

# Effectiveness of the Account Manager Program for the 2007 Economic Census

Robert Marske  
U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233-6000 <sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The Economic Census imposes a significant burden on the Nation's largest companies, which have hundreds of locations and must complete a form for each of them. These large companies, which comprise at least 35 percent of U.S. payroll, are critical to the census. Because large companies are critical to published data, the U.S. Census Bureau has developed an account manager (AM) program. This program appoints a single contact to help each large company meet its filing requirement. The goal of the program is to help companies understand the census, facilitate use of electronic reporting tools, and accelerate response. While the AM program has been in existence for the past three censuses, the 2007 Economic Census was the most effective in terms of timeliness and unit response. This paper presents background on the AM program, new strategies used for 2007 and plans for the next census.

**Key Words:** Census, large companies, response

## 1. Introduction

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the Economic Census every five years, and requires multiple-location companies to complete a separate detailed report form for each of their locations. The largest companies are critical to the census because they comprise over one-third of total U.S. payroll. At the same time, the task of completing the required report forms imposes a significant burden on these companies. In order to help the companies and to enhance census response, the Economic Directorate of the Census Bureau has, since the 1992 Economic Census, provided Account Managers (AM) to work with 1,000 or more of the Nation's largest companies. AMs are drawn from census and survey analysts. They contact assigned companies, encourage reporting, answer questions, and help companies in any way possible to report.

Success of the economic census is measured in terms of data quality, timing of response, and the rate response measured in terms of percent of establishments mailed. Success of the AM program can be measured by these same variables for the selected AM companies. Evidence has shown that large multiple-location companies with an AM in 1992, 1997, and 2002 had higher response rates for the census than those without an AM. The AM program has grown in importance with each census, and the rate of response by AM companies has improved as well.

## 2. What is the AM Program and what is it designed to do?

The AM Program is a coordinated system of outreach, communications, assistance and customer service provided to some of the Nation's largest companies. The AM program begins when we select large companies for special treatment and assign Account Managers to work with them. We provide advance information about the census to these companies, and the AM contacts them to offer assistance and resources. We monitor the contacts and performance of the AMs. Each of these steps is critical to success of the program and the census.

### 2.1 Select large companies.

We begin by selecting the largest, most important companies, based on such factors as number of establishments, employment, payroll, revenue, and importance within a given sector. We also target businesses with a history of poor response. *For the 2007 Economic Census we selected around 1,200 large companies accounting for 650,000 locations. In 2002, we selected about 1,900 companies with 470,000 locations.*

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2007 Economic Census Account Manager program includes selected very large firms with paid employees. Data may be subject to nonsampling error (see <http://www.census.gov/econ/census07/www/methodology/> for a discussion of economic census methodology).

**Table 1.** The AM Program has grown steadily since its introduction for the 1997 Economic Census

	1997	2002	2007
Account Managers	99	126	145
AM Companies	850	1069	1195
AM Establishments	348,000	470,000	650,000
Economic Census check-in rate	86%	90%	96.3%

## 2.2 Select Account Managers

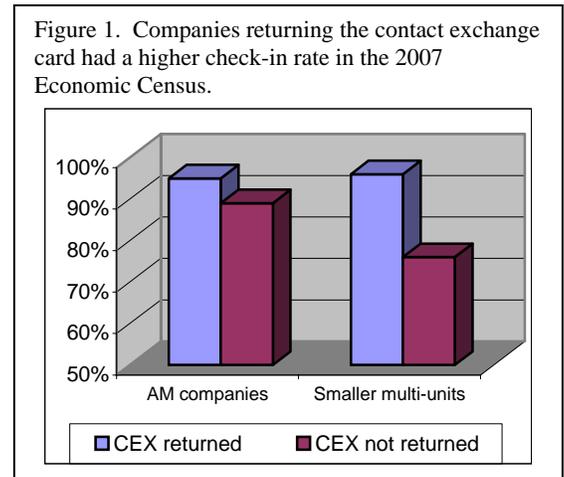
We appoint survey and census analysts to serve as AMs. Where possible, we select analysts who are familiar with the economic census and selected industries. We suggest that AMs work with companies that will be important to their continuing, post-census survey work, after the census is complete. *For 2007, we selected over 140 AMs, compared to less than 100 in 1997.*

