



Highlights of [GAO-08-259T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

For Census 2010, automation and information technology (IT) are expected to play a critical role. The Census Bureau plans to spend about \$3 billion on automation and technology that are to improve the accuracy and efficiency of census collection, processing, and dissemination. From February 2006 through June 2009, the Bureau is holding a “Dress Rehearsal” during which it plans to conduct operational testing that includes decennial systems acquisitions.

In October 2007, GAO reported on its review of four key 2010 Census IT acquisitions to (1) determine the status and plans, including schedule and cost, and (2) assess whether the Bureau is adequately managing associated risks. This testimony summarizes GAO’s report on these key acquisitions and describes GAO’s preliminary observations on the performance of handheld mobile computing devices used during the Dress Rehearsal.

What GAO Recommends

In its report, GAO made recommendations that the Bureau strengthen its systems testing and risk management activities, including risk identification and oversight. The Bureau agreed to examine additional ways to manage risks, but disagreed with the view that a full complement of systems would not be tested, stating it planned to do so during the Dress Rehearsal or later; however, the test plans have not been finalized and it remains unclear whether this testing will be done.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-259T](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Census Bureau Needs to Improve Its Risk Management of Decennial Systems

What GAO Found

As of October 2007, three key systems acquisitions for the 2010 Census were in process, and a fourth contract had recently been awarded. The ongoing acquisitions showed mixed progress in meeting schedule and cost estimates. Two of the projects were not on schedule. The award of the fourth contract, originally scheduled for 2005, was awarded in September 2007. In addition, one project had incurred cost overruns and increases to its projected life-cycle cost. As a result of the schedule changes, the full complement of systems and functionality that were originally planned will not be available for upcoming Dress Rehearsal operational testing. This limitation increases the importance of further system testing to ensure that the decennial systems work as intended.

The Bureau’s project teams for each of the four IT acquisitions had performed many practices associated with establishing sound and capable risk management processes, but critical weaknesses remained. Three project teams had developed a risk management strategy that identified the scope of the risk management effort. However, not all project teams had identified risks, established mitigation plans, or reported risks to executive-level officials. For example, one project team did not adequately identify risks associated with performance issues experienced by handheld mobile computing devices, even though Census field staff reported slow and inconsistent data transmissions with the device during the spring Dress Rehearsal operations. The magnitude of these difficulties is not clear, and the Bureau has not fully specified how it plans to measure the performance of the devices. Until the project teams implement key risk management activities, they face an increased probability that decennial systems will not be delivered on schedule and within budget or perform as expected.

Performance of Risk Management Activities by Key Census Acquisition Projects

Specific practices	Acquisition projects			
	1	2	3	4
Preparing for risk management				
Determine risk sources and categories	○	●	●	●
Define risk parameters	●	●	●	●
Establish and maintain a risk management strategy	○	●	●	●
Identify and involve the relevant stakeholders	○	○	●	○
Identify and analyze risks				
Identify and document the risks	●	○	●	○
Evaluate, categorize, and prioritize risks	○	●	●	●
Mitigate risks				
Develop risk mitigation plans	○	○	●	○
Monitor status and implement risk mitigation plans	○	○	●	○
Executive oversight				
Review status with executive-level management	○	○	●	●

● practice fully implemented ○ practice partially implemented ○ practice not implemented

Source: GAO analysis of Census project data against industry standards.