

April 2007

2010 CENSUS

Census Bureau Should Refine Recruiting and Hiring Efforts and Enhance Training of Temporary Field Staff





Highlights of [GAO-07-361](#), a report to congressional addresses

Why GAO Did This Study

The success of the 2010 Census depends, in part, upon the U.S. Census Bureau's (Bureau) ability to recruit, hire, and train over half a million temporary workers at peak. Under the Comptroller General's authority, GAO reviewed the extent that the Bureau's (1) recruiting and hiring processes for these staff are consistent with selected human capital principles and (2) training delivery and content take into account known challenges. To answer these questions, GAO analyzed relevant reports and past recommendations to select principles for evaluating these activities, reviewed related Bureau documents, observed the 2006 Census Test in South Dakota and Texas, and interviewed Bureau officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending to the Secretary of Commerce that the Bureau refine its recruiting and hiring efforts and enhance training for field staff in the 2010 Census. These recommendations include using collected information to better target recruiting and hiring, collecting performance data on workers, and evaluating alternate approaches to delivering training. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Deputy Secretary of Commerce identified actions the Bureau would take on some of the recommendations but questioned the need to act on others. These stated actions partially respond to our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-361.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Mathew J. Scire at (202) 512-6806 or sciremj@gao.gov.

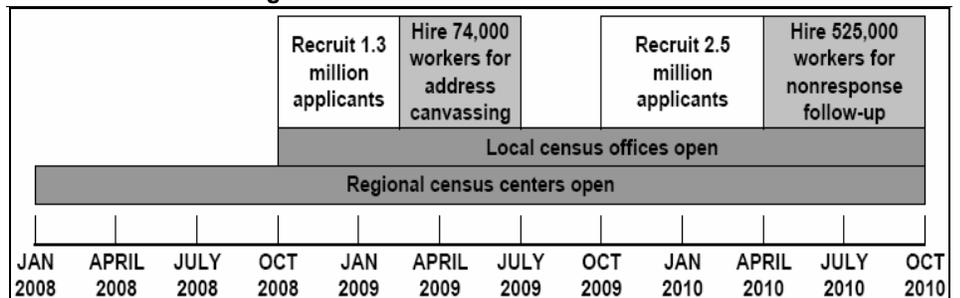
2010 CENSUS

Census Bureau Should Refine Recruiting and Hiring Efforts and Enhance Training of Temporary Field Staff

What GAO Found

For the 2010 Census, the Bureau plans to recruit 3.8 million applicants and hire nearly 600,000 temporary field staff from that applicant pool for two key operations: address canvassing, where staff verify the location of all housing units; and nonresponse follow-up, where they visit households that do not return census forms to collect data in person. Meeting these goals will be difficult because, since Census 2000, the Bureau is facing increased challenges, including the automation of its field data collection and long-standing demographic shifts, whereby the population is increasingly diverse and hard to locate. For the 2010 Census, the Bureau plans to use a recruiting and hiring approach like the one it used in 2000, which Bureau officials considered a success. That approach is designed to ensure a sufficient pool of qualified applicants from which to hire, but the Bureau could recruit and hire more efficiently.

2010 Census Recruiting Timeline



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Opportunities exist for the Bureau to improve and refine recruiting and hiring processes for the 2010 Census. It could better target its recruiting and hiring by analyzing the characteristics, such as education and work status, of employees more likely to be successful at census work and less likely to leave. This would allow it to seek workers with the skills, interests, and likelihood for success. Also, the Bureau does not collect performance data needed to rehire former workers, to whom it may give hiring priority. Officials said they try to exclude those terminated for cause. Conduct problems, such as selling drugs or striking another worker or unsatisfactory performance, can result in such terminations.

The Bureau's training approach for temporary field staff, consisting primarily of verbatim lectures, is largely unchanged from previous decennials. The Bureau is providing some computer-based training on using the handheld computers in key operations. However, despite findings that we and others have made suggesting that the Bureau consider alternatives to its verbatim approach, it has not done so. Further, although the Bureau has found that its field staff face an increasingly reluctant population and other location-specific challenges, it has not substantially changed the content of training.

Contents

Letter		1
	Results in Brief	4
	Background	6
	The Bureau Should Revise the Recruiting and Hiring of Its Temporary Field Staff	11
	The Bureau Has Not Changed Training Delivery or Content for Temporary Field Staff to Fully Address Known Challenges	23
	Conclusions	32
	Recommendations for Executive Action	33
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	34
Appendix I	Comments from the Department of Commerce	39
	GAO Comments	55
Appendix II	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	59
Related GAO Products		60
Table		
	Table 1: Results of OPM's 1997 Evaluation of Competencies Needed for Different Field Staff	18
Figures		
	Figure 1: The Bureau's Planned Temporary Field Infrastructure for the 2010 Census, Numbers at Peak	9
	Figure 2: The Bureau's Recruiting and Hiring Timeline for Temporary Field Staff during the 2010 Census	10
	Figure 3: Visual Created by Harris for Use in Training	26

Abbreviations

OIG	Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General
OPM	Office of Personnel Management

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

April 27, 2007

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Chairman
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government
Information, Federal Services, and International Security
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
The Honorable Tom Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Wm. Lacy Clay
Chairman
The Honorable Michael Turner
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The success of the U.S. Census Bureau's (Bureau) constitutionally mandated task of counting the nation's population every 10 years is contingent in part upon its ability to recruit, hire, and train a peak workforce of more than 500,000 temporary field staff needed to collect data through various operations. Of the \$11.3 billion that the Bureau expects to spend for the 2010 Census, it estimates that over \$2 billion will be used to employ temporary field staff for its major field operation—nonresponse follow-up—where enumerators visit households that did not return the mailed census forms to collect that data in person. It also plans to spend over \$350 million to employ staff for another large field operation, address canvassing, where field workers verify the addresses of all housing units. These field staff contribute to the Bureau's efforts to produce data to be used to reapportion the seats of the U.S. House of Representatives; realign the boundaries of the legislative districts of each state; allocate hundreds of billions of dollars in federal financial assistance; and provide a social, demographic, and economic profile of the nation's people to guide policy decisions at each level of government.

Despite a historically tight national labor market during Census 2000, the Bureau met its recruiting goals to hire field staff it could train for the decennial. However, the Bureau has the same daunting task of meeting its recruiting, hiring, and training goals for the 2010 Census, while faced with significant challenges. These challenges include demographic shifts whereby the population is increasingly diverse and difficult to locate, as well as newer challenges, such as the Bureau's reengineered approach, which incorporates the use of handheld computers for data collection in the field.

Because the effectiveness of field workers is critical to the success of the census, we reviewed, under the Comptroller General's statutory authority to initiate evaluations, the Bureau's recruiting, hiring, and training processes for temporary field staff during the 2010 Census. As agreed with your offices, we are providing this report to you because it contains information that will be useful for your oversight responsibilities. Specifically, we reviewed the extent to which the Bureau's (1) recruiting and hiring processes for temporary field staff are consistent with selected human capital principles and (2) training delivery methods and training content take into account known challenges as observed and recorded in previous decennial operations.

To determine whether the Bureau's recruiting and hiring practices in the field are consistent with selected human capital principles, we reviewed reports on leading human capital practices from a variety of sources, including our strategic human capital model,¹ as well as documents from external sources, such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We then identified and selected principles to use as criteria that we determined to be relevant and applicable to the Bureau's efforts to recruit and hire a temporary field staff based on our reports and that of the Department of Commerce (Commerce) Office of Inspector General (OIG), which made recommendations based on experiences during Census 2000 and tests in preparation for the 2010 Census. These principles include developing human capital strategies that can be implemented with the resources reasonably expected to be available;² evaluating and identifying

¹GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, [GAO-02-373SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002).

²GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, [GAO-04-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003).

critical skills needed by an agency facing a changing environment;³ using employee insights to develop responsive human capital practices;⁴ and matching the right people to the right jobs in such a way that would allow agencies to maximize economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the face of finite resources.⁵ We also reviewed Bureau documents on recruiting and hiring, including scripts used by recruiting staff, selection tests for temporary workers, and recruiting reports developed for local offices. We interviewed recruiting staff and other temporary field staff about their experiences with the recruiting and hiring process during the Bureau's 2006 Census Test, conducted at the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota and in parts of Austin, Texas, in Travis County. We also obtained and analyzed personnel data on recruiting and hiring from the 2006 Census Test. Finally, we spoke with Bureau officials regarding our observations in the field and about plans for conducting recruiting and hiring during the upcoming 2008 Dress Rehearsal and the 2010 Census.

To determine whether training for temporary field staff takes into account known challenges, we reviewed prior recommendations on training that we, the Bureau, OIG, and others made. We also reviewed our guide for strategic training and other human capital reports for principles relevant to the Bureau's training efforts.⁶ For example, one key principle is that agencies should consider refinements to human capital initiatives, including training, in light of changing organizational needs.⁷ We attended training sessions at both 2006 test sites and spoke with field staff about their impressions of training. We also accompanied field staff as they conducted their work to observe whether they were following the Bureau's prescribed protocol. We reviewed Bureau training manuals, scripts for instructors, and workbooks used by field staff during Census 2000 and the 2006 test. We also spoke with Bureau officials about our observations of training and operations in South Dakota and Texas. We obtained information about plans for the 2008 Dress Rehearsal and the

³[GAO-04-39](#).

⁴GAO, *Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders*, [GAO/OCG-00-14G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2000).

⁵[GAO/OCG-00-14G](#).

⁶See, for example, GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, [GAO-04-546G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2004) and [GAO-02-373SP](#).

⁷[GAO-02-373SP](#).

2010 Census as well as actions taken as a result of previous recommendations. Finally, we interviewed project staff at the Harris Corporation (Harris)—contracted by the Bureau to develop handheld computers for field operations and training materials for those handheld computers. We obtained and reviewed Harris’s planning documents and samples of materials being developed for the 2008 Dress Rehearsal and 2010 Census.

We conducted our work from March 2006 through April 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

This report contains recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce to improve the Bureau’s recruiting, hiring, and training of its temporary field staff. This report is also the latest in a series of evaluations that we have issued on the Bureau’s preparations for the 2010 Census. See the Related GAO Products section at the end of this report for a list of selected reports we have issued to date.

Results in Brief

The Bureau has taken some steps that are consistent with selected human capital principles, such as identifying the critical skills its field staff need to properly use handheld computers in the reengineered census and using employee insights to improve its recruiting and hiring processes. Overall, the Bureau plans to use an approach similar to the one it took during Census 2000 to recruit and hire its temporary workers for the 2010 Census. During Census 2000, that approach allowed the Bureau to recruit 3.7 million qualified applicants. The recruiting expenditures for fiscal years 1998 through 2000 were estimated to be \$250 million, or about \$66 per applicant. However, opportunities exist for the Bureau to improve and refine its recruiting and hiring of temporary workers for the 2010 Census. Specifically, the Bureau could better target its recruiting and hiring through an analysis to identify the characteristics of employees who are successful at census work and less likely to leave census work before an operation ends. This evaluation would allow the Bureau to seek workers with the skills, interests, and likelihood to be successful at census work. Employing such field staff could reduce or better control operational costs as well as recruiting and hiring expenditures. Further, the Bureau has not differentiated its hiring tools—written tests and phone interviews administered to each qualified applicant—to distinguish skills needed by people serving as crew leaders from those skills needed by other staff. Moreover, while Bureau policies recommend that former employees are rehired first before selecting individuals without prior census experience, the Bureau does not fully consider the past performance of these

individuals. Rehiring, in this case, applies to field staff who left their positions—due to the end of an operation or for other reasons—but then were rehired for a subsequent operation in the same decennial. The Bureau does not use certain information that could help assess these applicants' competence nor does it prepare employee performance evaluations that could be used later when considering rehiring former employees. Bureau officials explained that, in their view, recruiting and hiring was effective in Census 2000 and will be effective again during the 2010 Census. However, refinements to the Bureau's approach for the 2010 Census could help it more efficiently recruit and hire.

The Bureau has taken some actions to examine or enhance the delivery and content of the training it provides to temporary field staff to address challenges previously identified by the Bureau, us, and the OIG. The Bureau is providing some computer-based training on using the handheld computers for the nonresponse follow-up and address canvassing operations and will include visual aids to enhance training on using the handheld computers. Nonetheless, the Bureau's standardized approach to delivering training, including reading training scripts word-for-word over the course of several days, has remained largely unchanged. The Bureau has not evaluated alternate training delivery approaches, such as providing video segments, as has been recommended by us and the OIG. While, the Bureau will be including visuals created by a contractor that show how to use the handheld devices, it has not otherwise incorporated visual aids, such as posters or pictures, to enhance training on census work, as the Bureau and the OIG have recommended. Finally, the Bureau has not provided adequate training on the challenges field workers are likely to face, such as dealing with reluctant respondents and location-specific issues. The Bureau already collects data it can use to assess ways in which reluctance to respond to the census is increasing and areas where additional content may be necessary given location-specific conditions, but the Bureau has not used these data to enhance its training. Bureau officials stated that their training is effective and that their approach is necessary to ensure the consistency of training nationwide. However, the Bureau has not evaluated the effectiveness of its approach to training in comparison with alternate approaches, nor does its emphasis on consistency prepare staff for situations they are likely to face in the geographic areas in which they are working.

We are making seven recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce to improve the Bureau's recruiting, hiring, and training processes. These recommendations are (1) refining its recruiting and hiring approach by collecting and analyzing information on the factors that explain worker

success, such as worker characteristics and performance evaluations; (2) determining the best way to gather and use field staff performance data that could be collected during the address canvassing operations of the 2010 Census and that could be used to inform hiring decisions for subsequent operations; (3) modifying recruiting and hiring tools to better identify applicants with the skills needed to serve as crew leaders; (4) evaluating the effectiveness of alternate approaches to training, such as the use of video segments; (5) incorporating visual aids illustrating decennial concepts; (6) modifying or revising training content to enhance material on dealing with reluctant respondents; and (7) preparing training modules that reflect prototypical location-specific challenges.

