

TO: Executive Committee, American Economic Association
FROM: John Haltiwanger, Chair American Economic Association Committee on Economic Statistics
RE: Annual Report for 2020

The current members of the Committee on Economic Statistics (AEASat) are: John C. Haltiwanger, University of Maryland, Chair; Erik Brynjolfsson, MIT; Carol Corrado, The Conference Board; Janice Eberly, Northwestern University; Martin Gaynor, Carnegie-Mellon University; Erica Groshen, Cornell University; Steve Landefeld, BLS (retired); Josh Lerner, Harvard Business School; Edward Montgomery, Western Michigan University; Emi Nakamura, University of California – Berkeley. Kitty Smith Evans staffs the Committee.

The Committee met 10 times by telephone this year to discuss recent developments in economic statistics and the activities it was undertaking, and to plan new activities. Various Subcommittees met separately to implement specific activities.

This report first describes sessions on economic statistics that the Committee solicited, selected and organized for the 2021 ASSA Meetings. It then describes its educational activities in support of economic statistics, activities that advance methodology or technical aspects of economic statistics for the economics profession, and outreach activities. There are no action items in this memorandum.

Sessions for the 2021 AEA Meeting

The three 2020 ASSA AEASat paper sessions were exceptionally well attended and engaging. The Committee aimed to repeat its performance in the call for and choice of 2021 session.

The AEA Stat committee issued a call in April 2020 for papers for the 2021 AEA meetings on topics related to economic statistics. As usual, up to three sessions would be selected, and one could be recommended for inclusion in the May 2021 Papers and Proceedings (P&P).

The Committee received 9 session submissions and 16 individual paper submissions, many of which were of high quality. From these, the Committee selected 2 submitted sessions, as is, and worked with submitters of a third session to add an additional paper to the session. The 2021 sessions are:

Innovations in Measuring the Economic Impacts of COVID 19 (This is the AEASat designated P&P session)

<https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2021/preliminary/2034?q=eNqrVipOLS7OzM8LqSxIVbKqh nGVrJQMIWp1IBKLi OTgRwzUyUdpZLUolxcIBviSkmshDBKMnNTIayyzNRykAFFBQVAAVMDpdpX DBjahvD>

New Approaches to Measuring Comprehensive and Fully Integrated Household Financial Statements at the Micro and Macro Levels

<https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2021/preliminary?q=eNqrVipOTSxKzICyqgayiosz8 NCKgtS>

[kbhKVkqGSrU6SonFxfnJQI6ZqZKOUklqUS6QDWSIJFZCGCWZuakQVIlmajnlgKKCAqCAqQFId0FiOk gWyK4FXDA 1lwiag%2C%2C](https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2021/preliminary/2037?q=eNqrVipOLS7OzM8LqSxIVbKqh nGVrJQMIWp1IBKLi OTgRwzUyUdpZLUolxcIBvISkmshDBKMnNTIayyzNRykAFFBQVAAVMDkO6Cx HSQJANXDCKDx5-)

Globally Engaged Firms in the U.S. Economy

<https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2021/preliminary/2037?q=eNqrVipOLS7OzM8LqSxIVbKqh nGVrJQMIWp1IBKLi OTgRwzUyUdpZLUolxcIBvISkmshDBKMnNTIayyzNRykAFFBQVAAVMDkO6Cx HSQJANXDCKDx5->

Activities Advancing the Employment of Data, Data Transparency, and Data Linkage for Economic Research

