
00:01 Profile America Voice Over: The Constitution of the United States, ratified in 1788, somewhat famously made this nation the first in the world to conduct a census of population on a regular basis. Every 10 years, on years ending in zero, in fact. Divisibility... From nursery school to college over 77 million students are headed to the classroom. That's more than one out of four of the total US population age three and over. Of the eight and a half... Profile America is in its 19th year as a public service of the US Census Bureau.

00:34 Lisa Blumerman: We are a mission oriented organization. There is nothing more powerful than what we do in social-science research.

00:42 Kendall Lott: The first census took place in 1790, not long after the inauguration of President Washington. The law required that the aggregate amount of each description of persons for every district be transmitted to the President. That means count everyone.

00:56 LB: It's a very large operation and a very complex operation with lots of moving parts.

01:03 Voice Over 2: From the Washington DC chapter of the Project Management Institute, this is PM Point of View, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host, Kendall Lott.

01:14 KL: The US Constitution outlines some of the most important government innovations in history. Laying out a framework of representational government that's continued for over 200 years. The oldest written constitution still in use today. And sure, it was visionary and as we would say today, cutting edge, creating a balance of powers among the three distinct branches of government, civilian control of the military, bicameral legislature, I could go on and on. But one of the key elements to the success and longevity of this geographically diverse representational government is the National Census. The founders knew you had to count the people. And that, PMs, is a project.

01:51 LB: The need, the responsibility, the conduct of the census, it's in our constitution.

01:57 KL: And it's laid out right in Article One, Section Two, that means the first page of the constitution. It says, "The actual enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States and within every subsequent term of ten years in such manner as they shall, by law, direct." 6,000 employees work in the US Census Bureau Headquarters, a striking and sustainable structure made of wood, glass, and concrete located next to a national park in Suitland, Maryland, a few miles south of Washington DC.

02:28 KL: It was there I met the executive in charge of running the 2020 census, Lisa Blumerman, Associate Director for Decennial Census Programs. An award winning senior executive, actually, a winner of multiple service awards, Lisa has been working for the bureau in various capacities since 1997. And, as I discovered, is a firm believer in the use and value of project management.

02:53 LB: Within the decennial census programs, I actually oversee and provide executive
guidance and leadership for three critical programs of the Census Bureau, one of which is the 2020 census, the decennial census. I also provide guidance and oversight for the American Community Survey, which is the largest household survey that's conducted in the United States. In addition to that, I also oversee the Census Bureau's geographic programs and our geographic programs really provide the foundation for all of the work that the Census Bureau does, it provides us that address information for which all of our data and our statistics are built upon.

03:24 KL: Oh, so that's separate from the actual census itself?

03:27 LB: One of the really interesting things about the census as a program is that there are so many projects that are interrelated with it. I like to picture them as gears where we have all of these many many moving gears circling around and they have to touch at just the right places. And when we think about the geographic programs, for example, that's a big gear, that's a huge undertaking that occurs throughout the 10-year period, what we call the intercensal period, to provide the foundation, the address information, not just for the census, but for all of the survey and business work that the Census Bureau does.

03:58 PO: Of the eight and a half million Americans ages 20 and 21 years old, over 50% are enrolled in college. For women, that figure nears 56%. Nursery school or kindergarten enrollment is...

04:10 KL: By the way, these fun facts are from Profile America. Profile America's audio features are daily, 60-second vignettes from key events, observations, or commemorations for that day to highlight information collected by the Census Bureau. The clips used in this podcast do not draw on statistics called from the decennial census specifically.

04:28 PO: There are nearly 33 million students in elementary schools and 16 and a half million high school students. Some 264,000 high school students are over the age of 25. You can find more facts about America from the US Census Bureau online at census.gov.

04:44 KL: You just described that it's a lot more complicated, I think, than the founding fathers sitting down thinking about counting some folks running around in the villages. So let's talk about the scope. With respect to the census itself that counts the population, as I understand it, is that correct?

04:57 LB: That's correct.

04:58 KL: Can you define for me the scope of the census? I guess it's kind of one of the big gears.

05:02 LB: Sure, so the overarching scope of the census is to count every person in the United States once and only once and in the right place.

05:09 KL: So, part of the project is to determine how that can best be done?