The Deputy Secretary of Commerce forwarded written comments from the Bureau on a draft of this report dated April 4, 2007. The comments are reprinted in their entirety in appendix I. Commerce generally either pointed to actions that it is taking that are consistent with the recommendations, or questioned the need for taking action. It agreed fully with one of our recommendations. We believe that additional refinements to its overall recruiting and hiring approach, such as collecting information to better target its efforts, could help the Bureau better identify the workers it needs for the 2010 Census. Further, we continue to believe that enhancements to the delivery and content of the Bureau's training, such as considering alternate approaches to delivering training—as has been previously recommended by us, OIG, and the Bureau itself—would better prepare staff to collect data in the field. We reflected Commerce's comments in the report and, where appropriate, provided additional context.

Background

For the 2010 Census, the Bureau has reengineered its approach to collecting census data by developing three interlinked strategies, which it refers to as a “three-legged stool.”

- The **American Community Survey** will collect long-form from 250,000 housing units each month and will provide such data on an annual basis, eliminating the need for a long-form as part of the decennial census.
- The **Map and Address File Modernization** will update Bureau files with geographic coordinates to provide more accurate location data on the nation's households.
- The **2010 Census** will survey the nation for the upcoming decennial using a short-form-only census, enhanced by handheld computers and

electronic maps for key operations to promote increased responsiveness and reduce costs.

The Bureau estimates the 2010 Census to cost \$11.3 billion, an increase from the \$6.5 billion it took to carry out Census 2000. The Bureau believes that its reengineering will help contain the cost of the 2010 Census. It expects to increase the response rate, thereby reducing the cost of nonresponse follow-up, through a short-form-only census. The use of handheld computers for nonresponse follow-up and address canvassing is also expected to yield cost savings. In the past, field staff collected data on housing units and nonresponding households using cumbersome pencil-and-paper processes. According to the Bureau, handheld computers will allow its field workers to more quickly collect information for each housing unit and reduce costly data collection activities. The handheld computers will also eliminate the need to visit households that return their questionnaires late because the cases can be deleted from the workload on a real-time basis. The Bureau has a testing and development program to hone these new methods for the 2010 Census. It included field tests in Georgia and New York during its 2004 Census Test, as well as field tests in Texas and South Dakota for the 2006 Census Test. The Bureau plans to hold the 2008 Dress Rehearsal in California and North Carolina, which is to be a demonstration of the operations and systems planned for the 2010 Census. The Bureau has already started to recruit and hire in the two dress rehearsal locations for the address canvassing operation, which is scheduled to begin in May 2007.

Although the census is a national undertaking, it is locally implemented by a temporary workforce hired to complete work. To gather data from all households, the Bureau opens temporary offices across the country and employs several different data collection methods. Local census offices are opened for approximately 2 years and all field staff employed in these offices are considered temporary, with jobs as long as the entire 2-year period or as short as a few weeks. Some field staff work on several different operations during the decennial. For example, one could work on address canvassing, an early operation, and be rehired again to work on the nonresponse follow-up operation later on in the decennial.

Operations for the 2010 Census will begin in April 2009, with address canvassing, a field operation for verifying and correcting addresses for all households and street features contained on decennial maps. Almost a year later, the Bureau will mail census questionnaires to the majority of the population in anticipation of Census Day, April 1, 2010. Those households that do not respond will be contacted by field staff through the

nonresponse follow-up operation to determine the number of people living in the house as of Census Day, among other information. In addition to address canvassing and nonresponse follow-up, the Bureau conducts other operations, for example, to gather data from residents of group quarters, such as prisons or military bases. The Bureau also employs different enumeration methods in certain settings, such as remote Alaska enumeration, when people living in inaccessible communities must be contacted in January 2010 in anticipation of the spring thaw, which makes travel difficult, or update/enumerate, a data collection method involving personal interviews and used in communities where many housing units may not have typical house number-street name mailing addresses. The Bureau has a quality control (or reinterview) process that involves rechecking a sample of completed work performed by an individual and rectifying that work if significant problems are detected. Approximately 5 to 10 percent of the work is to be checked during the quality control process.

Some positions in local census offices include

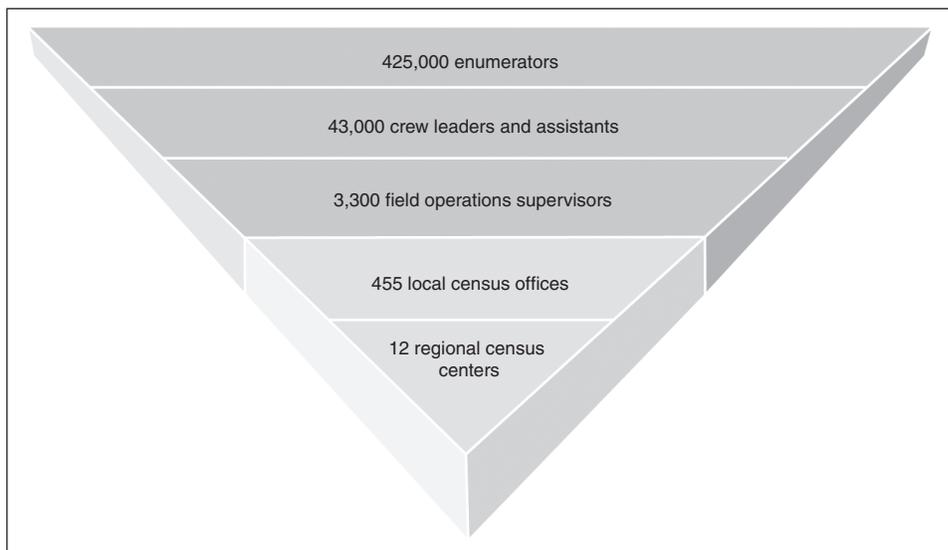
- **field operations supervisors** who coordinate, supervise, and oversee the work performed by crew leaders, crew leader assistants, and enumerators, as well as train assigned crew leaders;
- **crew leaders** who supervise and train a crew of enumerators or listers and meet daily with the crew to distribute work assignments, monitor progress, and review finished work for accuracy and completeness;
- **crew leader assistants** who help crew leaders in guiding and directing the work of a group of enumerators or listers engaged in field data collection; and
- **enumerators or listers** who perform field activities in and around their respective neighborhoods, including verifying addresses, canvassing and listing addresses, and interviewing.

Conducting the census is a tremendous task given the hundreds of thousands of field staff⁸ the Bureau hires and trains in just a few weeks. (See fig. 1.) Further, field workers often have little or no prior census experience, and are expected, after just a few days of training, to do their jobs with minimal supervision, under sometimes difficult and dangerous conditions. Moreover, crew leaders are usually recent hires themselves, with little, if any, experience as instructors or with decennial issues.

⁸Throughout this report, we use the term field staff to refer to crew leaders, crew leader assistants, enumerators, and listers—the frontline staff collecting data for the Bureau.

Overall, few, if any, organizations face the hiring and training challenges that confront the Bureau with each decennial population count.

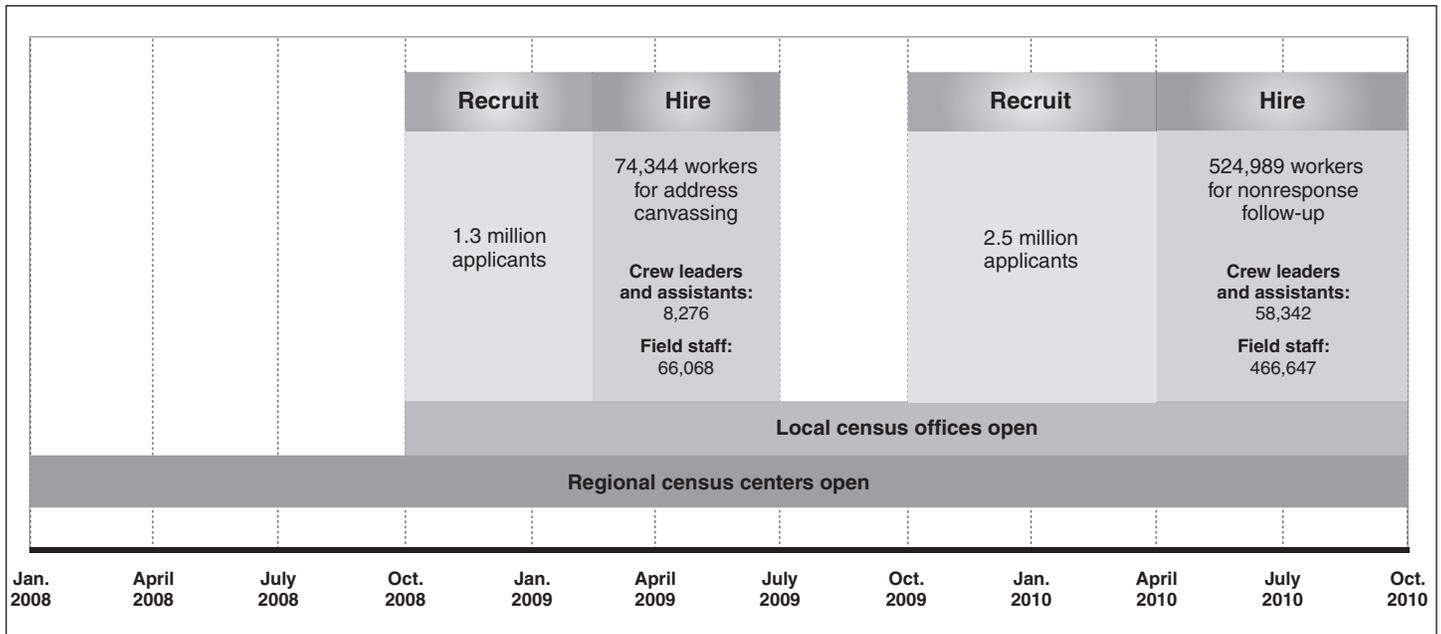
Figure 1: The Bureau's Planned Temporary Field Infrastructure for the 2010 Census, Numbers at Peak



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

The census is the nation's largest peace-time mobilization. For the 2010 Census, the Bureau plans to recruit and test 3.8 million applicants and hire nearly 600,000 field staff for address canvassing and nonresponse follow-up. During Census 2000, the Bureau also hired about half a million enumerators at peak, which temporarily made it one of the nation's largest employers, surpassed by only a handful of big organizations, such as Wal-Mart and the U.S. Postal Service. For the 2010 Census, the Bureau expects to hire almost 75,000 temporary workers during address canvassing to verify and identify the addresses of an estimated 130 million living quarters over the course of about 6 weeks in 2009. During nonresponse follow-up, the Bureau expects to hire almost 525,000 temporary workers to visit an estimated 39 million housing units over the course of 12 weeks in 2010. (See fig. 2.)

Figure 2: The Bureau’s Recruiting and Hiring Timeline for Temporary Field Staff during the 2010 Census



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Each regional census center creates a recruiting plan based on a template developed by headquarters, which allows for variations to reflect characteristics of different regions. The Bureau has developed a Planning Database that local and regional offices use to prepare recruiting plans. The Bureau expects those offices to use the database to identify areas where field staff are more difficult to recruit and other areas where certain skills—such as foreign language abilities—are needed. The Bureau will update the Planning Database for every census tract in the United States for the 2010 Census, using many variables from Census 2000. These variables include Census 2000 mail return rates; household size; median household income; percentage of persons living in poverty; number of single person households; highest level of education achieved; percentage of linguistically isolated households (i.e., where no person 14 or over speaks English at least “very well”); and percentage of persons on public assistance.

The Bureau has employed essentially the same approach to training since the 1970 Census. To conduct training, the Bureau solicits free or low-cost training spaces from local organizations, such as churches or libraries. Training classes typically include 15 to 20 students. Crew leaders usually

train their crews, with the help of at least one crew leader assistant, using a verbatim training approach, whereby crew leaders read training scripts word-for-word over the course of several days. Similarly, the crew leaders were themselves trained by their supervisors in a “train-the-trainers” approach. The length of training varies by operation; for nonresponse follow-up, training took almost 42 hours over the course of 6 days during the 2006 test.

The Bureau Should Revise the Recruiting and Hiring of Its Temporary Field Staff

For the 2010 Census, the Bureau plans to use a similar approach to recruit and hire workers as it used during Census 2000. Some broad approaches the Bureau will take in the 2010 Census that it successfully implemented during Census 2000 include

- exercising the flexibility to raise pay rates at local census offices that were encountering recruiting difficulties;
- recruiting five times more applicants than the needed number of field workers to ensure a considerable depth in the applicant pool from which to hire;
- “frontloading,” or hiring twice the number of people needed to do the work in anticipation of high levels of turnover;
- launching a recruitment advertising campaign, which cost over \$2.3 million for Census 2000; and
- working with federal, state, local, and tribal officials who manage existing government programs to obtain waivers that will expand the pool of applicants by making census jobs available and attractive to certain populations, such as allowing individuals to simultaneously work two federal jobs and obtaining exemptions from state governments so that individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, and selected other types of public assistance would not have their benefits reduced when earning census income.

We have noted that these strategies, in part, made the Bureau a more attractive employer to prospective candidates and helped to ensure a steady stream of applicants during Census 2000, when the Bureau was able to recruit 3.7 million qualified applicants.⁹ In particular, the flexibility to raise pay rates at those local census offices that were encountering recruitment difficulties helped local offices obtain the staff they needed. Bureau officials found that being able to set competitive, locally-based pay

⁹GAO, *2000 Census: Best Practices and Lessons Learned for More Cost-Effective Nonresponse Follow-up*, [GAO-02-196](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 11, 2002).

was the Bureau's most important strategy during Census 2000.¹⁰ We have identified the recruitment advertising campaign as another key ingredient of Census 2000's recruitment efforts as it emphasizes the ability to earn good pay, work flexible hours, learn new skills, and do something important for one's community.¹¹ This message was conveyed in a variety of languages through traditional outlets, such as newspapers, as well as more novel media, including Internet banners and messages on utility and credit card bills. The Bureau's recruiting and hiring approach allowed it to surpass its recruitment goals in Census 2000 and officials believe it could be successfully used in the 2010 Census as well.

