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# BLS/Federal Perspective

Data Insights Roundtable: State LMI in a Time of Federal  
Uncertainty

**CREC Webinar**

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# Agenda

- 2026 mission-critical challenges
  - Long-standing
    - Response rates
    - Funding
    - Modernization
  - Immediate
    - Resources
    - Trust
    - Shutdown
- Status, reform, and call to action



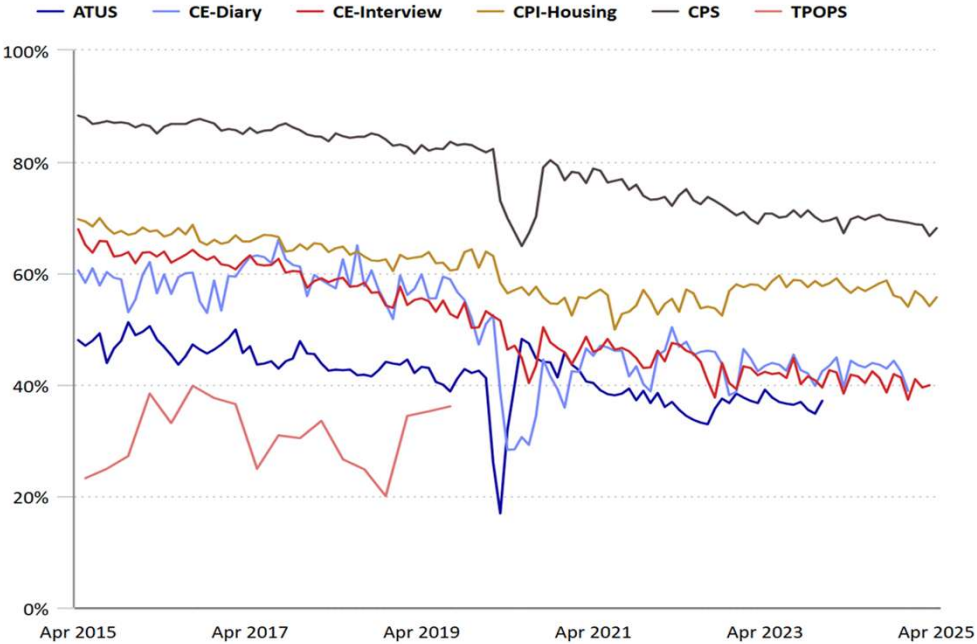
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**LONG-STANDING CHALLENGES:**

**RESPONSE RATES, FUNDING, MODERNIZATION**

# Survey response rates declining—eroding quality and raising costs

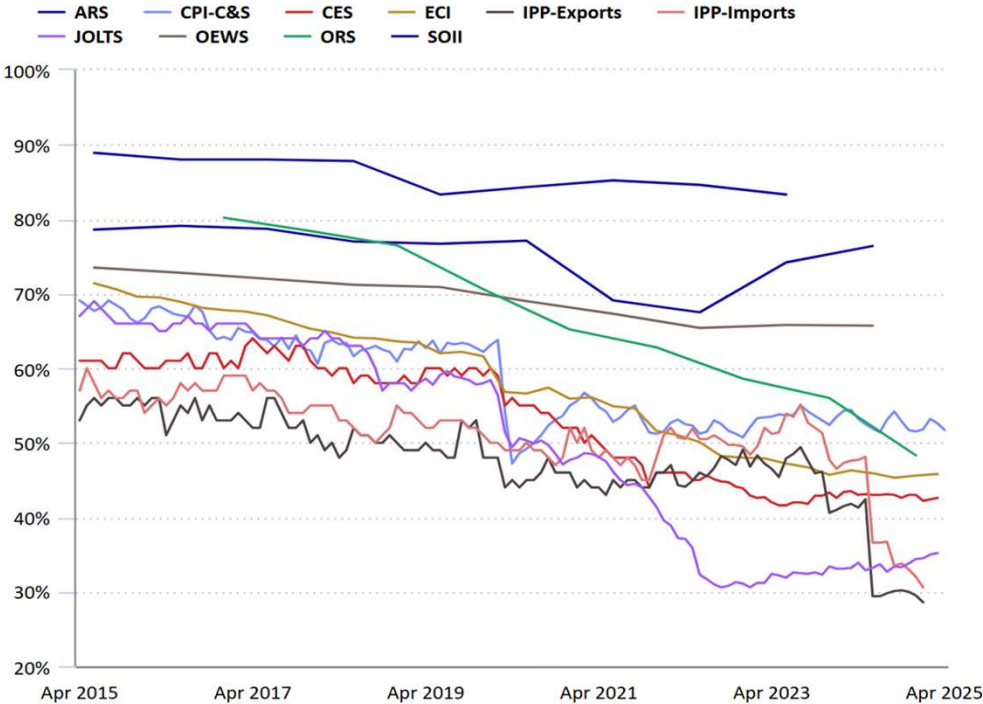
Household survey response rates, April 2015–April 2025



