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2010 Census: Door-to-Door Enumeration Underway

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It's only been a few days since we met with you to discuss the final mail response rates, and I am pleased to say again that our operations are on schedule and at or under budget.

AMERICA'S SECOND CHANCE: DOOR-TO-DOOR ENUMERATION

As I said last week, we are very pleased at progress thus far, but I want to dispel any notion that the census is over. We have many miles to travel and several months to go before we wrap up data collection.

We still have about 36 percent of the nation's addresses to visit. America, if you did not get a form or did not mail back a form, you get a second chance. We will count you when our census takers come to call.

We call this operation Non-Response Follow-Up, and it takes place between May 1 and July 10.

Ask the average person for an image of the census, and many will call to mind a scene in which a census taker dutifully records the answers from a family in a large register. This has been a part of the census since day one.

In this operation, census takers receive a series of assignment areas of about 40 cases each. They visit each address, verify that we have the correct address, interview the respondents and take down the answers on the census questionnaire. They also add and complete questionnaires for addresses that they find that are not on our list.

The workload for this operation is about 48 million addresses.

WHO WILL GET A VISIT?

A census taker may visit you if –

- We sent you a form but we never received a completed one back.
- You submitted an incomplete form.
- You submitted your form too late to be pulled from our list of non-responding households. (We set April 16 as a deadline for people to return their forms, to allow forms to arrive and be processed. We accept mailed-back forms after that date, but with each passing day there is less chance of deleting them from our list of non-respondent cases to visit.)
- We can't match the address you provided on a "Be Counted" form or that you provided over the phone to an address in our master list. We will need to confirm that we are counting you in the correct location.
- We sent a form to your physical address, but the Post Office returned it to us as undeliverable. This includes households which may receive mail at a P.O. box instead of their physical address.

We have two ongoing field operations that also may mean a visit from a census taker. You may get a visit if you live on an American Indian reservation or in a remote or rural area.

You may get a visit if you live in a college dorm, nursing home, military barracks, prison or other "group quarters."

Both operations are nearing completion.

SAME 10 QUESTIONS

The enumerator questionnaire is a tri-fold form, like the mail questionnaire, but looks a little different from the mail form. For example, the questions for each person progress across the page horizontally, rather than down the page vertically.

The form has records for five persons, rather than six as on the mailback. If the household has more than five residents, the census taker has continuation questionnaires to record the answers for the other household members.

Of each person we ask the same questions we asked on the questionnaire received in the mail: name, sex, age and date of birth and race and whether they are Hispanic. It still should take only a few minutes to fill out.

We ask several other questions to make sure that we've got the right address and that we are talking to a person who knows the composition of the household. They check to see if the house was occupied on April 1, whether it is a seasonal residence and whether the unit was vacant on April 1 or occupied by a different set of residents.

The workers also record the date and time of an interview and its outcome – for example, whether they conducted the interview or were refused.

They also ask two coverage questions (one at the household level and one for each person) to help ensure no one is left out or included in error.

635,000 CENSUS TAKERS

This is our country's largest peacetime mobilization. Our recruiting has been successful. We have about 2.5 qualified recruits for each position and in many local census offices the ratio is closer to 4 to 1.

Where possible, we are hiring people from your community as census takers – people who speak your language and understand your concerns about privacy and safety.

Last week we conducted 33,000 training sessions for over 400,000 employees. Additional training will be conducted to deal with staff replacement.

I am very pleased to report that we spent no taxpayer money on the training sites: all the space was donated by local organizations, saving the government an estimated \$23 million dollars.

BONA FIDE CENSUS TAKER

We understand that in this age of identity theft people are very concerned about disclosing their personal information to strangers.

I can assure you everyone hired goes through the FBI background and fingerprint check. We place the greatest value on the safety of the American public and our staff.

By law, the Census Bureau cannot share respondents' individually identifiable answers with anyone, including tribal housing authorities, other federal agencies and law enforcement entities.

All Census Bureau employees take the oath of nondisclosure and are sworn for life to protect the confidentiality of the data. The penalty for unlawful disclosure is a fine of up to \$250,000 or imprisonment of up to five years, or both.

That sounds fine you say, but how do you know the person knocking on your door is a bona fide census taker?

They will have a census ID badge that contains a Department of Commerce watermark and a black shoulder bag, with a Census Bureau logo. If asked, he or she will provide supervisor contact information and/or the Local Census Office phone number for verification.