05:12 LB: Sure.

05:13 KL: That's one of the key nodes around those three areas of your scope.
Sure. So, when we look at the census overall and we think about how are we gonna conduct the census, what are the overarching programs, what are the projects within it, we've actually defined the 2020 census today to consist of 34 independent, but interrelated operations. Those operations range from everything from address listing or address canvassing to our language programs, to data products, to non-response follow-up, to self enumeration. And so it's just a wide, complex set of interdependent, yet interrelated programs that we have to manage.

Divisibility by 10s had an earlier attraction for the Continental Congress. As on this date in 1785, for the first time in history, a nation adopted a decimal coinage system, founded on the dollar we know today. At the time, money systems around the world were a chaos of fractions and units. Today, only two of the 190 plus countries in our world...

It's decennial, so every 10 years.

But do we call it a 10-year project, the actual counting? When does the counting begin? And I was also wondering when does it officially end?

So, one of the things that's interesting about looking at the census as a program and all of our projects within our program, is really when we put it in context of the triple constraints: Scope, cost, and schedule.

Right. And so, now we wanna talk a little bit about schedule. But really if we think about it from the three key components, in terms of scope, count everyone once and only once and in the right place. That's more than 330 million people living in 140 million addresses. We have nine months to do this really. Census day is April 1. We are mandated to release those counts by December 31st of the year of the census.

Census day, where did that come from? Tell me what defines census day.

Census day is April 1st. It's been April 1st for a number of decades, but census day is the reference day. So, it's where we are looking to know where you were as of this date for the purpose of the census. We'll start our advertisement, our engagement, our motivation campaign generally around January, February of that year. We'll really begin to increase our partnership activities, our sense of community because the census is a nation-wide civic engagement activity. It's our chance to stand up and be counted and do something for democracy.

And we'll start to really ramp that up in the February-March time frame, all leading up to self-collection, self-enumeration, beginning about mid-March.

And you're formally reporting to Congress at the end of the year, December 31?

Sure.
07:50 KL: That's the requirement?

07:51 LB: The requirement is that the apportionment counts are reported to Congress by December 31st of that year.

[music]

08:01 KL: So how does counting happen? Because you're talking about self-enumeration, which implies there might be some other enumeration going on. So, what goes on there?

08:09 LB: So we define enumeration as containing a number of components and it clearly is one of the critical aspects of the census, how we get that information in. But self-enumeration is that process of where you as an individual or you for your household will respond to the census.

08:22 LB: For the 2020 census, you'll have various means to do that. Internet will be our primary means, we hope, for people to respond to the census. We'll have mail. We'll have the ability to respond by telephone. We'll have the ability for you to respond at a partnership event. So say you're out at a local community event, maybe there's a neighborhood picnic, or a sporting event in your local community and we're doing some partnership activities there with local partners. Stakeholders are very, very important to us.

08:50 KL: Let's make sure I understand that.

08:51 LB: Sure.

08:51 KL: Then the department here, or the bureau is sending individuals who connect to the high school football games or...

09:00 LB: Could very well happen. Communication and stakeholder relations are very, very important to the census. It's really important to remember that when we're trying to count more than 330 million people, we are going to use a standard methodology to do that but we also rely on you. We rely on you to help us. We rely on state and local governments to help us. We rely on over... For the 2010 census, over 275 partners, local civic engagement groups, certainly sporting events, local partners to really step up and help motivate people to respond.

09:32 LB: We've found that one of the most successful ways that we can help encourage people who might be hesitant to respond, is by having that trusted voice talk with them. Churches, communities, local leaders, really step up and encourage people to do it. I think one of the things that's getting more and more challenging, is that as our population continues to grow, it's also getting exceedingly more diverse. And people's concerns and interests have changed. And that affects people's willingness, and time, and their ability to participate.

09:58 KL: You see that reflected people's vision of government and what they're reading, is reflected in how you see responses or how people wanna talk about responses with you?

10:05 LB: Absolutely and that's why our communication, our partnership activities are so, so important. We need to understand what will motivate you to respond. We need to understand what
concerns you might have and then we need to work with you, so that you understand the importance of the census, and are willing to provide the information to us, that you understand that that information is safe and secure.

[music]

10:29 PO: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Poet Emma Lazarus composed those words in 1883 to help raise funds for a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. But on this date, just a year earlier, Congress enacted one of the first immigration limitations in our history. The law barred entry to people thought likely to become what is called a "public charge" or burden on society.

10:55 PO: Immigration laws have been much revised since 1882 and remain a topic of great political contention to this day. Of the roughly 309 million residents counted in the 2010 census of population, nearly 40 million were foreign born, and another 40 million were naturalized citizens or non-citizen immigrants. You can find more facts about America...

11:15 KL: How big is the stack? How many humans are involved in the counting process?

11:18 LB: For the 2010 census we opened over 500 local offices to help us enumerate the population. We employed over 750,000 enumerators, people working in the field, knocking on doors. That number of enumerators doesn't count the people working in the offices, it doesn't count the people working in headquarters or in our regional offices. For the 2020 census, we're really looking to bring those numbers down.

11:41 KL: Down?

11:41 LB: Some of what we're looking at is a re-engineering how we conduct the census, encouraging people to self-respond. In 2010, we had to knock on 48 million doors for non-response follow up. If we can engage and motivate those people to respond to the census and we can bring that number down, we can change the infrastructure, we can change the landscape.

12:02 KL: And then, 48 million of about 140 households. 140 million.

12:04 LB: It was about 130 million then. We're looking at about...

12:08 KL: So, about a third, a little higher don't respond on the first round, the first couple of engagements. So is the trigger the technology, the communication or the marketing side of this or the combination. Are those the two factors?

12:18 LB: I think it's a combination. I think some of what we're finding in the tests that we're doing are that the combination of the partnership activities, so those trusted voices in the local community really encouraging you to respond, combined with our contact strategies of engaging and motivating you. I'm seeing an advertisement, for example, that encourages you to respond, that documents the benefit of what your community will get, a new school, a new road, a new park. Where those resources, where the firehouse needs to be, those kinds of things. Combined with the mailings that we do to your house encouraging you to respond and providing you with the information that you need to feel safe about responding to the census.
13:00 LB: People think, "You have 10 years to plan, no big deal. What do you do the other nine years?" We do a lot the other nine years. Our significant design documentation will be coming out by the end of September.

13:10 KL: So, five years ahead of time, you're getting your design into place.

13:12 LB: Absolutely. We've been very, very fortunate to be able to put the resources that we need on the testing we needed to do earlier this decade.

13:20 KL: What caused that to be able to happen this time?

13:21 LB: Well, as we were really wrapping up the last census, one of the challenges that we were tasked with was to find a way to conduct the census at a cost lower than the previous census. So, if we were to repeat the 2020 census using the same design than we used in the 2010 census, the cost of that design would be about $17 billion. With the design and the experimentation we're doing now, we're looking at saving $5 billion off that cost. Bringing the cost to the 2020 census down to about $12 billion.

13:50 KL: Ah, design matters.

13:51 LB: Design matters. And because of that, we were really able to communicate to our stakeholders what the plan was, where we needed to do research and testing. Where the major cost drivers for the census operations are. And to design a research and testing plan around that to allow us to actualize the savings in 2020.

14:12 PO: Income taxes first came to America 153 years ago today when president Abraham Lincoln signed a bill levying a 3% tax on incomes between $600 and $10,000, and 5% for greater incomes. After helping finance the federal cause in the civil war, the tax was rescinded in 1872. The income tax all of us know today dates to 1913 when the 16th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving Congress the power to levy such taxes. About 147 million individual income tax returns are submitted annually, totaling nearly $2 trillion. There are over 27,000...

14:50 LB: This census truly will be like no census that we've ever done. We are looking at using technology, we are testing technology in ways that we've never integrated it. So, for example, we have enumerators out there using a handheld device with an app on it to help them take the census. We are deploying new case management software with adaptive design techniques to help us manage, instead of by paper and pencil like we've traditionally done it, but to manage via alerts and messages using parameters and using rules that tell us what to do and how to follow and how to interact. It's just a phenomenal undertaking that we had and it's really, really exciting.

15:25 KL: And it's changing so fast, the technology, just in the last couple of census, I would imagine.

