



*Census Bureau*

*2010 Census:  
Cooperation Between Partnership  
Staff and Local Census Office  
Managers Challenged  
by Communication and  
Coordination Problems*

*Final Report OIG-11-023-I*

*April 8, 2011*

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

*Office of Audit and Evaluation*





April 8, 2011

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** Robert M. Groves  
Director, U.S. Census Bureau

**FROM:** *for* Ron Prevost *John C. Eilers*  
Assistant Inspector General for Economic  
and Statistical Program Assessment

**SUBJECT:** Report No. OIG-11-023-I, *2010 Census: Cooperation Between Partnership Staff and Local Census Office Managers Challenged by Communication and Coordination Problems*

This memorandum transmits the final report on the Census Partnership Program. The report examines the relationship between local Census office managers and Partnership staff, including the new Recovery Act-funded Partnership Assistants.

We briefed your staff regarding our findings and recommendations on February 17, 2011, and provided you with a draft report on February 28. In short, we found that Partnership staff and operations managers experienced systemic communication and coordination problems. In addition, we found that the views of operations managers toward the Partnership program were influenced by the guidance the managers received, with managers reporting effective guidance tending to report more favorable views of the Partnership program. For subsequent decennials, we recommend that the bureau (1) align Partnership activities and objectives with LCO schedules to remedy current systemic shortcomings and (2) ensure joint Partnership-LCO manager training as part of the decennial process. With respect to the Partnership Assistants, we found that the Assistants added value to the decennial but also presented challenges. Should the bureau retain the Assistant position in the 2020 Census, we recommend that it (1) refine the recruitment and hiring process (especially through more job-specific examination) and training of Assistants, as well as (2) provide Assistants adequate electronic resources to do their job.

Your March 23 response to our draft report generally agreed with our recommendations. We have summarized the response in our report and included it in its entirety in an appendix. The report will be posted on OIG's website pursuant to section 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

cc: Brian Monaghan, Division Chief, Field Division  
Theodore A. Johnson, Chief Financial Officer  
Marilia A. Matos, Associate Director for Field Operations  
Arnold Jackson, Associate Director for Decennial Census  
Timothy P. Olson, Assistant Division Chief, Partnership and Data Services

Adrienne C. Oneto, Acting Division Chief, Decennial Management Division  
Pamela H. White, Branch Chief, External Liaison Branch  
Adam Miller, Audit Liaison

Attachment



# Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General

April 8, 2011



## Why We Did This Review

The Census Bureau—with 680 Partnership and Data Services Program (Partnership Program) staff positions established for community outreach supporting the 2010 decennial census—received \$1.0 billion in 2009 Recovery Act funds for “Periodic Censuses and Programs” and set aside \$126 million for the Partnership Program.

Approximately 3,000 Partnership employees worked in FY 2009 and 3,800 in FY 2010 (out of more than 165,000 and 782,000 total decennial employees, respectively). The Partnership program spent about \$300 million in FY 2009–2010, out of more than \$8 billion total spent on the decennial in those years.

This report examines, among other things, the relationship between Partnership staff promoting the 2010 decennial and the local Census office (LCO) managers hired to implement it.

## Background

First conducted in 1790, decennial censuses have fulfilled a vital constitutional mandate. The 2010 Census enumerated more than 300 million people. The results provide important data that will guide Congressional apportionment and redistricting, as well as the distribution of more than \$400 billion of government funding annually.

For the 2010 decennial, Census integrated 44 separate operations (totaling some 9,400 program- and project-level activities). Temporary bureau management staff ran 494 local offices and managed over 600,000 temporary workers. Additionally, Census hired Partnership Specialists who primarily recruited local partners and provided support for decennial operations. The bureau spent approximately half of its \$126 million Recovery Act Partnership Program funding to establish a new position, Partnership Assistant, to provide additional support to the program.

## Census Bureau

### ***2010 Census: Cooperation Between Partnership Staff and Local Census Office Managers Challenged by Communication and Coordination Problems (OIG–11–023–I)***

## What We Found

The Partnership Program primarily assisted decennial operations by interfacing with hard-to-count groups, populations who have historically been undercounted or traditionally have not responded well to the decennial census questionnaire (e.g., ethnic or minority populations, renters, or low-income people). To accomplish its goal, the Program collaborated with partners (including local and tribal governments, community and religious organizations, schools, businesses, and the media) in communities within a Census regional office area. Partners pledged their commitment to share the Census message and mobilized their constituents in support of the decennial count. According to the bureau, there were approximately 257,000 regional Census partners.

