EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The nation's federal statistical system—long regarded as a model for objective, relevant, and high-quality official statistics—is facing a period of unprecedented strain, uncertainty, and transformation. Since the American Statistical Association (ASA) began monitoring the health of the federal statistical agencies in 2023, the system's core capacity has been tested by significant staff losses, funding shortfalls, and threats to statistical integrity. These pressures have strained agencies' abilities to innovate, engage data users, and fulfill their missions, while underscoring the indispensable role of federal statistics in informing the nation's economy, governance, and well-being. As we wrote in our inaugural report—The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report—"Our democracy, economy, and society could not function without objective, accurate, timely, relevant, and credible statistics from the federal government."

This report continues ASA's multiyear effort to assess the state of the U.S. federal statistical system, with a focus on developments in 2025. It highlights challenges and opportunities across five dimensions: staffing and capacity; system structure and funding; innovation; congressional engagement; and stakeholder support. It concludes with a set of nine new recommendations to Congress, the administration, the statistical agencies, and professional associations to strengthen and modernize the nation's statistical foundation. These new recommendations add to the 15 recommendations in our inaugural report—The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report.

This December 2025 report finds:

> **Immediate action must be taken to halt the severe decline in the federal statistical agencies' ability to meet their basic mission and be positioned to keep up with increasing information needs and to address uncertainty in the trustworthiness of federal statistics. Top leadership in both the Congress and Executive Branch must prioritize investment in modernization to provide the resources, vision, momentum, and oversight required for a robust, relevant, and efficient statistical system for the nation and affirm the importance of credible and objective statistics.**

> *Federal statistics are essential U.S. infrastructure. Produced by 13 principal federal statistical agencies and other statistical programs, they are the official facts and figures on which countless government, personal, and business decisions depend. The importance of this infrastructure goes beyond commerce. Federal statistics are a core democratic institution, supporting free and fair elections, fair and impartial courts, informed civil discourse, and other vital functions that are not easily replicated by the private sector. Further, high-quality official statistics are essential to understanding flows of trade, investment, and people with other nations.*
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> Opening paragraph, Executive Summary, The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report

We first discuss our findings (see Box ES-1 for excerpts from key findings) and note that the state of federal statistical infrastructure remains fluid: this report reflects our assessment for 2025.

