

**Ken Hodges**

## **BACKGROUND ON THE DECENNIAL CENSUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Decennial Census Advisory Committee (DCAC) provides advisory input on the design of the 2010 census, the American Community Survey, and related programs. Committee members represent a range of census stakeholders, and APDU's seat on the Committee provides a channel for APDU members to weigh in from the data user perspective. The Committee has a new Chair (Kim Coon, President of Educational Resources Group in Mechanicsburg, PA) and Vice Chair (D.V. "Sonny" Flores, President/Owner of PEC Corporation in Houston, TX). And in even more recent news, John Thompson, the Census Bureau's Principal Associate Director for Programs (and who has worked closely with the Committee), is leaving the Census Bureau for a position at the National Opinion Research Center. Committee meetings are open to the public, and are held twice a year (the next meeting is September 30-October 1). Frequent conference calls on specific census topics provide additional opportunity for input.

The May 2-3 DCAC meeting was a briefing on Census 2010 and American Community Survey plans that raised critical issues as described below. This report is designed to keep APDU members informed on the census planning process, but also to encourage feedback. Questions at the end of this report solicit your thoughts on specific issues, but all comments are welcome. We will also share the input we receive with other APDU members (through the APDU listserv)—to promote dialogue among ourselves. Your new representative (Ken Hodges [khodges@claritas.com](mailto:khodges@claritas.com)) and alternate representative (Mark Salling [mark@urban.csuohio.edu](mailto:mark@urban.csuohio.edu)) encourage your participation.

## **MAY 2-3 MEETING OF THE DECENNIAL CENSUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

In the absence of the new Chair, John Thompson, Principal Associate Director for Programs at the Census Bureau, opened the May 2002 meeting. The meeting reflected the fact that the Census Bureau is straddling two censuses. The 2000 census is not yet finished—as the undercount is still being investigated, and data products are still being released. But planning for the 2010 census is underway—with some urgency, as innovations and cost savings are needed to offset the cost of the American Community Survey (ACS) that is to replace the long form in 2010.

The growing focus on 2010 was evident in the remarks of Louis Kincannon, the new census director, and former acting director Bill Barron. Kincannon commented that he looks forward to the challenges of the ACS, and stressed the importance of the updated information it would provide. Responding to questions about ACS funding, Kincannon expressed confidence that once ACS products are released, support will grow, and funding will become more secure. It is near-term funding that concerns him—with the ACS still being a "sell job" at this stage.

Bill Barron's budget report echoed the sense of urgency, as he described the Fiscal 2003 budget as "a make or break moment for the Census Bureau." Among the priorities are funds to improve the intercensal estimates program—including Demographic Analysis. Then there is the effort to re-engineer the census for 2010. We have heard this term before, but the present effort has Jay Waite and staff seeking innovations that improve data quality, and reduce costs to help fund the ACS. As Barron described it, only with such savings can the Bureau characterize the combination of the ACS and short form census as "cost neutral" compared with a traditional census with a long form.

### **Census 2010 Re-Engineering Update**

**Jay Waite. Associate Director for Decennial Census. U.S. Census Bureau**

Jay noted that the 2000 census is still ongoing, and reviewed the product release schedule. Of immediate interest was the release of long form "profiles" for states, counties and places, set to begin May 7. Jay also reported the "good news" that so far, the Count Question Resolution (CQR) program has resulted in only 200 "re-certifications." One implication was that group quarters geocoding errors are not as widespread as some users had feared. Left unexplained, however, was that only group quarters errors crossing government unit boundaries would generate a CQR challenge, and that the CQR tally is a poor measure of the extent of group quarters geocoding errors.

Jay also described the ongoing investigation of undercount. Inconsistencies between the 2000 census population count and the two measures of census coverage (Demographic Analysis and the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation, or A.C.E) prompted a major review, and the Census Bureau has concluded that the A.C.E. estimates were "incorrect." Specifically, the results suggest that there were about 3 million erroneous enumerations (persons counted more than once) in the 2000 census that were not detected by the A.C.E.—including college students, children of separated or divorce parents, snow birds, and others at risk of being counted more than once.

Jay explained that the Bureau cannot say yet what the "real undercount" was, but shared some revised estimates by race and Hispanic ethnicity. The revised estimates—based on a re-interview sample of 17,000 persons—suggest a near disappearance of the net national undercount from 1.18 to just 0.13 percent. Estimated undercounts for Blacks, American Indians, and Hispanics also are reduced; while the White and Asian populations indicate a slight overcount. However, the standard errors are large, and there was concern among Committee members that the Census Bureau not make too much out of such uncertain estimates. There was particular concern with the indicated overcount of Asians—which, given the standard error, could easily be an undercount in reality. The investigation will continue with an expanded sample to better evaluate the A.C.E., and in an effort (debated within the Bureau) to see if they can find a way to modify the population estimates.

