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[Review of Certain Costs Associated with Pretests for the 1980 Census]. GGD-78-53; B-78395. May 23, 1978. 8 pp. + enclosure (2 pp.).

Report to Rep. William Lehman, Chairman, House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service: Census and Population Subcommittee; by Robert F. Keller, Acting Comptroller General.

Contact: General Government Div.

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An examination of costs of the 1980 census pretests dealt with headquarters travel, the 1980 Census Advisory Committees, and the Public Information Office and the Community Relations Program as they relate to the pretests. The Bureau of the Census spent about \$17.5 million for travel from July 1, 1975, to September 30, 1977, of which about \$3.8 million was attributable to headquarters' activities. Most of the travel was directly related to program objectives, but some was for employee relocation or attendance at conferences. The Bureau had six standing and four temporary advisory committees as of December 31, 1977. The advisory committees, which deal with Black, Spanish origin, and Asian populations, and with housing, had expenses for travel and a pro rata share of other expenses totaling \$135,000 in 1976 and \$173,000 in 1977. Approximate costs for the Public Information Office were \$545,000 in fiscal year (FY) 1976, \$49,500 for the transition quarter, and \$669,000 in FY 1977. It charged about \$66,100 to pretest projects. Over \$1 million was spent on the Community Services Program during FYs 1976 and 1977, but only about \$15,000 was charged to pretest projects. Charges to the pretest projects by the Public Information Office and the Community Services Program were greatly understated because some costs were incorrectly charged to overhead or other projects. As of November 1977, 423 people from other organizations had active appointments as Census employees and had access to certain confidential information. (HTW)

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**COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548**

**RELEASED**  
6/19/78

May 23, 1978

B-78395

The Honorable William Lehman, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Census and Population  
Committee on Post Office and  
Civil Service  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On October 11, 1977, we responded to your August 9, 1977, request to examine estimated and actual costs of the 1980 census pretests to determine problems experienced, their cause, and their potential impact. This final report responds to additional questions included in your request and raised during subsequent discussions with your office.

This report discusses the Bureau of the Census' costs for (1) headquarters travel in fiscal years 1976 <sup>1/</sup> and 1977, (2) the 1980 Census Advisory Committees, and (3) the Public Information Office and the Community Relations Program, <sup>2/</sup> as they relate to the 1980 census pretests. In addition, we gathered information on employees of other organizations who were sworn in as special Bureau employees and had access to confidential census information.

The Bureau spent about \$17.5 million for travel from July 1, 1975, to September 30, 1977, of which about \$3.8 million was attributable to headquarters' activities. Most of the Bureau's travel was directly related to its program objectives, but some travel was for such purposes as to relocate employees and to attend professional conferences.

The charges to the pretest projects by the Public Information Office and the Community Services Program were greatly understated because some costs were incorrectly charged to overhead or other projects. How effective the Public Information Office and the Community Services Program were at the three pretest sites (Travis County, Texas; Camden, New Jersey; and Oakland, California) is unknown. The Bureau could not determine local residents' views of the pretest.

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1/Includes transition quarter.

2/The Bureau refers to this as the Community Services Program.

We reviewed the Bureau's accounting records and other related documents and held discussions with its representatives. We randomly sampled headquarters travel records for fiscal years 1976 and 1977 to determine the purposes of travel. As you requested, in the interest of timeliness we did not obtain the Bureau's written comments, 1/ but we discussed the report with Bureau officials and their comments have been incorporated where appropriate.

### TRAVEL

The Bureau's travel costs between July 1, 1975, and September 30, 1977, were about \$17.5 million of which \$13.7 million (78 percent) was used by the Bureau's 12 regional offices and its processing center in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Most field travel costs were incurred for interviewers gathering information for Bureau surveys. The other \$3.8 million (22 percent) was for headquarters travel. The following table summarizes the distribution of travel by fiscal year.

