

February 18, 2025

The Honorable David Schweikert  
Chair  
US Congress Joint Economic Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maggie Hassan  
Ranking Member  
US Congress Joint Economic Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Schweikert and Ranking Member Hassan,

We wish to draw your attention to a critical issue threatening our nation's economic statistical infrastructure—one that risks undermining economic decision-making and reducing efficiency in both the public and private sectors. Our federal statistical system is facing severe challenges due to pressing needs to modernize and lack of funds to secure its long-term future.

Federal economic statistics are primarily produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the US Census Bureau. All three agencies have had to reduce or propose cuts to programs or critical surveys as well as defer survey redesigns, transitions to internet data collection, and new products because of declining purchasing power, increasing data purchasing costs, declining response rates, and other challenges. We are gravely concerned that without intervention, these cuts will continue and even worsen, thus endangering our nation's statistical infrastructure.

The statistics provided by these agencies have long been integral to effective governance and policy. Informed changes, including decisions on government budgets and monetary policy, depend heavily on these data. A continued erosion of the quality and availability of economic statistics would harm not only governmental efficiency but also private-sector decision-making, where businesses rely on accurate data to understand economic conditions and create value for millions of Americans. For an assessment of the health of the entire US statistical system, see this 2024 report, *The Nation's Data at Risk - Meeting America's Information Needs for the 21st Century*.<sup>1</sup>

The statistics produced by these three agencies serve as the private sector's macroeconomic dashboard, offering critical insights into the health of the economy. Government statistics help U.S. companies identify and capitalize on industry trends and anticipate shifts in the behavior of their customers, helping them stay competitive globally. Understanding how the economy is currently performing—and how it may perform in the months and years ahead—shapes a wide range of business operations, from capital expenditures and workforce planning to scenario development and investment strategies. Industry-specific data is particularly valuable for identifying opportunities and addressing challenges within specific sectors, while geography-specific data guides decisions on where to establish new facilities or focus sales efforts. Without

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nation's Data at Risk—Meeting American's Information Needs for the 21st Century*. Default. Retrieved January 9, 2025, from <https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/the-nation's-data-at-risk-meeting-american's-information-needs-for-the-21st-century>

timely and accurate economic statistics, the private sector's ability to adapt to changing business conditions and effectively manage risks would be severely hindered.

The BEA had to discontinue in 2024 three statistical products and 24 tables, and delayed another product indefinitely, all due to budgetary pressures:<sup>2</sup> Among the programs cut were new statistics on the digital economy and highly valued near-real-time measures of consumer spending. The BLS announced in June that the sample size for the Current Population Survey – the source of the nation's monthly unemployment statistics – would need to be cut by 8% by the end of 2024 due to lack of funding.<sup>3</sup> While stop-gap funding postponed the cut,<sup>4</sup> the pause will be short lived without additional funding.<sup>5</sup> This reduction would result in less reliable, less certain data, and would reduce the ability to report on employment trends by region.

Federal economic statistics are at risk due to several interconnected factors.<sup>1</sup> First, the production of trusted and timely statistics – which includes being relevant, credible, accurate, and objective – is resource intensive, requiring extensive expertise and experience. Such work cannot be readily outsourced. Second, maintaining production and relevance of these statistics is a never-ending challenge because it entails measuring a constantly evolving economy and workforce in the face of various challenges that require continual research and innovation. Finally, these agencies have all lost purchasing power over the last several years. Since FY16, BEA has lost 16%, BLS, 11%, and the Census Current Surveys account, 5%. In that time, federal compensation rates have increased 30%.<sup>6</sup> The costs for data purchasing have also been rising. This leads to unwelcome consequences, such as BEA reducing its workforce by 12%, a major factor in its product cuts.

The statistical system clearly has high potential to innovate to meet changing demand for information. For example, statistical agencies reacted quickly after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic to urgent requests for timely data on jobs, health, crime, work locations, and many other important metrics. Congress provided short-term funding for new, high-frequency data, and the statistical system demonstrated its ability to quickly innovate and serve the needs of public and private decision makers.

However, the statistical agencies need sufficient support to be able to carry out plans to modernize their surveys and other statistical products. As noted above, cuts in operations and statistical products are

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/near-real-time-spending>; <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/digital-economy>; <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/health-care#>; <https://www.bea.gov/itable/discontinued-data-tables>; <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/integrated-macroeconomic-accounts>

<sup>3</sup> Bloomberg, "BLS Survey Cuts May Blur US Labor-Market Picture," June 26, 2024 (<https://www.piiie.com/commentary/op-eds/2024/bls-survey-cuts-may-blur-us-labor-market-picture>).

<sup>4</sup> Bloomberg, "US Government Pauses Plan to Cut Sample of Critical Jobs Survey," November 1, 2024 (<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/business/company-news/2024/11/01/us-government-pauses-plan-to-cut-sample-of-critical-jobs-survey/>).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-06-07/us-jobs-household-survey-size-to-be-cut-amid-budget-constraints>

<sup>6</sup> See, [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1\\_xt8ol2neZyTwaZvtyQOtujzuHnjemZPwPuYVsEELr0/edit?gid=131887528#gid=131887528](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_xt8ol2neZyTwaZvtyQOtujzuHnjemZPwPuYVsEELr0/edit?gid=131887528#gid=131887528), tab 3, line 19.

occurring now. Indeed, we run the risk of following other nation's statistical systems into a fraught era of stuttering performance. The UK's current struggles with its employment statistics highlight the risks involved. Sharp declines in response rates for its Labor Force Survey without alternative data sources sufficiently developed and researched raises serious doubts about the quality of the UK employment statistics.<sup>7</sup>

The interconnectedness of these agencies' programs also poses a risk for federal economic statistics. For example, the Census Bureau's business surveys are the primary inputs into BEA's National Income and Product Accounts, as well as its annual input-output tables. BEA's quarterly and annual estimates of Gross Domestic Product, which are among the most closely watched principal indicators of the strength of the U.S. economy, are founded on Census Bureau data. The BLS uses Census data for its estimates of labor productivity, which measure prospects for rising living standards, as well as its Producer Price Indexes (PPI);<sup>8</sup> the PPIs are in turn used by BEA in its estimates of real (inflation-adjusted) GDP.<sup>9</sup> The Federal Reserve Board uses Census Bureau manufacturing data to compile its Index of Industrial Production.<sup>10</sup> In other words, cuts to one agency's programs can have significant downstream effects.

Census programs overall face challenges as a result of its stagnant funding. For example, the agency is depleting resources it needs to conduct the 2027 Economic Census, advance operations supporting the 2030 Decennial Census, and deploy the Data Ingest and Collection for the Enterprise (DICE) program. New initiatives proposed for FY 2025, such as stabilizing and modernizing the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the Population Estimates Program, are also delayed and jeopardized.

Unless the current trends – i.e., declines in purchasing power and staff – are reversed, we believe these agencies will have to make further cuts because of the labor intensity of their work, the rising costs of data, and mandatory pay raises. The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE), Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) program, and National Longitudinal Survey are among the BLS programs most at risk. With low and declining response rates, the CE and JOLTS have been proposed for modernization and upgrades to improve timeliness and granularity for several years, but Congress has not funded needed upgrades. As you know, CE is a key input to the Consumer Price Index and Poverty indexes and JOLTS is a measure of the unmet demand for labor and therefore complements the employment rate to provide a better understanding of the US job market dynamics. Such cuts could in turn undermine major economic and policy decisions and raise inefficiency in the public and private sectors.

Thank you for your consideration. Please direct any questions on this letter to American Statistical Association Director of Science Policy Steve Pierson: [spierson@amstat.org](mailto:spierson@amstat.org).