To connect these community partners with Census required Partnership to collaborate with LCOs. However, we found that Partnership operated independent of LCO production time-lines—and the two groups experienced systemic communication and coordination problems:

- *The relationship between Partnership staff and LCO managers suffered from misunderstanding and miscommunication.*
- *LCO managers lacking good guidance about Partnership tended to hold unfavorable views of the program.*

We also examined the new, Recovery Act-funded Partnership Assistant position, finding that it added value to the program but also presented challenges:

- *The Partnership Assistants were not subject to thorough screening and were varied in their workplace skills.*
- *Greater access to equipment and systems, as well as improved training and technical support, would help Partnership Assistants improve performance.*

## What We Recommended

For subsequent decennial censuses, we recommend that the Census Bureau:

- *Specify how to align Partnership activities and objectives with LCO schedules to remedy current systemic shortcomings*
- *Ensure joint Partnership–LCO manager training as part of the decennial process*

Should the bureau retain the Partnership Assistant position in the 2020 Census, we recommend that it:

- *Refine the recruitment and hiring process (especially through more job-specific examination) and training of Partnership Assistants*
- *Provide Partnership Assistants adequate electronic resources to do their job, a key to efficient and effective Partnership programming*

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## Introduction

The Census Bureau—which already maintained 680 Partnership and Data Services Program (Partnership Program) staff positions—received, in 2009, \$1.0 billion from the 2009 Recovery Act for “Periodic Censuses and Programs” and set aside \$126 million for the Partnership Program. The Partnership Program aimed “to get people (especially hard-to-count population groups) to fill out the 2010 questionnaire and send it back.”<sup>1</sup> “Hard-to-count” refers to groups or populations who have historically been undercounted or traditionally have not responded well to the decennial census questionnaire (e.g., ethnic or minority populations, renters, or low-income people).

To accomplish its goal, the Program collaborated with partners including state, local, and tribal governments; community-based organizations; faith-based groups; schools; media outlets; businesses; and other grassroots entities in communities within a Census regional office area. Partners pledged their commitment to share the Census message and mobilized their constituents in support of the decennial count. According to the bureau, there were approximately 257,000 regional Census partners.

Approximately 3,000 Census employees worked in the Partnership Program in FY 2009 and 3,800 in FY 2010 (out of more than 165,000 and 782,000 total decennial employees, respectively). The Partnership Program spent about \$300 million in FY 2009 and 2010, out of more than \$8 billion total spent on the decennial in those years.

In addition, Census hired Partnership Specialists (“Specialists”) who primarily recruited local partners and provided support for decennial Census operations. Also, the bureau spent approximately half of its \$126 million Recovery Act Partnership Program funding to establish a new position, Partnership Assistant (“Assistant”), to provide additional support to the program.

This report examines the relationship between two categories of Census employees: (1) Partnership staff (Specialists and Assistants) hired to promote the decennial and (2) the local Census office (LCO) managers hired to implement it. We found that the two groups experienced systemic communication and coordination problems. The report also examines the new

### Census Outreach: 1970–2010

1970: The Community Educators Program seeks to increase communication between local and national organizations and the Census Bureau.

1980: The Community Services Program expands on the outreach program.

1990: The Census Community Awareness and Products Program targets minority groups on a local level.

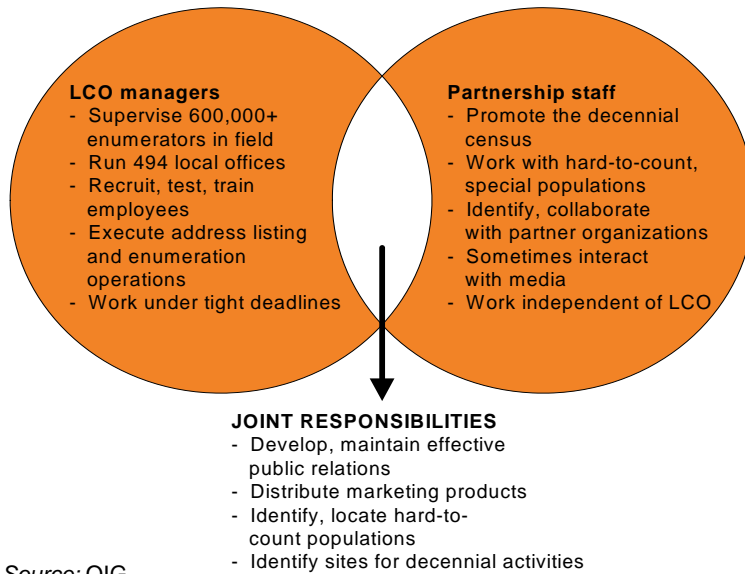
2000: The Census Partnership Program reaches out to governments, organizations, media, and businesses, as well as the general public.

2010: The Partnership and Data Services Program creates partnerships with national governmental and nongovernmental organizations; state, local, and tribal governments; and community groups.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>1</sup> 2010 Census, *Partnership and Data Services, Building Partnerships: Program Components, Partnership Specialist, Participant Guide and Reference Manual*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, December 2008, 1-1.

