

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-21](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

A complete and accurate address list is a key building block of a successful census, but developing such a list is costly and labor intensive. For the 2020 Census, the Bureau is reexamining approaches to control cost and maintain accuracy, including approaches to meet its address and mapping needs.

GAO was asked to examine potential private sector roles in 2020 Census address list and map development. GAO (1) evaluated the extent to which the Bureau is considering non-Bureau data source opportunities to meet such 2020 needs, and (2) reviewed the status of the Bureau's plans for meeting its key 2020 address and mapping needs.

GAO compared Bureau documentation to leading practices for planning, management, and scheduling from industry guides for project management, reviewed relevant documentation, and interviewed Bureau officials familiar with decennial census needs and data source decisions.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends the Bureau implement processes for reviewing the cost and quality of data source selections and for documenting support for those decisions; document management approval of key data source decisions; and—for remaining data source decisions—develop a detailed plan with measurable goals, track performance against these goals, and set a timeline.

The Department of Commerce generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

View [GAO-15-21](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov).

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## 2020 CENSUS

### Census Bureau Can Improve Use of Leading Practices When Choosing Address and Mapping Sources

#### What GAO Found

The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) is working with stakeholders to identify various data sources to meet its address and mapping needs. For example, the Bureau has worked with state, local, and tribal governments and with commercial vendors to identify potential data sources to augment or verify data collected through its Geographic Support System Initiative (GSS-I) program. GSS-I allows government agencies at all levels to regularly share and continuously update their address lists and road data with the Bureau. Federal internal control standards and Office of Management and Budget guidance on geospatial data suggest that the Bureau should support significant data source decisions in terms of both data cost and quality.

However, the Bureau has inconsistently documented cost and quality support for decisions already made to use address and mapping data from state, tribal, and local governments, other federal agencies, and a commercial vendor. Without a systematic consideration of the quality of the variously sourced data that the Bureau plans to rely on, it cannot ensure that effective choices are being made and that possible data limitations that might affect their use are fully understood. Further, the Bureau did not document management approval in support of its data source decisions at the time that the decisions were made; without such documentation, the Bureau lacks accountability and transparency for future sourcing decisions. The Bureau does not have guidance clearly outlining the need or process for ensuring consideration of cost and quality—primary concerns of the Bureau's reexamination—or documentation of management approval for those data sources selected. By implementing a process for documenting such steps, the Bureau can ensure that data source decisions are transparent to Congress, commercial vendors, and other stakeholders.

The Bureau's approach for meeting its address and mapping needs lacks key elements of effective project management outlined in guidance GAO reviewed. Specifically, while the Bureau prepared planning documents to guide GSS-I, it did not include

- clear and measurable performance goals to help it effectively meet its address and mapping needs;
- milestones detailed at a level where decisions on GSS-I data sources might be tracked; and
- performance measures, data, and reporting to help guide planning and track progress toward filling gaps in the Bureau's data needs.

While the Bureau has taken some positive steps—such as preparing a series of planning documents that provide high-level examples of measurable goals, schedules, and deadlines—the absence of detailed goals, schedules, deadlines, metrics, or data on monitoring progress toward outcomes, as well as the absence of a detailed integrated plan that incorporates these elements, means any limitations of the GSS-I strategy may not be fully known or apparent until late in the decade. Without these elements, it will be difficult for the Bureau to ensure that it is adequately evaluating the costs and benefits of alternative data sources, measuring and reporting its progress, or holding managers accountable for results.