Turning to the re-engineering of the census for 2010, Jay described four major goals: 1) increasing the relevance and timeliness of census long form data, 2) reduced operational risk, 3) increased census coverage and accuracy, and 4) containing census costs. The

three components for achieving these goals are: 1) the American Community Survey, 2) Master Address File/TIGER, and 3) Census 2010 development and testing.

As Jay described it, they need to find cost savings to pay for the ACS, and the biggest savings to be achieved are in the census field operations. Accordingly, much of the re-engineering effort is focused on MAF/TIGER, where it is hoped that improvements to address updating and the data processing environment can enhance census coverage, while reducing the space and staffing requirements of the field operation.

### **American Community Survey Update**

**Nancy Gordon. Associate Director for Demographic Programs. U.S. Census Bureau**

The ACS is on the congressional radar. Nancy noted that in response to congressional questions, the GAO issued a report confirming that the Census Bureau has authority under existing legislation to collect ACS data, and to require that the public respond to the ACS. And when congressional skeptics asked if the ACS questions are legally required, an interagency committee verified that the legal justifications are essentially the same as those for the long form. A recent Federal Register notice soliciting comments on the ACS generated 50 responses. About half expressed strong support, most others expressed support with some concerns, and only a few expressed opposition.

With the ACS set to go nationwide in 2003, content is pretty much in place, and the next content review is targeted for the 2006 ACS. Part of the appeal of the ACS is the option of changing questions, but Nancy explained that this option must be balanced with the needs of those with a stake in the 5-year average data. Nancy also noted that, due to budget limitations, group quarters data will not be collected in the 2003 ACS, but that group quarters will be included in the 2004 ACS "if funding permits."

Nancy concluded with a description of the Bureau's communications strategy for the ACS. Again, it is hoped that ACS funding will become more secure as users become aware of and start using ACS data. To promote awareness and use, the Bureau is holding a series of community outreach meetings, and is releasing additional data from the ACS Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS).

In response to a question about Census 2000 data often falling outside the range of C2SS high-low estimates, Nancy argued that ACS data should get better with the full sample, but noted that there will always be differences with decennial data. She went on to note that the Bureau is preparing a document providing guidance for comparing ACS and Census 2000 data, which will be on the Census web site when ACS data are released. When asked about plans (reportedly discussed at one point) for reducing the ACS nonresponse follow up sample from 1 in 3 to 1 in 4 or 1 in 5, Nancy indicated there are no such plans, and that the Bureau would do this only if funding did not permit 1 in 3.

Users of small area data have become concerned with indications that plans for 5-year average ACS data for block groups had been scaled back to census tracts only. Your

APDU representative raised this concern at the Advisory Committee meeting, and later at an ACS session at the Population Association of America meetings. The concern is that if the ACS is to be a long form replacement, and if the ACS sample is touted as enabling accuracy comparable to the long form, the ACS should provide what the long form provided—including data for block groups. Following up on this concern, the Census Bureau later contacted your representative to explain that, contrary to what some of us had heard from Census Bureau sources, plans for ACS block group data had never been dropped. Where the 2000 long form is providing block group data, the Bureau's intention is to provide block group data from the ACS.

### **Congressional Update. Chip Walker and David McMillen**

Chip Walker (with the Republican staff of the House Committee on Government Reform) noted the elimination of the census subcommittee, and the transfer of census oversight to the Subcommittee on Civil Service, Census, and Agency Organization within the Committee on Government Reform. Rep. David Weldon (R-FL) chairs the subcommittee, and Rep. Danny Davis (D-IL) is the ranking Democrat.

In remarks that some Advisory Committee members found “chilling,” Chip described chairman Weldon as “undecided” on the ACS, and described the reluctance of some subcommittee members to fund a survey that would bother people more than once a decade. Questions also are being raised about the need for mandatory ACS response. Chip pointed out that the census budget is part of the Commerce, Justice and State budget, and commented that it will be tough competing with some of this budget's priorities in the post September 11 environment.

Noting that Census 2000 gross errors were similar to those in 1990, David McMillen (with the Democratic staff of the House Committee on Government Reform) expressed regret that Congress may not provide the \$4 million needed to further evaluate the A.C.E. Several Committee members picked up the issue—arguing that without the \$4 million for A.C.E. testing, the previous \$200 million will have been wasted. Chip countered that the Census Bureau does not even know if the \$4 million will “fix” the A.C.E., and argued that the reluctant members are responding to the perceived priorities of their constituents.

