



Australian Government



# Program Delivery Case Study

March 2022

Implementation & Services

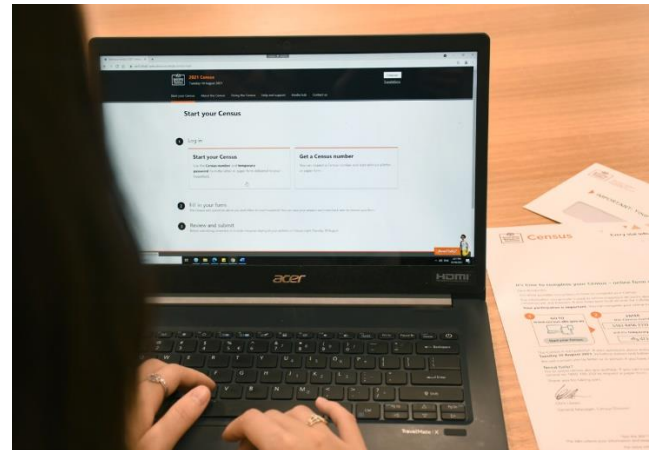


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The Census is one of the largest and most important statistical collections undertaken by the ABS and provides a snapshot of who we are, and how we are changing. The recent Census was held on Tuesday 10 August.

Across Australia, the scale of Census operations extends from the physical dimension—large distances, diverse climate, different terrain, to the people dimension—trust, cultural diversity, a common understanding of the purpose and value of the Census, and other important factors like verifying the quality of the data captured and looking after Census staff.



## How did the ABS help people complete the Census?

Participation in the Census is vitally important because data from the Census is used by community groups, businesses and governments to make important decisions. To ensure everyone could participate, the ABS worked with the public and community organisations to ensure people had access to the support they needed.

The Census form was available in several formats to ensure everyone had an opportunity to complete the Census. This included the option to complete online, by paper or with help from the ABS. Census staff were also locally recruited to help people in remote communities and people experiencing homelessness complete the Census.

For the first time, the ABS took a user-centred design approach to understand the needs, behaviours, experiential preferences, and barriers in completing the Census. This research was used to inform the design of the Census letter, the online form and contact materials about where to get help.

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People were encouraged to complete before Census night if they knew where they would be on Census night. This flexibility made it more convenient for people to complete and the ABS saw a higher early response rate than previous Censuses.

The Census website and online form were created to ensure they were accessible for as many people as possible. The website was designed to work with screen readers, keyboard navigation and a range of assistive technologies. The Census form also filtered questions so that only items relevant to the person were shown.

The ABS included options for people to log in and complete the form if they could not locate their Census letter – people could request a Census number online and complete the form at a time that was convenient for them.

Census information hubs, fill in the form and information sessions provided local help for people in their community. These sessions offered on-the-ground face-to-face support to make it easier for people to complete the Census.

## What Governance processes were involved?

Robust and effective governance was critical to ensuring the successful management and implementation of the 2021 Census Program. The Census Executive Board, chaired by the Australian Statistician and comprised of senior ABS staff and external representatives, provided oversight of the strategic direction and priorities for the 2021 Census Program.

In addition to the Census Executive Board, the ABS received specialist expertise and guidance on IT security, operations and integration.

Independent assurance processes facilitated the ABS in receiving advice and guidance on areas for improvement. This was an important addition to provide an objective, third party view of the Census progress, along with real-time assurance and views on the emerging risk and issues during Census operations.

## How did the Census partner with industry?

For the 2021 Census, the ABS took a partnership approach and worked closely with a range of community organisations, private and public sector specialists. The partnership approach enabled the ABS to access a depth of expertise required and provide additional assistance to help people complete the Census, more so than any previous Census.

The partnership approach resulted in the ABS working with over 50 private sector suppliers.

Key partnerships included:

- PwC in partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS) helped to build the 2021 Census digital service and website.
- the ABS implemented state of the art cyber security protections informed by the Australian Cyber Security Centre ensuring people's information was kept safe, secure and protected from cyber-attacks.
- Adecco supported the recruitment of 35,000 Census staff in cities, towns, and regional areas across all states and territories.
- Australia Post delivered 8.3 million approach letters, 2.7 million reminder letters, and returned nearly 2.5 million paper forms to the processing centre.
- Services Australia hosted the Census Contact Centre and managed nearly 650,000 calls during data collection.

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From a project and program management perspective, the ABS worked with partners in using a mixture of agile and waterfall approaches. **The holistic approach to project management combined with a continuous focus on improvement ensured that deliverables were achieved, issues were identified early and innovate ways to overcome barriers were implemented.**

## How did you adapt to the COVID-19 environment?

When the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in Australia in early 2020 and its impacts became known, the ABS began planning for the prospect of it affecting Census collection in 2021.

The ABS continuously monitored the changing COVID-19 environment to ensure that Census safety measures were up-to-date and met federal, state, and territory government guidelines and advice. A three step framework was established to inform when to restrict or remove face to face contact with the public.

The ABS also learnt from our counterparts internationally in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United State who also delivered a Census during the pandemic.

Overall the design of the Census meant that most people completed the Census online, with no in-person contact from the ABS. In locations where the ABS could not provide in-person support, alternative assistance was offered, including through the Census website, chatbot, online video guides in multiple languages and help over the phone.

People who were subject to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were still required to complete the Census. The ABS received many questions from the public about how to complete the Census if living within lockdown restrictions. Advice was provided through the Census website, social media channels and call centre about how to respond to questions related to study and work as a result of the change in circumstances.

The 2021 Census data will likely provide interesting stories about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Australia in how people worked, studied and travelled during this period.

## What is next for the Census?

The ABS will release data from the 2021 Census in three phases:

- in June 2022, key demographic, cultural diversity and health data will be released
- in October 2022, employment, educational qualifications and internal migration data will be released
- in early to mid-2023, complex data such as distance to work, socio-economic indexes for areas (SEIFA) and counts for people experiencing homelessness will be released.

Planning has already commenced for the next Census in 2026.