



Highlights of [GAO-09-525T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

A complete and accurate census is becoming an increasingly daunting task, in part because the nation's population is growing larger, more diverse, and more reluctant to participate, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau). When the census misses a person who should have been included, it results in an undercount, and the differential impact on various subpopulations, such as minorities, is particularly problematic.

This testimony provides an update on the Bureau's readiness to implement its Integrated Communications Campaign, one of several efforts aimed at reducing the undercount. GAO focused on the campaign's key components: partnerships with local and national organizations, paid advertising and public relations, and Census in Schools (designed to reach parents and guardians through their school-age children). GAO also discusses the extent to which the rollout of the campaign is consistent with factors important for greater accountability and successful results. This testimony is based on previously issued work, ongoing reviews of relevant documents, and interviews with key Bureau officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made several prior recommendations in its earlier review of the Bureau's partnership program, all of which were implemented. At this time, GAO is not making any new recommendations.

View [GAO-09-525T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Robert N. Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov).

## 2010 CENSUS

### Communications Campaign Has Potential to Boost Participation

#### What GAO Found

The Bureau has made notable progress in rolling out key components of its communications campaign; if implemented as planned, the campaign will help position the Bureau to address the undercount. For example, to help promote the census and convince individuals—especially hard-to-count groups—to respond, the Bureau plans to partner with state, local, and tribal governments; religious, community, and social service organizations; and private businesses to secure a more complete count. According to the Bureau, it has thus far secured partnership agreements with more than 10,000 organizations for 2010. The Bureau intends to focus its efforts on hard-to-count communities using data from the 2000 Census, and additional funding made available from the recently enacted economic recovery legislation will enable the Bureau to greatly expand staffing for the partnership program. Future success will depend in part on how well the Bureau communicates with partners and incorporates other best practices from 2000, as well as on how well it monitors the progress of the partnership efforts and whether it uses results-oriented measures so as to deploy resources as needed.

The Bureau updated its paid media and public relations strategy from 2000 to meet a changing media environment and plans to focus its efforts on hard-to-count populations. In addition to traditional outlets such as television and radio, the Bureau also intends to employ on line media, such as podcasts and blogs. Currently, the Bureau plans to devote 55 percent of its advertising resources to national media, which provides the broadest reach, and 45 percent to local media, which better targets specific hard-to-count communities. The Bureau has also completed research on factors affecting census participation, which could help the Bureau address the long-standing issue of converting awareness of the census into actual participation. The Census in Schools program is also moving forward. Like the other components of the communications campaign, the Bureau plans to target its efforts to those schools where data from the 2000 Census suggest that the program will have the most impact: school districts in hard-to-count communities and kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

In general, the design of the Bureau's communications campaign appears to be comprehensive, integrated, shaped by the Bureau's experience in the 2000 Census, and targeted to hard-to-count populations. The programs GAO reviewed are in the planning or early implementation phases, and future success will depend on how well the Bureau moves from the design to operational phases. Further, while the extra money the Bureau received under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 will help augment its outreach efforts, it does not necessarily follow that additional activity will yield higher response rates. Therefore, consistent with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act the Bureau will need to identify, among other things, (1) cost estimates of the activities being funded, (2) the objectives and outcome-related goals of the planned spending, and (3) how the spending will help achieve those goals.