

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO's prior work has shown that it will be important for the Bureau to reexamine its management and culture as well as the fundamental design of the census in order to ensure a cost-effective census. The Bureau recognizes this and has taken steps in at least three management areas toward achieving these goals. As requested, this report addresses the extent to which the Bureau is taking steps in accordance with selected leading practices that GAO identified for (1) organizational transformation, (2) long-term project planning, and (3) strategic workforce planning in preparing for the 2020 Census. To meet these objectives, GAO identified leading practices in these areas that are relevant to the Bureau's 2020 Census planning, reviewed Bureau documents, and interviewed officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Census Director take a number of actions to make 2020 Census planning more consistent with key practices in the three management areas, such as examining planned transformation activity to ensure its alignment with resources, developing a more-detailed long-term schedule to smooth transition to later planning phases, implementing effective congressional outreach to ensure a stable planning environment, and setting workforce planning goals and monitor them to ensure their attainment.

The Department of Commerce concurred with GAO's findings and recommendations and provided minor clarifications, which were included in the final report.

View [GAO-12-626](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov.

2020 CENSUS

Additional Steps Are Needed to Build on Early Planning

What GAO Found

The Census Bureau's (Bureau) early planning and preparation efforts for the 2020 Census are consistent with most leading practices in each of the three management areas GAO reviewed. For example, with respect to its effort to transform its decennial organization, top Bureau leadership has been driving the transformation, and the agency has focused on a key set of principles as it begins to roll-out the strategy to staff. Furthermore, the Bureau has created a timeline to build momentum and show progress. At the same time, however, the amount of change-related activity the Bureau is considering as part of its reorganization of its decennial directorate may not be aligned with the resources the Bureau has allocated to plan, coordinate, and carry it out, and, as a result, the planned transformation efforts may not be sustainable or successful.

Similarly, the Bureau is taking steps consistent with many of the leading practices for long-term project planning, such as by, among other activities, issuing its series of 2020 planning memorandums in 2009 and 2010 that laid out a high-level framework documenting goals, assumptions, and timing of the remaining four phases of the 2020 Census. The Bureau also created a high-level schedule of program management activities for the remaining phases, documented key elements such as the Bureau's decennial mission, vision, and guiding principles, and produced a business plan to support budget requests, which is being updated annually. Still, the Bureau's schedule does not include milestones or deadlines for key decisions needed to support transition between the planning phases, which could result in later downstream planning activity not being based on evidence from such sources as early research and testing. Furthermore, there has been little effective outreach to the Bureau's congressional stakeholders about its reexamination of census processes and design, which could result in a lack of support on potentially complex or sensitive topics that can be crucial for creating a stable environment in which to prepare for a census.

In the area of strategic workforce planning, the Bureau is taking steps consistent with leading practices such as by identifying current and future critical occupations with a pilot assessment of the skills and competencies of selected information technology 2020 Census positions. However, the Bureau has done little yet either to identify the goals that should guide workforce planning or to determine how to monitor, report, and evaluate its progress toward achieving them, which could help the Bureau identify and avoid possible barriers to implementing its workforce plans.

The steps the Bureau has taken and has planned are positioning it well during this early phase of planning for the 2020 Census. Since much of the Bureau's early progress is tied to additional planning and other activity needed over the coming months, equally important will be the need to execute these activities in a timely manner to maintain the Bureau's early momentum toward a cost-effective 2020 Census.