State Data Centers, Census Information Centers, and Data Dissemination Training Branch Annual Conference

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

July 16, 2024

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Good morning, everyone. It's great to see many of you again! It's an honor to be here with you for another annual conference.

- The state data centers (SDC) and census information centers (CIC) are such important partners in our work. You've been providing feedback to the U.S. Census Bureau for many decades. We are so appreciative of those ongoing relationships and the insights you have given us over the years.

- I want to thank both the SDC and CIC steering committees for your leadership in keeping these programs vibrant. And I'm grateful to be at this conference, which is one of the ways that we are working to keep those lines of communication open.

- Now, each year the steering committees present a member of their respective networks with an award honoring their outstanding service and contribution, and I want to acknowledge them today.

- This year, the CIC Steering Committee has posthumously presented the Falcón-Wade Award to Dr. John Flateau, former director of the CIC at Medgar Evers College. This award recognizes his leadership and dedication to the CIC program and the advancement of underserved communities through the power of data.

- I was honored to meet Dr. Flateau last year, and I can't imagine a more deserving recipient. His knowledge of census data and passion for improving his community of Bedford-Stuyvesant and New York as a whole, will be greatly missed.

- Additionally, the SDC Steering Committee presented this year's Gustafson Award to Jennifer Shultz of Penn State. This is in recognition of her leadership, innovation, and dedication to the SDC program and the data community. Her knowledge and use of data has had great positive impacts on the state of Pennsylvania. Congratulations, Jennifer.

- And of course, I can't let our wonderful Data Dissemination and Training Branch go unnoticed. I can't say enough about how important you are. Your firsthand experience with the public and our data is so important, and you have so many valuable insights into how we can better serve our nation.

- Did you know that so far this fiscal year, the Data Dissemination Specialists (DDS) team has conducted over 660 data trainings and presentations; over 100 webinars, including a series on "Exploring the Diversity of Census Bureau Data;" six data gems; and three courses? Wow!

- As director, I have been traveling across the country to get the message out about Census Bureau data and hosting listening sessions so I can better understand the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

- In every state I visit, I look to see if there is an SDC or CIC located close by. So, I have had the pleasure of meeting several of you during these visits and learning more about your SDCs and CICs and the amazing work you do to support the census. Frequently, I've also been able to have a DDS join me on the trips as well!
- I've visited Vanderbilt University, Medgar Evers College, Spelman College, and the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley; and the SDCs in Georgia, Indiana, Texas, Tennessee, and Idaho to name a few.
- And I want to thank you for your help in getting the word out and helping the communities in which you serve understand and use the data.

TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNIZATION

- This is a time of great change for the federal statistical system. The Census Bureau—and all of our fellow statistical agencies—is facing new and complex challenges.
- As we advance into the 21st century, we are faced with a new statistical universe that comes with new and complex data user needs, data collection challenges, the demand for doing more with less, the need for improved collaboration with stakeholders and partners, stronger computing power, the proliferation of alternative unofficial data products, and new technologies.
- The Census Bureau has a long proud history of innovation, which helps us deliver on our mission to serve as the nation's leading provider of quality data about our nation's people, places, and economy.
- Our mission exists to answer simple and complex questions, which we have historically done by conducting censuses and surveys.
- But censuses and surveys alone, while still critical, can no longer answer the questions completely or quickly enough to satisfy the modern need for data. We need a better approach that combines new and traditional data sources and aligns our talent and resources to meet these challenges.
- To adapt in this changing environment, we understand the need for new innovations and approaches to help us transform and modernize how we do our work.
- And threats aside, modernization introduces new opportunities to increase the timeliness, relevance, and value of official statistics. Many facets of our data production, even ordinary processes, stand to benefit from modernization.
- But the modernization of official statistics requires more than the latest technology or the latest statistical methods. It requires a transformation in our thinking—how we think about data, their relevance in a rapidly evolving society, and how the needs of the public can be met.
- That's why the Census Bureau is engaged in an enterprise-level transformation and modernization initiative.
- This is a multiyear, enterprise-wide effort to evaluate and improve current processes, infrastructures, and mindsets to ensure that we equitably collect, analyze, and disseminate valuable information that reflects the changing nature of our nation's population and economy.
- While this effort doesn't focus on any single initiative or program, it seeks to assess and improve the universe of current and future Census Bureau activities.
- The Census Bureau is the largest federal statistical agency, and as I mentioned, we conduct many censuses and surveys. As such, the path to modernization is necessarily multipronged and complex.
- It involves an enterprise-wide, community of the whole approach—one that combines both an internal common strategy of modernization, with continuous external outreach to stakeholders and partners. This outreach is meant to share and reinforce the value of the data we produce and to grow trust within hard-to-count and historically undercounted populations.

