

Why GAO Did This Study

The 2010 Decennial Census, at a cost of approximately \$13 billion, was the most expensive headcount in our nation's history. Prior to the 2010 Decennial Census, the Census Bureau experienced significant challenges in managing its information systems leading to cost overruns and performance shortfalls which increased the cost of the 2010 census by almost \$3 billion. Given the bureau's extensive use of IT in collecting, analyzing, and distributing information, GAO was asked to determine to what extent the bureau has developed (1) effective policies, procedures, and processes for managing IT investments and system development; and (2) effective practices for acquiring and maintaining IT human capital skills. To address these objectives, GAO identified leading practices in these areas, reviewed bureau policies and procedures to determine whether they followed these practices, and interviewed bureau officials.

What GAO Recommends

To strengthen and improve the Census Bureau's management of IT, GAO recommends that the Acting Secretary of Commerce take eight actions, including improvements to guidance for its planned IT investment process, a consistent requirements development and management process, an implementation plan and time frames for its investment management process and system development methodology, and coordination of IT workforce planning efforts. In written comments, the Acting Secretary concurred with our recommendations and described steps the bureau was taking to implement them.

View [GAO-12-915](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Census Bureau Needs to Implement Key Management Practices

What GAO Found

The U.S. Census Bureau (Census Bureau) has drafted a new investment management plan, system development methodology, and requirements development and management processes to improve its ability to manage information technology (IT) investments and system development, but additional work is needed to ensure these processes are effective and successfully implemented across the bureau. GAO and others have identified the importance of implementing critical processes within an agency to allow it to select, control, and evaluate its IT investments and effectively manage system development. The bureau has developed a new draft investment management plan which contains policies and guidance for managing IT projects; however, the plan does not explain when investments with cost or schedule variances should be escalated to higher-level boards for review, or when managers should provide updated investment information to a planned bureau-wide tracking tool. The bureau has also developed a new system development methodology guide, but the guide has critical gaps. For example, although there are five development process models allowed, including the traditional sequential approach and newer more iterative approaches, the guide does not explain how to adapt processes and related work products for newer iterative approaches. Furthermore, while the bureau has developed new draft requirements development and management processes for system development within individual bureau directorates, it has not established a consistent process bureau-wide as GAO recommended in 2005. Lack of a consistent bureau-wide process contributed to significant cost and performance issues in the 2010 Decennial Census. Although the bureau plans to begin operational development for the 2020 Decennial Census in fiscal year 2015, it has not finalized plans for implementing its new investment management and system development processes across the bureau. Until the bureau takes additional action to finalize and implement consistent, bureau-wide processes, it faces the risk that IT governance issues that adversely affected the 2010 Decennial Census will also impact the 2020 Decennial Census.

The bureau has begun to take steps to improve its IT workforce planning; however, many key practices consistent with principles for effective workforce planning remain to be put in place. In particular, there is no bureau-wide coordination of these workforce planning efforts. Each directorate is responsible for its own IT workforce planning and the bureau has not established any efforts to coordinate activities among directorates. While the bureau identified mission critical IT occupations and began an assessment of select mission critical competencies in June 2011, it does not plan to perform a bureau-wide IT competency assessment until the fall of 2012. Until bureau-wide IT workforce planning processes are established and the bureau develops specific plans to conduct an IT skills inventory and gap analysis, the bureau faces the risk that the appropriate IT workforce will not be in place to effectively develop and manage multimillion dollar investments in information systems and technology that will be needed for the 2020 Decennial Census.