

December 2010

2010 CENSUS

Key Efforts to Include Hard-to-Count Populations Went Generally as Planned; Improvements Could Make the Efforts More Effective for Next Census



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Why GAO Did This Study

To overcome the long-standing challenge of enumerating hard-to-count (HTC) groups such as minorities and renters, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau), used outreach programs, such as paid advertising, and partnered with thousands of organizations to enlist their support for the census. The Bureau also conducted Service-Based Enumeration (SBE), which was designed to count people who frequent soup kitchens or other service providers, and the Be Counted/Questionnaire Assistance Center (QAC) program, designed to count individuals who believed the census had missed them. As requested, GAO assessed how the design of these efforts compared to 2000 and the extent to which they were implemented as planned. GAO reviewed Bureau budget, planning, operational, and evaluation documents; observed enumeration efforts in 12 HTC areas; surveyed local census office managers; and interviewed Bureau officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Bureau take steps to improve the effectiveness of its outreach and enumeration activities aimed at HTC groups, including developing a predictive model to better allocate paid advertising funds, improving coordination between partnership and local census staff, revisiting SBE staffing guidance, and ensuring Be Counted/QAC sites are more visible and optimally located. Commerce generally agreed with the overall findings and recommendations.

2010 CENSUS

Key Efforts to Include Hard-to-Count Populations Went Generally as Planned; Improvements Could Make the Efforts More Effective for Next Census

What GAO Found

The Bureau better positioned itself to reach out to and enumerate HTC populations in 2010 in part by addressing a number of key challenges from 2000. The Bureau's outreach efforts were generally more robust compared to 2000. For example, compared to 2000, the Bureau used more reliable data to target advertising; focused a larger share of its advertising dollars on HTC groups, such as non-English-speaking audiences; and strengthened its monitoring abilities so that the Bureau was able to run additional advertising in locations where mail response rates were lagging. The Bureau also significantly expanded the partnership program by hiring about 2,800 partnership staff in 2010 compared to around 600 in 2000. As a result, staff were not spread as thin. The number of languages they spoke increased from 35 in 2000 to 145 for the 2010 Census.

Despite these enhancements, the outreach efforts still faced challenges. For example, while most of the partnership staff GAO interviewed reported having mutually supportive relationships with local census offices, about half of the local census office managers surveyed were dissatisfied with the level of coordination, noting duplication of effort in some cases. Additionally, a tracking database that partnership staff were to use to help manage their efforts was not user-friendly nor was it kept current.

The Bureau also improved the key enumeration programs aimed at HTC groups and the efforts were generally implemented as planned, but additional refinements could improve them for 2020. For example, the Bureau expanded SBE training by teaching staff how to enumerate all types of SBE facilities, which gave the Bureau more flexibility in scheduling enumerations, and advance visits helped enhance service providers' readiness for the enumeration. Nevertheless, while most local census office managers were satisfied with SBE staffing levels, pockets of dissatisfaction existed and observers noted what appeared to be a surplus of enumerators with little work to do in some locations. While overstaffing can lead to unnecessarily higher labor costs, understaffing can also be problematic because it can affect the accuracy of the overall count, and it will be important for the Bureau to review the results of SBE to staff SBE efficiently in 2020.

For the Be Counted/QAC program, the Bureau addressed visibility and site selection challenges from 2000 by developing banners to prominently display site locations and hours of operation and updating site selection guidance. For 2010, the Bureau opened around 38,000 sites and completed the monthlong operation under budget. However, the Bureau experienced recurring challenges with ensuring that the sites were visible from street level and were in areas with potential for high levels of activity, and the overall effort was resource intensive relative to the average of 20 forms that were returned and checked in from each site. Moving forward, it will be important for the Bureau to explore ways to maximize the program's ability to increase the number of forms checked in for 2020.

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Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

December 14, 2010

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Chairman
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government
Information, Federal Services, and International Security
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Darrell E. Issa
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable William Lacy Clay
Chairman
The Honorable Patrick T. McHenry
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

A complete and accurate census is becoming an increasingly daunting task, in part because the nation's population is growing larger, more diverse, and more reluctant to participate. When the census misses a person who should have been included, it results in an undercount; an overcount occurs when an individual is counted more than once. Such errors are particularly problematic because of their differential impact on various subgroups. Minorities, renters, and children, for example, are more likely to be undercounted by the census while more affluent groups, such as people with vacation homes, are more likely to be enumerated more than once. As census data are used to apportion seats in Congress, redraw congressional districts, and allocate billions of dollars in federal assistance to states and local governments, improving coverage and reducing the differential undercount¹ are critical.

¹ The differential undercount describes subpopulations that are undercounted at a different rate than the total population.

To help reduce the undercount for the 2010 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) embarked on a number of outreach and enumeration activities aimed at getting the hard-to-count (HTC) populations to participate in the census. On the outreach side, the Bureau implemented a communications campaign that included paid media and partnership activities (among others) to target advertisements and engage government and community organizations in support of the census. On the enumeration side, the Bureau relied on such efforts as Service-Based Enumeration (SBE) to enumerate individuals residing in less conventional housing, such as shelters and tent encampments, and the Be Counted/Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) programs to count people who believed they did not receive a census form.

One key to a successful census is a high mail participation rate, which helps the Bureau obtain more accurate data and reduce costs. The mail participation rate—which the Bureau defines as the percentage of forms mailed back by households that received them—was 74 percent for 2010, the same as in 2000.² Considering the nation’s diversity and other sociodemographic trends that adversely affect participation rates, this was an important accomplishment.

Because of your interest in the Bureau’s efforts to boost census participation and reduce the differential undercount, we reviewed the design and implementation of key outreach and enumeration programs aimed at HTC populations. In so doing, we paid particular attention to assessing (1) how the design of these programs compared to 2000 and (2) the extent to which the Bureau implemented these programs as planned and where refinements might be needed should these efforts be used in the 2020 Census.

This report is one of three we are releasing today.³ Of the other two, one assesses the implementation of key field data collection operations, and

² The 2000 mail participation rate was 74 percent for the short-form only. In 2000, the census included a long-form that asked for information that was not included on the short-form. The 2000 mail participation rate when including both the long-form and the short-form was 69 percent. The 2010 census did not use a long-form.

³ GAO, *2010 Census: Data Collection Operations Were Generally Completed as Planned, but Long-standing Challenges Suggest Need for Fundamental Reforms*, [GAO-11-193](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 14, 2010). GAO, *2010 Census: Follow-up Should Reduce Coverage Errors, but Effects on Demographic Groups Need to be Determined*, [GAO-11-154](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 14, 2010). For additional products, see the Related GAO Products section at the end of this report.

the other examines the implementation of operations aimed at reducing census coverage errors. Both reports identify preliminary lessons learned, as well as potential focus areas for improvement for the 2020 Census.

To assess how the Bureau's efforts to reach out to and enumerate HTC populations compared to 2000, we reviewed and analyzed budget, planning, operational, and evaluative data and documents for the 2000 and 2010 paid media, partnership, SBE, and Be Counted/QAC activities. We chose these activities because they constitute the majority of the budget for outreach efforts or, according to the Bureau, were enumeration activities that contributed to reducing the differential undercount in 2000. For example, paid advertising accounted for approximately 39 percent (\$258,738,551) of the Bureau's originally planned \$660 million communication campaign effort, and the partnership program accounted for over 56 percent (\$364,331,089) of the campaign.⁴ According to the Bureau, the Be Counted/QAC program was an important part of the Bureau's efforts to enumerate people often missed by the census, including people who had no usual residence on Census Day, such as transients, migrants, or seasonal farm workers. In addition, we attended presentations on the paid media program by the Bureau and its contractor, DraftFCB, which assisted the Bureau with creating promotional campaigns to research, develop, and target the paid advertising efforts. We also reviewed Bureau, Department of Commerce Inspector General, and our reports on the 2010 and 2000 censuses, and interviewed cognizant Bureau officials at headquarters and local census offices.

To evaluate whether implementation proceeded as planned and identify areas for improvement in 2020, we conducted 78 observations of enumerators as they visited SBE facilities, including 22 targeted non-sheltered outdoor locations (TNSOL)—such as parks and under bridges where people experiencing homelessness were sometimes counted. We interviewed enumerators in 12 urban local census offices across the country, such as those in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, and Los Angeles, and interviewed enumerators' supervisors, known as crew leaders, in some of

⁴ The other approximately 5 percent of the communications campaign budget was targeted to public relations, at about 3.9 percent (\$25,610,360), and the Census in Schools Program, at about 1.7 percent (\$11,320,000).

the local census offices we visited.⁵ Further, we conducted observations of 51 Be Counted/QAC sites in 12 urban areas. For the SBE and Be Counted/QAC observations, we selected offices located in HTC areas as determined by data from the 2000 Census. While these sites were not selected randomly, we considered factors such as ethnic and geographic diversity in selecting them.