- So, as we go about our work, it's critical that I—and more importantly, we, at the Census Bureau—connect with our partners, stakeholders, data users, policymakers, and the public. We need to understand their needs, concerns, and more generally, their perspectives on matters related to statistical data products.

- That is why a principal priority of mine as the director is to seek out, listen to, and converse with the multitude of diverse voices across our nation. We are actively engaging the public.

- We recognize the value and importance of different perspectives. They help us to be innovative and creative, and ultimately produce accurate, relevant, and useful data on our nation's people, places, and economy.

- Toward that end, I continue to make a concerted effort to engage stakeholders, partners, and local communities across the nation—which of course includes you.

- I have met with hundreds of users of Census Bureau data across America. This includes our partners, state, local and tribal government officials, community groups, and businesses.

- In all this, our goal is to strategically organize and engage a widening diversity of talent and stakeholders to achieve our transformation and modernization goals. By leveraging our core values of scientific integrity, objectivity, transparency, and independence, we can strengthen our data portfolio.

- The key is to combine technological advances and rigorous research with innovation and creativity through promoting diverse perspectives and engaging communities.

2030 CENSUS

- Now, as you know, the last remaining data products from 2020 are scheduled to be released later this year.
  - First, in August, we'll release the last products from the 2020 Census—first is the Detailed Demographics and Housing Characteristics File-B, which includes household type and tenure data for approximately 1,500 detailed racial and ethnic groups and American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
  - And second, in September we'll release the Supplemental Demographic and Housing Characteristics File, which reflects especially complex relationships between the characteristics about households and the people living in them.

- As our 2020 Census activities draw to a close, we're focusing more and more on our preparations for 2030. We're doing a lot of exciting work and research ahead of the next census.

- In January, we announced that our initial operational plan for the 2030 Census will be released in 2025, and we'll hold a major field test in 2026.

- In March, we announced the 23 members of our new 2030 Census Advisory Committee, which will hold its first meeting later this month.

- We shared the scope of the 2026 Census Test in a webinar on April 30, and we'll be announcing the test sites in an upcoming webinar.

- Also in April, we released the 2030 Census strategy documents outlining how we're approaching fundamental aspects of our census preparations, including stakeholder engagement.

- I want to point out our redesigned website at <www.census.gov/2030census>. The content there will give you a better idea of all the work that we're doing, and many of the resources I've mentioned—such as the strategy documents—are posted there.

- And as part of our commitment to open and transparent communication, we will be continuing our series of webinars to share information about our preparations for the 2030 Census. I hope that you will follow along on those webinars.

- Our main goal for the 2030 Census—and for every decennial census—is a complete and accurate count of the nation's population. To accomplish that, it's so important that we engage with diverse voices and perspectives.

- After 2020, stakeholders asked us to do more to engage with them earlier in the decade—and we listened and are acting on that.

- We learned a lot from the uniqueness of the 2020 Census, but hearing from our partners, like you, early in the planning will help us shape the 2030 Census and beyond.

- Your knowledge of your communities is one reason why we're so keen to hear your ideas about what to research and how to conduct the 2030 Census.

- We know that the census is a job that we don't complete alone. Without your support, we could not have achieved the measure of success we did attain in 2020. We recognize and deeply appreciate that.

- We needed the help of the people in this room, 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.

- We need to hear from people across our nation about how to reach hard-to-count and historically undercounted populations, how to leverage technology, how to collect information in an easy and efficient manner.

- And we need to work with stakeholders like you to identify hard-to-find populations and tailor our strategies to reach them. I hope you will provide your valuable input and feedback.

CONCLUSION

- I can't thank you enough for your work in bringing Census Bureau data to people across the country. I appreciate your support and enthusiasm and look forward to receiving your ideas.

- Thank you again for having me. Thank you again for your engagement and invaluable help getting information on the 2020 Census.

- And I am so excited to be part of the decade-long journey working toward the 2030 Census with you—and, for the next hour, to have the opportunity to hear from you as we continue to discuss closing out the 2020 Census and the path to 2030.

Possible Topics During Q&A

- Impact of revised SPD 15 on communities of color and data quality.

- 2030 Census preparations (timeline, plans, etc.).

- Effect of administration change: mitigation strategies, citizenship question, etc.

- Role of AI in Census Bureau products, tools, and services.