

Meeting 8 Notes and Actions

May 21, 2021

Next Meeting: June 18, 2021 (9 AM - Noon (EDT))

Meeting Agenda:

1. Focus Area 1: Legislation and Regulations – Nick Hart, Christine Heflin, and Committee Discussion
2. Focus Area 2: Governance, Transparency, and Accountability – Charles Cutshall, Julia Lane, and Committee Discussion
3. Focus Area 3: Technical Infrastructure – Amy O’Hara, David Park, and Committee Discussion
4. Focus Area 4: Government Data for Evidence Building– Anna Hui, Ken Troske, and Committee Discussion
5. Focus Area 5: Other Items/Services/Capacity Building Opportunities– Kim Murnieks, Matt Soldner, and Committee Discussion
6. Next Steps – Emilda Rivers and Committee Discussion

I. Focus Area 1: Legislation and Regulations – Nick Hart, Christine Heflin, and Committee Discussion

The subcommittee co-chairs for the Legislation and Regulations Focus Area provided an overview of the Focus Area’s scope and identified potential quick wins in the area. They noted that there is both existing laws and ongoing activity on Capitol Hill that can be leveraged to achieve recommendations. With that in mind they envision a focus on gaps in the existing laws and regulations that have been authorized but not yet issued. They also intend to identify additional guidance or regulations that may be needed to promote successful data sharing policies, weigh additional authorities and statutory modifications suggested by the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking (CEP) against the now-current environment, and consider additional proposals to support intergovernmental cooperation with an eye towards consistency across policies as well as statistical system efficiency.

Some potential quick wins for the subcommittee to consider include:

- Call on OMB to issue overdue regulations and guidance under the Evidence Act, OPEN Government Data Act, and CIPSEA
- Recommend OMB update overdue data standards, such as for race/ethnicity
- Direct OMB to use its authority under the Paperwork Reduction Act to compel agency data sharing in targeted, high-priority areas like COVID mitigation, oversight of pandemic spending, and improper payments
- Endorse select legislative proposals offered by the CEP, such as the strategies to promote intergovernmental cooperation

(See presentation at bea.gov/evidence under Meetings tab.)

Committee Feedback/Discussions:

→ **CEP Recommendations as Starting Point:**

- The CEP recommendations provide us a basis for starting discussions on what needs to be done next
- It is recognized that much has changed in the legal, policy, and technological environment since the CEP recommendations were issued. As such, the Committee will not just accept and repeat those recommendations but reevaluate them in light of the current environment.

→ **Appreciate Current Resource Constraints:**

- The Committee recognizes that current staffing and resource constraints are real and are not looking to just recommend that staff work harder and faster
- Committee recommendations will help staff focus on the most pressing and promising regulatory guidance
- The Committee also hopes to influence the appropriations and resource allocation decisions going forward

II. Focus Area 2: Governance, Transparency, and Accountability – Charles Cutshall, Julia Lane, and Committee Discussion

The subcommittee co-chairs for the Governance, Transparency, and Accountability Focus Area discussed their Focus Area's scope across five dimensions:

1. Governance
2. Transparency
3. Accountability
4. Sustainability
5. Innovation

They noted that success for NSDS will require trust, integrity, openness, and transparency, and all that exists in a balance. Data needs to be made discoverable and more efficient while maintaining security and privacy. It will not suffice to just build a secure environment; you also need to invest in human resources and relationships to leverage the data. Additionally, evaluations should be built into the system up-front to ensure data can be evaluated and used for decision-making closer to real-time.

Some potential quick wins they have identified include building on existing use cases with clear value, establishing tiered access approach to privacy, standards for searchability and discoverability, access and use of reports, standardized data-sharing agreements, as well as the NSDS as an innovation sandbox/common platform for the development of new products.

(See presentation at bea.gov/evidence under Meetings tab.)

Committee Feedback/Discussions:

→ **Bottom-Up and Top-Down:**

- Bottom-up approaches will be critical for getting the data in from the program-level data sources
- Top-down approaches will be critical for broader goals that are costly and challenging administratively like data linkages and privacy protections

→ **Linking Transparency and Accessibility:**

- It is not enough just to release data to the public; instead, you need to make it easier to access and use at the level of those who would act on it in policymaking
- It will be critical to find ways to support capacity and capabilities in the intended user-base

→ **Sustainable Funding:**

- Existing funding models can be the starting point for a model but need to recognize challenges that exist both in fully funded and pay-as-you-go type models

III. Focus Area 3: Technical Infrastructure – Amy O’Hara, David Park, and Committee Discussion

The subcommittee co-chairs for the Technical Infrastructure Focus Area provided an overview of the Focus Area’s scope built around the five safes:

1. **Safe People:** Where do we want technology to make NSDS as efficient as possible. How will users authenticate—what technology monitoring can keep NSDS safe and discern between user/insider threat
2. **Safe Data:** The CEP recommended that NSDS not be a warehouse, but we should reconsider whether that would be needed to meet the goals for reuse, archiving, interoperability, etc.
3. **Safe Projects:** Will need adequate data discovery and metadata along with a functional single application portal
4. **Safe Settings:** Need to determine if/how to federate across existing secure platforms and automate resource scaling
5. **Safe Outputs:** Need approaches that align with privacy; must consider how will we protect the inputs and outputs and who will own those decisions. Encourage focusing not on specific solutions but on broader threat models and what we are protecting against

Potential quick wins in the area include making lists of sources and uses that would preclude virtual access, developing and applying data standards like for race/ethnicity, developing standards and templates that can be used off-the-shelf such as for retraining, frameworks and templates, reciprocity agreements, and platform review processes.

