THE NATION'S DATA AT RISK: 2025 REPORT

A Report of The American Statistical Association Project Team to Assess and Monitor the Health of the Federal Statistical Agencies

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Claire McKay Bowen
Urban Institute

Constance Citro
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine,
and independent consultant

Michelle Crosby
American Statistical Association

Steve Pierson
American Statistical Association

Nancy Potok
NAPx Consulting (former Chief Statistician of the United States)

Zachary Seeskin
NORC at the University of Chicago

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We dedicate this report to the current and former employees and leaders of the federal statistical system. We admire and are grateful for their service and commitment to producing trusted, quality statistics with scientific rigor and integrity.

We thank our scientific advisory board (SAB) for their guidance, critique, and support throughout the process as well as the many report reviewers whose comments to us strengthened this report. Please see Supporting Materials: J for SAB members' and reviewers' names. We are also grateful for the expert editing of the report by Kerri Kennedy and the report's design by Melissa Gotherman.

We are especially grateful to our funders—Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, California Community Foundation, and the American Statistical Association—whose support makes this project possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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.*
>
> 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.

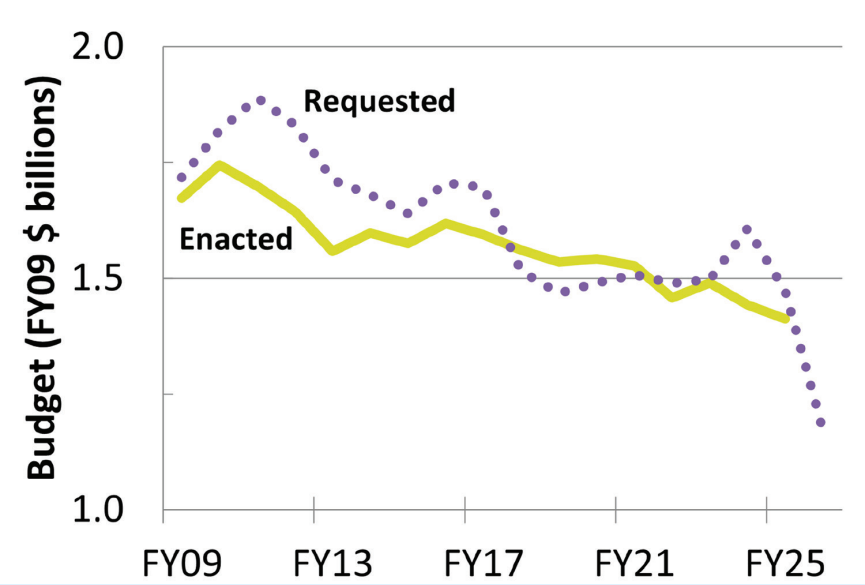
FINDINGS

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 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.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Federal statistics are the nation's dashboard—our instrument panel for steering the economy and society. They track the pulse of America: how many people are working, how fast the economy is growing, how healthy we are, how safe our communities are, and how well our children are learning. From monthly unemployment figures and inflation rates to data on crime, income, and transportation, these numbers form the backbone of informed decision-making. Businesses use them to plan investments, state and local governments rely on them for budgets and services, researchers and journalists use them to uncover trends, and everyday citizens depend on them to understand the world around them. Without trusted federal statistics, we would be flying blind—making choices without the facts to guide us.

The American Statistical Association's project to assess and monitor the health of the federal statistical agencies was launched in 2023 to take the pulse of the nation's statistical system—the backbone of America's public data infrastructure. This effort focuses on the 13 federal agencies whose primary mission is to produce official statistics, along with the chief statistician's office in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The project has three key goals: first, to create clear metrics to track how the system's capabilities, achievements, and challenges evolve over time; second, to proactively monitor the agencies' health to enable timely responses to emerging needs and vulnerabilities; and, third, to identify opportunities and inform discussions on statistical system priorities. One could think of it as a regular checkup for the agencies whose statistics keep our country running—just as engineers inspect roads, bridges, airports, and rail lines to ensure they are safe, strong, and ready for the future.

1.1 PROJECT SCOPE

Our data analyses and development of metrics have focused on six questions:

1. Does a statistical agency consistently produce quality data, i.e., relevant, timely, credible, accurate, and objective statistics?
2. Is it trustworthy and accountable?
3. Does it have sufficient support in three key areas—statistical integrity protections (professional autonomy), institutional support from its parent agency,[1] and sufficient budget and skilled staff?
4. What challenges and threats does it face, and what are their magnitude and potential consequences?
5. Is it agile? What is its innovation record and its capacity to respond to future data needs?
6. Is it responsive to user needs and transparent about its data products and decisions that affect users?[2]

[1] Cabinet departments and independent agencies such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) are defined as parent agencies in the Trust Regulation. See §1321.2.

[2] These questions are grounded in the fundamental responsibilities for federal statistical agencies stated in the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act). To date we have developed quantitative measures for some of these questions (e.g., staffing-budget ratios); data to answer other questions are qualitative or not readily available. See discussion of data sources and methods in Supporting Materials: G.

Since its launch, the ASA assessment and monitoring project has provided a window into the condition of the nation's statistical infrastructure. To date, it has produced three reports—The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report (July), The Nation's Data at a Crossroads: Status Report (July 2025), and this report, The Nation's Data at Risk: 2025 Report (December)—along with supporting analyses and resources. In February 2025, the project established a near-real-time monitoring function on its website to track the surge of actions by the new administration affecting the federal statistical system. Key developments are shared through LinkedIn posts and the monthly Count on Stats newsletter, ensuring that policymakers, researchers, and the public have timely, reliable information. The project has also supported new research on how federal statistics are used and how much they are trusted by the public.

Looking ahead, the project will build on this foundation. In its third year and beyond, the project will expand its measures of user perspectives and public trust, while continuing to monitor agency budgets, staffing, and program capacity. It will issue one or more reports and spotlight topics, such as data initiatives by state governments and the private sector, which could benefit federal statistics. Another focus will be assessing the real-world consequences of declining budgets and staff—how these trends affect the quality, availability, and usefulness of the data that government, business, and the public depend on every day.

Ultimately, the health of the federal statistical system is a measure of the nation's commitment to evidence-based governance. When federal data are accurate, objective, timely, and accessible, they strengthen democracy by ensuring that decisions—whether in government, the marketplace, or local communities—are grounded in fact, not opinion. The ASA assessment and monitoring project is designed to help safeguard that foundation by shining a light on America's public data infrastructure so it can be strong, trusted, and ready to serve the public good for years to come.

1.2 STATUS OF THE FEDERAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM IN BRIEF

What we have observed since benchmarking federal statistical infrastructure in July 2024 is a significant erosion in the ability of the 13 statistical agencies to not only carry out their statutory duties, but also to stay current with rapid changes in technology and information demands. The loss of skilled staff, the inability to hire new staff with up-to-date skills, heavy turnover in leadership and widespread leadership vacancies, reductions in funding, and an inability to conduct research and development to support much-needed innovation have brought modernization efforts to almost a complete halt. At the same time, lowered public trust in government, and growing disinclination to answer surveys in any case, continue to hamper effective collection of information through asking questions of the public and businesses. In combination, we are seeing the system approach a crisis point unless immediate action is taken by Congress and the Executive Branch to reform the current trajectory.

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.**

Threats and diminished support for the federal statistical agencies existed well before the inauguration of the new administration in January 2025. Thus, our inaugural July 2024 report (p. 43) found:

> Increasing challenges to the principal federal statistical agencies' ability to produce trusted, quality statistics and to innovate to the extent necessary in meeting the nation's information requirements in the 21st century. The increase in these challenges can be attributed to many reasons. Importantly, at least one out of three critical supports—professional autonomy, parent-agency support, and adequate budget and skilled staff—exhibits significant weaknesses for most agencies. The agencies depend on these supports to produce quality data, to be trustworthy and accountable, and to build an innovative, agile organizational culture. Further, weaknesses in these supports may leave the agencies susceptible to the types of political meddling and other improper outside influence that have occurred in the past.

The new administration escalated the threats and diminution of support for federal statistics: our July 2025 status report (p. 3) found:

> … reductions in the amount and availability of federal statistical data, as well as delayed and less detailed statistical reports and a likely instance of improper political influence…. We have not seen any meddling by the Executive Branch in the underlying data or published estimates. Moreover, the federal statistical agencies are focused on continuing to meet their missions. Yet continued staffing and budget reductions for the statistical agencies could affect quality in the future. We are at an inflection point: To meet current and future challenges requires thoughtful, well-planned investment in research and infrastructure, informed by input from the public and users. In contrast, what we have observed is uncoordinated and unplanned reductions with no visible plan for the future.

This report documents continued deterioration in the health of the federal statistical agencies.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 presents our findings on the health of the federal statistical agencies, brought up to date through December 2025, addressing questions 1–4 in our list of six questions (e.g., quality, trustworthiness, external support, and challenges). Section 3 presents results from surveys about data users and the public's trust in federal statistics, addressing question 6. Section 4 assesses obstacles and opportunities for innovation by statistical agencies, addressing questions 4 and 5 (e.g., challenges, threats, innovation opportunities). Section 5 addresses the disconnect between the value of federal statistics and the lack of congressional support, addressing question 3, and Section 6 presents our recommendations. Supporting documents provide added detail on the topics covered in the findings and recommendations.

SECTION 2

FINDINGS ON THE HEALTH OF FEDERAL STATISTICAL AGENCIES

In this section, we describe and assess the sweeping changes that federal statistical agencies have undergone since our inaugural 2024 report. We examine the longer-term implications of these shifts and conclude with a summary of how they have affected the relevance, timeliness, and overall quality of the federal statistics on which policymakers and the public rely.

The picture that emerges is stark. The nation's statistical infrastructure—its essential data backbone—is under strain, with serious implications for the timeliness, accuracy, and credibility of the information on which an informed citizenry and evidence-based policymaking depends.

Our inaugural report on the health of the federal statistical system centered on the standards in the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (the Evidence Act), which codified long-standing requirements in OMB directives and other foundational documents for federal statistical agencies.[3] The Evidence Act emphasizes that statistical agencies must be *agile, trustworthy, and accountable*, and capable of producing *reliable, high-quality data*, which means they must continuously ensure their statistics are relevant, timely, accurate, and objective. Meeting these standards requires constant adaptation—responding to new policy issues, overcoming data collection challenges such as declining survey participation or disruptions like the Covid-19 pandemic and the October 1–November 12, 2025, government shutdown, and harnessing new methods and technologies to reduce burden and improve precision, including for small geographic areas and demographic groups. Federal statistical agencies must also work together as effectively as possible, given the challenges and opportunities they share in common and their interdependence (data products from one agency typically require inputs from other agencies in the system). In short, federal statistical agencies must operate as a living interconnected system—continually innovating to keep pace with a changing nation. (See Section 2.3.3 for examples of interdependencies and Section 4 for a discussion of innovation challenges and opportunities.)

Our 2024 report identified three essential supports that enable federal statistical agencies to meet their Evidence Act requirements and serve evolving user needs:

1. Adequate budgets and staffing to fulfill their mission;
2. Institutional backing from their parent agencies; and
3. Strong safeguards for statistical integrity and independence.

We found that in 2024, many agencies faced significant weaknesses in at least one of these areas and that the chief statistician's office lacked the resources to provide effective strategic leadership. The effects were clear: innovation slowed, quality suffered, and vulnerability to political interference grew. In Section 2.1, we bring this assessment up to date—finding that these foundational supports have weakened further across all three dimensions.

Yet understanding the foundational supports is only part of the story. Equally important are the consequences—how these pressures shape the quality and availability of the statistical products that inform public understanding and government action. Since February 2025, our near-real-time monitoring of developments across agencies has recorded a troubling pattern: abrupt

[3] See Supporting Materials: D to The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report.

leadership turnover, program and staff cutbacks, reductions in data quality, and increasing delays in key statistical releases. These developments are hamstringing agencies' ability to innovate and therefore continue to produce high-quality, trusted statistics and also leaving agencies susceptible to political meddling and other improper outside influence that could harm the objectivity of and trust in data being released to the public. Section 2.2 summarizes these developments, with detailed profiles provided in Supporting Materials: I.

2.1 2025 DEVELOPMENTS IN THREE CRITICAL SUPPORT AREAS

This section reviews what has happened in 2025 for the federal statistical agencies, focusing on the three key supports identified in our first report:

1. Resources (budgets, staffing, and contracting capacity);
2. Parent-agency political and administrative support; and
3. Protections for statistical integrity.

(See Box 2.1 for a list of the 13 statistical agencies and their departments.)

In most cases, the setbacks in funding and support we document are the result of government-wide efforts to reduce staff, budgets, and contracts. These broad cuts have hit the statistical agencies hard, even though they were not necessarily the primary targets, and have also affected parent agencies' ability to provide services to their statistical agencies. A few statistical agencies have faced more direct actions that have further limited their capacity to fulfill their missions.

2.1.1 RESOURCES (BUDGETS, STAFFING, AND CONTRACTING)

Staffing

All 13 federal statistical agencies lost staff during 2025 (see Table 2.1), mirroring broader cuts across the federal government. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) experienced the most severe loss when all but three employees were terminated in March 2025. The Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (ORES) saw its workforce reduced by about half, while the Energy Information Administration (EIA), Economic Research Service (ERS), and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) each lost between 25% and 35% of their staff. The agencies have also been impacted by the loss of staff in their parent agency on whom they depend for contract, IT, human resources, and other support.

BOX 2.1
LIST OF FEDERAL STATISTICAL AGENCIES

BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis, Department of Commerce
BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Justice
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor
BTS	Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Department of Transportation
Census	U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce
EIA	Energy Information Administration, Department of Energy
ERS	Economic Research Service, Department of Agriculture
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service, Department of Agriculture
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education
NCHS	National Center for Health Statistics, Department of Health and Human Services
NCSES	National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, National Science Foundation
ORES	Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics, Social Security Administration
SOI	Statistics of Income, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury

As shown in Table 2.1, staffing levels planned for fiscal year (FY) 2026 remain below those of FY 2024—sometimes sharply so, as with NASS. Producing federal statistics is a labor-intensive process that relies on skilled professionals who understand complex data systems and long-standing programs. Losing that expertise threatens the agencies' ability to collect, analyze, and release accurate information, ultimately weakening their capacity to fulfill their missions.[4]

TABLE 2.1. Staffing Levels: FY24 Actual; FY25 Estimated* Change from FY24 (%), and FY26 Proposed Level for the 13 Statistical Agencies, FY24–26.

	FY24	FY25*	FY26	
Agency	Actual No.	Approximate* % Change from FY24	Proposed No.	% Change from FY24
BEA	451	-20%	380	-16%
BJS		-14%		
BLS (Total)	2,058	-20%	1,851	-8%
- FTE Permanent	1,824		1,621	-9%
- Other	234		230	0%
- Reimbursable	169		144	-8%
BTS	75	-31%		
Census	8,414	-15%	7,657	-9%
- Current	5,988		5,896	-2%
- Periodic	2,426		1,761	-27%
EIA	371	-35%	246	-34%
ERS	329	-26%	244	-26%
NASS	839	-40%	495	-41%
NCES	100	-95%		
NCHS	470	-10%	428	-9%
NCSES				
ORES		-50%		
SOI		-10%		

SOURCE: FY24 levels and FY26 proposed levels are from the parent agency's FY26 congressional justification document. Empty cells for FY24 and FY26 indicate there is no official documentation.

*The estimated percentage losses of staff for FY25 are from media reports, former staff with direct knowledge, or agency staff directories.

[4] See National Academies (2022), *Transparency and Reproducibility of Federal Statistics for the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics and All Statistical Agencies*, https://doi.org/10.17226/26360. P. 21 notes the importance of knowledge transfer to new staff, which these substantial staff reductions make exceptionally difficult to accomplish.

Budgets

The statistical agencies also all lost purchasing power in FY25 because of FY24 funding levels being carried over to FY25 (see Table 2.2). Since FY09, 8 of the 13 agencies have lost 16% or more of their purchasing power in real terms. Figure 2.1, which charts the proposed (by the President) and enacted (by Congress) total budget, minus the cyclical components, for the nine agencies whose budgets are determined by appropriations, also shows this loss of purchasing power since FY09. For agency-specific budget graphs, see Supporting Materials: I for the individual agencies. For Table 2.2, the entries for the Census Bureau and NASS omit their periodic census figures for the sake of comparability over time.

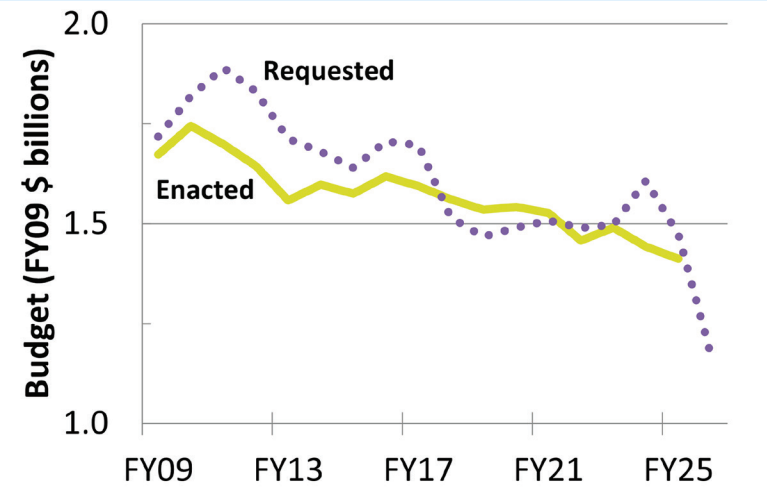
TABLE 2.2. Enacted Budgets for FY09–FY25 for the 13 Statistical Agencies in Real (Inflation-Adjusted) 2009 Dollars

Agencies	FY09 $ millions	//	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	% Change from FY24	% Change from FY09
BEA	86.9		87.1	83.8	88.3	82.9	80.9	-2.4%	-6.9%
BJS	51.0		54.7	48.2	49.3	41.6	40.8	-1.9%	-20.1%
BLS	597.2		516.0	494.8	505.5	493.6	485.7	-1.6%	-18.7%
BTS	27.0		20.9	19.5	19.0	18.7	18.5	-1.5%	-31.6%
Census Current Surveys	233.6		231.8	225.1	239.0	232.3	226.6	-2.4%	-3.0%
EIA	111.0		101.9	96.9	97.8	95.5	93.1	-2.4%	-16.1%
ERS	87.2		68.7	65.9	67.1	64.1	62.5	-2.4%	-28.3%
NASS surveys (non-Census) line	123.1		110.6	107.6	104.7	99.7	97.3	-2.4%	-21.0%
NCES	228.6		222.3	218.7	222.0	216.7	211.5	-2.4%	-7.5%
- Assessment line	130.1		132.6	135.1	134.0	130.8	127.6	-2.4%	-1.9%
- Statistics line	98.5		89.6	83.7	88.0	85.9	83.8	-2.4%	-14.9%
NCHS	154.4		141.0	135.4	135.7	132.5	129.3	-2.4%	-16.3%
NCSES	56.5		53.6	50.8	64.4	61.0			
ORES	29.3		28.7	29.8	29.0	31.2	20.0	-35.7%	-31.5%
SOI	32.2		30.5	30.2	33.0				

NOTES: The GDP deflator is used to adjust for inflation. For the Census Bureau and NASS, their cyclical (census) budget lines are excluded. Empty cells for the last three columns of NCSES and SOI indicate there is no official documentation. The FY09 SOI cell is empty because of a budget restructuring making a comparable value infeasible.

