

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-496](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The decennial census is used to apportion seats in Congress, redraw congressional districts, and allocate hundreds of billions of dollars in federal assistance annually and helps to guide public policy decisions based on social, economic, and demographic data.

While recent censuses appear to have been increasingly accurate, measurement errors are not evenly distributed across the population. Given the uses of census data, ensuring an accurate count is important.

As part of its partnership and outreach efforts, the U.S. Census Bureau's (Bureau) Partnership Program works with local and national organizations, businesses, and governments to promote awareness of and participation in the census, as well as to help recruit census workers.

GAO was asked to review the Bureau's partnership and outreach efforts, including paid advertising and targeted communications. This report examines the Bureau's progress in addressing selected prior census challenges in these areas. GAO reviewed relevant Bureau planning documentation, collected regular Bureau reports on progress, and interviewed Bureau officials responsible for partnership and outreach efforts.

GAO provided a draft of this report to the Bureau. The Bureau agreed with the report's findings.

View [GAO-20-496](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or MihmJ@gao.gov

May 2020

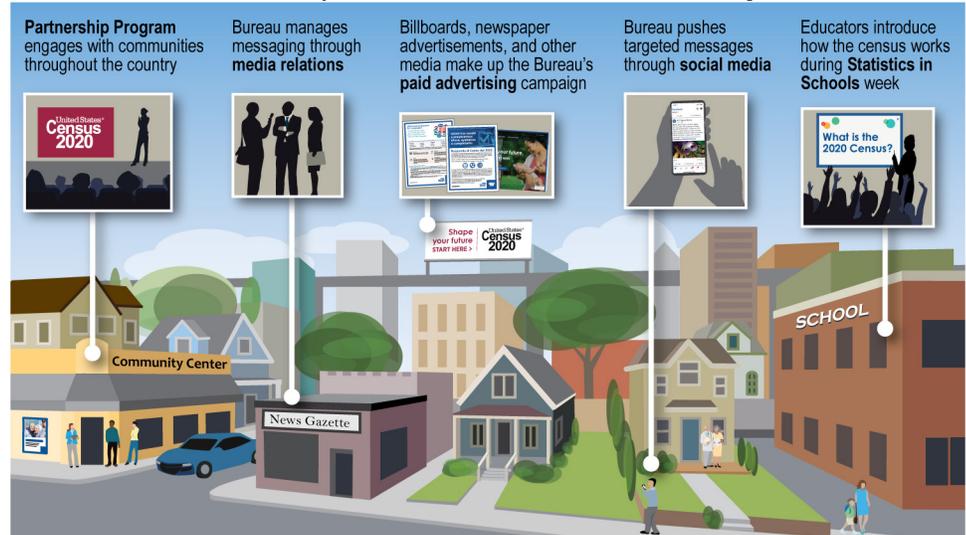
2020 CENSUS

Update on the Census Bureau's Implementation of Partnership and Outreach Activities

What GAO Found

The Partnership Program, a core component of the Bureau's partnership and outreach activities, delivers outreach to partnering organizations at the national and local levels in order to ensure a more complete and accurate count. These partners include retail associations, tribal, state, and local governments, local businesses, and non-profit organizations, among others. Roughly 1,500 partnership specialists, who are temporary Bureau employees responsible for building relationships with and obtaining commitments from these partners, help to implement the Partnership Program, which exists alongside several other components of the Integrated Partnership and Communications operation, as shown below. The Bureau experienced delays, however, in getting these employees onboarded.

The Census Bureau Uses Multiple Avenues of Outreach to the Community



Source: GAO analysis of Census Bureau documentation. | GAO-20-496

The Bureau has taken important actions to address challenges that GAO, the Bureau, and others have previously identified. These challenges include: (1) Enumerating hard-to-count groups; (2) Mobilizing partnership and outreach resources; (3) Coordinating outreach across the Bureau's organization and operations; and (4) Measuring outcomes.

Events taking place during implementation of partnership and outreach activities, such as the COVID-19 outbreak, provide a salient basis for which to continue to monitor these challenges and any effects they may have on the census. Moreover, continued monitoring of the Bureau's survey of public awareness of and sentiment toward the census, for example, will provide information on whether difficulties experienced in getting partnership specialists onboarded had an effect on the success of the Bureau's outreach.