The Bureau Plans Improvements to Its Recruiting and Hiring

The Bureau is making changes to how it will recruit and hire its temporary workforce during the 2010 Census. While still employing frontloading, Bureau officials said they plan to exercise caution in this approach, in part because census funding could result in more limitations in 2010 than in 2000. According to Bureau documents, local offices may not necessarily invite twice the number of needed staff to training as they did in 2000; however, these final numbers have not yet been determined. According to Commerce in its response to a draft of this report, the Bureau is also preliminarily examining whether varying recruitment goals by area is a viable alternative to its current fixed goal. Using recruiting and hiring data from its 2004 and 2006 Census Tests, the Bureau plans to determine whether a variable recruiting goal for each local census office participating in the tests would have produced enough qualified applicants to complete the census workload.

The Bureau has also conducted and incorporated information collected from employee debriefings that could improve its recruiting and hiring processes. During the 2006 Census Test, the Bureau collected information from employees to evaluate its operations, including the effectiveness of its recruiting and hiring processes, by (1) debriefing field staff at the end of each operation to gain a broader understanding of their thoughts on operations and procedures and (2) conducting exit interviews to understand why certain enumerators, crew leaders, and crew leader assistants left before field tests were completed. Bureau officials said that feedback from employees could be helpful in evaluating and refining its

¹⁰Janet Cummings, *Census 2000: Staffing the Nation's Largest Data Collection Workforce*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Aug. 2001).

¹¹ [GAO-02-196](#).

recruiting and hiring processes and intend to incorporate some of that information for the 2008 Dress Rehearsal. For example, the Bureau intends to include in its recruiting manuals the strategy of better utilizing the recruiting staff by establishing and assigning specific groups—like faith-based groups and community-based organizations—for recruiters to focus on, as was suggested to the Bureau during a debriefing. Bureau officials said that they plan to conduct these debriefings and exit interviews during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal as well. Specifically, information from exit interviews will be used to gain additional insight into why employees leave before an operation was completed. Finally, officials also told us that a small amount of money was allocated to improve their recruiting efforts, for example, through conducting focus groups on diversity.

Opportunities Exist for the Bureau to Refine Its Recruiting and Hiring Efforts

Opportunities exist for the Bureau to hone its recruiting efforts to identify individuals who would be more likely to be effective at census work and willing to continue working throughout an operation. Presently, the Bureau casts a wide net to recruit its temporary workforce to ensure it has a large enough applicant pool from which to hire. The Bureau selects field staff on the basis of how well they score on the standardized hiring test each applicant takes. The written test consists of basic cognitive skills required for the job, such as clerical skills, number skills, and organizational skills. Additional points are provided to applicants with veteran's preference. Applicants who score 70 or above on the written test¹² and pass a Federal Bureau of Investigation background check are interviewed on the phone by office clerks. This interview assesses the extent to which the applicant can speak and understand English. Additionally, the applicant's availability, access to transportation and phone lines, willingness to travel from house to house to gather data, and other logistical questions of this nature are asked during the interview. Other than applicants achieving a passing score on its written test, however, the Bureau has not targeted its recruitment toward approaches that are likely to hire successful employees willing to complete a census operation.

We understand that when recruiting and hiring for so many positions, it is a challenge to assess an applicant's potential success or willingness to work. However, Bureau officials have also stated that refining this

¹²Local census offices experiencing difficulties in recruiting applicants are able to lower the cutoff score on the written test.

approach could allow them to recruit more efficiently. To do so, the Bureau could evaluate the factors associated with and predictive of employee acceptance of census work, performance on the job, and commitment to completing census operations. The Bureau possesses much of the information needed to identify the factors that would characterize an employee who would be successful at census work and willing to work throughout an operation.

- Through the employment application form, the Bureau collects information about how field staff learn about census work to understand the most effective ways to reach out to potential applicants.
- Also through the application form, the Bureau collects information on the characteristics of every temporary employee, such as education level and language skills.
- As previously described, the Bureau's Planning Database will be updated for every census tract in the nation for the 2010 Census, using such variables as Census 2000 mail return rates, household size, and percentage of linguistically isolated households, among others. The database might allow the Bureau to adjust its analysis of employee productivity across locations by holding constant factors that affect productivity in different areas.
- Through its personnel database, the Bureau knows whether employees completed the operation they were hired for, which could provide information about commitment of field staff and willingness to work in the census.

The Bureau could collect or extract other data to evaluate factors to help determine the likely success of an applicant.

- The Bureau does not have data about the attrition rates of its field staff, which could provide information on what type of workers are more likely to commit to census employment and thereby would stay long enough to complete census operations. However, the Bureau already gathers personnel data during each of its tests, including dates of the hiring and termination of each applicant, and plans to collect them for the 2008 Dress Rehearsal and 2010 Census. Attrition data could be extracted from an analysis of those data.
- The Bureau does not have a direct measure of an employee's effectiveness. However, the Bureau could begin collecting such information as early as the 2008 Dress Rehearsal. Further, the Bureau

also could compile information about individual performance using data collected from its quality control operation.¹³ The Bureau does collect productivity data, which indicate the number of housing units for which a field worker successfully collected data from each hour, and could be an indicator of employee performance.¹⁴ However, Bureau officials said this information does not adequately reflect worker performance because the situations in which workers do their jobs vary considerably. Nevertheless, information from the Planning Database may allow the Bureau to adjust these data for differences in employee productivity between locations. With this adjustment, productivity data might better inform the Bureau about employee performance after controlling for location-specific differences.

- The Bureau does not have information about other characteristics of field staff, such as employment status and history. However, these data can be collected on the application form workers complete when they apply for census work, as well as before the employees leave the Bureau's employment.

Analysis of these data would allow the Bureau to refine its recruiting and hiring strategy. Multiple regression or other statistical methods can be employed to analyze these data to determine likely predictors for successful field staff. Although local and regional factors can affect how successful a worker will be, such as working in urban or rural settings and unemployment rates, information from the Planning Database and other such data may be useful in controlling for these variations. In addition, analyses can be conducted at the regional or local level to further tailor recruiting and hiring. There are several ways that the Bureau can define a successful worker. Productivity data and attrition rates can be used to measure employee success. But there may be better measures of performance that could be identified by using information collected in the quality control operation. However, without conducting such analysis, the Bureau does not know what types of workers are more likely to be successful at census work.

The Bureau noted that it has done or plans some analyses of worker effectiveness and turnover. For example, during the 2006 Census Test, a contractor examined the Bureau's selection tools to see which employee

¹³As stated earlier, the quality control process involves rechecking a sample of completed work an individual performed and correcting it if significant problems are detected. Approximately 5 to 10 percent of work completed is checked in all operations.

¹⁴Officials said productivity data are primarily collected and used for budgetary purposes.

attributes are most highly associated with success, tenure, and performance. However, the Bureau could not produce the results of the contractor study at the time of this report. The Bureau also plans to identify factors that might affect turnover and job tenure from its employee debriefings and exit surveys.

Officials provided various reasons for why the Bureau's recruiting and hiring processes remain substantially unchanged. First, they said the Bureau focused on achieving cost containment through the reengineering of the census, including a short-form census and use of handheld computers, which left few funds to make improvements in other areas, such as recruiting and hiring. Second, in commenting on a draft of this report, Commerce noted that it does not believe that significant cost savings could be achieved through refining its recruiting and hiring approach. Third, Bureau officials said that the recruiting and hiring during Census 2000 was a success and the same approach will be effective during the 2010 Census. Lastly, Commerce noted in its comments that making any changes to the Bureau's current approach would reduce its ability to find the people needed to complete operations within the statutory deadlines. We agree that the Bureau needs to recruit and hire staff in time to meet these deadlines; however, Bureau officials told us that they have not invested resources into making recruiting and hiring more effective.

Regarding evaluating factors that would allow the Bureau to target potential applicants and hence improve recruiting practices, Bureau officials said that doing this could prevent the Bureau from forming community-based census crews that, in their view, are more likely to be familiar with the local environment, build trust with nonrespondents, and hence elicit their participation in the census more easily than would other field staff. However, the Bureau has not conducted analyses to indicate that targeting recruitment would preclude it from hiring community-based field staff.

Moreover, according to Bureau officials, having a large applicant pool provides the Bureau with assurance that it can meet its recruiting goals; however, they agree that this approach may not be the most cost-effective. Specifically, in an evaluation of the Census 2000 recruiting effort, a contractor found that the goal of creating an applicant pool of five individuals for each needed field staff position was more than adequate for staffing the nonresponse follow-up operation.¹⁵ The contractor suggested

¹⁵Westat, Inc., *Factors Affecting Census 2000 Recruiting* (Rockville, Md.: Jan. 7, 2002).

that the Bureau develop methods to recruit for the 2010 Census without the resulting applicant pool exceeding the number it plans to hire by such large amounts. Nevertheless, the Bureau does not plan to modify this approach and will continue to recruit five times as many individuals as it plans to hire. Officials told us that as a result of the Bureau's inability to hire enough field staff during the 1990 Census—which delayed the address canvassing operation—the Bureau would rather overrecruit than underrecruit. The statistical analysis discussed above would be one method the Bureau could use to target its recruiting, thereby potentially decreasing both the size of the applicant pool and the number of persons who would need to be hired.

A more targeted approach to recruiting and hiring for the 2010 Census could allow the Bureau to recruit and hire staff with the necessary skills and interests for census work, and identify applicants who would be more likely to commit to completing an operation and be successful throughout census operations. Having these workers could help reduce or better control operational costs as well as recruiting and hiring expenditures. Better performing workers could complete fieldwork more expediently, thereby potentially decreasing the time needed to complete operations. During Census 2000, the recruiting expenditures for fiscal years 1998 through 2000 were estimated to be \$250 million, about \$66 per applicant. Efforts to target applicants likely to continue throughout an operation could decrease the need to recruit and hire additional workers. Improving recruiting and hiring could also reduce training costs to replace staff who have quit, which add to the Bureau's training expenses. For example, during the 2006 test, the Bureau paid each enumerator in Texas \$605 to participate in 1 week of training.

The Bureau May Modify Some Tools and Processes to Hire Staff with the Right Skills, but Should Also Differentiate Those Tools for Various Field Positions

The Bureau uses the same set of hiring tools—written tests and phone interviews administered to each qualified applicant—to hire individuals for crew leader and other field positions, although the skills needed for those positions differ. The Bureau hired a contractor to assess whether the tools used during the 2006 Census Test selected individuals with the skills necessary to conduct fieldwork using handheld computers. According to comments provided by Commerce, this contractor plans to conduct a comprehensive study to review the validity and reliability of new selection tools during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal to assess whether they appropriately address the new skills needed in the reengineered census environment. While updated hiring tools may be implemented during the 2010 Census, Bureau officials said that, overall, they do not expect major changes to be made. Changes made to the hiring process will be to

account for the automation of field data collection, and not to differentiate hiring tools for crew leaders and other field positions.

In 1997, OPM found that the competencies needed by a crew leader were different from those required in other field positions.¹⁶ For example, while it was important for field staff working in the nonresponse follow-up operation to have arithmetic and visual identification skills, crew leaders need skills such as management, leadership, and creative thinking (see table 1). Bureau officials stated that crew leaders are also responsible for providing on-the-job training where necessary and will accompany workers who are facing problems. Further, with the reengineering of the 2010 Census, crew leaders are responsible for troubleshooting the handheld computers that other field staff use to collect census data.

Table 1: Results of OPM’s 1997 Evaluation of Competencies Needed for Different Field Staff

Competencies rated as important for crew leaders and not enumerators	Competencies rated as important for enumerators and not crew leaders
Creative thinking	Number manipulation
Manages and organizes information	Arithmetic
Leadership	Perceptual speed
Teaching others	Visual identification
Managing human resources	Foreign language
Managing diverse workforce	
Geography	

Source: GAO analysis of OPM data.

Applicants interested in census fieldwork take one of two hiring tests, a supervisory or nonsupervisory one. Individuals who wish to be considered for field operations supervisor or office operations supervisor take the supervisory test. Those people interested in all other positions, including crew leaders, enumerators, and clerks, take the nonsupervisory test. Individuals that score highest on this test are supposed to be selected as crew leaders. A selection guide for crew leaders is used to conduct phone interviews with qualified applicants, but the two sets of additional questions asked of individuals applying for the crew leader position do not

¹⁶Office of Personnel Management, *A Test Validation Study of the Bureau of the Census: Decennial Census Non-Supervisory and Supervisory Selection Aids*, PRDC-97-02 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 1997).

assess the specific skills needed of crew leaders. During their phone interviews, crew leader applicants are asked to broadly describe the nature and scope of their leadership responsibilities, including organizing materials, scheduling activities, and leading others.

OPM also examined whether the Bureau's hiring tools adequately identified individuals with the abilities needed for those positions during Census 2000. It found that the hiring tools adequately assessed the cognitive competencies of field staff but were limited in assessing interpersonal competencies. OPM validated the hiring tools for use in Census 2000 but suggested that the Bureau incorporate interpersonal assessments into the hiring tools.

We reviewed the Bureau's hiring tools during the 2006 test and found that they do not differentiate between crew leaders and other field positions. Bureau officials said they do not expect to revise these tools for the 2010 Census because the selection guide used during phone interviews has two sets of questions for the crew leaders. However, these two sets of questions do not specifically ask whether applicants have experience in providing training or using computers. One set of questions asked candidates if they were familiar with the area in which they live and the second set of questions asked about their leadership experiences and willingness to lead others. Officials told us that the selection tools the Bureau plans to use in the 2010 Census will be largely unchanged from those used in Census 2000 and the 2004 and 2006 tests. That is, the Bureau does not plan to hone its tools to target the skills needed by crew leaders, a key position for decennial field activities.

