**Tribes and the 2020 Census**

**2017 Census Tests on Two Reservations Cancelled**

The Census Bureau announced today that the Census tests scheduled for 2017 on two Indian reservations have been cancelled. The tests were to help prepare for the 2020 decennial census in Indian Country. Announced some time ago and scheduled to take place next April, work on the tests had just begun on the Standing Rock Reservation in North and South Dakota and the Colville Reservation in Washington State.

The main purpose of the reservation tests was to try out revised methods to conduct "Update Enumerate" Census operations. This is the procedure used in some rural areas where Census takers go to the door of each household, make note of the address (the "Update" part of the process) and collect the answers to the Census questionnaire on the spot (the "Enumerate" part).

In making the announcement of the cancellation, the Bureau said that a mail questionnaire would still be sent out next April to a sample of households nationwide. This is the "self-response" part of the 2017 test.

The Census Bureau blamed the cancellation of the reservation tests on the likelihood of severe cuts in the agency's budget request for Fiscal Year 2017. Congress has yet to pass the appropriations bills for the full Fiscal Year that started over three weeks ago. The funding for the portion of the Bureau's budget that includes the 2020 Census was recommended for a nearly $150 million cut below the Administration's request by the Senate appropriators and a $100 million cut by the Appropriations Committee in the House of Representatives.

Census Bureau Director John Thompson put the matter this way:

"We did not make this decision lightly; we're less than one year from beginning field work on the 2018 End-to-End Census Test -- the final, major test for the 2020 Census. But as we enter 2017, we don't have clarity about our funding for the year. Based on what we know now, the proposed funding levels require us to prioritize other activities in 2017 rather than expend the resources necessary to conduct the two field tests we had planned for 2017."

In addition to cancelling the two reservation tests, the Bureau also dropped a major test in Puerto Rico.
The announcement promised that the reservation and Puerto Rico tests would be considered for inclusion in the 2018 "End-to-End" test -- a full scale "dry run" for the 2020 headcount.

**Tribal Enrollment Question Still Being Tested**

The reservation tests were also to have tried out a version of the proposed question on tribal enrollment. The question would ask each person whether she or he is enrolled in a tribe, and, if so, which one. Such an enrollment question would be in addition to the question that asks about a person's race, and if the person identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native, asks for the name of the person's "enrolled or principal tribe."

Cancelling the reservation tests does not mean that the Bureau is dropping the idea of adding the enrollment question to the Census questionnaire for 2020. In fact the questionnaire for the self-response mail exercise in 2017 will include one or more versions of the proposed tribal enrollment question.

Many tribes have opposed the use of any enrollment question, arguing that, as a matter of tribal sovereignty, only tribes have the right to maintain enrollment information. The Mid-Year Conference of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) unanimously passed a resolution opposing the question, citing a long list of reasons why. The Tribal Council at Standing Rock refused a Bureau request to turn over its enrollment records.

Other crucial issues involving the 2020 Census are also due to be decided in the near future. Among them is the likely addition of Hispanic origin as a category in the race question. Hispanic origin has been a completely separate question from the one asking about a person's race all the way back to the 1980 Census when it was asked for the first time.

The addition of Hispanic to the list of racial categories has the potential to significantly reduce the count of persons who identify only as American Indian in the next Census. Dropping those who identify as both Indian only and Hispanic from the Indian only count would drop the total Indian only numbers and shift the Indian only and Hispanic count to the Indian multi-racial totals. Most of the published data on the American Indian/Alaska Native population includes just the AI/AN only population (AI/AN "alone" in Census terms).

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