Census Bureau Counts Down to 2010

With the 2010 Census only a year away, the U.S. Census Bureau continues to prepare for the massive national head-counting project. Data from the census should help leaders make key decisions, from congressional representation to the allocation of more than $300 billion annually in federal funds.

In spring 2009, the bureau undertook several key operational activities, including address canvassing involving approximately 140,000 census workers covering most U.S. neighborhoods to identify each residential address; partnership recruitment that pulled in other organizations to help spread messages about the census; and a “census in schools” project that encourages principals and teachers to participate in a program to provide schools with census-related instructional materials.

In the realm of canvassing, the U.S. Census Bureau has been working to update its address list of the nation’s approximately 130 million housing units. Census workers will use confidential and secure GPS-equipped hand-held computers to verify, add and delete addresses.

Meanwhile, the bureau has submitted to Congress a proposed recovery plan to create jobs, strengthen the economy, and conduct a successful 2010 Census. The bureau was provided with $1 billion under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“The Census Bureau’s proposed investments will improve our ability to conduct an accurate census and will create thousands of good-paying jobs,” said U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke. “A successful census is critical for ensuring that communities have proper representation, and the resources needed for health care, law enforcement and education.”

Under the proposal, the Census Bureau will invest $250 million in partnership and outreach efforts to minority communities and hard-to-reach populations. The remaining $750 million will be committed to support early 2010 Census operations that should reduce operational and programmatic risks at a critical stage of the census process.

Some census recovery-plan highlights include $108 million for an “update/enumerate” operation, which will serve as a method of data collection in communities where many housing units may not have house numbers and street-name mailing addresses. This method will be used on American Indian reservations, colonias (usually rural Spanish-speaking communities) and resort areas with high concentrations of seasonally vacant living quarters. The update/enumerate workers canvass assignment areas to update residential addresses (including adding living quarters that weren’t included on the address listing pages), update Census Bureau maps and complete a questionnaire for each housing unit during the same visit.

Another $388 million would be designated for a Local Census Office (LCO) Staffing Operation to support the major 2010 Census field operations. The LCO Staffing Operation recruits, hires and releases office and field staff; performs supervisory and non-supervisory functions for office activities and field operations; distributes training and procedural manuals for office staff; and trains employees and office staff for the field operations performed at the LCO. The LCO also manages and troubleshoots field and office automation systems and problems.