**LCO Management and the Partnership Program:  
Distinct Roles, Joint Responsibilities**



Source: OIG

Assistant position, finding that it added value to the program but also presented challenges. (See Appendix B for a simplified chain of command.)

As part of our evaluation, we sent opinion surveys to Partnership staff<sup>2</sup> and LCO managers.<sup>3</sup> Further, we interviewed Census Regional Directors, gaining the benefit of their experience and institutional perspective, and to whom both Partnership staff and LCO managers were accountable. Appendix A includes the full scope of our work.

Census—which often does not provide Partnership staff work space in LCOs, leaving them to work out of home or in the community—has not

fully integrated Partnership into LCO timelines. As a result, communication and coordination problems with LCOs hampered crucial Partnership efforts. In principle, the Partnership Program supports LCOs by, among other things, obtaining commitments for use of sites for a wide range of decennial activity (see diagram for delineated responsibilities). In general, we found Partnership employees under the impression that LCO managers had used these sites. However, LCO managers reported the opposite: often they were unable to use sites they were counting on. From LCO managers' perspective, this resulted in time lost to additional, unplanned work during high-pressured decennial operations.

Additionally, we found that the Assistants added value to the Program but presented challenges. Although the Partnership staff reported generally positive views of the Assistants, they also reported that, as a group, Assistants varied in their workplace skills and should have been subject to a more selective hiring process. Partnership staff tended to report that the limited resources afforded the Assistants made management difficult—and greater access to those resources, to accomplish their jobs, could have improved Assistants' performance.

In our December 2009 *2010 Census: Quarterly Report to Congress*, we expressed our concerns about Specialists' preparedness to supervise Assistants—and began to monitor the Partnership Program and Census's accountability of these employees' performance. Because surveys provide self-reported information, we contacted both LCO managers and Partnership staff to obtain well-rounded views on Partnership effectiveness. The results point the way toward future challenges—evaluations tackling hard-to-quantify issues. For instance: what success did the 2010 Partnership Program achieve? How did it fall short? And where should Census outreach go in 2020 and beyond?

<sup>2</sup> At the time of our survey, there were 834 Partnership Specialists, 90 Senior Partnership Specialists, and 13 Partnership Coordinators, according to bureau payroll records. We refer to these employees collectively as "Partnership staff."

<sup>3</sup> We surveyed LCO Managers (LCOMs), Assistant Managers for Quality Assurance (AMQAs), and Area Managers (AMs). Each of the 494 LCOs has an LCOM and an AMQA. In addition, at the time of the survey, there were 79 AMs. We refer to these employees collectively as "LCO managers."

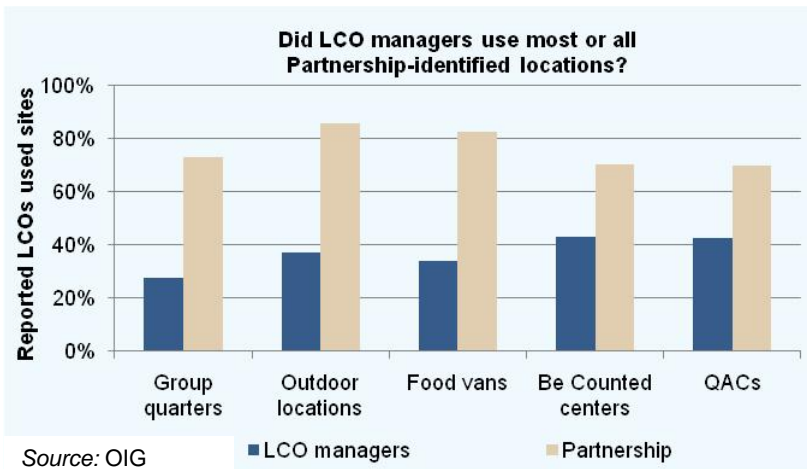
## Findings and Recommendations

### I. The Partnership Program and LCO Managers Experienced Systemic Communication and Coordination Problems

#### A. The Relationship Between Partnership Staff and LCO Managers Suffered from Misunderstanding and Miscommunication

Partnership staff and operations managers held opposing views of what Partnership staff accomplished for critical decennial operations. LCO managers relied on Partnership staff to identify locations for Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs) and Be Counted sites.<sup>4</sup> When

**Figure 1. Partnership and LCO Managers: Conflicting Views**



Source: OIG

and use of locations for the Service-Based Enumeration (which included mobile food vans and unsheltered outdoor locations<sup>5</sup>) and Group Quarters Enumeration operations.<sup>6</sup> (In **figure 1**, note the large discrepancy between the views of “LCO managers” and “Partnership.”)

