



Committee on Economic Statistics (AEASat)

New Initiatives to Support the Future of Economic Statistics

September 2026

Background

Over the years, the agencies primarily responsible for economic statistics – the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) – have regularly updated their data and methodologies to reflect changes in the economy, newly available data, and advances in statistical methods and computing power.¹ In recent years, [declining survey response rates](#) have increased the need for innovation, while multiplying sources of [naturally occurring business and administrative data](#) and new methods like large language models have expanded scope for improvements. Yet in recent years, the statistical agencies' abilities to take advantage of new opportunities have been constrained by flat or falling inflation-adjusted budgets.² Their work was further complicated in 2025 by 15-20% reductions in staff, intensified scrutiny of headline economic indicators, and instances where traditions intended to keep statistical production separate from political considerations were disregarded, including the dismissal of the BLS Commissioner in August.³ Ensuring that high-quality, reliable economic statistics continue to be supplied is essential for everyone who relies on them, including policymakers, businesses, financial-market participants, and the general public, as well as economic researchers.

In this context, six new initiatives were launched in 2025 to support the future of federal economic statistics. To varying degrees, they have aimed to draw attention to the challenges currently faced by statistical agencies; identify and recommend policy options that could accelerate progress towards statistical modernization and improve system efficiency; and catalyze and conduct research that lays foundations for modernizing official statistics using new data sources and methods. The table below provides summary information on the initiatives' work.

- Four initiatives focus on **federal economic statistics**. A first (Brookings) has produced a set of analyses of challenges currently faced by economic statistics and measurement issues affecting specific economic indicators and is hosting regular seminars on new developments in economic statistics. A second (NBER-EMRI) is a new research institute, housed at the National Bureau of Economic Research, that supports research with potential to lead to major overhauls and

AEASat contact information for this brief: Karen Dynan, AEASat chair, kdynan@fas.harvard.edu; Martha Starr, AEA Washington DC representative, martha.starr@aeapubs.org.

modernization of official economic statistics. A third (NBER-AEM) aims to catalyze new research on high-potential uses of alternative data to estimate headline economic indicators. A fourth unique initiative (CSIS) examined data needs relating to US economic security, with special emphasis on timely, detailed data on trade and advanced technologies.

- Two initiatives are focused on the broader **federal statistical system** (FSS). A first (ASA) provides a roadmap for policymakers for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the FSS, from a team of seven experts who have held FSS leadership roles. A second (BPC) is in the process of developing actionable, specifically bipartisan recommendations for improving how well the FSS meets U.S. 21st century data needs.

The main activities and deliverables of the six initiatives include conferences, workshops, reports, and outreach to policymakers and the public. As currently planned, three initiatives will conclude in 2026, two in 2027, and one in 2028. The work of the initiatives has benefited from the support of the Sloan Foundation (Brookings, NBER-AEM, CSIS) and the National Science Foundation (NBER-EMRI, NBER-AEM).

Overview of Initiatives to Support the Future of Economic Statistics					
Initiative	Abbr.	Focus	Key outputs	Main activities and deliverables	Expected end date
Brookings Economic Indicator Initiative	EII	Economic statistics	Analyses of key challenges facing federal economic statistics and review of measurement of key economic indicators	4 papers written by area experts; seminars and blogs on economic measurement; conference in late 2026	Late 2026
NBER-Economic Measurement Institute	NBER-EMRI	Economic statistics	Significant research projects advancing use of new data and methods for producing official economic statistics	4-8 research projects in 3-year pilot phase; conference on modernizing employment data	Pilot through late 2028
NBER-Advancing Economic Measurement	NBER-AEM	Economic statistics	High-promise research agendas for estimating headline economic indicators using alternative data	3 conferences bringing academic and government economists together with private-data providers	December 2027
Center for Strategic & International Security	CSIS	Data needs for economic security	Analyses of data needs for tracking strategically important areas like trade and advanced technologies	Report based on a workshop held in November 2025	Report released March 2026
American Statistical Association	ASA	Federal statistical system	Actionable recommendations for policymakers for modernizing the federal statistical system	Roadmap by 7 statistical system experts	Report released June 2026; outreach after
Bipartisan Policy Center	BPC	Federal statistical system	Actionable, bipartisan recommendations for legislative and administrative changes, grounded in a new FSS mission statement	Reports to be shared with policymakers, via BPC's advocacy arm	Mission statement Sept 2026; additional reports and advocacy to follow

The purpose of this AEASat brief is to inform AEA members about the important work being done by the initiatives. It provides overviews of each initiative's objectives and planned activities, as well as links to web materials as available. Information given here is **current as of September 2026**; with the initiatives' work in full swing, activities and schedules could change going forward. For up-to-date information, please consult the initiatives' websites (links given below).

