2020 CENSUS

Actions Needed to Address Challenges to Enumerating Hard-to-Count Groups

What GAO Found

The Census Bureau’s plans for enumerating hard-to-count groups in the 2020 Census includes the use of both traditional and enhanced initiatives. For example, the Bureau plans to continue using certain outreach efforts used in 2010, such as a communications campaign with paid advertising, partnerships with local organizations, and targeted outreach to immigrant and faith-based organizations. The Bureau also plans enhancements to its outreach efforts compared to 2010. For example, the Bureau revised the census questionnaire and instructions to enumerators to more explicitly include grandchildren in counts. Other planned changes include:

- **Expanded languages**: The Bureau plans to offer more non-English language response options and instructional materials than for 2010.
- **More partnership specialists**: The Bureau plans to hire nearly twice as many partnership specialists as it had planned for the 2010 Census to recruit partner organizations in local communities.
- **Earlier partnership hiring**: The Bureau started hiring a small number of partnership staff in October 2015—2 years earlier than it did for 2010.

While efforts have been made, enumerating hard-to-count persons in 2020 will not be easy. Aside from the inherent difficulties of counting such individuals, the Bureau faces certain management challenges related to its hard-to-count efforts.

- First, the Bureau’s hard-to-count efforts are distributed across over one third of its 35 operations supporting the 2020 Census. And while decentralized operations can provide flexibility, the Bureau recently developed a draft operational document. However, the Bureau will continue to face challenges in ensuring its hard-to-count efforts integrate with existing plans. For example, some of the detailed plans for 10 of the hard-to-count efforts were released in 2016 and are awaiting updates, while 4 plans have yet to be released. With less than 2 years until Census Day (April 1, 2020), there is little room for delay. Therefore, to ensure that emerging plans related to the hard-to-count efforts integrate with existing plans, the Bureau will need to continue its focus on control of the changes in hard-to-count efforts moving forward.

- Second, the Bureau faces a challenge of a tighter labor market than existed prior to 2010 that could potentially create shortfalls or delays in its hiring of partnership staff who are needed to reach small and hard-to-count communities. In early hiring for 2020, Bureau officials reported smaller than expected applicant pools, declined offers, and turnover. Although it has plans to identify critical skills for 2020 and for tailored recruiting, collecting data on its hiring efforts will also be important. Currently, the Bureau lacks data from its 2010 Census that could have helped inform its partnership-staff hiring efforts for 2020.