

Census 2000 Update

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The Sampling Issue - Resolved?

The question of whether or not to include sampling in the Census 2000 population count was recently answered by the U.S. Supreme Court. The court handed down its decision in January, stating that sampling could not be used in the count used for apportionment. Many thought this would be an end to the sampling controversy that has plagued the census for more than a year, but it seems now that might not be the case. In late February, recently appointed Census Bureau Director Dr. Ken Prewitt announced that sampling would be used to correct all but the apportionment count. The Bureau is planning to conduct a post-enumeration survey to measure the accuracy of the count and then to adjust the census figures based on that sample survey, called *ACE - Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation*. Some members of Congress, and notably the chair of the census oversight committee (Dan Miller, R-FL), are opposed to this new plan, while other members support the use of sampling to improve coverage.

A Traditional Census, Plus

At a recent meeting with senior census staff,* plans to enhance various aspects of the count were unveiled. This was done in the context of director Prewitt's comment rebutting statements oft-repeated in Congress that the 1990 census was a failed census: "The 1990 census was not a failed census. A failed census is one that is not used. The 1920 census was a failed census. Congress was not happy with the results and did not reapportion itself until after the 1930 census." But to increase the accuracy and completeness of the count, the Bureau now plans to pursue three strategies:

1. To gain public cooperation to get a high mail return
2. To gain cooperation for enumeration in non-response follow up
3. To gain improvements in coverage (both geographically and in terms of hard-to-count persons)

The Bureau expects a return rate of 65 percent nationally on the mailout/mailback portion of the census. This can vary by state. Indiana is typically among the states with the highest initial return rate for forms that are mailed to and then mailed back from households. Each percentage point of non-returned forms costs \$25 million in follow-up (calling and visiting the household). The Census Bureau believes that an enhanced partnership program can help increase response rates and plans to funnel more money, more employees and more promotional materials into this program (which is pre-

dominantly the Complete Count Committee program and Address List Review). The Bureau will also spend more money on ad campaigns, with more messages aimed at the hard-to-enumerate and in areas that have low participation rates in other activities, such as voting. Some of these messages will be designed to change attitudes rather than to urge turning in the form. The ads will be professionally produced and begin airing in the Fall of 1999.

Other actions to be taken by the Census Bureau to ensure an accurate census in 2000:

- Non-Response Follow Up

The Bureau has to follow up every questionnaire that goes out in the mail but does not come back. Some forms will be returned because the post office says they are not deliverable. The Census Bureau must follow up on these and estimates there will be 45 million such non-responses (which are based on households) nationwide. With sampling, so much follow up would not have been an issue. With a traditional census now the order of the day, more temporary employees must be hired and trained and will spend 10 weeks doing the follow up. There is concern at the Bureau about finding sufficient employees to do this work and there has been some difficulty even now, in the winter and spring, in accomplishing the address checks that have been conducted in many urban areas in Indiana.

- Coverage Improvement

One simple way to help coverage was to expand the number of persons in a household that could be included on the form. Originally, the limit was five but the new form will accommodate six persons. For every person beyond that limit, the Census Bureau must send out an enumerator to contact the household and collect the data, so increasing the limit will reduce the need for that follow up. Other ways to improve coverage include better quality control with housing units marked as vacant or non-existent. Those units will be visited by a second enumerator to a double check. In 1990, the Census Bureau picked up 1.5 million people by double-checking the first enumerator, so it is a proven quality control measure. In some areas of our state, housing units may not seem obvious from the road or street. Examples of hard-to-locate units might include a trailer behind a house, or what looks like a single-family home that has actually been converted into multiple units. Enumerators will

closely check returned forms. If the questionnaire says several people at a given location, but information is given for only one person, the enumerator will conduct a telephone interview with that household to clear up the discrepancy. Because the census is so labor intensive the people who become enumerators must receive training with emphasis on map reading and spotting difficult-to-find housing.

- Address List Review

The 1998 program is actually still underway. Participating cities, if willing, were able to check their local information on addresses against the Census Bureau's (after signing an oath not to divulge any of this information for any reason). This is a difficult, time-consuming and, from what we have heard from some communities, frustrating program. But the payoff could come in terms of improving the mailing list the Bureau will use to send out millions of questionnaires in our state alone.

The 1999 program has begun, with workshops offered throughout Indiana in January and February. Communities and areas outside of urban cities and towns can, if willing, check the Census Bureau's maps and estimated number and location of housing units against its own records. Participation among units of government in Indiana is approximately 20%, although if one takes out township governments (1,008) the rate goes up appreciably.

- Complete Count Committees

Every community in Indiana has the opportunity to establish a Complete Count Committee, and many did for the 1990 census. At this time, less than 100 of our communities have established such groups, but more are submitting proclamations (the first step) every day to the Census Bureau office in Chicago. The fundamental work of these committees is to promote the census within the community and to encourage response by its residents.

- Census in the Schools

Designed by Scholastic, this is one of the most interesting initiatives developed for the Census to encourage participation. The purpose is to incorporate the census in teaching about citizenship, geography, math, map skills, social studies and community involvement. The Bureau just announced plans to expand this program significantly so that every school in Indiana and the nation will be able to incorpo-

rate the specially designed materials into their curricula for the 1999/2000 school year. Response cards will be sent to teachers this spring and for those who respond, materials will be supplied during the summer. Those same materials will be available for download via the Internet.

Detailed information on the Census 2000 plans and other materials are available at www.iupui.edu/it/ibrc.

*The author is a member of the national data center steering committee, an elected body of nine that represents a network of 1500 such centers nationwide, and the IBRC Director is the Governor's Liaison to the Bureau for Census 2000.



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