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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-936](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) had planned to rely heavily on automation in conducting the 2010 Census, including using handheld computers (HHC) to verify addresses. Citing concerns about escalating costs, in March 2008 the Secretary of Commerce announced a redesign of the key automation effort. GAO was asked to (1) analyze Bureau and contractor data showing how HHCs operated and their impact on operations, and (2) examine implications the redesign may have on plans for address canvassing in the 2010 Census.

GAO reviewed Bureau and contractor data, evaluations, and other documents on HHC performance and staff productivity; interviewed Bureau and contractor officials; and visited the two dress rehearsal sites to observe and document the use of the HHCs in the field.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends the Secretary of Commerce direct the Bureau to specify the basis for determining the readiness of the FDCA solution for address canvassing and when and how this determination will occur, and to include the “dashboard” of performance metrics in its operational field test.

In commenting on a draft of this report, Commerce had no substantive disagreements with GAO’s conclusions and recommendations and cited actions it is taking to address the challenges GAO identified.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-936](#). For more information, contact Mathew J. Scire at (202) 512-6806 or sciremj@gao.gov or David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

2010 CENSUS

Census Bureau’s Decision to Continue with Handheld Computers for Address Canvassing Makes Planning and Testing Critical

What GAO Found

Census and contractor data highlight problems field staff (listers) experienced using HHCs during the address canvassing dress rehearsal operation in 2007. Help desk logs, for example, revealed that listers most frequently reported issues with transmission, the device freezing, mapspotting (collecting mapping coordinates), and difficulties working with large blocks. When problems were identified, the contractor downloaded corrected software to the HHCs. Nonetheless, help desk resources were inadequate. The Bureau acknowledged that issues with the use of technology affected field staff productivity. After address canvassing, the Bureau established a review board and worked with its contractor to create task teams to analyze and address Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) performance issues.

Although the Bureau recognized that technology issues affected operations, and the contractor produced data on average transmission times, the Bureau and its contractor did not fully assess the magnitude of key measures of HHC performance. GAO previously recommended the Bureau establish specific quantifiable measures in such areas as productivity and performance. Also, the FDCA contract calls for the contractor to provide near real-time monitoring of performance metrics through a “dashboard” application. This application was not used during the census dress rehearsal. The Bureau has developed a preliminary list of metrics to be included in the dashboard such as daily measures on average transmission duration and number of failed transmissions, but has few benchmarks for expected performance. For example, the Bureau has not developed an acceptable level of performance on total number of failed transmissions or average connection speed.

Technology issues and the Bureau’s efforts to redesign FDCA have significant implications for address canvassing. Among these are ensuring that FDCA solutions for technical issues identified in the dress rehearsal are tested, the help desk adequately supports field staff, and a solution for conducting address canvassing in large blocks is tested. In June 2008, the Bureau developed a testing plan that includes a limited operational field test, but the plan does not specify the basis for determining the readiness of the FDCA solution for address canvassing and when and how this determination will occur.

Contractor-Built Handheld Computer



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO).