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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.

This meeting report is designed to keep APDU members informed on census activities, but also to encourage feedback. Your DCAC 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 questions and participation among APDU members. We have posed questions at the end of this report, and look forward to all questions, comments, and resulting dialogue.

OCTOBER 9-10 MEETING OF THE DECENNIAL CENSUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Gloria Gutierrez (the Designated Federal Officer to the DCAC) opened the meeting with a review of recently released census data products, including SF4, five-percent PUMS, 2002 county estimates of population by age/sex/race/ethnicity, and the income and poverty estimates.

Census Director Louis Kincannon then reported that the American Community Survey (ACS) is moving forward with an organizational change. The ACS has been transferred from Demographic Programs to Decennial Census, reflecting how integral the survey is to the design of the 2010 census. As Kincannon put it, the change moves the ACS from Nancy Gordon's to Jay Waite's area, but Gordon and many others will continue to be involved with the ACS. Turning to budgets, Kincannon noted that the House of Representatives endorsed the full administration request for census funding, but the Senate cut that amount by about \$110 (or 17 percent). The final appropriation will likely reflect a compromise. The Census Bureau has evaluated the implications of cuts, but Kincannon indicated that the ACS will go forward with full implementation next summer.

Kincannon then introduced Gerald Gates (Chief of the Census Bureau's Policy Office) who described the Data Stewardship Program (DSP). The discussion was in response to concerns, raised at the May meeting, that the Patriot Act and other anti-terrorist activities may have put the confidentiality of census data at risk. Kincannon was adamant that the Title 13 protections are strong, stressed how seriously the Census Bureau takes this responsibility, and reiterated that they have not been pressured to reveal protected information.

As Gates described it, the DSP was initially motivated by the Census Bureau's use of sensitive IRS data, but its objectives are now a broader part of the mission statement. Through the DSP, the Census Bureau seeks a balance between its *mission* to collect and disseminate data, and its *obligation* to protect confidentiality. More specifically, the objective is to carry data protection strategies down to specific practices, and it is believed that the program helps protect census data from post-September 11 pressures. While the Census Bureau is confident that its data protections are strong, it seeks suggestions on how best to "get the word out" to the public—especially for the ACS, which will not benefit from the massive marketing program of the decennial census.

Committee members were reassured by the Census Bureau's strong pronouncements, but data users might take note of Kincannon's comment that the greater risk of disclosure comes not from anti-terrorist activities, but from the ever finer use of data by many data users.

Re-Engineered 2010 Census

Jay Waite (Census Bureau, Associate Director for Decennial Census) noted the organizational transfer of the ACS to the decennial census, and commented that it should result in greater consistency in the wording and editing of questions that the ACS and short form census have in common. He then reviewed the budget situation, and confirmed that even if there are cuts, they have decided not to take any of them out of the ACS. The view is that the ACS must begin full implementation in 2004, so any cuts likely would be absorbed by MAF/TIGER enhancements, the census tests, and possibly the use of mobile computing devices.

Results from the 2003 census test are becoming available, and the Internet response option continues to be disappointing. Some use the option, but it has no impact on response rate, even when respondents are "pushed" to use it. Waite noted that if Internet response does not ramp up, the Census Bureau will have to plan and pay for a lot of paper capacity in the 2010 census. Other results confirm that wording changes improve the reporting of specific Hispanic groups, and dropping the "Some other race" category provided mixed results—decreasing the number of persons who do not report a specified race, but also decreasing response to the race question among Hispanics.

Waite explained that the 2004 test will involve questionnaire content, the use of mobile computing devices for field work, and work on group quarters. He also noted that the Queens site was chosen because it is expected to present challenges that must be addressed for the next census. With respect to the overseas enumeration, Waite confided that "we're pretty scared about it," but will follow through with the operational test (in Mexico, Kuwait and France) to see how it goes. The MAF/TIGER enhancements program is on schedule, according to Waite. Contracts are being awarded, staff training is underway, partnerships are being established, and the Community Address Updating System (CAUS) is being launched.

Turning to the ACS, Waite noted that the survey is being expanded to Puerto Rico, and reminded us of some of the recent releases of ACS test data. He also noted that we now have three year averages in some test areas, and that the data are being reviewed, under contract, by local data experts.

As expected, the test of voluntary ACS response shows a reduction in response rate. The reduction is about 20 percent, and the consequence is a big reduction in sample size (ACS follows up only on a sample of nonrespondents), and a significant increase in cost. Waite estimated that it would take an extra \$55 to \$60 million per year to keep the number of interviews the same. When asked how voluntary ACS response rates compare to those for other voluntary federal surveys (such as the CPS), Waite said they are lower, but explained that this is expected, since the ACS is a large-scale mail survey, in contrast to the interview-based CPS. The Census Bureau is recommending to Congress that the ACS remain mandatory, and later in the meeting, the Advisory Committee voted to make a similar recommendation.

Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee Update

Friday's agenda started with Bob Hill's summary of activity at the Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee. Hill noted that Hispanic/Latino representatives advocate retaining the "Some other race" category, arguing that it includes immigrants who do not relate to the traditional categories. They also favor multiple Hispanic response options, and do not support the combination of the race and ethnicity questions. American Indian representatives have argued the need to better distinguish the American Indian category from those reflecting Central and South American origins. Asian representatives recommend that the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander response option immediately follow American Indian on the race question, and support oversampling in the ACS because of this population's small size. African American representatives see the need for an "Other black" category on the race question, because many blacks (Dominicans, Ethiopians, Jamaicans, etc.) do not identify with "African American."

Overseas Enumeration

Fay Nash (Census Bureau Decennial Management Division) explained that interest in counting non-federal civilians living in foreign countries was expressed late in the 2000 planning process, and prompted Congress to order a test of its feasibility. Nash described the 2004 test to be conducted in France, Kuwait, and Mexico. The objective is to count all U.S. citizens in these countries using a census short form with a few additional questions. Paper and Internet response options will be provided, but a mail out operation is not feasible. U.S. citizens will have to come forward to be counted, so blank questionnaires will have to be available in a variety of locations. Marketing and outreach will be critical, and for this purpose, the Census Bureau has contracted with a "well-known marketing firm" with experience in the test countries.

The overseas enumeration presents a long list of questions and challenges, such as who to include (just citizens? dependents of citizens? dual-nationals?). Then there is the question of how to assign persons to a U.S. state, and how the data should be used—for apportionment only, or also for redistricting and federal funds distribution? And what about data products? Nash said that apportionment is the application that makes the Census Bureau most nervous, and commented that such an application would be challenged in the courts. The courts, she explained, would want a legal mandate for the use of the overseas count, and expects that the Census Bureau would recommend that Congress establish such a mandate. Nash also noted that many of these questions are beyond the Census Bureau’s purview. Congress is the major stakeholder in the overseas count, and will call the shots for the 2010 census.

There was discussion of how poor the coverage and data on the overseas population would be. But the same could be said of the homeless population, where low coverage does not diminish the Census Bureau’s sense of obligation in counting as many of the homeless as possible. And growing interest in the overseas count is reflected in the addition of the “Census 2010 Coalition” to the DCAC. The coalition represents Americans overseas, and has taken on the cause of the overseas count. Coalition representative Leigh Gribble commented that many overseas Americans vote, pay taxes, have enduring ties to the U.S., and want to be counted in the census. He promised that the coalition will continue to press Congress for the overseas enumeration.

Working Group Reports

Next on the agenda were reports from the four DCAC working groups that had met the previous afternoon.

Small Populations

Ken Hodges (Association of Public Data Users) reported that the group started with a discussion of ACS weighting procedures, led by Mark Asiala (Demographic Statistical Methods Division). It is an elaborate process starting with a base weight, and modified with subsequent weights based on factors including CAPI sub-sampling, mode bias, and county population and housing unit controls—with the population weights specific to characteristics including age, sex, race and ethnicity.

Linda Franz (Geography Division) followed with a briefing on the MAF/TIGER update process—describing how the USPS Delivery Sequence File provides excellent updates in areas with “city style” addresses. The challenge is in updating addresses in “non-city style” areas. Mary Ann Chapin (Demographic Statistical Methods Division) described plans for meeting this challenge with programs such as the Community Address Updating System (CAUS), in which field staff would update addresses while in the field for the ACS. The automation required for an efficient CAUS would be promoted by Demographic Area Address Listing (DAAL)—a system for automated address updating using laptop computers—and the Automated Listing and Mapping Instrument (ALMI)—software for laptop address listing. These operations have been in testing since 1998, and

are intended to replace paper and pencil listing operations. The new operations hold great promise, but Franz noted that prior to 2010, there will be “a complete and over the ground coverage check of the MAF.” She described this as a recent (and expensive) decision, and it reflects how critical the address list is to the 2010 census.

The group identified areas for future attention, and requested a presentation on the interpretation of multi-year average data—with real examples, now that multiple years have data have been collected in ACS test sites. Also discussed was the argument that the prison population should be counted at its pre-incarceration residence. The issue had been raised in a mailing to DCAC representatives, and the discussion reached no conclusions concerning potential implications for the census and the ACS.

Data Quality

Dorothy Harshbarger (Association of State and Territorial Health Officials) explained that the Data Quality Working Group considered the issue of Census Bureau estimates versus ACS data, and the possibility that the ACS might get to the point where its raw data are better than the estimates to which it is controlled. The group was also concerned with the results of the voluntary ACS test results—expressed concern with the extra cost of maintaining data quality. The group supports a mandatory ACS, and asked for an update if this issue is not resolved by the next meeting.

With respect to automation efforts, the group asked the Census Bureau to provide timelines, and had further questions on Internet response, and the potential impact of cell phones on CATI follow up.

Topics on the group’s list for follow up include planning for coverage measurement, and the improvement of group quarters data—for both decennial census and ACS. The group also discussed how it can make progress on these and other issues between the DCAC meetings.

Language

Noting the large number of Census 2000 respondents who did not speak English, Marisa Demeo (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) described the Census Bureau’s presentation on its efforts to make the census more accessible to non-English speakers. The Census Bureau sees the need for better evaluation of the translation of census forms to other languages, and the working group supports the Bureau’s efforts as a move in the right direction.

The working group recommends pre-tests for the language forms (something not done in 2000), and cognitive interviews with Spanish speakers, to determine if their interpretation of census and ACS questions is consistent with Census expectations. They also recommend that, in addition to establishing guidelines for the language forms, the Census Bureau needs guidelines for staff conducting ACS interviews in non-English languages. It is important, they point out, that these interviewers have both language and cultural competency.

The group has also considered a change of name to the Language and Outreach Working Group.

Race and Ethnicity

Arturo Vargas (National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund) reported that the group discussed the 2003 census test results—noting that the elimination of “Some other race” got more respondents to indicate a specified race, but still left much non-response, and that the provision of examples improved the reporting of specific Hispanic origins.

The group recommends modifying the instructions on the questionnaire to explain that race and Hispanic ethnicity are separate concepts, and called for further research on this and other issues. For example, they recommend tests to determine if the quality of race and ethnicity data are the same across all response modes. Among the other topics recommended for further testing were the elimination of “Some other race,” which examples of Hispanic type to include on the question, dropping the term “Negro” from the race question, and the placement of the “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander” category among the race question response options.

An extended and sometimes spirited discussion followed on numerous aspects of the race and ethnicity questions—including how to ask race and ethnicity, whether the census should ask race and ethnicity, and how many race and ethnic categories should be identified.