## ORGANIZATIONS

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/09/business/britain-jobs-data.html?searchResultPosition=1>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/pdf/ppi-20111028.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/resources/methodologies/nipa-handbook/pdf/chapter-03.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g17/lpNotes.htm>

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American Statistical Association  
Asian American Federation  
Asian American Organizing Project  
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Association for Public Policy Analysis and  
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operative for Population Estimates and for  
Population Projections  
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Massachusetts, Amherst  
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SocialExplorer Inc.  
SRR Consulting  
State International Development Organizations  
(SIDO)  
Statistics Department, California Polytechnic  
State University  
Steering Committee Federal State Cooperative on  
Population Estimates (FSCPE)  
Twin Cities Research Group  
UC Riverside Center for Community Solutions

USAFacts  
VOICES for Alabama's Children  
The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment  
Research  
Washington Center for Equitable Growth  
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy  
Wilder Foundation  
Wilder Research  
Women Employed  
Workplace Justice Lab

### **INDIVIDUALS\***

\*The signer's affiliation is only for identification purposes and does not imply the endorsement of the signer's company, institution, or university.

John M Abowd, Edmund Ezra Day Professor emeritus, Cornell University\*

Katharine G. Abraham, Distinguished University Professor, Department of Economics, University of  
Maryland\*

Joelle Abramowitz, Co-director, Michigan Federal Statistical Research Data Center, University of Michigan\*

Jason Abrevaya, Professor of Economics, The University of Texas at Austin\*

Jennifer Adams, Consultant, JCAAdams Economics\*

Pam Adams, Retired

Alan Agresti, Statistics department, University of Florida\*

Tanweer Akram, Senior Economist, Independent Scholar\*

Krishna Akundi, Research Manager, Maryland Department of Planning\*

Randy Albelda, Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts Boston\*

Zachary Albert, Assistant Professor of Politics, Brandeis University\*

Sylvia A Allegretto, Senior Economist, Center for Economic & Policy Research\*

Daniel Altman, Founder, North Yard Analytics LLC\*

Skanda Amarnath, Executive Director, Employ America\*

Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat, Professor of Economics, Barnard College\*

Dr. Margaret L. Andersen, Sociology, University of Delaware\*

Karen Anderson, Former Chief of Staff, White House Council of Economic Advisers\*

Soren Anderson, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Michigan State University\*

Sarah Angell, Research Associate, PHI\*

Armando Anzellini, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, Lehigh University\*

Hannah Archambault, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Fresno State, Fresno State\*

Kelly Asche, Senior Researcher, Center for Rural Policy and Development\*

Michael Ash, Economics, School of Public Policy, Energy Transition Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Kiran Asher, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst\*

Marissa Ashner, PhD, Biostatistician / Instructor, Dept of Biostatistics & Bioinformatics, Duke University\*

Fred Ashton, Director of Competition Policy, American Action Forum\*

Algernon Austin, Director for Race and Economic Justice, Center for Economic and Political Research\*

Anthony Babinec, Principal, AB Analytics\*

Daniel Bachman, George Washington University / Herman Stekler Research Program on Forecasting, Affiliate Professor\*

Ruediger Bachmann, Professor of Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Heidi Bailey, Lecturer, Marketing Department, University of Massachusetts\*

Dean Baker, senior economist, Center for Economic and Policy Research\*

Kermit Baker, Chief Economist, The American Institute of Architects\*

Deborah Balk, Director, CUNY Institute for Demographic Research\*

Robyn Ball, Senior Computational Scientist,

Hailey Ballard, Graduate student - Department of Population Health Sciences & Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Sarah Bana, Assistant Professor, Argyros College of Business and Economics, Chapman University\*

Chris Barber, Economic & Community Development Specialist, Greater Nashville Regional Council\*

Jake Barnes, Research Project Manager, Workplace Justice Lab@Rutgers University\*

Felipe Barrera-Osorio, Associate Professor of Public Policy, Education, and Economics, Vanderbilt University\*

Timothy J. Bartik, Senior Economist, Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

Robin Bartlett, Emerita Professor of Economics, Denison University\*

Joanne Basta, Senior Research Associate, LeCroy & Milligan Associates\*

Alvin Bauman US citizen

Mary Ryan Baumann, Assistant Professor, Depts of Population Health Sciences and Biostatistics & Medical Informatics, University of Wisconsin - Madison\*

William W Beach, Former Commissioner of Labor Statistics at BLS, William Beach, LLC\*

Edward Beaver, Research Product Developer, Allegis Group\*

Elizabeth Beckett, Student, Northeastern University\*

Jennifer Beier, Lead designer, print, Omnicom production\*

Katherine Bell, Analytics & Information Systems Manager, CGR\*

Hiram Beltrán-Sánchez, Professor, UCLA\*

Gabriela Vazquez Benitez, Research and Evaluation Division, HealthPartners Institute\*

Avner Ben-Ner, Professor, University of Minnesota\*

Grace Benninger, Spatial Analyst, Northwester Indiana Regional Planning Commission\*

Virginia Bernal, Retired RN, University of California Irvine Medical Center\*

Jordan Berne, Department of Economics, University of Michigan\*

Richard Berner, Professor emeritus and Co-Director, Volatility and Risk Institute, NYU Stern School of Business\*

Daniel Bernhofen, Professor of International Economics, American Economic Association\*

Laura T Bernhofen, Senior Professorial Lecturer Department of Mathematics and Statistics, American University, American Statistical Association, Mathematical Association of America\*

David W Berson, Chief Economist, Cumberland Advisors\*

Alan Berube, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Brookings Metro, Brookings Institution\*

Richard Bilsborrow, Ph.D., Research Professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill\*

David Birkholz, MN SDC/BIDC Coordinator, RET, State of MN\*

Marianne Bitler, Professor, Department of Economics, UC Davis\*

Francine Blau, Professor of Economics, Emeritus, Cornell University\*

Pamela Bodden, Graduate student, Kairos University\*

Courtney Boen, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Population Studies and Training Center, Brown University\*

Jennifer Boettcher, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University and voting citizen\*

Mitchell Boice, PhD Student in Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Irina Bondarenko, Statistician Lead, Department of Biostatistics, School of Public Health, University of Michigan\*

Tonya Boone, Professor, William & Mary\*

Philip S Boonstra, PhD, Associate Professor, Biostatistics, University of Michigan\*

Blaise Bornhorst, Sr. Engagement Manager, ConstructConnect\*

Kathy Bostjancic, Chief Economist, Nationwide\*

John Bound, Professor, Department of Economics and ISR, University of Michigan\*

Sebastien Bradley, School of Economics, Drexel University\*

Jennie Brand, Professor, UCLA\*

Rosemary Braun, Professor, Northwestern University\*

Matt Brems, Chair, Statistics Without Borders\*

Maya Brennan, Doctoral student, University of the District of Columbia\*

Laura Briggs, Professor, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies and History, University of Massachusetts\*

Evelyn Brodtkin, Emerita prof., University of Chicago\*

Susan Brower, Minnesota State Demographer, State of Minnesota, State Demographic Center\*

Charles Brown, Professor Emeritus (Economics), Research Professor Emeritus (Survey Research Center), University of Michigan\*

Dr. Jonathan Brown, Research and Project Management Analyst - University Survey and Assessment Services, University of Minnesota\*

Hayley Brown, Research Associate, Center for Economic and Policy Research\*

Mark Brown, Adjunct Professor, Statistics, Columbia University\*

Robert Brusca, Chief Economist, FAO Economics\*

Brielle Bryan, Department of Sociology, Rice University\*

Jordan Grey Bryan, Postdoctoral trainee, Department of Biostatistics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill\*

Thomas Buchmueller, Professor of Business Economics and Public Policy, Ross School of Business,  
University of Michigan\*

Elaine Buckberg, Salata Institute for Climate and Sustainability, Harvard University\*

Lindsey Bullinger, Associate Professor, Georgia Institute of Technology\*

Patrick Burns, Senior Researcher, Economic Roundtable\*

Rachel Burten, Department of Anthropology, Ph.D, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Benjamin Bushong, Associate Professor, Economics, Michigan State University\*

