

## American Economic Association Committee on Statistics (AEASat)

The current members of the Committee on Economic Statistics (AEASat) are: John C. Haltiwanger (Maryland, Chair); Randall Akee (UCLA); Pat Bajari (Amazon and Washington); Erik Brynjolfsson, (Stanford); Janice Eberly (Northwestern); Martin Gaynor (Carnegie-Mellon); Erica Groshen (Cornell and Upjohn Institute for Employment Research); Steve Landefeld (BEA, retired); and Ayşegül Şahin, (Texas, Austin). The members of AEASat also have rich histories as policy advisors with/to the federal government, innovators in the private sector, and accomplished academics (See <https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/economic-statistics/members>). Kitty Smith Evans staffs the Committee. Andrew Reamer seeks and posts information on economic statistical events and opportunities of value to AEA members.

The Committee met ten times by telephone and Zoom 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 2022 ASSA Meetings. It then describes its educational activities in support of economic statistics, its activities that advanced methodology or technical aspects of economic statistics for the economics profession, and various outreach activities.

### Sessions for the 2022 AEA Meeting

The AEA Stat committee issued a call in April 2021 for papers for the 2022 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 2022 *Papers and Proceedings* (P&P).

The Committee sought to select or organize sessions with immediate relevance and broad professional bearing. As it has done in the past three years, the Committee also organized a special 2022 Working Session at which talent was pooled in a facilitated roundtable to address a current technical issue in detail.

In response to the April 2021 call, the Committee received eight proposed session submissions and six proposed individual paper submissions, many of which were of high quality, for consideration as AEASat sessions at the 2022 AEA meeting. From these, the Committee selected two submitted sessions, as is, and developed its own session on a recognized need. The 2022 paper and panel sessions are each described in full at <https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/economic-statistics/annual-meeting/2022>:

- *New Approaches to Measuring Poverty and Income*—Paper Session (Also selected as the 2022 P&P session)
- *Measuring Inflation in the Service Sector: Accounting for Changes in Quality*—Paper Session
- *Updating National Economic Statistics with Real-Time Data*—Panel Session

**2022 Working Session.**—AEASat planned a 2022 ASSA Working Session on *Modernizing Official Statistics and Economic Measurement Using High Frequency Data: Challenges and Opportunities*. A total of about 30 individuals representing private data firms (e.g., ADP, Amazon, Indeed, Mastercard, Redfin), federal economic statistics agencies, academics from economics and data science programs, and economists with nonprofit organizations, participated in a facilitated roundtable by responding to questions posed by the organizers.

Others separately registered for the session made comments and asked questions via the Chat mechanism, enriching the perspectives of the invited participants. As with past Working Sessions, the plan is to produce, disseminate, and educate stakeholders with a report on the session's results.

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

At the 2021 ASSA meeting, AEASat and the National Economic Association held a joint Working Session on “Measuring the Economic Consequences of Systemic Racism and Discrimination,” with a focus on data and data collection needs. Detailed notes on the Session (<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=14021>) were created and formed a basis for a synthesis report, “Economic Measurement of Consequences of Systemic Racism: Challenges and Opportunities” (<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=14646>) that AEASat and its members subsequently used to brief economic institutions and policy makers on the problems and actions that could be taken to alleviate them. Outreach activities based on the May 2021 report include:

- An organized webinar for interested Federal Reserve Bank economists;
- A Brookings Blog on the session and its implications, by AEASat member Randy Akee;
- A Summary of findings for members of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP);
- Participation on a panel of professional associations that briefed the White House Equitable Data Working Group (Co-Chaired by OSTP and the White House Office of Management and Budget), and provided briefing materials on the implications of data-based challenges and opportunities in measuring the effects of racism;
- A letter to Janelle Jones, Chief Economist of the Labor Department (<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=14649>);
- A session on “Why Federal Surveys Can’t Capture Measures of the Economic Consequences of Systemic Racism, and What Might We Do About It” for the Data Foundation’s 2021 Virtual Data Symposium, featuring AEASat members Randall Akee, John Haltiwanger and Erica Groshen, as well as Linwood Tauheed, our National Economic Association collaborator.

