

# Census Scientific Advisory Committee Spring Meeting

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

March 9, 2023

- Good morning, and thank you for joining us for this meeting of the Census Scientific Advisory Committee. The work that the CSAC conducts is so important. I thank you for sharing your time and expertise with us today.
- I'm excited to give you some updates on some key programs here at the Census Bureau.

## 2030 Federal Register Notice

- As you know, last fall, we announced that the Census Bureau was seeking the public's ideas for a better 2030 Census through a Federal Register notice. This outreach represented an important part of our overall commitment to engaging with stakeholders, tribes, partners, and communities.
- I am pleased to report that we received a tremendous response! Over 8,000 comments were registered from people across the country.
- The comments focused on advancing our upcoming 2030 Census operational plan, overall. There was also special attention to the enumeration of historically undercounted populations.
- Jordan Misra will cover those comments and our next steps in greater detail later in this meeting. And the comments will be released publicly tomorrow, and you'll be able to see them for yourself, firsthand.
- But I want to thank CSAC for helping us prioritize the suggestions we received. It's a big task, but your assistance is critical in allowing us to better integrate those suggestions into our 2030 Census research agenda and operational plan.

## Population Estimates

- We're also very excited about the efforts to improve our population estimates.
- As you know, due to the delay in 2020 Census input, our April 1, 2021, population estimates used a new "blended base" that integrates several sources of data: the 2020 Census data available at the time, 2020 Demographic Analysis estimates, and the Vintage 2020 estimates.
- And in adopting this approach, we saw a mitigating effect on the estimated undercount for some historically undercounted populations: specifically, young children.
- Now, this blended base opened our eyes—and the door—to exploring what else may be possible to improve the base estimates.
- For instance, can we incorporate other sources of data, such as administrative records, into the estimates base? Can we use coverage measures to design and apply adjustments to the base population? That could potentially mitigate coverage issues for other populations.
- Many avenues of research are now being considered by our Base Evaluation and Research Team (BERT), which includes experts in areas including population estimates, age and sex statistics, coverage measurement, race and ethnicity, demography, and disclosure avoidance.

- The BERT team’s research has thus far focused on analyzing the 2020 Census data and coverage estimates. These analyses involve comparisons to benchmarks data (such as population estimates and American Community Survey data), evaluations of change since the 2010 Census, consideration of whether operational or quality metrics correspond with observed changes, and assessments regarding whether 2020 results meet expectations, based on demographic expertise.
- Contingent on the research findings, the soonest potential adjustments could be implemented into the estimates base would be for the Vintage 2023 estimates series, which is scheduled to be released on a rolling basis from December 2023 through June 2024. BERT hopes to have initial findings to share with the public this summer.
- The expansion and support of our Population Estimates Program is a priority. The impact of their work is far-reaching and can be used to facilitate community planning, among many other important uses.

## 2020 Data Products

- Later this year, our final 2020 Census data products—the most detailed to date—will be released.
- The Demographic and Housing Characteristics (DHC) file 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 you helped us during this effort, and we want to acknowledge that and thank you.
- In the end, we believe we found the proper balance between disclosure protection and data utility. We’ve heard requests for more guidance on using our 2020 differentially private data products, and we will respond to these requests for guidance.
- 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 will be seeking your feedback on the usefulness of that product.
- We’re also reaching out to other stakeholders for their feedback. We held a webinar recently to help data users understand the product, and we’ve also been holding tribal listening sessions and consultations on the Proof of Concept.

## American Community Survey Updates

- Lastly, I want to give you some updates on the American Community Survey.
- While survey data collection is becoming increasingly difficult in these times where unit nonresponse has increased, we are committed to finding ways to maintain or improve the data quality of the ACS.
- This includes the use of administrative records to inform our data collection in our personal visit mode by better allocating resources to better capture a representative sample including those who have been historically underrepresented.
- In this way, even if our response rates decline from the high levels that we observed in the 2000s, we can ensure that the data is still representative of the full population.
- We are also exploring how administrative records can be used to fill in missing information for situations where we receive less than a complete interview. This is particularly important for those characteristics where the respondent may fill out the ACS, but is uncomfortable or unwilling to share information on specific topics.
- In addition to the data collection efforts, we are also researching how to improve the post-data collection estimation methods so that we can more robustly correct for non-response.

- That research involves leveraging administrative records so that the weighting process can take more information about the non-respondents into account when performing our nonresponse adjustments.
- This effort would greatly expand the current methodology, helping to make our weighting adjustments to be more robust than what we had in place in 2020, when the nonresponse bias ultimately led to the decision to not release the standard ACS 1-year estimates.
- Through this multitiered effort, we hope to make several adjustments in both the near and long term to combat the potential negative impact that nonresponse can have on the ACS estimates.
- I also want to give you an update on our plans to strengthen confidentiality safeguards for our data products, including the ACS.
- Our current assessment is that the science does not yet exist to comprehensively implement a formally private solution for the ACS.
- Strengthening confidentiality protections for the ACS is a continuous process, and we are taking the time to carefully research options. We expect a multiyear development period, that will extend beyond 2025.
- In the meantime, we will continue to strengthen the disclosure avoidance methods used for each ACS data product that we release.
- This may involve using solutions that are not formally private, but that offer enhanced protection, such as expanding reliance on synthetic data for the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) product.
- To address some of the known vulnerabilities in the ACS PUMS data product, we're researching the feasibility of creating a high-quality, fully synthetic public-use microdata file and accompanying validation service. This would allow users to verify the validity of analyses run on the microdata file while meeting ACS data users' needs.
- These products have several potential benefits to data users, such as including finer geographic detail for both the synthetic data and the validations and allowing users to account for privacy protection in their measures of uncertainty.
- Once developed, and after user review and feedback, these data products would provide a new tier of ACS data access between the current PUMS and access through the Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDCs).
- For the time being, the ACS PUMS data product will still be protected using traditional disclosure avoidance methods, such as swapping, synthetic data, perturbation, subsampling, top/bottom coding, and coarsening. Those methods are reviewed and strengthened every year and meet the high standards of the Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board.
- Ultimately, we will develop a comprehensive disclosure avoidance solution that can assess and mitigate the cumulative disclosure risk posed by the separate ACS data products.
- The Census Bureau takes its data stewardship responsibilities very seriously.
- We also recognize the importance of keeping our data users informed and engaged as we make data stewardship decisions that could impact how our data are used, both internally and externally.
- We will make these decisions based on the best science available. And we will continue to engage with CSAC and the rest of our stakeholder community while we research and test the ACS synthetic PUMS file and formal privacy.

## Conclusion

- We have a full day today, so I'll wrap up my remarks. On behalf of everyone at the Census Bureau, thank you for your active participation on the Census Scientific Advisory Committee. I welcome the recommendations that the committee will make for us to help us enhance our operations.
- I look forward to an engaging discussion with you, and again, thank you for joining us for the spring CSAC meeting.
- We look forward to a continued partnership with you and our tribal partners. Thank you for joining us.