- At the 2020 ASSA meeting, the AEASat Committee held a Working Lunch at which 26 representatives of tech and information companies, academic and federal government researchers, data intermediaries and their supporters, and economic journal editors sought “Successful Private Firm-Academic Researcher Agreements for Access to and Replicable Use of Private Data.” In a facilitated session, participants identified 7 major challenges to private data sharing arrangements for research, and proposed alternative potential solutions to each. The session was successful in stimulating several new initiatives by academic researchers and private firms. A report on the session and its findings is available at <https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=11794>.
- AEASat has planned, with the National Economics Association, and issued invitations to experts for a 2021 ASSA Working Session on Measuring the Economic Consequences of Systemic Racism and Discrimination. Final details of this working session are still being worked out at the time of the writing of this report. Linwood Tauheed (President of NEA, Professor at University of Missouri, Kansas City) and William Spriggs (Professor, Howard University), Erica Groshen, John Haltiwanger, Marty Gaynor and Kitty Smith Evans are the planning committee. We plan the working session (tentatively) for Monday, January 4 from 2:30-3:30. Linwood Tauheed and William Spriggs will make brief opening remarks. We will use a webinar format allowing a large number of individuals to attend while limiting the number of those making oral remarks and comments given the limited time available. The objective of the planned working meeting at the ASSA is to consider the state of economics measurement of disparities in economic outcomes by race and ethnicity and, in turn, whether the available statistics are sufficient to quantify the economic consequences of systemic racism and discrimination.

Educational Activities in Support of Economic Statistics

The AEASat also undertakes educational functions, mostly in Washington, DC, through formal and informal activities that provide information about specific economic data sets as well as issues arising that concern economic statistics and statistical agencies in general. It focuses on those data sets and statistical agencies that are relevant to the scientific interests of the members of the AEA, and its

activities are kept consistent with the charter of the AEA by not taking positions on questions of economic policy, budgets, or on any partisan matter.

The Committee issued the following statements, formal comments, and letters during calendar year 2020:

Necessary Improvement in the U.S. Statistical Infrastructure: A Report to Inform the Biden-Harris Transition (jointly with the AEA Committee on Government Relations)

<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=13507> Distribution of this report generated oral briefings with the members of the Dept. of Commerce Transition Team and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (by John Haltiwanger and Steve Landefeld)

Statement on Desirable Characteristics of Managing and Sharing Data from Federally Funded Research (jointly with the AEA Committee on Government Relations)

<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=11793>

Statement on the Need for Accurate and Reliable Data from the 2020 Decennial Census (jointly with the AEA Committee on Government Relations)

<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=12542>

Letter urging Congress to extend the deadline for 2020 Census (jointly with the AEA Committee on Government Relations) <https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=12799>

Memo supporting Senators Schatz, Murkowski, and Sullivan's co-sponsored bill, S. 4571, to extend the deadline for 2020 Census <https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=13207>

It should be noted that, although asked frequently, the Committee has NOT signed on to other associations' entreaties to federal policymakers to increase budgets for statistical agencies or weigh into policy matters.

Committee members and staff also engaged in the following activities:

- Kitty Smith Evans met periodically with current and former leadership of the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, the Economic Research Service and other statistical agencies.
- Independently and in collaboration with the American Statistical Association and COSSA, Kitty Smith Evans (virtually) met with a variety of Congressional staff persons on issues of importance to AEA members, including Senate Health, Education and Labor Minority Committee Staff and House HHS Minority Staff regarding the value and use of BLS statistics; Representative Schweikert staff re publication of income distribution statistics; Maryland Senators' and Representatives' staff leaders regarding the value of social science research and role of federal statistics, and staff of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on the Economic Research Service.
- Evans also spoke with several Budget Examiners in the White House Office of Management and Budget about the value of federal statistics to AEA members, to inform thinking about that office's appropriations proposals.

Outreach and Representation

- On behalf of the AEASat, Andrew Reamer has made over 200 postings on EconSpark of information useful to AEA members. Postings on such things as opportunities to comment on proposed federal data collections, to respond to requests for information, and to nominate economists to federal advisory committees benefit AEA members by providing opportunity to: comment on proposed and desirable changes in economic datasets; access technical documentation; provide input into federal decision-making; and create relations with federal economists and statisticians. A substantial number of the postings were widely viewed (several over 1000 times).
- EconTwitter and other social media have also been used extensively by some AEASat members and by Kitty Smith Evans to post (and retweet) information useful or interesting to AEA members.
- The Web site for the AEASat Committee is being refocused and improved to include the Committee's annual reports and to merge pages that contain similar information.
- Kitty Smith Evans made a presentation on the "Role of Policy and Advocacy" in a session at the American Statistical Association's August 2020 (virtual) Joint Statistical Meetings.
- Peter Rousseau represents AEA as a member of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) Board of Directors and the Governing Board of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA).