

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-59](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

According to the Bureau, it is committed to limiting its per household cost for the 2020 Census to that of the 2010 Census, and believes that reducing the cost of updating the MAF can be of significant help. Because of tight deadlines and the involvement of several different Bureau units in this effort, effective scheduling and collaboration practices are important for the entire process to stay on track.

GAO was asked to examine scheduling and collaboration in the Bureau's efforts to develop a more cost-effective MAF. GAO (1) assessed the reliability of the schedules for two key MAF development programs, and (2) examined the extent to which the Bureau is following leading practices for collaboration for its MAF development work. GAO analyzed the schedules for the two programs most relevant to developing the address list, and reviewed strategic plans and other documents establishing coordination mechanisms and compared them to leading practices for intra-agency collaborative efforts.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Census Director take a number of actions to improve the reliability of its schedules, including steps to ensure that all relevant activities are included in the schedules, complete scheduling logic is in place, and a quantitative risk assessment is conducted. In addition, GAO recommends a robust workforce planning effort to identify and address gaps in scheduling skills for staff that work on schedules. The Department of Commerce concurred and suggested several clarifications, which GAO included in the report as appropriate.

View [GAO-14-59](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov).

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## 2020 CENSUS

### Bureau Needs to Improve Scheduling Practices to Enhance Ability to Meet Address List Development Deadlines

#### What GAO Found

The Census Bureau (Bureau) is not producing reliable schedules for the two programs most relevant to building the Master Address File (MAF)—the 2020 Research and Testing program and the Geographic Support System Initiative.

- The Bureau did not include all activities in either schedule. The schedules appeared to have reasonable durations for most activities, but they did not include information about required resources.
- For both schedules, the Bureau logically linked many activities in a sequence. Yet in both schedules the Bureau did not identify the preceding and following activity for a significant number of activities. Without this logic, the effect of a change in one activity on future activities cannot be seen in the schedule, potentially resulting in unforeseen delays.
- The Bureau is not in a position to carry out a quantitative risk analysis on the schedules.

As a result of these issues, the schedules are producing inaccurate dates, which could mislead Bureau managers to falsely conclude that all of the work is on schedule when it may not be. Without reliable schedule information, such as valid forecasted dates and the amount of flexibility remaining in the schedule, management faces challenges in assessing the progress of MAF development efforts and determining what activities most need attention. Staff managing the schedules said that they had not received thorough training or certification on scheduling best practices, and, according to schedule managers, staff turnover contributed to the issues GAO identified. Workforce planning and training can help the Bureau have the skills in place to ensure that characteristics of a reliable schedule are met to support key management decisions.

The Bureau has documented collaboration activities that follow many leading practices for collaboration. Because several divisions are involved in efforts to develop the MAF, collaboration across these divisions is critical. In recent months, the Bureau has put in place a variety of mechanisms to aid coordination, such as crosscutting task teams. For example, research projects relevant to developing the MAF have representation from multiple divisions. The Bureau has also established memorandums of understanding across divisions to provide a broad framework for working together. Continued management attention to collaboration practices will help to ensure that collaboration across units is occurring as MAF development continues.