SOURCE: See ASA online resources for this table and underlying documentation.

FIGURE 2.1. 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

Contracting

Contracts play a vital role across the federal government, and they are especially important for statistical agencies. These agencies rely on contractors for a wide range of work—from survey design and data collection to information technology and website support.

Because of this dependence, the contract freezes, cancellations, and funding cuts imposed early in the new administration had a major impact on statistical operations. NCES was hit particularly hard in February when nearly all of its contracts were terminated, halting much of its data collection, which is entirely contract-based. Although some contracts have since been partially reinstated, the details remain unclear, and staffing shortages may prevent effective oversight and management of the restored work.

In addition, several parent departments have introduced new rules requiring the department secretary to personally review and approve contracts above certain thresholds—typically $100,000. These extra layers of approval can delay essential projects and hinder the agencies' ability to carry out their work efficiently.

> **FINDING 2.1:** The resource deficiencies that undermine the ability of many federal statistical agencies to produce relevant and timely data and to innovate effectively 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, 95% in the case of the National Center for Education Statistics, as well as the support of administrative staff in their parent agency (e.g., contract and IT support). These reductions, along with contract cuts and suspensions among other resource constraints, are resulting in product delays, suspensions, and cancellations as well as reductions in data scope and detail.

2.1.2 PARENT AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

A core provision of the 2018 Evidence Act requires that each department or independent agency head "enable, support, and facilitate" their statistical units in carrying out their responsibilities—a requirement further detailed in the regulation Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units (also known as the "Trust Regulation") issued by the Office of Management and Budget in 2024. Implicit in enabling, supporting, and facilitating the statistical agencies is ensuring they have the appropriate resources to carry out their fundamental responsibilities, such as human resources, IT systems, office space, financial services, contracting support, and legal counsel. Parent agencies are also required to share relevant policy information, communicate data needs, and respect the scientific integrity of their statistical offices.

Beyond support from their parent departments, statistical agencies also depend on the broader administration—especially OMB and other data-producing agencies—to carry out their missions. Our first-year report focused primarily on parent agency support, but developments in 2025 have highlighted actions and directives from the White House and OMB that also play a critical role.

As we have documented and catalogued on the monitoring page that we started in February 2025 (https://bit.ly/FedStatMonitoring), the current administration has taken numerous steps that have weakened federal statistical agencies. Some of these actions have not been specifically directed at the agencies but have had a significant effect on the ability of the agencies to meet their responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, the statistical agencies have not been exempt from staffing cuts, hiring freezes, return-to-in-person-work orders, and contract cancellations affecting most federal agencies. The president's FY26 budget proposal calls for sizable budget cuts and permanent reductions in staffing across most statistical agencies (see Tables 2.1 and 2.3 and Figure 2.1).

TABLE 2.3. President's Requested Budget for Nine Statistical Agencies or Agency Accounts as a Percentage Change Relative to Prior-Year Enacted Level, FY18–FY26, and Median*

Agencies	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	MEDIAN
BEA	-6.6	-1.0	7.1	2.5	4.0	14.5	14.4	11.1	-5.4	8.6
BJS appropriations line	-16.5	-14.6	11.6	0.0	0.0	12.5	85.7	20.0	-5.7	8.4
BLS	-0.2	-0.4	0.0	2.8	4.7	12.5	8.7	2.1	-8.0	4.7
Census Current Surveys	-8.9	-7.7	-2.2	1.9	7.4	12.1	13.8	11.8	-12.2	5.4
EIA	-3.3	-8.0	-5.6	1.5	0.0	2.7	15.9	4.9	0.0	4.9
ERS	-11.6	-48.2	-30.3	-26.8	6.0	5.9	6.4	8.2	-11.7	5.4
NASS surveys (non-Census) line	-5.5	-6.5	-8.7	-2.6	6.7	5.4	10.7	4.1	-1.4	4.1
NCES	0.9	1.3	0.4	11.8	5.4	-11.7	3.1	0.0	-57.6	5.2
- Assessment line	0.3	0.0	-1.3	18.3	9.1	-18.9	2.2	0.0	-29.7	0.8
- Statistics line	1.6	3.0	2.7	2.7	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	-100.0	5.9
NCHS	-3.1	-3.1	-3.1	-3.1	-7.4	0.8	1.1	0.0	-6.6	0.1
MEDIAN	-3.3	-3.1	-1.3	1.9	4.7	5.4	8.7	4.1	-8.0	5.7
GDP Deflator Rate	2.3	1.7	1.3	4.6	7.1	3.6	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.0

*NOTE: The last column is a median of the values back to FY01.

SOURCE: See ASA online resources for FY01–FY26 data.

The administration has given mixed signals on its support for the statutory and regulatory requirements that are the foundations of a healthy statistical system. One initiative from the administration recognizes the importance of federal statistics in informing public policy. The White House document America's AI Action Plan, released in July 2025, assigns new responsibilities to statistical agencies under the goals of "empowering the American worker" and "building world-class scientific datasets." The plan directs BLS, the Census Bureau, and BEA to study the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) on the labor market—such as job creation, displacement, and wage changes—using existing data. It also calls for OMB to issue regulations required under Title III of the Evidence Act to expand statistical agency access to datasets in other federal agencies for statistical purposes and to expand secure access to statistical agency data for evidence-building. Finally, the plan envisions an online portal through the ongoing National Secure Data Service (NSDS) demonstration project that would provide a "front door" for AI-related use cases involving controlled access to restricted federal data. (See Section 4 for further discussion of the White House AI action plan and the NSDS.)

The administration also proposed combining the Census Bureau, BLS, and BEA into one agency, an idea to enhance economic statistics that has been discussed but not acted upon for decades.[5] In 2016, BEA physically moved to the Suitland MD Federal Data Center, the home of the Census Bureau; BLS moved to the same location in early 2025. However, the effort to organizationally combine the agencies (or at least move BLS from the jurisdiction of the Labor Department to the Commerce Department) appears to have stalled.

Since January 2025, the administration has made unsubstantiated claims of biased data, baselessly criticized statistical agency staff, failed to fill key leadership vacancies, removed the heads of BLS and NCES, and replaced both the career civil service chief statistician of the United States and the acting director of the Census Bureau with politically appointed individuals who already hold other full-time positions. These actions undermine public trust in federal statistics. It is not yet clear what the effects of moving the chief statistician to a political appointment will be on the statistical agencies or statistical policy, and we will continue to monitor these developments closely.

Through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the administration executed broad government cuts that forced many agencies to immediately suspend or scale back major statistical programs. As mentioned previously, NCES products were the most impacted, due to the termination of virtually all staff and contracts in February and March 2025. Many contracts eventually were restored but at a reduced scope and without the NCES employees (including the commissioner) in place for management, direction, and oversight. Many if not most of the federal statistical data collections included in the May 2025 DOGE "Survey of Surveys" review, which asked statistical agencies to respond to questions on the value of data collections conducted by the Census Bureau, seem to have remained intact. There have also been partial suspensions of hiring freezes at BLS, and the Census Bureau is being allowed to advertise for field data collectors. NCES also started advertising for staff in September to carry out its work on the statutorily mandated National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), though the confidentiality promises in previous NAEP waves have been abandoned.

Recognizing that federal statistical programs are not intended to remain static is important. Agencies should periodically review their portfolios, make changes to align with new policy priorities, reduce respondent burden, and ensure efficient use of public funds. Statistical agencies must be accountable to the public and policymakers for the content of their programs, reducing burden on respondents, and making efficient use of their resources. Such changes should follow established procedures, which include consultation with OMB, Congress, and data users, respect congressional intent for programs explicitly authorized and funded by Congress, and follow the Evidence Act's provisions for transparency and accessibility.

However, the administration's early mandate to discontinue data collection of gender identity and sexual orientation and to abruptly cancel other data collections, which were approved through a transparent process that included consultation with data users and followed the statutory requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) for review of data collections, did not follow this guidance.

[5] See Supporting Materials: C to The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report.

Early in 2025, the administration terminated 10 advisory committees, organized under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), for 6 of the 7 statistical agencies with such committees, saying they had served their full purpose:[6]

- BEA Advisory Committee,
- BLS Data Users and Technical Advisory Committees,
- Census Scientific Advisory Committee, 2030 Census Advisory Committee, National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, Other Populations,
- BEA, BLS and Census Bureau Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee,
- NASS Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics,
- NCHS Board of Scientific Counselors, and
- NSF Advisory Committee for Social, Behavioral, and Economics Sciences (which provided input to NCSES).

These expert advisory committees, which operate under FACA provisions for open sessions and public comment, have long served as an important channel for external expertise and user feedback to statistical agencies. Such committees enable outside experts—academics, industry specialists, and data users—to formally advise federal agencies, offer new perspectives, and review program assumptions, thereby enhancing transparency, user engagement, and trust. In particular, the advisory committees were able to provide substantial private sector expertise on modernizing data collection and adopting new data technologies to produce more comprehensive data faster and more efficiently.

The administration has also announced or proposed moving additional parts of ERS to Kansas City and other regional hubs, along with similar plans for NASS. The initial move of ERS functions to Kansas City in 2019 led to a sharp disruption in its operations: more than half of the staff reportedly left, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the relocation did not fully evaluate the risks of attrition and loss of institutional knowledge. NCSES is also poised for a shift in physical location, with its parent National Science Foundation (NSF) vacating its current Alexandria headquarters (although it currently appears that the move will be only a few physical blocks).

Relocations are inevitable and should be undertaken with consideration for benefits and risks and with careful planning. Otherwise, while agencies may recover from such disruptions in a relatively short time, their operations could be severely hampered for years—the possibility of additional losses of staff unable to relocate on top of existing losses of staff and budget resources substantially increases that risk. Even moves within the Washington metro area can be disruptive. While information on the NCSES 2017 relocation or the more recent move of BLS was not available, the move of BEA from downtown Washington to co-locate with the Census Bureau in Maryland (approximately nine miles) resulted in BEA's usual attrition rate of approximately 6–7% to be twice as much for the next two years.[7] In the year following the move, one-quarter of the BEA workforce had fewer than two years of service.

Lastly, we note a sparsity of information from statistical agencies, perhaps out of caution or because they are not allowed to communicate with outside entities. The lack of information on current staffing levels, as reflected in Table 2.1, as well as budget information still missing in Table 2.2, are two examples.

> **FINDING 2.2:** The current administration's actions in support of federal statistical agencies have been heavily outweighed thus far by those weakening them. Like other government agencies, statistical agencies have experienced actions to reduce staff, weaken civil service protections, impose hiring freezes, propose deep budget cuts, and freeze or cancel contracts. 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.

[6] The National Board for Education Sciences, which provided input to NCES, has not been disbanded but is inactive. Other statistical agencies have had no FACA advisory committee or obtained advice through such means as expert groups organized by the American Statistical Association.

[7] Private communication.

As emphasized in last year's report, strong support from each parent agency is critical to protect the principles under which statistical agencies must operate. Such support ensures that agencies can act with statistical integrity safeguards, maintain the visibility needed to serve policy makers and the public, and adapt to changing data needs. The OMB's Trust Regulation describes these obligations in detail, outlining how parent agencies should safeguard the integrity, credibility, and capacity of their statistical units. In the current environment, OMB's role is especially important. Yet, in 2025, it has not provided the leadership or coordination necessary to reinforce departmental support. Without that engagement, the statistical system remains at risk.

2.1.3 STATISTICAL INTEGRITY SAFEGUARDS

Statistical integrity safeguards (see Box 2.2) are essential for a federal statistical agency to be agile, trusted, and accountable. Amounting to a statistical agency's control over its professional and statistical operations, the safeguards stem from the requirement for statistical agencies to meet scientific standards for producing objective, trustworthy, and credible statistics for public use. While there were few if any changes to the safeguards in place for the agencies to be able to fulfill their missions and Evidence Act responsibilities, there are threats to this core ability: the firing of BLS Commission McEntarfer being the primary threat (see Supporting Materials D and E for analysis of media coverage of this event). A possible instance of likely improper political influence according to Politico occurred when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) held up the release of a report from ERS based on concerns it forecasted an increase in the agricultural trade deficit. As mentioned earlier, the implications of replacing both the career civil service chief statistician of the United States and the career civil service acting director of the Census Bureau with political appointees who also hold other positions is unknown. The possible application of Schedule Policy/Career—which allows policy-influencing employees to be fired at will—to the statistical agencies and the OMB office of the chief statistician is also a situation that requires close monitoring, as explained in this ASA response to a call for comments.

Each of these decisions potentially increases the risk of undermining a federal statistical agency's mission to design and provide objective, trustworthy, high-quality statistics and could erode public trust. Adding political appointees to a statistical agency without clear guidelines that the political employee will not interfere for political reasons with career staff's professional judgement or allow political considerations to hold up data releases undermines objectivity. Such actions may give the impression that an administration wishes to improperly influence official government statistics. This could

BOX 2.2

STATISTICAL INTEGRITY SAFEGUARDS VS. PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

For our 2025 report, we use the term "statistical integrity safeguards" instead of "professional autonomy" because of the sensitivities of administrations of both political parties regarding the terms "autonomy" and "independence." Citro et al. (2023) adopted the use of the qualifier "professional" on "autonomy" to stress that the autonomy is around statistical and operational decisions, emphasizing that agencies are more accountable for data quality with greater professional autonomy. But sensitivity and possible confusion remain even with the use of the qualifier, hence the shift in terminology.

The term "statistical integrity safeguards" emphasizes the point that safeguards must be in place to ensure that statistical products are objective and trusted. While the definition of "statistical integrity safeguards" is similar to "professional autonomy"—"the ability to act independently from political or other undue external influence with regard to its operations, such as data collection and analysis, staffing, and publications"—we believe this new phrase better emphasizes the delegation of the necessary authorities for a statistical agency to fulfill its Evidence Act requirements and mission: that is, to produce independent statistics that are trusted and of high quality.

Our 2024 report specifies statistical integrity safeguards for 10 areas:

1. Data collection & analysis
2. IT systems
3. Publications
4. Hiring
5. Budget
6. Contracting, cooperative agreements, and grants
7. Staffing level
8. Agency name and logo ("brand") autonomy
9. Direct interactions with government officials, including Congress, on statistical activities
10. Direct interactions with the public and the data user community

have far-reaching implications, particularly regarding international investment in the United States. That is, the current advantage that the United States enjoys because international businesses and investors trust the official government statistics could erode significantly if there is a widespread perception that the data are not objective and reliable but rather skewed to portray whatever administration is in power in a favorable light. Several publications that reported on the firing of the BLS commissioner (see Supporting Materials: D) also examined the periods when official government statistics of Greece and Argentina were called into question due to political influence. Those countries experienced significant economic ramifications, both internationally and domestically.[8] Finally, classifying some or all of an agency's senior staff as Schedule Policy/Career also could undermine trustworthiness and potentially put the Policy/Career-designated staff in the position of having to comply with a political directive that undercuts their agency's mission to be objective, as a condition of retaining their job.

> **FINDING 2.3:** The statistical agencies face several areas of risk for maintaining statistical integrity. In particular, the August 1, 2025, firing of the Commissioner of Labor Statistics based on unfounded accusations highlights the risk that new administrations and parent-agency leadership may disregard existing guardrails that protect the objectivity and integrity of federal statistics.

2.2 SYSTEM-WIDE AND AGENCY-SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTS

In this section, we discuss statistical agency-specific developments since our July 2024 report, with more detail available in Supporting Materials: I (Agency Updates), and what has happened with other members of the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (made up of the recognized statistical units and statistical officials).

2.2.1 AGENCY-SPECIFIC EFFECTS

All of the federal statistical agencies have been affected by administration actions—some more than others. We note the content in this report on agencies is largely based on public information or what has been reported by staff recently separated from the agency. The limited information-sharing with outside stakeholders seems to also apply to Congress, as key congressional staff have shared with our project team their difficulties in obtaining information and responses from the administration.

As mentioned in previous sections, NCES has been the most severely impacted agency over the past nine months. Some of the cuts to NCES data collections have been restored and an acting commissioner was named in July. During September, the Department of Education started advertising to hire staff for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) work. Impacts to additional NCES data products are discussed in Supporting Materials: I (NCES) (see also Table 2.4 in Section 2.3.1 below).

ORES, the statistical agency in the Social Security Administration (SSA), was also impacted significantly with the departure of approximately half of its staff by March 2025, many of whom were reported to be highly specialized and therefore essential to its work. ORES had its budget cut during the fiscal year, enabled by its budget being determined by the SSA rather than in a congressional line item. Specifically, funding for the ORES Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC) was eliminated. The FY24 amount for the RDRC program was $16.8 million, so the ORES FY25 budget, after modest increases for other ORES programs, was reduced to an estimated $29 million from its FY24 level of $44.6 million. ORES was also moved organizationally to be under oversight of the political Chief Information Officer (CIO) and proposed to be replaced by or transitioned to an Office of Analytics and Improvements as part of a larger reorganization.