Jonathan Buttle, Research Program Specialist, California Department of Finance, Demographic Research  
Unit\*

Mauricio Caceres, PhD Candidate, Brown University\*

Henggao Cai, Software Engineer

Jorge Calderon, Data Analyst, IBI\*

C A Callies, Chief Investment Officer, Independent consultancy\*

Mary Campbell, Director, Texas Federal Statistical Research Data Center\*

Beatriz Del Campo-Carmona, RESEARCH ECONOMIST, EBRC-UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA\*

Jingran Cao, Biostatistician, HealthPartners\*

Michael Carey, Chief Economist US (retired), Chief US Economist credit Agricole corporate and investment  
bank (Retired)\*

Craig Carpenter, Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics, Michigan  
State University\*

Joseph Carpenter, Director, PwC LLP\*

Deborah Carr, A&S Distinguished Professor of Sociology, and Director, Center for Innovation in Social  
Science, Boston University\*

Joseph Carson, Chief Economist, Retired, AllianceBernstein\*

Shannon Cavanagh, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology, University of Texas\*

Grace Chan, Assistant Professor, Departments of Psychiatry and Public Health Sciences, University of  
Connecticut School of Medicine\*

Anand K. Chandarana, Director - People Analytics & Insights, Cencora\*

Scott Chasalow, Director, Translational Bioinformatics Methodology, Retired\*

Debipriya Chatterjee, Senior Economist, Community Service Society of New York\*

Mrinmoyee Chatterjee, Economics, Institute for Women's Policy Research\*

Abraham Chavez, Sr. Data Scientist, Gaming\*

Katherine Cheng, Evans School of Public Policy & Governance, University of Washington\*

Jenna Christensen, Assistant Professor of Molecular Biosciences, Northwestern University\*

Wendy M. Christensen, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Sociology, William Paterson University\*

Brandyn Churchill, Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Policy, American University\*

Kailin Clarke, Principal Economist, Amazon\*

Richard Clayton, Senior Economist, Clayton Economics\*

Michael Clemens, Professor of Economics, George Mason University\*



Lara Cleveland, Principal Research Scientist, Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation, University of Minnesota\*

Gerald D. Cohen, Chief Economist and Research Professor, Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill\*

Joel E. Cohen, Abby Rockefeller Mauze Professor of Populations, The Rockefeller University\*

Liz Cohen, Individual

Emma Cohn, Research Assistant, Economic Policy Institute\*

Charles Coleman, Consultant, Self\*

Cynthia Colen, Department of Sociology, Ohio State University\*

Paul Collins, Professor of Legal Studies and Political Science, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Jonathan Conning, Department of Economics, Hunter College, City University of New York\*

Clifford Cook, independent consultant\*

Leda Cooks, Dept. of Communication, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Sean P Corcoran, Associate Professor of Public Policy and Education, Vanderbilt University\*

Lorraine Cordeiro, Professor, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Sarah Cordes, Associate Professor of Policy, Organizational, and Leadership Studies, Temple University\*

Kimberly Cordova, Enablement Manager, Docusign\*

Michael Corey, Public historian, University of Minnesota\*

David J Corliss, PhD, Principal Data Scientist, Grafham Analytics\*

Julia Coronado, President, MacroPolicy Perspectives\*

Shelley Correll, Professor, Stanford University\*

David A. Cort, Professor, University of Massachusetts\*

Dora L. Costa, Professor, University of California, Los Angeles\*

Shelia Cotton, Professor, Sociology and Communication, Clemson\*

David Couper, Professor, Department of Biostatistics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill\*

William Craighead, Program Director, UCCS Economic Forum, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs\*

Aaron Crandall, director, social science research services, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Joshua Croff, Data Analyst, Metropolitan Transportation Commission\*

Rev. Jennifer Crow, Senior Minister, First Universalist Church\*

Mario J Crucini, Jerry and Rosie Semler Chair in Economics, Purdue University\*

Amy Crews Cutts, President and Chief Economist, AC Cutts and Associates LLC\*

Mark Czarnolewski, Ph.D., retired, Fed 27 years\*

Gregory Daco, Chief Economist

Stuti Das, PhD Candidate, Sociology, Boston University\*

Carolyn Davies, Lecturer, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, UMass Amherst\*

Jerry Davis, Professor, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan\*

Katherine Davis, Consulting Biostatistician

Owen Davis, Research Fellow, Siegel Family Endowment\*

Eric J. Daza, Founder and Chief Editor, Stats-of-1\*

Kris De Welde, Professor, College of Charleston\*

Francesca Degiuli, Associate Professor, Fairleigh Dickinson University\*

Irina Degtiar, Statistician

Cynthia Deitch, Associate Professor Emerita of Sociology, George Washington University\*

Shiloh Deitz, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Saint Louis University\*

Tim DeLuca, Assistant Professor in Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences, UMass\*

Sonalde Desai, Distinguished University Professor Emerita, University of Maryland College Park\*

Thomas deWolf, Individual Citizen

Virginia deWolf, Retired taxpayer

Kate E Doan, Math and Science Teacher, Brightmont Academy\*

Carlos Dobkin, Professor, Economics Department, UC Santa Cruz\*

Cynthia L Doniger

Julia Drew, Director of US Microdata, Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation, IPUMS, University of Minnesota\*

Michelle Driscoll, Associate Professor, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Northwestern University\*

Catherine Durso, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, University of Denver\*

Eva Dziadula, PhD, Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Randall Eberts, Senior Researcher, W.E Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

Mads Edmiston, Sr. Manager, Program Operations, General Assembly\*

Mieke Eeckhaut, Associate Professor, Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of Delaware\*

Ronald G Ehrenberg, Irving m Ives Professor Emeritus of ILR and Economics, Cornell University\*

Ingrid Gould Ellen, Paulette Goddard Professor of Urban Policy and Planning, NYU Wagner\*

Jordan Ellenberg, Department of Mathematics, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Brandon Eller, Senior Product Manager, Amazon\*

Nicholas Emery-Xu, PhD candidate, Department of Economics, UCLA\*

Susan Endres, Private citizen/voter

Clare Epstein

Gerald Epstein, Professor of Economics and Co-Director, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Dawn Erlandson, Director of Biostatistics

Liz Evans, PhD, Professor, Department of Health Promotion & Policy, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Vanessa Carter Fahnestock, Project Manager, USC Equity Research Institute\*

Daryl Fairweather, Chief economist, Redfin\*

Cristiana Falvo, Geospatial Analyst, Environmental Consulting\*

Leif B. Farr, GIS Coordinator, Mendocino County Government\*

Myra Marx Ferree, Alice H. Cook Professor of Sociology Emerita, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Deborah M Figart, Distinguished Professor Emerita of Economics, Stockton University\*

Kelsey Figone, Economics PhD student, UCLA\*

Alissa Fishbane, Managing Director, Ideas42\*

Catherine Fitch, Associate Director, Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation, University of Minnesota\*

Helen Flannery, Associate Fellow, Institute for Policy Studies\*

Martin Fleming, Research Scientist, MIT CSAIL FutureTech\*

Sarah Flood, Research Professor, Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation; Research Scientist, IPUMS Center for Data Integration; Director, Life Course Center, University of Minnesota\*

Alfonso Flores-Lagunes, Vice President and Director of Research, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

Nadia Y. Flores-Yeffal, Associate Professor of Sociology, Texas Tech University\*

Andrew Flowers, Chief economist, Appcast\*

Paula Fomby, Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania\*

Pascal Frank, PhD Student, Department of Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Robert J. Franzese, Jr., Professor & Associate Chair of Political Science, University of Michigan\*

Fatima Frausto, Doctoral Candidate, The University of Texas at San Antonio\*

Adrianne Frech, Department of Social Medicine, Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine\*

