

U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute Latino Leaders Roundtable: U.S. Census 2020-2030

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

February 18, 2023

Introduction

- Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Robert Santos, director of the U.S. Census Bureau. It's an honor to be here today to tell you about the work that the Census Bureau is doing.

Vision for the Census Bureau

- Let me tell you a little about how I am leading the Census Bureau. First, I think my roots as a statistician, a policy researcher, a fellow stakeholder, and a person of color offer me a unique perspective in leading the Census Bureau.
- I'm a leader who champions diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. I call these principles DEIA. I've lived them over a 40-year career and seen firsthand that innovation and excellence are advanced by embracing DEIA principles.
- An important part of our DEIA effort includes seeking out and listening to diverse voices, voices that represent every aspect of our nation. That certainly includes listening to our partners and stakeholders, which of course includes you.
- Now, I believe that we promote excellence by embracing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, in our policies and practices, as well as in how we engage stakeholders.
- In 2021, President Biden announced a federal agenda to advance equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.
- Because this goal "requires a systemic approach to embedding fairness in decision-making processes," policymakers and the public will need quality data about America's people and economy to advance equity.
- The Census Bureau is the leading provider of quality data about the nation's people and economy. We're committed to producing data that reflects an accurate portrait of America. Census Bureau data are valuable assets that can be used by policymakers and the public to advance equity.
- Our data can assist federal agencies and others in equitably distributing resources and identifying underserved communities.
- We provide a wealth of data by age, disability, race, ethnicity, sex, income, veteran status, and other key demographic variables to help measure equity. These data are often by geography, which provides meaning and context to the statistical data, and can identify rural and underserved communities.

- We also provide economic data that can help businesses in underserved communities identify opportunities for growth. The measures inform policymakers working to advance equity and enable them to propose effective, data-driven solutions.
- We're continually striving for excellence. And that can be challenging in our current environment. But even in the face of challenges, I believe that we can find new ways to collect data that are more accurate, timely, relevant, and most of all have utility, as in fit for use.
- Moreover, I believe that we promote excellence by embracing equity, diversity and inclusion in our workforce, policies, and practices, as well as in how we engage stakeholders and how we gather and incorporate feedback and advice. Let me talk a little more about that:
 - First, we are committed to data equity. We want to ensure our data is available and easily accessible to all, including underserved communities. We created an Equity Data Working Group to assemble various data sets generated by the Census Bureau that can help identify and explore disparities and inequities in our society.
 - Second, we seek to infuse diversity and inclusion in our workplace. Diverse voices and perspectives can be a potent catalyst for increasing data quality, data relevance as well as advancing equity. It promotes innovation, critical thinking, and excellence.
 - Third, we will engage with and actively listen to the full diversity of our stakeholders in the United States, which of course includes you. Stakeholder feedback is critical to understanding the needs of our data users and decision-making. We plan to strengthen existing partnerships and identify new partners. This includes advocacy organizations, folks in philanthropy, state and local jurisdictional officers, community-based organizations, scientific and other professional associations, and so on.
- The idea is to create opportunities for collaboration that build trust to aid in public participation in our research endeavors and apprise communities of the value of Census Bureau data.
- We are working to develop new ways to collect data that are more accurate, timely, relevant, and most of all meet the needs of the public. We continuously engage in improving how we support equity and diversity.
- We are constantly assessing how we can improve our statistical programs to better serve and represent underserved groups. We continuously research strategies for improving respondent understanding of questions we ask and the accuracy of the data we produce.
- And as I mentioned, we are conducting ongoing engagement and discussions about our research and findings with stakeholder groups.
- That is part of the reason I am here today, to continue and indeed strengthen a sustaining, continuous partnership of mutual benefit. We ask for your assistance with these censuses and surveys so that we use your feedback to improve our data products, which in turn can benefit you.
- We are always open to two-way communication to help understand and fulfil your data needs. But the quality of that data is directly related to the quality of response to our censuses and surveys, and encouraging response is an area I hope we can continue to collaborate on.