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Establishment surveys unit response rates, April 2015–April 2025



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



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Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics <https://www.bls.gov/osmr/response-rates/>

# Real funding for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has been declining for years

Percentage change in inflation-adjusted BLS funding from 2010 level by fiscal year, 2001–2026

Click buttons to see breakdowns:

Percentage change from 2010    Percentage change from 2001



*Note: Inflation adjustment was calculated using the employment cost index (ECI) in 2026 dollars. Measured BLS funds exclude the pot of money that the BLS could transfer from the federal Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund. Fiscal year 2025 is estimated net budget authority, while FY 2026 proposals have not been enacted.*

Source: Authors' calculations from Congressional Budget Office, "Historical Data and Economic Projections: January 2025" (Washington: 2025); Office of Management and Budget, "Public Budget Database: 2001 - 2024," on file with authors; Office of Management and Budget, "Technical Supplement to the 2026 Budget: Appendix" (Washington: 2025); Fiscal Year 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, H.R. , 119th Cong., 1st sess. (September 9, 2025); Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, S. 2587, 119th Cong., 1st sess. (July 31, 2025).

Chart: Center for American Progress  
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-next-bureau-of-labor-statistics-commissioner-must-restore-trust-in-the-agency-while-managing-fiscal-constraints/>



# Long-standing challenges

- **Survey response rates:** Since 2015, CPS participation ↓ from 88% to 68%
  - Universal decline, caused by survey fatigue, privacy concerns, less civic responsibility
  - Consequences: ↑ costs, ↑ standard errors, ↑ risk of bias, ↓ granularity
  - Solutions
    - Reduce burden via internet or electronic reporting
    - Augment or substitute with administrative data
- **Funds:** Since 2009, BLS funding ↓20%, adjusted for inflation
  - Cause: Part of “discretionary” federal spending
  - Consequence: slow modernization
  - Solutions
    - Search for efficiencies
    - Raise awareness of administration and elected officials



# Modernization

- Mission critical, a core competence and responsibility
  - Economy and technology always change
  - Alternative: lost relevance and efficiency
  - No program is “one and done”
- Challenges
  - Funding for investment
  - Barriers to data-sharing and coordination among federal agencies
  - Preserving continuity/consistency of existing products
- Need is critical now

# Evolution of US official statistics

## Stats 1.0 (1880s-mid 1900s)

- Convenience samples and censuses dominate

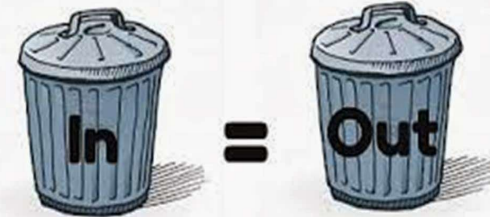
## Stats 2.0 (mid 1900s-early 2000s)