	Fiscal year <u>1976</u>	Transition quarter (millions)	Fiscal year <u>1977</u>	<u>Total</u>
Field	\$5.9	\$1.5	\$6.3	\$13.7
Headquarters	<u>1.6</u>	<u>.5</u>	<u>1.7</u>	<u>3.8</u>
Total	<u>\$7.5</u>	<u>\$2.0</u>	<u>\$8.0</u>	<u>\$17.5</u>

Our random sample of headquarters travel records indicates that about

- \$3 million was for general business activities, such as supervision, observation, or training;
- \$500,000 was for attendance at conferences; and
- \$250,000 was for changes of station and attendance at advisory committee meetings.

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1/ The Bureau provided written comments on its employees' attendance at the American Statistical Association meetings. These comments are included as the enclosure.

The travel activities, for the most part, were related to the Bureau's regular program objectives. About 13 percent of Bureau headquarters' travel costs was for attendance at conferences. The most heavily attended conference was the American Statistical Association annual conference. Fifty-one Bureau employees were authorized to attend the conference in 1975 and 95 in 1977. The Bureau had 60 active participants at the 1977 conference presenting papers and chairing sessions and 35 observers.

The Bureau said its policy of sending employees to American Statistical Association conferences is designed to directly support its program objectives and to maintain its high quality of statistical work and competence of its professional staff. The increase in the number of employees sent to the conferences resulted from a policy decision to stimulate greater participation for the Bureau's benefit.

The Bureau's regulations state that attendance at conferences shall be limited to those whose presence is clearly desirable and can be justified as having a substantial bearing upon the responsibility of the concerned organizational element of the Bureau. Approval of attendance at special interest conferences, such as the American Statistical Association conference, is to be coordinated centrally. The procedures also state that if more than three attendees from a division or office must attend a meeting or conference requiring travel, justification must be submitted to the Director.

#### ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The Bureau had six standing and four temporary advisory committees as of December 31, 1977. The four temporary committees which deal with the 1980 census are the Advisory Committee on the Black Population, the Advisory Committee on the Spanish Origin Population, the Advisory Committee on the Asian and Pacific American Population, and the Advisory Committee on Housing.

The three advisory committees on minority populations were established during the planning of the 1980 census to advise the Bureau on such things as improving the accuracy of the minority population count and recommending subject content for questionnaires. The Housing Committee provides technical advice and guidance on such matters as tabulating statistics.

The travel expenses of committee members and a pro rata share of Bureau personnel costs and other expenses follow.

<u>Committee</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>
Black	\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000
Spanish	45,000	45,000
Asian	15,000	45,000
Housing	<u>30,000</u>	<u>38,000</u>
Total	<u>\$135,000</u>	<u>\$173,000</u>

The advisory committees usually met twice a year at Bureau headquarters in Suitland, Maryland. They also held additional joint meetings, usually in Suitland.

The members of the four committees were reimbursed about \$64,000 for their transportation and subsistence for attendance at meetings during 1976 and 1977. Also, certain members of the minority committees were paid about \$13,000 for travel and subsistence on visits to the Camden, New Jersey; Travis County, Texas; and Oakland, California pretest sites, where they observed the pretests and, in some cases, worked as temporary Bureau employees. Those who worked were sworn in as Bureau employees and received wages of about \$1,000.

According to the minority committees' charters, payments for committee member services are not authorized--only travel and subsistence payments are authorized. Bureau officials told us that temporary employees were sworn in as Bureau employees to work as clerks or enumerators and were not considered advisory committee members at such time, which " \* \* \* did not constitute a conflict of interest." However, we were also told that the Bureau probably would not use advisory committee members as employees in the future.

#### PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

The Public Information Office, composed of 11 professional staff members, is the Bureau's primary contact with the news media (radio, television, and print). Office representatives try to publicize the Bureau and its activities by following leads developed in other Bureau programs, or on their own, with private business firms, Government agencies, or any other organization willing to help. The approximate costs for the Office were \$545,000 in fiscal year 1976, \$49,500 for the transition quarter, and \$669,000 in fiscal year 1977.