## 2.3 Hold Kick-offs and provide training for AMs

We held a kick-off event to signal the start of the AM program in April 2007, six months before census forms were mailed to the selected companies. We provided training for AMs as well as a regular schedule of refresher and debriefing meetings to update AMs on the program and the census. *For 2007, we scheduled a separate kick-off program and separate training sessions for managers who supervised AMs to ensure they had the information and support needed for the challenges ahead.*

## 2.4 Send Advance Information and verify census contact.

Prior to census mailout, we send the large companies an advance information package about the census (the package went to companies with AMs, and also to mid-size multi-units without AMs). The package included a list of items to be collected on the census, phone numbers to call to contact the Census Bureau, and facts about electronic reporting and the Census Bureau website. The package also contained a Contact Exchange Card (CEX). The card provided the name and contact information for the Account Manager assigned to each company. We asked companies to provide the name and mailing information for the person at the company who will coordinate census reporting. This allowed us to verify or update our mailing information as necessary. Companies without AMs that returned their CEX had a much higher check-in rate than for those that did not return the card (Figure 3). *For 2007, we provided an on-line version of the CEX, which could be accessed from our website. More than one-half of the selected companies used the on-line form.*



## 2.5 Provide a schedule of required contacts with the company.

The AMs call their assigned companies to introduce themselves after we send out the Advance Information packages. (See Attachment 1) The AM tells the company about the census, verifies where we should mail the report forms, and offers help. Some AMs also visited their companies to demonstrate electronic reporting methods and software. These visits were only possible because the electronic reporting software was developed and available for training and use.

AMs next called their companies after census report forms were mailed, to verify the company received them and to offer help. AMs maintained contact with companies throughout the reporting period, through the census due date and for several months afterwards, until the company reported. AMs also called to thank companies or sent thank you letters, to acknowledge their cooperation in completing the census. *AMs made thousands of contacts with their companies between the Advance mailing in April 2007, through the census closeout in October 2008.*

## 2.6 Mail census report forms to companies early

Large companies have told us that the best way to receive earlier completed report forms is to mail report forms earlier. Accordingly, we mailed census forms to these large companies in October 2007, about two months earlier than the bulk of the mailing to non-selected companies. *Earlier mailing of 2007 census report forms to selected companies resulted in a time advantage relative to the 2002 census. We began receiving these forms earlier and this advantage continued throughout census processing.*

## 2.7 Monitor contacts with companies

AMs keep records of all contacts with their companies, using Remedy/CRM software. This tool also provided background information on companies, displayed response rates, and recorded and displayed monitoring information for AMs and their supervisors (Attachments 2 – 4. ) *MIS reports developed according to supervisors' specifications allowed managers at every level to track performance and provide encouragement and feedback on specific companies.*

## 2.8 Prepare a strategy for non-responding companies

Not all selected companies responded by the due date or after a reasonable filing extension. Addressing late and non-responders was one of the key features of the AM program. AMs were able to reassign difficult cases to their supervisor or to the Customer and Respondent Outreach Branch (CROB) for follow-up. CROB often worked with the AM to prepare letters from our Assistant Director to company officers. These personalized letters were sent via Fedex. If this letter did not bring a response, we prepared a more direct letter from the Chief Counsel of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Roxie Jones. This “Roxie” letter emphasized the legal requirement to file census report forms and outlined further action that could be taken by the Department of Justice. *Letters to CEOs, delivered by Federal Express usually had immediate impact. Most companies contacted their Account Manager within 24 hours of receipt of the letter, and the AM helped them to report quickly.*

## 3. Keys to Success – 2007 Economic Census Account Manager Program

In helping to bring in completed census report forms for 96 percent of AM company establishments – surpassing the 92 percent response target – the AM program made a critical contribution to the overall response rate for the census, its timeliness, and the quality of the data.

Benefiting from the presence of staff with 2002 census experience, we improved planning and training, improved Remedy/CRM contact management software, provided more timely and comprehensive information and assistance to AMs, and made sure that everyone took the AM program more seriously. In the end, three factors contributed to the success of the AM program in 2007: planning, communication, and commitment.

### 3.1 Planning

The first AM program was created for the 1992 Economic Census. For the 1992, 1997, and 2002 censuses, the Account Manager Program was planned as part of the overall census response improvement effort, and several factors limited its effectiveness. Experienced staff and other resources were scarce and the program did not have a single manager. More importantly, not all census supervisors took the AM program seriously. Many supervisors viewed the AM function as competing for their analysts' time and attention.