15:29 LB: Absolutely, and that's part of what allows us to do it. So, we had talked earlier, for example, about geography and our geographic programs being the foundation. Let's talk about how
that space has changed over 10 years. 10 years ago, what we did for address canvassing is we walked every block in the nation and we did a listing operation where we listed all the addresses on those blocks. Aerial imagery, the ability to look at maps and look at change in time via those maps really didn't exist then. Today, I can look at two sets of imagery and see where change has occurred.

16:01 KL: So, reengineering of the process and then the implementation.

16:04 LB: It's a reengineering of the census and it's the business processes that are driving that. Technology is there, we need to figure out how to integrate technology with our new way of doing business.

16:15 PO: A romantic but controversial period of American history ended semi-officially on this date in 1893. That's when University of Wisconsin historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, delivered an academic paper in Chicago. Based on 1890 census data, Turner declared that the closing of the American frontier ended the formative national experience. Turner said that migration from the east, the building of railroads and hundreds of new towns had combined to forge a single nation from coast to coast. The most recent census showed that the West is still a magnet for growth. Between 2000 and 2010, Nevada was the fastest growing state at 35%. Other states that grew more than 20% were Utah, Texas, Idaho and Arizona. The nation as a whole grew 9.7%. Profile America has...

17:02 LB: We have 34 interrelated operations. So, for each of those operations, there's a program manager for those operations. Within those operations, there are projects and project managers within those projects. We have 96 projects right now going on, representing the research and testing we're doing this fiscal year. For each of those projects, we have project managers and those projects roll up to programs where we have program managers responsible for them and it rolls up even higher.

17:28 KL: Do you have a sense of what makes a strong PM in this environment?

17:31 LB: I think it depends on the operation they're overseeing. Our operations are so varied and so distinct that a good project manager, they bring a common set of skills, they bring the critical thinking, strategic writing, strong schedule management, cost management. They bring the typical project management skills to it but they also bring an aptitude for the area that they're supporting, and that's really varied.

17:54 KL: And that's gonna vary.

17:54 LB: Very much so.

17:55 KL: Do you have people move between projects incessantly as possible?

17:58 LB: We do. And I think one of the challenges that we have, and one of the things that we're constantly managing, too, is the varied life cycle of the census, and the different skill sets we need at different points in time. Someone who's doing research, and someone that's managing a research project, has a different skill set than someone that's managing a production operation. And so our ability to be able to move our project managers around, to be able to move our managers in general around depending on where we are on the lifecycle is critical. The 2020 Census, the American Community Survey, our geographic programs, those are only a piece of what the Census Bureau
does. The Census Bureau has our economic programs, we have our current surveys, we have our intercensal population estimates. And because we have all of these programs going on at any given point in time, we have the ability to draw upon the skill sets that we need and find the right expertise for the project or the program that we're currently undertaking.

18:49 KL: How integrated is the mapping on the HR side then from what you described? Is each program manager, you decentralize in the sense that they go and find the resources they need? Or is there kind of the big picture of where your project managers are and where they're gonna be coming in and out?

19:02 LB: I think it's a little bit of... Sure.

19:03 KL: How integrated is it?

19:04 LB: I think it's a little bit of both. Human resources is essential to any team, to any project, to any organization. On our ability to hire staff that we need to have them work on the projects is absolutely critical. So, we do work very closely with our Human Resources division. We work very closely within our directorate to make sure our staff are aligned appropriately. We also do quite a bit of succession planning, and work force gap analysis so that we can ensure we're bringing in the right skill set not just for today but for the future. So, I think, one of the things that's really interesting about the movement of staff and the ability for people to move around is those opportunities to develop your skill set, to build upon your skill set. They're here within the agency, and the Census Bureau strongly encourages you to do that. By moving from organization-to-organization, you're bringing everything you learned within that organization to help build upon the next.

[music]

20:01 PO: The first patent in a young United States was issued on this date in 1790 to Samuel Hopkins of Vermont, for a new method of making potash, useful in producing soap, fertilizer, and glass. The Constitution recognized, for the first time in history, the intrinsic right of an inventor to profit from his invention. Hopkins' application was initially reviewed by Thomas Jefferson and approved by President Washington. By 1802, the US Patent Office was established to process applications. More than 326,000 patents were granted last year out of some 615,000 submissions. Potash still has uses...