Dr. Callie Freitag, Assistant Professor of Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Mindy Fried, Principal, Arbor Consulting Partners\*

Ari Friedman, Assistant Professor (Tenure Track), Emergency Medicine, Medical Ethics and Health Policy, University of Pennsylvania\*

Steven Friedman, Managing Director, Mackay Shields\*

Laura Friesenborg, Institutional Effectiveness

Darcy Fudge, Assistant Professor, Strategy and Entrepreneurship, College of Business, Sacramento State\*

Shana Gadarian, Department of Political Science, Syracuse University\*

Misael Galdámez, Senior Research Analyst, UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute\*

Kenneth R. Gallager, Principal Planner, New Hampshire State Data Center\*

Natalie Gallagher, Principal Economist, Board\*

Byron Gangnes, Professor Emeritus of Economics, University of Hawaii\*

Rebecca Garvin, Business & Technology, Community College of Philadelphia\*

John R. Gawalt, Director (retired), National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics\*

James Mark Gbeda, Research Economist, Western Washington University\*

Ryan Gedney, Labor economist, Self employed\*

Lisa A. Gennetian, Professor of Public Policy, Duke University\*

Karen Gershowitz, President, Strategic Action Inc.\*

Matt Giani, Research Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Texas at Austin\*

Chloe Gibbs, Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Diane Gibson, Professor, Marx School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College - City University of New York\*

Jessica Gibson, Editor, Bankrate\*

Sam Giffin, Principal Product Manager, Gordian\*

Ellen D. Gilbert, DLS, Columbia University, 1992

Diana Gillooly, Executive Editor, Mathematical Sciences, Princeton University Press\*

Donna Ginther, Professor of Economics, University of Kansas\*

Lauren Girardin, Communications Consultant, Lauren Girardin Consulting\*

Laura Giuliano, Professor of Economics, UC Santa Cruz\*

Jennifer Glass, Centennial Commission Professor of Liberal Arts, Dept. of Sociology, University of Texas, Austin\*

Lauren Godding, Director of Strategy and Engagement, MA Department of Economic Research\*

Stephen Godfrey, Co-Founder, Numantic Solutions\*

Joanne Golann, Associate Professor of Public Policy and Education, Vanderbilt University\*

Lonnie Golden, Social Science, Business and Education, Penn State University\*

Miriam Goldfein

Paul Goldsmith-Pinkham, Associate Professor of Finance, Yale University\*

Bridget Goosby, Professor of Sociology, University of Texas at Austin\*

Yuriy Gorodnichenko, Professor, UC Berkeley\*

Robert Gould, Teaching Professor, UCLA\*

Ed Gracely, Associate Professor, Drexel University\*

Karen Graham, Consultant, Karen Graham Consulting\*

Elizabeth Gray, Department of Preventive Medicine, Northwestern University\*

John V Gray, Professor, Fisher College of Business, Operations and Business Analytics Department, The Ohio State University\*

Marcello Graziano, Senior Researcher and Associate Director, Ruralis and University of Connecticut\*

Brice Green, PhD Student, MIT Sloan School of Business, MIT\*

Edith-Marie Green, PhD Student, Population Health Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Keisha L. Green, Associate Professor and Director of Civic Engagement and Research, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Michelle Green, Chief Economist, Board\*

Julie Gressley, PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University\*

Nels Grevstad, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Metropolitan State University of Denver\*

Maryclare Griffin, Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Harold D Grotevant, Professor Emeritus, Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

David Grusky, Professor of Sociology, Stanford University\*

Andrew Guckes, Chief Economist, ConstructConnect\*

Audrey Guo, Assistant Professor of Economics, Santa Clara University\*

Sanjiv Gupta, Associate Professor, Sociology, UMass-Amherst\*

Michael K. Gusmano, Associate Dean and Professor, Lehigh University\*

Peter Guttorp, Professor emeritus of Statistics, Quantitative Ecology and Resource Management, and Urban Planning, University of Washington\*

Steven J. Haider, Professor and Department Chair, Michigan State University\*

Claudia Halbac, Adjunct Assistant Professor Political Economy, Columbia University\*

Galina Hale, Professor of Economics, UC Santa Cruz and NBER\*

Matthew Hall, Director of Cornell Population Center; Professor of Public Policy, Cornell University\*

Douglas Hall, PhD, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission\*

Maralyn Hamaker, Not in academia, Individual citizen\*

Dan E Hamilton, Economics, California Lutheran University\*

Abbey Hammell, Survey Researcher, University Survey and Assessment Services, University of Minnesota\*

George W. Hammond, Ph.D., Economic and Business Research Center, Director and Research Professor,  
Economic and Business Research Center, The University of Arizona\*

Frank Handler, Retired\*

Ben Hanowell, Private citizen

Carly Hanson, Cartographer, SRF\*

David J. Harding, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology, UC Berkeley\*

Matt Harris, Economics and Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research, University of Tennessee\*

Richard W. Hass, PhD, Associate Professor, College of Population Health, Thomas Jefferson University\*

Rudolf Hauser, economist (retired),

Maurine Haver, CEO, Haver Analytics\*

Alexander Rossell Hayes, Senior Data Scientist, YouGov America\*

Mark D. Hayward, Professor of Sociology and Centennial Commission Professor in the Liberal Arts,  
University of Texas at Austin\*

Ilana Hebert, Anthropology, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Diana Hechavarría, Professor entrepreneurship, Babson college\*

Colleen Heflin, Profess of Public Administration and International Affairs and Senior Associate in the Center  
for Policy Research, Syracuse University\*

Mark Heise, Director, Biostatistics, CSL Behring\*

Susan Helper, Professor of Economics, Case Western Reserve Univ\*

Adam S. Hersh, Ph.D., Senior Economist, Economic Policy Institute\*

Brad Hershbein, Senior Economist and Deputy Director of Research, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment  
Research\*

Rosanna Hertz, Professor of Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies, Wellesley College\*

Stephen Herzenberg, Executive Director, Keystone Research Center\*

Andrew Hess, PhD Candidate, Economics, University of California Los Angeles\*

Robert Hest, Senior Research Fellow, SHADAC, University of Minnesota\*

Kathryn Hexter, Associate, Cleveland State University\*

Christopher Hodge, Chief US Economist, Natixis CIB\*

Simon Hoellerbauer, Lecturer, Data Analytics and Computational Social Science, University of  
Massachusetts Amherst\*

Richard Holden, Owner, Vintage Arts\*

Tracie Holder, Filmmaker, Self-employed\*

Oscar Holmes IV, Associate Professor of Management, Rutgers University-Camden\*

Harry J. Holzer, LaFarge Professor of Public Policy, Georgetown University\*

Michal Horný, Assistant Professor of Health Policy and Management, Department of Health Promotion & Policy, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Charles Hosford, Statistician, signing as an individual\*

John Hosp, Professor of Special Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Elliot Huang, Principal Data Scientist, Metropolitan Transportation Commission\*

Ellen Hughes-Cromwick, HC Partners LLC\*

Paul Hughes-Cromwick, Independent Health Policy Consultant\*

Fred Hulting, Principal Consultant, Hulting Partners LLC\*

David Hummels, Distinguished Professor of Economics, Dean Emeritus, Purdue University\*

Constance Hunter, Chief Economist, Economist Intelligence Unit\*

Nick Huntington-Klein, Assistant Professor of Economics, Department of Economics, Albers School of Business and Economics, Seattle University\*

William Reuben Hurst, Smith Business School - M&O Department, The University of Maryland\*

Scott Imberman, Professor of Economics and Education Policy, Michigan State University\*

Elisabeth Infield, Professor of Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Hiromi Ishizwa, Sociology, George Washington University\*

