

# International Regional Director's Conference

## Director's Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

September 14, 2022

- Good morning. I give you a warm welcome to all attendees of the International Regional Directors' Conference.
- I'm so glad you could join us here in Washington, DC.
- We're delighted to host this conference for the first time since 2017.
- And it's an honor to be here with my counterparts from Mexico and Canada, Dr. Graciela Marquez and *Un-nil* Arora.
- So let me start by saying "Oh my, what an eventful few years we've had since the last conference!"
- We all conducted national censuses. And all were affected by the pandemic.
- And all of us—and our field directors and staff in particular—had our plans summarily upended in devastating fashion.
- Yet, despite these unprecedented challenges, our Census Bureau staff came together, were tenacious, and committed to mission.
- And with the help of our partners, we completed the job we set out to do... we enumerated the resident population of the United States.
- And we learned a lot about ourselves and our processes. We'll share our lessons learned at this conference.
- Now, as a policy researcher I witnessed this from the sidelines in 2020.
- But upon my appointment I quickly came to understand the magnitude of the accomplishment that had transpired.
- I can tell you now that I'm incredibly proud of the census career staff, the partners, and all who helped.
- The pandemic and all the other operational challenges that unfolded over the course of our decennial census year proved to be a catalyst for nimble adaptation.
- The taste of that nimbleness and the accompanying accomplishment created an appetite for change, for transformation.
- The Census Bureau is now a couple of years into a Transformation and Modernization initiative.
- Through that effort, we're focusing on new ways to find and collect data, and envisioning a Census Bureau using a data-centric lens.
- We've historically been an organization that solicits data from siloed directorates to create siloed products that don't often connect with each other.
- A data-centric Census Bureau flips this framework on its head by focusing on pooling and linking data from all sources to help address important policy questions.
- Besides our conventional censuses and surveys, we're expanding administrative data from government sources as well as from the commercial sector.

- We're evaluating and improving current processes, infrastructures, and especially our internal work culture.
- Our new system will use common platforms for ingesting data, be they censuses and surveys, or administrative data sources.
- We've already begun the process of combining and linking some of our largest administrative databases.
- A principal objective is to ensure equitable collection, analysis, and dissemination of data that reflects the changing nature of our nation's population and economy.
- So let me tell you a little about that.
- Now, for context, I believe we all share a commitment to excellence in the work we do in our respective nations.
- The Census Bureau mission is to be the nation's leading provider of quality data on our people and economy.
- So we're continually striving for excellence, and that can be challenging in our current environment.
- Despite any challenge we face, the pandemic taught us that we can find ways to collect data that are more accurate, timely, relevant, and most of all have utility.
- And I believe we promote excellence by embracing the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in our workforce, policies, and practices.
- Specifically, there are three things we are doing:
  - **First, we're committing to data equity.** We created an Equity Data Working Group to assemble various datasets generated by the Census Bureau that can help identify and explore disparities and inequities in our society.
  - **Second, we're infusing diversity and inclusion in our workplace and daily activities.** Diverse voices and perspectives can serve as potent catalysts to increase data quality, data relevance, and progress in equity.  
They promote innovation, critical thinking and excellence.  
  
I've spoken and written about this in my Director's Blog as well as during my presidency of the American Statistical Association.
  - **Third, we engage with and actively listen to a full diversity of stakeholders.** Stakeholder feedback is absolutely critical to understanding the needs of our data users.
- We are strengthening existing partnerships and securing new partners including advocacy organizations, folks in philanthropy, state and local jurisdictional officers, community-based organizations, scientific and other professional associations, and so on.
- We seek a continuous partnership to bolster trust, which in turn promotes public participation in our research endeavors and helps partners leverage the value of Census Bureau data.
- A key aspect of data equity is ensuring that our data are an accurate reflection of our nation.
- 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.
- On top of this, we also embrace the values of transparency and scientific integrity.
- In fact, the Census Bureau has released a number of quality assessments of the 2020 Census. So far, we've:
  - Released several reports and assessments on operational quality metrics
  - Commissioned three separate assessments by independent experts.

- Conducted and released findings from a Demographic Analysis.
- And, completed a suite of findings from our Post-Enumeration Survey.
- And there is much more to come.
- Now, these assessments provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of our census operations and data products.
- And just to be clear: knowing the strengths and limitations of any statistical data actually increases the value of the data.
- We'll continue to be transparent about the quality and reliability of the statistics we publish and the data we release.
- Our quality assessments have given us important insights for improving future data collections, including our planning for the 2030 Census.
- In that vein, we've begun research in five major areas that affect the quality and cost of the census.
- These are: data collection, data processing, counting people in group quarters, infrastructure for operations, and continuous assessment of coverage and quality.
- And last month—for the first time—we formally invited public input into the planning and design stage of a census.
- We're hoping to harvest the 2020 Census lessons learned from local communities and states.
- We are particularly interested in suggestions to help us to reach historically undercounted people and to reimagine what a 2030 Census can be.
- Lastly, I want to touch on differential privacy and data protection. The Census Bureau, like each of our official statistical agencies, has strong protections around privacy and confidentiality.
- It's our responsibility as ethical stewards of public data to ensure that privacy is not violated.
- As you know, statistical agencies are facing disclosure threats that over time can only grow in sophistication.
- Our obligation to protect our data means we need to get ahead of these threats—not just for today but for the coming years.
- And, strong privacy protections are critical to ensure strong response rates.
- The most common feedback we receive from respondents is that they fear how their data will be used or shared.
- As you're aware, we're using a new disclosure avoidance methodology involving differential privacy.
- This approach addresses our 21st century confidentiality threats, which over time will only grow in sophistication.
- And because of our obligation to protect census data, we believe this approach gets ahead of these threats—not just for today but for the coming years.
- It's a methodology that most would agree is much more advanced than the data-swapping methods used in the last decennial.
- And I think we all agree that differential privacy is far more protective against disclosure than previous methods.
- We believe that differential privacy, in combination with the other tools, can meet the dual objectives of disclosure avoidance and data granularity and accuracy to meet most data user needs.
- With that, I'll end my remarks.
- Thank you again for having me, and I look forward to hearing and learning from you today.