

Annette Strauss Institute of Civic Life Community Conversation

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

May 22, 2023

- Good afternoon, everyone. It's an honor to be here in my role as your director of the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Yes, I did say your director. This position serves the public . . . it serves our nation. And that's how I'm approaching my role as a public servant who happens to be in a leadership position.
- But first let me return to my original statement, that it's an honor to be here with you today.
- As we all know, the pandemic shut down the nation just before Census Day in 2020.
- The Census Bureau nimbly adapted our massive decennial census operation.
- And when its grip on society was strongest, we deployed a sizeable field force to knock on doors across our nation.
- We had a constitutional mandate to fulfill.
- All the while, new challenges unfolded, such as natural disasters like wildfires and hurricanes.
- Yet, despite unprecedented challenges, our career staff came together and completed the job we set out to do—that of counting the resident population of the United States.
- I'm incredibly proud of their accomplishments.
- But we recognize something important.
- We didn't complete this job alone.
- We needed the public's help, the help of our complete count committees, the help of state and local governments, and the help of national and local partners and stakeholders.
- Not to mention cooperation from the public.
- Without your support, we could not have achieved the measure of success we did attain.
- We recognize and deeply appreciate that.
- I'll return to this point a little later.
- But first, let me tell you a little more about our vision of the Census Bureau.
- It's important because it includes you.
- Now, the ability of the Census Bureau to adapt nimbly during the pandemic really opened our eyes.
- It showed us something we thought was impossible: that of adapting to and overcoming threats and doing so quickly.
- That experience motivated the development of a robust transformation and modernization initiative to recreate how we do our work at the Census Bureau.
- We are undertaking a paradigm shift in how the Census Bureau collects, processes, and disseminates our statistical data products.
- It involves the development of new systems to bring together data from all sources—both administrative data and data from surveys and censused.

- We will use new systems to create more efficient and effective data products that better meet the needs of data users.
- I won't go into the technical details, but I spotted an area where I thought I could help.
- I knew that such a transformation requires broad level of buy-in from our staff.
- I saw the opportunity to bolster that transformation with an accompanying culture change.
- But a specific type of change . . . on that inspires staff to innovate by realizing the value of diverse perspectives.
- Actively seeking and valuing different views from different players in the enterprise leads to better insights, creative solutions, and better methods and products.
- This is consistent with the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but you really don't need those terms to understand the value that flows from different ideas and perspectives on a problem.
- But if you take this cultural change to its natural conclusion, then we must also actively seek and value diverse perspectives of our external stakeholders, partners, data users, and the public.
- And that includes folks like everyone here today.
- So, I've spent this last year laying the groundwork to create continuous, ongoing community engagement in its broadest sense.
- I and Census Bureau staff met with numerous scientific and government associations.
- We've conducted listening sessions with stakeholders representing both communities and data users.
- I spoke at conferences.
- Internally, I've met with career staff at all levels and in offices around the country.
- I went out on multiple field observations for a housing survey and the American Community Survey.
- I've conducted numerous media interviews and used blogs, videos and other communications to reach out to stakeholders and the public.
- I met with tribal leaders from around the country.
- Throughout these engagements, we listened carefully, we strengthened existing ties, and we established new relationships.
- I must say: the experience was profound.
- I engaged with rural America and witnessed the struggles and joys of the lives of farmers and smalltown businesses.
- I visited inner-city neighborhoods; I spoke to local community leaders and pastors who recognized the value of local statistical data and expressed concern about data quality.
- I witnessed the dignity of America's indigenous people and their honorable, indeed sacred way of life through living with nature.
- And I met with scholars and researchers from across the nation to understand their concerns.
- After all these amazing experiences, here's my bottom line:
 - I learned that it takes a community-of-the-whole to maintain a fully functioning and successful federal statistical agency.
 - We need to seek and act on feedback from stakeholders, partners and the public.
 - We should be continuously communicating a value proposition that highlights the utility of our statistical data products for your communities.
 - We need to expand and nurture a trusted-messenger ecosystem of partners and stakeholders that operates continuously, not just near the time of decennial census.

- Such an ecosystem is a key for us to collect data from historically recalcitrant segments of our wonderfully diverse population.
- And that's why we wanted to meet with you today.
- We want to help you to serve your constituencies better by helping you to leverage the value of our data.
- The Census Bureau has Data Dissemination Specialists located around the country to help organizations like yours and to help communities understand the data that are available.
- Here are a couple of examples to illustrate what I am talking about.
 - First, we have tools like the *Opportunity Atlas*.
It's a Census tract-level dataset of children's outcomes in adulthood, such as earnings distributions and incarceration rates by parental income, race, and gender. You can trace the roots of poverty and incarceration to the neighborhoods where children grew up.
 - Then, there's the *My Community Explorer dashboard*.
It provides demographic, business, and resilience information for states, counties, and communities.
This visualization offers one-stop shopping in a interactive tool combining data from the several economic and demographic data sources.
 - And then there's the *Census Business Builder*.
It's a suite of services that combine demographic and economic data that helps give you information to develop a business plan to create a business or expand an existing establishment.
- We also have some 2020 Census data products being released.
- We're releasing the Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (DHC) and the Demographic Profile in a few days.
- These 2020 Census data products provide demographic and housing characteristics of local communities.
- And in September, we'll release the Detailed DHC-A.
- This product will provide the population counts and sex and age statistics for 370 detailed racial and ethnic groups and 1,200 American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
- I just want you to know that the data I've described is just the tip of the iceberg.
- We can arrange for Census Bureau staff to brief you on the various products that can meet your needs.
- There are also videos that help demonstrate some of these products.
- The point is that we have much to offer just about any data user.
- But we know that there are needs that still go unmet, so we want to learn about them through our continuous partnerships.
- One final thing I'd like to mention is the ongoing Economic Census.
- Conducted every five years, the Economic Census is key for developing a number of economic indicators like the Gross Domestic Product that our nation and states depend on.
- So, please help us promote the 2022 Economic Census among your local businesses and chambers of commerce.
- The main mailing for the Economic Census began in January 2023. We are still collecting data from businesses who received a questionnaire.
- Roughly 30,000 business locations in the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown Metro Statistical Area were invited to respond, but response for businesses in the region is currently below what we expected.

- As trusted voices in your communities, one of the best things you can do is to spread the word to business owners that the Economic Census is here.
- Please let them know that their response is important to understanding our nation's economy as well as their local community, and their business and industry.
- Ok, that's enough of me talking for now.
- Thank you again for your engagement, and invaluable help getting information on the 2020 Census and 2022 Economic Census in your community.
- We at the Census Bureau stand ready to help you access our wealth of data in any way we can.