To gain greater insight on the partnership program, we interviewed 11 partnership staff who represented historically HTC populations and different ethnic groups in the Bureau's Atlanta, Charlotte, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles regions. We selected these regions based on, in part, the allocation of partnership staff, but the sites were not randomly selected and results cannot be generalized nationwide.

To obtain information on the local implementation of the Bureau's outreach and enumeration efforts, we surveyed the Bureau's entire population of 494 local census office managers (LCOM) using a series of online questionnaires about their experience in managing local census office activities and enumeration efforts. The surveys were conducted in six waves from March through September 2010. Each survey had a response rate of at least 70 percent and was thus sufficiently reliable for providing evidence to support our findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

We analyzed Bureau data on the distribution of Be Counted/QAC sites among HTC census tracts and local census offices. We analyzed cost and progress data for SBE and Be Counted/QACs and analyzed data on partnership and Be Counted/QAC activities from the automated system the Bureau used to track its partnership contacts, the Integrated Partnership Contact Database.⁶ To further identify and assess the Bureau's outreach and enumeration efforts for HTC populations, we interviewed Bureau officials to obtain additional details about paid media, partnerships, SBE, and Be Counted/QAC.

⁵ Additionally, we visited local census offices in Atlanta, Baltimore, Brooklyn, Fresno, Miami, Phoenix, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. The Bureau had 494 local census offices nationwide. Local census offices recruited and trained enumerators and checked in completed questionnaires, among other tasks.

⁶ The Integrated Partnership Contact Database tracks and monitors activities of partner organizations. Available in January 2009, the database contains real-time information on the number of partner organizations, populations served, demographics, value-added contributions, and constituent reach.

This report is part of our larger review of lessons learned from the 2010 Census that can help inform the Bureau's planning efforts for 2020. The Bureau is also evaluating its efforts to reach out to and enumerate HTC populations and plans to issue the results by December 2012.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2010 to December 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

On December 8, 2010, the Secretary of Commerce provided written comments on the draft report, which are reprinted in appendix I. The Department of Commerce generally agreed with the overall findings and recommendations of the report.

Background

To improve participation in the census among HTC groups as well as the general population, the Bureau implemented a number of outreach and enumeration activities from January 2008 through September 2010. In this report, we focus on the following four efforts:

- paid media,
- partnerships,
- SBE, and
- Be Counted/QAC.

The four components of the outreach efforts, known collectively as the Integrated Communications Campaign, were paid media, a partnership program, public relations and an educational program called Census in Schools. According to Bureau officials, the components were designed to work together to unify census messages and communicate them to diverse audiences via various outlets in order to improve mail response and reduce the differential undercount. An appropriation in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) allowed the

Bureau to increase the communications campaign's initial budget of \$410 million by an additional \$220 million.⁷

The Bureau's regional census centers (RCC) were responsible for administering the partnership program, with partnership coordinators and team leaders at each RCC overseeing the work of the partnership specialists and partnership assistants. Local census offices played a more limited role in outreach efforts, and while the local census offices reported to RCCs, they had a different reporting structure than the partnership program.

SBE was meant to help ensure that people without conventional housing were included in the count. From March 28 through March 30, 2010, the Bureau attempted to enumerate those without conventional housing at facilities where they received services or at outdoor locations, such as parked cars, tent encampments, and on the street. The Bureau developed a list of potential outdoor locations based on several sources, including 2000 Census data and input from community leaders.

The Bureau's Be Counted program, which ran from March 19 to April 19, 2010, was designed to reach those who may not have received a census questionnaire, including people who did not have a usual residence on April 1, 2010, such as transients, migrants, and seasonal farm workers.⁸ The program made questionnaires available at community centers, libraries, places of worship, and other public locations throughout the country. Individuals were to pick up the forms from these sites and mail the completed questionnaires to the Bureau. Some of the sites also included a staffed QAC to help people, especially those with limited English proficiency, complete their questionnaires.

⁷ Pub. L. No. 111-5, div. A, tit. II, 123 Stat. 115, 127. The Bureau received \$1 billion from the Recovery Act. In the conference report accompanying the Act, the conferees stated that "of the amounts provided, up to \$250,000,000 shall be for partnership and outreach efforts to minority communities and hard-to-reach populations." H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 116-16 at 417 (2009). According to the Bureau, it planned to use \$220 million for expanding the communications campaign, out of this amount, \$120 million was to enhance the partnership program. The Bureau planned to use \$30 million for expanding its coverage follow-up operation, where census workers follow up to resolve conflicting information provided on census forms.

⁸ Cases where the respondents indicated that they had no usual address will be assigned to higher-level geographic units, such as state and county, and are allocated to census counts accordingly.

The Bureau's Outreach and Promotion Efforts Were Generally More Robust Compared to Those in 2000 and Were Implemented as Planned, but They Could Be Further Improved

Paid Media Plans Built in Better Targeting

The Bureau refined its paid media efforts for 2010, in part to address challenges from the 2000 Census. For example, in 2000, to target advertising to certain population groups and areas, the Bureau used data on measures of civic participation, such as voting in elections. However, the Bureau noted that civic participation did not appear to be a primary indicator of an individual's willingness to participate in the census. To better motivate participation among different population groups, for 2010 the Bureau used, among other data sources, actual participation data from the 2000 Census, as well as market and attitudinal research that identified five mindsets people have about the census. These mindsets ranged from the "leading edge" (those who are highly likely to participate) to the "cynical fifth" (those who are less likely to participate because they doubt the census provides tangible benefits and are concerned that the census is an invasion of privacy and that the information collected will be misused). The Bureau used this information to tailor its paid media efforts. Moreover, in 2000 the Bureau did not buy additional paid media in areas with unexpectedly low participation rates. For 2010, the Bureau set aside more than \$7 million to rapidly target paid media in response to specific events leading up to the census or to areas with unexpectedly low mail participation rates.

Overall, the Bureau budgeted about \$297.3 million on paid media in 2010, about \$57 million (24 percent) more than in 2000 in constant 2010 dollars. The Bureau's 2010 paid media budget reflected several increases. On a unit cost basis, spending increased from an average of about \$2.05 per housing unit in 2000 to \$2.25 per housing unit in 2010, in constant 2010 dollars. Also, the Bureau increased the percentage of the budget for media

development costs from 33 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2010. Table 1 compares the paid media spending in 2000 to 2010.

Table 1: Comparison of 2000 and 2010 Census Paid Media Budget

Component	2000 paid media ^a (in 2010 dollars)	2010 paid media ^b	Difference
Total paid media	\$240,593,921	\$297,346,773	\$56,752,852 (24 percent)
Paid media development (production, labor, research, and other costs)	80,187,677	129,025,327	\$48,837,650 (61 percent)
Paid media buys	160,406,244	168,321,446	\$7,915,202 (4.9 percent)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau data.

^aThese are 2000 paid media actual costs.

^bThese are 2010 paid media estimated budget costs.

According to the Bureau, the cost increased for paid media development in part because of the extensive research done to target the media to specific groups and areas and because advertising was created in 12 more languages than in 2000. For example, to determine where paid media efforts may have the greatest impact, the Bureau developed predictive models based on 2000 census data and the evaluations of the partnership and paid media efforts from 2000. The models were provided to its contractor, DraftFCB, to aid in making paid media decisions. By better targeting paid media buys by area and message, the Bureau expected to more effectively reach those who have historically been the hardest to count. However, according to the Bureau, two factors—the use of evaluations from 2000 that did not isolate the impact of paid media from other components of the Bureau’s outreach efforts, such as the partnership program, and the age of the data used—may have limited the model’s ability to predict where paid media efforts had the greatest impact.

In a further effort to reach HTC groups, in 2010 the Bureau budgeted more for paid media that targeted HTC groups, like non-English-speaking audiences, than on the national audience, which was not the case in 2000, as shown in table 2.