EIA, ERS, and NASS suffered from significant loss of staff. An early spring news report estimated that EIA would lose up to 40% of its staff, more than the other agencies, because of its practice of tapping talent nationally via remote work. The staffing loss is the most likely explanation for a number of EIA reports delayed, skipped, or suspended, as detailed in Supporting Materials: I (EIA). ERS and NASS have seen an estimated staff loss of 25–35%. NASS has cut two surveys and the state- and region-specific narratives that had accompanied the data releases. As mentioned, ERS and NASS along with NCSES are also at risk of major disruptions to operations and work due to proposed agency relocations, especially if the move results in significant additional staff loss. In September 2025, the *Wall Street Journal* (*WSJ*) reported that USDA had discontinued the annual

[8] See, e.g., What Happens When Politicians Meddle With Economic Data: Argentina's Example - WSJ; Trump Fired America's Economic Data Collector. History Shows the Perils. - The New York Times.

survey on food security. The USDA soon after suspended a dozen ERS staff, including the acting administrator and top managers, as it conducted an investigation into the disclosure of the survey discontinuation to the *WSJ*. Of particular interest from a monitoring standpoint is why publicly disclosing discontinuance of a data collection would be considered a "leak" rather than standard operating procedure for government transparency.

As of November 29, BLS had approximately one-third of its 36 leadership positions vacant, in addition to contending with the firing of its commissioner and challenges to its products, leadership, and staff. For instance, the agency had to delay one of its major annual releases by several weeks to address discrepancies, reduced sample size for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) generally, stopped CPI data collections in several metro areas, stopped calculation and publication of approximately 350 Producer Price Index (PPI) indexes, and reduced access to restricted data. In September 2025, in a partial hiring freeze suspension, BLS advertised for part-time data collectors for the CPI. BLS received some funding relief since our 2024 report in response to an announcement in June 2024, that, for budget reasons, it would have to make a 6% cut in the sample size for the Current Population Survey. This reduction was only staved off because BLS received an additional $6 million in FY25 appropriations beyond otherwise flatline FY24 levels. The additional funding is why BLS's loss of purchasing power in FY25 versus FY24, 1.9%, is less than that of most other agencies, 2.4%, as seen in Table 2.2.

BEA, whose staffing is down 20% since FY24 and 25% since FY19, has made five announcements of table discontinuations in 2025 to add to the five announcements of cuts in 2024.

Most notable at the Census Bureau were the new population census ordered by the president in August and the replacement of the acting director with a political appointee in September. The newly ordered census, to occur outside of the constitutionally mandated decadal census and for which work was to begin immediately, would exclude "people who are in our country illegally" from the count. We also note the appointment of a political appointee as acting director was only possible because Director Robert Santos resigned the position in February partway through a fixed five-year term set by law to immunize the director from outside influences and facilitate long-term planning for the decennial census and other programs.

The Census Bureau also lost 15–20% of its staff, which has consequences not only for its own work but also system-wide because of its extensive field data collection efforts for other agencies, including the monthly CPS for BLS and the National Crime Victimization Survey for BJS. A March report from the commerce inspector general found that the Census Bureau had already struggled with staffing gaps in 2023 and 2024. The strains resulted in the cancellations of three special local censuses in March, at least two of which were resumed after the Census Bureau was allowed to hire field representatives later in the spring.

In spring 2025, due to administrative actions, BEA, BLS, and the Census Bureau lost seven advisory committees serving them individually or, in the case of the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee, collectively.

2.2.2 BROADER FEDERAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM DEVELOPMENTS

While our project focuses on the 13 federal statistical agencies and the office of the chief statistician, we can report limited information on the broader statistical system. Notably, the ICSP includes three recognized statistical units: the National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) in USDA; the Microeconomic Surveys Unit that is part of the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve System; and the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in the Department of Health and Human Services. We understand that all NAHMS and CBHSQ staff were terminated this spring. The contract for the National Survey of Drug Use and Health, which CBHSQ's staff managed and oversaw, was maintained. The elimination of NAHMS and CBHSQ staff may explain why the OMB-managed website, www.statspolicy.gov, changed the terminology for its ICSP membership list denoting the 16 agencies and units from "Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units" to "Recognized Statistical Agency or Unit Head."

As of November 2025, 7 of the 13 statistical agencies have acting heads. For comparison, there were six acting heads in September of both 2021 and 2017. Of the three agency heads that are presidentially nominated and Senate confirmed—BLS, Census, and EIA– two are vacant and one confirmed, as of September 25, 2025.

In addition to the 13 heads of the statistical agencies and the three heads of the statistical units, the ICSP also includes the chief statistician of the United States and the statistical officials from across the government. Fifteen of the 30 ICSP members

are new to their position this year. Besides eight new statistical agency heads and the new NAHMS head, five of the statistical officials are new to their position this year, and the position is vacant for USAID.[9]

2.3 DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS AND RAMIFICATIONS

In this section, we step back to consider the broader ramifications of the developments discussed in subsections 2.1 and 2.2. Section 2.3.1 summarizes the ramifications of administration actions for the data available to users. Section 2.3.2 summarizes the broader implications of staff and leadership losses for the statistical agencies' ability to move forward. In Section 2.3.3, we look at longer-term challenges for the decentralized federal statistical system to operate more coherently and efficiently.

2.3.1 EFFECTS ON AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF FEDERAL STATISTICS

Our description of agency-specific and system-wide impacts of administration actions, such as staff reductions, have mentioned many instances of cuts and degradation in statistical products previously available to policymakers and data users. Here we summarize those impacts in Table 2.4 in the following categories:

- cancellation or significant reduction in scope of statistical programs, such as a survey;
- discontinuation or significant reduction in content of statistical products, such as an analytical report from a survey;
- delays in release of statistical products;
- degradation of data quality, such as from sample cuts or diminished response rates;[10] and
- across-the-board cuts in subject-matter content in statistical programs.

Regarding cuts in subject-matter content, it is the prerogative of an administration to decide that information on a topic should no longer be collected, subject to following congressional mandates and transparent processes for input and review. Our concern is about documenting those cuts in what was previously available to policymakers and the public and providing meaningful opportunity for public input. We also note that some of the table entries occurred in 2024 in response to budget caps that year, which essentially froze funding at FY23 levels. Finally, we believe the table entries are an understatement of the impacts on data availability because of the difficulty in finding definitive information about the status of many statistical programs and products.

[9] Although established in law, USAID has in practice ceased to exist as an independent agency. Early in 2025, its staff was reduced from over 10,000 people to about 600 people and over 80% of its programs were terminated. As of July 2025, its remaining programs were being run by the State Department.

[10] Sample size reductions increase the uncertainty of estimates and may prevent publication of previously available detail. Decreases in response rates reduce the effective sample size and thereby have the same impacts as sample cuts and, in addition, may introduce bias.

TABLE 2.4. Changes in Statistical Programs and Products, 2024–2025

Change Category	Agency, Description of Change (occurred in 2025 unless otherwise noted)
Program Cancellation/ Significant Scope Reduction	**BEA:** **2024:** Near-real-time spending series cancelled Digital economy and health care satellite accounts cancelled or delayed 23 national NIPA tables discontinued 1 Industry Economic Accounts table discontinued 2 state tables and part of a third table on employment and industry discontinued 3 county tables and parts of 3 other tables discontinued 2 metro area tables and parts of 3 other tables discontinued **2025:** Annual statistics on foreign affiliates with 50% or less U.S. ownership cancelled 9 NIPA tables discontinued Components of value-added tables for Industry Economic Account discontinued Tables on sales, net income, and balance sheets of new foreign direct investment in the United States discontinued **BJS:** National Law Enforcement Accountability Database and accompanying BJS report cancelled **BTS:** Daily Travel (cell-phone-based) series cancelled **Census Bureau:** Survey of Income and Program Participation discontinued in present form; to be redesigned using administrative records in some way **EIA:** Photovoltaic Module Shipments data collection and report cancelled **ERS:** Contribution to joint Census-FNS-ERS project to acquire and link SNAP and WIC data to other sources cancelled Food Security Supplement to the CPS cancelled **NASS:** Agricultural Labor Survey cancelled Mink Survey cancelled July cattle report and monthly crop reports, cancelled in 2024, have been reinstated **NCES:** High School & Beyond:2022 (longitudinal survey of 9th and 12th graders) cancelled NAEP scope reduced after 2026 to "pause" some grade levels and subjects, as well as state and city samples; NAEP 2024-2025 Long-Term Trend Age 17 assessment cancelled School Pulse Survey cancelled Note: Common Core of Data and National Postsecondary Student Aid Study cancelled and reinstated

Change Category	Agency, Description of Change (occurred in 2025 unless otherwise noted)
Product Cancellation/ Significant Scope Reduction	**BLS:** Approximately 350 PPI indexes no longer calculated or produced after July 2025 release **BTS:** *The Week in Transportation* suspended **EIA:** 2025 edition of biennial International Energy Outlook likely cancelled **NASS:** State and region-specific reports cancelled **NCES:** Indicators of School Crime and Safety report for 2024 pulled from publication schedule
Product Delays	**BLS:** 2024 Consumer Expenditures annual data release, originally scheduled for September 23, 2025, postponed to October 30, to resolve anomalies from a questionnaire change, and to December 19 because of the government shutdown. **Census Bureau:** Household Pulse Survey for April not yet released **EIA:** Working and Net Available Shell Storage Capacity report delayed for a year **ERS:** *Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade: May 2025*, released four days after its May 29 scheduled release; language removed on trade effects of tariffs **NCES:** *Condition of Education* report not published by June 1 deadline as required by law; sparse highlights report released on June 2 and report in the future to be updated on a rolling basis *Digest of Education Statistics* (basis of Condition of Education report) lagging; by June 2025 only 27 tables released, compared with 270 by June 2024
Data Quality Degradation	**BEA:** Could not afford to purchase SOI tax data for annual update of national, industry, and state and local accounts **BLS:** Roughly 15% of sample in 72 areas suspended from collection; affects Commodity and Services Pricing and Housing surveys; as a result, number of collected prices and rents used to calculate the CPI temporarily reduced **Census Bureau:** ABS sample size to be cut from 300,000 firms to 220,000 firms plus 8,000 nonprofits when merged with BERD in 2026 (but will provide additional content on R&D expenses on AI and other forms of innovation)
Cuts in Subject-Matter Content Across the Board	Questions on sexual orientation and gender identification (SOGI) removed from many surveys (e.g., NCVS, ABS)

NOTE: ABS = Annual Business Survey; BERD = Business Enterprise R&D Survey; CPS = Current Population Survey; NAEP = National Assessment of Educational Progress; NCVS = National Crime Victimization Survey; NIPA = National Income and Product Accounts.

SOURCE: Compiled by project staff (many products are delayed due to the government shutdown).

2.3.2 STAFF LOSS EFFECTS, SHORT TERM AND LONGER TERM

The significant loss of staff—and the particular types of employees lost—has deeply affected how statistical agencies operate. These reductions have weakened agencies' ability to innovate, modernize, manage effectively, mentor staff, engage with data users, and communicate with stakeholders.

For example, when the new administration dismissed many recently hired federal employees, the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS's) SOI Division lost several new data scientists who had been leading modernization efforts, according to former SOI Director Barry Johnson. Their departure, he said, deprived the agency of "new energy, ideas, and cutting-edge skills" that had also helped invigorate existing staff.

Across the system, modernization and IT work were hit hardest. Agencies such as EIA lost skilled technology staff during the return-to-office transition, and many employees with IT or data science expertise accepted separation offers, finding opportunities elsewhere.

Leadership and management ranks were also depleted as senior employees became eligible for early retirement. As mentioned previously, at BLS, one-third of 36 leadership positions were vacant by late summer. These senior staff carry institutional memory and technical expertise that cannot be quickly replaced, and their departure also ends valuable mentoring for early-career staff.

With fewer people to do the work, many agencies have adopted an "all-hands-on-deck" approach to meet critical publication deadlines, leaving employees covering multiple roles. Innovation, user engagement, and modernization often fall to the side. Agencies have had to reduce analytical products—such as reports and tables—to preserve core data collection, making information less accessible to all but the most advanced users. Deferred IT maintenance and delayed modernization efforts may not be immediately visible to the public but could soon threaten agencies' ability to meet even their basic missions.

Critical institutional knowledge for data collection, analysis, and dissemination has also been lost through the abrupt departure of staff. National Academies (2022) discusses smooth and effective knowledge transfer in detail in the context of the importance of transparency while also emphasizing its key role in operational efficiency and public trust.

Although they were not staff, members of the more technical disbanded advisory committees were helpful in bringing ideas for innovation and improved data collection technologies and methods from the private sector to agency staff. They were a voice for continued innovation, and the loss of both staff and outside advisors is likely to slow the pace of modernization and adoption of more efficient data collection practices.

2.3.3 COMPOUNDED EFFECTS ON A DECENTRALIZED STATISTICAL SYSTEM

As noted earlier, the U.S. federal statistical system is highly decentralized, with 13 agencies that differ widely in size, capacity, and access to training and IT resources. In spite of the 2018 Evidence Act mandates meant to foster more data-sharing, these agencies continue to face barriers to cross-agency collaboration yet depend heavily on one another for data and operational support. Staff losses and administrative disruptions can therefore cascade through the system, weakening the entire network.

Interdependencies

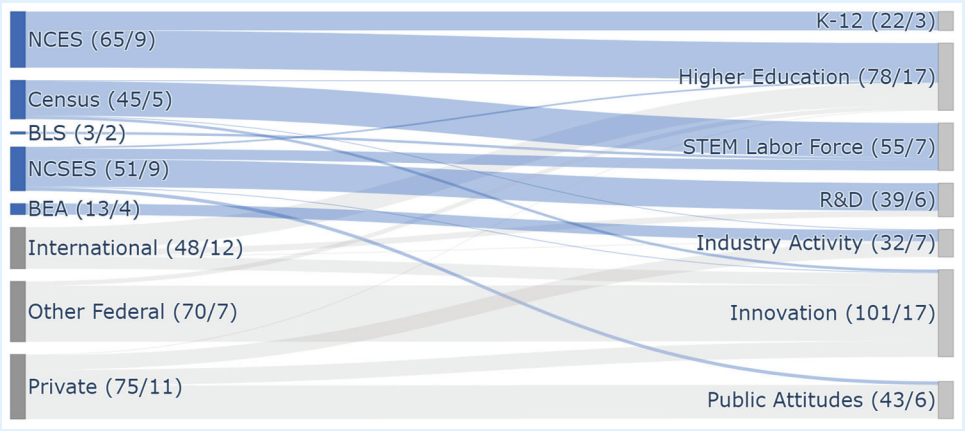
Resource and program cuts in one agency can directly affect others. For instance, reductions in Census Bureau field staff have disrupted surveys that the Bureau conducts for other agencies, such as the Current Population Survey (CPS) for BLS, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) for BJS, and the National Health Information Survey for NCHS.

Agencies often use external data streams to produce their own data products and reports. Two examples are discussed below for NCSES and BEA. Any disruptions to data collection, staff capacity, or collaboration within the system therefore ripple outward—undermining the consistency, reliability, and policy relevance of the nation's official statistics.

Example: NCSES depends on inputs from multiple agencies to produce the congressionally mandated *Science and Engineering (S&E) Indicators* report—a comprehensive assessment of the nation's science and engineering enterprise. These indicators draw heavily on data from NCES, BLS, BEA, and other federal agencies, as well as from international and private-sector sources.

Among NCSES's highest profile reports, *S&E Indicators* is widely used and cited across the public and private sectors and viewed as an important input to the measure of U.S. economic competitiveness. For the 2024 cycle of *S&E Indicators*, there were seven indicator areas: K-12 education; higher education; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) labor force; research and development (R&D); industry activities; innovation; and public attitudes towards S&E. Figure 2.2 illustrates the dependence of each indicator area, on the right side, on various data providers, on the left side: specific statistical agencies and the broader categories of international data providers, other (non-statistical agency) federal data providers, and private-sector data providers. In this Sankey diagram, the widths of flows linking providers and indicators are proportional to the number of times a provider's datasets are used, which is the first number in parentheses in the figure's labels for both providers and indicators. The second number in parentheses is the number of unique datasets for each provider and indicator. For example, 9 NCES datasets are used a total of 65 times in the 2024 cycle. For the K-12 indicator area, three NCES datasets are used 22 times. The statistical agency nodes and flows are in blue.

FIGURE 2.2. Data Providers for the 2024 Cycle of *S&E Indicators* Reports (number of uses/unique datasets)*



SOURCE: Compiled by project staff from the *NCSES S&E Indicators* data source page resources.
*Includes only one of three R&D reports in the 2024 cycle: "Research and Development: U.S. Trends and International Comparisons." "Number of uses" should be viewed as illustrative. For further explanation, detailed methodology, and source files for the S&E figure, a ReadMe file is provided

Several observations emerge from this figure. Federal statistical agencies account for half of all the datasets used in the 2024 cycle of indicators, with five of the seven indicator areas—K-12 education, higher education, STEM labor force, R&D, and industry activities—being especially reliant on statistical agency datasets. Most indicator areas rely on a multitude of datasets, but some are particularly reliant on a single provider—e.g., K-12 on NCES, STEM labor force on the Census Bureau, and R&D on NCSES. The innovation indicator area relies heavily on non-statistical-agency federal data providers, while the public attitudes indicator area is almost entirely reliant on private data providers.