Alan Jackson, Data scientist, Episcopal Relief & Development\*

Karen Jacques Ph.D, Retired

Sonia Jaffe, Economics researcher, Microsoft Research\*

Sahara James, MBA in Sustainability, Kinetic Communities Consulting\*

Tyler G. James, Assistant Professor, University of Michigan\*

David Jan, Senior Economist, Boston University\*

Chris Jansen, Geographer, Chris Jansen Consulting, LLC\*

Lorre Jay, Instructor, Montana State University\*

Mervin Jebaraj, Director, CBER, University of Arkansas\*

Jacob Jensen, Trade Policy Analyst, American Action Forum\*

Brian Jersky, Provost Emeritus, California State University, Long Beach\*

Amy Johnson, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Lehigh University\*

Robert C. Johnson, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Timothy Johnson, Senior Portfolio Manager

Elaina Johns-Wolfe, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Saint Louis University\*

Christopher Jones, Senior Systems Software Engineer, M.S. Computer Science

Lauren Jones, Product marketer, Corelogic\*

Jeffrey N Jonkman, Associate Professor of Statistics, Grinnell College\*

Cara Joyce, Biostatistician, Loyola University Chicago\*

Tom Juravich, Professor, Umass Amherst\*

Joshua Kaiser, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Laurel Kaish, Assistant Research Administrator, Northwestern University\*

Mihir Kakara, Assistant Professor,

Jason Kamilar, Professor, University of Massachusetts\*

Michelle Kaminski, Associate Professor, School of Human Resources and Labor Relations, Michigan State University\*

Matheu Kaneshiro, Data Scientist, Department of Health Services, WI\*

Kory Kantenga, Ph.D., Head of Economics, Americas, LinkedIn\*

Noula Karaszi, Anthropology Department, Sonoma State University\*

Julia Karon, Evans School of Public Policy & Governance, University of Washington\*

Dan Kasprzyk, Consultant, retired\*

Paul Kasriel, Founder, Econtrarian LLC\*

Peter Kaufmann, Associate Dean of Research, Professor, School of Integrated Health Sciences, University of Nevada Las Vegas\*

Harleen Kaur, Process Scientist, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals\*

Danielle Kavanagh-Smith, Economic Graph Research Institute, LinkedIn\*

Autumn Kaylor, Harris Baseball Softball, Inc.\*

Ian Kennedy, Data Scientist II, Building Products Research, John Burns Research and Consulting\*

Lee Kennedy-Shaffer, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Biostatistics, Yale University\*

Leyla Keough, Director of Faculty Development, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Michael Kevane, Professor of Economics, Santa Clara University\*

Sania Khan, Founder, Inflection Point Strategy\*

Kelley Kidwell, Professor of Biostatistics, University of Michigan\*

Jean Kimmel, Professor of Economics, Western Michigan University\*

Jessica King, Research and Evaluation Associate, PHI\*

William King, School of Economic Sciences, Washington State University\*

Jeff Kissel, Manager of Supply Chain Analytics, Panera Bread\*

Aaron Klein, Miriam K Carliner Chair and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution\*

Ken Kleinman, Biostatistics and Epidemiology, UMass Amherst\*

Valerie Klomparens, Research Analyst, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

James R. Knaub, Jr., Last held: Lead Mathematical Statistician, Retired US Government Employee\*

Masha Kocherginsky, Professor, Northwestern University\*

Deni Koenhems, Economist, Morning Consult\*

John R. Kort, Administrator

Dr. Ellen Ernst Kossek, Basil S. Turner Distinguished Professor of Management Emerita, Purdue University\*

Philip Kovacevic, M.S. DAV Student, CUNY Graduate Center\*

Alexander Kraieski, Data Scientist/Software Developer, Agility ERP\*

Laura Kramer, Professor Emerita of Sociology, Montclair State University\*

John Kubale, Research Assistant Professor; ICPSR, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, University of Michigan\*

Erica L. Groshen, Senior Economic Advisor, Cornell University\*

Laura Lackner, Associate Professor of Molecular Biosciences, Northwestern University\*

Johanna Lacoe, Research Director, California Policy Lab, University of California, Berkeley\*

David Lam, Emeritus Professor of Economics, University of Michigan\*

Susan Lambert, Professor Emerita, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, University of Chicago\*

Brady Lamson, Data Science Intern, Clifton Larson Allen\*

David Ian, Economics, American Chemistry Council\*

Dr. Mark Lancaster, Data Scientist, Independent Contractor\*

Nicola Lancki, Biostatistician, Department of Preventive Medicine, Northwestern University, Feinberg School of Medicine, Department of Preventive Medicine\*

Steve Landefeld, Former Director, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Self Employed\*

Reid D. Landes, Professor of Biostatistics, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences\*

Molly Monahan Lang, Associate Teaching Professor of Sociology and Criminology, Pennsylvania State University\*

Kenneth Langa, Professor of Internal Medicine, University of Michigan\*

Murad Laradji, 2nd year Medical Student, College of Medicine, University of Tennessee, College of Medicine\*

Annette Lareau, Professor, University of Pennsylvania\*

Cathy Latham, Researcher, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency\*

Geoffrey Laurence

Elizabeth Lawrence, Department of Sociology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas\*

M Cary Leahey, Principal, Independent consultant\*

Dr. Bryan Lenzo, SVP of HR, Business Intelligence, & PMO, Wallick Communities\*

Deborah Leonard, Individual\*

Margaret Levenstein, Professor and Director, ICPSR, University of Michigan\*

Adam Levine, Senior Tech Writer, Barron's\*

Kendra Lewis, Product Manager; Dept. Of Children, Youth, and Families, State of Minnesota\*

Chen Li, Finance, UMass Amherst\*

Ed Liebow, Affiliate Associate Professor, University of Washington\*

Sandy Litchfield, Department of Architecture, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Roderick Little, Department of Biostatistics, University of Michigan\*

Allison Liuzzi, Research Manager, Wilder Foundation\*

Evelina Loescher, PhD Economist, Retired\*

Kevin Logan, Retired (HSBC, Dresdner Kleinwort Benson, Citibank)\*

Cynthia R Long, Research Center, Palmer College of Chiropractic\*

Ryan Longmuir, Graduate Student, Department of Economics, UC Los Angeles\*

Margaret Longshore, Principal Software Engineer, ConstructConnect\*

Judith Lorber, Professor Emerita, Sociology, CUNY, CUNY Graduate School\*

Travis Loux, Associate Professor, Dept of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Saint Louis University\*

Michael Lovenheim, Professor of Economics, Public Policy, and Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University\*

Chris Lu, Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor (2014-2017), Self-employed\*

Jennifer Lundquist, Professor of Sociology, UMass\*



Philip Lutz, Consultant, PML Consultants\*

Jared Lyle, Archivist, ICPSR, University of Michigan\*

Molly Lynch, Teacher, Prince William County Schools\*

Thomas Lyon, Professor, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan\*

Wenting Ma, Assistant Professor in Finance, UMass Amherst\*

Patricia L. Mabry, Research, HealthPartners Institute\*

John Paul MacDuffie, Professor, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania\*

Sierra Mack-Erb, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Illinois State University\*

Stuart Mackintosh, PhD, Executive Director, Group of Thirty\*

Sangeetha Madhavan, Professor, University of Maryland\*

Parag Mahajan, Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Delaware\*

Vaibhav Mahajan, Associate Director of Biostatistics, CSL\*

Dillon Mahmoudi, Associate Professor, University of Maryland, Baltimore County\*

Elham Mahmoudi, Associate Professor, University of Michigan\*

Thomas Maierhofer, Lecturer, Department of Statistics & Data Science, University of California, Los Angeles\*

John Maluccio, Professor, Department of Economics, Middlebury College\*

Barbara L. Mann, Professor Emerita of Statistics, Wright State University, None\*

Sharon Manne, Rutgers Cancer Institute, Rutgers Cancer Institute of new Jersey\*

Elizabeth H. Margosches, Statistician, USEPA, retired\*

Ioana Marinescu, Associate professor, School of Social Policy & Practice, Economics Department (secondary), University of Pennsylvania\*