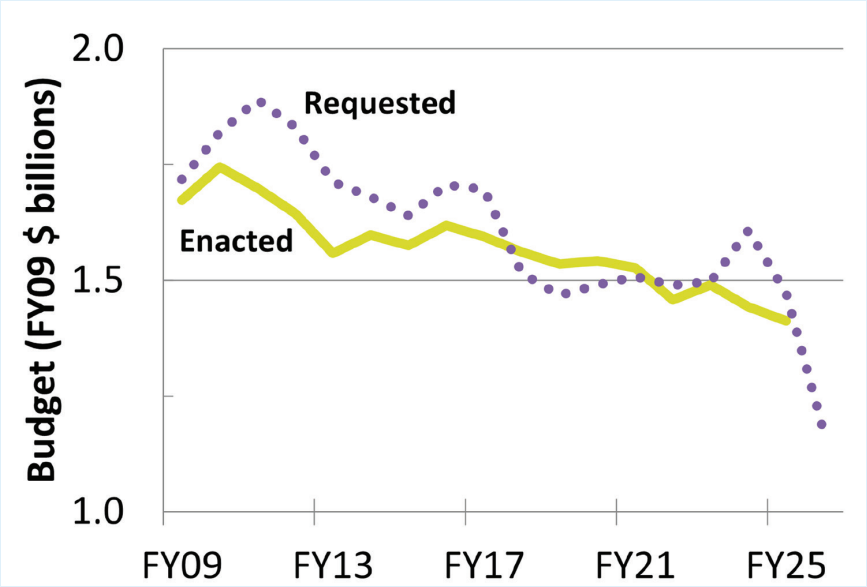
FINDINGS

FRAGILE CAPACITY AND ERODING TRUST

Statistical agencies' ability to produce accurate, timely, trusted, and credible data depends on expert staff and sufficient resources to meet current and future needs. Over the past year, agencies have experienced steep losses of personnel, including senior managers who anchor institutional knowledge and mentor newer employees, specialized data scientists, methodologists, and recent hires with up-to-date skills. These losses have affected agency work and undermined innovation, modernization, and communication with data users, leaving agencies struggling to meet expanding demands for data that are more granular, timely, and responsive to policymakers' needs. At the same time, agency leaders have to navigate diminished safeguards for statistical integrity. In several cases, delays in releasing key data and administration officials' statements questioning agencies' neutrality have raised concerns about the protections for credible, objective statistics. Moreover, most agency budgets continued a long downward slide in purchasing power, with the administration proposing steep cuts for FY26, as seen in Figure ES-1. The Office of the Chief Statistician in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), already under-resourced, still lacks sufficient staff and funding to lead system-wide integrity, coherence, and strategic modernization.

Based on our team's public polling, we observed lower levels of trust in federal statistics and of agreement that federal statistics are accurate between June and September 2025. The estimated percentage of U.S. adults who tend to trust federal statistics declined from 57% in June to 55% in August and then to 52% in September, according to NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak® survey.

FIGURE ES-1. The President's Requested Budget and Enacted Level in Real (inflation-adjusted) FY09 Dollars for the Combined Budget or Non-cyclical Budget Lines, 9 Federal Statistical Agencies, FY09–FY26



NOTES: The GDP deflator is used to adjust for inflation. BTS, NCSES, ORES, and SOI are omitted because their budgets are not determined through the congressional appropriations process. The Census Bureau budget line for periodic Censuses and the NASS line for the Census of Agriculture are both omitted because of their cyclical nature.

SOURCE: ASA online resources

SYSTEM CHALLENGES: A DECENTRALIZED STRUCTURE WITHOUT CROSS-AGENCY SUPPORT

The decentralized design of the U.S. federal statistical system has yielded both benefits and challenges. The 13 statistical agencies, along with scores of statistical units and offices, operate across multiple departments, each with its own priorities, appropriations, and oversight, and with limited central coordination. While this structure promotes subject-matter expertise, it also hinders the system from functioning as a true system—with shared priorities, funding mechanisms, and modernization strategies.

There is no dedicated funding stream to support system-wide initiatives such as joint IT upgrades, coordinated data-sharing, or cross-agency research. Each agency must include its own system-related funding in separate appropriations bills, making large-scale efficiencies nearly impossible to achieve. The Office of the Chief Statistician, which has a statutory mandate to provide a coordinating role and provide professional leadership, has minimal resources to initiate or fund system-level activities.

Barriers to data-sharing remain particularly costly. Agencies routinely spend months—or years—negotiating data-sharing agreements. The 2018 Evidence Act requires OMB to issue regulations to streamline such exchanges, but as of December 2025, no draft regulation has been released. These inefficiencies slow statistical production, waste limited resources, and frustrate collaboration across agencies and with researchers.

INNOVATION AND EFFICIENCY OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Federal statistical agencies cannot serve policymakers or the public effectively or improve efficiency without continuous innovation. The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) illustrates both the urgency and complexity of this challenge. Policymakers seek reliable and transparent measures of AI's economic and social impacts, while agencies themselves need to integrate AI tools responsibly to enhance efficiency, reduce operational costs, and improve data quality. Meeting these demands requires sustained funding, cross-agency coordination, and a culture that rewards experimentation.

The statistical agencies have a long historical record of innovation and have been introducing data science methods, increased automation, and new forms of data collection. However, constrained budgets, outdated IT systems, and procedural barriers continue to hamper progress. True innovation depends on three conditions: (1) sufficient, long-term, stable funding dedicated to innovation (reducing uncertainty and making more efficient investments); (2) few bureaucratic obstacles to data acquisition and system improvement; and (3) leadership that drives a culture of innovation—valuing training, cross-agency collaboration, engagement of outside expertise, dialogue with data users, and learning from failure.