Table 2: 2010 Census Paid Media Budget by Target Audience

Component	2000 paid media^a (in 2010 dollars)	2010 paid media^b	Difference
Total paid media buys	\$160,406,244	\$168,321,446	\$7,915,202 (4.9 percent)
Mass audience (general population)	84,441,528	81,915,970	\$-2,525,558 (-3 percent)
Ethnic/language audience	75,964,716	86,405,476	\$10,440,760 (14 percent)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau data.

^aThese are 2000 paid media actual costs.

^bThese are 2010 paid media estimated budget costs.

Additionally, the Bureau strengthened its outreach efforts in 2010 by improving its monitoring and evaluation activities. For example, throughout the census the Bureau monitored the public's awareness and attitudes toward the census via surveys and by tracking relevant blogs. The Bureau used five sources of information, including national polls and actual mail participation rates, to monitor metrics such as individuals' understanding of the census, perceived benefits from participating in the census, and barriers to participating in the census. As a result, the Bureau used this information to identify markets and groups where additional outreach was needed. Table 3 compares key aspects of the 2000 and 2010 paid media activities.

Table 3: Comparison of 2000 and 2010 Paid Media Activities

Paid media activities	2000 Census	2010 Census
Campaign development and targeting	Targeted advertisements by segmenting the population into three groups of census participation likelihood, based on measures of civic participation in an area, such as school board involvement.	Targeted advertisements based in part on actual 2000 participation rates and attitudinal research.
	Developed paid media messages in 16 languages.	Developed paid media messages in 28 languages.
	No electronic and Web-based communications made available.	Electronic and Web-based communications made available.
	Targeted the majority of paid media resources to national mass audience.	Targeted the majority of paid media resources to ethnic/non-English language audiences.
Implementation	Did not establish a media contingency fund for unexpected events.	Established a \$7.4 million rapid response/media contingency fund to address unexpected events, such as lower response rates in certain areas.
Monitoring	Did not have the ability to measure the effectiveness of paid media during the census.	Used national polling and other methods to measure the effectiveness of paid media during the census.
Evaluation	Evaluated the impact of the communications campaign as a whole on awareness of the census.	Conducted controlled experiments measuring the impact of increased paid media exposure on mail response and made plans to evaluate the impact of individual components of the communications campaign, including paid media, on awareness and likelihood to participate in the census.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau information.

Paid Media Used Market Research to Better Target HTC Populations

The Bureau generally implemented its 2010 paid media campaign as planned, targeting different segments of the HTC population. For example, to reach younger audiences, which are typically hard to count, the Bureau used new methods such as podcasts, YouTube videos, and social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter in addition to traditional TV and radio broadcasts. To reach people with limited English proficiency, the Bureau ran banner advertisements on, for example, Chinese language Web sites that linked directly to the Chinese language page of the Bureau’s own Web site and targeted local radio advertisements to various ethnic audiences. Moreover, to reach audiences through their media habits and interests, the Bureau integrated census messages into regularly scheduled television programming in an attempt to appeal to people in new and more personal ways. For example, a Spanish-language soap opera made one of its characters an enumerator.

The Bureau also took advantage of its improved monitoring capacity and implemented a rapid response initiative to address markets with lagging mail participation rates or unforeseen events that might have affected response rates in certain markets. For example, as Census Day

approached, the Bureau continuously tracked the public's attitudes toward the census to help determine the impact of its outreach activities. The Bureau found that while the percentage of people saying they would definitely participate in the census increased from about 50 percent in December 2009 to about 89 percent in March 2010, the data indicated that specific populations would have lower participation rates. As a result, the Bureau ran additional advertising targeted at the following groups, among others:

- 18- to 24-year-olds whose attitudes on their intent to participate in the census were not changing over time;
- English-speaking Hispanics who appeared less likely than Spanish-speaking Hispanics to understand the benefits of census participation; and
- Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, New York, because mail participation rates were lagging in neighborhoods known to have significant Hasidic populations.

Further, in late March, the Bureau identified 23 specific media markets with mail participation rates significantly below the national average. Following rapid response efforts in these areas, 13 of these markets showed a significant increase in mail participation rates compared to the national average.

The Bureau originally budgeted \$7.4 million for its rapid response efforts, but added approximately \$28 million from a separate management reserve fund as data analysis showed a need for media intervention, for a total of about \$35 million. Of this \$35 million, about \$31.8 million was allocated to new media purchases and about \$3 million went to media production and other costs. Of the \$31.8 million, the Bureau budgeted about \$17.3 million (54 percent) of the rapid response paid media funding for the general population and \$14.5 million (45 percent) for specific ethnic and language audiences.

The Bureau plans to assess the impact of the communications campaign on respondent attitudes and behaviors. For example, to determine how much it should invest in the paid media campaign, the Bureau held an experiment in 2010 where it flooded certain markets with more paid advertising than was used in other, similar markets. When the evaluation of this research is completed as scheduled in 2012, it could help the Bureau better determine whether greater levels of advertising would be cost-effective in terms of increasing the mail response rate of various races and ethnic groups. Moving forward, it will be important for the

Bureau to use these evaluation results not only for planning 2020 Census-taking activities, but, as was the case for 2010, also for aiding in the development of a predictive model that could help the Bureau determine which media outlets provide the best return on investment in terms of raising awareness of the census and encouraging participation for specific demographic groups. The model could combine data from the 2000 and 2010 enumerations and inform allocation decisions for paid media.

Partnership Efforts Were More Comprehensive Than in the 2000 Census

In designing the 2010 partnership program, the Bureau took a number of steps aimed at expanding its reach and addressing challenges from the 2000 Census. For example, in 2000, the Bureau hired about 600 partnership staff in the field who were responsible for mobilizing local support for the census by working with local organizations to promote census participation. However, we reported in 2001 that partnership specialists' heavy workload may have limited the level of support they were able to provide individual local census offices.⁹ To help improve its ability to mobilize local support for 2010, the Bureau created a new position, the partnership assistant,¹⁰ and hired about 2,800 partnership staff, about five times the number of partnership staff hired in 2000.¹¹ Thus, the Bureau increased the ratio of partnership staff per county and staff were not spread as thin.

Additionally, for 2000, the Bureau developed a database to track, plan, and analyze partnership efforts. We reported that the database was not user-friendly, which led to inefficiencies and duplication of effort.¹² For 2010, the Bureau revamped the partnership database to make it more user-friendly and to improve management's ability to use the information to monitor the progress of partnership activities. For example, while the 2000 database was mainly a catalog of census partner organizations, the 2010 database was designed to enable the Bureau to more actively manage the program in part by generating reports on value-added goods and services

⁹ GAO, *2000 Census: Review of Partnership Program Highlights Best Practices for Future Operations*, [GAO-01-579](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 20, 2001).

¹⁰ Partnership assistants were responsible for assisting partnership specialists in scheduling and conducting outreach activities.

¹¹ The staffing level was substantially higher than the Bureau originally planned for 2010 because of additional funds used to enhance the partnership program from the Recovery Act. See footnote 7.

¹² [GAO-01-579](#).

that partners provided, such as free training space. Table 4 compares key aspects of the 2000 and 2010 partnership activities.

Table 4: 2010 Partnership Activities Compared to Those in 2000

Partnership program activities	2000 Census	2010 Census
Implementation	Hired about 600 partnership staff.	Hired about 2,800 partnership staff.
	Recruited about 140,000 partner organizations.	Recruited more than 255,000 partner organizations.
	Partnership staff spoke 35 languages.	Partnership staff spoke 145 languages.
Monitoring	Did not establish real-time metrics to measure value-added and limited real-time tracking of partnership activities.	Established metrics to measure value-added contributions of partners and real-time tracking of partnership activities.
	Developed a partnership database to track partnership efforts. Bureau staff reported that the database was cumbersome and not user-friendly.	Revamped partnership database by, among other things, allowing for up-to-date monitoring of partner activity and a new Web-based interface.
Evaluation	Evaluated the impact of the communications campaign as a whole on awareness of the census, but had no ability to isolate the effect of partnership efforts.	Plans to evaluate the impact of individual components of the communications campaign on awareness of and likelihood to participate in the census, including the impact of the partnership program on raising awareness and affecting the participation rate.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau information.

The Partnership Program Was Significantly Expanded, but Coordination and Monitoring Issues from 2000 Persisted

Aided by the Recovery Act funding that allowed the Bureau to increase its presence in local communities, the Bureau's outreach efforts resulted in recruiting over 100,000 more partners and increasing by over 100 the number of languages spoken by partnership staff. The Bureau estimated that it would spend about \$280 million on partnership program costs from fiscal years 2007 through 2011, including \$120 million from the Recovery Act—an increase of 54 percent from 2000.¹³ To expand partnership activities in HTC areas, the Bureau used its allocation of Recovery Act-funded partnership staff in regions with large HTC populations. As a result, while in 2000 the average ratio was one partnership staff member for every five counties, in 2010 the average ratio was almost one partnership staff member for every county.

