

2020 Census Needs Investment in Enabling Technology and Infrastructure Requirements

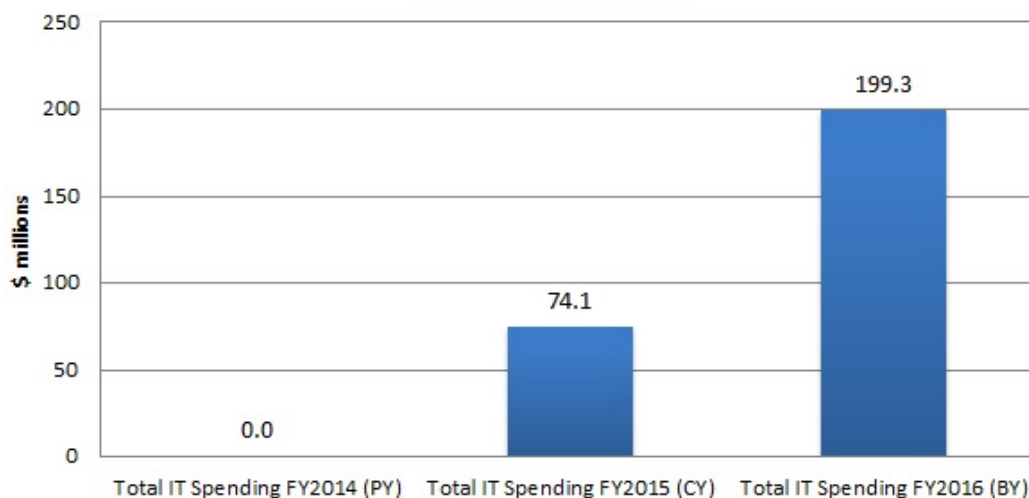
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Preparations for the 2020 Decennial Census are a key factor shaping the Census Bureau's budget. Plans for the 2020 Census aim to drive cost efficiencies by leveraging lessons learned and improving census procedures. FY2015 marked the launch of the second phase of R&D for the effort, which aims to overhaul the census process and achieve dramatic cost savings through technology implementation and process updates. A recent review of the Census Bureau's plans highlights technology hurdles that may provide business opportunities for contractors.

The Census Bureau approach to the 2020 Census intends to complete the survey for the same or less cost than 2010. **So far, the efforts have encountered a number of planning hurdles**, in particular challenges producing reliable schedules and cost inaccuracies. Insufficiently resolved issues underlying these problems will continue to be plague progress as work moves along with the second phase of research, testing, and operational development. The bureau's FY 2016 discretionary budget request included \$1.5 billion to support research, development, and implementation of the 2020 Census. The bureau's information technology budget has \$199 million slated for undertakings at this phase, an increase of 169% over FY 2015 enacted levels. Further, all of the FY 2016 funds are expected to support development, modification, and enhancement activities. All in all, just over 91% of the FY 2016 investment is potentially contractor addressable (based on the portion of resources that provides associated government personnel).

2020 Census Research and Testing, Operational Development, and Systems Testing, FY 2015 to FY 2018



Source: OMB FY 2016 IT Portfolio

Among other activities, these funds are intended to help roll out an internet response option for collecting enumeration data. In order to provide an option for collecting self-responses from households via the internet, the Census Bureau needs to make a number of investments. These enabling capabilities include designing and developing an application for internet response, developing and acquiring IT infrastructure to support the large volume of data processing and storage, and planning communication and outreach strategies to facilitate households' submission of responses via the internet. Preliminary cost estimates for the internet response were calculated at \$73 million, but **these figures were deemed unreliable for not conforming to best practices**. Issues included not updating the estimates to reflect changes related to the option that occurred since 2011. Another snag is the lack of time frames for decisions around implementation of cloud computing solutions. As a result of these problems, additional concerns are being raised about the estimated cost savings that is expected to result from these efforts. With field tests for various components anticipated during the fall of 2015, addressing these underlying complications will be necessary in order for the program to continue on schedule.

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