20:39 KL: Stakeholders, let's tackle a little about that. I imagine, since it's in the Constitution, and it's kind of a Congressional requirement in a sense, I guess, isn't it?

20:46 LB: We have a number of congressional deadlines that we must meet. 2017 will be a critical year for us. We are required by law to provide the topics for the Census and for the American community survey to Congress.

20:58 KL: So, Congress is a key stakeholder for you, clearly?

21:00 LB: Absolutely.

21:00 KL: They're essentially your sponsor, it sounds like, right?
21:01 LB: Mm-hmm. The general public is our sponsor. Congress is our sponsor. Everyone has a stake in the Census.

21:07 KL: So, when everyone is a stakeholder, [chuckle] it's kind of no one has...

21:10 LB: It is a very challenging project. Fundamentally what drives us is we have a constitutional requirement to conduct the Census. We have a requirement to provide the topics to Congress in 2017, the questions that we're gonna ask in 2018, and to deliver the apportionment counts by December 31st of the year of the Census.

[music]

21:34 KL: How do you perceive quality? How do you know that people are saying, "That's great. This worked."

21:40 LB: We do a number of post-enumeration activities, both research-based activities, experimental-based activities, and then coverage measurement activities, where we go back out and we re-measure and we ensure and understand the quality of the data that are coming in. Do we have an overcount? Do we have an undercount? How did it affect particular demographic groups?

22:00 KL: Do you get positive feedback in some way? I don't know what does... I filled out my form and I submitted it. And then I was impressed when I hear it's announced, and I'm like, "Oh, great. That's the thing I did. Oh, that's so impressive." It gets counted, and there's this number now.

22:13 LB: Taking the census is the largest peacetime effort that we do. It's an effort of national mobile engagement. We can't do it on our own. We have to do it with you. And one of the things when I go out into the community, and we did a test it in Savannah earlier this year, and I went out to some partnership events and to talk. And when you get out in the community and you talk to people and they talk with you about the importance of the data, you can see the pride. And when they're talking about their communities, and they recognize the value, we get lots and lots of feedback, and it's wonderful. And it helps inform what we're doing and how we're doing it. We encourage people to provide us feedback. We encourage people to be a part of the census. It's what we want. It's what will make the census great.

22:53 KL: So, what did they tell you when you heard that?

22:54 LB: For example, when we were out in Savannah, the Savannah government passed a resolution in support of the census.

23:00 KL: There you go.

23:01 LB: Yeah, it's wonderful. And we received a copy of that resolution which was just so powerful to see. Other things that we see, there's a lot of interest in the questions that we're asking and the technology that we're using, the use of the internet. People are really, really interested in what we're doing and how we're doing it, and how they can be a part of it.

[music]
23:21 PO: In January 1966, President Johnson handed the first Medicare cards to former President Harry Truman, who had advocated such a program, and his wife, Bess. Today, the Medicare system covers some 54 million Americans. The 65 and older population in the US nears 45 million and is expected to reach over 98 million by the year 2060. You can find more facts about America's...

23:46 KL: Where do you see risk and how is that identified? How do you work with risk?

23:50 LB: So, there's program level risk and project level risk, and then there's enterprise-level risk. We actually manage risks at all levels. Risk management is a very, very important part of our project management and a part of our planning and our implementation of all of the activities that we do. So the risk management will actually start at the project-level. Each of our projects will have a risk register that they manage to, that they account for. Those risk registers are reviewed by a risk review board. It's a weekly meeting that they conduct. From there, those risks will then be escalated to a program-level risk. Those risks are then elevated even higher to enterprise-level risks meaning for all of the Census Bureau. And the Census Bureau's operating committee actually convenes and we review those risks.

24:32 KL: That's a very tiered process. So, my experience with the government is eventually by the time a senior person is hearing something, it usually tends to be the big ones, you have an escalation path.