Nelson Mark, Professor of Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

David Marker, Principal, Marker Consulting, LLC\*

Daniel Marti, Vice President, J&D Hogs\*

Karin Martin, Associate Professor, Evans School of Public Policy & Governance, University of Washington\*

Molly Martin, Professor, Sociology & Demography; Chair, Graduate program in demography, Penn State University - University Park\*

Airin D. Martinez, Associate Professor in Health Policy and Management, University of Massachusetts\*

Andrew Martinez, HO Stekler Research Program on Forecasting, George Washington University\*

Elisa Martínez, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, UMass ADVANCE, University of Massachusetts, Amherst\*

Joshua Mask, Economics, Temple University\*

Evan Mast, Assistant Professor, University of Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame\*

Ken Matheny, The Budget Lab at Yale University\*

Jordan Matsudaira, Professor, American University\*

Peter Matthews, Professor of Economics, Middlebury College\*

Ryan Mattke, Map & Geospatial Information Librarian, University of Minnesota\*

Cameron McAlister, Sociology, University of Kentucky\*

Nancy McBeth, Census Consultant

Jenny McBurney, Government Publications Librarian, University Libraries, University of Minnesota\*

Cory McCartan, Assistant Professor of Statistics, Pennsylvania State University\*

Robert McClelland, Senior Fellow, Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center\*

David McCully, Research Manager and Economist, South Carolina Department of Commerce\*

Kimberly McErlean, Postdoctoral Affiliate, University of Texas at Austin\*

K.A. McGonagle, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan\*

Daniel McGregor, former BLS employee

Mark McLnerney, Director, Center for Workforce Research and Information\*

Daniel McLaughlin, Economic Consultant, S&P Global\*

Richard McNally, Principal, Self-employed\*

Douglas Meade, President, IERF, Inc. (Inforum)\*

John Meszaros, Independent Researcher,

Kurt R Metzger, Principle, Kurt R Metzger & Associates\*

Richard Meyer, No title. Retired high school teacher, Private Citizen\*

Sarah Michels, Director of research operations, Readex research\*

Jenny Michlich, PhD student, Harvard University\*

Allison Mickel, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Lehigh University\*

Rosanna Miguel, Department of Management

J. Edgar Mihelic, Director, Data Analytics, Community Support Services\*

Ahleah Miles, Research Associate, School of Human Resources & Labor Relations, Michigan State University\*

Melissa Milkie, Professor Emerita, University of Maryland\*

Curtis Miller, Research assistant professor, College of Pharmacy, University of New Mexico\*

J. Philip Miller, Professor of Biostatistics and Medicine, Washington University\*

Karen Miller, Lecturer, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Rachel Miller, Principal, Cymblem Consulting\*

Michelle Miller-Adams, Senior Researcher, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

A.J. Million, Assistant Research Scientist, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research\*

Jenny Minier, Professor of Economics, Miami University\*

Joya Misra, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts, Amherst\*

John W Mitchell, Principal, M&H Economic Consultants\*

Rand Mitchell, Atlanta, GA\*

Matthew Mleczko, Post-Doctoral Associate, Rutgers University\*

Steven Douglas Moffitt

Jane Monaco, Biostatistics SPH, UNC-CH\*

Shannon Monnat, Director, Center for Policy Research, Syracuse University\*

Felix Montag, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Stern School of Business, New York University\*

Michael Moran, Senior Economist, Haver Analytics\*

Merry Morash, University Distinguished Professor, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University\*

Sara Morell, Assistant Professor, The College of New Jersey\*

Nathan Moroney, Co-Founder, Numantic Solutions\*

Cody Morris, Senior Economic Research Analyst, Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, UNC Chapel Hill\*

Monique Morrissey, Senior Economist, Economic Policy Institute\*

Taryn Morrissey, Professor and Associate Dean of Research, School of Public Affairs, American University\*

Marilyn Moy, Graduate Student, Data Analytics and Visualization, CUNY Graduate Center\*

Dale Moyen, Consultant, Self Employed\*

Preston Mui, Senior Economist, Employ America\*

Ashley Mullan, Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Biostatistics, Vanderbilt University Medical Center\*

M. Kathleen Murphy, Policy Aide, Ramsey County\*

Kelly Musick, Professor, Brooks School of Public Policy, Cornell University\*

Ellen Mutari, Professor Emerita of Economics, Stockton University\*

Dowell Myers, Professor, Price School of Public Policy, University of Southern California\*

Theodore Naff, PhD Candidate, Department of Economics, UCLA\*

Nancy A. Naples, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, Sociology and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, University of Connecticut\*

Rick Neitzel, Environmental Health Sciences, University of Michigan\*

Leslie New, Asst. Prof., Department of Mathematics, Computer Science and Statistics, Ursinus College\*

Michael A. Nolte, Research Area Specialist Lead, Retired/temp/Univ of Michigan\*

Mary Noonan, Associate professor, Dept of sociology and criminology, University of Iowa\*

Emily Norton, Department of Biostatistics, Johns Hopkins University\*

Omar Ocampo, Researcher, Institute for Policy Studies\*

Krista O'Connell, Researcher

Sam O'Hana, English, CUNY Graduate Center\*

Margaret K. O'Hara, Policy Analyst and Lecturer

Chris O'Leary, Senior Economist, W.E. Upjohn Institute\*

Edward Olivares, Economist

Kristen Olson

Maria Osborne, Data Analyst, Department of Demography, UC Berkeley\*

Lauren Oshman, Associate Professor, Family Medicine, University of Michigan Medical School\*

Dr. Amy Owen, Founder and Principal Consultant, Silver Lynx Consulting, Silver Lynx Consulting, LLC\*

Lenore Palladino, Associate Professor of Economics & Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Amanda Paluch, Assistant Professor, Department of Kinesiology, University of Massachusetts\*

Eden Pan, Data Analyst, USC Equity Research Institute\*

Zach Pandl, Head of Research, Grayscale Investments\*

Athena Pantazis, Managing Director, Pantazis Consulting, LLC\*

Leslie E. Papke, Professor of Economics, Michigan State University\*

Mansi Parikh, M.S. of Data Science, The University of Texas at Austin\*

Annaliese Paulson, Doctoral Candidate, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education\*

Thomas Paulson, Head of Insights, Advan Research\*

Kristi Pavel, Individual

Jessica Pearlman, Director of Research Methods Programs Institute for Social Science Research, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Gabrielle Pepin, Economist, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

Linda Peters, Faculty, Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Nicholas Peterson, Member, American Society of Civil Engineers\*

Tom Petska, Director (Retired), IRS, Statistics of Income Division\*

Sayali Phadke, Assistant Professor of Statistics, Penn State Behrend\*

David J Corliss, PhD, Director, Peace-Work, Peace-Work, a Data for Good NGO\*

Philippa Clarke, PhD, Professor, Department of Epidemiology, and Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan\*

Lauren Phegley, Research Data Engineer, Penn Libraries, University of Pennsylvania\*

Edmund S Phelps, Nobel Laureate in Economics, 2006; Emeritus McVickar Professor; Founding Director, Center on Capitalism and Society, Columbia University\*

Nowell Phelps, PhD Student, Department of Biostatistics, Johns Hopkins University\*

Anne D Picker, Chief Economist, Retired\*

Hope Picker, VP Insights, JP Morgan\*

Amy Pienta, ICPSR, University of Michigan\*

Tevah Platt, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan\*

Karyn Polak, Founding Board Member, The 90-10 Institute\*

Lauren Pollak, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine\*

Amber Ponce, Strategist & Account Manager, Kindred Marketing Agency\*

Troy Post, CEcD, CBE, Executive Director, North Brevard Economic Development Zone Special District\*