Congressional Update

Jefferson Taylor (Chief of the Census Bureau’s Congressional Affairs Office) made introductory remarks describing progress in Census/Congressional relations. Noting that ACS appeared to be on life support just a year ago, Taylor said it is now in “launch sequence,” and gaining support. One member of Congress even called to complain about the large volume of mail he was receiving in support of the ACS.

Chip Walker (Majority Staff, House Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census) described the House as “backing up its verbal commitment” to the ACS with a recommendation for full Census funding. He acknowledged that the real funding test is 2005—the first full year of full implementation—but assured that “the people making these decisions” understand what it will take to have an ACS instead of a long form. Walker also acknowledged that the drop in response for the voluntary ACS was more significant than expected, and predicted that the ACS will go out as a mandatory survey. If there are complaints, Congress now knows how much a voluntary ACS would cost.

For the overseas enumeration, Walker recommended that priority be given to the question of whether this population should be counted—regardless of costs, operational obstacles,

and data quality. He expressed the hope that the DCAC would make a recommendation on this issue, but noted that the decision rests with Congress and the courts—not the Census Bureau. Walker also explained that the Census Bureau does not have the power to change the census form, and referring to the debate over the race and ethnicity questions, cautioned that the census form is not a forum for advocacy. Again, the case for change should be made through Congress and the courts. Walker commented that the Census Bureau might have more latitude with the ACS, but less than it would have had with a voluntary ACS.

In response to a question, Walker described increasing concern with mail security, and in particular, the possibility that the census or ACS could be the target of something like an anthrax attack. Such an event could cause massive disruption (people would fear opening their census form), and a constitutional crisis could result. Congress will be looking at this issue.

David McMillen (Minority Staff, Committee on Government Reform and Oversight) agreed that such concerns are legitimate, and cited the 1980 fire bombing of a census office as evidence that the census has been a target in the past.

McMillen indicated some disagreement with Walker's comments about DCAC's role in making recommendations on questionnaire content, and in particular with the race question. Walker clarified that he agrees that the DCAC should make recommendations, but maintained that these recommendations should be made to the Department of Commerce and to Congress.

Turning to funding, McMillen noted that the conference committee will convene soon, and both he and Walker agreed that some kind of "split difference" is the most likely outcome. McMillen also noted that Congress is becoming concerned about the costs and possible inefficiencies in the MAF/TIGER update process, and with the constraints to self-response that the elimination of "Some other race" would involve. McMillen also suggested that, while short-term census funding looks good, there could be problems on the horizon, as moves to extend recent tax cuts could severely reduce federal budgets in years when census expenses are especially high.

Public Comment

Two individuals spoke in the period for public comment.

One made the case that the prison population should be counted where they lived before they were incarcerated. The argument is that the prison population comes disproportionately from low income urban communities and communities of color, and resides not by choice in the increasingly rural communities where prisons are located. Consequently, low income urban communities are not allocated the full representation and funding that they deserve. DCAC representatives received a mailing on this issue a

few weeks before the meeting, and it was raised in the meeting of the Small Populations Working Group. It is an issue with active advocates, and may be one to watch.

The other person, representing the Federation of American Women's Clubs Abroad, spoke in support of the enumeration of non-federal civilians residing in foreign countries. Her points were similar to those made by the new DCAC representative, and were further indication of the growing interest in this issue.

Questions for APDU Members

As in previous meeting reports, we are posing questions to promote dialogue, and to help ensure that your views are represented to the Decennial Census Advisory Committee.

Please send your thoughts on these or other census data issues to your APDU representative, Ken Hodges at khodges@claritas.com and/or alternate representative Mark Salling at 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. What do you see as the data user issues related to the proposed "overseas enumeration?"
2. What are your thoughts on the proposal that the prison population be counted at their pre-incarceration residence? In particular, do you see issues related to data quality or data products?
3. Have you used any of the ACS test data, and if so, how well have the data worked for your application?
4. Do you have other comments or issues relative to this most recent DCAC meeting?