Partnership specialists conducted outreach activities that addressed the concerns of HTC communities in their areas. For example, one

¹³ From October 1997 through September 2000, the Bureau spent about \$182 million on its partnership program in constant 2010 dollars.

Coordination Issues Persisted
Despite Additional Bureau
Guidance

partnership specialist in the Atlanta region organized a conference of leaders in the Vietnamese community to ease their concerns about the confidentiality of census data. Another partnership specialist in the Los Angeles region leveraged the credibility of several large national Iranian and Arab organizations to help convince local community leaders that the census was mandated by law and that their constituents should complete and return census forms. Further, an LCOM in the Dallas region told us that partnership specialists worked to get a letter from the Mayor that helped enumerators gain access to local gated communities and apartment complexes.

During the 2000 Census, LCOMs we surveyed said that the reporting structure for partnership specialists may have led to communication and coordination hurdles between the partnership staff and local census office staff. As a result, we recommended that the Bureau explore ways to increase the coordination and communication between the partnership specialists and the LCOMs.¹⁴ To address coordination and communication challenges in 2010, the Bureau developed additional guidance for partnership specialists and LCOMs, revised partnership training materials, and held meetings between regional operations staff and partnership staff to discuss ways to enhance communications. For example, the Bureau revised the LCOMs' handbook to explain that partnership specialists and local census office staff have a responsibility to work together to ensure that they do not duplicate each others' efforts. In addition, the partnership training manual specifically stated that partnership specialists should participate in local census office management meetings, provide management teams with their schedules of planned meetings and activities in advance, and update LCOMs on their completed activities.

Moreover, most of the partnership staff we interviewed reported working closely or having mutually supportive relationships with local census office staff. For example, partnership staff in the Atlanta and Charlotte regions said that they attended training with local census office staff, and one partnership specialist told us that training gave them a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of local census offices.

However, LCOMs we surveyed provided a more mixed view of the coordination and communication between the partnership program and local census offices. On the one hand, 39 percent of 395 LCOMs

¹⁴ [GAO-01-579](#).

responding to our March survey said they were generally or very satisfied with partnership staff's assistance with local challenges.¹⁵ In addition, some managers provided positive comments in the open ended section of the survey about partnership staff's assistance. For example, one LCOM commented that partnership staff assisted with local census office recruiting activities, such as setting up and providing materials for promotional events. In another example, a manager from the Boston region said that the local census office staff and the partnership specialist worked as one team and contributed to the success of the census. These results varied regionally, with more satisfaction in the Bureau's Boston, Los Angeles, and Dallas regions than in the Philadelphia and New York regions.

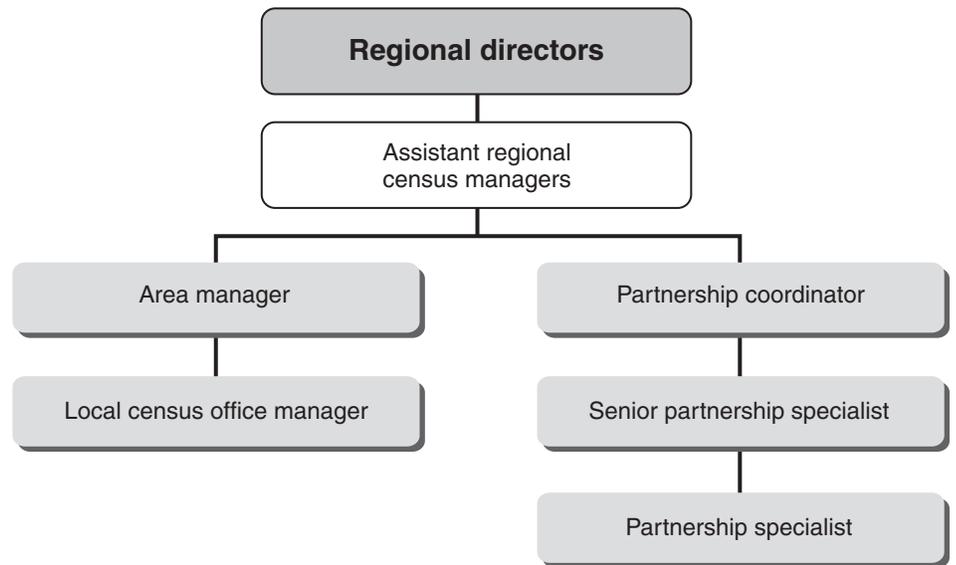
On the other hand, the results of our survey of LCOMs also highlight areas for improvement. In March, 50 percent of 393 LCOMs responding said they were generally or very dissatisfied with coordination between local census offices and partnership staff and a similar level of dissatisfaction was found in a follow-up survey we conducted in May after the nonresponse follow-up operation started.¹⁶ Among the responses of those LCOMs who elaborated on their satisfaction with coordination between local census offices and partnership staff, a key theme was a lack of cooperation or interaction between the partnership and local census office staffs. A manager from the Chicago region said that though the partnership specialist was good, the organizational structure and upper management did not allow for proper interaction. The manager said that at first, communication between the local census office staff and the partnership specialist was prohibited by the partnership specialist team leader, which impeded the local census office's ability to make valuable community connections.

One reason for the coordination challenges between local census offices and partnership staff could be their different reporting structures. As shown in figure 1, LCOMs and partnership specialists report to different officials, and the official who oversees both positions is two levels above the LCOM and three levels above the partnership specialist.

¹⁵ The number of managers who responded to individual survey questions varied by question.

¹⁶ Nonresponse follow-up is the largest and most costly field operation, where census workers follow up in person with households that did not respond to the census forms that were mailed to them.

Figure 1: Reporting Structure for Regional Census Centers



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

According to Bureau officials, this reporting structure was established to allow partnership specialists to coordinate their efforts with other partnership specialists in the same geographical areas and share common problems and solutions. Further, some partnership specialists were responsible for reaching out to specific ethnic groups in areas covered by different local census offices, making it logistically difficult for the specialists to report to one local census office.

But among the LCOMs who elaborated on their responses to our survey, a key theme was dissatisfaction with this reporting structure. For example, one manager reported that the partnership program and local census office operations are too disconnected, adding that at times both partnership staff and local census office staff were doing the same tasks. The manager said that the partnership program was an essential part of a successful census, but only when performed in conjunction with local census office operations. Another manager said that the partnership program needs a direct link to the local census office and suggested that a position such as an assistant manager for partnership be added to the local census office staff. Such a position, the manager explained, would solidify the communication between the partnership program and the local census office.

Despite Revamping, the
Partnership Database
Remained Problematic

Regardless of the management structure, what is clear is that more positive experiences seemed to result when LCOMs and partnership specialists dovetailed their efforts. Better communication between partnership specialists and LCOMs may have enhanced the Bureau's capacity to reduce duplicative efforts, close any gaps in outreach to community organizations with significant HTC populations, and leverage opportunities to achieve a more complete and accurate count.

The partnership tracking database could also benefit from refinements. Despite improvements, partnership staff raised concerns about its user-friendliness similar to those reported in 2000. In 2010, all the partnership specialists we interviewed reported that data entry was time consuming, and 8 of the 11 partnership staff we interviewed reported that they needed help with data entry in order to keep the database current. The Bureau expected to use the partnership database to more accurately monitor and improve partnership efforts nationally; thus the difficulty partnership staff found in updating the system is noteworthy.

Initially, no partnership assistants were authorized to access the database because the Bureau wanted to ensure that data were entered into the system consistently. The Bureau was also concerned about the additional costs associated with purchasing licenses for the large number of partnership assistants. However, in response to regional partnership staff's concerns over the partnership specialists' struggles to update the database in a timely manner, the Bureau procured approximately 400 licenses for select partnership assistants in August 2009. But in interviews with partnership specialists from March through May 2010, they told us that they continued to experience difficulty meeting the data entry requirements.