Nevertheless the earlier AM programs resulted in improved response. For example, AMs in the 2002 program estimated they brought in at least 70 companies (out of 1,069) that would not have responded otherwise - although some responses were received up to 15 months after census mail out. We feel that the actual number of “conversions” is probably larger, and many companies reported earlier than they would have without AM help.

Figure 2. AM Resources

The **CROB** (Customer and Respondent Outreach Branch) was in charge of training AMs, keeping them informed, and helping them as needed. CROB kept AMs informed about policies and procedures, as well as schedules and resources available throughout the census data collection cycle. The CROB also maintained Remedy/CRM software.

**Remedy/CRM** is contact management software used to collect and display company information, interactions with companies, and the status of company response. The software can be accessed by any analyst interested in a particular company with respect to any survey or the economic census. It generated monitoring reports that supervisors used to track AM contacts with the companies as well as company response. The success of the system relied on AMs recording all interactions with their companies.

**The Contact Exchange Card (CEX)** Six months before we mailed out report forms, we informed the CEO and last known contact for AM companies that the census was coming by sending them a letter and census brochure. We included a post card, which we requested the company fill out, entering the name, mailing address, e-mail, etc. of the person to whom we should mail the census forms. For 2007, we made it possible for the company to go to our website and enter the contact information electronically.

Several staff who served during the 2002 program were in place as the 2007 program began. Their experience, and understanding of the lessons learned in 2002, was a key advantage for 2007.

For 2007, the AM program was given a separate project charter. A project plan was drafted and approved and a project manager was appointed. Structured planning – done early in the census cycle - allowed AM project staff to focus on improvements. Program staff worked hard to improve training and tools needed by the Account Managers.

During the 2002 economic census, we selected over 1,000 companies – with about 470,000 establishments – for the program and we assigned approximately 120 Account Managers to assist them. The AM program and associated activities helped obtain a 92 percent establishment response rate for the selected companies. For 2007, we increased the number of selected companies to nearly 1,200, bringing the number of their establishments to over 650,000. We had approximately 140 AMs.

Focus groups with AMs following the 2002 census had revealed the following points:

- Companies that completed Contact Exchange Cards (CEX) were more likely to report on the census
- AMs and their supervisors needed to take AM tasks seriously
- AM training needed to be improved
- AM training and company contact activities needed to be tracked
- Remedy/CRM needed to be easier to use
- AMs needed back up from CROB throughout census
- AMs needed information on census events, timing, and procedures
- Chief Counsel letters were effective in 2002, we needed them to be sent earlier and to more companies.
- Electronic reporting software needed to be easier to understand and use.

Better project planning resulted in:

- Improved and expanded training for AMs,
- Better tools for keeping track of, sharing, and accessing information about assigned companies.
- Better information sharing.
- An integral AM performance and company response project monitoring system designed according to supervisors' specifications.
- Most supervisors – through Division Chief level - were assigned at least one AM company.

A key improvement for the 2007 AM program was that follow-up strategies and letters were in place before census mail out. We prepared follow-up letters from the Assistant Director and the Chief Counsel that were personalized on AM request and sent to company officers via Fedex. These letters appear to have had a major positive impact on response of the targeted companies. The letters were similar to letters sent after the 2002 census, but we sent nearly three times as many letters from the Chief Counsel as we did in 2002 and we sent them earlier in the census cycle.

### **3.2 Communication**

AM Training – Training of Account Managers was substantially overhauled for the 2007 census. Much of the AM training in 2002 focused on sales/customer relations and communication techniques. For 2007, based on 2002 AM feedback, we provided extensive hands-on training with networked computers both at headquarters and at the National Processing Center in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Web-based versions of all training modules were stored on the Census Bureau's Intranet site to provide for refresher training and new employees. Training covered:

- Economic Census basics
- Census schedule and key activities
- Respondent resources (Business Help Site, Secure Message Center, etc.)
- Use of Remedy/CRM software
- Respondent contact strategies
- Use of Electronic Reporting Software

We were committed to providing answers and information to AMs and supervisors as quickly as possible during the census. This improvement was based on AM feedback from the 2002 focus groups regarding the need for current information, quick answers, and authoritative guidance.

