



## 2020 CENSUS PROGRAM MEMORANDUM SERIES: 2020.08

**Date:** May 18, 2020

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The Record

**From:** Albert E. Fontenot, Jr. **(Signed May 18, 2020)**  
Associate Director, Decennial Census Programs

**Subject:** Adjustment of 2020 Census Operations in Response to COVID-19

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This memorandum documents how the Census Bureau has adjusted operations for the 2020 Census in light of the coronavirus pandemic. The Census Bureau made these adjustments in order to do the following:

- Protect the health and safety of the American public and Census Bureau employees.
- Implement guidance from federal, state, and local authorities regarding COVID-19.
- Ensure a complete and accurate count of all communities.

Early in 2020, the Census Bureau began tracking the COVID-19 outbreak and considering its potential impact on the 2020 Census.

- On February 25, 2020, the Census Bureau issued its first statement on this topic, [noting](#) that we were working with national health authorities—including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the President’s Task Force, as well as state and local health departments—to ensure that appropriate guidance was incorporated into our operations. We also noted that the 2020 Census had procedures built in that specifically anticipated epidemics and pandemics, and we would continue to work with the relevant authorities.
- On March 11, 2020, the Census Bureau released a more extensive announcement [detailing](#) the establishment of a Census Bureau COVID-19 Internal Task Force charged with continuously monitoring the situation and updating the Pandemic Addendum to the Census Bureau’s Continuity of Operations Plan.

- On March 18, 2020, the Census Bureau announced a two-week [suspension](#) of field operations, ending April 1, 2020, in accordance with official guidance to help slow the spread of the coronavirus and to evaluate all 2020 Census operations.
- On March 28, 2020, the Census Bureau announced a further two-week [suspension](#) ending April 15, 2020. At that point, the Census Bureau did not issue an updated schedule of operations, opting instead to continue its review of federal, state, and local guidance to evaluate the potential for a major shift in field operations that could impact the statutory deadlines.
- On April 13, 2020, the Census Bureau Director and the Secretary of Commerce [announced](#) that in order to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau was seeking statutory relief from Congress of 120 additional calendar days to deliver formal apportionment counts to the President and redistricting data to the states. This proposal would extend the window for field data collection and self-response to October 31, 2020, so that the apportionment counts could be delivered to the President by April 30, 2021, and redistricting data could be delivered to the states no later than July 31, 2021. The April 13 announcement included [a preliminary schedule](#) for the completion of census operations.

The April 13 announcement stated that the Census Bureau would continue to assess further operational modifications as necessary to conduct a complete and accurate census. We now have guidance issued by the [Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management](#) that gives federal agencies direction for resuming operations in an epidemiologically sound, data-driven basis, adhering to the latest federal, state, and local guidance. This guidance is consistent with the [President's Guidelines for Opening Up America Again](#) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance](#).

In light of these guidance documents, the Census Bureau will update planned start dates—consulting with appropriate officials—for selected operations and in selected states. Under the current situation, states and localities will reopen at different times across the country. This means that in some areas, census workers will have the opportunity to safely resume some operations earlier, and in other areas they may need to wait. At this point the Census Bureau has resumed dropping off census invitation packets and completing hiring operations in certain local areas, as those areas are able to support these specific operations in a safe and secure manner. Each week the Census Bureau will assess the most current information from federal, state, tribal, and local health officials to determine which areas would be able to support field operations in the coming week.

As decisions are made, updated information will be posted on the Census Bureau's website to ensure transparency. In making these weekly decisions, career staff in the Decennial Census Programs and Field Operations directorates will examine:

- Whether the state has begun phased reopening, relying on state websites and official statements.

- Whether the data supports the decision to restart, relying on federally established health criteria (such as downward trajectory of symptoms and cases, availability of health care facilities, and robust testing for at-risk health care workers). This includes relying on federal gating criteria, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) GeoHealth Dashboard, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) risk data, and other Census Bureau data analysis.
- Whether we can successfully start operations and meet safety needs of our employees and the public, relying on analysis of local conditions, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines, and consultation with regional directors.
- Whether we have official approval to restart, relying on federal gating criteria, official statements from state governments, HHS GeoHealth Dashboard, FEMA risk data, Census Bureau data analysis, CDC guidelines, OMB guidelines, consultation with Census Bureau regional directors, and analysis of localized conditions.

During this phased resumption of field operations, the Census Bureau will apply the most current guidance relating to the health and safety of staff and the public. All staff will be supplied with needed personal protective equipment and trained on safety protocols.

In light of the changes to previously established deadlines and procedures, the Census Bureau is monitoring and documenting impacts on the quality of the 2020 Census. For this reason, we decided to form additional data quality teams to bring together skill sets across the agency to think creatively about how best to complete 2020 Census operations and document and implement efforts to improve the quality of the 2020 Census.

### **The 2020 Census Memorandum Series**

The 2020 Census Memorandum Series documents significant decisions, actions, and accomplishments of the 2020 Census Program for the purpose of informing stakeholders, coordinating interdivisional efforts, and documenting important historical changes.

A memorandum generally will be added to this series for any decision or documentation that meets the following criteria:

1. A major program-level decision that will affect the overall design or have significant effect on 2020 Census operations or systems.
2. A major policy decision or change that will affect the overall design or significantly impact 2020 Census operations or systems.
3. A report that documents the research and testing for 2020 Census operations or systems.

Visit [2020 Census on Census.gov](https://www.census.gov) to access the Memorandum Series, the 2020 Census Operational Plan, and other information about preparations for the 2020 Census.