



441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

August 27, 2019

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Chairman
The Honorable Chip Roy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
Committee on Oversight and Reform
House of Representatives

2020 Census: Questions for the Record on Oversight of Outreach to Rural Areas

As part of the hearing on Wednesday, July 24, 2019, "Beyond the Citizenship Question: Repairing the Damage and Prepping to Count 'We the People' in 2020," you submitted a series of questions for the record to us concerning the Census Bureau's efforts to conduct the census in rural areas. Enclosed are GAO's responses. If you have additional questions or concerns, you may reach me at GoldenkoffR@gao.gov or 202-512-2757.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Goldenkoff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert Goldenkoff
Director, Strategic Issues

Enclosure

cc: Amy Stratton
Candyce Phoenix
Ellen Johnson

The Honorable Jamie Raskin & the Honorable Chip Roy
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
Committee on Oversight and Reform
Questions for the Record
Oversight of the 2020 Census

Questions for the Government Accountability Office (GAO):

1. What recommendations has GAO made regarding hard-to-count populations in rural areas?

While we've made no recommendations specific to hard-to-count populations in rural areas, in our prior work we found that many local census office managers were dissatisfied with the level of coordination with the Bureau's partnership staff during the 2010 Census.¹ We recommended that the Bureau develop mechanisms to increase coordination and communication between partnership and local census office staff, and according to Bureau officials as of March 2019, the Bureau had indicated it would assign at least one partnership specialist per census office manager to promote coordination. Going forward, the Bureau will need to further operationalize this step, such as by documenting expectations of how these staff should best work together.

We have also reported that the Bureau faces challenges with its efforts to enumerate hard-to-count persons—namely, these efforts are distributed across 35 operations, and as stated in our testimony, the Bureau is facing a tight job market that has already led to delays in hiring partnership specialist staff.² In 2018 we recommended that the Bureau take steps to better integrate its hard-to-count efforts with other census-taking activities, and as of July 2019 we await evidence that a new working group the Bureau has formed has been able to coordinate hard-to-count activities across operations.

2. Has GAO conducted an analysis of the 2020 Census partnership program in rural areas?

We have not analyzed the Bureau's partnership program in rural areas for the 2020 Census. However, in our prior work we highlighted some best practices for successful partnership engagements. For partners the practices included (1) identifying "census champions" that is, people who will actively support the census and encourage others to do so, (2) integrating census-related efforts into partners' existing activities and events, and (3) leveraging resources by working with other partners and customizing census promotional materials to better resonate with local populations. For the Bureau, best practices include (1) providing adequate and timely information, guidance, and other resources to local partners on how they can support the census, (2) maintaining open

¹GAO, *2010 Census: Key Efforts to Include Hard-to-Count Populations Went Generally as Planned; Improvements Could Make the Efforts More Effective for Next Census*, GAO-11-45 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 14, 2010).

²GAO, *2020 Census: Actions Needed to Address Challenges to Enumerating Hard-to-Count Groups*, GAO-18-599 (Washington, D.C.: Jul. 26, 2018).

communication with partners, and (3) encouraging the early involvement of partners in census activities.³

For 2020, the Bureau plans to continue using certain outreach efforts used in 2010, such as a communications campaign with paid advertising, partnerships with local organizations, and targeted outreach to immigrant and faith-based organizations. The Bureau also plans to hire nearly twice as many partnership specialists as it had planned for the 2010 Census to recruit partner organizations in local communities. The Bureau was seeking to hire approximately 1,500 partnership specialists by the end of June 2019 to help increase census awareness and participation in minority communities and hard-to-reach populations.

However, the Bureau did not meet its June 30 hiring goal. According to the Bureau, as of July 6, 2019, it had hired 903 partnership specialists, and as of July 17, 2019, another 872 applicants were waiting to have their background checks completed. According to Bureau officials, hiring data are based on payroll dates generated biweekly, while background check data are tracked internally and can be updated daily. The Bureau expects to have all partnership specialists on board by September 1, 2019.

We are actively monitoring the progress of the hiring of the partnership program going forward.

3. If so, what are your findings and recommendations?

See answer to question 2 above. We have not specifically analyzed the partnership program in rural areas.

4. Does GAO believe the Census Bureau has a robust plan to reach rural areas with low internet connectivity?

We have not specifically analyzed the Bureau's outreach or enumeration plans for reaching rural areas with low internet productivity.

According to the Bureau's August 2018 detailed operational plan for its Internet Self-Response Operation, the Bureau will use data on historical response rates from other Census Bureau surveys, internet access and penetration, and demographics to determine what local geographic areas are least likely to respond to the census over the internet. The mailings in these areas inviting households to participate in the census will include both

³GAO, *2000 Census: Review of Partnership Program Highlights Best Practices for Future Operations*, GAO-01-579 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 20, 2001).

paper copies of the census questionnaire as well information about contacting the Bureau to respond over the phone, in addition to the instructions for responding over the internet. We are actively monitoring the Bureau's plans and conduct of the 2020 Census going forward.

5. Does GAO believe any rural outreach strategies have been disregarded by the Census Bureau?

We are actively monitoring the Bureau's partnership program and outreach going forward. However, we have not analyzed the Bureau's rural outreach effort.