Further, Bureau managers could not be sure if information in the partnership database was up-to-date. Bureau officials told us that they expected partnership specialists to immediately log any contact they had with a partner into the database. However, our analysis of reports from the database showed, on average, that about 35 percent of users did not update the database on a weekly basis from March 4 through April 22, 2010. According to Bureau headquarters officials responsible for managing the partnership program, because the partnership data were not always current, they took the extra step of organizing weekly telephone calls between headquarters and regional partnership staff in order to gain the most up-to-date information on partnership activities. More current information during a crucial time period around Census Day, April 1, could have better positioned the Bureau to quickly identify and address problem

Aligning the Delivery of Promotional Materials with the Hiring of Partnership Staff Could Foster More Effective Relationships with Partner Organizations

areas. Further, Bureau managers would likely have had better data for redeploying partnership resources to low responding areas with significant HTC populations during different census operations.

Although the Bureau developed English and foreign language promotional materials—both in hard copy and for the Bureau’s Web page—for partnership specialists and assistants to use when recruiting partner organizations, the materials were not available when partnership specialists were first hired. Eight of the 11 partnership specialists and assistants we interviewed reported that because promotional materials were not available when needed, it was more difficult for them to build relationships with potential partners. Specifically, the Bureau began hiring partnership specialists in January 2008. However, delivery of the promotional materials did not start until April 2009, more than a year after partnership specialists first came on board. Although this still left a year until Census Day, by not having promotional materials on hand when partnership staff first began their work, the Bureau may have missed opportunities to develop and strengthen relationships with organizations that had the ability to influence census participation among HTC groups.

Further, three of the eight partnership staff who worked with non-English-speaking communities said it was difficult to obtain in-language materials when needed. For example, one partnership employee in the Los Angeles region reported being unable to engage Korean churches until after January 2010 when the needed in-language materials first became available (according to Bureau officials, in-language materials took longer to develop than English language materials because of the need to ensure accurate translations).

Bureau officials acknowledged that the schedule for hiring partnership staff and the delivery of promotional materials were not well aligned. In the interim, the Bureau provided partnership staff with talking points to help them reach out to organizations in the early phase of the program.

Moving forward, it will be important for the Bureau to take a fresh look at recurring problems in the partnership program, as well as reconsider time frames for the availability of promotional materials. Through improving communication and coordination between partnership and local census office staff, developing a user-friendly database to more effectively monitor the program’s progress, and ensuring that promotional materials are available for distribution when partnership specialists are first hired, the Bureau would better position itself to promote the census to HTC populations.

The Bureau Enhanced Enumeration Programs Aimed at HTC Groups; Additional Refinements Could Improve Them for 2020

Aspects of 2010 SBE Were Refined to Address Implementation Issues from 2000 and Better Enumerate HTC Groups

To improve its ability to count individuals without conventional housing, the Bureau made a number of improvements to SBE, many of which were designed to address challenges experienced in 2000. For example, in 2000, SBE enumerators were not trained to enumerate all types of SBE facilities, which limited the times when enumeration could occur. In response to service providers' requests for more flexibility on scheduling enumeration during the 3-day operation, the Bureau trained census workers to enumerate all types of SBE facilities. This change made training more consistent nationwide and enabled the Bureau to better accommodate last-minute schedule changes.

Further, in some cases in 2000, the supply of census forms and training materials provided to the local offices was not adequate. In 2010, the Bureau reduced the number of form types used for enumerating individuals at SBE facilities from four to a single multipurpose form. According to Bureau officials, this change allowed them to provide an adequate number of forms to local census offices and also helped increase efficiency.

The Bureau took several steps that helped it identify a larger number of SBE facilities in 2010 than in 2000, thereby positioning the Bureau to conduct a more complete count. The actual number of SBE facilities the Bureau enumerated in 2000 was 14,817, whereas for 2010 the Bureau had plans to enumerate 64,626 sites—four times more than previously enumerated.¹⁷ The steps included working more closely with local and

¹⁷ At the time of our work, the Bureau had not yet produced a final number of facilities actually enumerated.

national partner organizations and assigning partnership assistants a role in identifying service-providing facilities. The Bureau also developed better guidance for partnership assistants to identify TNSOLs, relying in part on input from partner organizations, such as church groups and service providers that were familiar with outdoor areas where people often spent the night. Further, the Bureau used public mailings and technology, such as the Internet, to find a broader spectrum of facilities, as compared to local telephone listings that were used in 2000. Table 5 compares key aspects of the 2000 and 2010 SBE operations.

Table 5: Comparison of 2000 and 2010 SBE Operations

SBE activities	2000 Census	2010 Census
Planning and training	Used four different types of questionnaires to enumerate SBE facilities.	Used one questionnaire to minimize confusion and facilitate the availability of supplies in a timely manner.
	Did not consolidate training for SBE facilities.	Consolidated training for staff enumerating people living in group situations such as those in SBE facilities, thereby enabling enumerators to work on multiple operations and all types of SBE facilities.
	Questionnaires and training materials were insufficient, untimely, or both.	Materials were generally timely and sufficient.
	Conducted advance visits to identify the population to be enumerated and issues that could affect enumeration.	Same as 2000.
	Made no additions to list of SBE facilities and TNSOLs after the enumeration date.	Allowed additions to list of SBE facilities and TNSOLs through the last day of SBE enumeration.
	Allowed no flexibility for facilities on when they would be enumerated.	Provided facilities with flexibility on when they would be enumerated.
	Identified SBE sites by working with local governments and community-based organizations, reviewing facility listings from other census operations, and having local staff review the yellow pages.	Expanded efforts to identify SBE sites by providing partnership staff with more guidance, including identifying TNSOLs, and by having headquarters staff work more closely with regional and local staff to develop a more complete list.
Evaluation	Assessment included an examination of duplicate questionnaires and quality assurance procedures. Used results for future planning.	Assessment will include (1) final workload volumes, costs, and quality assurance results; (2) information collected from debriefings; and (3) lessons learned. Plans to use results for future planning.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau information.

The Bureau Generally Implemented SBE Consistent with Its Operation Plans but Experienced Continuing Challenges

The Bureau generally implemented the SBE operation as planned, completing the 3-day operation on schedule, and spending \$10.9 million, slightly more than the \$10.6 million budgeted for the operation. However, while the overall budget estimate for the 2010 SBE operation was more accurate than in 2000, the actual costs for local census offices in urban HTC areas was almost double the amount budgeted—\$1.9 million compared to the actual cost of \$3.6 million.¹⁸ Bureau officials said they will examine the data further to determine why the budget was exceeded in urban HTC areas. We have noted the Bureau’s difficulties in developing accurate cost estimates for several other Bureau operations, and the cost overrun in urban HTC areas is another example of this.¹⁹

As in 2000, our observers noted that enumerators were professional, responsible, knowledgeable, and highly committed to fulfilling their responsibilities. For example, during heavy rain in the Boston area, enumerators remained focused on counting individuals living under overhangs and stairwells, despite the difficult conditions. Our observers in Brooklyn reported the same of enumerators there, although enumeration of the outdoor locations was delayed one night because of adverse weather conditions. Further, one of our observers reported that in Los Angeles, cultural advocates—individuals the Bureau hired to accompany enumerators and facilitate access to certain communities—helped ease potentially tense situations.

As described below, based on our observations and the results of the LCOM survey, SBE generally went well, and in some areas the Bureau appears to have addressed challenges it experienced in 2000.

Enumeration Supplies Were Generally Adequate

Enumerators we spoke with reported having enough forms in 68 of 78 sites we visited. Also, 76 percent of 359 LCOMs who responded to our question on the timing of the delivery of questionnaires and other enumerations supplies were generally or very satisfied. In contrast, during the 2000 Census, our observers noted that the timing of questionnaires and

¹⁸ In 2000, the budget for SBE, in constant 2010 dollars, was \$52.2 million, and the expended amount, in constant 2010 dollars, was \$12.1 million. Budgeted and actual dollars spent for 2000 and 2010 were rounded.

¹⁹ GAO, *2010 Census: Efforts to Build an Accurate Address List Are Making Progress, but Face Software and Other Challenges*, [GAO-10-140T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2009), and *2010 Census: Census Bureau Should Take Action to Improve the Credibility and Accuracy of Its Cost Estimate for the Decennial Census*, [GAO-08-554](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 2008).

training materials was not always adequate at the locations they visited, which impeded enumerators' ability to conduct their work in a timely manner.