- Designed surveys and valid statistical inferences dominate
- Administrative data used if available

## Now: Threats to surveys



**G.I.G.O.**



**"GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT"**



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# 21<sup>st</sup> Century official statistics

- **Opportunity**

- High demand for evidence-based decision-making—granular, timely, nimble
- “Big Data”: Digitized operations, cheap powerful computers, internet connectivity, novel software (e.g., AI)

- **Stats 3.0 Solution: Blended data products**

- Combine multiple sources (e.g., surveys plus administrative data) to overcome limitations from single sources
- With safeguards and advanced privacy-enhancing practices to minimize possible individual harm
- Interoperability facilitated by data and technology standards developed via public/private governance



# Essential standards for Stats 3.0: Employer records

- **Civilizations set standards** (Egyptians, 2600 BC) to promote trade & trust
  - Transparent
  - Comprehensive—all kinds (weight, size, composition, etc.)
  - Interoperable—apply across venues
- **Data and technology standards** improve data & interoperability
  - Quality via common terms, formats, collection methods
  - Validation and consistency
  - Exchange and processing efficiency
  - Security
- By [law](#), Federal agencies must use industry standards



**JEDx**



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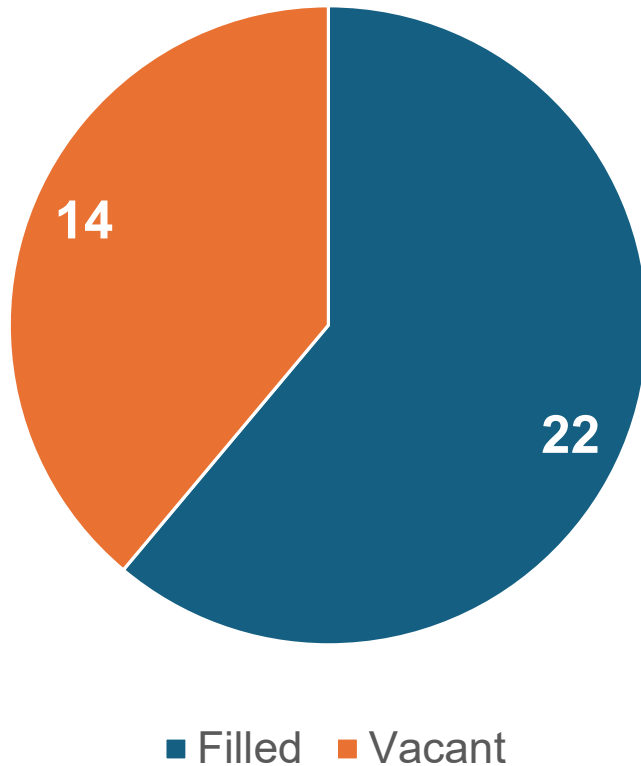
**IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES:**

**RESOURCES, TRUST, & SHUTDOWN**



- Since Jan. 2025—collateral damage from **resource restrictions**
  - Staffing reductions since January--Not sustainable
    - Staffing down by about 25% and 39% of leadership positions vacant
    - PhDs collecting data instead of doing research for modernization
  - Leases and contracts cancelled without consultation
  - Advisory committees terminated
  - If current package enacted, may have small increase in FY2026

## BLS Leadership Positions 39% Vacant



## Vacant Positions at BLS (January 2026)

- **Commissioner**
- **Associate Commissioner for Compensation and Working Conditions**
- Assistant Commissioner for Occupational Safety and Health Statistics
- Assistant Commissioner for Industry Employment Statistics
- Assistant Commissioner for Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections
- Senior Research Economist — Employment Research Staff
- Assistant Commissioner for Industrial Prices and Price Indexes
- **Associate Commissioner for Productivity and Technology**
- Senior Research Economist — Division of Productivity Research and Program Development
- Assistant Commissioner for Regional Operations for Northeast
- Assistant Commissioner for Regional Operations for Midwest
- Senior Research Survey Methodologist