Brookings Institution, "Economic Indicators Initiative"

Brookings' "Economic Indicators Initiative" (EII) is a [think-tank collaborative](#) that includes Brookings, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Niskanen Center, the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, and the Urban Institute. Co-led by John Sabelhaus and David Johnson, both Brookings Senior Fellows, the initiative aims to generate analysis, exchange of ideas, and useful resources that can help strengthen and ensure the continued supply of high-quality, credible, useful official statistics. The project has produced four "framing" papers that discuss issues broadly affecting federal economic statistics, including: (a) [threats to the current system](#) for producing economic statistics; (b) [current use](#) of economic statistics and unmet needs; (c) [increasing trust](#) in economic statistics; and (d) developing a framework to [evaluate innovations](#) in official statistics. Papers have been authored by people who have been centrally involved in producing and improving economic statistics, including Upjohn Institute president Michael Horrigan, who served as BLS's Associate Commissioner for Prices and Living Conditions and then its Associate Commissioner for Employment and Unemployment Statistics. Brookings and AEI have also been co-hosting seminars on new developments in economic statistics, with a workshop on CPS modernization planned for October. The initiative also maintains an "Economic Indicators" [website](#) that features commentaries, policy briefs, and other posts on emerging and high-priority topics in the field, as well as posting information on EII activities and outputs.

Brookings' initiative weblinks:

- <https://www.brookings.edu/projects/economic-indicators-initiative/>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/projects/economic-indicators-initiative/about-the-initiative/>

NBER, "Economic Measurement Research Institute (EMRI)"

In Fall 2025, NBER launched a new "[Economic Measurement Research Institute](#)" (EMRI), co-directed by Katharine Abraham (University of Maryland) and Matthew Shapiro (University of Michigan). EMRI is intended to support multiyear research projects with high potential to significantly advance modernization of official economic statistics using new data and methods, factoring in that federal agencies should be able to sustainably operationalize new approaches. In its three-year pilot phase, EMRI will house [four research projects](#) that plan to: (a) compute CPI-type goods-price indexes using product-level sales data from Circana;⁴ (b) measure growth in the "gig economy" by linking data from the American Community Survey with administrative data;⁵ (c) use information from businesses' required financial reports to measure [intangible capital](#), an increasingly important factor of production

in the contemporary economy; and (d) measure R&D effects on productivity by linking Census business data with data from NSF's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. Additional research projects will be selected from calls for proposals.⁶ In September 2026, EMRI hosted a conference on [innovations in measuring employment](#), an area of special importance after intensified discussions of revisions in U.S. employment statistics in 2025.⁷

NBER-EMRI weblinks:

- <https://www.nber.org/programs-projects/projects-and-centers/economic-measurement-research-institute?page=1&perPage=50>
- Projects: <https://www.nber.org/programs-projects/projects-and-centers/economic-measurement-research-institute/EMRI-projects>

National Bureau of Economic Research, "Advancing Economic Measurement (AEM)"

A second NBER project, "Advancing Economic Measurement," is directed by Karen Dynan (Harvard University) and aims to catalyze new, high-promise work using alternative data to measure headline economic indicators. "Alternative data" in this context refers to naturally occurring business data that could be used to track changes in economic activity; examples already in use include payroll-provider ADP's jobs report, [Indeed's](#) job-posting index, [LinkedIn's](#) hiring index, web-scraped [gasoline prices](#) used in the CPI, [State Street PriceStat's](#) inflation indexes, and the Census Bureau's [experimental housing-start estimates](#) using satellite data.⁸ Naturally occurring business data can be problematic as substitutes for official economic statistics, as they typically cover unrepresentative pools of firms or households, may be discontinued for business reasons, etc.⁹ But as supply of alternative data continues expanding, and methods for compiling and analyzing novel data improve, potentially promising uses are emerging at a rapid rate.

To expand research into the scope for using alternative data to produce reliable measures of economic activity, NBER-AEM will hold three conferences that bring academic and government economists together with private-sector suppliers of alternative data. As identifying appropriate data sources and setting up arrangements to use them can be time consuming, the convenings aim to move good ideas into active research more quickly, boosting the supply of projects with potential to scale up into the types of research efforts that EMRI supports. A first conference was held in Washington, DC, in November 2025 and reviewed work using alternative data to track headline economic indicators; recordings and slides are available [online](#). The next two conferences will focus on challenges to using alternative data and new developments in research based on it, respectively.