### **Census 2000 Planning**

**Teresa Angueira. Chief, Decennial Management Division. U.S. Census Bureau**

Teresa described the ambitious plan for the 2010 (short form only) census, which includes census tests in 2004 and 2006, and a dress rehearsal in 2008. The process is well underway with the establishment of numerous Planning, Development and Testing Groups, devoted to key areas. Representatives of these groups gave brief presentations describing their work and objectives.

Content: This group's focus is on the improvement of data quality through enhanced question wording, instructions, and questionnaire design.

Language Program: The objective is to improve census response from linguistically isolated households through the use of bilingual forms, and better translation of census questions to other languages.

Race and Ethnic Testing: This group is addressing the always sensitive issues related to the race and ethnicity questions. Among the options being considered are adding the term “origin” back to the Hispanic question, allowing Hispanics to designate more than one origin (e.g., Puerto Rican and Cuban), and the elimination of “Some other race”—a category not recognized in the OMB race standards. Some Committee members expressed concern with this proposal, arguing that respondents who regard “Hispanic” as their race would find it even more difficult to answer the race question if the “Some other race” option were removed.

Mobile Computing Devices (MCDs): It is hoped that the 2010 census can reduce costs by making greater use of MCDs, including personal digital assistants and hand-held computers. Potential uses include data collection and entry, address list and map display, and several GPS applications for MAF/TIGER maintenance. The group is planning performance tests of current and forthcoming technologies in this area. A Committee member asked if there are confidentiality concerns related to the use of MCDs, and the Bureau responded that they are looking into this issue.

Field Activities: This group is looking more broadly at things like the impact of MCDs on the field operation, and how such innovations can be best integrated into such a complex function.

Special Place/Group Quarters: The counting and classification of these populations was described as “always a challenge,” and the entire process is being reviewed. The 2000 group quarters geocoding errors were acknowledged, but described as no worse than those for housing units (an unsettling thought for those who have seen the group quarters data). In addition to geocoding, the group is working to make census group quarters definitions more consistent with those used by states and industries.

Self-Response Options: This group is investigating ways to reverse the trend of declining response rates. They describe an “enhanced mail strategy,” expanded Internet response options, and other electronic options—including automated telephone response and kiosks. There is even talk that interactive voice response might be feasible by 2010.

Communications: The objective is to identify target audiences, the best messages, and the best communications methods to promote public buy-in to the census. This group has the formidable task of determining the impact that census advertising had in 2000.

Coverage Improvement: The next census needs to build on the improved coverage of the 2000 census, while addressing the problem of duplication (counting people more than once). As Jay Waite quipped, “duplication is a coverage improvement method, but we’re trying to find a better method.” Current efforts are focused on improved housing unit and

within-household coverage, and the possible addition of census questions to help identify and reduce duplication.

Overseas Enumeration: The 1990 census counted the armed forces and federal civilian populations stationed overseas for apportionment purposes only. There is now pressure to count other Americans living outside the U.S., and the Census Bureau is dutifully exploring the possibilities. Key questions include who should be counted, how the data should be collected and used, and data quality. The topic generated a lively discussion, with most Committee members identifying additional obstacles to such a count, and expressing doubt over the quality of the data. However, it appears that data from such a count would remain separate from the “resident population” data—just as data on military and federal civilians abroad are separate in 1990 census products. If this is the case, there would seem to be little impact for most data users.

American Indian and Alaska Native: Efforts to improve the count of this population are focusing on enhanced relationships with tribal governments, innovative partnership strategies, and enumeration methods targeted to this population.

### **Questions for APDU Members**

To assist us in representing you in the Advisory Committee meetings and conference calls, we will pose specific questions in the meeting reports. Please send your thoughts on these or any other census data issues to your APDU representative, Ken Hodges at [khodges@claritas.com](mailto:khodges@claritas.com) and/or alternate rep Mark Salling at [mark@urban.csuohio.edu](mailto:mark@urban.csuohio.edu). Your responses will keep us aware of APDU interests and insights, and provide us with specific feedback to relay to the Committee.

1. From current descriptions of the American Community Survey, does it appear that the ACS would adequately replace the data that you currently use from the census long form? Please describe ACS versus long form issues of relevance to your work. Material on the ACS can be found at the Census Bureau’s web site [www.census.gov/acs/www](http://www.census.gov/acs/www).
2. To what extent does your stake in the ACS relate to 1) microdata files, 2) data for small areas, or 3) data for large areas?
3. Do you have successful applications of ACS test data (or Census 2000 Supplementary Survey data) that you can contribute to the growing list of case studies?
4. Would the elimination of the “Some other race” category affect your work? How? What are your thoughts or questions on this issue?
5. What are your thoughts on the counting non-federal Americans living outside the U.S. in the 2010 census?
6. Please convey any other thoughts or questions that we should keep in mind or communicate as we represent you on the Decennial Census Advisory Committee.