During the 2004 Census Test, the OIG reported that Bureau officials said the multiple-choice test does not capture the technical or supervisory skills needed by crew leaders. Several field operations supervisors also commented that enumerators in training were more managerially and technically competent to be crew leaders than the crew leaders who were training them.¹⁷ Furthermore, during debriefings conducted with field staff (including field operations supervisors, crew leaders, and enumerators) during the 2006 test, participants commented about the ability of crew

¹⁷Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, *Improving Our Measure of America: What the 2004 Census Test Can Teach Us in Planning for the 2010 Decennial Census*, OIG-16949 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2004).

leaders to carry out their duties.¹⁸ There were a few comments that were positive, such as one that noted that crew leaders were able to resolve their problems about census procedures immediately. However, most other comments regarding crew leaders remarked upon the need for them to be better skilled or prepared. The following observations were made about individuals in the crew leader position:

- they did not have the skills necessary to perform the duties required in that position,
- they did not feel comfortable providing training to enumerators and asked their assistants to deliver the training,
- they did not have the appropriate leadership skills, and
- they should not be hired based on their test scores but based on whether they possess specific skills needed for that position.

Without using hiring tools that distinguish between skills needed for the crew leader position, the Bureau does not have assurances that it is selecting crew leaders who can best perform duties like providing training, managing other field staff, and troubleshooting handheld computers. In commenting on a draft of this report, Commerce noted that a contractor hired by the Bureau is examining whether there is a need to replace the current written tests and interview selection guides used for hiring all field positions, including crew leaders. Depending upon the contractor's finding, the Bureau may modify these selection tools. Nevertheless, the Bureau still does not collect information about the performance of individual crew leaders nor does it collect information on turnover of crew leaders. Without this information, the Bureau is limited in its ability to assess the effectiveness of its hiring tools in selecting able crew leaders for the 2010 Census.

¹⁸These sessions aimed to obtain information that will improve Bureau procedures, including training. We reviewed summaries of debriefings conducted for three operations—nonresponse follow-up, update/enumerate, and address canvassing. The Bureau's debriefing documents did not specify how many participants were included during debriefings for update/enumerate and address canvassing. During nonresponse follow-up debriefings, Bureau officials spoke with 3 field operations supervisors, 9 crew leaders, 5 crew leader assistants, and 18 enumerators. These statements reflect the opinions of a sample of individuals who completed the operation. Field workers who left the census before the end of the operation were not included in these debriefings.

The Bureau Gives Little Consideration to Previous Performance When Rehiring Former Workers

When hiring, Bureau policies recommend that former employees are rehired first before selecting individuals without prior census experience. Over the course of the 2006 Census Test, almost 15 percent of all field staff were rehired. In other words, these individuals left their field position—due to the end of an operation or for other reasons—but then were rehired for a subsequent operation of the 2006 test. However, the Bureau does not fully consider past performance. When rehiring field staff, the Bureau does not use certain information that could help assess an applicant's competence, nor does the Bureau prepare employee performance evaluations that could be used later when considering rehiring former employees. Bureau officials say they try not to rehire those individuals who were terminated for cause. In comments on a draft of this report, Commerce noted that OPM has exempted most of the Bureau's statutory field staff from its requirement that all federal employees undergo a performance evaluation.

The Bureau rehires former employees using the same procedures it uses to hire those with no prior census experience. Office clerks conduct telephone interviews of former employees using the same hiring scripts used to assess all other applicants. Individuals who could comment on the performance of an individual, such as crew leaders, field office supervisors, or local office managers, are not consulted during the rehiring process. Bureau officials said that they try to exclude rehiring former employees who were terminated for cause. The actions that would result in a worker being terminated for cause are severe conduct or performance problems—such as striking another person or selling alcohol or drugs on Bureau premises.

Commerce also stated that the Bureau's Decennial Applicant Personnel and Payroll System contains termination data about each applicant—such as whether a worker left an operation due to cause, resignation, or lack of work—and have controls that do not allow employees who were terminated for cause to be rehired. However, officials we interviewed during the 2006 Census Test told us that not all employees with conduct problems or who performed poorly were terminated. Further, the OIG found that during Census 2000, managers were reluctant to terminate poor-performing workers, but instead would refrain from assigning them new work. Some of these managers were concerned that separated employees would be unable to find new jobs; others were put off by the amount of time and paperwork involved in terminating workers. In addition to collecting termination data, the Bureau also collects productivity data on field workers. According to officials, the Bureau does not use this information when rehiring former employees, because

productivity data do not adequately describe the performance of a temporary worker, as the situations in which workers do their jobs vary considerably.

Despite the limitations of using productivity data discussed above, the Bureau does not collect other data that could allow it to quickly evaluate the prior performance of applicants reapplying for census work, such as individual performance evaluations that could be prepared at the completion of employment. Bureau officials said that the policies for rehiring former employees should be sufficient to hire and maintain a competent workforce because the process worked during Census 2000. Furthermore, they said that the pace of the decennial, particularly the nonresponse follow-up operation, is such that local census officials have insufficient time to consider past performance in making hiring decisions. Bureau officials do not prepare performance evaluations of employees because field operations supervisors do not have the time to conduct this assessment and crew leaders do not have the training needed to provide a relatively objective assessment of field staff.

Although officials believe they lack sufficient time to consider past performance when rehiring, we believe that the Bureau does have enough time. For example, performance data could be collected during the address canvassing operation to be used to assess previous workers for the nonresponse follow-up operation, which occurs nearly a year later. Moreover, during the 2006 Census Test, information from supervisors on the performance of their workers was readily available, as crew leaders we spoke with were able to identify the relative strengths of their crew members; however, that information is neither collected nor used. Bureau officials believed that such information is inherently subjective. Nonetheless, the Bureau appears to recognize the value of collecting such information. Specifically, the contractor validating the hiring tests intends to collect similar information during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal by asking supervisors, "Would you be willing to rehire this individual for the next operation?" Collecting and using responses to a question as simple as this could inform the Bureau about the performance of former employees and help ensure that rehired workers are competent.

If 15 percent of the field staff were to be rehired during the 2010 Census, as was the case during the 2006 Census Test, the Bureau would not have performance data to meaningfully evaluate whether to rehire approximately 90,000 individuals. Without preparing employee performance information, the Bureau cannot ensure that the weakest performers are not rehired.

The Bureau Has Not Changed Training Delivery or Content for Temporary Field Staff to Fully Address Known Challenges

The Bureau is providing some computer-based training on using the handheld computers in key operations. However, overall, the Bureau has made limited changes to the approach it uses to deliver training and has not evaluated alternate approaches to providing training. In addition to having trainers read a script verbatim, nonresponse follow-up training in 2006 included (1) scripted role play exercises, where trainers and trainees read from prepared materials; (2) a few hours of practice in the field with actual housing units and residents, although not all field staff we spoke with had this opportunity; (3) opportunities for enumerators to answer scripted questions from the crew leader, though instructions for trainers discouraged class discussion because such discussions would disrupt the training schedule; and (4) limited use of visual aids, created by crew leaders rather than the Bureau or local census office staff. Although in commenting on a draft of our report, Commerce stated its commitment to continuously improving training through the incorporation of trainee self-assessment and practice questions, role-playing, and focusing on practical applications it has largely retained its verbatim approach. Bureau officials stated this was to preserve the consistency of the training it delivers nationwide. Additionally, officials stated that a verbatim approach is necessary because crew leaders, who usually provide their crews' training, may have been employed only a few weeks and have no practical decennial experience in the field. Commerce also pointed to the challenge of holding 40,000 training sessions simultaneously.

Many field staff we spoke with during the 2006 test said their overall impression of training was generally positive. Nonetheless, many said that videos or visuals would or might improve training. Further, according to Bureau summaries of debriefings it conducted, field staff indicated that the verbatim training was slow-paced and redundant; they said training would have been improved by videos or other media.¹⁹ These comments are bolstered by observations during the 2004 and 2006 tests, which showed that field staff may have missed important parts of training. When Harris—the contractor developing the handheld computers—observed training during the 2006 test, it saw students playing games on their handheld computers during training.²⁰ Moreover, in 2004, OIG observers

¹⁹These sessions aimed to obtain information that will improve Bureau procedures, including training. We reviewed summaries of debriefings conducted for three operations—nonresponse follow-up, update/enumerate, and address canvassing.

²⁰The handheld computers developed by Harris will not include software that will allow field staff to play games during training.

found students not paying attention and even falling asleep during class and concluded that some enumerators may have failed to learn how to conduct census operations.²¹ The OIG attributed some enumerator deficiencies to the Bureau's verbatim training method, as enumerators they spoke with said training was slow and uninteresting and that lapses in their concentration occurred.

The Bureau and others, including us, have reported that the Bureau should consider alternate approaches to training delivery. Our review of the 2004 Census Test found that, as a result of the demographic and technological changes that have taken place since 1970, the Bureau might want to explore alternatives to its verbatim approach to training.²² Moreover, in 2004, the OIG suggested the Bureau explore the use of interactive training methods, as the Bureau does for other nondecennial surveys.²³ Specifically, the OIG noted that the Bureau should consider using multimedia or computer-based training. The Bureau has also conducted, or contracted for, several evaluations of its nonresponse follow-up training, though none of these evaluations assessed whether alternate delivery approaches would improve training. Bureau officials claim the training they provide is effective so evaluations comparing alternate approaches are not necessary. Officials indicated that the primary criterion they used to judge the effectiveness of training was whether operations were completed on time. However, timeliness does not take into account the quality of data collected by these field staff and therefore is not an appropriate measure of training effectiveness. In an evaluation of training for nonresponse follow-up in Census 2000, for example, the Bureau found that field staff struggled to read questions as worded, show flashcards to respondents, and consistently ask questions about Hispanic origin and race.

Our guide for strategic training recommends that agencies compare various training approaches by weighing their estimated costs and anticipated benefits,²⁴ but Bureau officials said they did not explore alternate approaches because they could not think of any feasible

²¹OIG-16949.

²²GAO, *2010 Census: Basic Design Has Potential, but Remaining Challenges Need Prompt Resolution*, [GAO-05-9](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 12, 2005).

²³OIG-16949.

²⁴[GAO-04-546G](#).

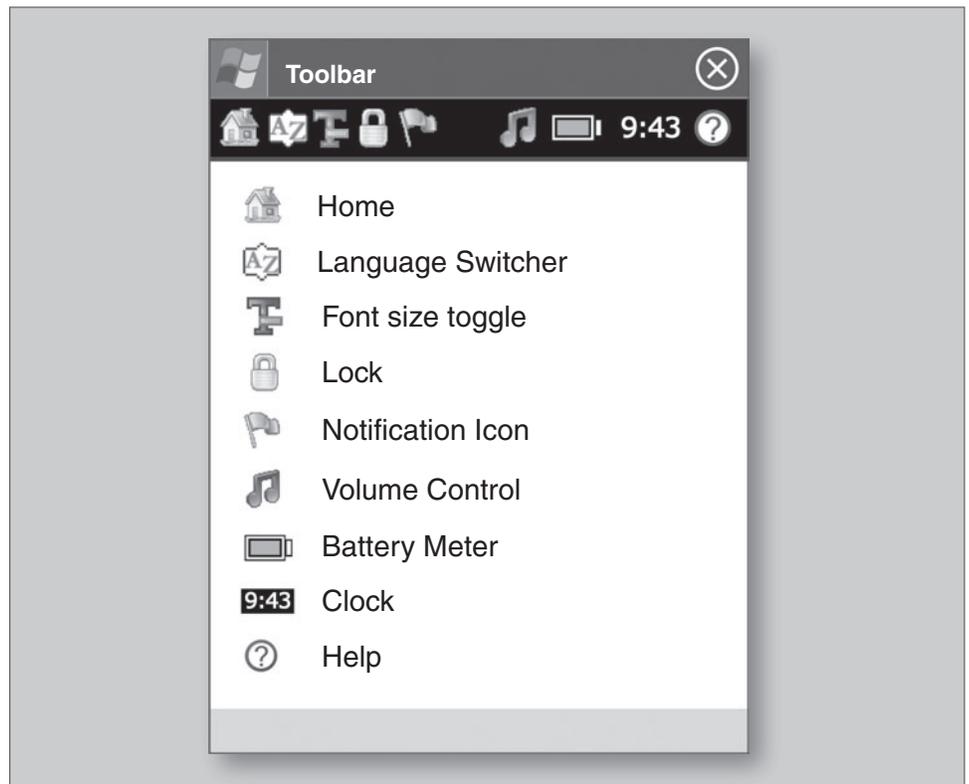
improvements. In particular, Bureau officials explained that audiovisual equipment was not always available at training sites, so video segments could not be scheduled during training. Further, they said wealthy areas are more likely to have greater access to video equipment, which may lead to better-prepared field staff in those neighborhoods. However, the Bureau has not collected data to show that video equipment was unavailable at training locations during Census 2000 or either of the tests conducted in 2004 and 2006. In fact, for some training sites in the reengineered environment, the Bureau has increased requirements such as having sufficient electrical outlets to power trainees' handheld computers and a dedicated phone line for transmitting census and payroll data. As a result of having to meet increased Bureau requirements, training sites may be more likely to have audiovisual technology.

Commerce's comments also cited concerns about the cost of buying or renting audiovisual equipment. However, several options exist that could allow video content to be used more broadly without renting or purchasing new technology. Further, evaluations could show that video segments are more efficient than verbatim training, thus reducing the time needed for training and mitigating the cost of audiovisual equipment. One option the Bureau could pursue is providing video content to its field staff to watch during their self-study as homework assignments. In an OIG report on the 2004 Census Test, Bureau officials agreed that distributing videos as a homework assignment might be beneficial and feasible, as a large number of homes now have VCRs or DVD players, but did not distribute this type of content in the 2006 test. Alternatively, given increased Internet access, Web-based material may be a practical way to present video content. If only a few training sites lack access to audiovisual technology, crews could be invited into the local census office to view video segments. If more training sites lack such technology or the local census office is located a great distance from the training site, field operations supervisors, who we observed visiting each of their crews every day during training, could show video segments on their laptops. However, the Bureau has not evaluated whether any or all of these options would be feasible. Officials explained that they could not know the extent to which technology is available prior to opening local census offices, but this information could be compiled during early operations for use during nonresponse follow-up training, which occurs more than a year after the local census offices open.

Regardless of whether the Bureau considers alternate approaches to training, training could be enhanced by the addition of visual aids to illustrate census concepts. In fact, the Bureau has shown support for using

visual aids during training, as it will incorporate visual aids developed by Harris that will help illustrate how to use the handheld computers (see fig. 3).

Figure 3: Visual Created by Harris for Use in Training



Source: The Harris Corporation.