We improved and updated Remedy/CRM. To encourage AMs to use Remedy/CRM, we improved the software and updated it regularly with company contact and response information. Among other functions, Remedy/CRM allowed AMs to identify companies needing special letters or contacts.

We published a newsletter - *AM Bulletins* - covering key issues AMs should be aware of, as well as a Q/A section with timely discussion of concerns raised by AMs. We maintained a repository of resources on the AM website. For 2007 we included training reviews and on-line versions of training materials.

We improved resources for managers of AMs. We scheduled a special “Kick-Off” and other briefings expressly for supervisors, ahead of comparable briefings for the AMs. We worked with managers to create monitoring reports within Remedy/CRM. Supervisors used these reports to monitor response for companies assigned to their AMs, and to track their AM’s scheduled company contacts.

The Director of Pay Services for a large Fortune 500 company also spoke at the Kick-Off to provide a census respondent’s perspective. The Kick-Off introduced the goals of the census, and the importance of the AM’s role to the success of the census. Also presented were the schedule of training, and the resources that would be available to them.

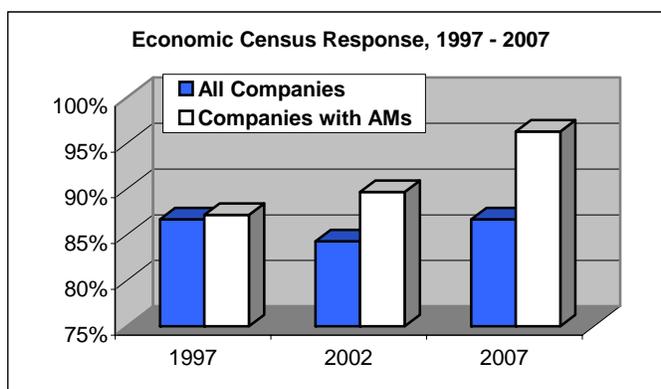
### 3.3 Commitment

Another key factor in place for 2007 was a clearly understood target for overall census response. The Census Bureau had committed, as part of the Office of Management and Budget’s Performance Assessment and Rating Tool (PART Score), to reach the 86 percent response rate – two percent above the level in 2002, by October 2008. We also set an internal target of 92 percent response for AM companies. These targets were included in most census managers’ performance plans and helped make managers more receptive to goals and strategies in the AM program. These targets represented a higher percentage response rate and more timely reporting than had been achieved in any prior census. They were on every AM’s lips. Each AM, each supervisor, each employee up and down the line thought daily about what they could do to help the Census Bureau achieve its targets.

Supervisors took a more active role in the 2007 AM program. Not only was the AM role included in performance plans, the program was also discussed and emphasized at staff and planning meetings. Perhaps most importantly, each supervisor – including senior executives -- served as an AM for at least one company. AMs saw the boss encounter the same challenges that every other AM faces. Supervisors, in turn, better understood the complexity of the AM function and the resources AMs need to be successful.

During the 2002 census, we kept track of census performance by querying AMs about the status of large outstanding companies through regular e-mails. We asked the AM about their latest contact with the company and whether they felt the company required contact from executive staff or a letter from the Chief Counsel of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This information flow was built into the 2007 Remedy/CRM software: AMs could characterize companies as “likely to refuse.” This attribute was incorporated into the supervisors’ monitoring reports. Making it easier for AMs to identify uncooperative companies assured that problem cases would not be overlooked. The Remedy/CRM tool also allowed AMs to escalate companies to a supervisor, or to refer them to CROB for preparation of a legal letter.

Figure 3. Response by companies with Account Managers has risen faster than for all companies since the 1997 Economic Census.<sup>1</sup>



While the legal action letters had a positive impact, it was AM training that made them effective. When the company representative receiving the letter called the Census Bureau, they encountered an AM who understood the company organization, was a master of the electronic reporting software, and was prepared to provide all necessary assistance to help the company complete its census reports.

#### **4. Improving the AM program for 2012**

It is clear that Account Managers helped large businesses achieve a high level of response, in a variety of ways. The challenge for the 2012 Economic Census will be to retain the good communication with businesses while identifying opportunities for further improvement.

