

Draft 7-23-2020 v4

Elevator Speech

High Level Message: Curtailing census operations will result in a census that is of unacceptable quality. The Census Bureau needs the full 120 days that the Administration originally requested from Congress to have the best chance to produce high quality, usable census results in this difficult time. Shortening the time period to meet the original statutory deadlines for apportionment and redistricting data will result in a census that has fatal data quality flaws that are unacceptable for a Constitutionally-mandated national activity.

I. Shortening field data collection operations will diminish data quality and introduce risk.

- a. COVID-19 presents an unprecedented challenge to field data collection. While starting NRFU early in select ACOs is a good idea and has provided the Census Bureau a short window to work out any kinks with our systems, the Census Bureau will likely need to conduct staggered operations all over the country from July until the end of October in order to conduct the most complete NRFU possible. Areas that are now low risk for COVID will become high risk and vice versa, and the Census Bureau will need to adapt NRFU on an almost daily basis to conduct data collection using the Administration's gating criteria.
- b. The Census Bureau is adapting NRFU for the COVID environment, including development of systems for an outbound telephone operation, increased use of administrative records (is this last one true?), and significantly increasing selections for field positions to compensate for a much higher dropout rate from enumerator training to field deployment. These adaptations are designed to adapt NRFU operations to the COVID environment, not to shorten the operation.
- c. NRFU is not the only challenge; the Census Bureau is also adapting its operations for counting the group quarters population, college students and the homeless.
- d. All of these adapted operations are intended to produce the most accurate census possible, and cannot be rushed without diminishing data quality or introducing unacceptable risk to either operations or field staff.

II. Shortening post processing operations will diminish data quality and introduce risk.

- a. The Census Bureau could, with the introduction of great risk, shorten the post processing schedule, but it is not possible to shorten the schedule appreciably without directly degrading the quality of the results and introducing great risk.
- b. Post processing is a massive and complex operation and the steps of the operation must be performed consecutively. It is not possible, e.g., to establish the final collection geographic framework (question – this one for an outside reader will leave them scratching their head – what the heck are they talking about?) for the nation prior to processing housing units and Group Quarters (GQs) that are added or corrected during NRFU. Similarly, it is not possible to unduplicate responses prior to processing all non-ID responses. In this sense, post processing is like building a house – you cannot apply dry wall before erecting the walls, you cannot lay floor tile before the floor is constructed, etc.

- c. Nor can post processing operations begin until data collection operations are completed everywhere. There is no option, e.g., to begin post processing in one region or state of the country while other areas are still collecting data. This is so because the very first step is geographic processing, which cannot begin until the entire universe is determined. Geographic processing is key because we need to tabulate census results at the block level and then be additive to higher levels of geography such block groups, tracts, counties, and states.
- d. Each and every step in post processing is necessary and eliminating any step would result in a diminished data product. The steps are listed in the table below – no step can be eliminated or overlap with another step.
- e. Some of these steps provide for quality reviews. While it may be tempting to think that quality reviews can be shortened, through decades of experience the Census Bureau has learned that quality reviews are essential to producing data products that do not need to be recalled, products that stand the test of time. We routinely discover items that need to be corrected during data review and appreciably shortening data review would be extremely unwise.
- f. The revised schedule requested by the Administration to Congress includes an additional 30-calendar days of schedule contingency. The Census Bureau needs these 30 days for risk mitigation:
 - i. In case we are not able to complete data collection operations everywhere by October 31 (e.g., a hurricane, or a COVID outbreak).
 - ii. To account for additional processing steps and reviews made necessary by the COVID adaptations (e.g., extra time for processing responses related to college students).

III. Curtailing either field operations or post-processing may result in loss of public confidence in the census results such that census results would be unusable regardless of quality.

- a. The Administration already requested 120 days and Census officials have repeatedly said we need this time.
- b. Producing results in a vastly-diminished time frame may result in great skepticism about the numbers and unwillingness to use them.
- c. There are always winners and losers in census results. Census results have always been about confidence – our nation uses census data because people and politicians have confidence in the Census Bureau’s ability to produce high quality, impartial data, free from political interference. In this sense being seen to produce politically-manipulated results is as much of a danger as low quality data.

IV. Summary of Post Processing Timeline

Activity	Completion Date	Description
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Complete field data collection operations	10-31-2020	The Census Bureau collects information about both GQ and housing units that it uses during post processing to update the Master Address File (MAF).
Incorporate address updates from the field data collection operations into MAF/TIGER	11-12-2020	Once data collection ends, the Census Bureau updates the MAF to add, delete, or correct housing units and GQs.
Produce Final Collection Address Data Products	12-20-2020	The Census Bureau geocodes all addresses, meaning that it codes each address to the block level so that it is properly reflected in the correct geography. This geography will form a backbone for all remaining processing.
Produce Decennial Response File 1 (DRF1)	1-21-2021	Creating the DRF1 requires the Census Bureau to reconcile status for both the housing and group quarter populations, meaning that we classify each and every address in the nation as occupied, vacant, non-existent or undetermined. We begin the unduplication process and standardize response data across modes, which is necessary because we collect response information from self-response, as well as NRFU and other field operations. Additionally we link continuation forms for specific households, so that individuals are correctly associated with a specific household.
Produce Decennial Response File 2 (DRF2)	2-11-2021	Producing the DRF2 requires the Census Bureau to verify Self Response Quality Assurance (SRQA) results, and to match responses to ensure that individuals and households are not duplicated. For households with more than one return, we select the "primary" return.
Produce Census Unedited File (CUF)	3-8-2021	The CUF is the file used to produce the apportionment data. To create it the Census Bureau ingests administrative record data and then determines the occupancy status for every housing unit in the nation. We append Hispanic origin and race write-in codes, and define and create variables for imputation. Imputation is necessary to provide values for data that we know to be missing, a situation that inevitably occurs in a small percentage of cases.

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Review and verify data	4-1-2021	Population subject matter experts review and verify data to ensure that the input numbers are correct.
Produce Apportionment Counts	4-30-2021	We receive and ingest the Federally Affiliated Count Overseas (FACO) file, and verify and resolve issues. We verify counts in the CUF and resolve issues before calculating the apportionment counts, conducting multiple independent calculations. We create the apportionment tables and maps, and coordinate review prior to delivery to the Secretary.
Census Edited File (CEF)	4-28-2021	After delivery of the apportionment counts, we begin to work on subsequent data products, products that will include demographic variables. This means we need to merge additional administrative records files, and perform substitution and edit processes necessary to provide complete information.
Produce Microdata Detail File (MDF)	5-12-2021	The MDF is the last major national file and it is used to create all subsequent data products. It involves creating and verifying a person level file for the U.S. and Puerto Rico person level file and transferring the file to the tabulation system. Creating the MDF requires application of complex disclosure avoidance processes necessary to achieve the confidentiality guarantee contained in T13.
Review and verify data processing	6-6-2021	This is a critical review step necessary for data processing where Census Bureau staff conduct quality reviews, including of the disclosure avoidance results.
Finish Delivery of P.L. 94-171 Data Products	7-29-2021	Creating the PL data products involves ingesting the MDF and the final tabulation geography, adding variable recodes, and working with our production system to allow posting of the data, as well as producing the actual tables and metadata. Extensive review is necessary prior to producing the files, which will be released on a flow basis weekly beginning 6-18-2021.