- **Trust**—hard to regain
  - Mission-critical, necessary for **use** and **survey responses**
- Administration lodges baseless claims to refute unwelcome news (8/1), undermining trust
  - Administration’s supporters’ doubts confirmed
  - Others fear that Administration will begin meddling
- Political interference may be more likely
  - BLS Commissioner fired (“killing the messenger” -- 8/1)
  - First nominee insufficiently vetted



- **2025 Shutdown**—43 days with only Acting Commissioner at work
  - **National impact**
    - No data collection, processing, releases or modernization
    - Recovery complicated by length and staff shortage
    - <https://www.bls.gov/bls/2025-lapse-revised-release-dates.htm>
  - **State impact**
    - Furloughed state employees
    - QCEW state system not available for duration
      - Cornerstone for measuring employment, wages, and Gross Domestic Product
      - Benchmark for numerous private-sector economic models
    - Delayed and/or lost current state and metro data on payroll jobs, unemployment rate, and inflation
      - Hinders evidence-based policy and effective response to changing economic conditions
    - Reduced trust in continuity of federal/state data partnerships



- **Now/soon:** Flying blind(er)
  - Shutdown, slow recovery
  - Staff shortage, interference, lost trust, declining responses
  - Lack of funding for modernizing
- **Longer term:** A “moment,” turning point for official statistics?
  - Uproar: many sectors, bipartisan, public, vigorous, sustained
    - Signals appreciation for a long-neglected public good
  - Recognizes that modernizing official stats is needed and possible, with support from the Hill and Administration
  - If avoiding disruption prevented change, this Administration or the next may be able to lift barriers to modernization



# Federal statistical system reform?

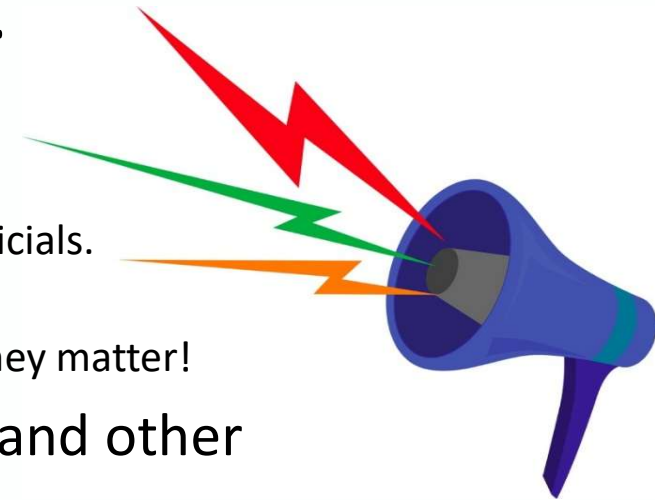
## [ASA Ad Hoc Committee on Modernization of the Federal Statistical System](#)

- Goal: Seize the “moment” by catalyzing stakeholders with an actionable plan that coalesces thinking about needed organizational change to modernize the FSS
- [Background document](#) with options to improve coordination, innovation, and efficiency in the statistical system
- Meetings: [Structure](#) – July 22; [Products \('shiny objects'\)](#) – August 19; [Implementation](#) – October 21
- Roadmap document and launch – February/March



# Call to action

- 1. Speak up** for trustworthiness of BLS and official data in your networks.
  - Debunk baseless claims and innuendo. Stay informed. Decry interference if it happens.
- 2. Get your state into the BLS Wage Records Program.**
  - Help pilot JEDx.
- 3. Influence policymakers.**
  - Communicate about stats modernization and funding with elected officials.
  - Comment on FRNs related to FSS.
  - Watch for sign-on letter opportunities from the Friends and others. They matter!
- 4. Join Friends of BLS (<https://www.friendsofbls.org/>)** and other agency support groups.
  - Connect to Friends' co-chairs.
  - Ask people and organizations to join the Friends.
  - LinkedIn—Join the Friends group.