[music]

24:42 LB: So with something as complex and as fast-moving as the Census, there isn't a lot of time for you to allow. We are meeting daily. We are meeting weekly. We are meeting monthly. And so how we have to manage it depends on where we are. Where we are in the lifecycle right now is in the planning stage. We're doing research testing daily in our operational plan. So our risks are different than where we were last month when we were in the middle of a census test. When we were in the middle of a census test my risks were different. Are my systems up? Are they running? Are they functioning? Can people submit? Do I have enough people at my help center so that they can answer questions?

25:16 KL: From a categorical perspective, what type of risk is the one that most keeps you up or keeps your executive team up?

25:23 LB: Today, some of the risks that I worry about are budgetary risks. Will we have enough funding to do the work that we need to do? Design risks. Do we have the right design? Will we have a late design change? With so many stakeholders, how do we manage those expectations? Will we establish the right infrastructure? Will we have offices in the right place? These are the questions and the challenges that we're facing. When we're in the height of the census they shift more to operational risks. What sort of epidemic might come on? Will there be a flood that changes my address space? The benefit of doing a census every 10 years is there is a bucket of those risks that we plan for every 10 years. I mean, there are some things that we think about and then there are some new things. But we have a lot of experience. We've been doing this for a long time. A fire may occur, a natural disaster may occur, we know how to plan for these things.

26:14 KL: Do you have people who specialize in risk?
26:16 LB: Absolutely. We have people that specialized in risk, in quality, and project management. So for example, if we talk about schedule, I have 16 certified schedulers right now working on the 2020 schedule. That should show the complexity of the schedule itself, and the interrelationships between the schedule.

26:31 KL: So, specialization is a good thing here and is useful here.

26:33 LB: It's very useful, but it's...

26:34 KL: It's something our audience might be interested in.

26:36 LB: Absolutely. But it's also important to understand the big picture. And to understand how those different operations fit together. We need people to be very focused on their operation, but at the same time, the data that come out aren't dependent on just one operation. It's dependent on how the data transform across all operations.

26:52 KL: Do you typically have project managers that are coming through multiple censuses?

26:56 LB: We have a lot of staff that have worked on multiple censuses. Two censuses, three censuses, four censuses, maybe even five, I'm not, really...

27:04 KL: Fort to five decades working through...

27:06 LB: Yeah, a wonderful institutional experience. But we also have a number of staff, like me, that have worked around the agency. So you know, I did the American Community Survey. I dabbled in the 2010 census. I even worked on some of the post-enumeration activities for census 2000. Now, I'm in for 2020. So, I think that we have a little bit of both. And I think that's what makes the census strong. Is having that foundation. Having that mission-driven culture. Understanding what our scope is. Understanding and being passionate about what it is we're trying to do combined with the new ideas.

[music]

27:41 LB: The 2020 census will be like no census we've ever taken before. It's exciting, it's modern, it's innovative. We're using technology and pushing it to a new degree. We can't do the census without project management. The triple constraint is critical; scope, schedule, cost. We can't do it without that and we can't do it without project managers. Each of 34 operations has a program manager, and there are multiple projects within that. And it's the unique combination of bringing all of that together which is what will ensure a successful census.

28:13 KL: So not just a project. But a collection of nearly 100 projects. For over 200 years, project management has played a central role in maintaining our democracy. That's something to be proud of. To listen to more profiles from Profile America on topics ranging from First Traffic Light, Doctors in the House, Summer Food Favorites, Women's Right to Vote, National Dog Day, Disabilities Act, Downscale Dining, State Gas Taxes, and more, visit the audio section of the online library at census.gov. Special thanks to today's guest, Lisa Blumerman, and a personal thanks to Danny Rickers of PMI, WDC chapter for introducing me to the staff of the Census Bureau. We get...
great guests at the recommendation of our PM community.

29:06 V2: Our theme music was composed by Molly Flanner, used with permission. Post-production performed at MPower Strategies and technical and web support provided by Potomac Management Resources.

29:22 KL: PMPs who have listened through this complete podcast may submit a PDU claim, one-half of a PDU, in the new talent triangles strategic and business management with the Project Management's Institute CCR system. Choose the REP chapter-sponsored education category. Search for C046, the Washington, DC chapter, and submit code PMPOV0021 entitled, America Counts: The US Census. I'm your host, Kendall Lot, and until next time, "Keep it in scope and get it done."

29:55 V2: This podcast is a Final Milestone production distributed by PMI WDC.