These decennial operations required extensive coordination, preparation, and local knowledge. However, one LCO manager noted misunderstandings between these two groups about responsibilities. A manager from a different region observed that sometimes Operations managers and Partnership staff received conflicting information, possibly as a result of the decennial’s organizational structure.

<sup>4</sup> Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs) were staffed sites established to assist people with completing their questionnaires or who needed language assistance. Be Counted sites (often co-located with QACs) provided blank questionnaires to people who believed they were not included in the decennial.

<sup>5</sup> Service-Based Enumeration counted people who are experiencing homelessness. Mobile food vans were among the places where people experiencing homelessness receive services. Unsheltered outdoor locations the bureau targeted included parks, alleys, and bridges.

<sup>6</sup> The Group Quarters population consisted of all persons residing in the United States who do not live in housing units such as single-family houses, apartments, and mobile homes, but rather in group situations such as college dormitories, nursing homes, military barracks, prisons, juvenile institutions, migrant worker dormitories, convents, and group homes.



**The bureau’s written guidance for Partnership staff and LCO managers presented conflicting messages on Partnership staff job responsibilities.** The bureau’s written guidance for LCO managers emphasized the Partnership’s cooperating role, while its Partnership guidance tended to understate the Partnership’s working relationship with the LCO managers. This model for the Partnership–LCO relationship conveyed mixed messages—and no formalized methods for holding Partnership to LCO schedules—resulting, in part, in Partnership contributions far less productive and timely than many LCOMs had hoped.

*LCO guidance.* The bureau’s manual for Assistant Managers for Quality Assurance (AMQAs), a key LCO position, called Specialists “vital” to outreach success and stressed that AMQAs and “Partnership Specialists must . . . establish and maintain a team environment” to establish Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be Counted sites.

Unlike the AMQA manual, the LCO manager manual did not put them in such a position of reliance. In fact, the manual referred to previous misunderstandings of the Partnership’s role in LCOs by telling managers that Specialists are “not assistant managers [but] almost like consultants or your public relations barometers.” Further, the LCO manager training agenda devoted only 30 minutes (out of three days) to the Partnership program, emphasizing working and coordinating with Specialists. However, neither manager’s manual specified how LCO managers were to align Partnership contributions with LCO schedules. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in LCO manager and AMQA survey responses. Both groups expressed similar levels of dissatisfaction with Partnership staff.

*Partnership guidance.* The Partnership staff training manual did not emphasize cooperation to the extent that the LCO managers’ manuals did: “[O]n a secondary level, the Partnership Specialists will work with the Local Census Office to support operations. During the course of a Specialist’s job, tie-ins to the operations will inevitably arise.” Further, only one chapter out of 13 in the training manual outlined the Specialist role in operations. Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be Counted appeared among 10 operations briefly described. Nothing in Partnership guidance specified how LCO managers would hold Specialists accountable to LCO production schedules.

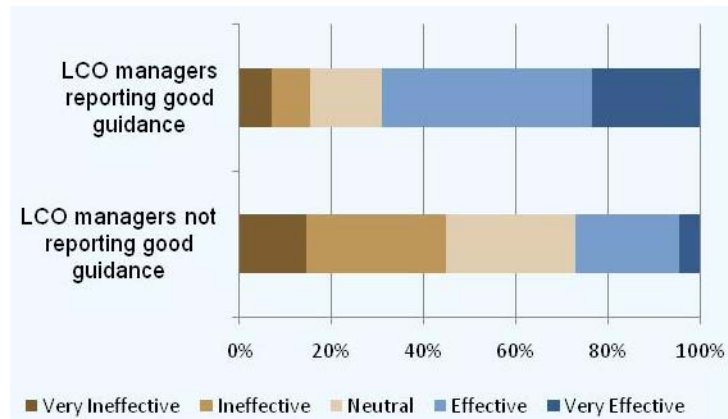
The bureau’s Specialist position description was consistent with LCO managers’ guidance, saying that the position’s major duties included LCO support through “[working] effectively and efficiently with the operational staff in providing support to census field operations. . . . This will require integration with operational staff in . . . the Local Census Offices as well as the Regional Census Centers.”

In other words, we see from the written guidance that while some at the bureau appear to have embraced a cooperative and supportive Partnership–LCO manager relationship, that message became fragmented and diluted, requiring specific management intervention to repair.

**The challenges of the Partnership–LCO manager relationship were well-known among Regional Directors.** One Regional Director saw the problem as a decennial constant: “You cannot eliminate friction between the Partnership and [LCOs].” Partnership is concerned with building relationships and working with people; LCOs are focused on production, meeting deadlines, and reaching quotas, this Regional Director noted.