Advanced Visits Helped Enhance Service Providers' Readiness for Enumeration

Our observers reported that facilities were prepared for SBE enumeration in 35 of 56 visits to SBE facilities. Furthermore, 73 percent of 356 LCOMs who responded to our question about the readiness of SBE facilities were generally or very satisfied. In instances where facilities were not prepared, there appears to have been an expectation or communication gap. Despite advance visits from the Bureau, one representative at a Baltimore facility said she was not aware that census workers were expected, and would not allow enumeration to take place because it would disrupt the individuals' dinner and medication treatments. She was not receptive to the workers returning later the same evening. In another case, a Boston facility manager was not aware that the enumeration was to take place, but allowed the census workers to proceed. Bureau officials said that in some instances facility staff may not have communicated previous agreements for conducting the enumeration to new or other staff on duty at the time of the enumeration.

Training Material Was Tailored to Accommodate Local Conditions

Of the LCOMs we surveyed, 65 percent of 359 LCOMs were generally or very satisfied that the content of SBE training materials was tailored to accommodate local conditions, such as taking into account whether an area was urban or rural. In 2000, enumerators expressed concern that the training they received did not always adequately prepare them for the wide range of scenarios they encountered.

Despite these successes, the Bureau experienced some procedural and operational challenges during SBE implementation, some of which were similar to the Bureau's experience in 2000.

Enumerators Did Not Always Follow Procedures

The Bureau's policy referred to in its SBE enumeration manual stipulates that when individuals state that they have already been enumerated elsewhere, the enumerator still must attempt to complete a questionnaire.²⁰ While enumerators adhered to this procedure at about two-thirds of the facilities we visited, we found that in 26 of 78 visits enumerators did not attempt to enumerate individuals who told them they had already completed a questionnaire at another location. When individuals refuse to be enumerated, regardless of the reason, the Bureau's

²⁰ The Bureau has procedures in place to remove duplications at a later date.

guidance instructs enumerators to ask the facility's contact person for information about the individual. If a contact person is not available, the enumerator should attempt to complete as much of the questionnaire as possible through observation. By not always following these procedures, enumerators may have missed individuals who should have been enumerated and the extent to which accuracy of the count was affected is unknown.

Enumerators Did Not Always Fulfill Agreements

As mentioned previously, Bureau officials visited SBE facilities to make agreements with service providers on conducting the actual enumeration. Our observers noted that in 15 of 78 site visits, enumerators did not arrive as scheduled at shelter locations. One of these instances occurred in Washington, D.C., where the facility manager had instructed the clientele who typically frequent that location to make an effort to be present when the enumerator arrived. According to the facility manager, the enumerator did not arrive at the scheduled time. In another instance, a facility manager at a Boston site told our observers that she was concerned that enumerators had arrived earlier than the agreed-upon time. She explained that her clientele consisted of emotionally disturbed women, many of whom had fears of authority. Thus, she said she would have preferred more time to prepare the women for the impending visit.

When enumerators do not fulfill commitments, the missed appointments and the need to reschedule could make the enumeration more burdensome to service providers and detract from the Bureau's reputation.

Determining Appropriate Staffing Levels for SBE Sites Was Sometimes Problematic

The mobile nature of the SBE population and other factors make it difficult to precisely determine the number of enumerators that should be sent to a particular site, and sending either too many or too few enumerators each has its consequences. Although the Bureau has guidance on staffing ratios for enumerating different types of group quarters, including service-based facilities, it did not always result in optimal levels of staffing at shelters and TNSOLs. Overstaffing can lead to unnecessarily higher labor costs and poor productivity, while understaffing can affect the Bureau's ability to obtain a complete count at a particular site.

Our observers and those in the Department of Commerce's Office of Inspector General both reported overstaffing as an issue at SBE locations. For example, at one of our SBE site visits, approximately 30 enumerators reported to the same shelter in Atlanta to conduct the enumeration. Unsure of how to proceed, the census enumerators waited for over an

hour before a crew leader instructed over half of the enumerators present to leave, at which point no work had taken place. Similarly, the Department of Commerce Inspector General's staff observed long periods of inactivity at sites and increased operational costs as a result.²¹

Also, while most LCOMs we surveyed were satisfied with SBE staffing levels, pockets of dissatisfaction existed at some locations. Of the LCOMs responding to our survey in April, 81 percent of 361 were generally or very satisfied with the number of enumerators hired to complete the SBE workload, 10 percent of managers said they were generally or very dissatisfied, and 9 percent of managers said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Of the responses from managers who elaborated on our question about their satisfaction level with the SBE operation, a key theme that emerged was overstaffing. One manager, elaborating on his response, said that he sent a detailed cost and benefit document to higher-level Bureau officials to demonstrate that the number of enumerators needed for the SBE operation in his local area should be reduced, but his request was denied. In another instance, a manager said he was required to train and hire at least 100 more enumerators than he felt were necessary.

Given the Bureau's constitutional mandate to enumerate the country's entire population and the difficulty of enumerating the SBE population, it is not unreasonable for the Bureau to err on the side of over- rather than understaffing SBE to help ensure a complete count. Going forward, as part of the Bureau's plans to examine SBE costs, schedule, training, and staffing, it will be important for the Bureau to determine the factors that led to less-than-optimal staffing levels and use the information to help determine staffing levels for SBE in 2020.

Be Counted/QAC Programs Were Implemented as Planned, but Visibility Issues Remain a Concern

For 2010, the Bureau developed plans that according to Bureau officials, were designed to address challenges that the Be Counted/QAC programs faced during the 2000 Census, such as (1) visibility of sites, (2) ability of the public to find where the Be Counted/QAC sites were located, and (3) monitoring of site activity. In 2000, for example, several sites we visited lacked signs publicizing the sites' existence, which greatly reduced visibility. In some sites, census questionnaires were in places where people might not look for them, such as the bottom of a shelf. We reported

²¹ Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, *2010 Census: Quarterly Report to Congress*, Final Report No. OIG-197914 (May 2010).

that the Bureau had problems with keeping site information current, and as a result, changes in the information about the program's site location or points of contact were not always available to the public.²² To address these issues, in 2010, the Bureau created banners for display in public areas of Be Counted/QAC sites, developed a Web page with locations and hours of the sites, and updated the guidance for site selection. Table 6 compares key aspects of the 2000 and 2010 Be Counted/QAC programs.

Table 6: Comparison of 2000 and 2010 Be Counted/QAC Programs

Be Counted/QAC activities	2000 Census	2010 Census
Planning and site selection	Selected sites via a joint effort between partnership specialists and partner organizations. No role for local census office staff.	Selected sites via joint effort between partnership specialists and local census office staff with input from partner organizations.
Implementation	Had a goal to establish about 66,000 locations. Census data indicated that 28,632 were established.	Had a goal to establish 40,000 Be Counted and QAC sites. Census preliminary data indicated that 38,827 sites were established.
	Staffed sites with paid employees and volunteers, which led to inconsistent service.	Staffed sites solely with paid employees to ensure consistent service.
	Forms available in 6 languages—English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Tagalog. Language assistance guides available in 37 languages.	Forms available in 6 languages—English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Russian. Language assistance guides available in 59 languages.
	Did not provide Web page for public to locate Be Counted/QAC locations.	Established a Web page that helped the public locate Be Counted/QAC locations.
	Did not issue official signage identifying Be Counted/QAC sites.	Issued uniform signage for prominent display at sites.
Monitoring	Attempted to monitor site performance, but the number of Be Counted/QAC sites was more than could be handled.	Monitored sites by designating Be Counted clerks in local census offices to regularly visit sites and check staffing and adequacy of materials.
Evaluation	Relied on cost and workload data.	Same as 2000.
	Assessment included final workload volumes, costs, and quality assurance results. Used for future planning.	Same as 2000.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau information.

The Bureau generally implemented the Be Counted/QAC program as planned. The Bureau opened around 38,000 sites, conducted the Be

²² GAO, *2000 Census: Actions Taken to Improve the Be Counted and Questionnaire Assistance Center Programs*, GAO/GGD-00-47 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2000).

Counted/QAC program as scheduled from March 19 through April 19,²³ and completed the Be Counted/QAC program under budget. The Bureau reported spending \$38.7 million versus the \$44.2 million budgeted. Bureau officials commented that the program came in under budget in part because the Bureau staffed the sites with one QAC representative for 15 hours a week, rather than with 1.5 representatives, as originally budgeted. This allowed the Bureau to spend less on payroll and training, according to officials.

Overall, the majority of the 51 sites we visited were staffed as planned and census materials and forms were available at most sites in multiple languages. Further, the Bureau's preliminary data on 2010 show overall activity at Be Counted/QAC sites increased, with about 1 million more forms picked up in 2010, compared to the approximately 1.7 million forms in 2000—an increase of 62 percent.

