Quality Framework Category: Data Products and Services Issue date: 05/16/02

Census Bureau Standard: Correcting Information That Does Not Comply with Census Bureau Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines

Introduction

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued government-wide guidelines at 67 FR 8452-8460 (February 22, 2002) that provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information, including statistical information, they disseminate. Agencies are required to issue their own implementing guidelines, including corrections procedures, and to make the guidelines available on individual agency websites. Written or electronic requests for correction communicated to an agency must specifically identify the information or procedures of concern, explain why the information is not in compliance with the information quality guidelines, indicate any potential adverse impact, and provide a return address for response. If the agency agrees that an error was made, it will determine the appropriate level of correction, within available resources.

The Census Bureau has preexisting procedures for correcting errors, within available resources, in many programs: the Count Question Resolution (CQR) program; the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program; Governmental Unit Boundaries; Street and Address Range Information; the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program; Annual Estimates of the Total Population; and Foreign Trade Statistics. This document describes the procedures the Census Bureau will follow if a party outside of the Census Bureau, alleging that the Census Bureau has not adhered to its information quality guidelines, requests correction of data disseminated by the Census Bureau and the data are not covered by the programs listed above.

Scope

These standards apply to statistical information disseminated by the Census Bureau in programs other than those listed above. They do not apply to routine revisions of data.

Standards

1. Requests for correction received by the Census Bureau will be forwarded to the program area responsible for the information being questioned.

2. Based on the explanation and evidence submitted, the Census Bureau will review the information being challenged, the processes that were used to create and disseminate it, and how it conforms to the Census Bureau's Information Quality Guidelines. After its review, the Census Bureau will determine whether a correction is warranted.

3. The Census Bureau will respond in writing to the affected person within 60 days of receiving the complaint. If the Census Bureau has completed its review, the response will explain the process that the Census Bureau followed in its review of the complaint, and the findings of the review. If correction is warranted, the response will include a progress report, and a subsequent letter will be sent when the correction action is complete. If correction is not warranted, the Census Bureau will explain that a correction will not be made, and why.

   If the Census Bureau has not completed its review, the response will notify the affected person that a review is underway, and provide an expected completion date. When the review is complete the Census Bureau will again contact the affected person in writing, and explain the process that the Census Bureau followed in its review of the complaint, and the findings of the review. If correction is warranted, the response will include a progress report, and a subsequent letter will be sent when the correction action is complete. If correction is not warranted, the Census Bureau will explain that a correction will not be made, and why.

4. If the Census Bureau concurs with an external complaint, the responsible program area will decide what to do based on factors like the nature and timeliness of the information involved and such factors as the significance of the error on the use of the information, the magnitude of the error, and the cost of undertaking a correction. This will be done with the concurrence of the program area Associate Director and the Associate Director for Methodology and Standards.

5. In all cases, corrected data will be made available on the Census Bureau website and subsequent issues of recurring products, including subsequent annual reports, will reflect the corrected data. Because the Information Quality Guidelines under which these corrections will occur are for statistical information disseminated after October 1, 2002, any correction of historical data suggested by a complaint with which the Census Bureau concurs will be done at the discretion of the program area.

6. In the case of a major error that could potentially mislead decision makers, any published reports containing the erroneous data will be reissued.

7. If the Census Bureau responds to an external complaint by declining to correct the data in question, and the affected party appeals, the appeal process will be managed by a panel determined by the Associate Director for Methodology and Standards.

8. The Methodology and Standards Directorate will track requests for correction and resulting actions (for programs other than those specified above), and the Methodology and Standards Directorate will compile correction requests across all program areas and make annual reports to the Office of Management and Budget.

Responsibilities

Program areas will be responsible for the following:

- The preparation of the appropriate information/materials based on these standards;
- The implementation of items 2-6; and
- The clearance of the proper use of the standards.

The Methodology and Standards Directorate will be responsible for the following:

- The coordination of overall tracking procedures;
- The establishment of appeals panels;
- The initiation of evaluations, reviews and updates to the standards, as necessary; and
- Guidance to program areas in the development and usage of the standards.

Implementation

To comply with the OMB directive, implementation should be fully phased in by October 1, 2002, with the first annual report on requests for corrections made to OMB in January, 2004 (for fiscal year 2003).

Inquiries

Inquiries relating to the interpretation of this standard should be addressed to the Associate Director for Methodology and Standards.

RECOMMENDATION:

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