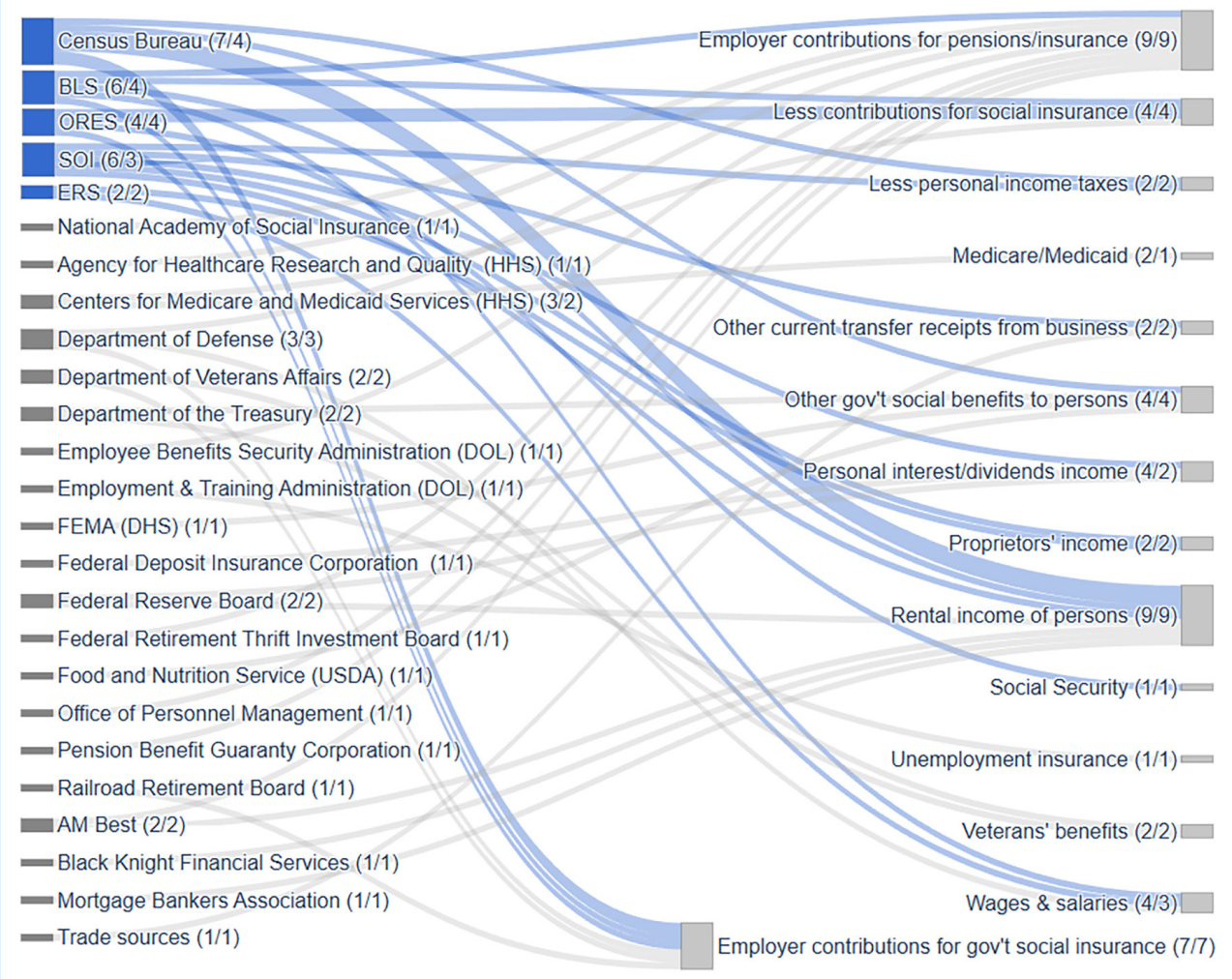
From the provider perspective, NCES primarily underpins education-related indicator areas (K-12 and higher education) with multiple underlying data series like the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and NAEP, while NCSES largely informs the STEM labor force and R&D indicator areas. Both BLS datasets inform the STEM labor force indicator area, as do most of the 5 Census Bureau datasets. The 13 uses of 4 BEA datasets all inform the industry activities indicator area. International data providers almost entirely inform 3 indicator areas: higher education, R&D, and innovation.

Example: BEA's estimates of Personal Income (PI), which represent about 74% of Gross Domestic Income/Gross Domestic Product, provide another example of the interdependencies among federal statistical agencies' programs. PI estimates are a principal federal economic indicator (PFEI), issued monthly. They are widely cited in the business and general press and, expressed in per capita terms, are used to measure the household sector's economic well-being and as the basis for the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) to determine reimbursements to states for Medicaid expenditures.

Figure 2.3 visualizes the dependence of PI estimates on a wide variety of data sources.

As the figure illustrates, BEA's PI estimates rely on 17 datasets from 5 federal statistical agencies: BLS, the Census Bureau, ERS (USDA), ORES (SSA), and SOI (IRS). Another 21 datasets come from 15 non-statistical federal agencies (e.g., CMS for Medicare and Medicaid expenditures). Finally, 6 datasets that feed into the estimates come from 5 nonfederal businesses and organizations (e.g., AM Best provides group insurance premiums and property insurance data that feed into the estimates for employer contributions for pension/insurance and rental income of persons).

FIGURE 2.3. Data Providers for Aggregate Components of Annual Personal Income Estimates (number of uses/unique products)



SOURCE: PI components and their data sources based on detailed spreadsheet provided to the project team by BEA staff.

Overall, the visualization illustrates the risk to an agency's data product due to disruptions in the availability of data from other sources. For example, BEA was unable to follow its usual practice of obtaining select SOI tabulations for its 2025 Annual Updates to the National, Industry, and State and Local Economic Accounts (see Supporting Materials: I (BEA)). As seen in Figure 2.3 above, SOI provides three datasets that feed into five components of Personal Income.

> **FINDING 2.4:** The agencies that produce official statistics are dependent on each other's output across the system both to inform data collections and to produce certain datasets, such as GDP. Resource reductions and cuts in data programs and products that fail to consider the interdependencies among components of the federal statistical system (and the dependence of federal statistical agencies on outside data sources) impair agencies' ability to fulfill their Evidence Act responsibilities, meet their missions, and meet growing information needs.

System Challenges

The decentralized nature of the federal statistical system poses long-term structural challenges. Chief among them is a mismatch between the system's operational expectations and how it is funded. Although the system is expected to function as an interconnected network, guided and overseen by the chief statistician as prescribed by the Paperwork Reduction Act, its budgets are not designed that way. Each of the 16 statistical agencies and units, along with the Office of the Chief Statistician, and numerous statistical offices across government, receive separate appropriations, and the chief statistician's office is under-resourced for its coordination and planning functions. There is not a dedicated funding mechanism for the U.S. federal statistical system to operate as a system—in which priorities are set system-wide, interagency collaboration is seamless, agencies can take advantage of system-wide funds for IT upgrades, and the like.

In addition to being under-resourced, the Office of the Chief Statistician, being part of OMB, lacks its own funding for system-wide initiatives. To support shared modernization or IT investments, each parent department must include its portion of the costs in its own budget request, subject to OMB approval. Given the difficulty agencies already face in meeting their own missions, it is even harder to secure funding for collective improvements that would benefit the system as a whole. In order to fund system-wide initiatives, funding for agency-wide needs has to be included in each of half-a-dozen appropriations bills.[11]

One notable exception is the National Secure Data Service (NSDS) demonstration project. This initiative is envisioned as a shared service for statistical agencies to facilitate cross-agency data-sharing, enable enhanced privacy protections for protected data while enabling easier and broader access to researchers, and provide a platform for innovation. The NSDS was authorized as a five-year demonstration project in the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act. The funding was provided to NCSES to manage the project on behalf of the statistical system, and governance and priorities are set by the ICSP. The NSDS demonstrates the value of collaboration and intentional sharing of resources to benefit the entire system. However, to continue to add value as a part of the larger federal statistical system, it will require sustained OMB support, funding, and staff.

Several decades ago, then OMB director Peter Orzag conducted a cross-cutting review of the statistical agencies as part of the annual budget process. This review provided the visibility and information needed to include sufficient funds in each statistical agency's budget to maintain critical activities, particularly those affecting the other statistical agency outputs. That sort of review has not been conducted recently. But even that review did not include funding mechanisms for shared infrastructure and modernization efforts that would benefit all the agencies. Elevating the role of the chief statistician offers an opportunity to focus the attention of the OMB director on this gap and the importance of addressing it.

> **FINDING 2.5:** The federal statistical system is not funded as a system. As a result, it lacks the resources needed to implement many shared initiatives and services that could make it more responsive, efficient, and cost-effective, while improving the timeliness and relevance of federal statistics.

Leadership and Cross-Agency Experience

The system benefits greatly from leaders and staff who have served in multiple statistical agencies or elsewhere in government, industry, and academe. Such experience brings perspective, expertise, and institutional understanding that strengthen both individual agencies and the system overall. Some agencies have taken advantage of existing authorities to encourage

[11] See Figure B-2 of *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency: Eighth Edition*. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2025. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/27934.

professional development, such as those available under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA), which enables senior executives to spend time working in academia or the nonprofit sector. Similarly, professionals in academe, industry, and the nonprofit sectors bring fresh viewpoints to the federal statistical system and communicate to their colleagues the challenges and opportunities in the federal statistical system. Other opportunities have existed in the past for personnel details to other agencies as part of leadership and senior executive development programs, although the fate of these programs is unknown at this time. However, there is no formal mechanism to encourage and support temporary assignments or staff exchanges that could systematically promote this valuable cross-fertilization specifically between the statistical agencies. As a result, some agencies, particularly those that are larger and better staffed, have tended to offer more opportunities for advanced professional development than the smaller agencies (see Section 4 and Supporting Materials: H). The current hiring freeze and staff shortages exacerbate this problem.

> **FINDING 2.6:** The federal statistical system lacks formal mechanisms to promote cross-agency leadership development. While some agencies use existing authorities for professional development, there is no systematic program for temporary assignments or staff exchanges between statistical agencies, particularly disadvantaging smaller agencies with fewer resources.

Data-Sharing Barriers

Barriers to data-sharing for statistical purposes remain one of the most persistent and costly obstacles to system efficiency. Establishing or renewing data-sharing agreements between agencies can take months, with each agreement often negotiated separately even when multiple agencies seek access to the same data. These duplicative processes add unnecessary cost and delay, diverting resources from analytical work and innovation.

The September 2025 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report CBO's Agreements to Access Data Since September 30, 2024 offers a window into these challenges. Like the statistical agencies, CBO depends on extensive data from other federal entities to produce its projections and analyses. The report describes frequent delays tied to agency responsiveness, legal authority, and lengthy approval processes, even for renewals of existing agreements. As stated in the introduction, "Some of the most salient challenges relate to agencies' responsiveness, and others relate to the legal authority to access particularly sensitive data."

The Evidence Act directed OMB to issue a regulation to facilitate data access for statistical agencies, but as of December 2025, no draft regulation has been released for public comment. Moreover, legislative changes would be required for access by more statistical agencies to key administrative data (e.g., expanding Census Bureau access to IRS business records to BEA and BLS). This continuing gap leaves agencies to navigate complex and inconsistent procedures that limit their ability to efficiently produce high-quality, integrated federal statistics.

> **FINDING 2.7:** The federal statistical system continues to face significant barriers to data-sharing for statistical purposes. As a result, agencies continue to navigate complex, duplicative data-sharing agreements that can take months to establish or renew, which diverts resources from analytical work and limits their ability to efficiently produce high-quality, integrated federal statistics.

SECTION 3

FEDERAL DATA USE AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD FEDERAL STATISTICS: FINDINGS

Our inaugural 2024 report emphasized ensuring the quality of federal data, the importance for statistical agencies to be responsive to user needs, and the need for statistical agencies to maintain the trust of the public. Indeed, the health of the federal statistical system depends on cooperation with and participation in data collection by the public. Moreover, statistical products that are not broadly trusted are not serving the system's fundamental function to support an informed citizenry and evidence-based governance. Further, support and resources for federal statistics are also influenced by public attitudes toward federal statistics. As such, this project is conducting activities to both study how federal data are used and to monitor public perspectives on federal statistics.

In The Nation's Data at a Crossroads: Status Report, we analyzed two data sources to understand how federal data are used and the perspectives of the public and of data users on federal statistics. The two data sources were: (a) Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey across three rounds collected in October 2024, December 2024, and February 2025 (6,740 to 9,404 respondents each round); and (b) NORC at the University of Chicago AmeriSpeak® panel data from June 2025 (1,163 respondents). Estimates from the AmeriSpeak data found that a sizable portion of the public have used federal data and that data users come from a wide variety of professional backgrounds, industries, and occupations. Estimates from the Household Pulse Survey of the overall percentage of adults who tended to trust federal statistics were steady during the October 2024–February 2025 period.

Since that time, additional AmeriSpeak data have been collected in separate rounds toward the end of each month in July (1,132 respondents); August (1,121 respondents); and September (1,120 respondents). This section presents key findings on federal data use and public perspectives on federal statistics using the combined AmeriSpeak data collected between June and September 2025 (4,536 total respondents). Detailed tables are available in Supporting Materials: B. (More recent data from the Household Pulse Survey have not yet been released.)

3.1 FEDERAL DATA USE

Analyzing the combined June through September AmeriSpeak data, we provide here updates to estimates previously provided in The Nation's Data at a Crossroads, which was based only on the June data. The results demonstrate how broad are the needs for federal data for a variety of individuals working in different employment sectors, industries, and occupations.

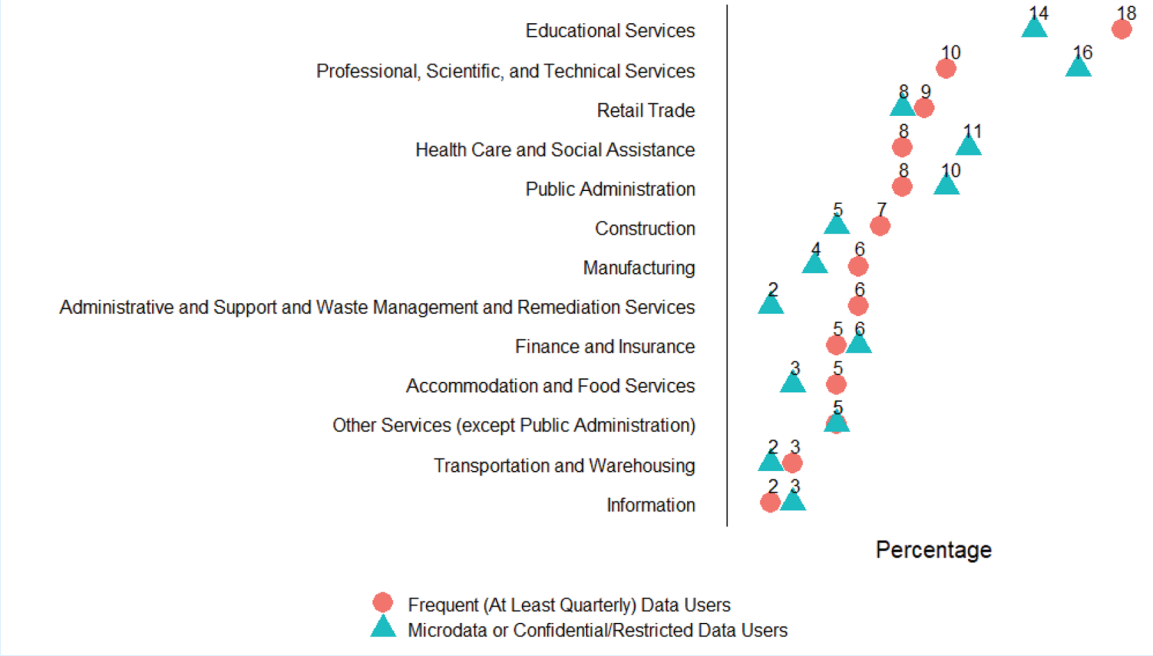
We estimate 23% of adults report having used federal statistics, with the most common uses being to cite facts or figures from a federal statistics report (14% of adults) or to use individual statistics, tables, and/or maps (13% of adults). Smaller proportions of adults reported using microdata or confidential/restricted data.

Among individuals reporting having used federal statistics, an estimated 39% of data users reported using federal data less than once a year while 41% use federal data at least quarterly.

We studied the professional backgrounds of two groups of data users: (a) "frequent data users" who use federal data at least quarterly, and (b) individuals having used either microdata or confidential/restricted data. Note that these two groups have some overlap but also have many members who are in one of these two groups but not the other—we estimate 49% of individuals who have used either microdata or confidential/restricted data are frequent data users. Supporting Materials: B presents estimates of the percentage of these two groups of data users in different employment sectors (Table B-3), industries (Table B-4), and occupations (Table B-5). Altogether, these tables demonstrate that federal data are used by a variety of individuals

with different professional backgrounds. In Figure 3.1 below, we present the estimates by industry. Educational services and professional, scientific, and technical services are the two industries with the most data users of both types. However, combined, these industries include only 28% of frequent data users and 31% of microdata or confidential/restricted data users. These data demonstrate that data users come from a wide variety of other industries as well.

FIGURE 3.1: Estimated Percentage in Different Industries Among U.S. Adults Who Report More Experience Using Federal Statistical Products



SOURCE: NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, June–September 2025.

FINDING 3.1: A sizable portion of the public reports having used federal statistics, including federal statistics reports and individual statistics, tables, and/or maps. Federal data are used by a wide variety of individuals with different professional backgrounds, including across employment sectors, industries, and occupations.