NBER-AEM webpage:

- <https://www.nber.org/programs-projects/projects-and-centers/8849-new-approaches-constructing-economic-statistics?page=1&perPage=50>

Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Federal Statistics for Economic Security”

In November 2025, CSIS organized a well-attended full-day conference on “Federal Statistics for Economic Security”; recordings and transcripts are [available online](#). With heightened concerns about global competition in advanced technologies, vulnerability in global supply chains, and shifting trade patterns, access to high-quality, timely, and accurate data on aspects of US economic performance relevant to national economic security take on [new priority](#). Topics covered at the conference included the high value users get from federal statistics; challenges currently faced by the statistical system; data needs relating to national economic security; and statistical-system innovation. [Participants](#) in the event included the [US chief statistician](#); [BEA, BLS, and Census Bureau](#) leaders; academic and think-tank economists; and people from business, finance, and trade associations. New voices in this mix included economists from large private-equity firms, which can have portfolios [large enough](#) to provide a lens on the economy; leads in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s [JEDx project](#), which is working to advance use of standardized wage-record formats, which in turn could substantially simplify automated payroll-data reporting; and research directors from trade associations. Consistent themes were that, for purposes of tracking US economic security, data on trade and advanced technologies need short lags between collection and availability, and the granularity and time-series consistency of data on strategically important technologies and products need to be improved. The CSIS event was organized by Navin Girishankar, Chris Borges, and Andrew Reamer of CSIS. CSIS published a [report of findings](#) in March 2026 and is considering next steps.

CSIS conference webpage:

- <https://www.csis.org/events/federal-statistics-economic-security>

American Statistical Association, “Modernizing the Federal Statistical System”

In 2025, the ASA launched an initiative on “[Modernizing the Federal Statistical System](#),” which is intended to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers for modernizing and strengthening the ability of the FSS to deliver high-quality, trusted statistics to the US public. The team is made up of 7 people who have had longtime leadership roles in the FSS, including two former BLS Commissioners (William Beach and Erica Groshen); a former US Chief Statistician (Nancy Potok); the former executive director of the Commission on Evidence Based Policy (Shelly Martinez); former key people in the National Academy of Science and Medicine’s Committee on National Statistics (Connie Citro and Jen Park); and ASA’s Science Policy Director (Steve Pierson). The project held various convenings in 2025-26 to solicit input from stakeholders, including a June 2025 webinar that discussed options for reorganizing the FSS with an [expert group](#); an August 2025 webinar with [federal-data users](#) on their data needs; and previews of findings presented in various settings (including at a workshop at the [CSIS event](#) in November). The ASA initiative covers the [FSS generally](#), including the 13 principal federal statistical agencies and many other statistical units within other government agencies, the office of the Chief

Statistician (housed in the Office of Management and Budget), and the Interagency Committee on Statistical Policy; as Census, BLS, and BEA taken together are large relative to the FSS,¹⁰ issues affecting economic statistics receive special, but not exclusive, attention in the ASA report. The Roadmap was publicly released on June 16, 2026.

ASA webpage resources:

- Summary of the Roadmap: <https://www.amstat.org/docs/default-source/amstat-documents/modernizing-the-federal-statistical-system/roadmapsummary.pdf>
- Full report: https://www.amstat.org/docs/default-source/amstat-documents/modernizing-the-federal-statistical-system/fss_modernizationroadmap.pdf
- Webpage for the modernization project: <https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/modernizing-the-federal-statistical-system>

ASA has a second project, “[Assessing and Monitoring the Health of the Federal Statistical Agencies](#),” which published an inaugural report in [July 2024](#), follow-on reports in [July](#) and [December](#) 2025; and a midyear update in [September 2026](#). This project is intended to provide regular assessments of the statistical agencies’ ability to produce high-quality federal statistics, including by tracking staffing and budgets on an agency-by-agency basis.

Bipartisan Policy Center, “Data for the Future”

In September 2025, BPC launched a “[Data for the Future](#)” initiative, which aims to produce a set of actionable bipartisan recommendations for strengthening and modernizing the federal statistical system. Building on the work of ASA and other groups concerned with maintaining a robust FSS, BPC plans to use a series of discussions, meetings, and workshops with experts, government officials, and other stakeholders, as well as its own research, to identify recommendations for enhancing the ability of the FSS to meet 21st century data needs that can appeal to policymakers on both sides of the aisle. Recommendations could cover legislative and administrative changes and will also be grounded in a new, [nonpartisan mission statement for the FSS](#) developed by BPC and published in September 2026. Uniquely among the initiatives, BPC’s 501(c)(4) [advocacy arm](#) will provide strategic guidance as the report is prepared and then will help share its recommendations with Congress and the executive branch after it is published. Co-led by Rachel Snyderman and Emerson Sprick, the BPC initiative is being advised by Jed Kolko (Peterson Institute for International Economics) and Karen Dunn Kelley (BPC Board of Directors, former Deputy Secretary of Commerce); both served as the Under Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs – the position responsible for overseeing Census and BEA – in the Biden and Trump I administrations, respectively.