Without deliberate investment in these conditions, the statistical system will fall further behind technological advances in academia and the private sector, and the statistical agencies of other countries, further weakening the timeliness and relevance of U.S. official data. In addition, new models may be needed that rely more heavily on federally funded cutting-edge innovations being developed in the private and nonprofit sectors that are directed toward improving the production of official government statistics. The 2024 report (p. 72) concluded that "the agencies have a rich history of meeting the nation's data needs through innovation. They continue to innovate but not at the level needed, and external and internal barriers, if not addressed, will leave them behind at a time when the demands for more timely, accurate, and granular data are growing every day." At least half of that inaugural report's 15 recommendations spoke to increasing statistical agency innovation capabilities, but only one has been implemented (see Section 6.1).

DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE VALUE OF FEDERAL STATISTICS AND CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT

Despite widespread acknowledgment of their importance, federal statistical agencies remain chronically under-resourced. Objective, high-quality data underpin the nation's economic policy and management, public health, and security—yet they are often taken for granted until a crisis reveals their absence or fragility. This dynamic is compounded by the appropriations process, which disadvantages agencies that produce "public goods" not always tied directly and immediately to politically advantageous outcomes.

Even when Congress recognizes urgent needs, funding increases have been minimal and insufficient to offset inflation. The National Center for Health Statistics, for example, has lost 12% in purchasing power since FY20 despite bipartisan agreement on the importance of its work in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The same pattern affects nearly all statistical agencies.

Agencies face additional pressure on already-limited staff and resources, both from congressional directives to produce new reports or surveys without corresponding increases in appropriations and from having to adapt to changes in law that affect administration program data. The agencies often are not empowered to set priorities and sunset programs or data collections to reallocate funds for newly mandated activities. Advocacy groups have helped secure modest gains, but many agencies lack well-organized stakeholder support networks with dedicated staff to sustain ongoing engagement with

Congress. Some statistical agencies are buried in the hierarchy of their cabinet departments and not allowed to speak directly to congressional oversight staff and members, a situation our 2024 report recommended be addressed.

TOWARD A STRONGER, MORE VISIBLE STATISTICAL SYSTEM

The federal statistical system is fundamental infrastructure similar to the nation's roads, bridges, and power grids. Yet, as the producer of a public good and for other reasons (e.g., the number of statistical agencies and programs and that many agencies are buried in their departments), it lacks the support, visibility, and advocacy that such key infrastructure should command. Addressing this imbalance requires not only new funding models but also a more coordinated partnership among stakeholders, nonprofits, professional associations, and the private sector.

Professional associations, "Friends" groups, and other stakeholders have shown that organized, well-informed advocacy can provide necessary feedback to the agencies and Congress on what types of data are of highest priority in supporting our communities and nation. Expanding this model to all statistical agencies would strengthen the system's voice and help ensure that critical data programs are preserved, modernized, and adequately funded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report concludes with nine new recommendations aimed at securing the future of federal statistics by aligning resources, leadership, and advocacy with the nation's data needs. The recommendations build on, but do not replace, the 15 recommendations made in the 2024 report, very few of which have been implemented (see Section 6.1). The new recommendations are additional actions that have become more pressing to address in the near term since the 2024 report was released.

CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION

Recommendation 1—Staffing: As a first step toward restoring needed staff capacity and expertise for federal statistical agencies, the administration should grant exemptions to the hiring freeze to enable the statistical agencies to fill critical positions to support efficient operations, knowledge transfer, modernized data collection methods, and improved accessibility to data products. The hiring freeze exemption should include the administrative staff in the parent agency that facilitate the work of the statistical agency.