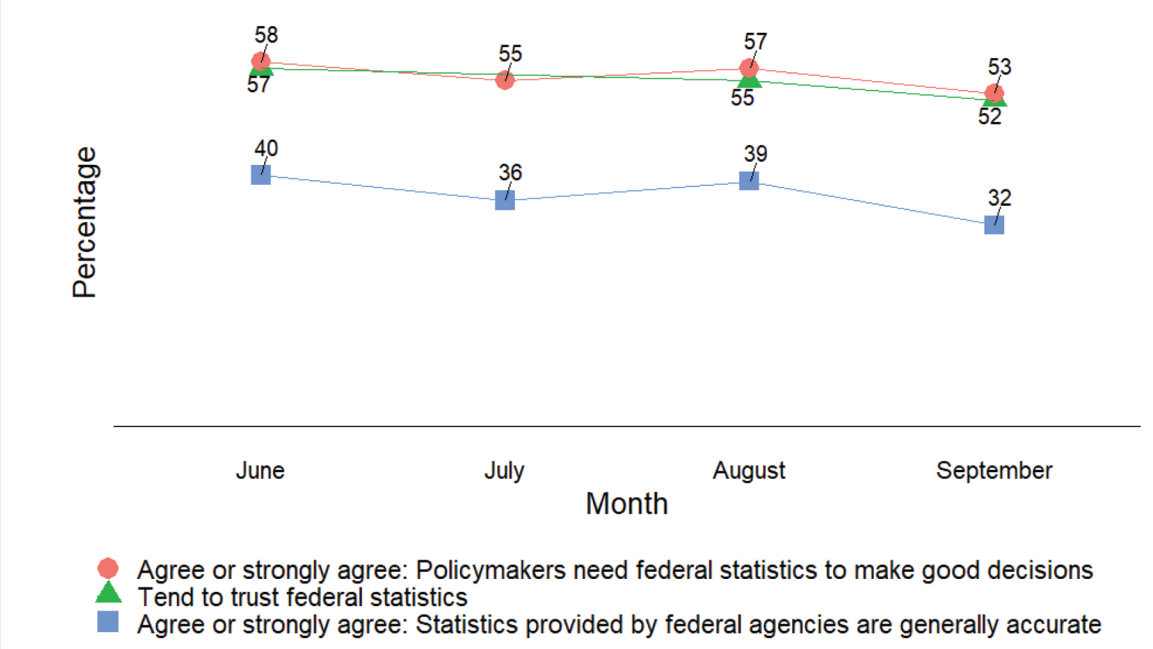
3.2 PUBLIC PERSPECTIVES ON FEDERAL STATISTICS

Analyzing the AmeriSpeak data between June and September 2025, we found an overall pattern of decline in agreement with favorable statements about federal statistics. 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. While this change between June and September was not statistically significant (p-value 0.11), we found statistically significant declines in trust in federal statistics among specific subgroups, including the non-Hispanic white alone population (7 percentage point decline) and among those with a professional degree or with post-graduate study (10 percentage point decline). Additionally, many other subgroups examined showed declines in trust during this time period, although the changes were not statistically significant. This trend contrasts with the steady estimates of trust in federal statistics found in the Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey between October 2024 and February 2025 seen in Table 1 of the supporting materials for the Nation's Data at a Crossroads: Status Report.

We additionally analyzed seven statements regarding perspectives on federal statistics among the U.S. public, presented in Table B-9 of Supporting Materials: B with select trends graphed in Figures 3.2 and 3.3. For many statements, there is a sizable estimate for the group who neither agrees and disagrees with the statement per Table B-7 of Supporting Materials: B. For six of the seven statements, there were declines in the percentage of U.S. adults agreeing or strongly agreeing with a positive statement about federal statistics, with the declines being statistically significant at the 10% level:

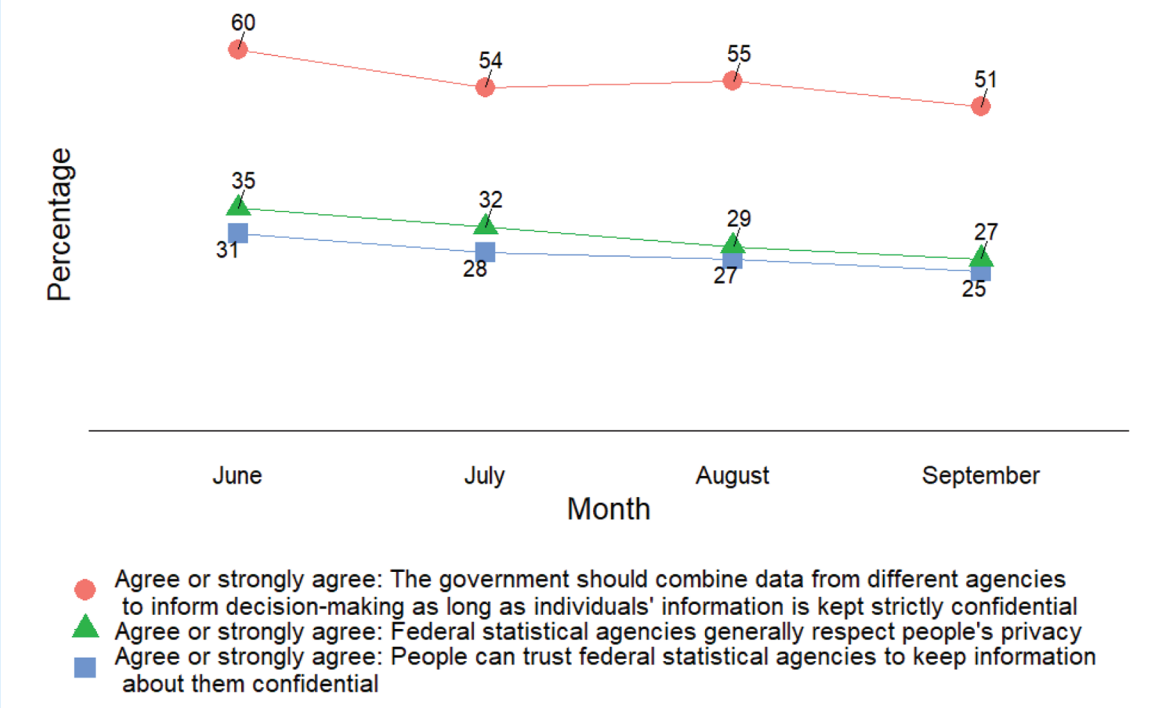
- The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that statistics provided by federal agencies are generally accurate decreased from 40% in June to 32% in September (p-value 0.01).
- The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that policymakers need federal statistics to make good decisions decreased from 58% in June to 53% in September (p-value 0.06).
- The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that businesses need federal statistics to make good decisions decreased from 51% in June to 46% in September (p-value 0.08).
- The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that people can trust federal statistical agencies to keep information about them confidential decreased from 31% in June to 25% in September (p-value 0.02).
- The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that federal statistical agencies generally respect people's privacy decreased from 35% in June to 27% in September (p-value <0.01).
- The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that the government should combine data from different agencies to inform decision-making as long as individuals' information is kept strictly confidential decreased from 60% in June to 51% in September (p-value <0.01).

FIGURE 3.2: Estimated Percentage of U.S. Adults Agreeing with Different Positive Statements About Federal Statistics, by Month



Note: Question about trust in federal statistics not asked during July survey.
SOURCE: NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, June–September 2025.

FIGURE 3.3: Estimated Percentage of U.S. Adults Agreeing with Different Positive Statements About Federal Statistics, by Month



SOURCE: NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, June–September 2025.

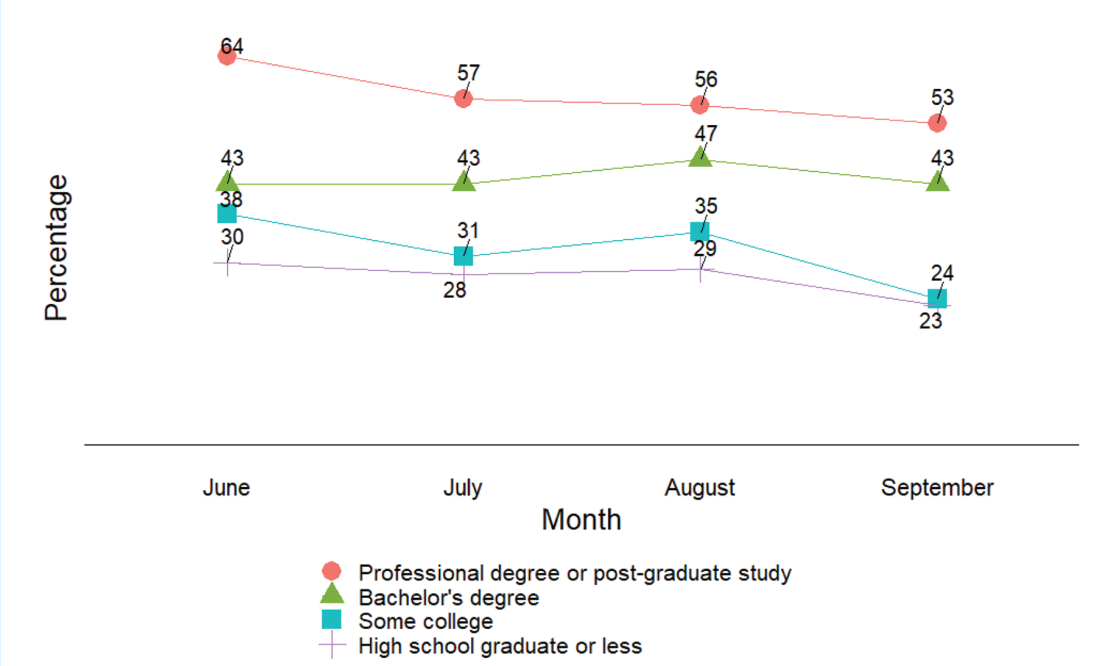
Tables B-10 to B-14 of Supporting Materials: B demonstrate trends in agreeing or strongly agreeing with select statements about federal statistics by a variety of panelist characteristics including data use, age, race/ethnicity, education, and political party identification. Groups that tend to have more favorable views of federal statistics for most questions include data users,[12] those ages 60 or older, the non-Hispanic all-other group (neither white alone nor Black alone), more educated adults, and Democrats. In each table, we find multiple subgroups with statistically significant decreases in favorable views of federal statistics between June and September. Across the tables, we consistently find statistically significant decreases in favorable views of federal statistics for the non-Hispanic white alone population and those with some college but not a bachelor's degree. In Figures 3.4 and 3.5, we present trends in agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements "statistics provided by federal agencies are generally accurate" and "policymakers need federal statistics to make good decisions" by education level.

For this project, we anticipate analyzing new AmeriSpeak data on these topics to be collected on a regular basis. We will continue to analyze and monitor trends in public perspectives on federal statistics with this data, sharing regular updates.

> **FINDING 3.2:** Positive views among the U.S. public declined between June and September 2025 about 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.

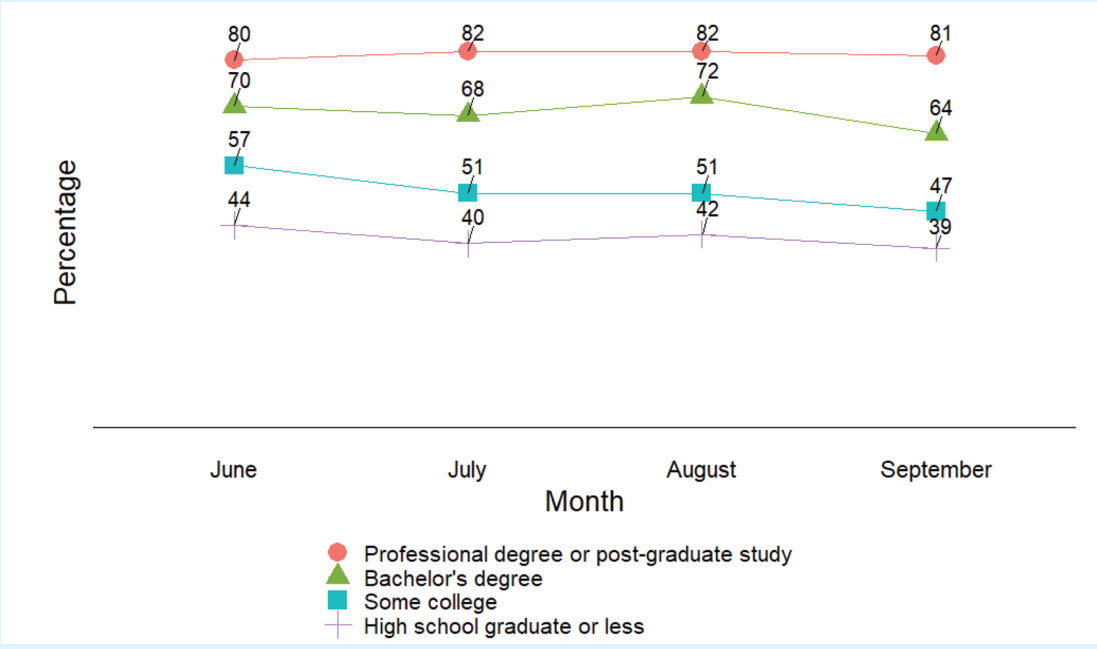
[12] Responses to a February 2025 ASA call for feedback from a nonrepresentative group of experienced data users echoed the AmeriSpeak findings regarding trust in federal data by data users. The feedback group tended to find federal statistics timely, relevant, and essential to their work and to say their efforts would suffer if data were less detailed or less current (see Supporting Materials: A).

FIGURE 3.4: Estimated Percentage of U.S. Adults Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing That Statistics Provided by Federal Agencies Are Generally Accurate, by Education Level and Month



SOURCE: NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, June–September 2025.

FIGURE 3.5: Estimated Percentage of U.S. Adults Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing That Policymakers Need Federal Statistics to Make Good Decisions by Education Level and Month, NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, June–September 2025



SOURCE: NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, June–September 2025.

SECTION 4

INNOVATION OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES: FINDINGS

Federal statistical agencies cannot fulfill their missions—or serve policymakers and the public—without agility and a strong capacity for innovation.[13] To ensure data remain relevant, accurate, timely, and accessible, agencies must continually modernize methods and technology while minimizing costs and respondent burden.

Artificial intelligence (AI) illustrates the urgency of this need. Policymakers and the public are seeking reliable data on how AI is reshaping employment by industry, the scale and sources of AI investment, and how AI is being taught and used in education. At the same time, as statistical agencies strive to respond to this need, they are exploring ways to responsibly apply AI to improve their own operations and analytical capability.

Addressing a comprehensive AI agenda for statistical agency products and operations will require sustained, coordinated effort across the federal statistical system and partnerships with other federal and state agencies and with the private and academic sectors. The system and its partners will need to work together to establish shared definitions of AI applications, identify best practices for collecting and analyzing AI-related data, make databases (agencies' and data providers') AI-ready, and test AI tools for use in official statistics. The administration's America's AI Action Plan (July 2025) includes provisions that could help advance this work (see discussion below).[14]

This section describes the key requirements for innovation, summarizes the historical record of innovation within the federal statistical system, and assesses recent developments that have either supported or hindered progress since July 2024. It also highlights selected agency initiatives to sustain innovation despite constraints and notes promising advances from the academic, state government, and business sectors that could strengthen federal statistics in the future. Three key findings conclude the section (see Supporting Materials: H for details and documentation).

4.1 REQUIREMENTS FOR STATISTICAL AGENCY INNOVATION

To innovate effectively—whether in measuring the impact of AI or improving data collection—several conditions must be present beyond the resources and protections outlined in Section 2.1:

1. *Adequate and sustained funding targeted to innovation.* Agencies require stable funding and staffing to plan and phase in innovations, especially for cross-agency or long-term initiatives and to address the effect of changes on time series. The ability to use unexpended funds across fiscal years is crucial to successful, sustained innovation.
2. *Supportive policy and procedural frameworks.* Agencies need clear, streamlined processes for data acquisition, IT modernization, and other core functions, free from unnecessary legislative or administrative barriers and including active support from the chief information officer and other parent agency staff.

[13] Innovation includes both new and improved methods, datasets, access tools, etc. (see Supporting Materials: H).

[14] Our use of "AI" refers to the large language models (LLMs) and related models recently made available, which are "trained" on enormous databases and, greatly oversimplifying, predict answers to user queries probabilistically based on their learnings. Statistical agencies have used machine learning techniques for decades for such purposes as facilitating coding of write-in entries on surveys for occupation, industry, and other variables. The new models are vastly more powerful but require careful adaptation to specific user needs (e.g., parsing data provided to statistical agencies directly from corporate accounting systems) and careful review to guard against errors.

3. *Sustained collaborative relationships with partners outside of government.* Outside experts in academia, state and local government, and the private sector are often positioned to move more quickly than federal agencies in researching ways to use new data sources to measure economic well-being, business dynamics, and other phenomena. Statistical agencies need the ability to pursue partnerships with outside experts in both the research and implementation phases of innovation.
4. *A strong culture of innovation* in which staff are empowered, rewarded, and encouraged to test new ideas and learn from experience. As described in The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report (p. 68), 10 characteristics define such a culture:

   (a) staff have the tools, training, and time they need to innovate,

   (b) staff are rewarded for innovation,

   (c) failure to meet identified goals is viewed as an opportunity to learn,

   (d) a well-specified strategic plan spells out goals for innovation, but locking down too early constrains innovation (successful projects are a bit unruly, early on),

   (e) the agency regularly obtains outside reviews of major programs and implements recommendations in a timely manner,

   (f) experts are invited to work with and present to staff,

   (g) staff are rotated among assignments and leadership participates in short-term details to other statistical agencies,

   (h) collaboration with other agencies and with outside partners is embedded in the culture and rewarded,

   (i) agency staff believe the agency is innovative and rewards innovation, and

   (j) the agency proactively reaches out to diverse user communities to learn where and which innovations would have most value.

4.2 WHAT IS THE RECORD OF THE STATISTICAL AGENCIES ON INNOVATION?

The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report (pp. 65–67) documented a long record of innovation by federal statistical agencies, including their rapid response to many of the data needs that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, without the extensive innovations tested and implemented in the 2010s, it would likely not have been feasible to conduct the 2020 Census during the height of the Covid-19 restrictions. These innovations, sparked by a Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) report and continued work by members of a CNSTAT standing committee of expert volunteers,[15] included development of a robust infrastructure for internet self-response and nonresponse follow-up carried out by smartphone-outfitted field staff, with their routes optimized similar to how UPS and other companies manage peak deliveries during the holidays.

Many Covid-era innovations were designed to be temporary and have ended appropriately. Others with long-term value have continued, though often with reduced scope or resources. BEA's near-real-time consumer spending series—begun in 2020—was discontinued in 2024 for lack of funding and because of concerns about the data. Of eight post-pandemic innovations highlighted in the inaugural report, most remain active, although some are lagging, and all depend on continued support (see Supporting Materials: H).

