



Highlights of [GAO-08-886T](#), a testimony to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

On April 3, 2008, the Secretary of Commerce announced significant changes to how the Census Bureau (Bureau) would conduct nonresponse follow-up, its largest field operation, in which census workers interview households that do not return initial census forms for the 2010 decennial census, and to its Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) contract. The Bureau has since issued a redesigned plan to conduct a paper-based follow-up operation, an integrated 2010 Census project schedule, and is working on revising the FDCA contract. These are major changes late in the decennial census cycle. This testimony discusses (1) the Bureau's plans for conducting a paper-based nonresponse follow-up operation, (2) management of the FDCA contract and its latest cost estimates, and (3) the status of the Bureau's integrated 2010 project schedule. This testimony is based on past work, recent interviews with Bureau officials, and a review of redesign documents.

What GAO Recommends

At this time GAO is not making any new recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-886T](#). For more information, contact Mathew Scire at (202) 512-6806 or sciremj@gao.gov or David Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

2010 CENSUS

Plans for Decennial Census Operations and Technology Have Progressed, But Much Uncertainty Remains

What GAO Found

The Bureau has taken important steps to plan for a paper-based nonresponse follow-up operation, but several aspects remain uncertain. On May 8, 2008, the Bureau issued a paper-based nonresponse follow-up plan that details key components of the operation and describes processes for managing it and other operations. However, the plan envisions using an information system to manage the field operation workload, which experienced significant problems when tested earlier in the dress rehearsal. These problems make it more critical to test the system's capabilities for supporting the nonresponse follow-up operation. The Bureau will also institute new strategies—through second mailings and a new approach to remove late mail returns—but has only tested some aspects of these operations and will be unable to test them in a dress rehearsal, making it difficult to estimate their impact on operations in 2010. Ideally, the dress rehearsal should test almost all of the operations and procedures planned for the decennial under as close to census-like conditions as possible. Bureau officials expect that some small-scale testing will occur, particularly integration testing for its operations control system and cognitive testing of the forms used by enumerators for nonresponse follow-up, but what will be tested and when is not yet certain.

The Bureau has taken several positive steps to address FDCA program management and oversight, but cost estimates need reconciling. The Bureau has taken actions to strengthen the FDCA program office leadership and expertise. To lead the program office, the Bureau has assigned an experienced Census program manager and hired an outside information technology expert to provide executive level guidance. The Bureau has also taken actions to improve communications and transparency of contractor activities. Further, the Bureau has obtained an independent government cost estimate based on the changes to the FDCA program's scope, which is nearly \$600 million less than the contractor's rough order of magnitude estimate. After the contractor develops its detailed cost estimate, then the Bureau will need to reconcile the two cost estimates and renegotiate the contract. The Bureau will need to ensure that the final contract modifications and terms allow for FDCA program activities to be conducted in a timely and accurate manner for the 2010 decennial census.

The Bureau's integrated schedule, dated May 22, 2008, identifies over 11,000 activities and milestones for the census. There is overlap in the testing and deployment schedule for the handheld device that will be used to collect address data in the field. Further, the Bureau's summary of key milestones does not include a milestone for when testing of key activities related to nonresponse follow-up will take place. Such milestones are important because nonresponse follow-up is the single largest field operation and will not be part of a dress rehearsal. The Bureau recognizes that it could include a key milestone for nonresponse follow-up testing activities. GAO is reviewing in greater detail the summary and integrated schedule of milestones and a summary of program risks provided on June 4th.