A Bureau evaluation of nonresponse follow-up training in Census 2000 recommended creating additional media, such as flip charts or posters, for use in training.²⁵ The OIG found that some trainees had trouble following the verbatim instructions and might have benefited from the use of visual aids.²⁶ Finally, an external contractor that reviewed the Bureau's training

²⁵U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

²⁶Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, *Valuable Learning Opportunities Were Missed in the 2006 Test of Address Canvassing*, OIG-17524 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2006).

in 2004 recommended that the Bureau develop visual aids for use during training.²⁷ During our observations of the 2006 test, we also noted instances where visual aids might enhance training. For example, field staff had difficulty distinguishing between vacant and occupied housing units in rural South Dakota. Training materials suggested field staff speak with a knowledgeable person and observe some visual cues, such as uncut grass or boarded-up windows. In that regard, a series of pictures illustrating such features might enhance the ability of field staff to make judgments about vacant houses consistently.

Bureau's Training Content Largely Unchanged Despite Recommendations Calling for Change

The content of the Bureau's training for field staff has not changed substantially since Census 2000, despite the fact that collecting data from the nation's population has become increasingly complex, as people become more reluctant to participate in the census and the nation has continued to become more diverse. According to Bureau officials, the Bureau is finding it increasingly difficult to locate people and get them to participate in the census. Field workers we spoke with during the 2006 test noted two related issues on which they had not received sufficient training—dealing with reluctant respondents and handling location-specific challenges.

Field staff may not be sufficiently prepared to encourage reluctant respondents to participate in the census. In 2004, the OIG found that field staff complained they felt unprepared to deal with reluctant respondents and the report recommended the Bureau consider adding content to enhance training on this topic.²⁸ In 2006, the Bureau included one role-play example of a reluctant respondent in nonresponse follow-up training in Texas, but none in update/enumerate—the comparable operation conducted at the more rural South Dakota test site. Despite this improvement, dealing with these reluctant respondents continued to be a problem for field staff in 2006. For example, an enumerator in Texas told us that the Bureau should more directly explain that most respondents are likely to be reluctant. She said she was surprised by how many reluctant respondents she encountered. During the debriefing discussions the Bureau held with field staff, many participants indicated that respondent

²⁷Eagle International, Inc., *2004 Census Test: Review and Evaluation of Training Efficacy* (Rochester, N.Y.: Oct. 21, 2005).

²⁸OIG-16949.

reluctance was challenging.²⁹ When asked, enumerators at the debriefings said respondent refusals were something they were least prepared to handle after training. Crew leaders echoed this sentiment when asked about it during the debriefing, saying that overcoming respondent reluctance was the most difficult task enumerators faced.

The nonresponse follow-up training provided in 2006 has more material on how to deal with reluctant respondents than did the Census 2000 nonresponse follow-up training. However, much of the new material concerns how enumerators enter data on the handheld computers and not about training field staff on how to best elicit cooperation. A relatively small portion of training time is dedicated to working with reluctant respondents and this section begins “most of the people you have to interview will cooperate.” Officials explained to us that households in nonresponse follow-up have already chosen not to participate—by not mailing in their surveys—and therefore may be more likely to be reluctant to respond when field staff visit their homes. Finally, as the OIG noted in 2004, training materials generally advised field staff to be prepared to explain why the census was necessary and how data would be used, but offered no special guidance for convincing respondents to cooperate.³⁰ This kind of guidance was also not contained in training materials for the 2006 test.

Although data are available to help the Bureau refine its material on reluctant respondents, the Bureau is not making use of this resource. The Bureau’s Planning Database, used mainly for recruiting purposes and enumeration planning, highlights areas where the Bureau believes it would be hard to enumerate, such as where many migrant workers reside or where there is a large number of public assistance households. Those conditions could be used to assess whether the responsiveness of households to respond to the census over time indicates a need to increase training on handling reluctant respondents. For example, reasons for respondent reluctance could vary based on whether the population of migrant workers or people living in public assistance housing has increased. The necessary changes to training should vary based on how

²⁹As previously discussed, these sessions aimed to obtain information that will improve Bureau procedures, including training. We reviewed summaries of debriefings conducted for three operations—nonresponse follow-up, update/enumerate, and address canvassing.

³⁰OIG-16949.

the population has changed. Bureau officials said that they had not used the database to inform changes made to training.

The increasing reluctance of the nation to participate in the census makes it important for field staff to be trained in the skills needed to complete census work accurately and effectively. We also saw a notice created by an enumerator that informed residents they needed to provide census data or federal marshals would come to arrest them, which local officials told us will not happen. Without adequate preparation, field staff may develop their own strategies when confronted with these difficult situations, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes inappropriate data collection methods. For example, when unable to contact respondents, one Texas enumerator we observed looked up respondent information online, tried to find a phone number for another respondent from a neighborhood cat's collar, and even illegally went through residents' mail. Another enumerator told us she sat in front of housing units for hours waiting for residents to come home from work. Bureau procedures as outlined in training indicate that field staff should make six attempts to contact residents, either in person or by phone, before seeking another knowledgeable person from which to obtain data.

Another issue on which field staff said they needed additional training was with challenges that were specific to their local areas. In South Dakota, for example, an enumerator told us that Abbotsville, Oklahoma—the hypothetical city the Bureau used for role playing and other exercises in the training class—did not reflect the rural conditions of the Cheyenne River Reservation.³¹ This sentiment was also mentioned in the Bureau's debriefing following the operation.³² Field staff participating in these meetings also commented on the challenges related to enumerating empty mobile home sites and working under dangerous rural road conditions. In Austin, Texas, on the other hand, one crew leader explained that training

³¹The example of Abbotsville, Oklahoma, was not used in nonresponse follow-up training. It was used to train field staff in South Dakota to carry out the update/enumerate operation. That operation targets communities with special enumeration needs and where most housing units may not have house number and street name mailing addresses. These areas include resort areas with high concentrations of seasonally vacant housing units and selected American Indian reservations. The training provided for this operation is different from that provided during nonresponse follow-up.

³²As previously discussed, these sessions aimed to obtain information that will improve Bureau procedures, including training. We reviewed summaries of debriefings conducted for three operations—nonresponse follow-up, update/enumerate, and address canvassing.

spent a lot of time on mobile homes—which did not exist in his area—but very little time on apartment buildings, which are common there. Other field staff mentioned problems collecting data from the large college student population in Austin—which had already vacated their Census Day residences for summer vacation by the start of nonresponse follow-up. In debriefings from the nonresponse follow-up operation in Texas, field staff also mentioned a need for additional information on obtaining data in apartment buildings and dealing with large families.

To address these kinds of location-specific challenges, the Bureau works with regional offices to develop 10-minute training modules for specific locations. For example, in 2000, Bureau officials said enumerators in Los Angeles were trained to look for small, hidden housing units, such as apartments in converted garages. Commerce's comments on a draft of this report stated that the Bureau also provides guidance on how long these modules should be and at what point they should be presented. However, officials told us they were not sure how often this kind of training took place, nor had they allocated time during training to present specialized information. On the basis of observations of the 2004 test, we suggested that the Bureau supplement the existing training with modules geared toward addressing the particular enumeration challenges that field staff are likely to encounter in specific locales.³³ The National Academy of Sciences also recommended in 2004 that the Bureau develop special enumeration methods for locations that might face unique challenges, such as irregular urban areas, gated communities, rural areas, and colonias—unincorporated and low-income residential subdivisions lacking basic infrastructure and services along the border between the United States and Mexico.³⁴

The Planning Database may be helpful in determining whether modules focused on particular enumeration challenges may be needed, in that it includes detailed information on small geographic areas. For example, the database contains information on the prevalence of difficult terrain, student populations, and trailer parks, among other variables. However, the Bureau has not used information from the Planning Database to determine where a local census office may need to use location-specific

³³GAO-05-9.

³⁴The National Academies Press, *Reengineering the 2010 Census: Risks and Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: 2004).

training modules nor taken any steps to develop this type of module centrally to ensure the consistency of content.

Bureau officials offered several explanations as to why they have made limited changes to enhance training on reluctant respondents and location-specific challenges. They said the Bureau lacks the time and budget to make systematic changes to its training, and they believe that the content of training is already effective. They also said that the Bureau has made changes to training “iteratively” over time, citing increases to the content on reluctant respondents since Census 2000. Officials noted that while fieldwork in various locations can be different, a consistent nationwide approach is necessary and that local differences were handled by the 10-minute modules that could be created by regional offices. Further, officials explained that creating location-specific modules centrally would be time-consuming and expensive. Finally, officials were opposed to including any additional material on dealing with reluctant respondents because longer training is costly. However, as field staff told us, the training contains material on issues they did not face in their local areas. For example, as we stated earlier in this section, much time was spent on training on mobile homes in Austin, Texas, although they are not prevalent in the area. The inclusion of this material in a standard nationwide training reduces the time available for other issues, such as strategies for addressing reluctant respondents.

Developing modules for different types of locations centrally, while potentially costly, would allow the Bureau to control the consistency and quality of training throughout the nation and therefore control the cost of local operations. For example, headquarters staff could centrally develop modules covering enumeration strategies in a variety of situations, such as mobile homes, large apartment buildings, and migrant worker dwellings, which local officials can selectively insert into their training if there is a need to train their field staff on that topic. In Census 2000, the Bureau did not know where location-specific modules created by regional offices were used, nor the quality of instruction provided in those modules. For example, to collect data from colonias in 2000, the Denver Regional Office provided field staff information about the layout of the colonias, while the Dallas Regional Office decided to use a different enumeration method for these housing units. Targeting training to address those issues field staff are likely to face could also save time during training by deleting topics that are not needed by field staff. Moreover, targeted training could enhance the effectiveness of trainers and field staff by giving greater attention to the challenges they do face.

Conclusions

For the 2010 Census, the Bureau faces difficulties in enumerating a changing society, whereby the population is increasingly diverse and hard to locate. The Bureau has responded to challenges with a reengineered approach that relies to a much greater extent on new technologies, such as handheld computers. In addition, it is important that the Bureau evaluate and improve how it recruits and hires temporary field workers and trains them on the skills needed to successfully complete the 2010 Census.

The Bureau's overall approach to recruiting and hiring is focused on ensuring that it recruits and hires a sufficient number of field staff. However, a more targeted and considered approach would help the Bureau to more effectively identify the workers it needs. Conducting an analysis of the characteristics of applicants likely to become effective census workers or analyzing information about field staff turnover could allow the Bureau to recruit and hire staff more likely to be successful throughout census operations and thereby reduce or better control operational costs, as well as recruiting and hiring expenditures. The Bureau is making efforts to revise its tools to better identify staff with the necessary skills in light of the new automated environment. However, its hiring tools have not adequately differentiated between crew leaders and their field staff. During the reengineered 2010 Census, crew leaders will be responsible for training and supervising field staff as well as troubleshooting the handheld computers used to collect data in the field. By using the same hiring tools for positions that need different skills, the Bureau cannot ensure that crew leaders have the skills needed to fulfill the requirements of those key positions. Finally, the Bureau does not prepare employee performance evaluations that can be used to make informed decisions when rehiring former employees, who may be given preference during hiring for later operations. Such performance information may also be useful in assessing the characteristics of applicants likely to be successful at census work.

The Bureau has decades of experience in training field workers, but we and others made recommendations following Census 2000 and subsequent field tests that could improve the delivery and content of training. The Bureau has not evaluated alternate approaches to training like using video content, nor has the Bureau evaluated the feasibility of such alternatives. Without these evaluations, Bureau decision makers lack information they need to determine the best way to deliver training. Moreover, while the Bureau will be incorporating visual aids on how to use the handheld computers, it has not developed other visual aids that could improve the ability of field staff to conduct census operations.

With respect to the content of training, some field staff said they need more training on how to deal with reluctant respondents. Bureau officials said that this content has increased since Census 2000, but we found that field staff still lacked a clear idea of how likely they were to encounter reluctance and also needed strategies to convince such respondents to cooperate. Likewise, although the Bureau permits regional or local offices to provide a very small amount of training specific to their areas, it has not centrally developed modules on topics field staff are likely to face in certain areas—such as apartment buildings and mobile homes—for those offices to incorporate into their standard training. These modules could improve the training on these situations and increase the consistency of training content. Without evaluating the way training is delivered, developing visual aids to enhance training, and making appropriate modifications to improve content on reluctant respondents and location-specific situations, the Bureau’s temporary field staff may be less than fully prepared to do their work.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Commerce direct the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau to take the following seven actions to improve the Bureau’s recruiting, hiring, and training of temporary field staff. The Bureau should

- To refine its approach to recruiting and hiring, evaluate the factors that are associated with and predictive of employee interest in census work, performance, and commitment. These factors may include prior work experience and employment status. The Bureau should determine the best way to measure employee performance for the purposes of this analysis. The Bureau should also consider these findings for better targeting applicants in subsequent decennial operations. This effort could be conducted during address canvassing and other early operations during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal and during the 2010 Census. The resulting information will be useful when recruiting and hiring for the Bureau’s largest decennial operation, nonresponse follow-up, and subsequent operations.
- Determine the best way to gather employee performance data during the address canvassing operation in the 2010 Census to inform rehiring decisions during subsequent operations.
- Modify recruiting and hiring tools, including the skills test and phone interview, to better differentiate applicants with the skills and competencies needed by crew leaders from those who would be better suited for other field positions.

