

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-9](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

A rigorous testing and evaluation program is a critical component of the census planning process because it helps the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) assess activities that show promise for a more cost-effective head count. The Bureau conducted a field test in 2004, and we were asked to (1) assess the soundness of the test design and the extent to which the Bureau implemented it consistent with its plans, (2) review the quality of the Bureau's information technology (IT) security practices, and (3) identify initial lessons learned from conducting the test and their implications for future tests and the 2010 Census.

What GAO Recommends

We recommend that the Secretary of Commerce direct the Bureau to address the shortcomings revealed during the 2004 test. Specific actions include enhancing the Bureau's IT security practices; improving the reliability of hand-held computer (HHC) transmissions; developing a more strategic approach to training; and ensuring that all systems are test ready. The Bureau should also regularly update Congress on its progress in addressing these issues and meeting its 2010 goals. The Bureau generally agreed with most of our recommendations, but took exception to two of them concerning certain census activities and their impact on Bureau objectives. However, we believe those recommendations still apply.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-9.

To view the full product, 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.

2010 CENSUS

Basic Design Has Potential, but Remaining Challenges Need Prompt Resolution

What GAO Found

The Bureau's design for the 2004 census test addressed important components of a sound study, and the Bureau generally implemented the test as planned. For example, the Bureau clearly identified its research objectives, developed research questions that supported those objectives, and developed evaluation plans for each of the test's 11 research questions.

The initial results of the test suggest that while certain new procedures show promise for improving the cost-effectiveness of the census, the Bureau will have to first address a number of problems that could jeopardize a successful head count. For example, enumerators had little trouble using hand held computers (HHC) to collect household data and remove late mail returns. The computers could reduce the Bureau's reliance on paper questionnaires and maps and thus save money. The test results also suggest that certain refinements the Bureau made to its procedures for counting dormitories, nursing homes, and other "group quarters" could help prevent the miscounting of this population group.

The 2004 Census Test Was Conducted in Rural Georgia and Queens, New York

COLQUITT, THOMAS, and TIFT COUNTIES...

Census Workers are in Your Neighborhood

If the U.S. Census Bureau did not receive your 2004 Census Test form, a census worker will come to your door. Please answer their questions.

Census Worker's Tools:

Badge, Handheld Computer, Bag

U.S. Census Bureau

2004 CENSUS TEST

For more information about the 2004 Census Test, call 877-648-9819

One of the primary responsibilities of the U.S. Census Bureau is to count every person in the United States. Census workers will come to your door to help you with your 2004 Census Test form. Please answer their questions.

ASTORIA, CORONA, ELMHURST, EAST ELMHURST, JACKSON HEIGHTS, LONG ISLAND CITY, WOODSIDE

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The Bureau conducted a 2004 census test in Queens, New York and three counties in rural Georgia. The test focused on using HHCs for conducting nonresponse follow-up interviews—where census workers go door-to-door to count those households that did not mail back their census forms. The Bureau also tested new methods for improving coverage, redesigned race and ethnicity questions, and improved methods for defining and identifying group quarters. The Bureau established these test objectives to help meet its goals for improving accuracy, reducing risk, and containing the cost of the 2010 Census.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Other aspects of the test did not go as smoothly. For example, security practices for the Bureau's IT systems had weaknesses; the HHCs had problems transmitting data; questionnaire items designed to improve coverage and better capture race/ethnicity confused respondents; enumerators sometimes deviated from prescribed enumeration procedures; and certain features of the test were not fully operational at the time of the test, which hampered the Bureau from fully gauging their performance. With few testing opportunities remaining, it will be important for (1) the Bureau to find the source of these problems, devise cost-effective solutions, and integrate refinements before the next field test scheduled for 2006, and (2) Congress to monitor the Bureau's progress in resolving these issues.