Economic Census

- For that reason, I encourage you to promote the 2022 Economic Census among your partners and constituents.
- This is the most comprehensive measure of the U.S. economy. Data from the Economic Census serve as the foundation for our nation's GDP and other leading economic indicators.
- It provides information to businesses, trade associations, economic development organizations, and state, local, and tribal governments. They need this information to make informed decisions that affect the health of America's economy.

- As trusted voices in your communities, one of the best things you can do is to spread the word to your communities that the Economic Census is coming soon and let them know that their response is important to the national economy, their local community, and their business. Their participation ensures that your businesses have quality, timely data about this industry.
- The main mailing for the Economic Census began in January 2023, and the deadline to respond is March 15.

DHC A Proof of Concept

- Another area where I want to encourage your input is with our Demographic and Housing Characteristics (DHC) file. It is in production right now, with a planned release in May.
- External engagement was critical in developing a disclosure avoidance system for the DHC; many of our partners helped us during this effort.
- In the end, we believe we found a good balance between disclosure protection and data utility. You—our data users—will be the ultimate judge.
- We've heard requests for more guidance on using our 2020 differentially private data products, and we intend to meet those needs.
- Additionally, the Detailed DHC A, which will include tables on detailed racial and ethnic groups and American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages, is scheduled for release in August.
- A Proof of Concept demonstration product was just released and we seek your feedback. In fact, we held a webinar recently to help data users understand the product.
- My colleague from the Census Bureau, Merarys (Meh-RAH-ree-se) Rios, will discuss the DHC in greater detail in a moment. As stakeholders, I encourage you to weigh in on those products.

2030 Feedback

- Another area where we will be seeking your ideas and input is in what to research and how to conduct the next census. Stated briefly, we want and need your help.
- Right now, we are planning for the 2030 Census. As part of that planning, we will be doing a lot of stakeholder engagement—it is very important to receive public input early in the decade and to hear from as many people and communities as possible. Please stay tuned for ways to get involved.

OMB Revision of Race and Ethnicity Standards

- Lastly, I want to mention something that's of interest to all of us—that is, the federal collection of race and ethnicity data.
- As you know, every federal agency—including the Census Bureau—collects race and ethnicity data following standards set by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.
- Last summer, OMB announced that it was beginning a formal review of its Statistical Policy Directive 15, which lays out standards for maintaining, collecting, and presenting federal data on race and ethnicity.
- This review process has a simple goal: to ensure that the standards better reflect the beautiful diversity of the American people.
- On January 26, the OMB Office of the Chief Statistician released an initial set of recommended revisions to the statistical standards for collecting and reporting race and ethnicity data.
- These proposals were developed by an Interagency Technical Working Group made up of federal government career staff representing more than 20 agencies, including the Census Bureau.
- The proposal covers:
 - Collecting race and ethnicity together using a single question.

- Adding a response category for Middle Eastern and North African, separate and distinct from the “White” category.
- Updating the terminology, definitions, and question wording in the standards (SPD 15).
- These recommendations are preliminary, and they don’t represent the positions of OMB or the agencies participating on the Working Group.
- There’s still much work to be done. But like the Census Bureau, they cannot do this alone. They need your input.
- The Working Group wants to hear directly from the American people and stakeholders like you. I encourage you to review these proposals. Comments can be submitted through April 12, 2023.
- Please visit the Working Group’s new website at spd15revision.gov.
- The Working Group is committed to a full, transparent revision process and remains on track to reach the goal of completing these important revisions by the Summer 2024.
- The Census Bureau will continue to support OMB throughout this critical endeavor by co-chairing the Working Group and providing extensive subject matter expertise.

Conclusion

- Thank you again for having me, and for helping to get information on the 2022 Economic Census and the 2030 out to your constituents. Your participation and cooperation are really important in helping us to maintain the excellent data quality that we provide. We at the Census Bureau stand ready to help you access our wealth of data in any way we can.
- Now, I want to introduce my colleague, Merarys (Meh-RAH-reese) Rios.