



American Statistical Association Statement on the Role of Data Experts within the Government, Especially during a Public Health Emergency

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Government officials face challenging decisions during this COVID-19 pandemic. To make good decisions, policymakers need timely, accurate, and clear reports based on the best available data and science. Professionals in statistics, data science, epidemiology and other fields are ideally suited to produce accurate and objective information to fuel evidence-based decision-making.

Scientific experts and policymakers best collaborate when scientists are able to apply their expertise unfettered and independent of political influence—and absent the fear of retaliation, regardless of the implications of their results on policy making. A healthy, effective collaborative environment requires that experts provide the most objective and best possible analyses, along with their full context. This allows policymakers and decision-makers to integrate the expert analyses with other considerations to arrive at judicious decisions. The process is entirely transparent.

Decision-making breakdowns occur when these collaborations fail and transparency dissipates. For example, when data visualizations are produced without input from the experts, errors or bias can easily appear, leading to misleading and potentially damaging public health consequences. When experts' data are taken out of their hands, their analyses politicized, or their expertise mocked—rather than valued—disinformation emerges. If experts have to fear for their livelihood when the integrity of the data and their evidence-based conclusions are challenged for purely political reasons, the entire populace suffers. When it becomes known that experts cannot freely and independently provide the best possible information and that policymakers spurn this information when making decisions, public confidence fades and public interests are endangered.

Scientists abide by high standards of conduct in their work. Statisticians, data scientists, epidemiologists, and other scientists who are members of the American Statistical Association (ASA) know to abide by [professional ethical standards](#). These standards not only demand a high level of professional integrity from experts, but also inform those who rely on their expertise about the ethical standards on which they can depend.

The ASA urges government officials to work collaboratively with scientific experts for the good of the people they serve. Data integrity, rigorous science, and good decisions go together. We stand ready to assist officials in identifying appropriate unbiased expertise.