# FY2016 U.S. CENSUS BUREAU APPROPRIATIONS
Why Full Funding Matters

Five years from now, the 2020 Census will be underway. More than 130 million households will receive an advance notice, urging them to respond via the Internet but offering other options to participate, such as through the mail or by telephone. Regional Census Centers and Local Census Offices will be open and staffed. Hundreds of thousands of national, state, and local Census Partners will be launching outreach campaigns to urge participation. Census ads will be running on prime time television, radio, and social media platforms. The 2020 Census website must be ready to handle up to eight million hits a day during peak operations.

The 2020 Census must count roughly 334 million people in homes and group facilities across the country, as of Census Day (April 1st). Escalating costs for the 2010 count led the Census Bureau to explore modern ways of reaching people, collecting and processing data, and managing field operations. Congress has directed the bureau to conduct the 2020 Census for less than the 2010 Census, which cost about $13 billion. New counting methods and operational reforms could **save taxpayers $5 billion** and help produce a cost-efficient, accurate census. **But Congress must invest now in testing new initiatives and developing the infrastructure to execute them with confidence.**

o **Leverage technology to offer multiple response options, including the Internet and smartphones. Cyber-security and volume are key challenges; people responding electronically also must be counted at the correct address.**

o **Automate field data collection using call centers, tablets or smartphones for enumerators, web-based human resource functions, and remote case management, to improve efficiency and lower costs.**

o **Use administrative records (data the government has already collected) to enumerate households that do not self-respond.**

o **Target pre-census address canvassing only to areas experiencing housing changes, while using government and commercial databases to update and verify most of the master address list.**

o **Improve the management of field staff using administrative data to determine the sequence of phone calls, plan travel routes, and prioritize caseloads in real-time.**

These reforms are promising, but enormously complex, and require significant lead-time for research, testing, and development. *Using unproven methods puts a cost-effective and accurate census at high risk. Failure to complete testing and development on time could force the Census Bureau to fall back on older, costly, less efficient methods in 2020.* In FY2016, the Census Bureau must pivot quickly to the systems and operations development phase:
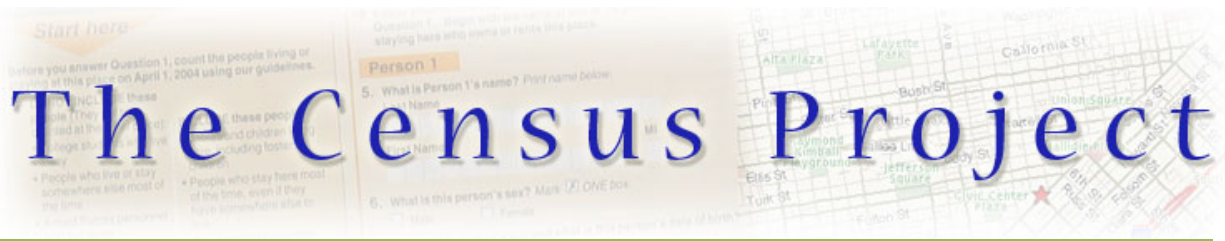
o **Begin three-year operational design and systems development phase, including contracting for over 30 IT systems needed to conduct the census, in preparation for an end-to-end operational readiness test in 2018.**

o **Conduct 2016 Field Operations Test to evaluate new 2020 Census management framework for nonresponse follow-up operations, including workload and case assignments, remote staff supervision, and web-based recruiting, applications, and human resource functions.**

o **Conduct 2016 Early Operations Test of targeted address canvassing methods, including the use of new technology to collect, validate, and process information.**

o **Continue evaluating and testing the use of administrative records — that is, data collected for other government programs, such as IRS, Medicaid, and Postal Service records — to remove vacant and nonexistent addresses from the costly field follow-up universe and to enumerate households that do not self-respond.**

o **Begin preparations for the 2020 Census Communications campaign, Partnership Program, language assistance, and questionnaire assistance efforts, including best methods for answering "help" calls, developing web-chat assistance, and routing calls to local field staff.**

o **Hire hundreds of new employees to manage and implement design and development activities and to conduct field tests; create private sector job opportunities through contracting partnerships.**

Also in FY2016, the Census Bureau will conduct a national content test for the American Community Survey (ACS)—the modern version of the census 'long form' that yields irreplaceable, high-quality annual data on key social and economic characteristics for every community in the U.S. The bureau is taking steps to reduce the survey's response burden, improve the usefulness of data products, and streamline field operations. This review will ensure that the ACS only collects data needed to implement federal programs and policies.

Why Congress Needs an Accurate, Well-Executed Census

An accurate census and robust American Community Survey are the foundation of fair political representation and prudent allocation and stewardship of tax dollars at the federal, state, and local levels. Business and industry also leverage these data to plan and execute investments that promote private sector economic development, job growth, and prosperous communities.

o Fair apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislatures depends on an accurate census. Census data are used to draw congressional and legislative districts and to allocate representation on city councils, school boards, and other municipal bodies, in accordance with the constitutional principle of "one person, one vote."
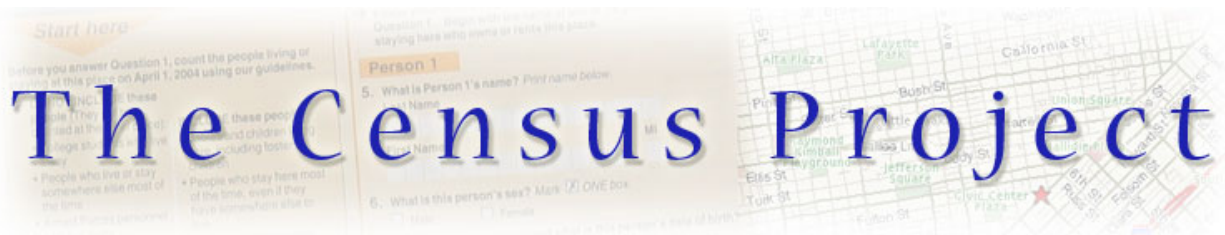
o Decennial census data guide the allocation of nearly a third of all federal assistance to state and local governments ($450 billion annually), accounting for three-quarters of all federal grants. Similarly, ACS data guide the allocation of more than $415 billion annually in federal assistance to state and local governments, also accounting for nearly a third of all such funding and more than two-thirds of all federal grants.[1]

o Congress uses decennial census and ACS data to allocate grants for school districts (e.g. Title I); homeland security; highway planning and construction; Medicaid; substance abuse treatment; community development; rural electrification; public transit; low income housing; special and adult education; home energy assistance; rural business and industry development loans; water and waste disposal systems; mental health services; rural broadband access; crime victim assistance; coastal zone management; outreach to disabled veterans; natural disaster recovery; and dozens of other programs.

o State and local governments use census and ACS data to plan a myriad of services and direct resources to communities with the greatest need.

o Census and ACS data are a primary source of information for state and local emergency planning agencies. These agencies rely on the data to prepare emergency preparation, evacuation and response plans (for example, when hurricanes, tornados, and wildfires strike).

o Census and ACS data are required to implement the Voting Rights Act and to ensure that citizens whose first language is not English can navigate the voting process.

o ***There are no "do-overs" for the census. The Census Bureau must get the count right the first time, counting every person once and in the right place, and Congress must live with the results for ten years!***

For more information on the importance of American Community Survey data, see our new fact sheet, "*Why We Need the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey" at < http://www.thecensusproject.org/factsheets/acs/ACS-WhyWeNeedTheSurvey-FactSheet-March2015.pdf>.*

Questions? *Please contact Census Project Co-Director Terri Ann Lowenthal at <TerriAnn2K@aol.com>.*

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[1] Brookings Institution, "Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Distribution of Federal Funds" <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2010/03/09-census-dollars> (March 2010), and "Surveying for Dollars: The Role of the American Community Survey in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funding" < http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2010/07/26-acs-reamer> (July 2010).