They will carry a black three-ring legal-sized binder that contains the questionnaire forms, various address register forms and maps they use to locate an address and ensure they are at the right one.

They will not ask to come inside your home and they will not ask for money or for bank account numbers, credit card numbers or Social Security numbers.

If you have doubts about a census taker, we urge you to call the local census office or our regional census center to verify the employee's identity. Phone numbers for these offices can be found on the Census Bureau Web site.

There is also information on our Web site about how to contact the U.S. Postal Service or the Federal Trade Commission if you believe you are being scammed by mail, telephone, Internet or personal contact.

Let me comment on the precautions we take to ensure the safety of our staff as well. As part of their training, census takers receive guidance on the steps to take in protecting themselves no matter where they are. They are instructed not to enter any location or put themselves into any situation where they feel unsafe. They are trained on how to deal with angry or hostile respondents and how to avoid animal bites.

They are given training on safe driving techniques and general guidelines on personal safety while working alone. They are required to remove themselves from any situation they feel is unsafe and to report this to their supervisors.

Our local offices have developed enumeration plans for areas that for many reasons may be difficult to enumerate. Managers can send our workers in pairs or teams either as a safety precaution or as a strategy to ensure the work gets done on schedule.

One benefit of hiring from the neighborhood is that local staff will be familiar with the areas in which they are working.

Well-meaning people often ask about police protection for census takers. We do not allow law enforcement officers to accompany our staff because our confidentiality guarantee restricts our operations to only sworn employees.

We do not share respondent data with law enforcement nor do we permit them to participate in the interview process.

Having said that we do send communications to 30,000 law enforcement agencies across the country to alert them that field staff are at work in their areas visiting homes. We want the police

to be informed about the operation and the badges our workers carry. This is true for all Census Bureau field activities.

NO CAMERAS PLEASE

This concern for confidentiality brings me to another matter of immediate concern to the media. Every census we get many requests from the media to videotape or photograph field operations in progress or to sit in and observe an interview in action. This is strictly prohibited.

If the media show up during an operation, our staff are trained to stop the operation and leave the scene. Once again, Title 13, the law requiring confidentiality, prohibits the disclosure of respondent information under any circumstances. Even if the cameras are not recording sound, we do not allow the taping.

A second reason is that media attention can be disruptive and interfere with the interview process. Our goal is to assure respondents that their personal information is kept confidential and to complete an accurate interview as quickly and efficiently as possible.

We realize that media needs images to tell the story and so we have plenty of B-roll and photographs simulating field activities. For this operation, we have released an electronic toolkit containing video and still photos showing these activities. You can download clips from our Web site.

HOW DOES THE OPERATION WORK?

Let me give you an overview of how the process works. Last week the local census offices printed address lists and put them into address register binders like the one I showed you earlier, along with locator maps, labeled enumerator questionnaires and other forms.

At headquarters, we ran an automated removal of late mail returns last week; in the local office, clerical staff will manually perform a second removal of late returns. This happens before the binders are given to the census takers.

The workload is divided into 1.5 million assignment areas nationwide, each with about 40 door-to-door assignments. Crew leaders make the assignments to the census takers and carefully monitor their work and expenses. Crew leaders can alter assignments to accommodate workload demands or special needs such as language assistance.

Census takers visit addresses in their assignment area, determine the occupancy status on Census Day and complete a paper questionnaire enumerating the household residents.

Before any interview, the census taker verifies the address is located within the block on the census block map. They determine also whether the unit was occupied or vacant on Census Day. They record whether the address in fact existed at all on Census Day; if not, they mark it as a "Delete."

They visit the address in person and talk with a knowledgeable respondent to obtain the required information. A knowledgeable person is generally a member of the household (age 15 and over). It could be a neighbor or a building manager if the household is on vacation or away during the period of the operation.

If there is no knowledgeable person in an occupied unit, the census taker leaves a Notice of Visit. The Notice is in both English and Spanish and provides a statement of purpose and the confidentiality guarantee. It also tells the household how to contact the census taker and the best time to call.

If they have to make multiple calls or visits, they will vary the times of contact. Late afternoon, nights and weekends are often the best times.

We urge respondents to call and give answers over the phone or schedule the interview so our staff can enumerate them as quickly and inexpensively as possible. We will make six attempts to reach you. If multiple contacts do not work, we gather the information from a proxy – a neighbor or a building manager or someone with knowledge of the household.