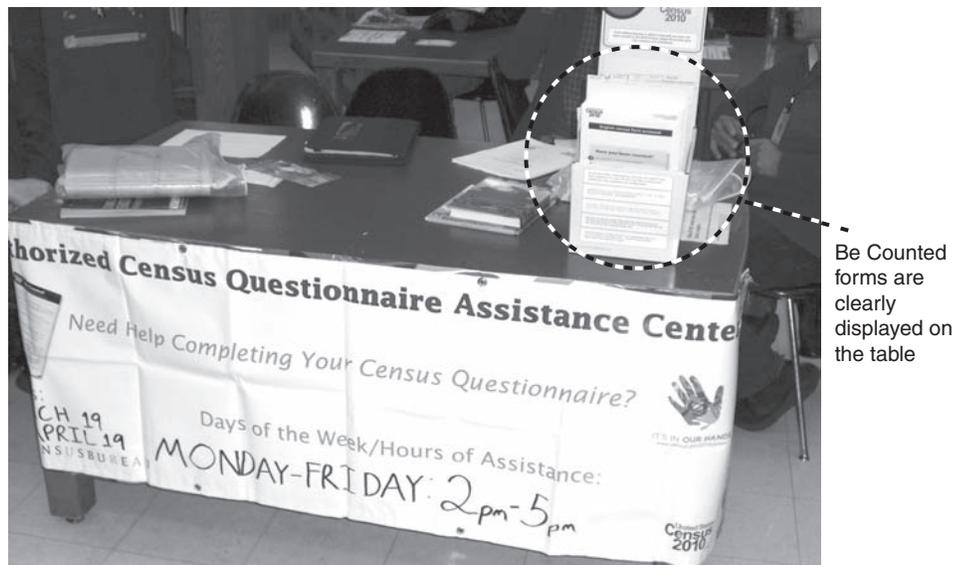
Visibility of Be Counted/QAC Sites Was Poor at Many Sites Visited

Visibility is key to the effectiveness of Be Counted/QAC sites because it is directly related to people's ability to find them. According to the Bureau's Be Counted job aid guidance, Be Counted clerks in local census offices were responsible for monitoring sites and ensuring that banners were displayed at Be Counted/QAC locations. In many locations we visited, the Bureau's efforts to raise the visibility of sites were evident to our observers. For example, 23 of the 51 Be Counted/QAC sites visited were displaying the banners the Bureau developed to advertise the existence of the Be Counted/QAC sites. More generally, however, there were areas for improvement. For example, our observers noted problems with "street-level" visibility in 26 of 51 Be Counted/QAC sites visited. At one site in Atlanta, for instance, no signs were visible from the main road to publicize the existence of the Be Counted site. In addition, our observers visited two sites in Brooklyn that were not visible from the street. In some cases, the banners provided by the Bureau to advertise the location of a site were not used or displayed prominently upon entering a location that housed a site. At another site in Washington, D.C., our observers noted that the banner was rolled up and leaning against a file cabinet and consequently was not clearly visible to the public.

²³ The Bureau opened Be Counted sites on February 26, 2010, in areas where Bureau staff were hand delivering questionnaires to housing units with mostly rural route and PO Box addresses.

In addition, Be Counted/QAC sites were sometimes in obscure locations within the buildings in which they were housed. For example, at sites located in the basement or rear of the building, we observed no signage directing people to the Be Counted/QAC site. Further, forms and materials available at Be Counted/QAC sites were not always clearly identified and thus could have been overlooked. Figure 2 is an example of a Be Counted site in Brooklyn that was prominently visible at a library. Importantly, the banner was clearly displayed to draw attention to the site, and the time that staff would be in attendance was also obvious.

Figure 2: Be Counted Forms Prominently Displayed at Brooklyn Be Counted/QAC Site



Source: GAO.

In contrast, figure 3 shows a Be Counted site in Fresno, California, that was difficult to find in a barbershop. Note that the area had no signage to draw attention to the site and the forms were scattered about and difficult to find.

Figure 3: Be Counted Forms Not Prominently Displayed at Fresno Be Counted/QAC Site



Be Counted forms are stored under the shelf

Source: GAO.

In those instances when the Be Counted/QAC sites were not clearly visible to the public, the Bureau may have missed one of the last opportunities to directly enumerate individuals. Moving forward, the Bureau should consider more effective ways to monitor site visibility at Be Counted/QAC sites. For example, the Bureau could include visibility as one of the areas

Site Selection Guidance Does Not Consider Potential Activity Levels

to monitor when census staff conduct their regular monitoring of the Be Counted sites.

Along with visibility, the procedures used to select Be Counted/QAC sites are also key to the effectiveness of the program because they affect the extent to which sites are easily accessible to targeted populations. To improve selection of Be Counted/QAC sites in 2010, the Bureau revised its guidance on Be Counted/QAC site criteria by emphasizing locating sites in HTC areas and specifying the types of local census office areas where sites should be located (e.g., urban/HTC and urban/metropolitan). However, the guidance did not provide direction on identifying sites in locations with the likelihood of higher levels of activity, which would increase the potential for individuals to pick up Be Counted forms. Moreover, Bureau officials said they encouraged staff to take advantage of locations that were free of charge as well as locations with the likelihood of higher levels of activity.

Activity levels at the Be Counted/QAC sites varied based on information from Bureau staff and our observations. QAC representatives at 8 of 43 QAC-only sites visited told us that their sites had moderate to high levels of activity while 12 of 43 QAC representatives told us their sites had low levels of activity.²⁴ For example, a QAC representative at one facility in Phoenix and another in Atlanta said they had to frequently restock Be Counted forms and that they provided many people with assistance. Another QAC representative in Dallas said that he assisted up to 30 people in one day at the Be Counted/QAC site he staffed. Conversely, a QAC representative in Miami said that the LCOM was considering the site for closure because very few people visited the location and used the services. Similarly, a firefighter at a Dallas QAC site observed that the site was open for 11 days and no one visited the site during this time and the box containing materials accompanying the questionnaires (i.e., pens and language reference documents) was unopened. Additionally, during a June debriefing, where QAC representatives discussed their experiences with Bureau officials, the QAC representatives commented on the problem of low activity at some Be Counted/QAC sites, according to Bureau officials.

²⁴ QAC representatives at 23 of 43 sites did not comment on the level of activity at their sites. Of the 51 Be Counted/QAC sites visited, 43 were QAC-only sites and 8 were Be Counted-only sites.

Preliminary data on forms returned and checked in also revealed changes in activity levels at Be Counted/QAC sites for 2010. For example, an average of 20 forms were returned and checked in from each Be Counted/QAC site in 2010, down from an average of 28 in 2000. Given that the operation was conducted over a 30-day period, that translates to less than 1 form per day per site. While this difference might reflect the fact that the address list in 2010 was better than in 2000 and that fewer households were missed, it also indicates that the operation was very resource intensive relative to the number of forms that were returned.

According to Bureau planning guidance, both local census office staff and partnership specialists were jointly responsible for identifying Be Counted/QAC sites, and local census office staff were responsible for monitoring the sites. However, a number of LCOMs we surveyed in May expressed concern about assistance from partnership specialists in identifying Be Counted/QAC sites. While 32 percent of 369 LCOMs who responded to our survey were generally or very satisfied with the assistance they received from partnership specialists for identifying sites, 57 percent of managers responding indicated that they were generally or very dissatisfied. Among the responses of those LCOMs who elaborated on their satisfaction level with the partnership program, one key theme that emerged was dissatisfaction with the Be Counted/QAC sites identified. For example, one LCOM commented that many of the Be Counted/QAC sites were in poor locations and were not in areas with the highest need. To the extent that the Be Counted/QAC sites were established in locations with low activity, the result was lower productivity and higher costs to the Bureau in the form of wages paid to census employees to staff and monitor the sites. There were also opportunity costs in monitoring a site with low activity when a site in a different location could have produced better results.

The Be Counted/QAC program, in concept, may be a reasonable effort to include people who might have otherwise been missed by the census. However, it was also a resource-intensive operation in which relatively few questionnaires, on average per site, were generated, once the cost and effort of identifying, stocking, staffing, monitoring, and maintaining the sites are considered. More will be known about the effectiveness of the Be Counted/QAC program when the Bureau determines how many Be Counted/QAC forms resulted in adding people and new addresses to the census. Similar to SBE, the Bureau plans to assess the Be Counted/QAC program by examining costs, schedule, training, and staffing. Moving forward, it will also be important for the Bureau to explore ways to maximize the Be Counted/QAC program's ability to increase the number of

forms returned and checked in from the target population for the 2020 Census and, ultimately, determine whether fewer but more strategically placed sites could produce more cost-effective results.

