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STATISTICS FOR DEVELOPMENT DIVISION (SDD)

2020 WORLD ROUND OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES –
PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES' CENSUS PLANNING MEETING:
INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS/STANDARDS, CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGIES
AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

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PART 1-c: FIELD MANAGEMENT

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1. Introduction

The success or failures of a census or survey are:

1. Response Rate
2. Timelines
3. Data Quality

The outcomes of each measure highlight how well the field operation is managed.

Effective field management is the key to successful census.

This paper will focus on the three core phases of census and survey operations with emphasis on staff recruitment and field supervision. It will also highlight areas where the field operation is usually, if not mostly, affected in recruiting qualified staff followed by recommendations that will serve as the Quality Control and Quality Assurance mechanism for staff recruitment.

This will then be briefly followed by some discussions on the need for commitment, ownership (accountability) and leadership in relation to effective field management and successful census.

2. Background

Cost is always a concern and center of discussion in census planning. The largest portion of a census budget goes to staffing.

Conducting a Census does not only require sufficient funds but also field workers. Having a successful census is dependent not only on adequate funding and staff but also effective field team management work.

To minimize cost and yet produce maximum coverage on or before dateline and the production of quality data, Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA) processes are without any question(s)

must be established before and applied from the opening to the closing of the census operation. These procedures or mechanisms, along with all pertinent training and operational manuals, should have already been prepared by the National Statistics Offices (NSOs). All of these should take place after a pilot census is completed and should be in place even before the pre-census stage begins.

Many reports and presentation on what needs to take place on each census operation as they involved field management (e.g. field work recruitment, training, budget, supervision, ownership “local manager” have been made/produced and are for everyone’s disposal.

However, little or no emphasis, have been made and shared on what it takes to have a SUCCESSFUL Census.

Perhaps, given the decreasing level of fiscal resources available for censuses, it is only proper, at this point in time, to modify existing models or adopt a proven one.

3. Pre-enumeration

This phase of a census could be described as the administrative operations and activities. It is the first stage where Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA) start and the start of field management.

The census managers, either by appointment or competitive recruitment, when selected (this may vary based on the size of country and operation) should start ownership (accountable and committed). Their specific duties and responsibilities are described in their respective manuals. However, how well they interact with field staff (e.g. crew leaders and enumerators) is dependent on each leadership’s skill.

The most basic activities in this phase are:

- A. Budgeting (payroll, procurement, travel, etc.)
- B. Timetable of activities – Time lines
- C. Core Staff Recruitment and Training
- D. Logistics, Scheduling and Publicity
- E. Printing of forms and manuals
- F. Field Staff Recruitment/Training
- G. Operational supplies, materials and equipment
- H. Advance listing

The recommended Quality Control and Quality Assurance procedures in this operation for effective Census operation are broken down below by each evaluation component

3a. Response Rate (coverage)

When hiring field staff, because of the allotted time of the field operation and the requirements and duration in recruitment process, it is best to hire more than budgeted. It is and has been experience in prior censuses where enumerator’s attrition occurs between the first and second week of the field

enumeration stage. Also, some will be release for poor performance. With this QC, there will always be replacements in the pool of selected and qualified applicant to maintain daily production and most importantly, it eliminates the need to start a tedious recruitment process.

Another control instrument is to have a daily pay and work record for each staff for each day that accounts for forms completed and passed or exceed or fail the minimum coverage or the incomplete work versus hour work, miles driven and other expenses (see Exhibit A). This will also allow the field management to make immediate decisions to ensure the daily productions (including quality of work) are on schedule and budget.

To safeguard uniform training between trainees occurring at different times and place, it is important to conduct all training in verbatim (script) approach. Questionnaire Reference Book (QRB) should be available to each field worker for reference in the field. This helps where access to communications is limit or not available.

It is important to meet (when and where possible) daily with staff to review work, hear and discuss any concerns, acknowledge their work and motivate them. This will increase staff confidence and establish good rapport amongst staff.

Recruiting a Partnership/Media Specialist is critical to a successful campaign on and about the census (importance, benefits, etc.). The candidate must be energetic, creative and has good public/human relation skills.

In the absence of good house listing of an area, it has been proven that conducting an advance listing (inclusive of map spots) of the area very good reference is when doing field follow-up and or Quality Assurance on enumerated areas.

3b. Timelines - (accountability)

In any census and survey operations, logistics and scheduling are very crucial administrative tasks to ensure that all needed administrative support for the field staffs are done as or on schedule. A detailed organizational structure and a comprehensive project management chart must be prepared on or before the opening of the census field office.

All staff must be paid on scheduled dates, travel arrangements made in advance, supplies, materials and equipment must be procured in advance, forms and manuals must be printed and available before scheduled trainings. Scheduling of job announcement, recruitment, testing and final selection of staff must take place ahead of scheduled operational phase.

Notes: Two main causes of frustrations expressed by majority of both field and office staff, which have great impact on census or survey operation, are un-timely payment of work performed and reimbursements of expense incurred. A clear guide, procedures and arrangements should be identified and documented in advance for timely procurement and payment of obligations to ensure continuity of field work.

Communications on all schedules of activities must take place daily to confirm that all are on track per project management chart.

