



Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General

September 19, 2007



Why We Did This Review

To prompt a fuller accounting of American Indians living on reservations in 2010, Census added a new query to the census coverage question that specifically asks if other individuals or families reside in the home. It also used a separate, downstream operation, called coverage follow-up, for collecting information from households identified through the coverage question as potentially having additional members. These modifications were put to the test in spring 2006 on the Cheyenne River Reservation. We evaluated the conduct and early outcomes of the update/enumerate test, taking a specific look at the impact of the new query on improving “within household coverage”—that is, counting all members of reservation households—and the success of the overall operation in accurately counting the reservation population. We also assessed whether enumerators updated maps and address lists correctly and quality control staff provided an effective quality check of these revisions.

Background

American Indians have historically been undercounted in decennial censuses. Enumerating those who live on large, rural reservations is especially difficult because several families frequently share a single residence. During the census, family members may be unwilling or unable to accurately report how many people actually reside at the address. In update/enumerate Census staff go door to door to collect population data and to correct, as needed, the bureau-generated maps and address lists used to locate housing units.

View the full report at www.oig.doc.gov/oig/reports/2007/OSE-18027.pdf.

U.S. Census Bureau

2010 Census: Key Challenges to Enumerating American Indian Reservations Unresolved by 2006 Census Test

(OSE-18027)

What We Found

We determined that the update/enumerate process was flawed by three primary problems that caused frequent errors and kept the operation from finishing:

1. The unclear, inaccurate maps and incomplete address lists generated during address canvassing and supplied to update/enumerate staff prevented enumerators from finding a significant number of housing units and quality control staff from completing their follow-up checks.
2. Update/enumerate staff did not have GPS technology to compensate for the poor maps and address lists.
3. The multitude of errors made during enumeration caused a higher than expected number of areas to fail quality control and require recanvassing, which in turn overwhelmed the quality control check and crippled the progress of the operation.

We also found that the change to the census questionnaire designed to more accurately count all household members identified only 16 households with additional residents and added only *one* person to the reservation’s census numbers.

Finally, we noted that despite the difficult challenges to improving the count of reservation populations, the Census Bureau did not have any headquarters official whose principal responsibility was to plan and implement the 2006 update/enumerate test for American Indian reservations. Although many employees work on American Indian issues, no headquarters official was assigned leadership responsibility for the operation or charged with the singular task of improving enumeration on reservations for 2010.

What We Recommended

We recommended that the bureau assign a senior headquarters official specific responsibility for leading the effort to identify, implement, and monitor changes to the update/enumerate process on American Indian reservations. This effort should, at a minimum, generate actions to improve the maps and address lists for update/enumerate staff.

To accomplish this goal, Census should consider (1) adding current landmark information and community names to maps and (2) giving field staff handheld computers or an alternative off-the-shelf GPS device in conjunction with the housing unit GPS coordinate information obtained during address canvassing. We also recommended that the bureau modify quality control procedures to better identify missed or duplicated housing units; enhance staff training to ensure the coverage question is asked as intended; and reconsider the decision to delay collecting information on additional household members to a later operation.