Post-census focus groups have suggested improvements to the AM program for 2012. These include further improvement of information flow to AMs, better integration of census form mailing and response information, Remedy/CRM-based monitoring systems with more up-to-date information, better coordination between AMs and other survey analysts working with the same companies, and continued comprehensive training on census procedures, reporting resources, policies, and timing. Focus groups have said we should do pretty much the same things we did in 2007 – with some fine-tuning.

We will consider expanding the scope of the program for 2012, e.g. to include additional companies beyond the 1,200 companies with AMs in 2007. We also will explore development of ongoing relationships with businesses to include their current survey as well as census reporting. Initially we will focus on businesses that are important to particular surveys or sectors and have histories of poor or non- response.

For 2012 we will develop a dynamic link between the Remedy/CRM software and the business register, to provide a real-time view of business response. In addition, we will continue to work with AMs and their supervisors to improve the quality and usefulness management reports.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The lesson of the AM program is that a company-centric approach is effective, and for this reason the 2007 Account Manager Program can be viewed overall as an impressive success. In helping to bring in completed census report forms for 96 percent of AM company establishments, it made a critical contribution to the overall response rate for the census, its timeliness, and the quality of the data.

Several factors contributed to the program's success. Benefiting from the presence of staff with 2002 census experience, we improved planning and training, improved Remedy/CRM software, provided more timely and comprehensive information and assistance to AMs, and made sure that everyone took the AM program more seriously. The result was a response rate (96 percent) exceeding the original target for a larger number of AM companies.

#### **6. References**

- Marske, Robert A., "Improving Large Company Response to the Economic Census," *Proceedings of the Census Advisory Committee of the Professional Associations*, Washington, DC, October 1995.
- Marske, Robert A., "Promoting Business Response to the 2007 Economic Census," *Proceedings of the Census Advisory Committee of the Professional Associations*, Washington, DC, April 2008.
- Sudman, S., Willimack, D. K., and Nichols, E., and Mesenbourg, T. L., "Exploratory Research at the U.S. Census Bureau in the Survey Response Process in Large Companies," *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Establishment Surveys*, American Statistical Association, 2000.

Attachment 1 - 2007 Census - Major Milestones

Advance Mail packages - CEX	April 2007
AM Core training	April – May 2007
Managers’ Kick-off	May 1, 2007
AM Program Kick-off	May 16, 2007
AM Call #1	April – July 2007
AM “L” company mail out	Oct 2007
Call 2 & 3 Training	Oct 2007 – Mar 2008
AM Call #2	Oct 2007 – Feb 2008
Census Reports Due	Feb 12, 2008
AM Call #3.....AM Call #4	Feb 2008 – Sept 2008
“Getting Tough” with non-respondents	Mar 2008 & beyond
Census closeout	Oct 2008

Attachment 2 - Remedy/CRM Contact Management Software, Dashboard View

**Company Dashboard**

Likely to Refuse

**NEED HELP?**  
 Please Contact the CRM Staff @ x3-2547

LaunchPad
Refresh Dashboard
Disclosure Prohibited -- Title 13, U.S. Code
AM Software Help

**BR Headquarters**

Headquarters: TEST COMPANY 901

Alpha: 000901

ENT ID: 29292154321

CRM Analyst:

Census Acct Mgr: ROBERT MARSKE

Census Acct Mgr Phone: 301-763-6718

2007 Password: 21Q45x2Y 2007 Resp Rate:

View Headquarters

**Name & Address**

Alpha/Alpha-Part # or 0+SU EIN#: 000901

Register ID + (ENT, SPE, SU): 29292154321

Name 1 + : TEST COMPANY 901

Name 2 :

Attention :

Street : unknown

City : unknown State: UNKN Zip: unknown

Company Contact : Phone : Part Resp Rate :

Call 2 Contacted

CEX Received

ER Visit Completed

Activities/Interactions | Company Visits | Contacts | Surveys | Company Info | Company Parts | 2002 Activities/Interactions

