



## THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE AND THE CENSUS

### USPS & Census Bureau are Already Partners The Bureau is a Less Expensive Option for a Decennial Census

On [March 23, 2026](#), the Census Bureau finalized major changes to the 2026 Census Test. The most striking of the changes was the agency's decision to cancel 4 of the 6 original test sites, and within the two remaining sites assess the use of postal carriers as enumerators. Specifically, the test will employ postal workers to collect responses from households that do not self-respond using two different models. In Huntsville, Alabama, postal workers will be hired as Census Bureau employees to collect census responses outside of their work hours, while in Spartanburg, South Carolina postal workers will collect census responses as United States Postal Service (USPS) employees as part of their routine mail delivery route.

The use of postal carriers as enumerators is not an original idea and has been previously considered. Further, there are other ways in which the USPS and Census Bureau can collaborate to achieve savings and enhance operations.

#### Previous Findings

- **Using Postal Workers to Interview Households Will Cost Tens of Millions More**

[In a 2011 report](#), the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that using mail carriers to conduct census field operations at USPS pay rates would not be cost-effective. In 2010, USPS mail carriers cost, on average, about \$41 (city) or \$34 (rural) per hour compared to about \$15 per hour for census part-time enumerators. The GAO concluded it would be more efficient to hire both retired and active postal workers as Census temporary field staff to help with enumeration.

- **Postal Carriers and Census Enumerators Operate Under Different Legal Authorities**

In 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau proposed a pilot program to test whether USPS carriers could serve as census enumerators during the 2020 Census. The test was to have taken place as part of the 2018 End-to-End Test conducted in and around Providence, Rhode Island. Despite significant planning, the pilot was canceled given irreconcilable differences between the legal authorities under which census enumerators (U.S.C.13) operate versus postal workers (U.S.C. 18/39).

- **Postal Addresses Miss Millions of Housing Units**

Ever since 1960 (even before the Mail Out-Mail Back innovation), the Census Bureau has conducted a major operation to hand deliver census forms to housing units called “Update Leave.” It is designed to occur in geographic areas where most housing units either did not have mail delivered to the physical location (Post Office Boxes, etc.), or the mail delivery information for the unit could not be verified. The operation also occurred in areas affected by major natural disasters. In 2020, 19,000 enumerators and 2,800 census field supervisors worked more than 7.5 million addresses that were not in USPS records.

- **Who Will Deliver the Mail If USPS Workers are Conducting Interviews All Spring and Summer?**

The 2020 Census Nonresponse Follow up (NRFU) operation occurred when census enumerators attempted to conduct interviews with as many as one third of the 141 million housing units that did not self-respond by mail or online. The operation began on August 11, 2020, and ended on October 15, 2020. NRFU was originally scheduled to run from May 13 to July 31, 2020. Enumeration of remote Alaska and other rural, remote regions is conducted as early as January and throughout the year. Will USPS workers conduct interviews while delivering mail, lengthening their daily routes by hours, or will temporary USPS staff be hired at rates double or triple what Census paid enumerators?

- **USPS and Census Bureau Already Collaborate on Innovations and Taxpayer Savings**

Since the innovation of the “Mail Out-Mail Back” Census of 1970, the USPS has been a major partner in the design and execution of the national head count. In 1990, the Census Bureau and USPS established the interagency Joint Committee for Census Planning to develop opportunities for cooperation in support of the decennial census. For the 2010 decennial, the GAO found that USPS delivered 417-million census mail pieces, virtually 100 percent of which were delivered on time and generated over \$202 million in revenue for USPS. The partnership provided USPS with an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of their new Intelligent Mail Barcode. The Bureau was the largest ever user of the new Bar Code and, as a result, was able to remove 11 million addresses from the replacement mailing, which led to nearly \$5 million in postage savings.