Schedules of meeting should be charted and distributed to all involved. Daily field staff meeting should take place, bi-weekly for 2nd level field supervisors and weekly for 1st level supervisors and office operations. This is an approach to visibility and interaction.

Notes: Two methods that worked well and has helped in the success of the censuses and surveys in the CNMI, in particular, are Team Enumeration (a group working in same areas known as the A/Clean-up Team) and Payment of Work by Forms completed (complete and clean).

3c. Data Quality

Data quality is the most crucial measure of effective census operation. Some census and survey planners will say that poor data quality is a result of poor field management or staff's proficiency. This will be covered in detail in the enumeration phase.

4. Enumeration

The field enumeration phase requires a more rigorous Quality Control and Quality Assurance procedures to guarantee the information from the households are properly collected and safeguarded. At this stage, it is said that the train is already rolling towards its destination. It cannot be stopped. Therefore, we need to have all able staff work to maintain its course.

Although all field staff might have undergone both classroom and field training, it does not mean that all should go well and we will have good data. Furthermore, it doesn't mean field managers can now stay in the office and let the crew lead take care of the work.

The Manager must be out in the field as much as possible unless when working on reports.

Note: two examples of will be illustrated at the end that the above approach is effective.

The daily pay and work record, the training and retraining, daily and weekly performance report and daily field interaction serve as the primary quality control mechanisms in the enumeration phase of the census.

The recommended Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA) procedures in this stage for effective Census operation are broken down below by each evaluation component

4a. Response Rate (coverage)

The recommended QC and QA are the same as those in the pre-enumeration phase.

4b. Timelines - (accountability)

The recommended QC and QA are the same as those in the pre-enumeration phase.

4c. Data Quality

To safeguard the standards set for the various stages of the census or survey operations, the QC and QA procedures and to eliminate any influence outside the set boundaries of competitive process in the recruitment of census staff, the recruitment processes for field staff need to be elevated. This is will allow a level playing field to all interested individuals in applying for a census job regardless of gender, race, ethnicity and physical conditions. This process is for all field and field support staff at all level as outlined below.

Suggested Guide for Staff Recruitment – Performance (selecting the right staff) all applicants must:

- a. Be of legal working age and fulfil the basic local government personnel requirements (e.g. drug testing and police clearance).
- b. Take and pass a basic standardized Skills Test (organizational skills, basic math, geography and reading comprehension) .
- c. Complete an interview session (communication skills)
- d. Attend mandatory classroom and field training

All of the 4 modules above have weights and can be customized for specific areas.

The employment or initial hiring is provisional until completing two interviews on the 1st week of enumeration.

A failed review will require the applicant to attend additional hours of classroom retraining session followed by another two full interviews.

The two review covers completeness and accuracy of completed forms and corresponding record keeping and mapping work.

Once they passed, they are then given permanent identification card, pertinent supplies and materials and forms before they start work on assigned areas.

Supervisors are required to be always available during working hours. They should be visible and should interact with both clients and staff. This process is proven to increase coverage and quality completed forms.

Staff payroll and reimbursements are timely. Timely payments, especially payroll, are a motivation for staff to increase production that commensurate with quality complete forms.

5. Post enumeration

The post enumeration covers a full QA on completed enumeration areas.

Once the field staff has completed work in their assigned areas, they are then trained on the QA process to validate coverage in areas outside their enumeration areas.

5a. Response Rate (coverage)

The completed QA work after enumeration is then verified with the records from the Advance Listing collected in the pre enumeration stage. If all records and population count match for an enumeration area then the area is considered covered and work is closed. If there is any discrepancy, another group is assigned to investigate and make appropriate corrections or updates per field follow-up procedures. The process involved the matching of map spots, description of dwelling unit, name of head of household, household count and all supporting forms reconcile.

5b. Timelines - (accountability)

The field follow-up and QA are performed on areas where enumeration work is done. This process usually takes place after all enumeration work is done but can start on the third week into the enumeration stage.

5c. Data Quality

The reconciliation of enumeration, field follow up, QA and advance listing records is the primary validation of the quality of the field work. However, during the enumeration stage all completed forms, after reviewed and certified by field supervisors, are reviewed again for completeness in the office by field operation support staff following established procedures. This operation is called office reconciliation and quality assurance.

6. Conclusion

A successful census can be attributed to the following:

1. Efficient pre-enumeration work following all procedures in the various manuals. This is critical to ensure data collection between censuses and surveys are collected using the same standards.
2. Implementation of efficient office/administrative procedures at opening of pre-enumeration operations. This includes logistics and scheduling
3. Sufficient budget and corresponding staff
4. Rigid recruitment procedures.
5. Effective staff training plan and extensive publicity program
6. Sufficient supplies, materials and forms
7. Effective leadership – ownership, visible, listen/ guides/mentor, motivates, cognizant to procedures and able to earn and reciprocate respect and trust.
8. Adequate office equipment

Notes: Having the privilege to be direct/manage two Decennial , planed/organized from bottom up and managed one Mid-Decade , I cannot ignore to emphasize the importance of daily interaction/communication with field staff (from top to bottom and vice versa) and being proactive in actual field work. Be visible and available to guide, coach and motivate. Listen with empathy.

