

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-857T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, U.S. Postal Service and the Census, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

At \$13 billion, 2010's headcount was the costliest in U.S. history. Thus, over the next few years, the fundamental challenge facing Bureau leadership will be designing and implementing a census that controls the cost of the enumeration while maintaining its accuracy.

This testimony focuses on progress the Bureau is making in three areas key to a more cost-effective enumeration: (1) transforming the Bureau into a higher-performing organization; (2) improving the cost-effectiveness of census-taking operations; and (3) strengthening IT management and security practices. This testimony is based on completed work that included an analysis of Bureau documents, interviews with Bureau officials, and field observations of census operations in urban and rural locations across the country.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations in this testimony but reports on the status of past recommendations that the Bureau strengthen its IT management, develop policies and procedures for its cost estimates, and integrate its 2020 Census planning. The Bureau generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations and is taking steps to implement them.

View [GAO-13-857T](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff, 202-512-2757, [goldenkoff@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoff@gao.gov) or Carol R. Cha at 202-512-4456 or [chac@gao.gov](mailto:chac@gao.gov).

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## 2020 CENSUS

### Progress Report on the Census Bureau's Efforts to Contain Enumeration Costs

## What GAO Found

In preparing for the 2020 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) has launched several initiatives aimed at organizational transformation, some of which show particular promise. For example, the Bureau is attempting to develop Bureau-wide, or "enterprise," standards, guidance, or tools in areas such as risk management and information technology (IT) investment management to reduce duplicative efforts across the Bureau. Although the Bureau has made progress in these and other areas, if the Bureau is to transform itself to better control costs and deliver an accurate national headcount in 2020, several areas will require continued oversight: cost estimation, integrated long-term planning, and stakeholder involvement. For example, while the Bureau has made progress with long-term planning by implementing some elements of GAO's recommendation that it develop a road map for 2020 planning, it still needs to pull together remaining planning elements, such as milestones for decisions and estimates of cost, into its roadmap.

The Bureau is researching several key operational initiatives that may yield significant cost savings. However, while these initiatives have the potential to reduce costs, the Bureau will be employing them in ways that are new for 2020 and thus entail some operational risk. Key among these are using the Internet as a self-response option, targeting only certain addresses for field verification as the Bureau builds its national list of addresses, and replacing enumerator-collected data with administrative records under certain circumstances. Bureau tests conducted in 2011 showed that adding an Internet response option to the census could increase its overall response rate, which could save money, since Bureau field staff would need to visit fewer households, which is its largest and most costly census field operation. In addition, the Bureau has estimated that it could save up to \$2 billion if it uses administrative records in 2020 to reduce the need for related costly and labor-intensive door-to-door visits by Bureau employees.

Additionally, the Bureau is exploring technology options for census operations that collectively represent a dramatic leap from 2010. These options include the possible use of a "bring your own device" model to enable enumerators to use their own mobile devices for field data collection. Given the role of information technology in conducting the census, while controlling cost and protecting privacy, it is essential that the Bureau strengthen its ability to manage these investments, as well as its practices for securing the information it collects and disseminates. The Bureau faces several long-standing IT challenges that, if effectively addressed, will significantly enhance its ability to acquire these solutions within cost, schedule, and performance targets. For example, effective workforce planning is essential to ensuring organizations have the proper skills, abilities, and capacity for effective IT management; however, the Bureau has not yet finalized its IT workforce plans. Additionally, in January 2013, GAO reported that controls over access to the Bureau's IT systems contained deficiencies. Without adequate system access controls, the Bureau cannot be sure that its information and systems are protected from intrusion.