Opportunities and Challenges Facing the 2010 Census
Key Points

• The U.S. Census Bureau Goes to Great Lengths to Accurately Count the Nation’s Population

• Inherent and Newly Emerging Challenges Put the 2010 Census at Risk
Inherent Challenge: Increasing Costs, Marginal Returns

Average Cost per Housing Unit (constant 2010 dollars) and Survey Response Rate: 1970 – 2010

Average cost per housing unit ($2010)

Survey Response Rate (est.)
Inherent Challenge: Reducing Differential Participation and Undercounts

Return Rate, by Race/Ethnicity

- White: 77.5%
- Black: 59.7%
- American Indian: 64.5%
- Asian: 69.8%
- Pacific Islander: 54.6%
- Some Other Race: 58.7%
- Two or more races: 57.7%
- Non-Hispanic: 75.0%
- Hispanic: 64.5%

Overall average: 74.1%

Note: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
Inherent Challenge: Housing
More People Are Residing in “Non-Traditional” Dwellings

FEMA Trailers after Katrina

Migrant farm worker dormitories in central Florida.

Census workers had trouble entering certain communities.

Group Quarters or single housing unit?
Inherent Challenge: Housing

Hidden Housing Units Require Special Attention

"Housing unit or storage shed?"

Source: GAO.

Two doorbells could indicate two housing units.

Source: GAO.
Inherent Challenges: 
A Changing Nation

The Census Bureau Has to Work Harder Just to Stay in Place Because of:

- Divided families
- Gated communities
- Hidden housing units
- Second homes/Snowbirds
- Homelessness
- Migrant and seasonal farm workers
- Language barriers
- Increasing immigrant population, many undocumented
- Distrust of government
- Concerns over privacy
- Post 9/11 environment
- Nontraditional living arrangements
Newly Emerging Challenges

• Limited Dress Rehearsal—key operations not tested under operational conditions e.g.:
  • Fingerprinting
  • Mailing replacement questionnaires
Newly Emerging Challenges

• Key IT Systems Not Fully Tested
  • Limited integration and end-to-end testing
  • Handheld computers not fully tested in an operational environment
Newly Emerging Challenges

• Lack of Precise Cost Estimates

• Schedule is Compressed
Moving Forward, it will be Important for the Census Bureau to:

• Strengthen executive-level oversight to monitor testing and manage risks.

• Develop metrics to monitor completion of IT tests.

• Prioritize by focusing on critical systems.

• Focus on risk and cost management.
GAO Will Focus its Work on the Key Ingredients for a Successful Census

- Developing a complete and accurate address list
- Effective marketing to boost participation
- Field infrastructure for data collection
- Effective IT systems
- Robust evaluation systems
- Reliable cost model to estimate resources