Grant Extension | Create New Activity/Interaction

Last Update	Alpha - Part	Thread	Alert	Category	Summary	Notes
8/29/2008 9:28:37 AM	000901	2	Check	Econ Census Call	Call 2: Form Received? / ER Assistance Requ	Introduced myself to Mr. Jones. He has received the advance info materials
1/7/2008 3:38:22 PM	000901	1		Econ Census Call	Call 2: Form Received? / Spoke to Contact	updated task
8/30/2007 3:32:46 PM	000901	1		Econ Census Call	Call 1: AM Introduction / Spoke to Contact	
8/30/2007 3:18:39 PM	000901	1		Other	test icon change	test
8/30/2007 3:18:16 PM	000901	1		Econ Census Call	Call 1: AM Introduction / Spoke to Contact	test
8/15/2007 1:28:11 PM	00001	1	Check	Other	test email notify - 2	test email notify
12/4/2007 10:53:59 AM	00001	1	Check	Other	test email notify	test email notify
12/4/2007 10:53:52 AM	000901	2	Check	Other	blah blah blah	

Attachment 3 - Remedy/CRM Contact Management Software: Documenting Interactions

The screenshot displays the Remedy/CRM Contact Management Software interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'LaunchPad', 'Refresh Dashboard', 'Disclosure Prohibited -- Title 13, U.S. Code', 'AM Software Help', and '<< Go Back'. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- BR Headquarters:** A form with fields for Headquarters (TEST COMPANY 12), Alpha (000012), ENT ID (9002007003), CRM Analyst (LAURIE TORENE), Census Acct Mgr (LAURIE TORENE), and 2007 Resp Rate (301-763-2547).
- Name & Address:** Fields for Alpha/Alpha-Part # or 0+SU EIN# (000012), Register ID + (ENT., SPE., SU) (9002007003), Name 1 + (TEST COMPANY 12), Name 2, Attention (Chris Mass), Street (893 Place), City, State, Zip, and Company Contact (AMIE STONE, Phone 410-222-4567).
- Activity/Interaction Details:** A section for 'Contact Information' with fields for First Name (GLORIA), Last Name (SALAS), Phone (661-889-0011), and Email Address (gs@test12.com). It includes a 'Spoke to Contact' section with a category dropdown and a message text area containing details about an introduction to Ms. Salas.
- Email Reminder:** A section with a checked box for 'Check box to Create Email Reminder for later date [Optional]' and a subject line 'AM Reminder: ENITID 9002007003'.
- ER Assistance:** A section with a checkbox for 'Check box if ER Assistance Requested'.
- Likely to Refuse:** A section with a checkbox for 'Check box if Company is Likely to Refuse'.

A 'Field "Date"' calendar widget is open, showing the month of April 2007. The interface also features a 'Call 1 Contacted' and 'CEX Not Received' status indicator on the right side.

Attachment 4 - Remedy/CRM Contact Management Software – MIS  
 “You Manage What You Measure”

 <b>Managers HQ Report</b>											
	Company (#)	2007 % Resp	% ER Resp	2007 Ext.	Call1 Hot Cont	Call 2 Hot Cont	Call 3 Cont	Call 3 LVM	Call 3 Hot Cont	Call 4 Cont	Likely to Refuse
<b>GRAND TOTALS:</b>	1,225	84.07	73.63	81	153	196	853	74	49	429	44
<b>CSD</b>											
<b>DIVISION TOTALS:</b>	4	97.37	63.03	0	0	0	1	1	0		
Business Investment Branch(BIB)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	4	97.37	63.03	0	0	0	1	1	0		
<b>EPCD</b>											
<b>DIVISION TOTALS:</b>	179	79.31	63.28	12	76	73	60	6	21	26	3
Chief, EPCD(Chief, EPCD)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	1	98.25	0.00	0	0	1			0		
Assist Director For Econ Prgrm(Assist Director For Econ											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	11	73.55	56.44	0	2	1	9	0	0	4	
Economic Plan & Process Imprvmnt(EPPIS)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	1	75.00	0.00	0	0	1			1		
Edit & Micro Processing Branch(EMPD)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	2	100.00	99.58	0	0	2			0		
Electronic Reporting Branch(EROB)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	20	98.26	77.97	1	4	13	3	0	2		
Mailout & Data Capture Branch(MDCB)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	11	32.17	3.06	1	6	4	4	1	3		1
NPC Staff(NPC Staff)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	85	91.08	76.71	8	61	44	8	3	13		
Program Research & Methods Branch(PRMB)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	2	10.15	9.79	1	0	1	2	0	0		
Summary Statistics Processing Br(SSPB)											
<b>BRANCH TOTALS:</b>	3	98.67	97.33	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	