*Extension of Session implications for Federal Statistical Agencies.*—Some of the points made by the AEASat report show up in a November 2021 US Census Bureau Blog, “Advancing Equity with Census Bureau Data,” by the Acting Director of the Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/director/2021/11/advancing-equity.html>).

#### **Other Outreach and 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. In addition to its reports on measuring the effects of racism, the Committee issued the following statements, formal comments, and letters during calendar year 2021:

- *Necessary Improvement in the US 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>). Wide distribution of this report was timed to introduce newly appointed members of the Biden Administration to the importance of the US data infrastructure. The report’s distribution subsequently spawned a number of oral briefings of White House appointees, including the members of the Dept. of Commerce Transition Team, Ronnie

Chatterji, the Commerce Department's new Chief Economist, and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. Additionally, copies of the report were sent along with customized letters indicating which improvements might be especially relevant to the recipient. These were sent to Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. A letter to Representative Scott Peters (<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=14647>) points out that the Health Statistics Act of 2021, which he introduced, is consistent with our report on improving the US statistical infrastructure.

Also, at the invitation of the sponsor, we sent the Brookings Institution a question for Labor Secretary Walsh to address during a webcast in-depth conversation. Our question, written by AEASat member Erica Groshen, addressed the modernization of and potential enhancements to the Unemployment Insurance system. Although Secretary Walsh did not directly answer the question, he did state that "What gets measured gets done," and expressed the need for better data on why people are not working.

- *Comments for the Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building*, jointly with the AEA CGR, in response to the Federal Advisory Committee seeking answers to a series of questions (<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=13947>).
- *A Briefing Paper, joint with the AEACGR, on "How Data Synch Can Save US Official Statistics"* (<https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=15315>), for use by AEA Committee members and groups with which AEA collaborates, in explaining the need for "data synchronization" of business data across the three principal economic statistical agencies. This will be an important document in a planned campaign to promote the need for synchronization of business data across the three principal economic statistics agencies.
- With AEA Data Editor, Lars Vilhuber, provided AEA-relevant feedback and ideas

about American Community Survey synthetic data to Liz Pancotti, senior analyst for the Senate Budget Committee.

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 directly into specific policy proposals.

#### **Coordination and Collaboration with other Organizations**

Kitty Smith Evans and Ken Troske represented AEA in the Consortium of Social Science Association's (COSSA) virtual Science Advocacy Day. Evans also attended monthly Government Relations meetings with COSSA member organizations to learn about others' activities and coordinate when appropriate. AEA is a governing member of COSSA.

Evans and/or Peter Rousseau represented AEA at quarterly meetings of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS), of which AEA is a member.

Evans attended periodic webinars put on by the Data Foundation to inform topics of interest to AEA data users. She also listened in on periodic Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building meetings, federal statistical agency briefings of interest, and meetings of the Federal Economic Statistics Committee (on which John Haltiwanger sits), all to inform AEASat activities.

With counterparts from the American Statistical Association, Population Association of America, the Coalition on National Science Funding and other affiliated professional associations, Evans tracks annual federal budget developments and reports back to the AEASat Committee on budget issues of relevance to AEA members. For example, the Continuing Budget Resolution, which extends passage of federal appropriations bills until at least February 2022, has serious implications for the timeliness of business statistics and indicators.

#### **Informational Posts on EconSpark**

On behalf of AEASat, in 2021 Andrew Reamer posted over 400 informational items on EconSpark for AEA member use. Subjects of

posts included: opportunities for economists to comment on proposed federal data collections; announcements of new data programs and initiatives; federal agency requests for information from economists; and invitations for economists to apply for membership on federal advisory committees. The benefits of these postings to AEA members include: advance notice of proposed changes in federal data collections; opportunity for input on economic data program design; access to detailed technical documentation; opportunity to provide input into federal policymaking (through RFIs); and opportunities to create relations with federal economists and statisticians.

Reamer's posts for the highest number of views in 2021 were:

- Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics—Census introduces new data series (2,800 views)
- Small Business Pulse Survey—Census invites comments on proposed revisions (2,300 views)
- HHS Teletracking COVID-19 Portal (daily hospital data upload)—HHS invites comments to OMB (1,200 views)
- 2022 Survey of Consumer Finances—Fed invites public comments on proposed approach (674 views)
- OMB Report to President—Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity (667 views)

JOHN HALTIWANGER,  
*Chair, AEASat*