A number of agencies have invested in developing staff expertise in data science and other advanced disciplines, built fellowship and internship programs to attract new talent, and pursued collaborative projects with peer agencies. Staff surveys generally reflected positive views of how well their agencies supported and rewarded innovation—particularly in larger agencies.

[15] National Research Council. 2011. *Change and the 2020 Census: Not Whether But How.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/13135.

However, the 2024 report also found persistent challenges. Since 2009, most agencies have experienced real-dollar funding declines and significant staffing limitations. Every agency, regardless of size, reported barriers to innovation, including inflexible funding structures, cumbersome data access procedures, and limited IT modernization capacity. These barriers included:

- inadequate resources for continuous testing and improvement to key long-standing data series (e.g., the BLS-Census Current Population Survey (CPS) that produces monthly estimates of labor force participation and unemployment);
- barriers to sharing of data among federal agencies;
- barriers to sharing of state data with federal statistical agencies;
- difficulties in resourcing infrastructure (e.g., IT systems) improvements;
- insufficient staff in the chief statistician's office; and
- challenges to innovation and related data collection updates for smaller agencies, especially by staff size.

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 the report's 15 recommendations spoke to increasing statistical agency innovation capabilities, but only one has been implemented (see Section 6.1).

4.3 WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE JULY 2024 TO HELP OR HINDER INNOVATION?

The ongoing monitoring for this project presents an austere picture of the federal statistical agencies' ability to innovate. The cumulative effects of administrative decisions since early 2025 have significantly eroded the resources, scientific capacity, flexibility, and culture that enable the agencies to modernize and respond to emerging data needs. The result is a system struggling to sustain even its core operations, much less advance new approaches to meet policymakers' and the public's evolving information requirements.

Resources

The administration's federal hiring freeze, buyout programs, and other downsizing initiatives have led to staff losses ranging from 10% to more than 30% across statistical agencies, with a few taking deeper cuts as mentioned previously. These losses include many of the staff most directly involved in modernization efforts, such as data scientists and IT specialists. Parent agencies have also experienced staff losses, which hinder the statistical agencies to the extent that parent agencies provide shared human resources (HR), IT, and other services.

Fiscal 2026 budget requests, apart from funding related to 2030 census planning and testing, are flat or below FY25 levels in real terms. For example, no funds are currently available at BLS for urgently needed modernization of cornerstone series, such as the CPS and Consumer Expenditure Survey programs, although some work is in progress on the CPS with the Census Bureau.

Barriers

Barriers to innovation previously identified (see Section 4.1) remain largely unaddressed. In some cases, they have grown worse. Several departments now require secretarial review of contracts above $100,000, creating long delays in renewing essential software licenses and technical services. These procedures have added friction to already-strained operational processes and have further slowed innovation.

Innovation Culture

The administration's actions have also weakened the culture of innovation that federal statistical agencies depend upon. Early in 2025, meetings were cancelled of advisory committees for BEA, BLS, and the Census Bureau—then the committees were disbanded altogether. Advisory committees were also terminated for NASS, NCHS, and NCSES. This eliminated important channels of outside expertise and user input.[16]

Budget and approval restrictions have curtailed agency participation in CNSTAT, a key mechanism for maintaining scientific standards and developing new methodologies. For example, the Department of Homeland Security terminated a CNSTAT study intended to strengthen its Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS).

The annual Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) conference—formerly a three-day open event attracting hundreds of researchers, practitioners, and users—was reduced to a closed, two-day meeting for federal employees only. This change has limited interaction with outside experts and data users.

The Census Bureau lost the ability to renew a long-standing contract with the Population Reference Bureau for the American Community Survey (ACS) Users Forum, which had over 7,000 members and provided valuable user-to-user feedback and problem-solving.

Across agencies, travel restrictions, curtailed professional development funds, and denials of permission to present at conferences have compounded the problem. Staff have fewer opportunities to engage with peers, learn new techniques, or exchange ideas—all vital to innovation.

Consequences

The scale and speed of these changes have rendered pre-2025 strategic innovation plans largely obsolete. Agency leaders are now forced to concentrate on preserving basic data collection and dissemination. As documented in Section 2, this has meant reducing data detail, delaying releases, and cutting collaborative projects, research access to confidential data, and staff-intensive products that aid users. The cumulative effect is to choke off nearly every source of innovation—resources, partnerships, and feedback alike.

4.4 WHAT ABOUT INNOVATIONS UNDER WAY? RAYS OF LIGHT

Despite these headwinds, federal statistical agencies continue to pursue selected innovations that hold promise for improving data quality, timeliness, relevance, and cost-effectiveness. BEA introduced a new webpage in summer 2025 that describes their innovation work in 13 categories, and its director has previewed advances coming in 2026. The Census Bureau maintains an Experimental Data Products webpage that provides updates on "innovative statistical products created using new data sources or methodologies" and a Modernizing Federal Statistics page highlighting their innovations in many categories. Other agencies provide information on improvements (or innovations) on the webpages for specific datasets, which we searched to identify other innovative activities.

Examples of innovations are available for each functional domain identified in the 2024 report: data concepts and topics, data collection, data processing and estimation, data dissemination, and data evaluation and testing (see Supporting Materials: H). Below we single out key innovations under the first three of these headings that promise major strides toward improved cost-effectiveness of the federal statistical system but only if they are continued and supported. At the same time, the system must do more to make federal statistical data easier to find and use across agencies, ensuring that valuable innovations reach their full potential.

[16] The members of the Census Scientific Advisory Committee (CSAC) have reconstituted themselves as the Independent Census Scientific Advisory Committee (I-CSAC). They held an inaugural meeting on September 18, 2025, at which they reviewed Census Bureau presentations prepared for their cancelled March 2024 meeting, accepted public comments, and made recommendations.

4.4.1 DATA CONCEPTS AND TOPICS

Keeping existing concepts up to date and introducing new concepts and topics for federal statistics are two important areas for statistical agency innovation. A prime example is measuring AI adoption in the economy.

The Census Bureau has worked with NCSES as far back as 2017 to measure AI adoption by businesses (see Box 4.1). More work is needed for the federal statistical system to standardize a set of generally applicable questions and to develop questions targeted to specific industrial and service sectors, such as health care, education, agriculture, and others. Measures of use of AI by households, people with AI-related jobs, and energy consumption of AI data centers are also of interest, as is measuring the production of AI tools and techniques as part of the national accounts. In December 2024, BEA discussed a possible AI production satellite account with the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee, noting the sparseness of available data and the conceptual and technical challenges (Concepts and Challenges of Measuring Production of Artificial Intelligence in the US Economy). To our knowledge, this effort has not gone forward.[17]

One of the administration's three "recommended policy actions" for statistical agencies in its July 2025 AI action plan (America's AI Action Plan, p. 6) calls on BLS, BEA, and the Census Bureau to use "data they already collect" to analyze "AI adoption, job creation, displacement, and wage effects." This item is supportive of the work the Census Bureau is doing on AI adoption, but—to our knowledge—there is no additional funding for BLS, BEA, or the Census Bureau to expand their initiatives.

BOX 4.1

AI DATA SOURCES AND MEASURES FROM FEDERAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMS

Annual Business Survey (ABS): The online ABS, developed by the Census Bureau and NCSES, was first conducted in 2018. It sampled about 850,000 nonfarm employer firms, achieving a 69% response rate (the ABS in non-economic-census years has sampled about 300,000 firms, with a response rate as of 2023 of 62%). Census Bureau analysts linked most ABS respondents to its Longitudinal Business Dynamics (LBD) database, which provides employment and payroll data and other information. Questions on AI adoption included: extent of use (testing, low, moderate, high) of five AI-related technologies: automated vehicle guidance, machine learning, machine vision, natural language processing, and voice recognition software (see AI Adoption in America: Who, What, and Where).

The 2019 and 2023 rounds of the ABS included detailed AI-related questions (e.g., asking about workforce impacts), with a much richer (compared to 2018), paragraph-length definition of AI provided to respondents. The 2020 ABS had a question on the use of AI for innovation activities. The 2022 ABS included a question about AI use and another question on its workforce impacts. The 2024 and 2025 ABS did not touch on AI use or impacts. (See Annual Business Survey Respondent Materials). For 2026, the ABS is planned to merge with the NCSES-sponsored Business Enterprise R&D Survey (BERD), which asks about R&D expenses on AI; the ABS sample size will be reduced from about 300,000 firms to about 220,000 firms and 8,000 nonprofit organizations. (See Federal Register :: Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; Annual Business Survey.)

Business Trends and Outlook Survey (BTOS): The online biweekly BTOS is the successor to the Census Bureau's online weekly Small Business Pulse Survey (SBPS), which ran from April 2020 to April 2022, representing single-location employer businesses with fewer than 500 employees. The BTOS sample (about 200,000 firms in each biweekly cycle) as of July 2022 represented all nonfarm single-location employer businesses, expanded to all nonfarm employer businesses in October 2023. The BTOS has included two questions since September 2023 on AI use in the last two weeks and whether a business expects to use AI in the next six months. A supplement administered in December 2023 through February 2024 asked additional questions on AI adoption and impacts. (See Slide 1 of Measuring AI Use by U.S. Businesses.) E-mail response rates are generally in the range of 25–30%. BTOS published statistics are labeled "experimental."

[17] In fact, BEA has cancelled or suspended two of its satellite accounts (digital economy and health care).

At the same time, the federal government is funding innovation outside the federal government that promises to contribute to the AI economic impact body of knowledge and methodology. Partnerships of states, nonprofits, and academia have been able to move more rapidly than the statistical agencies, which have not been able to overcome many of the barriers to innovation cited above. One example is the Industries of Ideas: A Prototype System for Measuring the Effects of TIP Investments on Firms and Jobs, an NSF-funded project to develop a new, data-driven way to measure the economic impact of federal investments in research and technology, with a focus on AI.[18] The project is led by research teams at the University of Michigan Institute for Research on Innovation and Science (IRIS), The Ohio State University, and the Social Science Research Council and is focused on AI and electric vehicles in Ohio to develop the methodology. It follows the movement of ideas from federally funded research to the marketplace by identifying businesses that employ people trained in deep technology skills through federal research investments (such as research grants to universities), along with early, never-before-available indicators that can provide alerts associated with potential workforce impacts, including, for example, the need for reskilling, upskilling, and new skill acquisition. The project builds on established and successful data systems at IRIS (university administrative data) and the Ohio Education Research Center at The Ohio State University (state longitudinal data systems) to create a prototype pipeline.

4.4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Given declining survey response rates by businesses and households and the costs of preventing further decline, the federal statistical system has a compelling need to develop innovative ways to maintain and improve data quality and achieve greater efficiencies in survey operations. Possible paths to sustain response at affordable costs are to reduce response burden and streamline collection processes—such as BLS's use of online and transactions data for components of both the Consumer Price Index and Producer Price Index.[19]

For businesses, both the Census Bureau and BLS have been working to simplify processes for companies to provide their data confidentially for statistical purposes.[20] In a major overhaul, the Census Bureau simplified and standardized its annual business surveys, combining what were separate surveys of retail trade, manufacturing, and other sectors into the Annual Integrated Economic Survey (AIES).[21] BLS has worked with large companies to facilitate their response for multiple firms and establishments. The Census Bureau has gone a step further to eliminate the need for a large company to respond to surveys entirely; instead, a company like Amazon can have a secure portal to the agency to provide its data on employment, payroll, and other topics in its own format for agency software and staff to sort into standard statistics. Instead of hundreds of hours for a large company to fill out surveys, it may take only 15 minutes to upload their data once a quarter. At present, the Census Bureau is limited to working with a handful of large companies because staff must translate company-provided data into usable statistics. To scale up, the Census Bureau is developing an LLM to map companies' various ways of organizing their data into a common format suitable for census processing.[22]

For households, BLS and the Census Bureau have been working for many years to simplify and facilitate response to the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE), which provides the market basket weights for the CPI (see Gemini Project to Redesign the Consumer Expenditure Surveys: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). More recently, for the CPS, which provides the monthly unemployment estimates, the two agencies have developed a modernization plan with several components (e.g., an internet response option) (see 2023 Modernization Efforts). These efforts have moved slowly and are not as thoroughgoing as they could be in scope (see, e.g., Modernizing the Current Population Survey: Discussion) or in the necessary testing to minimize the effects of different response modes (internet, telephone, in-person) on data quality, as discussed at the fall 2024 meeting of the BLS Technical Advisory Committee. At present, BLS's work on modernizing the CE and CPS has slowed but continues within existing resources.

[18] TIP is the acronym for the NSF Technology, Innovation, and Partnerships Directorate.

[19] See this CNSTAT report, *Modernizing the Consumer Price Index for the 21st Century* (National Academies, 2022): https://doi.org/10.17226/26485.

[20] The Census Bureau for over 50 years has used IRS returns for the nation's 21 million nonemployer businesses (e.g., independent consultants) instead of sending them surveys.

[21] A CNSTAT report played a major role in articulating the vision for the AIES. See *Reengineering the Census Bureau's Annual Economic Surveys* (National Academies, 2018): https://doi.org/10.17226/25098.

[22] See Source Data Innovation at the Census Bureau on direct data feeds from businesses as well as examples of using commercial, satellite, and other alternative data sources; see also Federal Register :: Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; Direct Digital Data Feeds.

4.4.3 DATA PROCESSING AND ESTIMATION

Following data collection, important steps in the production of federal statistics include data processing and estimation. For surveys, many steps are long-standing, such as weighting adjustments for nonresponse, automated imputation for missing responses to specific questions, adjustment of time series for seasonal fluctuations in employment and other phenomena, and increasingly sophisticated confidentiality protection for statistics before public release. For administrative records series, various data cleaning operations are needed prior to release of statistics.

Increasing household and business nonresponse and incomplete response in surveys have undercut the ability of standard methods to compensate, affecting the quality of survey estimates. Administrative records are typically not sufficient on their own to provide useful statistics. More and more, statistical agencies are turning to the concept of blended data or multiple data sources, such as a survey combined with administrative records, to develop improved statistics in terms of accuracy and granularity. Three important initiatives are:

- Personal income distributions for households is an ongoing experimental BEA initiative to distribute aggregate estimates from the national accounts to households on the CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) (see Box 4.2). The initiative was developed after the Great Recession when it became clear that aggregate statistics, such as per capita income, were obscuring growing inequality that was leaving many households behind and vulnerable to the collapse of the housing market. The initiative resumes a tradition of distributional estimates dating back to the 1940s, which was discontinued for lack of resources in the 1970s.[23] To be most useful, BEA needs to produce distributions for the Census Bureau's post-tax, post-transfer income definition, which would permit apples-to-apples comparisons across sources.

BOX 4.2

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONAL INCOME* FOR HOUSEHOLDS FROM BEA

BEA produces a household distribution (means, medians, deciles, and other fractions of households) of its personal income (PI) series (NIPA Table 2; see, e.g., Personal Income and Outlays, August 2025), based on the CPS ASEC augmented with tax and other administrative data. Results are adjusted for household size. The first "prototype" national statistics were published in March 2020 for income years 2007–2016. Subsequently, BEA has produced household personal income distributions every December in final for year t–2 and provisionally for year t–1, with estimates available back to 2000. BEA added disposable (after-tax) PI household distributions in 2020, internationally comparable (with Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] concepts) distributions in 2022, and state PI distributions (for 2012–2023, currently) in October 2023. To improve timeliness, BEA developed an experimental "nowcast" for 2024, using machine learning techniques that analyzed relationships between published annual distributions and current NIPA totals (see Distribution of Personal Income | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis).

*Personal income differs from the Census Bureau's after-tax-and-transfer income definition. Three important differences are that PI includes an imputed value for home ownership, includes contributions to Social Security and other retirement plans and excludes retirement plan distributions, and includes the full insurance value of Medicare and Medicaid.

- National Experimental Well-being Statistics (NEWS) is a recently initiated, ongoing Census Bureau project that we highlighted in The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report (p. 60). Its goal is to provide high-quality distributions of household income and poverty, using carefully edited administrative records to correct for nonresponse and underreporting of income in the CPS ASEC (see Box 4.3). These kinds of errors are well known and have been increasing for decades. At present over 40% of income in the CPS ASEC is imputed because respondents said they received an income source but did not provide an amount. Moreover, comparisons with independent sources indicate that nonreporting of both receipt and income amounts contributes to underestimates of many types of income in the survey. To be fully realized, the NEWS project needs greater access by the Census Bureau to tax return data from SOI and to state administrative records. With additional resources, NEWS could make faster progress toward the goal of releasing

[23] See C. F. Citro. (2025, May). Challenges in Measuring Household Income and Poverty. Why Is It So Hard? Why Is It So Important? 32nd Morris Hansen Lecture, September 26, 2024. 2024Citro_paper.pdf. BLS and BEA have also estimated consumer unit distributions of personal consumption expenditures (see Supporting Materials: H).

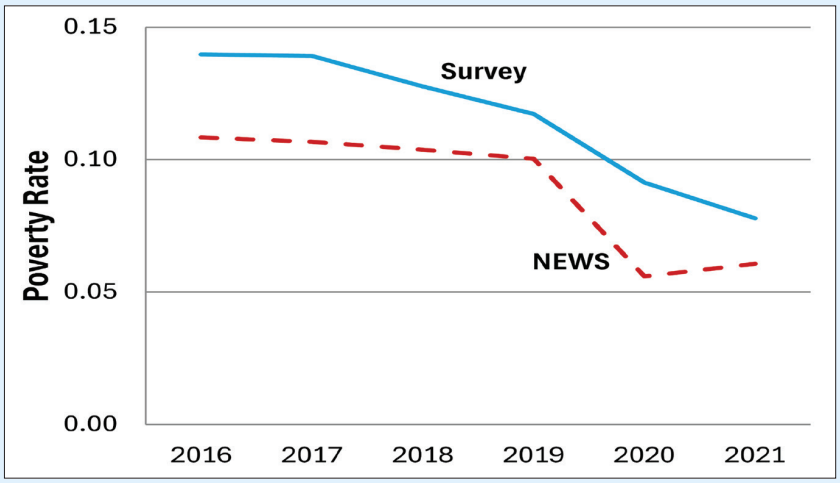
production estimates of pre- and post-tax-and-transfer income and poverty for households every fall for the preceding calendar year.

