



2000 CENSUS

Coverage Measurement Programs' Results, Costs, and Lessons Learned

Highlights of [GAO-03-287](#), a report to Chairman, Subcommittee on Civil Service, Census, and Agency Organization, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

To help measure the quality of the 2000 Census and to possibly adjust for any errors, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) conducted the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (A.C.E.) program. However, after obligating around \$207 million for A.C.E. and its predecessor program, Integrated Coverage Measurement (I.C.M.), from fiscal years 1996 through 2001, the Bureau did not use either program to adjust the census numbers. Concerned about the amount of money the Bureau spent on I.C.M. and A.C.E. programs and what was produced in return, the subcommittee asked us to review the objectives and results of the programs, the costs of consultants, and how best to track future coverage measurement activities.

What GAO Recommends

The Secretary of Commerce should direct the Bureau to (1) work with Congress and other stakeholders and soon decide on whether and how coverage measurement will be used in 2010, (2) adopt lessons learned from its 2000 Census experience, and (3) ensure that its financial management systems can capture and report program activities early and that projects' costs are monitored. The Bureau agreed with our recommendations but noted that for the 2000 Census, it followed the steps we identified as lessons learned. It also took exception to how we presented our conclusions concerning its ability to properly classify certain costs.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-287.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Patricia A. Dalton at (202) 512-6806 or daltonp@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

As shown below, the two programs the Bureau employed to measure the quality of the 2000 Census population data did not meet their objectives.

Coverage Measurement Programs Did Not Achieve Objectives

| Program/objectives | Objectives met? | Reasons |
|--|-----------------|--|
| I.C.M. | | |
| • Measure census coverage | No | Program was canceled following January 1999 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the Census Act prohibits the use of sampling to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. |
| • Generate data for apportionment, redistricting, and federal programs using statistical sampling and estimation | No | |
| • Produce a "one-number" census | No | |
| A.C.E. | | |
| • Measure census coverage | No | Uncertainties surrounding the accuracy of the A.C.E. results and the inability to resolve them in time to meet legally mandated deadlines for releasing data. |
| • Generate data needed for redistricting and other purposes using statistical methods | No | |

Source: GAO.

Note: This table reflects GAO's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

The A.C.E. program achieved results other than those laid out in the Bureau's formal objectives that highlight important lessons learned. They include (1) developing a coverage measurement methodology that is both operationally and technically feasible, (2) determining the level of geography at which coverage measurement is intended, (3) keeping stakeholders, particularly Congress, informed of the Bureau's plans, and (4) adequately testing coverage measurement methodologies. It will be important for the Bureau to consider these as its current plans for the 2010 Census include coverage evaluation to measure the accuracy of the census but not necessarily to adjust the results.

Of the roughly \$207 million the Bureau obligated for I.C.M./A.C.E. programs from fiscal years 1996 through 2001, we identified about \$22.3 million that was obligated for contracts involving over 170 vendors. We could not identify any obligations prior to 1996 in part because the Bureau included them with its general research and development efforts and did not assign the I.C.M./A.C.E. operations unique project codes in its financial management system. To track these costs in the future, it will be important for the Bureau to (1) have a financial management system that has specific project codes to capture coverage measurement costs, (2) establish the project codes as early in the planning process as possible, and (3) monitor the usage of the codes to ensure that they are properly charged.