Another Regional Director offered a different perspective: “They both need to understand their roles. [LCO managers] need to understand that the Partnership must focus on hard to count, that

**Figure 2. How Effective Was the Partnership Program?**



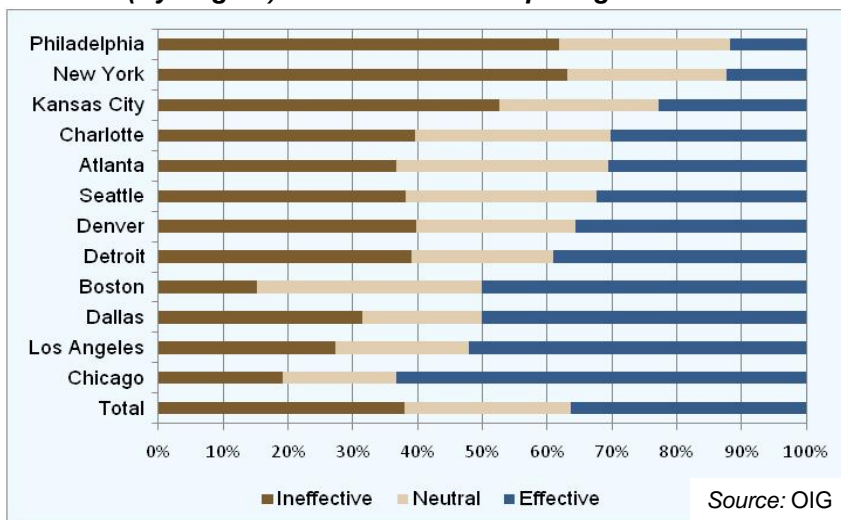
Source: OIG

they’re not special assistants to the LCOM.” This Regional Director observed that the most frustrated LCO managers had little or no assistance from Partnership staff, often because a particular office lacked sufficient hard-to-count population to warrant significant Partnership assistance. This same Regional Director noted the need to “manage expectations” among Partnership and LCO managers.

**B. LCO Managers Lacking Good Guidance About Partnership Tended to Hold Unfavorable Views of the Program**

Partnership staff and LCO managers expressed dramatically different views of the Partnership Program. Partnership staff overwhelmingly reported favorable views of their own program, with 94 percent responding “Very Effective” or “Effective” to that survey question. On the other hand, only 36 percent of LCO managers reported the same view, with a virtually equal number saying the Program was “Very Ineffective” or “Ineffective.” However, the views of the LCO managers were influenced by guidance they may have received about Partnership. Among those reporting receiving at least “Effective” guidance about working with Partnership staff, nearly 70 percent reported a favorable view of the program.<sup>7</sup> (Note, in **figure 2**, the contrasting views of well-informed LCO managers [top] compared to less-informed managers [bottom].)

**Figure 3. Asked of LCO Managers: How Effective (By Region) Was the Partnership Program?**



Source: OIG

percent reported a favorable view of the program.<sup>7</sup> (Note, in **figure 2**, the contrasting views of well-informed LCO managers [top] compared to less-informed managers [bottom].)

In addition, there were pronounced regional differences in attitudes among LCO managers. As seen in **figure 3**, half or more of the managers responding in the Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, and Dallas regions reported favorable views of Partnership, with Chicago in particular showing

<sup>7</sup> However, only 23 percent of LCO managers who answered the question, or 192 respondents, reported receiving “Very Effective” or “Effective” guidance—these are the managers of whom 70 percent favorably viewed the Partnership Program. Seventeen percent said they received no guidance at all.

64 percent favorable. Meanwhile, in the New York, Philadelphia, and Kansas City regions, more than half of respondents reported negative views.

We found no survey data that explained these regional differences. In particular, we found no relationship between the views of LCO managers and the proportion of hard-to-count populations in a region, or other factors that could account for a variety of challenges. Improving the Partnership–LCO manager relationship will result in a more efficient and, perhaps, more accurate Census—unencumbered by outreach inefficiencies, mismatched goals and expectations, or significant resentment and frustration.

### **Recommendations**

For subsequent decennial censuses, we recommend that the Census Bureau:

1. *Specify how to align Partnership activities and objectives with LCO schedules to remedy current systemic shortcomings.* Other adjustments to Partnership–LCO manager misalignment may include clarifying both the separate and shared responsibilities of Partnership staff and LCO managers. Along with common timelines, this helps each party better manage their relative skills and expectations.
2. *Ensure joint Partnership–LCO manager training as part of the decennial process.* Adequate joint training would communicate and align complementary and differing roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

## **II. Partnership Assistants Added Value to Partnership but Presented Challenges**

Census hired Assistants to raise public awareness of the 2010 Census by staffing or attending activities at local events, festivals, fairs and meetings; helping Specialists conduct outreach with communities traditionally hard to count; preparing presentations and promotional materials and distributing materials to partners and the public. Assistants were also to collaborate with Specialists to identify testing and training space; maintain files; schedule appointments and make follow-up phone calls on behalf of Specialists; and provide linguistic support. Census’s hasty addition of Assistants to the Partnership Program (in response to unanticipated Recovery Act funds) may account for some of the workforce inconsistencies we found.