- The National Secure Data Service (NSDS) is a potentially consequential innovation in how data users, including federal, state, and local agencies and others, can access federal statistical datasets, link them to other data, and obtain privacy-protected results for evidence-based policymaking, program planning and evaluation, and other applications (see Supporting Materials: H). The NSDS was recommended by the Commission on Evidence Based Policymaking, and a five-year demonstration project was authorized by the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, P.L. 117-167. The demonstration project is a collaborative effort of the federal statistical system managed by NCSES. The goal of the NSDS is to streamline data discovery, access, linkage, analysis, and privacy protection, thereby increasing efficiency, reducing duplication and cost, and supporting expanded data use for research and policymaking by users both within and outside of government. An important success of the NSDS demonstration project to date has been the application of AI to solutions that support its overall vision and goals (see Box 4.4 for an example). For a full list of specific demonstration projects, see Demonstration Projects | NSF - National Science Foundation. It will be important to evaluate the NSDS at the end of the demonstration project to assess its effectiveness in meeting its goals.

BOX 4.3

NATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL WELL-BEING STATISTICS (NEWS) FROM THE CENSUS BUREAU

The Census Bureau released the first NEWS income and poverty estimates in 2023 for income year 2018 for money income (this concept excludes tax credits and in-kind benefits such as SNAP). Based on a combination of CPS ASEC, administrative records, and other data, they show (Bee, et al., 2023; Table 16) an increase of $4,000 or 6 percentage points in household median income, mainly due to the use of administrative records for retirement and investment income for the elderly. A release in January 2025 added estimates for post-tax-and-transfer income and poverty, with improved handling of missing data and nonresponse bias, and improved modeling of earnings taking account of errors in both survey and administrative data. The latest release in July 2025 added estimates for 2016–2021. Future plans include producing timely estimates for the previous year, revising them as needed as more data become available, and working with the ACS to develop improved income and poverty estimates for states and localities. (See National Experimental Well-being Statistics (NEWS) Version 1.) The graph below illustrates the impact on the Supplemental Poverty Measure of the more complete NEWS income data, compared to the CPS ASEC (from National Experimental Well-Being Statistics):



4.5 WHAT ABOUT OTHER NEEDED INNOVATIONS?

We have highlighted a handful of in-progress statistical agency innovations that, if supported and continued with adequate resources, could lead to major improvements in key economic statistics and in processes for using statistical agency data assets together with other data to expand the return on investment in the federal statistical system. We offer a few additional examples in Supporting Materials: H. Examples for social, demographic, and other economic statistics from the smaller agencies are missing for the most part because they have been hit so hard by resource cutbacks, particularly in staff, as to have little leeway for major improvements. Even the highlighted agencies are hard pressed to innovate in areas other than key economic indicators or to move quickly on those.

4.5.1 FOUNDATION-FUNDED INITIATIVES TO REINVENT KEY ECONOMIC STATISTICS

A number of nonprofit and foundation-funded efforts are under way that could contribute to innovation in federal statistics, focused primarily on economic measurement. We highlight a few here to give examples on some thinking and experimentation. In March 2024, the American Enterprise Institute, Stanford University's Digital Economy Lab, and New York University convened a seminar, New Approaches to Characterize Industries: AI as a Framework and Use Case. The goal was to explore a theoretical framework to identify what data, definitions, models, and tools exist or could be developed to measure the effect of AI on the economy and workforce. The workshop was attended by experts from universities, state labor and workforce agencies, private job market companies, and BEA. The workshop concluded that a new classification system needed to be developed via collaboration between government and industry and implemented by statistical agencies and researchers. Another takeaway from the workshop was a potential model for such work in the form of an innovative, independent, nonprofit institution dedicated to producing tools and insights for businesses, workers, and government to better understand the effects of AI and other new technologies on jobs, skills, and economic opportunity. The resulting tools and classifications would inform and complement federal statistical agency operations and ideally be facilitated by collaborative fellowships, training, and competitions. An organized effort is needed to pick up on these ideas and make actual improvements.

Two collaborative efforts that reflect the power of the type of model discussed at the workshop are: (a) the Re-Engineering Statistics using Economic Transactions (RESET) project, begun in 2017 as a collaboration of the University of Maryland, University of Michigan, and Census Bureau, with funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation; and (b) the just-funded (by NSF) Economic Measurement Research Institute (EMRI) at the National Bureau of Economic Research. (See Box 4.5 for details; note that RESET is also receiving funding from EMRI.) The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation is looking to expand several initiatives (e.g., its Jobs and Employment Data Exchange, JEDx) to standardize and improve education and workforce data through partnerships involving federal statistical agencies, state agencies, businesses, and researchers.[24] These efforts are welcome and a possible blueprint for ongoing collaboration across the system. Their ultimate success will depend

BOX 4.4

AN EXAMPLE OF AN AI SOLUTION FOR THE NATIONAL SECURE DATA SERVICE PORTAL

The NSDS has developed a proof of concept for an AI chatbot that can respond to open-ended user questions with detailed reports that include statistical estimates, data visualizations, and references to source data. Using a hybrid approach of generative AI and pure retrieval AI, the statistical chatbot mandates factual accuracy in its responses. As one component of the larger NSDS Data Concierge service, the chatbot could play a crucial role in quickly and efficiently fielding user questions, connecting users to data, streamlining the data user experience, and showcasing how AI can be innovatively harnessed by the federal statistical system. This innovation accords with the provisions of the AI Action Plan that charge NSF to create an online portal for the NSDS "to provide the public and Federal agencies with a front door to AI use-cases involving controlled access to restricted Federal data" and which charge OMB to promulgate the two outstanding regulations in the 2018 Evidence Act to facilitate statistical agency access to other federal agencies' data and facilitate secure access by users to statistical agency data (see America's AI Action Plan, p. 8).

[24] See The New Data Paradigm: Empowering Learners and Workers in Skills-Based, Data-Driven Talent Markets; also, National Initiative Aims to Make Sense of Jobs Data—and Asks Others to Join.

on adequate resources for the relevant statistical agencies to actively participate with academic researchers, state agencies, and the business community during the R&D phase and to integrate research data series into the agencies' ongoing operations during an implementation phase.

4.5.2 NEED FOR INNOVATION IN DISSEMINATION ACROSS THE FEDERAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Finally, we note an important area for innovation that pertains to data dissemination. The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report documented innovations by individual statistical agencies in the dissemination of statistics to policy makers and the public (e.g., the BJS Just the Stats initiative—see Search Publications | Bureau of Justice Statistics). It found, however, only one effort to make it easier for users to find and work with data they need across agencies. This is the standard application process (SAP) for researchers and other users to locate and apply to use confidential datasets from statistical agencies in a secure setting (see Box 4.6).[25] At present, however, due to lack of funding and staff, the availability of datasets for confidential access has been cut back. NCES and SAMHSA's Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality are no longer accepting applications, IRS/SOI has suspended accepting applications to its Joint Statistical Research Program, and BLS has reduced the number of programs to which researchers may apply for access. In addition, datasets for EIA and ORES are not yet catalogued. Nonetheless, the SAP is an important cross-cutting innovation.

BOX 4.5

TWO FOUNDATION-FUNDED INITIATIVES TO REDESIGN KEY ECONOMIC STATISTICS

RESET. From the project's website (RESET: Re-Engineering Statistics using Economic Transactions): "The Re-Engineering Statistics using Economic Transactions (RESET) project [of the University of Maryland, University of Michigan, and U.S. Census Bureau] aims to provide the architecture for re-engineering official economic statistics—literally to build key measurements such as GDP and consumer inflation from the ground up. The new measurement architecture offers internally consistent real expenditure and inflation measures that adjust for product turnover and product quality change at scale. It builds up measures of inflation and spending from granular, item-level transactions data. It therefore engineers statistics directly from the information systems of firms.... To implement the architecture, the project and ultimately the statistical agencies will partner with firms to create a pipeline from business information systems to statistical agencies to aggregate data for official statistics."

EMRI. From the project's grant abstract (NSF Award Search: Award # 2537470): "The Economic Measurement Research Institute (EMRI) [at the National Bureau of Economic Research] will support and catalyze research focused on improving official economic statistics for the country through systematic use of the data generated by the 21st century information economy. The methodologies, techniques, and tools developed by the EMRI will enable more timely, accurate and granular measures of key economic outcomes including prices, productivity, output, wages, and employment.... The EMRI will support demonstration projects that show how the production of official economic statistics can be modernized. In its first phase, the EMRI will support research in four areas: (1) how measurement of retail spending and inflation can be redesigned to make use of item-level transactions data to value technologically driven and other quality changes embedded in retail goods, (2) integration of administrative and American Community Survey data to produce new statistics on the gig economy, (3) use of new information on income statements of businesses to lay the groundwork for improving the measurement of intangible capital to account for investments in R&D, and (4) linking of data from the NSF Business R&D and Innovation Survey to other business data housed at the Census Bureau to generate new estimates of the contribution of R&D to productivity growth in manufacturing."

[25] The chief statistician's office a few years ago instituted a useful website for posting information about the decentralized federal statistical system, statspolicy.gov. The site includes links to each recognized statistical agency and unit, statistical policy and standards documents, and the like. It is not intended to help users find data across agencies.

The federal statistical system could increase its value to policymakers and the public by making it far easier to locate and access public data across agencies. Currently, agencies differ widely in website functionality, search and analysis tool capabilities, metadata content and format, and access to historical data. They rarely link to other agencies' data on similar products or work to make those products more consistent. For example, there is no ready way for users to find available data on families' social and economic well-being, or to readily compare Census, BEA, and BLS household income series given differences in concepts, tabulation categories, and other characteristics.[26] Feedback from our initial effort in February 2025 to reach federal statistics users through professional associations (see Supporting Materials: A) made clear not only how vital federal datasets were for these largely experienced users, but also their desire for improved data access, documentation, training, and websites. These users want FTP and API capabilities on all agencies' websites, data-finding guides, ready availability of historical data, and ongoing engagement with agency staff.

Such feedback should motivate agencies to adopt improved, AI-supported search capabilities (which, in turn, requires data to be AI-ready) and to make web functionality, data products, access tools, and documentation (metadata) as state-of-the-art and consistent as possible to encourage wider use of their output and return on the taxpayer investment. As a first step, we recommended in The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report (p. 81) that the chief statistician's office:

> develop and implement standard identification for the principal federal statistical agencies' websites to increase their visibility individually and collectively as part of the system—as illustration: "We [e.g., BLS] are a principal federal statistical agency—see statspolicy.gov and [agency page with information on quality standards, data accessibility, confidentiality protection, etc.]."

Other needed steps forward will require the participation of the ICSP and chief statistician's office with relevant partner groups to adopt existing standards or develop new standards as needed and establish timetables for implementation. Included in the effort should be standards for agencies to provide quality metrics for datasets (e.g., response rates for surveys) (see The Nation's Data at a Crossroads, p. 26); cross-referencing other agencies' datasets on cross-cutting topics and explaining differences among series; and adoption of state-of-the-art methods for data archiving and preservation, including permanent identifiers and standard citations for data products and documentation.[27] Attention to archiving and presentation is particularly important given the discontinuation of some series in 2024 and 2025.

BOX 4.6

THE STANDARD APPLICATION PROCESS (SAP)

Responding to Section 3583 of the Evidence Act of 2018, the ICSP and the Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDC) network established a standard application process (SAP) and website to make it easier for researchers and other users to locate and apply to use confidential datasets from statistical agencies in a secure setting (e.g., an FSRDC or comparable facility at a statistical agency). The site, ResearchDataGov.org, developed and operated by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan under contract to NCSES, has come a long way since it was first launched on a pilot basis in December 2019. The SAP provides a catalog of datasets potentially available from the statistical agencies and recognized statistical units, a common application form, standards for criteria and timeliness of agency review, and metrics on status of applications received since December 2022 when the portal became fully functional. The SAP, however, does not address the time required for additional steps beyond approval to begin work with the data (e.g., for researchers to obtain security clearances, which is necessary for confidentiality protection but could be streamlined, perhaps by creating a portable clearance passport good for a fixed number of years). The SAP also places considerable administrative burden on agencies that have highly sought data, with no additional funding to support agency work on SAP requests. The latest report for the SAP is for 2024.

[26] See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2024). *Creating an Integrated System of Data and Statistics on Household Income, Consumption, and Wealth: Time to Build*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/27333

[27] See National Academies. (2022). *Transparency and Reproducibility of Federal Statistics for the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics and All Statistical Agencies*. https://doi.org/10.17226/26360.

4.6 FINDINGS

We make three findings about innovation by the federal statistical agencies.

FINDING 4.1: As our 2024 report noted, the federal statistical agencies have a rich history of meeting the nation's data needs through innovation—in concepts, collection, processing and estimation, dissemination, and evaluation (e.g., the development of cost-effective probability sampling methods). Their record of responding to the need for new data delivered promptly on social and economic conditions at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic was substantial. They continued to innovate in the post-Covid years but not at the level needed. Currently, the agencies face declining resources, particularly the knowledgeable staff required for innovation (trends that predate but have accelerated under the current administration). Known barriers to innovation persist (e.g., lack of data-sharing legislation). Moreover, since January 2025, many of the requirements for a culture of innovation such as outside expert advice and the ability of agency staff to interact with others in their profession have been undermined.

FINDING 4.2: Foundation-funded efforts are enabling a model for improving federal statistics by involving academic researchers, state agencies, and the business community in developing major innovations in economic statistics for ultimate implementation by the federal statistical system. These efforts are welcome and a possible blueprint for ongoing collaboration across the system. To be most useful, the relevant statistical agencies need resources to actively collaborate with partners during the R&D phase and to integrate research data series into the agencies' ongoing operations during an implementation phase. Comparable efforts are needed in other areas, such as health and education statistics.

FINDING 4.3: Federal statistical agencies lag in adopting state-of-the-art standards and tools system-wide to facilitate data access and use within and across agencies' websites and data products. Agencies differ widely in website functionality, search and analysis tool capabilities, metadata content and format, and accessibility to historical data. They rarely link to other agencies' data on similar products or work to make those products more consistent. Allocating a modest amount of innovation funds and staff time to 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.

SECTION 5

DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE VALUE OF FEDERAL STATISTICS AND CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT

Despite growing recognition of the importance of objective, independent, and timely federal statistics—especially in the wake of the firing of the BLS commissioner—proactive congressional support for statistical agencies remains weak. The statistical agencies rarely are seen as a high priority, except for the Census Bureau during the years leading up to a decennial census, when the results are used for congressional apportionment and redistricting. Occasionally, a product will be discontinued that has a strong constituency, and then funding for that particular product may be restored or an unfunded mandate to continue producing the product will be placed in legislation. This gap between public value and political backing exposes several structural challenges:

1. Federal statistics are a public good that many use but few actively champion.
2. The annual fragmented congressional appropriations process disadvantages statistical agencies, and the statistical system connections remain hard for the congressional committees to discern.
3. Stakeholder and statistical agency communication with Congress is fragmented, and stakeholder engagement is inconsistent.

Federal statistics are vital but largely invisible except to researchers and people in specific industries and state and local governments that are aware of the sources of information that they use regularly. They benefit everyone, yet few recognize their role until a crisis occurs. This invisibility helps explain why agency budgets rarely keep pace with needs. Although some members of Congress act as champions for agencies within their committee jurisdictions, and appropriators often resist cuts proposed by the administration, real budget increases—needed for modernization, innovation, and expanded data products—are rare except for periodic cyclical programs such as the population, economic, and agricultural censuses. This situation is compounded by the fact that the leaders of most statistical agencies are not permitted by their parent agency to communicate directly with the key staff of the committee with jurisdiction over the agency.

Without broader congressional support, statistical agencies will continue to fall further behind year after year. Moreover, the rules governing the appropriations process further this disadvantage: budget increases cannot be provided without vocalized support from a sufficient (though unspecified) number of members of Congress to the appropriations committees. This procedural requirement—which has been communicated to federal statistical agency stakeholders, including project-team member Pierson, by appropriations staff consistently over the years—is difficult for statistical agencies to meet because, except for a few agencies, they are largely little-known entities: their benefits are widely distributed rather than concentrated in specific districts or industries, and their work is not understood well. The requirement may also not fully consider that the federal government is the principal intended user of federal statistics.

Furthermore, statistical work, by its nature, is complex and low-profile. Words like “innovation,” “modernization,” and “R&D” seldom generate enthusiasm on Capitol Hill outside the context of AI or advanced weaponry. Improvements are often explained by statisticians in dense technical terms rather than in benefits to the public. As a recourse, many observers, including our team, describe the statistical system as part of the nation’s essential infrastructure—akin to the highways, ports, and bridges that support commerce. Yet unlike transportation systems, data infrastructure lacks visibility that motivates political support for sustained maintenance resources. The system’s value is more comparable to the National Weather Service or Air Traffic Control—crucial but often overlooked until problems arise.

Overcoming the inherent challenges of building support for federal statistical agencies with Congress and the administration requires more than effective messaging and framing—it demands coordinated, sustained engagement that both educates on the value of federal statistics and translates that recognition of value into congressional action during the appropriations process. Such large-scale engagement must result in members of Congress actively supporting the agencies through the process of members' annual requests to the appropriations committees.