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- Evaluate the effectiveness of alternate approaches for delivering training, including the use of video content, as compared to the current verbatim approach. If new approaches are found to be more effective, evaluate the feasibility of delivering this type of training during subsequent operations.
 - Prior to the 2010 Census, incorporate into training visual aids illustrating how to conduct census work.
 - Revise or modify training to enhance material on reluctant respondents so that field staff are provided with a realistic impression of the prevalence of respondent reluctance and strategies for convincing these respondents to participate.
 - Prepare training modules addressing prototypical location-specific challenges that may be selected and used by regional or local census offices. For example, modules on situations localities may face—such as enumerating apartment buildings or dealing with empty mobile home sites—could be centrally developed by Bureau officials to ensure the consistency and quality of such modules. Local or regional officials could then select those modules most appropriate to the local area for use in training.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Secretary of Commerce for his review and comment. We received comments from Commerce's Deputy Secretary. Overall, Commerce agreed with the importance of the key human capital principles reflected in the draft report, noting that the Bureau believes it already has implemented strategies relating to those principles for its permanent workforce, and that, internally, the Bureau has recommended using similar strategies for the decennial census as well. Commerce incorrectly asserts that we find the Bureau's overall approach for recruiting, hiring, and training to be insufficient. Rather, as the report title indicates, we believe the Bureau can refine its recruiting and hiring efforts and enhance training. Commerce agreed with one of the report's recommendations and in commenting on the remaining recommendations, either pointed to actions that it is taking that are consistent with the recommendation or questioned the need for taking action. We describe Commerce's response to the report's recommendations below. Commerce also provided other comments and concerns, including technical corrections and suggestions where additional context was needed. We revised the report to reflect these comments as appropriate. Our response to these comments and Commerce's letter appear in appendix I.

In response to our recommendation that the Bureau refine its overall approach to recruiting and hiring, Commerce noted that the Bureau's

selection tools are developed to ensure that all legal and professional standards for hiring employees are met, while allowing it to select the large number of persons needed to complete the census. Commerce also stated that the Bureau's previous and current job analyses would allow the Bureau to identify the factors most likely to predict success on the job and that those factors are currently represented in the Bureau's selection tools and procedures. We agree that the Bureau's recruiting approach should be designed to ensure it may select a sufficient number of persons to complete the census. However, we do not agree that the Bureau's analyses identify the factors most likely to predict applicants' success and are incorporated in selection tools and procedures. In fact, the Bureau has no documentation to indicate that it has identified and analyzed these factors. As a result, we concluded that the Bureau could refine its recruiting and hiring tools to better understand what makes applicants successful and thereby minimize operating costs. Our recommendation calls for the Bureau to use a fact-based approach to developing selection criteria. We believe that without a usable measure of performance and analysis of attrition, the Bureau cannot fully measure success in terms of performance and turnover. Such analysis would permit the Bureau to target recruitment to applicants who are not only more likely to perform well, but also continue throughout an operation. Recruiting such applicants could help reduce or better control operational costs as well as recruiting and hiring expenditures by decreasing the need to recruit and hire additional workers.

Regarding our second recommendation that the Bureau determine the best way to gather performance data to inform rehiring decisions, Commerce stated that our report does not have evidence that a significantly large portion of rehired employees are poor performers. It also noted that the Bureau has taken steps to prevent the rehiring of poor performers. While agreeing that performance appraisal and evaluation are relevant in most agencies, Commerce added that such a system would not be practical for the Bureau given the sheer number of workers hired during the decennial, their temporary employment, and the time-consuming nature of performance management systems. Our draft report in no way suggested that either a "significantly large" or even a "large" portion of the employees are poor performers. To the contrary, neither we nor the Bureau has information regarding the performance of its temporary workers, other than whether an employee has been terminated for cause. Further, we disagree that our suggested appraisal system would create a large administrative burden. We are not recommending that the Bureau develop a complex, time-consuming and formal appraisal system in the course of obtaining performance information; instead, we suggest that local census

offices obtain limited information, such as whether a crew leader would be willing to rehire a worker for a later operation. As we noted in the report, these data could be systematically collected upon a worker's termination to assess whether to rehire that individual. In commenting on the report, Commerce noted that crew leaders and other field office supervisors are instructed to terminate workers who are not performing at an acceptable level, thus eliminating them from consideration for future operations. However, the OIG found that during the Census 2000, managers were reluctant to terminate workers, but instead would refrain from assigning them new work. Officials we interviewed during the 2006 test told us that not all poor performers were terminated. We conclude that the Bureau could do more to determine whether an employee should be considered for rehiring, such as through recording the crew leader's or field office supervisor's overall assessment prior to an employee leaving operations. Without such information, the Bureau cannot know whether it is rehiring poor performers who had not been terminated due to conduct problems or unsatisfactory performance. We added additional context in our report about how poor-performing workers are not always terminated. By failing to terminate weak performers, local census offices cannot identify those workers if they reapply for census work in a subsequent operation. Finally, we do not believe that a performance assessment system would create a large set of legal problems because it is unlikely that taking such information into account would negatively affect the Bureau's compliance with the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act and veterans' preference requirements.

Commerce agreed with our third recommendation that recruiting and hiring tools should be modified to better differentiate applicants with the skills and competencies needed by crew leaders and noted that the Bureau is working with a contractor to do so.

In its comments on our fourth recommendation—that the Bureau evaluate the effectiveness of alternate approaches to delivering training—Commerce noted that the Bureau continues to explore methods for providing training within the constraints of time and funding, and that it intends to reevaluate the purely verbatim training approach. Commerce commented that renting or purchasing additional audiovisual equipment needed for nonresponse follow-up training would be cost-prohibitive. However, Bureau officials have told us that they have not studied the prevalence of audiovisual equipment in training locations; therefore, the Bureau cannot know the cost of providing such equipment. Further, we are not recommending that the Bureau rent or purchase this equipment. Instead, we call for the Bureau to evaluate the effectiveness of these

alternative approaches, including audio-visual equipment. The internal process of reviewing previous training schedules and topics to identify areas needed for modification and emphasis is commendable; however, the Bureau does not have any documentation of this effort. Further, while the Commerce also asserts that it is not feasible to provide training content through audiovisual technology, in our report, we outline several ways the Bureau could provide this content using technology already available. Moreover, without studying whether alternate approaches are more efficient or effective; the Bureau cannot know whether or not it is worth making an investment in such approaches. Therefore, we continue to recommend that the Bureau study alternate approaches to delivering training.

Regarding our fifth recommendation—that the Bureau incorporate into training visual aids that illustrate how to conduct census work—Commerce explained that the Bureau will be using visual aids in address canvassing and nonresponse follow-up training. Commerce offered to provide us with the visual aids that would be used during the dress rehearsal; however, when we asked for these visual aids, the Bureau informed us that they have not been completed and could not be provided. We believe that introducing this material during the dress rehearsal is an excellent first step and commended the Bureau taking this step. As our report pointed out, however, the visuals proposed for address canvassing and nonresponse follow-up were technical in nature, illustrating how to use the handheld devices. Commerce also pointed out that the Bureau would use large maps during training in another operation. These maps will also likely enhance training for this operation. Nonetheless, in our audit work, we found that additional visuals, such as pictures illustrating the difference between vacant and occupied housing units, would have helped field staff better understand census work. We, therefore, believe the Bureau could do more to incorporate visual aids into training.

In response to our sixth recommendation, where we recommended revising or modifying training on reluctant respondents, Commerce explained that efforts to reevaluate training are ongoing. It mentioned that adding material to training would make training longer and thereby costlier. In recognition of the costs of additional training time, we specifically recommended that the Bureau revise or modify its approach to providing training on reluctant respondents, rather than simply providing more training. Overall, we found that continued attention to providing adequate training on reluctant respondents is important, especially given that the Bureau believes reluctance among the nation's public has been increasing.

Finally, Commerce noted that the Bureau acknowledged that location-specific training was necessary in some cases, as was suggested by our seventh recommendation. The comments provided outlined the Bureau's procedures for providing location-specific training modules through the efforts of regional census offices. We incorporated some additional details into our report to better characterize the role of headquarters staff in developing the modules used in specific local census offices. However, as we state in the report, developing modules for different types of locations centrally would allow the Bureau to control the consistency and quality of training throughout the nation.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Commerce, Commerce's Office of Inspector General, the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau, and other interested congressional committees. We will make copies available to others upon request. This report will also be available at no charge on our Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me on (202) 512-6806 or by e-mail at sciremj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.



Director
Strategic Issues

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Commerce

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

April 4, 2007

Mr. Mathew J. Scire
Acting Director
Strategic Issues
United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Scire:

The U.S. Department of Commerce appreciates the opportunity to comment on the United States Government Accountability Office's draft report entitled 2010 Census: *Census Bureau Can Refine Recruiting and Hiring Efforts and Enhance Training for Temporary Field Staff (GAO-07-361)*. I enclose the Department's comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David A. Sampson".

David A. Sampson

Enclosure

U.S. Department of Commerce
Comments on the United States Government Accountability Office
Draft Report Entitled 2010 Census: Census Bureau Should Refine Recruiting and Hiring
Efforts and Enhance Training for Temporary Field Staff (GAO-07-361)
March 2007

The U.S. Census Bureau appreciates the United States Government Accountability Office's (GAO) efforts to review our recruiting, hiring, and training plans for the 2010 Census and this opportunity to review the draft report.

The Census Bureau agrees that the application of key human capital principles is essential to the effective accomplishment of an agency's mission. This is especially true for the decennial census, because an exceptionally large and dispersed temporary workforce plays a large role. The broad, generally accepted human capital management principles that the GAO, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and others have identified provide a useful framework for shaping specific human capital management programs. These principles are necessarily broad since they are designed to have applicability across the entire spectrum of missions and human capital needs of the federal government. The principles must be general enough to help guide efforts in a variety of circumstances. They must also apply across a highly diverse set of occupations: nuclear physicists, seasonal park rangers, cemetery managers, information technology professionals, fire jumpers, border patrol agents, nurses, and so forth.

Within that context, the Census Bureau believes that the decennial census presents unique human capital management needs and challenges that require very different strategies and solutions than those that would be appropriate with a permanent workforce and ongoing function. This is not to say that we discount the principles of good human capital management when dealing with these challenges; it is simply that we have adapted the principles of human capital management to address the unique requirements associated with carrying out our mission.

As the report shows, for peak operations during 2010—making personal follow-up visits to households that do not return their census questionnaire by mail—the Census Bureau estimates it will need to recruit 2.5 million applicants, train over 1 million, and hire over 500,000 field staff to work on a job that will last only a few months. This temporary workforce is nearly 100 times that of the Census Bureau's ongoing permanent workforce.

For that permanent workforce, the Census Bureau believes it already has implemented strategies relating to the human capital principles highlighted by the GAO. Both our Field Division and our Human Resources Division are involved with the recruiting, hiring, training, and management of that permanent workforce (as well as of the temporary workforce for the decennial census) and have recommend using similar strategies for the decennial census as well, to the extent they are feasible and cost-effective. Finally, although the GAO and others have recognized that we met our unique challenges and successfully achieved our recruiting, hiring, and training objectives for Census 2000, this report states that our overall plan to use much the

same approach for the 2010 Census will not be sufficient, particularly in light of our plans for increased use of automation for field data collection activities. However, the purpose of the Census Bureau's testing in 2004 and 2006 was to answer just the opposite question. Namely, the objective was to determine if the temporary workforce we traditionally are able to recruit, hire, train, and supervise would be capable of using the automated equipment. If the tests had shown this was not the case, we were fully prepared to drop plans to automate these activities because of the much higher costs and risks of having to find and hire a significantly different temporary workforce for this major undertaking. Fortunately, our tests showed that the people we know how to recruit and hire for these temporary positions will be able to do the jobs, so we have proceeded with our automation plans. As part of these plans, we have stressed to our field data collection automation contractor that we need simple, user-friendly applications and devices so that we do not have to recruit for special skills.

Additional details can be found below in our comments regarding the recommendations that begin on page 45:

GAO Recommendation 1:

"To refine its approach to recruiting and hiring, evaluate the factors that are associated with and predictive of employee interest in census work, performance, and commitment. These factors include employee prior work experience and employment status. Determine the best way to measure employee performance for the purpose of this analysis. The Bureau should also consider these findings for better targeting applicants in subsequent decennial operations. This effort should be conducted during address canvassing and other early operations during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal and during the 2010 Census. The resulting information will be useful when recruiting and hiring for the Bureau's largest decennial operation nonresponse follow-up and subsequent operations."

Census Bureau Response:

The proposed report repeatedly emphasizes that the Census Bureau needs to refine its recruiting and hiring approach to enhance the quality of candidates. The report appears to assume that our current selection practices are inadequate for recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining one of the largest peacetime mobilizations of workers in the nation. However, we believe our selection tools are being developed to ensure that they meet all legal and professional standards for reliable and valid employee hiring requirements, while allowing us to select the large number of persons needed to complete the census in all communities across the country. Our previous and current job analyses have allowed us to identify those factors that are most likely to predict success on the job, and these factors currently are represented in our selection tools and procedures. Our priority is to reach out as broadly as possible to the diverse communities in the country, because in order to hire hundreds of thousands of temporary workers, we must attract several million applicants.

Now on page 33.

A new selection aid currently is being evaluated to see if it is a better tool than the one that was used successfully in Census 2000 and in the 2004 and 2006 Census Tests. We have always depended on our ability to adequately train employees who have the skills for the job. This limits our restriction on the recruiting pool to location and availability.

GAO Recommendation 2:

“Determine the best way to gather employee performance data during the address canvassing operation in the 2010 Census to inform rehiring decisions during subsequent operations.”

Census Bureau Response:

The GAO suggests several strategies to modify our assessment process; however, there is nothing in the report to suggest that a significantly large portion of rehired employees are poor performers, or that any studies or assessments by the Census Bureau, the Office of Inspector General (OIG), or GAO have identified this as a significant problem.

The Census Bureau has taken steps to prevent poor performers from being rehired. Every enumerator’s production is monitored and assessed on a daily basis. The crew leaders and field operations supervisors are instructed to terminate employees who have not performed at an acceptable level, which eliminates them from consideration for future operations. We will continue to emphasize the need for these types of actions.

The suggestions concerning performance appraisal and evaluation are relevant in most agencies and in most relatively stable work environments. Performance management is undeniably important. But, given the sheer number of employees the Census Bureau hires for the decennial census, the temporary nature of these appointments, the time-consuming nature of a performance management system, and the lack of time allowed for managers to develop these employees, a performance management system for the decennial census is not feasible.

Gathering performance data after the address canvassing operation has been completed would have the effect of creating a formal performance appraisal system, in which the employees being assessed were not involved. Unlike a performance, conduct action, or termination, the employee would have no knowledge that any assessment had been made that could prevent their subsequent employment. If such assessments were made, it would create a potentially large set of administrative and legal problems. Veterans, in particular, would have a strong basis for appeal under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act and under the requirements of veterans’ preference.

