supported—suggests that the partnership staff were more thinly spread in 2000."

   Comment: The number of Complete Count Committees (CCCs), as it relates to the number of staff, is not a good indicator of staff workload. Regardless of the number of specialists or CCCs, it is not the responsibility of the partnership specialists to service the CCCs, but rather to offer assistance if and when needed. Many CCCs are experienced in outreach for the census and are extremely self-sufficient requiring only process and time line information from the Census Bureau. Other CCCs need more extensive attention.

2

4. Section: Page 13, Paragraph 2 – "a common perception was that the management structure led to coordination problems between the local census offices and the partnership specialists, and that it diminished the partnerships program's effectiveness."

   Comment: There may have appeared to be a coordination problem, but our efforts were coordinated through partnership specialists attending the local census office (LCO) management meetings, sharing newsletters, and assistant census managers and partnership coordinators participating in regional census center management meetings. While coordination and communication varied among particular LCOs, the partnership program was designed so that strict attention was paid to this important element. In most cases, the partnership specialists were included in LCO managers' meetings, so that they could keep abreast of operational issues and offer appropriate assistance to partners. However, in some regions where the partnership specialists were assigned to work with specific race and ethnic groups, they were responsible for multiple LCOs. As an example, one specialist in the Charlotte region was responsible for contacting all American Indian/Alaska Native groups in the region, which covered about 40 LCOs. So, the level of communication in this example was different from one where a partnership specialist was assigned to one LCO.

5. Section: Page 13, Paragraph 2 - "To better integrate the local census offices with the partnership program, a number of managers suggested that the partnership specialists should report directly to local census office managers."

   Comment: The Census Bureau's experience in the area of outreach indicates that a program as multifaceted and dynamic as the partnership program is most effective when the partnership specialists report to a person experienced in outreach, whose sole responsibility is the coordination of that program. The Census Bureau found this to be more effective than having partnership specialists reporting to a manager who has a variety of operationally focused responsibilities. Reporting to the partnership coordinator ensured that the partnership specialists received consistent information and direction.

6. Section: Page 16, Paragraph 3—"the lack of guidelines governing use of the Bureau's logo is at odds with federal internal control requirements that call on agencies to develop process and procedures that support performance-based management and minimize operational problems."

   Comment: The Census Bureau recognizes and understands the importance of providing very specific guidance to our partners on how they should characterize their association with the Bureau and on the use of the Census logo. Census Bureau staff will work very closely with the division responsible for this area to strengthen guidelines for use by partners in 2010.

3

Responses to GAO Recommendations

Recommendation 1: "In completing the evaluations of the partnership program as planned, ensure that the Bureau managers receive the information they need to refine and develop the program, and allocate resources appropriately. As part of this effort, the Bureau should identify best practices and ensure that they are incorporated into future partnership efforts."

Census Bureau Response: The Census Bureau recognizes the value of sharing information among regions. For this reason, our plans and activities throughout the decennial included numerous opportunities for staff to share best practices with each other and their partners. Some examples are:

- A major component of partnership training sessions included best practices of partnership specialists and partners. During these sessions, each specialist was required to present outstanding practices used in their assignment area and among their partners. Feedback from the specialists indicated that this was one of the more beneficial components of training because it equipped the specialists with new and innovative ideas.

- Recognizing the importance of sharing best practices among partners, the partnership program held a special meeting in Washington, DC, for partners across the country on March 15, 1999. This meeting provided an opportunity for partners from each region to share innovative and creative methods and strategies to motivate their communities.

- The Census Bureau maintained an internal Web site, which contained a section called the "Partnership Exchange." This served as a clearinghouse where the partnership specialists described their most creative and innovative best practices. Partnership specialists from all regions tapped into this resource quite frequently to keep abreast of and utilize new strategies and approaches.

- The Partnership and Data Services Staff published two newsletters, a quarterly one for partners and a monthly one for partnership specialists. Both newsletters contained information on new ideas and resources that were being used to implement motivating activities in communities across the country.

- Most regions published regional newsletters for staff and partners where they highlighted exemplary partnership activities and practices.