Recommendation 2—Innovation for Quality and Efficiency Gains: Congress should fund research grants and partnerships with academia, the private sector, and federal,

BOX ES-1

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY FINDINGS

Detail and analysis to support these and other findings are in the body of the report.

▸▸ **Resource deficiencies have worsened since our 2024 report, dramatically so for staffing.** Eight of the 13 agencies have lost at least 16% of their purchasing power since FY09 while congressional mandates have increased. Most of the agencies have also lost 20–30% of their staff. These reductions, along with contract cuts, are resulting in product delays, suspensions, and cancellations as well as reductions in data scope and detail (see Section 2.1.1).

▸▸ **The current administration's actions in support of federal statistical agencies have been outweighed by those weakening them.** The administration has left key leadership positions unfilled, pursued disruptive agency relocations, and eliminated statistical products without consultation with Congress, the public, or other stakeholders (see Section 2.1.2). Particularly concerning was the August 1, 2025, firing of the Commissioner of Labor Statistics based on unfounded accusations (see Section 2.1.3).

▸▸ **When asked about their views of federal statistics, positive views among the U.S. public declined between June and September 2025 regarding the accuracy of federal statistics, whether the statistical agencies can be trusted to protect privacy and confidentiality, and whether the government should combine data from different agencies to inform decision-making.** Based on these findings, we are concerned about upholding the trust of the American public in the federal statistical system (see Section 3.2).

▸▸ **Resource reductions and cuts in data programs and products that fail to consider the interdependencies across agencies impair their ability to meet their missions.** Statistical agencies are dependent on each other's output across the system both to inform data collections and to produce certain datasets, such as GDP. Because the system is not funded as a system, it faces bureaucratic barriers to implement many shared initiatives and services that could make it more responsive, efficient, and cost-effective (see Section 2.3.3).

state, and local agencies to foster system-wide innovation and efficiency in statistical agency operations, data sources, estimation, and dissemination. The funding could be appropriated to the National Science Foundation (NSF) to manage with input from the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy. Congress should also provide adequate funding to individual agencies to implement system-wide innovations, improve IT infrastructure, and work actively with partnerships funded by outside sources, such as foundations. Advisory committees should be reactivated to provide expert input, engagement, and oversight.

Recommendation 3—Appropriations: The House and Senate Appropriations Committees should make an exception in the case of federal statistical agencies, as providers of a public good that serves federal policy and program needs, to the practice that, absent vocal championship by appropriations subcommittee members, budget line increases are not generally provided through the annual process of direct member requests to the appropriations committees. The appropriations subcommittees should be authorized to allocate sufficient funding for the statistical agencies to fulfill their missions and the requirements of the Evidence Act. This funding should include support for research, innovation, and data user engagement.

Recommendation 4—Portfolio Management: The administration should direct and fund the chief statistician's office and the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) to build on the Paperwork Reduction Act's requirements to justify federal data collections by developing an agency and system-wide portfolio review framework. Agencies should use the framework to regularly assess, modernize, add to, and sunset programs based on evolving needs and priorities of policymakers and stakeholder groups. The ICSP should identify system-wide priorities. Congress should engage in regular oversight of the agency portfolios within their committee jurisdiction. Budget requests to Congress should reflect the cross-agency portfolio.

Recommendation 5—Cross-Agency Leadership Development and Coordination: As budget and staffing allow, senior statistical agency leaders should be expected to serve temporary details in other agencies or the chief statistician's office to foster system-wide collaboration, leadership development, and shared understanding.

Recommendation 6—Enhanced Data Accessibility, Functionality, and Preservation: As budget and staffing allow, federal statistical agencies should improve website functionality, data products, and search capabilities based on making their data AI-ready to facilitate access to current and historical data system-wide. The ICSP and the chief statistician's office should partner with relevant groups to adopt or modify

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY FINDINGS (CONT.)