GAO Recommendation 3:

“Modify recruiting and hiring tools including the skills tests and phone interview that better differentiate applicants with the skills and competencies needed by crew leaders from those who would be better suited for other field positions.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau agrees that hiring tools need to be evaluated and currently is working with a contractor to do this. For the crew leader position, we continue to research methods to identify and test for these skills that are within legal and professional best practice employee selection guidelines. We note that there are currently five different guides that are used for selections for various local census office (LCO) positions, including crew leaders. These guides were reviewed and altered based on recommendations from the regional offices (ROs) or LCOs. Within the selection guides, there is variance based on the operation for which the applicant is being interviewed. These guides will be reviewed and reevaluated before they go into production for the 2010 Census.

GAO Recommendation 4:

“Evaluate the effectiveness of alternative approaches for delivering training, including the use of video content as compared to the current verbatim approach. If new approaches are found to be more effective, evaluate the feasibility of delivering this type of training during subsequent operations.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau continues to explore methods, within the constraints of time and funding, for providing standardized training to a national, diverse staff. Some of the constraints are the volume of simultaneous training sessions (more than 40,000) and limitations on the types of space we can obtain, as well as the cost to provide equipment, such as projectors, television, videos, and the like. At this point, it is cost-prohibitive to either rent or purchase the audiovisual equipment needed for the number of simultaneous training sessions for Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU). We will continue to explore use of technology, as well as continue to improve the traditional methods of training. As an example, for the NRFU training for the 2008 Dress Rehearsal, we are reevaluating the purely verbatim training approach to include more interactive activities and employing more visual aids as described in response to Recommendation 5.

GAO Recommendation 5:

“Prior to the 2010 Census, incorporate into training visual aids illustrating how to conduct census work.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau is using visual aids in several field operations, such as the following:

- Address Canvassing (AC)—We can provide GAO with five poster-size screen shots of the application on the hand-held computer that will be used to aid in training staff for this operation. These larger size sheets will be included in each Lister training kit and will be

posted on the wall during training. In addition, AC provides a quick reference guide to each Lister.

- Group Quarter Validation, which is a paper-based operation, will provide four large maps in each trainee kit, marked for easy identification, to make map training more efficient and easier to understand.
- Nonresponse Follow-up, which is an automated operation utilizing the hand-held computers, will continue to use visual aids during the enumerator training. The Nonresponse Follow-up training materials are still in the planning stage, but will incorporate similar visual aids.

We can provide copies of the currently developed visual aids for GAO review.

GAO Recommendation 6:

“Revise or modify training to enhance material on reluctant respondents so that field staff are provided with a realistic impression of the prevalence of respondent reluctance and strategies for convincing such respondents to participate.”

Census Bureau Response:

As mentioned under our response to Recommendation 5, we are reevaluating our training to identify areas in need of a different or enhanced approach, such as providing additional tips and techniques to counteract reluctant respondents. It should be noted that there are numerous constraints that must be considered that affect training, including the significant cost of longer training.

GAO Recommendation 7:

“Prepare training modules addressing prototypical location-specific challenges that may be selected and used by region or local census offices. For example, modules on situations localities may face—such as enumerating apartment buildings or dealing with empty mobile home sites—could be developed by Bureau officials to ensure the consistency and quality of such models. Local or regional officials could then select those modules most appropriate to the local area for use in training.”

Census Bureau Response:

Our training prepares for extensive national operations like AC and NRFU so that all data collection is conducted in a standardized and consistent manner for all areas of the country. At the same time, the Census Bureau recognizes that there is a need for some location-specific training. In order to meet this need, Field Division headquarters staff work with the decennial managers in each Regional Census Center to customize a location-specific training module for the Local Census Offices. Field Division staff also provide guidance on how long and at what point during the training the location-specific training should be presented.

Now on page 4.
See comment 1.

Other comments and concerns about the report:

Page 6:

“Specifically, the Bureau could better target its recruiting and hiring through an analysis to identify the characteristics of employees who are successful at census work and less likely to leave census work before an operation ends.”

Census Bureau Response:

The report suggests that the Census Bureau has made little effort to improve its recruiting and hiring processes since 2000, when, in fact, we have been quite proactive. As part of our research program to improve the employee selection processes, the Census Bureau has held numerous focus groups to identify which recruiting strategies are most effective with diverse populations. Anticipating that the move to automation might impact needed skill sets, we hired a contractor in 2004 to do a preliminary examination of the impact of the hand-held computers on the crew leader and crew leader assistant positions. These results were used to develop a statement of work for hiring a contractor for the 2006 test to complete a job analysis for all LCO positions and to use the job analysis information to examine the continued validity of its selection tools. The job analysis identified which attributes are most highly associated with success on the various jobs. As reported to GAO, both employee debriefings and exit surveys have been used by the Census Bureau to help identify factors that might impact turnover and job tenure. Future work will examine correlations between job success, tenure, and performance on selection tools. During the 2008 Dress Rehearsal, the Census Bureau also plans to use exit survey data to gain additional insight into workers’ decisions to leave before an operation is completed.

Page 6:

“Further, the Bureau has not differentiated its hiring tools—written test and phone interview administered to each qualified applicant—to reflect skills needed by people serving as crew leaders from those skills needed by other staff.”

Census Bureau Response:

There are five different guides that are used for selections for various LCO positions, which were reviewed and altered based on recommendations from the ROs or LCOs. These guides will again be reviewed before they go into production for the 2010 Census. Within the selection guides, there is variance based on the operation for which the applicant is being interviewed. The guides are DX-269A, Selection Guide for Enumerator; DX-269B, Selection Guide for Crew Leader; DX-269C, Selection Guide for Office Clerk; DX-269D, Selection Guide for Supervisors; and DX-269E, Selection Guide for Recruiting Assistant. The Census Bureau currently has a contractor to examine whether there is a need to revise/replace our current selection tools for all LCO positions, including crew leaders. This includes evaluating both the written test and the current interview guides used for selection. The decision on the appropriateness of tools for the

Now on page 4.
See comment 2.

Now on pages 4-5.
See comment 3.

various positions, including the crew leader position, will be made once the contractor completes its research.

Page 6:

“Moreover, while Bureau policies dictate that former employees are rehired first before selecting individuals without prior census experience, the Bureau does not fully consider the past performance of these individuals.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau **recommends** hiring experienced employees before inexperienced employees. Successful work by a census enumerator is difficult to judge by our temporary crew leaders, and it cannot be measured by production rates alone. For example, due to the variety of enumeration areas and the complexity of some cases, employees who are the best workers often are given the most challenging assignments, which in turn would be reflected in a lower production rate.

Page 7:

“The Bureau has taken limited actions to examine or enhance the delivery and content of the training it provides to temporary field staff to address challenges previously identified by the Bureau, us, and the OIG.... The Bureau has not evaluated alternate approaches, such as providing video segments, to training delivery, as has been recommended by us and the OIG.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau does not believe these statements accurately reflect its commitment and implementation of continuous training improvements. The magnitude of the decennial census, with more than 40,000 simultaneous training sessions, creates many challenges to incorporating suggestions, such as using video segments. These include the cost of equipment, the limitation of training space, which is mostly donated at no cost to the government, and the logistics of temporary staff setting up and moving audiovisual equipment. The Census Bureau has used results of past training evaluations to make continuous updates and improvements to its training, reflecting best practices in adult learning and employee training. Some of these include use of frequent self-assessment and practice questions, role-playing, and focusing on the practical applications of what is being taught.

Page 16:

“...working within existing government personnel systems to make census jobs available and attractive to certain populations....”

Now on page 11.
See comment 5.

Now on page 14.
See comment 6.

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau is working with federal, state, local, and tribal officials who manage existing government programs and regulations to obtain waivers that will help expand the pool of potential applicants. Most of these programs involve social services and are not government personnel systems.

Page 19:

“As previously described, the Bureau’s Planning Database, will be updated for every census tract in the nation for the 2010 Census, using such variables as Census 2000 mail return rates, household size, and percentage of linguistically isolated households, among others. The database might allow the Bureau to adjust its analysis for differences in employee productivity between locations.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Planning Database is a useful tool for several purposes, but, as we explained in our discussions with GAO, adjusting for differences in employee productivity between locations is not one of them. One of the uses of the Database is to help plan work loads and, in turn, inform recruiting goals. Elements cited above, such as mail return rates, help us anticipate where we may need to hire larger or smaller staff, but they do not give us the type of information implied in the GAO report that could be used in adjusting enumerator performance data in making decisions about rehiring a particular individual. Information about linguistically isolated households is useful in helping to inform the language skills we may need our employees to possess in a particular location, but not how the productivity of an employee with those skills working in such an area should be adjusted in making a rehire decision.

Many of the best workers are given the most difficult assignments and may appear to be less productive. Therefore, penalizing these individuals for low productivity rates would be counterproductive.

Page 21:

“First, they said the Bureau focused on achieving cost containment through the reengineering of the census, including a short-form census and use of handheld computers, which left little funds to make improvements in other areas such as recruiting and hiring.”

Now on page 16.
See comment 7.

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau agrees that in trying to meet its reengineering objective of containing costs for the 2010 Decennial Census Program, it focused on those things most likely to produce significant cost savings. By far the most expensive task of the census is NRFU. The best way to reduce the costs of that operation is to reduce the work load through improvements that will increase the mail response rate (including using hand-held computers so that late mail returns can be removed from the NRFU work load after the operation begins). The second best way to reduce the costs of NRFU is to minimize the amount of paper (questionnaires, maps, payroll forms) needed for that operation, along with the attendant space and staff needed to control and process all that paper. Thus, these are the areas where we focused our reengineering efforts—in particular, automating field data collection and use of a replacement questionnaire mailing to increase mail response rates.

We did not believe, and still do not believe, that adding more complexity to the recruiting, testing, hiring, training, and supervision efforts are likely to produce significant cost savings. Furthermore, we are extremely adverse to making any changes likely to reduce our ability to find all the people we need to complete these tasks in the time constrained by two legal deadlines. Title 13 of United States Code requires that Census Day be April 1, 2010, and that within nine months of April 1, the Secretary of Commerce must deliver the apportionment counts to the President.

Page 22:

“Regarding evaluating factors that would allow the Bureau to target potential applicants and hence improve recruiting practices, Bureau officials said that doing this could prevent the Bureau from forming community-based census crews that, in their view, are more likely to be familiar with the local environment, build trust with nonrespondents, and hence elicit their participation in the census, more easily than would other field staff.”

Census Bureau Response:

The census is a national event, but it is a local activity. Local governments, community-based organizations, and other local organizations and groups expect that their residents, clients, and/or constituents will have a role in taking the census. These entities support the Census Bureau’s efforts to recruit and hire an indigenous workforce to take the census in every political jurisdiction and in every neighborhood in the United States and Puerto Rico. The Census Bureau has found that hiring people to work in the neighborhoods in which they live literally opens doors. Hiring locals also gives us staff who have a more detailed knowledge of the specific area. This familiarity helps them locate housing units more easily and can afford them easier access to areas that outsiders would not have (for example, hiring someone who lives in a gated community to enumerate that community). Enumerators’ duty stations are their homes. They are paid mileage and time from the moment they leave their homes to begin assignments. Therefore,

Now on page 16.
See comment 8.

Now on pages 16-17.
See comment 9.

hiring people from the neighborhoods in which they work helps to reduce cost and improve response rates.

Page 22:

“Moreover, according to Bureau officials, having a large applicant pool provides the Bureau with assurance that it can meet its recruiting goals; however, they agree that this approach may not be the most cost-effective. ... The contractor suggested that the Bureau develop methods to recruit for the 2010 Census without the resulting applicant pool exceeding the number it plans to hire by such large amounts. Nevertheless, the Bureau does not plan to modify this approach and will continue to recruit five times as many individuals as it plans to hire.”

Census Bureau Response:

The second part of the statement is inaccurate. The Census Bureau is taking a preliminary look at whether varying recruiting goals by area is a viable alternative.

Now on page 17.
See comment 10.

Page 23:

“A more targeted approach to recruiting and hiring for the 2010 Census could allow the Bureau to recruit and hire staff with the necessary skills and interest for census work, and identify applicants who would be more likely to commit to long-term employment and be successful throughout census operations.”

Census Bureau Response:

Census positions are temporary. The majority of the positions exist for 6-8 weeks. Although individuals who may be employed in June 2009 may be rehired in December 2009 and again in June 2010, this is not long-term employment. Well-qualified individuals who are interested in longer term employment are hired as managers or to replace experienced staff who have vacated their permanent positions to work on the decennial for a limited period of time.

Now on pages 17-18.
See comment 11.

Page 24:

“While updated hiring tools may be implemented during the 2010 Census, Bureau officials said that, overall, they do not expect major changes to be made. Changes that will be made to the hiring process will be to account for the automation of field data collection, and not for differentiating hiring tools for crew leaders and other positions.”

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau is examining all of its selection tools, and decisions about needed revisions and replacement of these tools will be made when the research is completed. While one of the major purposes for soliciting a comprehensive review of census selection tests by a contractor was to examine the impact of the automation on required job skills, the contractor has also been tasked with conducting a comprehensive study that will address the validity and reliability of all selection tools. The Census Bureau notes that none of the analyses to date have indicated that

current selection tools are neither valid nor reliable for selecting any LCO positions. In addition, an OPM study of census selection tests and procedures prior to Census 2000 concluded that the selection tools were indeed valid, and that most competencies required for the various field staff jobs were the same. The OPM did recommend that a test component be added to address interpersonal skills, and during 2000, an experiment was conducted for this using an off-the-shelf personality test. Work in this area continues with the current contractor.

Page 26:

"Bureau officials said they do not expect to revise these tools for the 2010 Census because the phone interview has two sets of questions for the crew leaders.... That is the bureau does not plan to hone its tools to target the skills needed by crew leaders, a key position for decennial field activities."