The Office charged about \$66,100 to the pretest projects: Travis County, \$9,300; Camden, \$9,800; and Oakland, \$47,000. These amounts, however, do not fully reflect all Public Information Office costs which may be attributable to the pretests. For example, payroll costs of \$20,000 for the staff working at the pretest sites were not charged to the projects because the Bureau considers the Office a service organization benefiting all projects. We believe that costs, if readily identifiable with a project, should be charged to that project to reflect more accurately project costs.

Oakland's costs were much greater than the costs of the other two pretest sites because of (1) higher travel costs and (2) larger expenditures for producing films and recordings for public service announcements on television and radio. Bureau officials said they could not relate the higher publicity costs in Oakland to a higher response rate because evaluations only reflected the amount of media coverage and not its effectiveness.

Public Information Office personnel spent 186 working days at the three pretest sites--118 at Oakland, 30 at Travis County, and 38 at Camden. The Chief of the Public Information Office said he wanted to have a senior and a junior staff member at Oakland constantly until the pretest was completed because the Oakland pretest would give the staff one of its last opportunities to be in a census environment before the 1980 census. Altogether, seven different staff members were in Oakland from March 6 to May 13, 1977. Two members of the Public Information Office staff were at Travis County and one was at Camden from time to time during the pretests.

During our review, the Bureau had not decided on the magnitude of its publicity effort for the 1980 census. Several options were being considered. Cost estimates range from about \$1 million to about \$16 million depending on whether the Advertising Council, a nonprofit organization, or a paid advertising campaign would be used.

#### COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAM

The Community Services Program is designed to develop and maintain strong two-way channels of communication with members of minority populations through local minority organizations. Community Services specialists, working out of the Bureau's 12 regional offices, are to establish and maintain working relationships with all kinds of local minority organizations

(e.g., civil rights, community development, neighborhood, religious, and economic development groups). The Program's major objectives are to

- inform local groups of the importance of the census data to them and their community and how to obtain and use the data,
- solicit information from these groups regarding potential local counting problems, and
- stimulate the groups active participation and support for the 1980 census field operations.

Program officials said the program's effectiveness cannot be measured because most factors are very subjective.

Over \$1 million was spent on the Community Services Program during fiscal years 1976 and 1977 but, according to Bureau officials, only about \$15,000 was charged to pretest projects. A breakdown of these costs follows:

Oakland pretest	\$ 14,293
Travis pretest	746
Camden pretest	21
Community Services--Decennial	296,905
Community Services--Interfund (overhead)	<u>729,327</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>\$1,041,292</u></b>

At our request the Bureau analyzed the work done at the pretest sites and determined that the proper amounts that should have been charged to the pretest projects are: Oakland, \$36,854; Travis County, \$31,348; and Camden, \$6,111. These costs are for the travel and salary of Community Services specialists who worked at the pretest sites. No adjustment to the accounting records was made during our review. Other Community Services specialists traveled to the pretest sites to observe the operations as part of their training. These costs, about \$9,200, were charged to either Community Services--Decennial or Community Services--Interfund.

Bureau representatives said the work done by those Community Services specialists who charge the Interfund project and the Decennial project is similar. However, most of those charging the Decennial project are considered temporary personnel whose tenure will expire after the 1980 census. The charges to the

Interfund project are distributed to other projects. During our review, 14 Community Service specialists were classified as permanent and 18 as temporary personnel. The Bureau plans to have 180 temporary Community Services specialists in the field offices before the 1980 census. The estimated cost for the Community Services--Decennial project through the completion of the 1980 census is approximately \$11 million.

### SPECIAL CENSUS EMPLOYEES

Section 23(c), title 13 of the United States Code, authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to hire temporary staff, including employees of Federal, State, or local agencies and employees of private organizations, to assist the Bureau in its work. These special employees must be sworn in due to the confidentiality of certain census information.

As of November 1977, 429 people from other organizations had active appointments as Census employees and had access to certain confidential Census information. This contrasts with 315 persons similarly employed 5 years earlier. The following is a breakdown of special Census employees by employer as of November 1977.