Dan Powers, Population Research Center, University of Texas at Austin\*

Elizabeth T. Powers, Economics Department & Institute of Government & Public Affairs, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign\*

Susan Pozo, Department of Economics, Western Michigan University\*

Chris Practicetek

David Prentice, Research Associate, American Academy of Pediatrics\*

Dean M. Prestegaard, President & CEO, DMP Development Analytics LLC\*

M Prichard, Chief Enrollment Coordinator, Los Angeles Unified School District\*

William Pyle, Professor, Economics Department, Middlebury College\*

Jana Radewonuk, Director, Biostatistics, CSL\*

Sandra Radoff, Co-Director, Students for Voting Justice\*

Michelle Ranville

Devan Rawlings, Becker Friedman Institute, University of Chicago\*

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James B. Rebitzer, Peter and Deborah Wexler Professor, Boston University Questrom School of Business\*

Jackson Reid, Economics Student, University of Tennessee\*

Anna Reilly, Marsh & McLennan\*  
 Marshall Reinsdorf, Economist, Self-employed\*  
 Amy Renne, Homeless and Basic Needs Case Manager, AEOA\*  
 Elizabeth Renter, Senior Economist, NerdWallet\*  
 Megan Reynolds, Dept. of Sociology, University of Utah\*  
 Hye Jin Rho, Assistant Professor, School of Human Resources and Labor Relations, Michigan State University\*  
 Glenn Rice, Lead Research Project Analyst, MU Center for Health Policy, Missouri Census Data Center\*  
 Valorie Rice, Sr. Business Information Specialist, Economic and Business Research Center, University of Arizona\*  
 Stephanie Richards, Data Analyst, Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation (ISRDI), IPUMS\*  
 Cecilia Ridgeway, Professor of Sociology, Emerita, Stanford University\*  
 Tina M. Riley, Associate Professor, Michigan State University\*  
 Kevin Rinz, Senior Fellow and Research Advisor, Washington Center for Equitable Growth\*  
 David Van Riper, Director of Spatial Analysis, IPUMS\*  
 Joseph Ritter, Professor Emeritus, Applied Economics, University of Minnesota\*  
 Rachael Rivard, Biostatistician, HealthPartners\*  
 Ado Rivera, Assistant Professor, Northwestern University\*  
 Yilda Rivera, Economist, QCEW PR\*  
 Suzanne Rizzo, PhD (Macro & International Economics), Retired\*  
 Elise Roberts, Statistician, Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory\*  
 Raymond Robertson, Professor of Economics and Government, Texas A&M University\*  
 Dean E. Robinson, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*  
 Emily Robinson, Assistant Professor, Statistics, Cal Poly - SLO\*  
 Philip Rocco, Associate Professor, Marquette University\*  
 Thomas Roderick, Chief Data Scientist, Flamelit Consulting, LLC\*  
 Renae Rodgers, IPUMS, research programmer, University of Minnesota\*  
 Nestor Rodriguez, Department of Sociology, The University of Texas at Austin\*  
 Barbara J Ronningen, Retired, MN State Demographic Center\*  
 Lawrence S. Root, Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan\*  
 Mark H. Rose, Professor of History, Florida Atlantic University\*  
 Deborah Rosen, MPA  
 Justine Ross, Executive Director, UCR Center for Community Solutions, UC Riverside\*  
 Robert Roth, Senior Specialist, Tennessee Valley Authority\*  
 Michah W. Rothbart, Associate Professor of Public Administration and International Affairs, Syracuse University\*  
 Christopher Roudiez, Graduate Student, University of Maryland\*  
 Samuel Rowe, Senior Lecturer, University of Maryland\*  
 Julia Sass Rubin, Associate Dean of Academic Programs, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University\*

Veronica Martin Ruiz, Assistant Professor, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

John Ruser, Ph.D., President, Insights Into Comp LLC\*

Barbara Rylko-Bauer, Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University\*

Patrick Sadil, Research Associate; Department of Biostatistics, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University\*

George L. Salis, Chief Economist & Sr. Tax Policy Director, Vertex, Inc.\*

Lauren Samuels, Research Associate Professor of Biostatistics, Vanderbilt University Medical Center\*

KC Sanjay, Economist, KC CRE Advisors\*

Kristina Sargent, Professor of Economics, Middlebury College\*

Sharon Sassler, Professor, Department of Public Policy, Cornell University\*

Narayan Sastry, Research Professor, University of Michigan\*

Atara Saunders, Student, School of Economics, Drexel University\*

Jennifer Blanchard Sayed, Graduate Student, Education, Southern Methodist University\*

Liana Sayer, Maryland Population Research Center, Sociology, University of Maryland\*

Andrew Schaffner, Department Chair, Statistics Department, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo\*

Justin Schardin, Former Director, Financial Regulatory Reform Initiative, Bipartisan Policy Center\*

Julia C. Schedler, Assistant Professor, Statistics Department, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo\*

Teresa Schicker, Department of Family Medicine, Univ of Minnesota\*

Carl Schmertmann, Professor Emeritus, Florida State University\*

John Schmitt, Distinguished Fellow, Economic Policy Institute\*

Rebecca Schneirov, Research Assistant, the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago\*

Tim Schock, Asst. Director, PA State Data Center\*

Paul Schroeder, Co-Chair, Friends of BLS\*

Juli Schroeger

Michael Schultz, Economist, SIA\*

Brian E Schwadron, Consultant

Aaron Schwartz, Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania\*

Christine R. Schwartz, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Christine R. Schwartz, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Mark Schweitzer, Research Associate Professor, Weatherhead School of Management, Economics Department, Case Western Reserve University\*

Shirley A. Scritchfield, Professor Emerita of Sociology, Rockhurst University\*

Robert Seamans, Professor, New York University\*

Michael Searson, Business Survey Manager, retired, Bureau of Labor Statistics\*

Jaye Seawright, Professor of Political Science, Northwestern University\*

Judith Seltzer, Research Professor and Faculty Fellow, California Center for Population Research, UCLA\*

Ananda Sen, Research Professor, University of Michigan\*

Stephanie Sezen, Macro Strategist, Turnleaf Analytics\*

Shanon Shae, VP Strategic Partnerships, HeartShare Human Services\*

Alan Finkelstein Shapiro, Associate Professor, Tufts University\*

Erin Sharifzadeh, Director, Analytics, Board Americas Inc.\*

Rhonda V. Sharpe, Women's Institute for Science, Equity and Race\*

Geoffrey Shaw, Statistician

Susan J. Shaw, Professor, Dept. of Health Promotion and Policy, University of Massachusetts\*

Louise Sheiner, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution\*

Anna Shetler, Graduate Student, Population Research Institute, Penn State\*

Heidi Shierholz, President, Economic Policy Institute\*

Susan Short, Robert E. Turner Distinguished Professor of Population Studies, Brown University\*

Maxwell Shramuk, Statistical Analyst, Department of Preventive Medicine, Northwestern University\*

Dave Shukla, Researcher, CivicSpark\*

Courtney Shupert, Economist, MacroPolicy Perspectives, LLC\*

Alexis Sievers

Madison Sievers, M.A. Economics, PhD Student, UCLA\*

Tara Sinclair, Professor of Economics and International Affairs, The George Washington University\*

Richard Single, Associate Professor of Statistics, University of Vermont\*

Timothy M Smeeding, Distinguished Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Benjamin Smith, PhD candidate, Economics, UCLA\*

Heather Smith, Work and Wages Researcher, Policy Matters Ohio\*

Laurel Smith-Doerr, Professor of Sociology, University of Massachusetts\*

Sonya Smith-Pickel, Senior Project Manager, WSP\*

Matthew Sobek, Research Scientist, Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation, University of Minnesota\*

Sara Soderstrom, Associate Professor, Organizational Studies & Program in the Environment, University of Michigan\*

Aaron Sojourner, Senior Economist, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

