



FY 2018 U.S. CENSUS BUREAU APPROPRIATIONS

Why Full Funding Matters

March 2017

In less than three years, the constitutionally-required 2020 American Census will be underway. More than 130 million households will receive an advance notice, urging them to respond via the Internet but offering other options to participate, such as mail or telephone. Regional Census Centers and Area Census Offices will be open and staffed. Hundreds of thousands of national, state, and local Census Partners will be launching outreach campaigns to urge participation. Census ads will be running on prime time television, radio, digital and social media platforms. The 2020 Census website must be ready to handle up to eight million hits a day during peak operations.

Because of the Continuing Resolution, Congress is still considering the Census Bureau's FY 2017 funding request. The Census Project believes the final appropriation must include funding for a significant increase matching prior decades just to keep the decennial census on track and to sustain other important programs and surveys.

Historically, at mid-decade, funding requests for the planning and implementation of the decennial census begin to account for the typical ramp-up to carry out the largest peace time mobilization undertaken by the government. For example, 10 years ago during the Bush administration, the FY 2008 funding request was 25 percent over the enacted FY 2007 funding level. Therefore, for the 2020 Census, a more technologically innovative, complex census – only two years away from the FY 2018 budget year – a substantial ramp-up is needed.

The 2020 Census must count roughly 334 million people in homes and group facilities across the country, as of Census Day (April 1st). Escalating costs for the 2010 count led the Census Bureau to explore modern ways of reaching people, collecting and processing data, and managing field operations. Congress has directed the Bureau to spend no more on the 2020 Census than it did for the 2010 Census (~\$13 billion). New counting methods and operational reforms could *save taxpayers \$5 billion* over the cost of repeating an outdated census design, and help produce a cost-efficient, accurate census. **But Congress must invest now in refining sweeping design changes and in developing the IT and operational infrastructure to execute the new methods with confidence.**

- Leverage technology to offer multiple response options, including the Internet and smartphones. Cyber-security and response volume are key challenges; and people responding electronically also must be counted at the correct address.

- Automate field data collection using call centers, mobile devices for enumerators, web based human resource functions, and remote case management, to improve efficiency and lower costs.
- Use administrative records (data the government has already collected) to enumerate some households that do not self-respond.
- Target pre-census address canvassing only to areas experiencing housing changes, while using government and commercial databases to update and verify most of the master address list.
- Improve the management of field staff using administrative data to determine the best sequence of phone calls, plan travel routes, and prioritize caseloads in real-time.

These reforms are promising, but enormously complex, and require significant lead-time for research, testing, and development. ***Using unproven methods puts a cost-effective and accurate census at high risk. Failure to complete testing and development on time could force the Census Bureau to fall back on outdated and more costly methods in 2020.***

In FY2017, the Census Bureau will continue the systems and operations development phase, and begin field infrastructure and communications preparations:

- Continue operational design and systems development, including contracting for over 30 IT systems needed to conduct the census, in preparation for an end-to-end readiness test in 2018 (April 1st “Census Day”).
- Refine the 2020 Census management framework for nonresponse follow-up operations and test the Census Questionnaire Assistance system.
- Conduct 2017 Address Canvassing Test to validate the accuracy of administrative records and 3rd-party data for updating the address file & digital maps using in-office procedures.
- Finalize decisions on the use of administrative records — that is, data collected through other government programs, such as IRS, Medicaid, and Postal Service records — to remove vacant and nonexistent addresses from the costly field follow-up universe and to enumerate some households that do not self-respond.
- Begin development of an extensive 2020 Census Integrated Communications and Partnership Program.
- Lease office space for six Regional Census Centers.

- Hire hundreds of new employees to manage and implement design and development activities and to conduct field tests; create private sector job opportunities through numerous contracting partnerships.

Also in FY2017, the Census Bureau will continue researching new methods to improve the American Community Survey (ACS)—the modern version of the census ‘long form’ that yields irreplaceable, high-quality annual data on key social and economic characteristics for every community in the U.S. At Congress’ urging, the Bureau is taking steps to reduce the survey’s response burden, improve the usefulness of data products, and streamline field operations. An ongoing review of ACS content will ensure that the survey only collects data needed to implement federal programs and policies.

