Discussion for CSAC of “Update on the 2020 Census Program”

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(Just a Few of the) Major Challenges of Census 2020

- Accurately count and collect data on more people living in more (and perhaps more complex) housing units than ever before
- Do so for the most ethnically, linguistically, and (most likely) socioeconomically diverse population than ever before
- Do so in a sociopolitical context that, at least in some portions of the population, is not necessarily friendly toward governmental survey operations
- Do so in a challenging budgetary context: cut costs

Rising to the Challenges

- The Bureau's plan to rise to these challenges is to innovate in 4 key areas:
  1) Reengineer field operations
  2) Optimize self-response
  3) Make better use of administrative records
  4) Reengineer address canvassing

Fall 2015 CSAC Update

- Lisa's and Amanda's presentation offers a wide-ranging overview of the Bureau's innovations and activities gearing up for Census 2020
- Some attention given to ACS updates as well
- Given the very broad scope, my questions/comments are meant to stimulate discussion and thought, and are not focused on details. I will also focus on Census 2020, rather than ACS, and I organize my discussion according to the four key 2020 Innovation Areas
- Later, I also suggest a few ways that preparation for 2020 may benefit from more specific and detailed exchanges with the CSAC

Reengineer Field Operations

- Of the 4 innovations for 2020, this one seems to have received the most intense focus…at least in our committee to date
- CEDCaP should result in a better and more cost effective Census. While not restricted to field operations, the innovations/efficiencies of CEDCaP are impressive, well documented, and well planned.

A couple of field operation questions based on the recent test sites:

- Maricopa County test yielded some problems with the COMPASS application…why did COMPASS freeze/crash? Were problems with COMPASS associated with reduced enumerator training (32 -> 18 hours)? Were they BYOD related? Software related?
- Were other problems with Maricopa enumerators (e.g., procedures, management of assignments) related to reduced training hours? Should an experiment with 2 or more different approaches to training be conducted to determine if some of these problems could be mitigated?

Optimize Self Response I

- Savannah, GA:

1) Partnerships and advertising successful
2) Mailing invitation letters and postcards a success
3) High match rates for non-ID cases

Questions/Comments:

1) What was the overall self-response rate? How did this vary by geography, SES of geographic area, race/ethnicity, language? Any surprises in the patterns?
2) What partnerships and advertising strategies are working in particular ways across geographic areas and demographic groups?
3) How can the upcoming 2016-2018 tests be tweaked to test particular strategies that seem to have promise for particular geographic areas and demographic subgroups, based on the results from this market area?

Optimize Self Response, II

- Maricopa County, AZ:

1) Self response rate of 56.2%

Questions/Comments:

1) How did this overall rate compare with Savannah? What factors differentiated the self-response rate in these two sites?
2) What geographic/demographic subgroups exhibited particularly low self-response rates? Are we seeing similar geographic/subgroup patterns in the different test cities?
3) Why are some population/geographic groups less likely to self-respond? Would some follow-up (e.g., focus groups) help in understanding the key sources of low self-response?

Optimize Self Response, III

- 2015 National Content Test:

Will Include An Innovative Test of 9 Different Contact Strategies (e.g., Letter-Postcard-Postcard-Mail Questionnaire)

Questions/Comments:

1) Overall (national) results will be informative. But perhaps more important, how effective are each of the strategies across geographic areas and population subgroups? Detailed analysis will be important.
2) Do the contact strategies need to be tailored to be most effective in particular geographic areas and among particular population subgroups? (Test for variation in Houston & LA in 2016???)

** Increasing the percentage of self-response among those who have low propensities to self-respond is the key to making this innovation work. **

Use of Administrative Records

- Only minor updates in this area
- Experience with the ACS GQ Working Group suggests much untapped potential for use of administrative records in that context (e.g., correctional facilities, nursing homes)
- Census 2020 work is in progress to evaluate the potential use of administrative records to reduce or eliminate visits to NRFU units and to assess the quality of administrative data in lieu of respondent data
- Given what we know at this point, which particular sources of administrative data (e.g., USPS mail delivery data; social program data; corrections facility data) are planned to be used in which particular contexts and for what purposes? Will the use of administrative data be evaluated in the upcoming 2015-18 test sites? How so?

Reengineer Address Canvassing

- Innovation: utilize better technology, statistical modeling, and local government input to substantially reduce traditional canvassing in producing an accurate address listing. Focus on-the-ground efforts on areas experiencing substantial change.
- 2016 Address Canvassing Test… in parts of Houston, Los Angeles, and Puerto Rico
- Will of course be critical to assess the accuracy of the address lists in areas of rapid transition; but within such transitional areas, those with high concentrations of immigrants and high rates of poverty (as opposed to new single-family housing developments in more affluent areas) will most likely need the greatest attention
- How will the accuracy of the newly generated lists be assessed? What is the gold standard? Will "traditional methods" of listing be utilized for comparison purposes?

Suggestions for Near-Term CSAC Attention

- Now <5 years to Census 2020; the challenges (and opportunities for innovation) are big
- A framework of innovation for producing a great product is in place
- We should continue to receive updates on CEDCaP and ROCkIT at future meetings, as recently acknowledged by Director Thompson
- Updates on other issues arising with field operations (i.e., training, BYOD, COMPASS) would be great
- Given the crucial timeframe leading up to 2020, and the challenges/opportunities that exist, other (recurring?) CSAC sessions in the near term could focus on specific innovations and tests for 2020:

Suggestions, II

1) Optimizing Self Response. What experiments are being conducted in each test site? Are we doing all that can be done to consider geographic and population heterogeneity in each experiment? What are we specifically learning from each of the experiments? How can what is being learned be best used in 2020?
2) Utilizing Administrative Records. What did we specifically learn from the 2015 test? What other tests are planned or ongoing to assess the use of such records…in which contexts and for what purposes? Are we missing potential major improvements in operations / cost savings?
3) Reengineering Address Canvassing. What did we specifically learn from Houston, LA, and Puerto Rico? What is the gold standard and how do the new innovations in canvassing compare to other methods of canvassing? Are the new methods working as well as possible in (challenging) areas of transformation?

THANK YOU… AND CONTINUED BEST WITH THE PREPARATIONS FOR 2020!!!