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare	186
Department of Agriculture	97
Department of Transportation	30
General Services Administration	28
Department of Labor	20
Department of Defense	17
Department of Justice	7
Department of Commerce	6
Internal Revenue Service	2
Office of Management and Budget	2
Others--contractors, universities, etc.	<u>34</u>
Total	<u>429</u>

For a new special employee, the Bureau requires, among other things, (1) a request for personnel action, signed by a Bureau division chief, listing name, birth date, social security number, effective date, and name and location of the employee's office and (2) a "not to exceed" date, which would be the time required to complete a current project, not to exceed 6 months. However, extensions can be authorized by the division chiefs. The Bureau is developing new procedures for special employees which would require a division chief to justify to top management why an extension is requested.



Special employees are restricted to reviewing activities of a specific project and do not have free access to all Census information. For example, an employee of the National Institutes of Health was restricted to reviewing activities on a Survey of Neurological Disorders; an employee of the Social Security Administration, to the 1978 Disability Survey; and an employee of the Brookings Institution, to the Longitudinal Manpower Survey.

Evidence on the extent to which the special employees have had access to confidential information is limited. The only documentation we found were memorandums sent to the Bureau's regional directors advising them of persons who traveled from Bureau headquarters to observe interviewing techniques or material in the regional offices.

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We plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of the report unless you publicly announce its contents earlier. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and to others who request them.

Sincerely yours,

  
ACTING Comptroller General  
of the United States

Enclosure

**Census Bureau Statement on Attendance at Annual Meetings of the American Statistical Association Authorized at Government Expense, for Consideration by GAO for its Report**

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The American Statistical Association (ASA) is the largest professional statistical society in the world, and its interests in statistical data and methodology are closely related to the Bureau's mission. The 13,000 members of ASA include practically every professional statistician in the U.S., and a number of leading statisticians in other countries as well. On the order of 2,000 ASA members attend the annual meetings, and the range of interests represented matches the broad mission of the Bureau. For these reasons, the ASA annual meetings are the most important statistical meetings for the Bureau.

Participation in papers at the annual ASA meetings provides an opportunity to present ongoing work of the Bureau for the information of, and critical review by, peer professional statisticians. Apart from the benefit to individual Bureau projects, such participation enhances the Bureau's image and that of its professional staff in the statistical community and aids in recruiting highly competent staff. Outside of the formal sessions there is face-to-face discussion with other statisticians and data users of statistical questions of mutual interest. Often Bureau staff will become aware in this way of new developments bearing on the Bureau's work perhaps a year or more before they will be published in the statistical journals. These activities stimulate other professional contacts on a continuing basis, frequently initiated from outside the Bureau by statisticians and other data users who become aware of Bureau work through the annual ASA meetings. Junior staff members are sent to annual meetings on a limited basis as part of their training. To extend its data user services, the Bureau maintains an exhibit of its statistical publications and services at the annual meetings. This exhibit is staffed on a rotating basis by Bureau statisticians attending the meeting, who are competent to discuss the materials with data users. Senior and middle level staff are scheduled to carry out recruiting activities, and to conduct personal interviews with promising candidates in a variety of professional specialities. Bureau participants are assigned to report on sessions and papers of interest at special Bureau staff meetings for the benefit of staff who were not sent to the annual meeting.

The Bureau's policy in authorizing attendance at ASA annual meetings is designed to directly support its program objectives and maintain the high quality of its statistical work and the competence of its professional staff. In particular, the increase in the number of staff members sent to the annual meetings from 51 in 1975 to 88 in 1976 and 95 in 1977 was the result of a policy decision to stimulate greater participation for

the Bureau's benefit. The cost for travel and per diem for the 1977 meeting was \$19,000. There may be a few marginal cases about which judgments would differ as to the justification for attendance of the employee at government expense. However, we believe that the Bureau's policy is in line with the spirit as well as the letter of OMB guidelines, and that the activities of Bureau attendees at the meetings are well programmed to yield benefits to the Bureau's work.