

Up for the Count: The U.S. Census Bureau delivers reliable, coordinated delivery of geographic data with Primavera

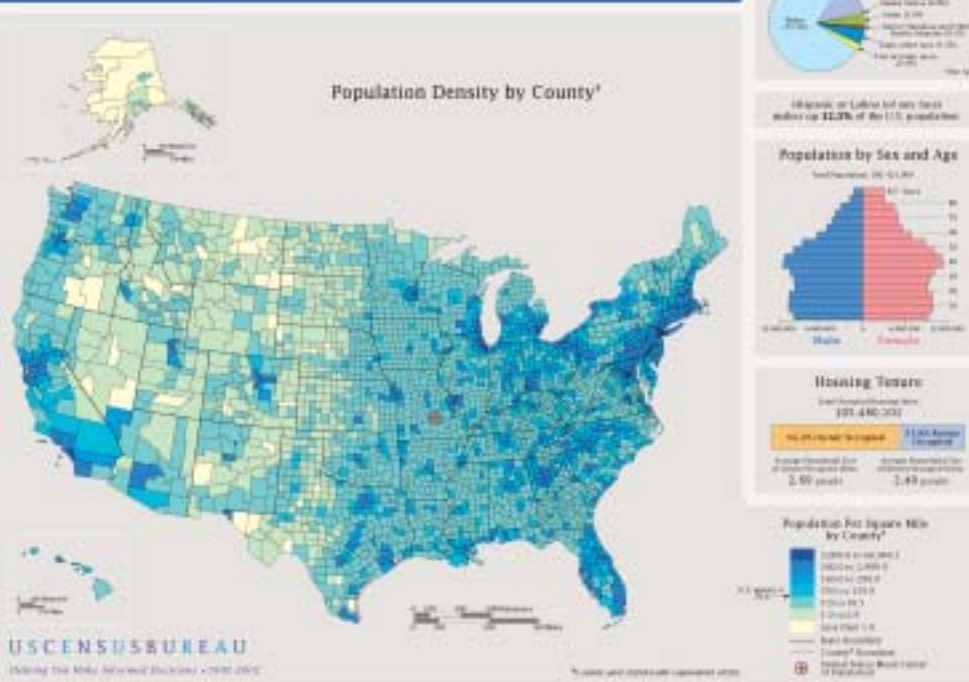
Project Management Highlights:

- Migrated from P3 to the latest version of Primavera
- Standardized project management practices

Project Statistics:

- 272 federal employees and 108 contractors
- 40 project managers

Census 2000: United States Profile



The U.S. Census Bureau does more than count people once every 10 years. As “the leading source of quality data about the nation’s people and economy,” the bureau collects and processes information year-round. Much of that information relies on classification of data coordinated through the Geography Division of the Census Bureau.

“I like to say that all roads lead to geography,” says Brian Scott, chief of the Geographic Programs Project Management Branch of the Census Bureau, “because data is only meaningful when applied to some geographic area, be it national, state, local, or tribal, tract, or block.”

The Geography Division creates, delivers, and updates reference files, digital and paper maps, address lists, and so on for divisions within the bureau, as well as for other

government organizations. For example, the Decennial Management Division (DMD) of the Census Bureau, which coordinates the once-a-decade census, might ask the Geography Division to provide a digital map and address list for a mobile computing device used by bureau workers who go door-to-door gathering information about people in the United States. The digital map instrument would include global positioning system (GPS) capabilities so that the workers, called enumerators, could accurately locate each residence and the division could, in turn, assign each address to a geographic area for tabulating the data.

To manage the provision of such geographic information, the Geography Division’s 272 federal employees and 108 contractors must deal with schedules, requirements, risks and other planning tasks. That level of coordination

requires technology with robust project management capabilities, which the Geography Division has found in Primavera software.

"We wanted more than a scheduling tool," says Scott. "In addition to planning and scheduling, we are now measuring earned value, and we have a Web presence for the management information system (MIS), which enables us to distribute access to the system across the organization via a secure intranet."

Doing More with Less

Throughout government and business, service divisions like the Geography Division are being asked to do more with less. "This puts the squeeze on applying a more rigorous project management framework around our everyday work," says Scott, "and involves improving the formalizing and documenting of our daily tasks."