2018 End-to-End Census Test

The Trump administration has released its so-called “skinny budget.” Funds for the vital 2018 End-to-End field test (see below) are woefully short.

Ten years ago in a similar situation, the Bush administration’s decennial census budget was increased by 25 percent over the previous fiscal year. By comparison, even if Congress allocates the higher Senate Appropriations Committee mark of \$1.52 billion for the Census Bureau for FY 2017, the Trump administration request for the next fiscal year would be hundreds of millions short of the Bush administration type of increase needed to marshal the nation’s largest peacetime activity and mobilization.

The 2018 End-to-End test in Providence, Rhode Island, Pierce County, Washington, and Bluefield-Beckley-Oak Hill, West Virginia, will count residents of more than 700,000 households in urban, suburban and rural settings. Census-taking itself will stretch from March through August 2018. This essential test is at risk of not being funded unless Congress acts.

The test is designed to confirm key information technologies, the use of the internet to collect data, and evaluation of outreach and promotional elements of the decennial plan as well as the management and response process. The End-to-End Census Test calls for the opening of temporary field offices and for the recruitment, hiring and training of short-term census takers, community partnership specialists and management personnel.

Also, the Census Bureau’s so-called LUCA program, to obtain locality-specific residential and commercial mapping from all local jurisdictions, peaks in FY 2018. Finally, the Census Bureau will submit its proposed questions for the 2020 Census and the ongoing American Community Survey to Congress during this fiscal year.

Why Congress Needs an Accurate, Well-Executed Census

An accurate census and robust American Community Survey are the foundation of fair political representation and prudent allocation and stewardship of tax dollars at the federal, state, and

local levels. Business and industry also leverage these data to plan and execute investments that promote private sector economic development, job growth, and prosperous communities.

- Fair apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislatures depends on an accurate census. Census data are used to draw congressional and legislative districts in accordance with constitutional and legal standards, and to allocate representation on city councils, school boards, and other municipal bodies.
- Decennial census data guide the allocation of nearly a third of all federal assistance to state and local governments (~\$450 billion annually), accounting for three-quarters of all federal grants. Similarly, ACS data guide the allocation of more than \$415 billion annually in federal assistance to state and local governments, also accounting for nearly a third of all such funding and more than two-thirds of all federal grants.¹
- Congress uses decennial census and ACS data to allocate grants for school districts (e.g. Title I); homeland security; highway planning and construction; Medicaid; substance abuse treatment; community development; rural electrification; public transit; low income housing; special and adult education; home energy assistance; rural business and industry development loans; water and waste disposal systems; mental health services; rural broadband access; crime victim assistance; coastal zone management; outreach to disabled veterans; natural disaster recovery; and dozens of other programs.
- State and local governments use census and ACS data to plan a myriad of services and direct resources to communities with the greatest need.
- Census and ACS data are a primary source of information for state and local emergency planning agencies. These agencies rely on the data to prepare emergency preparation, evacuation and response plans (for example, when hurricanes, tornados, and wildfires strike).
- Census and ACS data are required to implement the Voting Rights Act and to ensure that citizens whose first language is not English can navigate the voting process.

**There are no “do-overs” for the constitutionally required census.
America has just one chance to get it right,
counting every person once and in the right place.,
Our nation must live with the results for ten years!**

Please [visit our website](#) for more information.²

¹ Brookings Institution, “[Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Distribution of Federal Funds](#)” (March 2010), and “[Surveying for Dollars: The Role of the American Community Survey in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funding](#)” (July 2010).

² Our non-partisan coalition includes representatives from many sectors, including business and industry; state, local, and Tribal government; transportation; housing; education; labor; rural economic development; health care; civil rights; and nonprofit agencies helping low-income families and children, the elderly, people with disabilities, veterans, and immigrants and refugees.