

Need a job? Census hiring 15,000 in Houston

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People tired of endlessly posting job applications on the Web, wearing out their shoes at job fairs and yet still never landing a job, take heart.

The U.S. Census Bureau is now hiring 15,000 workers in the Houston area to assist in the massive undertaking that is the 2010 Census beginning in the spring.

The jobs are only temporary, some lasting through July. But with a struggling economy and with work hard to come by, any rush of jobs is a welcome sign. Just ask Marion Gibson.

The 26-year-old took a basic skills test Friday at Workforce Solutions on Stella Link in Houston in hopes of qualifying for a census job.

"It's been hard finding a job," Gibson said. "I'm a single parent of two young girls, and my mother died last month. I don't know if I'll be able to pay my rent."

The Census Bureau will be mailing out questionnaires to every household in the U.S. in March. Among job duties of the new hires in the Houston region will be to go to households who failed to mail back questionnaires and help them accomplish the task. They will also distribute the forms to rural areas that have no mailboxes or places like Bolivar Peninsula where homes are being rebuilt.

Weekend, evening work

Pay can range from \$8 to \$24 an hour, depending on a worker's geographic location and skills. The average starting pay for a census worker who knocks on doors ranges from \$11.25 an hour in Conroe to as much as \$17.50 an hour in central Houston.

"A majority of those being hired will be enumerators (census takers)," said Eduardo Guity, Houston's Census Bureau's spokesman. "They will go to work in the evenings and on weekends when people are home. We also will be adding secretaries and managers, all kinds of people."

Recruits must provide their own transportation but will be reimbursed for mileage. The jobs will be mostly positions of less than 30 hours per week and will last only a few weeks to a few months, he said.

"This job can be a good stepping stone to other positions because you are working for the government and pass an FBI check. That says something to your next employer," Guity said. "This is a good job for younger or older people if they are still active and mobile."

Test required

According to the latest data, the Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown metropolitan area's unemployment rate showed a slight improvement in November compared to the previous month. The rate dropped from 8.4 percent to 8.2 percent, although it is still much higher than the November 2008 rate of 5.4 percent.

Tanisha Ferdinand, an employment counselor at Workforce Solutions on Tidwell, who was assisting with testing that day, estimated 30 to 40 people were tested that day.

All Census applicants must pass a test that covers basic math, reading and organizational skills (a sample test can be found at www.2010censusjobs.gov) and FBI background check before they are interviewed for a position.

Applicants must register to begin the application process by calling 866-861-2010.