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# Thank you!

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## No tampering so far

- Tampering would disrupt tightly tuned processes
  - Commissioner (only presidential appointee at BLS) has no opportunity to tamper
    - Does not see data before it is final; no access to programs or source data
  - Processes are highly automated and decentralized
- Signs that would indicate tampering
  - New Commissioner arrives with or brings in a “posse”
  - Delayed, speeded up, or incomplete releases
  - Unannounced changes in methodologies/lack of usual transparency
  - Staff reactions: leaks, quits, whistle-blowing, firings, etc.



# Will objectivity be eroded?

- Concerns going forward
  - Advisory groups terminated
  - Schedule Policy/Career may be applied to staff
  - Next Commissioner nominee could be problematic
  - Administration could insert more politicals
  - OMB could change or not enforce Statistical Policy Directive #1 (Trust Directive) and the Trust Regulation
    - Inspectors General fired and CIGIE abolished



## Efforts to help the system

- Monitoring and preserving (many players)
- Advocacy and communication
  - Professional groups (APDU, COSSA, COPAFS, AEA, NABE, etc.)
  - Agency supporters (Friends of BLS, Census Project, Friends of Energy Information Agency, Friends of Health Statistics, etc.)
  - Thinktanks (Brookings, Essential data, CODE, USAFacts, Bipartisan Policy Commission, Center for Strategic and International Studies, etc.)
- Focus on the future—Stats 3.0
  - National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER): [Re-Engineering Statistics using Economic Transactions](#) (RESET) and “sandbox” for academics and stat agency researchers
  - Brookings’ modernization white papers
  - [ASA Ad Hoc Committee on Modernization of the Federal Statistical System](#)



## Some resources

- [Principles & Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency](#)
- [Statistical Policy Directive No. 1—"Trust Regulation"](#)
- [21<sup>st</sup> Century National Data Infrastructure](#)
- [The Nation's Data at Risk](#)
- [The Future of Federal Statistics](#)
- [Commerce Dept blog about heavy users of govt data](#)
- [Value of US Government Data to US Business Decisions](#)
- [Strengthening the nation's data infrastructure](#)
- [Is Schedule Policy/Career a Risk for Federal Statistical Agencies?](#)



- Founders (2014)
  - [American Statistical Association](#) (ASA)
  - [Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness](#) (CREC)
  - [Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics](#) (COPAFS)
  - [National Association for Business Economics](#) (NABE)
  - [Population Association of America](#) (PAA)
- Membership
  - Members: >1000 (including about 15 organizations) and growing; with LinkedIn group: >1,500
  - Diverse: Business, advocates, state government, Wall Street, think tanks, academics, media, current and former BLSers, etc.



## Friends of BLS objectives

- **Create a network of users** of BLS data and information to facilitate the distribution of information, opinions, and ideas about BLS among users.
- **Act as a reservoir of individuals and organizations** who can:  
(1) participate in seminars and other educational events for the public and for policy decision-makers about the utility and overall value of BLS programs; and (2) communicate the agency's needs and opportunities.
- **Support the BLS as an institution** that provides critical data and tools to a wide variety of users for a wide variety of purposes.

Note: The Friends of the BLS is not sanctioned by nor does it receive any support from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It is completely independent of the BLS and BLS leadership.



- Communicate with Congress and US Dept. of Labor
  - Support improvement and innovation
    - Budget and hiring freeze
    - Data sharing and FSS modernization
    - Advisory committees
  - Preserve and reinforce objectivity
    - Limit non-civil service roles to commissioner
    - Exempt staff from Schedule Policy/Career
    - Strengthen commissioner's protection against removal without cause
- Support BLS staff, morale, culture of excellence, and objectivity
  - Public defense
  - Safe way to report issues