The DMD of the Census Bureau had chosen Primavera Project Planner (P3) in the late 1990s to support planning and scheduling for the 2000 Census. Servicing the DMD, the Geography Division also used P3 to catalog and schedule census activities.

After completing the census, the Geography Division began planning for the work of the next decade. The division formed a team of representatives from among the 20 branches within the division to examine enabling technologies. "We looked at several solutions, but found the most recent version of Primavera to be a very powerful tool for project management," says Scott. "And we had the advantage of knowing P3."

Scott and his group turned to LaborLogix, a Primavera Solution Provider, to provide consulting services for the implementation of the new software, which is part of an ongoing system redesign. "We're redesigning our tried-and-true legacy systems, databases, and mapping system to make the latter more positionally accurate," says Scott, who explains that the Census Bureau was one of the first organizations to develop a digital mapping system. "At the same time, we must continue to deliver products and services on which our customers both inside and outside the bureau have come to rely."

Primavera also worked cooperatively with the Geography Division and LaborLogix to make the implementation a smooth one. As part of the process, project managers developed a wish list of capabilities they wanted, but were not included in the software, and relayed that to the developers at Primavera. In addition, LaborLogix interviewed branch managers to help ensure the project incorporated business processes into the implementation of the new software.

"It's akin to dismantling your house and constructing a new one while you're living in it," says Scott. By running the old software, then old and new simultaneously, and finally only Primavera, the Geography Division provided its customers with continuous service.

Training, of course, was vital. LaborLogix and Scott's team created a customized program to train 40 project managers on the Primavera solution onsite. And, for those interested in further refining their project management skills, the bureau sponsors attendance at project management courses at George Washington University.

Successful Project Management

Key business goals of the new Primavera implementation were to achieve executive-level vision into the status of projects across the division's 20 branches and to gain reliable, predictive schedules to ensure on-time deliverables, as well as to enable better coordination and collaboration among projects and people.

The realization of the goals is reflected in what the Geography Division calls "user success stories." For example, throughout the year, Census Bureau enumerators gather survey data, and project managers in the Geography Division must coordinate geographic support of those surveys. Web access to the software enables those managers to keep track of such projects, share information and determine where there are stalls or glitches. Because managers do not need to know how the underlying software works, the IT team focuses on service-related concerns instead of technology training.

The standardized updating cycle allows project managers to post reliable project data weekly on the intranet. The software automatically reschedules tasks as the user plugs in

new dates, so managers can see immediately which steps are taking too much time and can reschedule as necessary.

Repeatable Methodologies

In addition, in those cases in which a divisional task requires a number of steps that are identical to other tasks, the Geography Division can develop repeatable methodologies.

Ricardo Ruiz, chief of the Spatial Data Software Branch of the Geography Division, is using Primavera to manage a project involving proof-of-concept of GPS software. "We want to migrate our home-grown database applications that deal with spatial data to commercially available software," explains Ruiz.

Working with representatives from three other branches, Ruiz entered work breakdown structures and scheduling estimates into Primavera. "Now, without having to know how the software works, anyone working on the proof-of-concept project can enter into the software's timesheet module, via the intranet, the hours they're spending on each task," says Ruiz. "Multiple people have access to task information because sharing is easier. We can easily record who does what, when, and for how long, which will save me time when preparing the project's final report and product evaluation."

The Geography Division also uses Primavera to schedule project management tasks for providing address lists and reference files for the American Community Survey (ACS), which is designed to replace the long form of the Decennial Census in 2010. This survey gathers information every year to get a statistically significant – and more current – representation of the data the long form would gather.

Project managers in the Geography Division are also using the Primavera solution to aid in tasks such as assigning resources and budgets and tracking high-visibility and high-cost programs to analyze expected earned value. Some also use the risk management and document management components of Primavera. Their success is being watched closely by the DMD, as that division looks to move from P3 to the most recent version of Primavera to possibly manage the upcoming 2010 census.

"The trick is to work within the culture and move toward improving processes in controlled and measured increments, while demonstrating the value added," says Scott. "We are really just scraping the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we can do with Primavera. At the end of the day, we have to do things better and we have to deliver, so we're delving deeper and deeper into the software's capabilities."

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