

Data collection in the United States during the onset of the pandemic

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As of September 30, the United States will have completed data collection operations for the 2020 Census of Population and Housing. We conducted all data collection in the midst of a global pandemic, with our self-response operations (internet response, telephone, and paper forms) beginning on March 12. We began our 'Update Leave' field operation, during which census staff hand deliver mail packages to addresses while we update our frame, on March 15. Just a few days later, March 18, we had to make decisions and assess the operational impacts of a temporary stoppage of 2020 Census field data collection and other associated activities. An initial two-week work stoppage was implemented in March followed by a second two-week work stoppage in April.

We had to develop a plan that would:

- Protect the health and safety of the American public and Census Bureau employees
- Implement guidance from federal, state, and local authorities regarding the virus
- Ensure a complete and accurate count of all communities.

We made plans in preparation for the resumption of field operations as quickly as possible, targeting June 1, and operational schedules were revised. However, as the Census Bureau monitored the changing conditions at the subnational level, a phased re-start of data collection was implemented. A re-start of select operations in select states was implemented as conditions allowed beginning in May.

The situation presented challenges beyond anything we imagined. We faced the challenges, re-planning self-response and field data collection activities, adjusting our communications campaign, developing new operational features, and implementing creative solutions - multiple times. We delayed operations, implemented phased start dates for operations and added in new components of our mail strategy. Amidst the challenges we had many successes. We would like to share the successes and lessons learned as we complete our data collection operations.