BPC web resources:

- <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/press-release/bpc-launches-new-data-for-the-future/>
- <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/the-federal-statistical-system-provides-immense-value-and-faces-significant-challenges/>
- <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/the-uniquely-decentralized-u-s-statistical-system/>

Other work to support the future of federal data and statistics

In addition to the above initiatives, a number of other groups that have long worked to support robust federal data and statistics have stepped up their activities in 2025-26, as risks to continued supply of accurate, timely federal data have increased. More information on the ongoing work of other groups can be found on their websites:

- [America's Data Index](#) – tracks planned and unplanned changes to federal data collections; posts “requests for comment” on proposed changes in survey data collections.
- [America's Essential Data](#) – regularly posts [news stories](#) on changes in data availability and quality
- [American Association for Public Opinion Research](#) (AAPOR) – organizes letter-writing campaigns and issues statements supporting AAPOR members’ interests in robust availability of reliable, timely, representative data on the US population.
- [American Educational Research Association](#) (AERA) – activities include tracking changes in data availability due to downsizing of the Department of Education and its Institute of Educational Sciences, which houses the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).
- [Association of Public Data Users \(APDU\)](#) – a national network that links users, producers, and disseminators of government statistical data. APDU members share a vital concern about the collection, dissemination, preservation, and interpretation of public data.
- [Census Project](#) – tracks developments relating to the Decennial Census and American Community Survey, including resource needs and budgetary appropriations.
- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Data project](#) – tracks changes affecting the ability of CDC agencies to collect and disseminate information on public health (including the National Center for Health Statistics)
- [Council of Professional Associations for Federal Statistics](#) (COPAFS) – holds [quarterly meetings](#) covering new developments in federal data and statistics.
- [Federal Data Forum](#) (a project of the [Population Reference Bureau](#)) – message board for posting breaking news on federal data, including disruptions in data access.
- [Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) – membership organization that tracks developments at BLS and advocates for measures that will maintain the quality, credibility, and integrity of its data products.
- [Population Association of America](#) (PAA) – professional association of demographers with active profiles in government affairs and data advocacy.
- [USA Facts](#) – works to make government data and statistics accessible to the general public.

NOTES

¹ See, e.g., [Moulton \(2018\)](#).

² See [American Statistical Association \(2025\)](#), Table 2.2). The fact that the agencies’ budgets are decided annually complicates sustained progress on modernization, as funds available to finance it are uncertain from year to year.

³ See, e.g., [ASA \(2025\)](#). B. Casselman, “Cuts to Data Collection May Erode Reliability of Economic Statistics,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2025. J. Lahart, A. Leary, and M. Grossman, “Trump Orders Firing of Bureau of Labor Statistics Chief,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 2025. [AEASat/CGR \(2025\)](#). B. Casselman, “Why the BLS Regularly Revises Jobs Data,” *New York Times*, August 6, 2025.

⁴ This project continues multiyear “RESET” research work, spearheaded by Gabriel Erlich, John Haltiwanger, Ron Jarmin, David Johnson, and Matthew Shapiro. See, e.g., [Erlich et al \(2019a\)](#), [Erlich et al \(2019b\)](#), [Cafarella et al \(2023\)](#).

⁵ See also [Abraham et al \(2018\)](#), [Abraham et al \(2019\)](#), [Abraham et al \(2024\)](#).

⁶ A [first call](#) had a deadline of January 15, 2026, and a [second](#) of July 31.

⁷ See, e.g., [Leduc and Oliveira \(2025\)](#).

⁸ A broader definition takes alternative data to be all data not collected through a federal-government survey or census. In this sense, US economic statistics have long used alternative data alongside federally collected survey and census data. For example, BEA’s source data for the national income and product accounts have included Wards Automotive Reports’ data on vehicle sales, insurance-service data from AM Best, IQVIA data on prescription-drug sales, Compustat data on corporate profits, and data on oil-industry investment from the American Petroleum Institute. See, e.g., [BEA \(2014\)](#) and [Moyer and Dunn \(2020\)](#).

⁹ Additional problems known to limit potential for using alternative data as substitutes for headline economic indicators include the need to use official statistics for benchmarking, lack of detailed information on data features (e.g., units covered in the data, causes of discontinuities, etc.), difficulties seasonally adjusting data available for a short time span only, etc. Imperfect substitutability was made clear in the 2025 government shutdown, when questions about whether risks of rising unemployment had shifted, relative to risks of rising inflation, could not be answered without BLS’s monthly employment and CPI releases. See, e.g., B. Casselman and C. Smith, “A Month Without Data Muddles the Economic Picture,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2025.

¹⁰ See, e.g., [ASA \(2025, Table 2.2\)](#)