### ***A. Regional Directors and Partnership Staff Generally Reported Favorable Views of Partnership Assistants***

Overall, 87 percent of Partnership staff and 41 percent of LCO managers said that Assistants were “Very Effective” or “Effective.” However, among LCO managers reporting good communication with Assistants, 81 percent concluded that they were either “Very Effective” or “Effective.”<sup>8</sup>

Regional Directors felt positively about the Assistants. One Regional Director characterized the Assistants as a “huge advantage to us,” saying that in that region Assistants were especially helpful with languages and recruiting. Another Regional Director noted that the quick assembly of the Assistant program resulted in a varying regional styles of implementation.

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<sup>8</sup> Forty-two percent, or 364, of Operations managers answering the question reported good communication with Partnership Assistants.

Partnership staff found the Assistants were effective at distributing materials, working with hard-to-count populations, and managing partner relationships and commitments. One Specialist wrote that given the large geographic area he was assigned, the Partnership Assistants were especially helpful.

These findings suggest that good communication with Assistants was associated with favorable views of their effectiveness—and that management intervention to improve communication between the Assistants and LCO managers would improve LCO managers’ views of them.

***B. The Partnership Assistants Were Not Subject to Thorough Screening and Were Varied in Their Workplace Skills***

Only about a quarter of the surveyed Partnership staff had a favorable view of the recruiting and hiring system for Assistants, with many commenting that Partnership Assistants should have been subject to a more selective hiring process. **Table 1** shows agreement between Partnership staff and Operations managers with respect to the strengths and needed skills Assistants possessed.

**Table 1. Partnership Staff and LCO Managers Agree on Assistants’ Skills**

Current Skills	Needed Skills
Identifying local resources	Using Census forms and procedures
Understanding the importance of the Census	Recruiting temporary field employees from hard-to-count groups for enumeration
Knowledge of the local community	Scheduling

Source: OIG

***C. Greater Access to Equipment and Systems, as Well as Improved Training and Technical Support, Would Help Partnership Assistants Improve Performance***

Assistants worked flexible schedules, often 22–36 hours per week from their homes and in the field. The bureau provided cell phones to Assistants but not laptop computers, Census email accounts and editing capability in the Integrated Partner Contact Database (IPCD).<sup>9</sup> The limited resources available to Assistants hindered communication among Assistants, other Partnership staff, and LCOs—and intensified the challenges of managing Assistants. When asked how Census could improve the Assistant role, a Specialist commented that Partnership Assistants should have had access to the IPCD. Data entry is time-consuming, this respondent noted, and bureau management’s expectation that Specialists could maintain the database, in addition to their other duties, was not realistic.

Enabling Assistants to complete more of their tasks (e.g., entering IPCD data themselves) would have been a much more efficient and valuable use of staff. Supervising these Assistants also posed difficulties. Slightly more than half of the supervising Specialists found the training and guidance they received on how to supervise the Assistants “Very Effective” or “Effective.” According to responses to one question, slightly less than 40 percent did not use the bureau’s assignment sheet system to track Assistant-related activities. Instead, they monitored and verified

<sup>9</sup> A Web-based contact management tool designed to capture external contacts, activities, and communications with partner organizations, the IPCD generates management reports by region.

the Assistants' work through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations, site visits, non-bureau email, and following up with Census partners.

**Recommendations**

Assuming the retention of the Assistant position in the 2020 Census, we recommend that the bureau:

1. Refine the recruitment and hiring process (especially through more job-specific examination) and training of Assistants.
2. Provide Assistants adequate electronic resources to do their job, a key to efficient and effective Partnership programming.

## **Summary of Agency and OIG Comments**

In its official response to our draft report, Census generally agreed with our recommendations to better align the Partnership Program's activities and objectives with the Local Census Offices and to improve training and recruitment of the Partnership Assistants, should they be employed in the 2020 Census.

Separately, Census expressed concern that our report was too narrow in scope—which, they assert, has the effect of overstating the impact of the survey findings that are the basis of the report. Census also states that the survey results do not provide a useful evaluation of the Partnership Program's overall effectiveness. However, this report, one of many evaluative measures of the 2010 Census, did not set out to address the overall effectiveness of the Partnership Program; it was part of our oversight of the Department's Recovery Act spending. Further, to enhance the efficiency of decennial census oversight, OIG worked with Census and the Government Accountability Office to ensure that we did not have overlapping missions and measurements. Census also asserts that the surveys only reveal expected variation among LCO managers concerning the work of Partnership Specialists. We maintain that the extent of the variation and the totality of the survey results support our characterization of the communication and coordination problems between the Partnership Program and LCOs as systemic.