The fewer trips, the less costly the operation – and the more quickly we can move on to the next assignment.

So what happens when you receive a visit from a census taker? First, census takers identify themselves and show their ID badge.

They hand you an information sheet that explains the confidentiality of your answers and assists you in answering the questions. Copies of the information sheet are in your press kit and you can readily see how the sheet would assist in helping a respondent characterize household relationship or race. There is also a Spanish version.

Suppose the household member speaks a language other than English. Census takers have a flashcard containing a message about the 2010 Census written in 51 languages. If a resident doesn't speak English, the census taker shows the flashcard to the resident, and the resident points to the language he/she speaks. A census crew leader will then reassign the case to a person who speaks that language.

If the worker does speak the language, he or she conducts the interview in language and records the answers in English on the questionnaire along with a note about the language in which the interview took place.

Each day workers meet with their crew leaders who review their work for accuracy and timeliness and certify their hours, mileage and expenses. If a case is incomplete, the crew leader assigns the case for rework. If it's complete, it is delivered to the local office for check-in.

QUALITY FIRST: REINTERVIEW OPERATION

These daily meetings are just one of many quality assurance methods we use to ensure that the information we have about both addresses and respondents is as accurate as possible.

Another is the Reinterview Operation (May 7-July 17). This is a quality check on our field follow-up performance undertaken by a separate field staff. It ensures census takers followed procedures and identifies staff who have made errors.

This operation begins on May 7, a week after the door-to-door operation and proceeds concurrently, ending one week after the overall follow-up operation. About five percent of cases are selected for this operation.

Quality assurance staff attempt to reach a household by phone; if that is unsuccessful we send a reinterview enumerator.

Many cases are randomly selected but other factors influence the choice as well. Any cases that fail automated or clerical matching are checked. An enumerator who has falsified data will be prevented from completing further assignments and all completed work will be assigned to another worker for redoing.

ADVERTISING AND PARTNERSHIP

During this operation, our advertising messages shift and now center on cooperation with enumerators. Ads focus on how to recognize a census taker and reemphasize the confidentiality of the data collected.

Our monitoring sources tell us we have achieved a high level of awareness through our many integrated activities: advertising, partnership, Census in Schools, the Road Tour, the multiple contact strategy – indeed the very forms themselves. We are hoping to build on that awareness, especially in the early weeks of the door-to-door operation.

Paid advertising runs from April 26- May 22, mainly because we believe most (80 percent) of the workload may be completed during this period.

Advertising will target the U.S. as a whole with an emphasis on the lowest responding audiences and areas.

Our plan is to reach 75 percent of the audience with a frequency of at least three contacts.

We are still finalizing media buys so allocations could change. Right now we are envisioning allocating about 43 percent to national buys, 57 percent to local buys.

At the same time, we are relying heavily upon our more than 230,000 partners and 10,000 Complete Count Committees to keep up the drumbeat of support we saw during the mailback phase of the census.

Particularly at this stage of the census, when workers go door to door, we think trusted local voices are extremely important in reassuring their communities that participating in the census is easy, important and safe.

Our partnership staff numbers 4,000 and has capability in 146 languages. Almost 1,700 are bilingual so we believe we have sufficient resources in place to reach households that do not speak English at home.

Let me add that just as we did during the mailback phase, we will carefully monitor progress throughout the country and react quickly to problems or when we discover areas of special concern.

CONCLUSION: OPEN THE DOOR AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

The door-to-door follow-up is our most expensive and labor-intensive operation and we have tried to ensure the safety of the American public and our staff while maintaining the quality needed to achieve a good count.

Our message to the public today is the same as it has been for previous operations. Participating in the census is easy, important and safe.

The census won't be complete until we make an attempt to count every household for which we do not have a completed questionnaire. Our staff are persistent; they work hard, often during odd hours, and we encourage everyone to open the door and cooperate when they show up.

For us it doesn't matter how hard it is to reach someone – what matters is that we reach everyone.

You'll recall I told you last Wednesday that the mail participation rate is 72 percent. We believe that's a good response rate, but it's not enough for the census. We have to count 100 percent of the population.

In some cases, people who have mailed back a form will receive a visit. We ask them to be patient and provide their answers again. The follow-up visit serves as a safety net to help us ensure everyone is counted. We will weed out duplicates during the processing of the forms.

When I deliver the nation's population totals to the President next December, I want to be sure we include you, your family and all of your neighbors in the counts.