

2000 census to reduce undercount with corporations' help

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The year 2000 is still three years away, but the U.S. Census Bureau is already working on ways to accurately count the number of Alaska Natives.

The Census Bureau is currently working on a draft plan for Alaska. Two representatives from the bureau were at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention to ask for input.

The constitution calls for a census every ten years to adjust congressional districts and representation.

Linda Murphy, director of the Seattle regional office for the Census Bureau, said there has been some controversy about the census plans. She said most of the complaints about the last census came from the practice of sampling, where numbers are projected to compensate for non-respondents.

However, there will be no sampling of Alaska Natives. Murphy said the Census Bureau plans to count every Native American.

"We'll track everybody down," Murphy said. "One reason is because the differential undercount was the very highest for Indians on reservations, so because of that we're not going to sample for non-response follow up on reservations. And cer-

tainly not for Alaska Native villages as well."

Differential undercount is a problem that arises when some groups of people are less likely to respond than other groups.

Murphy said new strategies are needed this time to successfully complete the count. One way they hope to do better this time is by building partnerships with local government and even local businesses.

"We like to talk about the census as something that we do with our partners," Murphy said. "Not to them, and not for them, but with them. We are starting the partnership with state, local and tribal governments, community groups."

The Census Bureau is specifically trying to form partnerships with tribal governments, both federally and state recognized. They will also make special efforts to reach Native Americans living in urban areas. Murphy said this partnership process is already underway. The Census Bureau is asking tribal leaders to designate liaisons to promote communication. Village officials can also help the census by updating their records and sharing them with the Census Bureau.

"There are some opportunities and some responsibilities for the village officials for them to get prepared for the decennial. To updated," Murphy said. "If it looks like it's going to be feasible that we

can use their enrollment records somehow, it would be to their advantage—to our mutual advantage—to get them up to date."

A new law lets the Census Bureau get help from the U.S. Postal Service to develop the address list and to check and update and correct the address files.

She said the Bureau plans to use private business as a resource.

"We'll contract a lot of the processing work," Murphy said. "Using equipment that's state of the art. Instead of us, every ten years purchasing a whole system to do these things every ten years and then after it's over, we have to mothball everything, so we're looking at privatizing a lot of the functions."

The Census Bureau will use several mailings to encourage people to respond. First, a letter will tell people that the census is coming. Next, the census form itself will arrive in the mail. Afterward, a postcard will thank the respondent for their time, and remind the person to fill out the census form if they have not done so already. A fourth mailing containing a second form will go to people who still have not responded.

The Census Bureau will also incorpo-

rate modern technology. They plan to use scanners with text reading software to load responses directly into computers for tabulation. Murphy said this will eliminate errors and cost.

The census forms may become available over the Internet, if they can resolve the confidentiality issues. The results of the census will be easily available on the Internet.

Two Indian reservations are the subject of tests this year. The Bureau is performing an actual census of the reservations to test the readability of its forms and the preparedness of its census takers. In 1998, another dress rehearsal will involve several cities and one other reservation.

The 2000 census is scheduled for March and April, but the process will begin sooner for remote Alaska.

"We plan to do this in January through March," Murphy said. "Before Breakup. When people are still at home in their villages. Before the seasonal process of logging, hunting, fishing and so on starts taking people away from their villages."

More information about the Census Bureau is available on the Internet at: <http://www.census.gov/>