The NCHS budget in recent years illustrates that even strong arguments and widespread acknowledgment of importance are insufficient without a more deliberate advocacy strategy. During and after the pandemic, policymakers called for more timely and detailed health data. Yet the administration's budget requests for NCHS barely increased funding—averaging a 1% decrease since 2020—and Congress's modest additions failed to keep pace with inflation. Between 2020 and 2025, under two administrations, NCHS lost about 12% of its purchasing power despite clear, urgent needs.[28]

Resource limits now constrain agencies' ability both to fulfill their legal responsibilities under the Evidence Act and their authorizing legislation and to meet stakeholder expectations. Those expectations often go beyond more timely, granular, and accessible data to include more linked data or data linkage options, more accessible data, easier-to-navigate websites, and better communication about their products. Agencies have little flexibility to take on new initiatives, especially following significant staff losses. Effective advocacy must recognize these constraints and pair requests for new data or reports with explicit support for additional resources. EIA offers a cautionary example of the ramifications of requesting additional work of the agencies that is not coupled with calls to strengthen core budgets. The House FY26 Energy and Water Appropriations report language directs and encourages EIA to undertake multiple new data collections and analyses—without providing extra funding or addressing staff shortages. (See Box 5.1.) Such unfunded mandates stretch limited resources even thinner.

BOX 5.1

UNFUNDED MANDATES FOR EIA IN THE HOUSE FY26 ENERGY AND WATER APPROPRIATIONS BILL

In the House FY26 Energy and Water Appropriations report language, EIA is

1. directed to "survey electric transmission and distribution system operators for data on new generator interconnection applications and to provide … a report that summarizes its efforts";
2. "encouraged to collect data on aggregate state-level, monthly computation sector electricity demand";
3. encouraged to "resume data collection, analysis, and reporting activities for ground source heat pump shipments and installations"; and
4. directed "to continue important data collection, analysis, and reporting activities on energy use and consumption through the Commercial Buildings Energy Consumption Survey, the Residential Energy Consumption Survey, and the Manufacturing Energy Consumption Survey and to consider increasing the detail and frequency of these surveys."

These mandates and encouragements are not accompanied by additional funding or an acknowledgment of EIA's staff losses.

Successful models exist. The Census Project has long demonstrated how regular meetings, joint letters, and education campaigns can build understanding and support in Congress. The Friends of NCHS and Friends of BLS have also been active, though with limited capacity. In 2024, Friends-of-BLS efforts helped secure an additional $6 million for BLS to maintain its key survey sample sizes. Even so, appropriations staff emphasize that more members of Congress must be directly involved to secure meaningful progress. Furthermore, in his Hill meetings beyond some committee staff, Pierson experienced a general lack of awareness about BLS's operations, standards, needs, and challenges. With dedicated staff or funding for coordination, these "Friends" groups or related efforts could become more proactive in educating policymakers and developing materials such as letters and fact sheets.

[28] An administration FY23 budget document touted a "Data-Driven Response to COVID-19," but the FY23 request only requested a $1.4 million (0.8%) increase for NCHS. The six budget requests for NCHS since the onset of the pandemic averaged a 1% decrease, with the four Biden requests averaging a 0.5% increase. While Congress provided increases of $5 million (3%) and $7 million (4%) in FY22 and FY23, respectively, the former amounted to a 4% loss of purchasing power, and the latter maintained the NCHS budget's purchasing power.

Private-sector engagement is also essential. Many industries depend heavily on federal data and have influence with Congress and the administration. However, their participation is often limited by competing priorities. Building stronger partnerships between private stakeholders and statistical advocates—supported by dedicated staff—could help bridge the current advocacy gap and strengthen congressional understanding of the system's value.

FINDING 5.1: The annual appropriations process for the federal government disadvantages the budgets of the statistical agencies. Appropriations authority for the statistical agencies is divided across several subcommittees, and the statistical agencies face stiff competition for limited funds within those subcommittee allocations because they are largely little-known entities, their products are public goods (with the federal government a primary intended user of the resulting data), and their work is not well understood. Absent vocal championship by appropriations subcommittee members, budget line items may also be adjusted through the annual process of direct member requests to the appropriations committees, but securing a sufficient groundswell of such requests for a statistical agency is difficult for the same reasons. The subcommittee partitioning also complicates the formulation of system-level priorities or shared investments.

FINDING 5.2: Stakeholder communication and engagement with Congress on federal statistical agencies is fragmented and inconsistent. Outside of a few agencies, there is not a regular, coordinated message or strategy in support of the agencies to the appropriations committee. Where there is such coordination, the engagement may be thin—or only in the months when congressional appropriations is most hectic and appropriations staff most distracted. Many agencies lack the voice of their stakeholders altogether with the appropriators. Finally, stakeholder requests to Congress for new or expanded products or services may not also stress the importance of adequate funding for the agency's ongoing work.

FINDING 5.3: The appropriations process and the fragmented and inconsistent stakeholder engagement and communications make the statistical agencies prone to unfunded mandates. Specifically, the report language that accompanies the appropriations bills too often contains requests or requirements that do not come with additional funding necessary to follow through.

SECTION 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

For our recommendations, we first revisit The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report recommendations and supplement them with 9 new recommendations.

6.1 INAUGURAL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS REVISITED

Our inaugural report (July 2024) made 15 recommendations, directed to Congress, parent agencies, federal statistical agencies, and OMB and the chief statistician's office (see Table 6.1). Only part of one recommendation has come to fruition—namely, issuance of the "Trust Regulation" by OMB, as required by the 2018 Evidence Act, in fall 2024 (see Table 6.1). To our knowledge, little has occurred since then to follow the prescriptions in the Trust Regulation, such as for parent agencies to respect the statistical integrity of their statistical agencies and provide shared services (e.g., HR, IT) cost effectively.

TABLE 6.1: Inaugural Report Recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
CONGRESS	
Enact legislation that accords all principal statistical agencies autonomy over data collection and analysis, as well as other professional autonomy components specified in this report, and that explicitly authorizes those statistical agencies that lack specific authorization (BEA, ERS, NASS, ORES, SOI). For the three agencies that lack authority to use their appropriations to balance in-house and contractor staff (NCES, NCSES, and BJS), authorize the use of a new appropriations line for salaries and expenses.	NONE
Enact legislation to extend the authority in the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act for data-sharing between statistical agencies and from other federal and state agencies to the statistical agencies. To meet user needs, agencies require access to alternative data sources to blend with data from surveys, which the public is increasingly less willing to answer. Yet the Evidence Act, for example, does not provide for sharing of business data to all the statistical agencies or for sharing of state data with the federal statistical agencies.	NONE
Make budget levels and authority commensurate with responsibilities. Adequate funding levels, as well as authority for multiyear funding, are essential to enable statistical agencies to regularly update and supplement long-running data series and to test and implement data collection improvements. Budget levels should also support continual improvements to statistical agencies' IT and data infrastructure to align with ever-changing security requirements and data user needs.	NONE

Recommendation	Progress
Enact legislation to help build a shared culture of responsible data access and confidentiality protection among the statistical agencies and their data users. Legislation that extends existing penalties for statistical agency staff to anyone who willfully misuses federal statistics to identify an individual or business is needed for statistical agencies and data users to strike a reasonable balance of access and protection for federal statistics.	NONE
Ensure informed monitoring and oversight through annual or more frequent meetings of relevant congressional members and staff directly with statistical agency leadership.	NONE
PARENT AGENCY	
Proactively protect and promote professional autonomy. Parent agencies should regularly examine their procedures and policies for protecting statistical agency autonomy, including making sure that current and incoming leadership are aware of them.	NONE
Provide shared services as expeditiously as possible. Agency HR offices, for example, should facilitate and speed the hiring process for statistical agency staff. When services such as IT are shared, parent agencies should take steps to ensure that the statistical agency can meet deadlines, protect confidentiality, and innovate.	NONE
Provide adequate budget and staffing. Parent agencies have multiple bureaus to support but should recognize that statistical agencies need sufficient resources for continuous improvement of long-standing data series and other initiatives, including IT modernization.	Staffing has been cut, and budgets have been proposed to be cut.
Interact with and support their statistical agencies. Parent agency leadership should regularly meet with statistical agency leadership to learn what their statistical agency does, what it needs to fulfill its responsibilities, and how its functions are unique within the parent agency.	We lack knowledge on this point.
STATISTICAL AGENCIES	
Relate to parent agencies and Congress. Statistical agencies should proactively demonstrate agility and flexibility to meet parent agency and congressional needs for data for policymaking and evidence-building, while maintaining integrity and objectivity in methods and operations.	We lack knowledge on this point.
Relate to stakeholders and data users. Statistical agencies should proactively and interactively reach out to stakeholders and data users, using not only one-way methods (e.g., webinars) but also two-way, interactive dialogue and feedback to help establish priorities and understand user needs. They should ensure that stakeholder outreach covers as much of the political and policy spectrum as possible.	Agencies may be too resource-constrained to follow through.
Increase transparency and accessibility. Statistical agencies should provide comprehensive, accessible documentation of content, technical features, and methodological decisions for data programs. When data user needs' conflict, or when data series require major changes, statistical agencies should proactively reach out to affected users and be as transparent as possible about the rationale for the ultimate decision.	Agencies may be too resource-constrained to follow through.

Recommendation	Progress
U.S. OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET (OMB)	
OMB leadership should finalize as soon as possible its regulation on the fundamental responsibilities of statistical agencies and parent agencies ("Trust Regulation"), as required by the Evidence Act. This regulation is essential to bolster parent agency support for all statistical agencies, which, in turn, is essential to enable the statistical agencies to do their job and have credibility with the public. The chief statistician's office should move expeditiously to craft and issue the regulations on data access and confidentiality required by the Evidence Act.	The Trust Regulation was issued on October 11, 2024, and took effect on December 10, 2024 (Federal Register :: Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units). The other two regulations have not been released for comment.
The chief statistician's office and the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy should develop a strategic plan and vision for the federal statistical system and take actions to implement it. The plan should include maximizing the visibility and effectiveness of the statistical agencies, individually and collectively (e.g., consider mechanisms for upgrading IT infrastructure and providing staff training opportunities in new methods for all of the principal statistical agencies, large and small).	There is a strategic plan in place, but it is unclear whether it has been acted on (see "Fiscal Years 2025 & 2026 Strategic Goals and Objectives" at About Us - StatsPolicy).
OMB leadership should provide the chief statistician's office with sufficient resources to effectively carry out its statutory duties and other responsibilities. In particular, staff are needed so that the office can not only update statistical policy standards, issue guidance, and approve survey questionnaires but also provide substantive leadership to the federal statistical system, engage in strategic planning for the system, seek out and expedite the approval of statistical agency innovations in data collection and methodologies, engage internationally with other statistical agencies and bodies, and facilitate inter-agency collaboration to enable the system to meet current and future data needs for the public good.	The chief statistician is now a political appointee. To our knowledge, no added resources have been provided for the Statistical Policy Office.

We believe that all 15 recommendations remain relevant and urge their adoption. They speak to the need for:

- legislation authorizing and providing statistical integrity protections for all statistical agencies, enabling data-sharing, extending penalties for violation of statistical confidentiality to all actors, and providing adequate funding and staffing, and for direct communications between Congress and statistical agency heads;
- parent agencies to support their statistical agencies in a variety of ways;
- statistical agencies to communicate directly with Congress, their parent agencies, and their data users, and to be more transparent in their actions, particularly when data series need to change; and
- OMB to properly fund the chief statistician's office, and for that office to finalize the other two required regulations in the Evidence Act for sharing of federal data with statistical agencies and greater access to statistical agency data for evidence, as well as to provide strategic leadership to the federal statistical system.

We also want to clarify and emphasize aspects of recommendation #3 in Table 6.1, which urged that Congress "make budget levels and authority commensurate with responsibilities" and noted the importance of multiyear funding. While the rationale for multiyear funding was in the context of innovation efforts being multiyear efforts, we saw that EIA's authority to use its funding into the next fiscal year allowed it to continue its releases through the government shutdown in October and November 2025. Our clarification is to make explicit what was implicit in recommendation #3 of the 2024 report: **Congress should provide sufficient corresponding funding when mandating new statistical activities and authorize a portion of an agency's budget to be used across fiscal years, providing capability and flexibility for adequately planning multiyear projects.**

6.2 2025 RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal statistical agencies are in crisis with the dramatic loss of staff, leadership, and support from parent agencies, which is affecting the American people through their declining trust in government statistics as well as the reduced availability of statistics on various aspects of our economy, people, and well-being. Despite these circumstances, the employees of the agencies have been able to minimize reduction in products or their scope by taking on the responsibilities of their former colleagues. That focus and commitment likely come at the cost of the long-term research and innovation necessary to tackle the major challenges facing the federal statistical agencies.

Although the innovation culture remains, the agencies' already-thin innovation capacity has been stretched further. This situation undermines the agencies' ability to tackle the major challenges of addressing declining response rates, supporting evidence-based policymaking, meeting data-user needs, and fully taking advantage of AI. To address the current situation, we supplement our 2024 report recommendations with additional ones directed to Congress and the administration for statistical agency support and innovation, to the statistical system for professional development of statistical system leadership, and to professional associations and outside stakeholders for stronger advocacy for federal statistics and agencies.

6.2.1 CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION

The large drops in staffing that each of the 13 statistical agencies is facing, along with the leadership vacancies, profoundly impacts their work, as discussed in Section 2. The impacts include reduced efficiency because of lost expertise, knowledge, and experience as well as overburdened staff and processes. The widespread hiring freeze compounds the resulting inefficiencies. The partial lifting of hiring freezes at NCES for NAEP specialists and at the Census Bureau for field representatives to carry out survey field work acknowledges these impacts.

> **2025 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.

The importance of innovation to improved efficiency and reduced respondent burden has also been extensively discussed in our 2024 report and in this year's report, particularly Section 4. In addition to chronically underfunding the individual statistical agencies and the chief statistician's office, the president's budget and the congressional appropriations process lack a funding stream to support continuous innovation. As discussed in Section 2.3.3, there is no funding targeted for strengthening the agencies overall and insufficient funding for the chief statistician's office to perform its current duties, let alone develop and work with the statistical agencies to implement priority improvements system-wide.

> **2025 Recommendation 2—Innovation for Quality and Efficiency Gains:** Congress should fund research grants and partnerships with academia, the private sector, and federal, 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 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.

In Section 5, we discussed the disadvantaged position of federal statistical agencies as providers of a public good in the congressional appropriations process. To address the problem, we urge Congress to make new funding arrangements like the following:

> **2025 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.

In Section 2.1.2, we note that statistical agency programs or components thereof may need to be sunsetted to make other programs or other program innovations possible. We stated that statistical agencies would be well advised to conduct regular reviews of their portfolios to identify areas for expansion and contraction to suit current and emerging policy needs. Their reviews should demonstrate accountability to the public and policymakers for the content of their programs, for reducing burden on respondents, and for making efficient use of their resources.

> **2025 Recommendation 4—Portfolio Management:** The administration should direct and fund the chief statistician's office and 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.

Assuming progress on our report's 2024 and 2025 recommendations, statistical agency leaders need to be ready for an environment where barriers to data-sharing for statistical purposes are removed, and funding is available for system-wide strengthening and innovation. They need specifically to be ready to embrace new collaborative, system-wide efforts that will provide value to policymakers and the public. One mechanism for ensuring readiness is to have a policy and a practice for senior leaders to serve short-term details in other statistical agencies than their own and in the chief statistician's office. Such details can be valuable learning experiences.

> **2025 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.

The federal statistical system could increase its value to policymakers and the public by making it far easier to locate and access public data across agencies. As we noted in Section 4, agencies differ widely in website functionality, search and analysis tool capabilities, metadata content and format, and access to historical data. They rarely link to other agencies' data on similar products or work to make those products more consistent. For example, there is no accessible way for users to find available data on families' social and economic well-being across the federal statistical system. Federal statistics users have made it clear that federal datasets are critically important for their work as business planners, state and local government program managers, teachers, and journalists. They have also made clear their desire for improved data access, documentation, training, and websites.

> **2025 Recommendation 6—Enhanced Data Accessibility, Functionality, and Preservation:** As budget and staffing allow, 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 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., 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.

With the firing of BLS Commissioner McEntarfer in August 2025 and the other developments discussed in Section 2.1.3, the statistical agencies face several areas of risk for maintaining statistical integrity.

> **2025 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.

6.2.2 PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER OUTSIDE STAKEHOLDERS

As discussed in Section 5, because of lean budgets, staffing challenges, and the necessity to release statistical products in a timely manner, statistical agency leaders are hard pressed to deliver on stakeholder calls for more data granularity and frequency, more linked data or data linkage options, more accessible data, easier-to-navigate websites, better communication about their products, and more engagement generally. Professional associations and other stakeholders could be more helpful in several ways to the agencies. The following recommendations could be thought of as extending the Evidence Act requirement of parent agencies—to enable, support, and facilitate statistical agencies or units in carrying out their Evidence Act responsibilities—to the broader stakeholder community, who rely on and use federal statistics and data.

The first is based on feedback we received at a November 2024 meeting with agency heads during a discussion about the importance of connecting with data users. While all the agency representatives understood how important user feedback is, the statistical agencies—especially those from smaller agencies—stated their limited bandwidth for organizing user meetings.

> **2025 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.

In Section 5, we noted the extent to which stakeholder communication and engagement with Congress on federal statistical agencies is fragmented and inconsistent, and how some stakeholder advocacy is not accompanied by support for the agency's core budget or acknowledgement of their many constraints and innovation efforts. This issue, along with the problems we identified in the congressional appropriations process, may be contributing factors to agencies losing purchasing power over the last 15 years.

> **2025 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.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

A. Federal Statistics User Feedback (reproduced from *The Nation's Data at a Crossroads*, July 2025, Supporting Materials: A)

B. Federal Data Use and Perspectives on Federal Statistics: Analysis of NORC AmeriSpeak Panel (updated from *The Nation's Data at a Crossroads*, July 2025, Supporting Materials: B)

C. Citizen Science Project: Monitoring Federal Statistical Product Releases

D. Press Coverage of Firing of BLS Commissioner McEntarfer

E. Statements Supporting Objective Official Statistics, August–November 2025

F. List of Supporting Materials for *The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report* (inaugural report)

G. Data Sources and Methods

H. Innovation at Federal Statistical Agencies (updated from *The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report*, Supporting Materials: H)

I. Agency Updates (updated from *The Nation's Data at Risk: 2024 Report*, Supporting Materials: I)

J. Names and Affiliations: Project Team, Scientific Advisory Board; Report Reviewers