Gary Solon, Professor Emeritus of Economics, University of Michigan\*

Kerry Spitzer, PhD, UMass Donahue Institute, UMass Amherst\*

Christopher Sroka, Associate Professor, Dept of Economics, Applied Statistics, and International Business, New Mexico State University\*

Stacey Stark, U-Spatial, University of Minnesota Duluth\*

Evan Starr, Associate Professor, Management & Organization, Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland\*

Tanya Stasio, PhD, Researcher, Applied Economics Clinic\*

Tanya Lee Stasio, PhD, Researcher, Applied Economics Clinic\*

Zoe Stein, Heller-Hurwicz Economics Institute\*

Charles Steindel, Retired

Kendall Stephenson, Senior Fiscal Policy Analyst, Colorado Fiscal Institute\*

Susan M. Sterne, Economist, Economic Analysis Associates, Inc.\*

Jacqueline Stevens, Professor, Political Science Department, Northwestern University\*

Justin Stimatze

Carolyn Stocker, Adjunct Lecturer, University of Massachusetts at Amherst\*

Allison Stolte, Postdoctoral Scholar, Joe C Wen School of Population and Public Health, UC Irvine\*

Dustin Stoltz, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Cognitive Science, Lehigh University\*

Michael Strain, Director of Economic Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute\*

Ethan Struby, Assistant Professor of Economics, Carleton College\*

Anneliese Stuht

Teresa A. Sullivan, President Emerita and University Professor Emerita, University of Virginia\*

William Sundstrom, Professor of Economics, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University\*

Christopher Swann, Assistant Professor of Economics, Temple University\*

David A. Swanson, retired, Swanson consulting\*

Jeffrey Swigert, Economist, Independent Researcher\*

Bryan L. Sykes, Associate Professor of Public Policy & Sociology, Science Core Director for the Cornell  
Population Center, Cornell University\*

Thomas Synnott, Former Chief Economist, US Trust\*

Christopher Taber, James J. Heckman Professor, Walker Family Distinguished Chair, Department of  
Economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison\*

Judith Tanur, Distinguished Teaching Professor of Sociology Emerita, Stony Brook University\*

Maite Tapia, Human Resources and Labor Relations, Michigan State University\*

Timothy E. Targett, Professor Emeritus, University of Delaware\*

John A. Tatom, Fellow, Institute for Applied Economics, JHU\*

Allison Theobold, Assistant Professor of Statistics, California Polytechnic State University\*

Derek Thomas, Thomas Economic Policy and Data Consulting\*

Robert J Thomas, School of Management, Retired professor, MIT\*

Cynthia Thompson, Professor Emerita, Dept of Management, Baruch College\*

Sarahelen Thompson, Professor Emerita, University of Illinois\*

Jenna Tipaldo, PhD Student, CUNY\*

Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, Professor of Sociology, Center for Employment Equity, University of  
Massachusetts, Amherst\*

Lauren Toppenberg, Social science research analyst

Fernando Torres MSc, IPmetrics LLC\*

Rochelle Tractenberg, Professor, Georgetown University\*

Dung Tran, Professor, Banking Academy of Vietnam\*

Amy Traub, Senior Researcher, National Employment Law Project\*

Derald J Tucker II, Tutor, Long Beach City College\*

Naida Tushnet, PhD

Merih Uctum, Professor of Economics, City University of New York\*



Michiko Ueda-Ballmer, Associate Professor, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University\*

Rujuta Umarji, Director of Data Curation, ICPSR, University of Michigan\*

Isabel García Valdivia, Department of Sociology, University of Oregon\*

Lila Valencia, Demographer, City of Austin\*

Jennifer Valorose, Research Manager, Wilder Research\*

Paul Vastag, Vice President, Market Research and Business Intelligence, Continental Properties Company, Inc.\*

Ilana Ventura, Research Methodologist

Ashton Verdery, Sociology and Criminology and Institute for Computational and Data Sciences, Pennsylvania State University\*

Lars Vilhuber, Senior Research Associate, Economics Department, Cornell University\*

Byron Villacis, Assistant Professor, University of Oregon\*

Aida Villanueva, Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst\*

Gabriela Gaona Villarreal, Senior Research Analyst, DARTNet Institute\*

Jan Vink, Researcher at Cornell Program on Applied Demographics, Cornell University\*

Evelyn Vocu, Sr. Data Processing Technician, University of Minnesota\*

Julie Vu, Preceptor in Statistics, Harvard University\*

James Wagner, Research Professor, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan\*

Howard Wall, Director and Chief Economist, Center for Regional Economic Research, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga\*

Ryan Wallace, Ph.D., Principal Economist, Wallace Economic Advisers\*

Aspen Walters, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)\*

Paige Warren, Professor, Environmental Conservation, University of Massachusetts\*

Thomas J. Weinandy, Ph.D., Senior Research Economist, Upside\*

Mary Beth Weinberger, Demographer, United Nations, Retired\*

Coleson Weir, PhD Candidate in Economics, University of Notre Dame\*

Mark Weisbrot, Co-Director, Center for Economic and Policy Research\*

Christian Weller, Professor, University of Massachusetts Boston\*

Nancy Wemmerus, Director of Research, Decision Demographics\*

Jeffrey Werling, Director of Macroeconomic Analysis (retired), Congressional Budget Office (retired)\*

Brady West, Research Professor, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan\*

Mark C. White, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign\*

Abby Whitman, Adjunct professor- Dept of sociology, University of Massachusetts\*

Hadley Wickham, Chief Scientist, Posit\*

Jeannette Wicks-Lim, Research Professor, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Dr. Jerzy Wieczorek, Associate Professor, Department of Statistics, Colby College\*

Jeff Wiehardt, Director, Talent Acquisition

Calla Wiemer, President, American Committee on Asian Economic Studies\*

Noe Wiener, Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Zach Wilczyk

Madeline Wild, Analytics Manager, Richard M Fairbanks Foundation\*

Barbara Williams, Founder, Factual Communications\*

Geoffrey Williams, Professor of Economics, Transylvania University\*

Kari Williams, Research Manager/User Support & Outreach Manager - IPUMS, University of Minnesota\*

Kevin Williams, Professor of Economics, Occidental College\*

Randy A Williams, Ph.D., Lecturer, Operations and Information Management, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Sevrin Williams, Research Analyst, Regional, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research\*

Kristi Williams, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University\*

Robert J. Willis, Professor of Economics, Emeritus, University of Michigan\*

Elroi J. Windsor, PhD, Executive Officer, SSSP; Professor of Sociology, University of West Georgia, Society for the Study of Social Problems\*

Jeffrey A Witmer, Professor of Statistics, Oberlin College\*

Tom S. Witt, Emeritus Professor of Economics, West Virginia University\*

Christina Wood-Wentz, MS, Principal Biostatistician, Academic medical center\*

Justine Wu, Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine, University of Michigan\*

Lawrence L. Wu, Professor and Director, NYU Population Center, New York University\*

Philip Yates, Associate Professor of Statistics, DePaul University\*

Jeff Yayman, Retired Lecture Univ. of Calif., San Diego, Tayman Demographics\*

Philip Yeung, Graduate Student. MS-Health Data Science, Kansas University Medical Center\*

Youngmin Yi, Sociology, Wellesley College\*

Karen Yorks, Office Manager, Center for Governmental Research, Inc.\*

Deena Zaidi, Data reporter

Donglin Zeng, Professor in Biostatistics, University of Michigan\*

April L. Zenisky, Ed.D., Research Professor, Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst\*

Helen Zhou, Specialist, Tennessee Valley Authority\*

Jeanette Ziegenfuss, PhD, Director of Survey and Evaluation Sciences, HealthPartners Institute\*

Matthew Zielenski, Manager Building Products Research, John Burns Research and Consulting\*

Ben Zipperer, Senior Economist, Economic Policy Institute\*