

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-599](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

A goal for the 2020 Census is to count everyone once, only once, and in the right place. Achieving a complete and accurate census is becoming an increasingly complex 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. Historically, certain sociodemographic groups have been undercounted in the census, which is particularly problematic given the many uses of census data.

GAO was asked to review the Bureau's plans for enumerating hard-to-count groups in the 2020 Census. This report examines (1) the Bureau's plans for improving the enumeration of the hard-to-count in 2020, and how that compares with 2010; and (2) the challenges the Bureau faces in improving the enumeration of the hard-to-count in 2020. GAO reviewed Bureau planning, budget, operational, and evaluation documents as well as documents of the hard-to-count related working groups of the Bureau's National Advisory Committee; and interviewed Bureau officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Bureau take steps to ensure that forthcoming changes and decisions on its hard-to-count related efforts are integrated with other operational efforts and that it collects data on its 2020 partnership hiring efforts.

The Department of Commerce agreed with GAO's recommendations, and the Bureau provided technical comments that were incorporated, as appropriate.

View [GAO-18-599](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov.

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2020 CENSUS

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

What GAO Found

The Census Bureau's (Bureau) plans for enumerating groups considered hard-to-count, such as minorities, renters, and young children, 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, to help address the undercount of young children, 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, to enhance visibility over these hard-to-count efforts, 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 each other. 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, Bureau management 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.