As the bureau prepares for the 2020 Census Partnership Program over the next decade, we look forward to monitoring and reviewing its plans.

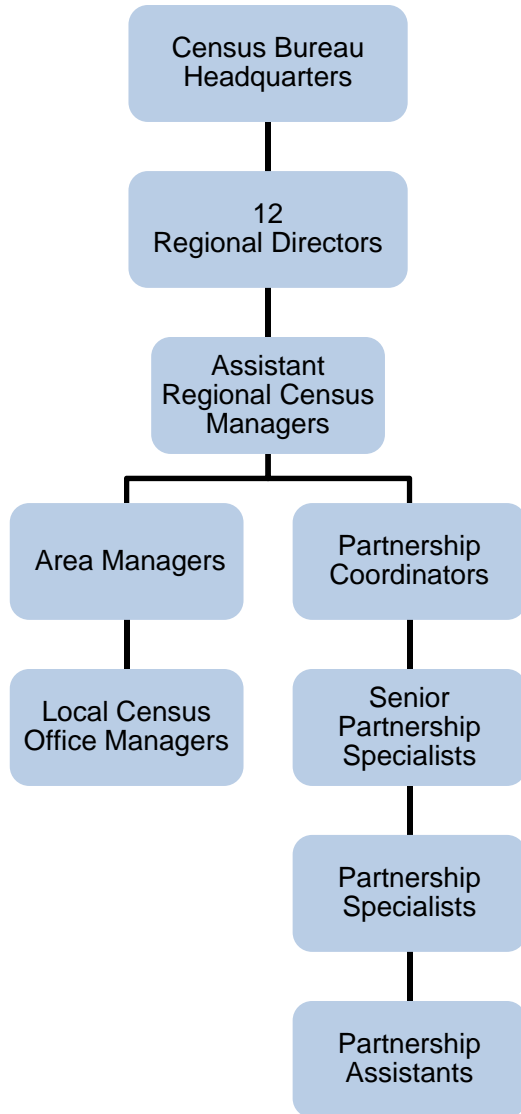
## **Appendix A: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology**

This report comprises part of OIG's comprehensive 2010 decennial review and oversight of the Commerce Department's Recovery Act spending. Our objective was to evaluate the relationship between the Census Partnership and Data Services (Partnership) Program and local Census office (LCO) managers, as well as assess the role of Partnership Assistants. To accomplish this, we surveyed both Partnership staff and LCO managers in all 12 Census regions, having developed potential respondent lists after consulting Census headquarters staff. (We did not survey Partnership Assistants [Assistants], the majority of whom concluded work at the end of April 2010. These Assistants had no bureau email addresses and there was no Assistant directory to assist the survey process.) To develop questions, we used Partnership training materials and job descriptions, consulted with Census staff, and referred to conventional employee satisfaction surveys. We also conducted follow-up interviews with a majority of the bureau's 12 Regional Directors in order to benefit from their long-term, institutional perspective.

We used email to contact potential respondents and the web-based Survey Monkey™ tool to collect survey responses. Partnership staff had access to the survey May 10–17, 2010 (for many Partnership staff, the near-end of their Census bureau employment). There were 698 responses, a response rate of 74 percent. The LCO manager survey was available from June 16–30, 2010, during the last major decennial field operation. There were 906 responses, a response rate of 84 percent. Finally, we used Microsoft Excel® to download survey responses and SAS® for analysis.

We prepared this report under the authorities of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended; Departmental Organization Order 10-13, dated August 31, 2006, as amended; and in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections (revised January 2005) issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

**Appendix B: Simplified Census Bureau Chain of Command:  
LCO Management and Partnership and Data Services Program**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



## Appendix C: Agency Response



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-0001  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

MAR 23 2011

MEMORANDUM FOR Todd J. Zinser  
Inspector General for Audit and Evaluation

Through: Rebecca M. Blank *Rebecca M. Blank*  
Under Secretary for Economic Affairs

From: Robert M. Groves *Robert M. Groves*  
Director

Subject: Draft Report: *2010 Census: Cooperation Between Partnership Staff and Local Census Office Managers Challenged by Poor Communication and Coordination (OIG-11-XXX-1)*

This document is in response to recommendations in your draft report entitled *2010 Census: Cooperation Between Partnership Staff and Local Census Office Managers Challenged by Poor Communication and Coordination (OIG-11-XXX-1)*. The U.S. Census Bureau appreciates the comments and recommendations developed by the Office of Economic and Statistical Program Assessment, Office of Inspector General, in producing this draft report.