▸▸ **The resources and capacity to sustain the pace of innovation have significantly eroded, particularly for the smaller agencies.** Since January 2025, many of the requirements for a culture of innovation such as sufficient staffing, outside expert advice, oversight through advisory committees and other means, and agency staff's ability to interact and collaborate with others in their profession have been eliminated or reduced (see Section 4.3).

▸▸ **To accelerate innovation, the statistical agencies need resources to actively collaborate with partners during development and to integrate research series into the agencies' ongoing operations during implementation.** Foundation- and nonprofit-funded efforts are pursuing major innovations in economic statistics, with the involvement of academic researchers, state agencies, and the business community, for ultimate implementation by the federal statistical system. These efforts are a possible blueprint for ongoing collaborations across the system. Comparable efforts are needed in other areas, such as health and education statistics (see Section 4.5.1).

▸▸ **Federal statistical agencies lag in adopting adopt state-of-the-art standards and tools system-wide to facilitate data access and use by a broad range of users within and across agencies' websites and data products.** Modest investment in these areas (such as occurred to set up the Standard Application Process mandated in the Evidence Act for access to confidential data in a secure environment) could pay large dividends in expanded use of federal statistics for policy and public understanding (see Section 4.5.2).

▸▸ **The annual appropriations process for the federal government disadvantages the budgets of the statistical agencies.** Procedural requirements make it difficult for statistical agencies to compete for limited funds because they are largely little-known entities, their products are public goods, and their work is not understood well, despite being central to the nation's data infrastructure. Stakeholder communication and engagement with Congress on federal statistical agencies is fragmented and inconsistent (see Section 5).

existing data access, documentation, and preservation standards and establish timetables for implementation. The goal is for all agencies to:

- provide the latest access capabilities (e.g., application programming interfaces, or APIs); thorough and accessible documentation (metadata); AI-enabled search tools; readily available data-quality metrics (e.g., response rates, coverage); and crosswalks and pointers to other agencies' data on common topics, such as families' well-being;
- to the extent possible, make data products on common topics more consistent across agencies (e.g., in tabulation categories); and
- adopt standard processes for preserving historical data and metadata, including permanent identifiers and standard citations for federal data products.

Recommendation 7—Trust in Federal Statistics: Public and policymaker trust in federal statistics is essential for their effective use in decision-making. The administration and Congress should take steps to strengthen this trust. Congress and the administration acting to implement the recommendations in our 2024 and 2025 reports and ensure that data collected for statistical purposes cannot be used for enforcement and regulation would help to strengthen trust in federal statistics.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Recommendation 8—Data User Engagement: Professional associations, "Friends of" groups, and similar organizations should collaborate to expand and systematize efforts to connect their members with statistical agencies, ensuring consistent feedback loops and broader engagement to help agencies be more responsive to evolving information needs.

Recommendation 9—Policymaker Engagement and Education: Stakeholders for agencies should collaborate and coordinate to more actively and systematically educate policymakers. Foundations and private funders with missions tied to federal data should consider supporting such education efforts. Stakeholders advocating for new statistical products should pair such requests with explicit calls for additional funding, emphasizing the importance of avoiding unfunded mandates. Stakeholders opposing the proposed elimination of a data program or product should focus on the importance of the data——and not the specific means by which they are currently provided——to allow the statistical agency the flexibility to determine the best way to provide the data going forward.

CONCLUSION

The federal statistical system stands at a crossroads. The status quo is not sustainable. The events of the past two years have underscored both its fragility and its indispensability. Without sufficient resources, leadership continuity, and system-wide coordination, the nation risks losing the statistical data infrastructure that enables sound policy, economic growth, and efficient and smooth governance.

At the same time, the system's resilience—evident in the dedication of its staff, its commitment to objectivity, and its willingness to innovate under constraints—provides a foundation on which to build a more efficient, modernized capacity that can support the nation's statistical data needs going forward. Implementing the recommendations in this report would begin to restore the system's capacity to deliver the timely, relevant, and trustworthy statistics the nation depends upon.