- The 1999 American Indian/Alaska Native conferences provided an opportunity for American Indians and Alaska Natives to meet and discuss various aspects of Census 2000, including those best practices implemented to date.

4

- The Partnership Report, Volume I, issued December 1999, contained numerous examples of best practices by our partners. This report was another resource used by partnership specialists and partners to help them develop and implement more exciting projects in their regions.

Recommendation 2: "Document in-kind funding expenditures and maintain proper accounting in accordance with federal government standards for internal control."

Census Bureau Response: The Census Bureau regrets that the in-kind funding records were not available at the time requested. In future similar activities, we plan to keep detailed records and have them readily available. However, Census Bureau staff reviewed each expenditure and are confident that no government dollars were improperly spent. All expenditures in this program were dispersed in accordance with standards for internal control within the federal government. In addition, the Census Bureau adhered to the "Guidelines for Spending Funds and Accepting Outside Support for Census 2000," developed by the Department of Commerce. A copy has been submitted to you.

Recommendation 3: "Explore ways to improve the coordination and communication between the partnership specialists and the local census office managers."

Census Bureau Response: There may have appeared to be a coordination problem, but the Census Bureau's efforts were coordinated through partnership specialists attending the local census office (LCO) management meetings, sharing newsletters, and assistant census managers and partnership coordinators participating in regional census center management meetings. While coordination and communication varied between particular LCOs, the partnership program was designed so that strict attention was paid to this important element. In most cases, the partnership specialists were included in LCO managers' meetings so that they could keep abreast of operational issues and offer appropriate assistance to partners. However, in some regions where the partnership specialists were assigned to work with specific race and ethnic groups, they were responsible for multiple LCOs. As an example, one specialist in the Charlotte region was responsible for contacting all American Indian/Alaska Native groups in the region, which covered about 40 LCOs. Consequently, the level of communication in this example was different from one where a partnership specialist was assigned to one LCO.

Recommendation 4: "Review partnership specialist staffing levels to make sure that the levels are sufficient to ensure the adequate provision of Bureau support to partners."

Census Bureau Response: The Census Bureau recognizes that budget and timing are key factors in assuring that staffing is sufficient. The plan developed for 2010 will include strategies for obtaining sufficient staff in a timely fashion.

5

Recommendation 5: "Develop regulations specifying how organizations may characterize their association with the Bureau and how they may use the Bureau's logo. The guidance should provide for needed flexibility while informing partners that they should not characterize their association with the Bureau or use the census logo in a manner that is inconsistent with the Bureau's mission, nor should they imply that the Bureau is sponsoring or endorsing a particular activity or organization."

Census Bureau Response: The Census Bureau recognizes and understands the importance of providing very specific guidance to our partners on how they should characterize their association with the Bureau and on the use of the Census logo. For the 2010 census, the Census Bureau will strengthen guidelines for characterizing associations between partners and the Census Bureau and for use of the logo by partners.

Recommendation 6: "Ensure that Prisms, the new partnership tracking system under development by the Bureau, is fully tested as planned under operational loads prior to being fielded. This should help ensure that Prisms increases the accuracy, ease of use, and utility of the Bureau's partnership program database and provides the Bureau with credible performance information necessary for monitoring, planning, and evaluating the partnership program."

Census Bureau Response: PRISMS is a contact management database that replaced the Contact Profile Usage Management System (CPUMS) in April 2001. The application provides full flexibility for users to enter new data, edit existing data, retrieve data from the national level down to the ZIP code level, and to produce reports to assist in managing the Partnership and Data Services Program. The system is currently fully functional; however, the contractor who designed PRISMS will continue making modifications to the application through September 30, 2001, further refining available features and making the system progressively more user-friendly and easy to use.

Recommendation 7: "Ensure that partnership specialists, as part of their training, are made aware of the best practices of productive partnerships, and that they incorporate those practices when engaging partners in the future."

Census Bureau Response: The Census Bureau recognizes the value of sharing information among regions. For this reason, planned activities throughout the decennial included numerous opportunities for staff to share best practices with each other and their partners. For examples of these activities, see the Census Bureau's response to Recommendation 1.

Appendix II: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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Acknowledgments

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