Attachment

cc: US/EA

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*Draft Response: 2010 Census: Cooperation Between Partnership  
Staff and Local Census Office Managers Challenged by Poor  
Communication and Coordination*

General Comments

The U.S. Census Bureau generally agrees with the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) recommendations that we need to better align partnerships activities and objectives with the Local Census Offices (LCO), and improve training and recruitment as described in our response to the report below. However, we are concerned that in focusing only on the relationship between Partnership Specialists and LCO managers, OIG examines only one relatively minor component of the Partnerships Program.

During the 2010 Census, Partnership Program staff were responsible for developing partnerships with local, state, and tribal governments; community based organizations; faith based organizations; schools; media outlets; businesses; and other key grassroots organizations who could help advance our mission to conduct a complete and accurate census. Partnership staff also educated the public on how the census is conducted and supported census operations. In all of these efforts their primary goal was to enlist the support of trusted voices in hard-to-count communities to help educate people about the importance of participating in the census. With resounding success, the Partnership staff were able to garner signed partnership pledges from over 250,000 businesses and organizations. They also were instrumental in encouraging community organizations to lend their support to the census. The donation of over 50,000 locations for the 2010 Census recruiting and training centers, at no cost to the federal government, was but one example of the success of this program. This saved the taxpayers over \$179 million.

This report, by singling out just one of the many components of the Partnership Program, implies that this component--Partnership Assistants-- was central to the goals for this program. This implication greatly detracts from the success achieved in this program and overstates the impact of survey findings. Moreover, the survey results reveal only that there was variation among the LCO managers concerning the work of the Partnership Specialists. This is not unexpected—with over 1500 LCO managers and 3,800 partnership specialists and assistants, all of whom were temporary hires; variability is inevitable. We do not believe the survey results provide a useful evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the Partnership Program as measured against the program goals.

OIG Recommendations

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*Specify how to align Partnership activities and objectives with LCO schedules to remedy current systemic shortcomings. Other adjustments to Partnership-LCO manager misalignment may include clarifying both the separate and shared responsibilities of Partnership staff and LCO*

*managers. Along with common timelines, this helps each party better manage their relative skills and expectations.*

**Census Bureau Response:** The roles of partnership staff and Local Census Office (LCO) managers are substantially different and contribute to the view by some LCO managers (not all) that partnership staff did not work effectively or communicate well with the LCO management teams. We believe the resolution to this conflict will, in part, be settled through clear and concise expectations management and stronger clarification of roles.

Partnership staffs work primarily with community leaders and external partner organizations. Partnership's role and interaction with LCO managers are to keep them informed about local issues, provide deeper insight into dynamics that may impact local recruiting and data collection activities, and provide potential locations for testing/training sites and "Be Counted" and Questionnaire Assistance Center sites. In contrast, LCO managers use these lists of potential sites and finalize actual locations based on operational requirements. LCO managers' roles are rooted in conducting census field operations, not community outreach. Clarifying these roles with greater specificity will benefit both groups in the 2020 Census.

LCO timelines are focused on operation-specific data collection activities that take place during peak census periods. Partnership timelines require advance community outreach that begins one to two years earlier than LCO operational activities, well before LCOs are established and management teams hired. Joint training sessions during the 2020 Census could explain the different timelines, along with better role clarification.

*Ensure joint Partnership-LCO manager training as part of the decennial process. Adequate joint training would communicate and align complementary and differing roles, responsibilities, and expectations.*

**Census Bureau Response:** The Census Bureau agrees that training for partnership and operational staff needs to be improved for the 2020 Census. Joint training that involves both groups will be critical in clarifying roles, expectations, timelines, and required communication protocols.

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*Assuming the retention of the Assistant position in the 2020 Census, we recommend that the bureau:*

- *Refine the recruitment and hiring process (especially through more job-specific examination) and training of Assistants.*

**Census Bureau Response:** The Census Bureau agrees that the hiring process for Partnership Assistants must be reevaluated for the 2020 Census. Using the same hiring process that is used for temporary field staff has benefits related to hiring short-term Partnership Assistants. However, the drawback is that specific skill sets may not be adequately considered during the

hiring process. The Census Bureau will review options for the 2020 Census during the mid-decade period and determine any changes needed for implementation.

- *Provide Assistants adequate electronic resources to do their job, a key to efficient and effective Partnership programming.*

**Census Bureau Response:** The Census Bureau agrees that if Partnership Assistants are used as part of the 2020 Census partnership program, they must have adequate communication tools and resources to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. As the Census Bureau moves closer to the 2020 Census implementation phase, a thorough review of electronic resources needed for this position will be considered.