Conclusions

In 2010, the Bureau was better positioned to reach out to and enumerate HTC populations compared to 2000 in large part because its plans addressed a number of the challenges experienced in the previous decennial. For example, the Bureau focused more of its resources on targeting paid media efforts to HTC groups, employed partnership staff with a wider range of language capabilities, and developed a more comprehensive list of service-providing facilities that likely enhanced its capacity to enumerate people lacking conventional housing. Further, from an operational perspective, the Bureau generally implemented its HTC outreach and enumeration efforts consistent with its operational plans, completing them within schedule and budget. Overall, while the full impact of these efforts will not be known until after the Bureau completes various assessments, including an evaluation of the extent and nature of any under- and overcounts, the Bureau's rigorous effort to raise awareness, encourage participation, and enumerate HTC populations likely played a key role in holding mail participation rates steady in 2010 for the overall population, a significant achievement given the various factors that were acting against an acceptable mail response in 2010.

Still, certain aspects of the Bureau's outreach and enumeration of HTC populations need attention. Key focus areas for outreach efforts include (1) ensuring the Bureau is using paid media efficiently to improve response rates, (2) improving the coordination between partnership and local census office staff to leverage opportunities to achieve a more accurate and complete count, (3) improving the partnership database to enhance its use as a management tool, and (4) making promotional materials available to partnership staff when they begin their work to improve their ability to develop relationships with partner organizations. For enumeration activities, by determining the factors that lead to the SBE staffing issues at some locations and revising site selection guidance for Be Counted/QAC sites based on visitation and other applicable data, the Bureau may increase the overall value of special enumeration activities.

More generally, the Bureau invested more resources in reaching out to and enumerating HTC groups in 2010 but achieved the same overall participation rate as in 2000. This trend is likely to continue as the nation's population gets larger, more diverse, and more difficult to count. As the Bureau looks toward the next national headcount, it plans to use the

results of its evaluations for input into 2020 planning. At the same time, it will be important for the Bureau to go beyond that and use 2010 evaluation results to gain a better understanding of the extent to which the various special enumeration activities aimed at HTC groups produced a more complete and accurate census. More specifically, better information on the value added by each special enumeration activity could help the Bureau allocate its resources more cost effectively. This may include changing existing programs to increase efficiency or undertaking new special enumeration efforts altogether.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To help improve the effectiveness of the Bureau's outreach and enumeration efforts, especially for HTC populations, should they be used again in the 2020 Census, we recommend that the Secretary of Commerce require the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs as well as the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau to take the following seven actions:

To improve the Bureau's marketing/outreach efforts:

- Use evaluation results, response rate, and other data to develop a predictive model that would inform decisions on how much and how best to allocate paid media funds for 2020.
- Develop mechanisms to increase coordination and communication between the partnership and local census office staff. Possible actions include offering more opportunities for joint training, establishing protocols for coordination, and more effectively leveraging the partnership contact database to better align partnership outreach activities with local needs.
- Improve the user-friendliness of the partnership database to help ensure more timely updates of contact information and enhance its use as a management tool.
- Ensure that promotional materials, including in-language materials for the partnership program, are available when partnership staff are first hired.

To improve some of the Bureau's key efforts to enumerate HTC populations:

-
- Assess visitation, response rate, and other applicable data on Be Counted/QAC locations and use that information to revise site selection guidance for 2020.
 - Determine the factors that led to the staffing issues observed during SBE and take corrective actions to ensure more efficient SBE staffing levels in 2020.
 - Evaluate the extent to which each special enumeration activity improved the count of traditionally hard-to-enumerate groups and use the results to help inform decision making on spending for these programs in 2020.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

On December 8, 2010, the Secretary of Commerce provided written comments on the draft report, which are reprinted in appendix I. The Department of Commerce generally agreed with the overall findings and recommendations of the report. In addition, the department noted that its Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA) has management oversight responsibility for the Bureau and asked that we include ESA in our recommendation. We revised the report to reflect this comment.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Commerce, the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, and interested congressional committees. The report also is available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.



Robert Goldenkoff
Director
Strategic Issues

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Commerce



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

December 8, 2010

Mr. Robert Goldenkoff
Director
Strategic Issues
United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Goldenkoff:

The Department of Commerce appreciates the opportunity to comment on the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report titled "2010 Census: Key Efforts to Include Hard-to-Count Populations Went Generally as Planned; Improvements Could Make the Efforts More Effective for Next Census" (GAO 11-45). Our comments on this report are enclosed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Locke".

Gary Locke

Enclosures

Department of Commerce
Comments on the
United States Government Accountability Office
Draft Report Titled

“2010 Census: Key Efforts to Include Hard-to-Count Populations Went Generally as Planned;
Improvements Could Make the Efforts More Effective for Next Census”
(GAO 11-45)
December 2010

The Department of Commerce thanks the GAO for their extensive efforts in examining these 2010 Census activities and for their ongoing efforts to help us develop a successful plan for the 2020 Census.

The Census Bureau generally agrees with the overall findings in this report and with the recommendations regarding matters we should study for the 2020 Census. Our comments follow.

- Page 44, first paragraph: “...we recommend that the Secretary of Commerce require the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau to take the following seven actions:...”

Response: The Secretary of Commerce should require the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs as well as the Census Director. The Under Secretary heads the Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA), which has management oversight responsibility for the Census Bureau and has been actively engaged in planning for the 2020 Census.

- Page 45, second paragraph from bottom of page: “We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Commerce, the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau, and interested congressional committees.”

Response: Please also send a copy of the report to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Robert Goldenkoff, (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Signora May, Assistant Director; Peter Beck; David R. Bobruff; Benjamin C. Crawford; Shaunessye Curry; Kathleen Drennan; Elizabeth Fan; Robert Gebhart; Guillermo Gonzalez; Thomas Han; Paul Hobart; Brian James; Paul Kinney; Elke Kolodinski; Kirsten B. Lauber; Veronica Mayhand; Karine McClosky; Catherine Myrick; Keith O'Brien; Michael Pahr; Melanie Papasian; Rudolfo Payan; Stacy Spence; Barbara Steel-Lowney; Travis Thomson; Cheri Y. Truett; Timothy Wexler; Monique B. Williams; Carla Willis; and Katherine Wulff made key contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

2010 Census: Data Collection Operations Were Generally Completed as Planned, but Long-standing Challenges Suggest Need for Fundamental Reforms. [GAO-11-193](#). Washington, D.C.: December 14, 2010.

2010 Census: Follow-up Should Reduce Coverage Errors, but Effects on Demographic Groups Need to Be Determined. [GAO-11-154](#). Washington, D.C.: December 14, 2010.

2010 Census: Cooperation with Enumerators Is Critical to Successful Headcount. [GAO-10-665T](#). Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2010.

2010 Census: Plans for Census Coverage Measurement Are on Track, but Additional Steps Will Improve Its Usefulness. [GAO-10-324](#). Washington, D.C.: April 23, 2010.

2010 Census: Data Collection Is Under Way, but Reliability of Key Information Technology Systems Remains a Risk. [GAO-10-567T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 25, 2010.

2010 Census: Operational Changes Made for 2010 Position the U.S. Census Bureau to More Accurately Classify and Identify Group Quarters. [GAO-10-452T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 22, 2010.

2010 Census: Efforts to Build an Accurate Address List Are Making Progress, but Face Software and Other Challenges. [GAO-10-140T](#). Washington, D.C.: October 21, 2009.

2010 Census: Census Bureau Continues to Make Progress in Mitigating Risks to a Successful Enumeration, but Still Faces Various Challenges. [GAO-10-132T](#). Washington, D.C.: October 7, 2009.

2010 Census: Communications Campaign Has Potential to Boost Participation. [GAO-09-525T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 23, 2009.

2010 Census: Fundamental Building Blocks of a Successful Enumeration Face Challenges. [GAO-09-430T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 5, 2009.

2010 Census: Census Bureau Needs Procedures for Estimating the Response Rate and Selecting for Testing Methods to Increase Response Rate. [GAO-08-1012](#). Washington, D.C.: September 30, 2008.

Related GAO Products

2010 Census: The Bureau's Plans for Reducing the Undercount Show Promise, but Key Uncertainties Remain. [GAO-08-1167T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 23, 2008.

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