



2020 CENSUS PROGRAM MEMORANDUM SERIES: 2016.21

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

From: Lisa M. Blumerman (**signed October 18, 2016**)
Associate Director, Decennial Census Programs

Subject: Adjustment of FY 2017 Test Scope

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This memorandum documents the 2020 Census Program decision to stop two field test operations in fiscal year (FY) 2017 to mitigate program risk amidst funding uncertainty.

Overview

The 2020 Census has reached a critical point in the decade. We are less than one year from beginning field work on the final major test for the 2020 Census – the 2018 End-to-End Census Test – but there is not yet clarity regarding funding for this program for FY 2017.

The proposed funding levels in both the House and Senate from the spring of 2016 require us to prioritize other activities in 2017 rather than expend the resources necessary to conduct two planned 2020 Census field tests in FY 2017. Given the current uncertainty about FY 2017 funding, the Census Bureau will not continue expending resources to prepare for the FY 2017 field tests, only to receive insufficient resources to conduct them. It is a risk we are unwilling to take, as it will directly threaten the readiness for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, more than \$5 billion in cost avoidance, and the high data quality of the 2020 Census. Continuing with the 2017 Census Test and 2017 Puerto Rico Census Test as planned amidst such funding uncertainty would all but guarantee wasted efforts and resources. The Census Bureau is making this decision now to mitigate funding uncertainty risk to the program and ensure readiness for a highly successful 2018 End-to-End Census Test given timely congressional appropriations providing the remainder of the 2017 President’s Budget request.

Discussion

With many scheduled development and integration steps remaining to ensure our systems and operations are ready to be deployed in production for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test by mid-2017,

the Census Bureau must make critical decisions now to adjust and ensure success in this all-important dry run of the 2020 Census.

In order to mitigate funding uncertainty risk and ensure readiness for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, the Census Bureau will stop FY 2017 field testing operations (in the Puerto Rico municipios of Carolina, Loíza, and Trujillo Alto, and Standing Rock Reservation in North and South Dakota and Colville Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land in Washington) originally planned as part of the 2017 Puerto Rico Census Test and the 2017 Census Test respectively. We will consider moving these field sites to be part of the 2018 End-to-End Census Test. The National Sample self-response test scheduled as part of the 2017 Census Test with an April 1, 2017 Census day will continue, which will allow for the testing of key new systems and includes the testing of tribal enrollment questions.

The decision to stop the 2017 field tests will enable us to focus the vast majority of program resources in FY 2017 on operational and systems readiness for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, including integrating, securing, and testing our systems. This streamlined plan will ensure that the integrated suite of 2020 Census systems can be deployed smoothly into the field by late FY 2017 when the initial operations for the 2018 End-to-End Census Test begin. We expect to have the resources to continue plans to conduct the national self-response component of the 2017 Census Test, which will still allow the essential testing of key systems and operations ahead of the 2018 End-to-End Census Test. Namely, the Internet self-response, with a Spanish language option, and Operational Control Systems integrated with the Census Questionnaire Assistance operation, as well as the ability to provision and run in a Cloud must remain in the scope of the 2017 Census Test.

It remains critical to test Spanish language systems and non-traditional addressing in Puerto Rico and the ability to list and enumerate at non-traditional addresses on tribal reservations. That is why we are considering conducting them during the 2018 End-to-End Census Test. Moving these field tests to 2018 would not be an ideal outcome for the operational risk of the 2018 End-to-End Census Test and 2020 Census, but would be the best overall option remaining for the program amid current uncertainty about FY 2017 funding. Additionally, we will ensure our tribal enrollment questions are well tested in the replanned 2017 Census Test (consisting solely of the national self-response component). The Census Bureau still expects to be able to test what must be tested ahead of and during the 2018 End-to-End Census Test.

Decision

The 2020 Census Program will rework its testing plans for FY 2017 to stop FY 2017 field testing operations in the Puerto Rico municipios of Carolina, Loíza, and Trujillo Alto, (originally planned as the 2017 Puerto Rico Census Test) and Standing Rock Reservation in North and South Dakota and the Colville Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land in Washington State (originally planned as part of the 2017 Census Test). These sites will be considered for potential inclusion in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test. The National Sample self-response test scheduled as part of the 2017 Census Test will continue as planned, with an April 1, 2017 Census day.

The 2020 Census Memorandum Series

The 2020 Census Memorandum Series documents significant decisions, actions, and accomplishments of the 2020 Census Program for the purpose of informing stakeholders, coordinating interdivisional efforts, and documenting important historical changes.

A memorandum generally will be added to this series for any decision or documentation that meets the following criteria:

1. A major program level decision that will affect the overall design or have significant effect on the 2020 Census operations or systems.
2. A major policy decision or change that will affect the overall design or significantly impact the 2020 Census operations or systems.
3. A report that documents the research and testing for the 2020 Census operations or systems.

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