(See presentation at bea.gov/evidence under Meetings tab.)

Committee Feedback/Discussions:

→ **Mind the Variations:**

- Need to recognize the wide variation across, and even within, agencies in information variances, data sensitivity and other aspects; this requires flexibility in standards
- Safe space will depend on dataset; for example, access thru validation server on PC may be possible for some datasets, while access to microdata may require physical presence in a building

→ **Limitations of Current Pilots:**

- There are existing FSRDC pilots for accessing data outside of RDCs that can be built upon
- However, they are fragile and limited so while they may serve as a starting point, but we really need to look beyond that to private-sector examples

IV. Focus Area 4: Government Data for Evidence Building– Anna Hui, Ken Troske, and Committee Discussion

The subcommittee co-chairs for the Government Data for Evidence Building Focus Area provided an overview of the Focus Area’s scope and identified potential quick wins in the area. The scope starts with stakeholder needs, framing it first at the local level, then state, and then Federal, as that is how the data often flow. The Committee needs to examine how to help at each level including through capacity building and skills emphasis. Finally, we need to evaluate what statistical system practices could be improved to facilitate system coordination.

Quick wins can focus on areas of overlap that will benefit program compliance as well as program administration at multiple levels. One potential timely area for a pilot program is leveraging data from the Unemployment System across states to serve as a real-time economic indicator and inform policy decisions.

(See presentation at bea.gov/evidence under Meetings tab.)

Committee Feedback/Discussions:

→ **Pilot Value:**

- A good pilot that leverages collaboration with local government on data standards, common accessibility rules, etc., could have a huge impact in demonstrating value and getting local-level stakeholders on board
- It would offer an opportunity for the Federal government to support state and local governments with the expertise and capacity for them to extract value

→ **Clarifying Guidance:**

- State agencies are often challenged by unclear guidance in areas such as allowable data sharing leading to different interpretations
- Ensuring that guidance is clear and direct should be addressed by the Committee

V. Focus Area 5: Other Items/Services/Capacity Building Opportunities— Kim Murnieks, Matt Soldner, and Committee Discussion

The subcommittee co-chairs for the Other Items/Services/Capacity Building Opportunities Focus Area described the purpose of this area as ensuring that the NSDS is both useful and used. They will focus on how it can provide meaningful technical assistance and other support across the evidence-building lifecycle, from formulation of initial research question to dissemination of actionable evidence. Additionally, they will look at communication needs; how do we explain the ‘why’ and what tools (such as pilot results) can help.

To support that, quick wins should focus on developing and curating artifacts that can serve as working examples of how the process is meant to work and the value it brings.

(See presentation at bea.gov/evidence under Meetings tab.)

Committee Feedback/Discussions:

→ **Stakeholder Mapping:**

- Need to define who the ‘public’ is while recognizing there may be multiple ‘publics’ the NSDS must serve (such as policymakers vs. society at large)
- Different communication strategies should be developed for different stakeholder groups; pilot results could be repurposed in different ways for different communities

→ **Infrastructure Support:**

- What is minimum viable product in terms of user support that would enable regular users to get value from the services and not limit the NSDS to being a playground of high-funded agencies and data-focused scholars
- Q&A, FAQs, meaning automated help desks, etc. can be built into the infrastructure up-front
- Need to think about how we provide capacity to those who require it and not simply subsidize those who already have it

→ **Administrative Data Challenge:**

- Administrative data are collected for administrative purposes rather than release purposes and are structured accordingly.
- NSDS needs to create the infrastructure to help turn administrative data from diverse sources into usable data sets including facilitating low-impact means of collecting input from the data creators
- The pandemic showed everyone the limitations of system interoperability today—there are a lot of lessons that can be drawn from it, and since it is a fresh example it can serve as a good case to demonstrate the potential value proposition

VI. Next Steps

As the Committee moves forward, we will simultaneously work on the overarching vision and continue the subcommittee focus area work. A Coordinating Subcommittee will be formed to work on the vision, using input from across all the Focus Area subcommittees. One early focus will be defining what will be in the Year 1 report to help facilitate the drafting process. In upcoming meetings, we will hear reports from the Coordinating Subcommittee and the Focus Area subcommittees.

June

Coordinating Committee and Subcommittee Reports