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau recognizes that the CL position requires many skills, such as training, supervision and organization, and continues to research methods to identify these skills that are within the approved guidelines. As stated previously, there are three different selection guides that are used for selections for various LCO positions: the DX-269A, Selection Guide for Enumerator; the DX-269B, Selection Guide for Crew Leader; and the DX-269D, Selection Guide for Supervisors (which includes information for field and office supervisors). These guides were reviewed and altered based on recommendations from the ROs or LCOs and will be reviewed before they go into production for the 2010 Census. Within the selection guides, there is variance based on the operation for which the applicant is being interviewed.

Page 27:

"The following observations were made about individuals in the crew leader position: they did not have the skills necessary to perform the duties required in that position; they did not feel comfortable providing training to enumerators and asked their assistants to deliver; they did not have the appropriate leadership skills; and ... needed for that position."

Census Bureau Response:

These observations are not consistent with the results of the Census Bureau's-sponsored evaluations of staff preparedness following training and on-the-job performance. For example, a 2006 study conducted by a contractor found that field staff were adequately prepared to do the tasks associated with their jobs. Our debriefing results also indicate that CLs felt they were adequately prepared, although there were areas where they would like more training.

Page 28:

"When hiring, Bureau policies dictate that former employees are rehired first...."

Now on page 19.
See comment 2.

Now on page 20.
See comment 12.

Now on page 21.
See comment 3.

Now on page 21.
See comment 13.

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau **recommends**, not dictates, hiring experienced employees before inexperienced employees.

Page 28:

"Nor does the Bureau prepare employee performance evaluations that could be used later when considering rehiring former employees."

Census Bureau Response:

Due to the short-term nature of decennial census employment, the Census Bureau believes it is impractical and cost-prohibitive to conduct formal performance evaluations for these positions. Furthermore, OPM recognizes this and has exempted the Census Bureau from this requirement to conduct evaluations for all temporary Schedule A employees (this includes the enumerators, crew leaders, as well as other field staff) and managerial staff serving in the LCOs under a one-year temporary appointment.

This does not mean that the Census Bureau does not evaluate performance. As noted in the GAO report, the Census Bureau monitors productivity on a daily basis and corrects or terminates poor performers, as necessary.

Pages 28/29:

"Bureau officials said that they try to exclude rehiring former employees who were terminated for cause.... Bureau officials say they try not to rehire those individuals that were terminated for cause."

Census Bureau Response

The Census Bureau does **not** rehire former employees who were terminated for cause. The Decennial Applicant Personnel and Payroll System does not allow for the rehire of employees who were terminated for cause.

Page 30:

"Although officials believe they lack sufficient time to consider past performance when rehiring, we believe that the Bureau does have enough time."

Census Bureau Response:

Please see our comments in response to Recommendation 2.

Now on page 21.
See comment 14.

Now on page 22.
See comment 15.

Now on page 22.
See comment 16.

Page 30:

"If 15 percent of the field staff were to be rehired during the 2010 Census, as was the case during the 2006 Census Test, the Bureau would not have performance data to meaningfully evaluate whether to rehire approximately 90,000 individuals."

Census Bureau Response:

In 2010, there will not be 90,000 individuals with previous census experience available for NRFU. At best, roughly 70,000 individuals are employed for AC—the second largest operation the Census Bureau conducts. The majority of those individuals will most likely not reapply for subsequent temporary operations that are conducted a year later. Even if 15 percent of them do so, this would only produce a pool of about 10,000 experienced staff—far short of the 500,000 enumerators we believe will be needed for NRFU.

Now on page 24.
See comment 17.

Page 33:

"In 2004, the OIG suggested the Bureau explore the use of interactive training methods, as the Bureau does for other non-decennial surveys."

Census Bureau Response:

Survey trainees are less than 1/50 the number of short-term decennial employees. In addition, survey employees are expected to be long-term, as opposed to the very short-term nature of decennial census operations. It is not valid to compare the two types of trainees or methods.

Now on page 25.
See comment 18.

Pages 34 and 35:

"While there are training locations that will not have access to audiovisual technology, several options exist that could allow video content to be used more broadly. One option the Bureau could pursue is providing video contents to its field staff to watch during their self-study as homework assignments.... If only a few training sites ..., crews could be invited into the local census office to view video segments.... If more training sites lack such technology ..., field operations supervisors, who we observed, ... could show video segments on their laptops."

Census Bureau Response:

The report appears to be confusing the techniques available to trainers and trainees for our ongoing surveys with what is available to decennial trainers and trainees. In most cases, decennial enumerators do not have self-study materials. There are no approved criteria to require that a trainee has a VCR or DVD, even though this equipment may be widely available. Trainees who did not have the equipment would be at a disadvantage in the classroom. The same applies to Internet access. The suggestion to invite crews to the LCO disregards the logistics of an LCO with more than 1,000 enumerators widely dispersed throughout the boundaries of the LCO (sometimes living hundreds of miles from their LCO). Also, each field operations supervisor has a crew of approximately eight crew leaders, with up to 16 trainees in each session. It is not logical to believe that trainees would receive any benefit from crowding around a laptop screen.

Now on page 27.
See comment 19.

The Census Bureau has not conducted a formal evaluation because basic calculations of the costs and constraints of this strategy make it unfeasible to effectively implement. Nevertheless, the Census Bureau continues to seek ways to improve the traditional training by reevaluating the presentations and use of visual aids. The HHC will include screen shots as illustrated on page 35 of the GAO report. It has been, and will continue to be, a part of the HHC applications.

Page 36:

"In that regard, a series of pictures illustrating features of vacant housing units, such as uncut grass or boarded-up windows, might provide field staff additional information to help them make these judgments consistently."

Census Bureau Response:

While the Census Bureau supports the use of visual aids, our procedures instruct the Lister to not only rely on visual cues but also to talk with a knowledgeable person in close proximity to the unit before classifying it as vacant. We do not want enumerators to consider Housing Units vacant based solely on visual cues.

Page 40:

(Summary) This page contains several examples of conditions in South Dakota and Austin, Texas that might not apply to all areas of the country in 2010.

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau must prepare national training to incorporate as many disparate examples as possible. In addition, the Census Bureau encourages each RO to identify local conditions that might require specific information. We will continue to explore more formal ways to assist the ROs in this endeavor.

Page 44:

"However, its hiring tools have not adequately differentiated between crew leaders and their field staff."

Census Bureau Response:

As stated above, there are three different selection guides that are used for selections for various LCO field positions. The DX-269A, Selection Guide for Enumerator; the DX-269B, Selection Guide for Crew Leader; and the DX-269D, Selection Guide for Supervisors (this guide includes information for field and office supervisors). These guides were reviewed and revised based on recommendations from the ROs or LCOs and will be reviewed before they go into production

Now on pages 27-28.
See comment 20.

Now on page 32.
See comment 2.

Now on page 32.
See comment 3.

for the 2010 Census. Within the selection guides, there is variance based on the operation in which the applicant is being interviewed.

Page 44:

"Finally, the Bureau ... when rehiring former employees, who are given preference during hiring for later operations."

Census Bureau Response:

The Census Bureau **recommends**, not dictates, hiring experienced employees before inexperienced employees.

Page 44:

"Moreover, while the Bureau will be incorporating visual aids on how to use the hand held computers, it has not developed other visual aids that could improve the ability of field staff to conduct census operations."

Census Bureau Response:

For the 2008 Dress Rehearsal, the Census Bureau has developed five poster-size visual aids for use in the AC. These are screen shots from the HHC and will be moved in the training sessions. There is also a Quick Reference Guide that has been developed for AC field staff use. The Group Quarters Validation (GQV) operation, which is a paper-based operation, has developed large-scale maps to assist in Lister training. For DR, NRFU will continue to use an updated Quick Reference Guide that was used in the 2006 test and will develop large-scale visual aids. NRFU is not at the same point of training material development as AC and GQV.

Now on page 32.
See comment 21.

The following are GAO's comments on the Department of Commerce's (Commerce) "other comments and concerns about the report" section of the letter dated April 4, 2007.

GAO Comments

1. This report does not, as stated in this comment, suggest that the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) made "little effort to improve its recruiting and hiring practices." In fact, we commend the Bureau for taking steps such as identifying critical skills for its field staff in using the handheld computer and using employee insights to improve its recruiting and hiring practices. We provided additional context in our report related to the Bureau's future work to examine correlations between job success, tenure, and performance on selection tools. Further, we also added the Bureau's plans during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal to use exit survey data to gain additional insights on why a worker left before an operation was completed. Such evaluations and insights may help the Bureau improve its recruiting and hiring processes for the 2010 Census.
2. As noted in the report, we reviewed each of these selection guides described in Commerce's comments. We found that these tools do not specifically ask whether the applicants have experience in providing training or using computers—critical skills needed for individuals in the crew leader position. We note in the report that the Bureau has a contractor that will examine the current selection tools during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal, including those used to select crew leaders.
3. We have revised the report to reflect the Bureau's clarification that it "recommends" hiring experienced employees before inexperienced ones.
4. We have revised our report to reflect the Bureau's stated commitment to continuously improving training, including the use of self-assessment and practice questions, role-playing, and focusing on the practical applications of what is being taught. Further, we incorporated additional information about the unique challenges faced by the Bureau in training its temporary field staff.
5. We incorporated the clarifying information Commerce provided that the Bureau is working with federal, state, local, and tribal officials to obtain waivers that will help expand the pool of potential applicants.
6. We have added to the report additional explanation of how the Planning Database may provide useful information in understanding productivity. The report describes how this information would be useful in designing a multiple regression or other statistical method for determining likely

predictors for successful field staff. Such information would be helpful in designing a recruiting strategy and not for making individual rehiring decisions. We include in the report additional explanation of how the data would assist in such an analysis.

7. Commerce states that adding more complexity to the recruiting, testing, hiring, training, and supervision efforts will not produce significant cost savings. We revised the report to further reflect Commerce's views on this matter. However, without adequately evaluating its existing recruiting, hiring, and training practices, the Bureau risks unnecessarily hiring too many employees without the right skills and commitment to completing key operations. As we note in our report, a more targeted approach could allow the Bureau to identify applicants who would be more likely to commit to long-term employment and be successful throughout census operations. Having these workers could help reduce or better control operational costs as well as recruiting and hiring expenditures. Better-performing workers could also complete fieldwork more expediently, thereby potentially decreasing the time needed to complete operations.

8. We agree with Commerce's comments. The draft described the advantages of forming community-based census crews.

9. We have clarified our report to reflect that the Bureau is taking a preliminary look at whether varying recruiting goals by area is a viable alternative. However, we have not received documents related to this effort.

10. We agree with Commerce's comment that the positions the Bureau recruits and hires for are not longterm. We have clarified the report to refer to workers who complete an operation and may stay on to work for later decennial operations.

11. We clarified our report to reflect Commerce's comments about the contractor's current study to address the validity and reliability of its selection tools.

12. Commerce noted that in Bureau evaluations of staff preparedness, field staff said they were adequately prepared to do their jobs. Further, crew leaders indicated in Bureau debriefings that they felt adequately prepared although there were areas where they would like more training. However, in this instance, we are not critiquing the Bureau's training of crew leaders. Rather, we have found that during the hiring phase—before training occurs—the Bureau does not have appropriate hiring tools to

identify and select crew leaders with the needed skills for that position, such as skills for instructing crews and troubleshooting computers. Commerce also noted that a 2006 contractor found that field staff were adequately prepared to do the tasks associated with their jobs. However, this evaluation assesses whether training effectively prepared crew leaders, their assistants, and enumerators to use the handheld computers.

13. We appreciate Commerce's concern that it is impractical and cost-prohibitive to conduct formal performance evaluations for temporary field positions. However, a system that the Bureau could use does not need to be complex or time-consuming. As we noted in the report, information from supervisors on the performance of their workers was readily available. Such information could be systematically collected upon a worker's termination to assess whether to rehire that individual.

14. We revised the report to state that, according to Bureau officials, its Decennial Applicant Personnel and Payroll System does not allow it to rehire employees terminated for cause.

15. See our response to Commerce's comments on the second recommendation in our evaluation of the agency's comments on page 35 of the report.

16. Our analysis of hiring data from the 2006 Census Test found that almost 15 percent of field staff were rehired for a later operation. These data included field staff from all field operations conducted during the 2006 test, including update/leave and group quarters enumeration. Therefore, this figure takes into account potential workers that the Bureau could rehire in all operations, and not just address canvassing and nonresponse follow-up.

17. We acknowledge the differences between the decennial and other Bureau operations, but nonetheless believe, as the OIG suggested in 2004, that some lessons could be learned from the Bureau's overall experiences with survey training.

18. The options provided in our report were not intended to be exhaustive, nor did we suppose that any of them would work in all field situations. Throughout the report, we were cognizant of the constraints and costs facing the Bureau, including those associated with training sites and equipment rental and purchases. We revised our report to reflect the Bureau's concerns about the costs of buying and renting audiovisual equipment; however, we offered various options as a way of illustrating

that the Bureau should consider innovative ways to provide training outside the context of a verbatim approach. We commend the Bureau's efforts to incorporate visual aids and computer-based training into training for address canvassing and nonresponse follow-up.

19. We agree with the Bureau's position that conversation with a knowledgeable person is also important and have incorporated this into the report. As our draft report indicated, however, understanding such visual cues would serve as an additional source of information for field workers.

20. The Bureau's efforts to explore more formal ways to assist the regional census offices to identify location-specific issues that might require unique information is a positive step. We have incorporated additional information into the report to acknowledge the Bureau's role in assisting regional census offices. However, we believe that the efforts the regional census offices would be enhanced if the Bureau prepared training modules addressing prototypical location-specific challenges that the regional census offices may use.

21. See our response to Commerce comments on our fourth and fifth recommendations starting on page 36 of the report.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Mathew J. Scirè (202) 512-6806 or sciremj@gao.gov

Acknowledgements

In addition to the contact name above, Ernie Hazera, Assistant Director; Betty Clark; Shirley Hwang; Krista Loose; and Scott Purdy made key contributions to the report. Thomas Beall, Catherine Hurley, Andrea Levine, and Donna Miller provided significant technical support.

Related GAO Products

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2010 Census: Census Bureau Needs to Take Prompt Actions to Resolve Long-standing and Emerging Address and Mapping Challenges. [GAO-06-272](#). Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2006.

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