

Data Defense: How to Use Key Tools to Advocate for Accessible Public Data

February 25, 2026

Speakers

Denice Ross, former U.S. Chief Data Scientist, Senior Advisor at the Federation of American Scientists

Meghan Maury, former Senior Advisor for Data Policy, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

Melanie Klein, Data Scientist and contributor to dataindex.us and EssentialData.US

dataindex.us

America's Data Index

Monitoring America's federal data infrastructure from dataset availability and new releases to planned and unplanned changes to collections.



EssentialData.US



America's Essential Data

About Us

Use Cases

Terminations and Removals

In The News

Get Involved

Federal datasets are essential infrastructure for American lives and livelihoods

Employees use retirement planning tools that depend on data from Labor

In 2011, [American Community Survey \(ACS\) data](#) revealed that only 48% of Black working-age men in New Orleans were employed. After a 10-year city-wide effort to increase employment among Black men, rates went up by 10 percentage

Taxpayers in a major US city save money when a university analyzes [American Community Survey \(ACS\) data](#) to structure a study on which social programs actually work, helping the city cut wasteful spending.

An American Indian student feels safer and less isolated because their school now sponsors heritage clubs, drawing from [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\) data](#) that shows belonging at school protects against suicide attempts.

Bats save America's agriculture up to \$53 billion every year by insects that harm crops. Bats to provide these services who land developers use [USGS' No Bat Monitoring Program \(NABMP\)](#) so they can better protect the building highways, wind farm mining operations.

demographic data CENSUS

demographic data CENSUS

health data CENSUS

CDC data

environmental data



Primary Threats to Federal Data

1. Changes and removals that don't align with administration priorities
2. Targets to collections that reflect poorly on administration policies
3. Loss of capacity from cuts to staff, budget, contracts, advisory boards, and more

Why Federal Data is Essential

People often take infrastructure – like bridges, electricity, and cell service – for granted. The same is true for federal data.

Demonstrating the broad real-world value of federal data is the most strategic path to ensuring its continued flow.

EssentialData.US – Use Cases of Federal Datasets



Federal datasets are essential infrastructure for American lives and livelihoods

Residents of a neighborhood with no grocery stores now have easy access to fresh, healthy foods because city planners used the [Food Access Research Atlas dataset](#) to establish a farmer's market in their neighborhood.

People living in wildfire-prone areas get near real-time access to [American \(CS\) data](#) to make the right decisions.

Americans' Social Security benefits are better protected from harmful policy changes because researchers use [SSA beneficiary statistics from the Annual Statistical Supplement](#) to accurately model the costs and impacts of proposed legislative reforms.

economic data USDA

economic data SSA

consumer data EPA

g data CENSUS

Use Case Repository

Search all columns:

Use Case

Primary Agency

Collecting Agency

Data Type

All Agencies

All Collecting Agencies

All Data Types

A child is not exposed to cancer-causing radon when she plays in the basement because the [EPA Map of Radon Zones](#) prompted local building codes for radon-resistant new construction.

EPA

health data

An eczema patient uses [EPA's Safer Choice data](#) to find fragrance-free household products without chemical ingredients that can irritate their skin (or harm the environment).

EPA

consumer data

A resident avoids a new scam in their community because local law enforcement used [federal Consumer Sentinel data](#) to spot the pattern and send out an alert.

FTC

consumer data

During a remodel, a homeowner uses [EPA's Energy Star product data](#) to select appliances that cut energy bills and qualify for rebates.

EPA

consumer data

A second-hand store reviews [Consumer Product Safety Commission recall data](#) before offering items for sale, reducing the chance of shoppers being harmed by unsafe products.

CPSC

consumer data

A new parent reviews federal safety data on [SaferProducts.gov](#) to ensure the crib handed down to them is safe for their baby to use.

CPSC

consumer data



Social Media Campaigns

FAS 04

5 surprising ways federal data make your life better

03

02

01

America's Essential Data

five ways federal datasets support student success

FAS America's Essential Data

federal datasets save lives

suicide awareness month

FAS America's Essential Data

4 ways federal data supports student success beyond K-12

FAS America's Essential Data

federal datasets for National Disability Employment Awareness Month

that keep disabled Americans going

DISABILITY HEALTHY SOCIETY RESEARCH NETWORK

FAS America's Essential Data

Dearly Departed Datasets

FEDERAL DATA

d.2025

On this All Hallow's Eve, let us recognize the losses of datasets that served the American people

How Federal Data Helps America's Neighborhoods

FAS

America's Essential Data

federal data we're thankful for

FAS America's Essential Data capdu

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

THANK YOU

8 ways federal data makes shopping not suck

FAS America's Essential Data

one year one hundred use cases

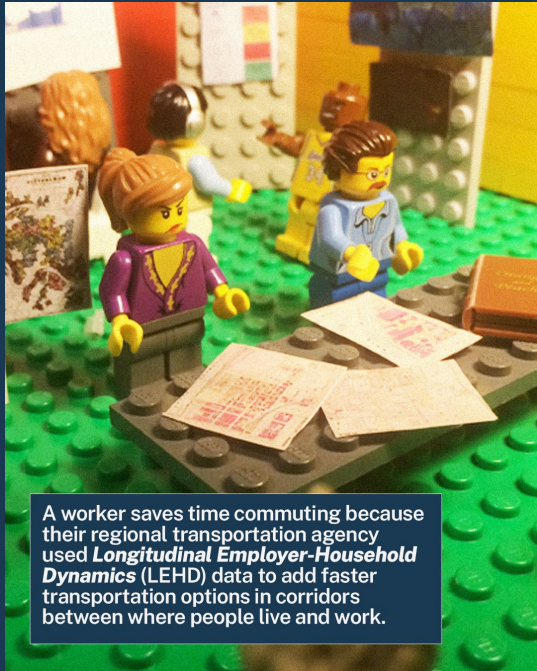
what we've learned from protecting federal datasets

FAS America's Essential Data

State and Local Use Cases



NATIONAL
NEIGHBORHOOD
INDICATORS
PARTNERSHIP



A worker saves time commuting because their regional transportation agency used *Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics* (LEHD) data to add faster transportation options in corridors between where people live and work.



Households receive internet access because their city improved broadband services in areas where *American Community Survey* (ACS) data showed there was limited connectivity.



A local library launches reading clubs for kids because *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP) data shows that the district's 4th and 8th graders are falling behind in reading.

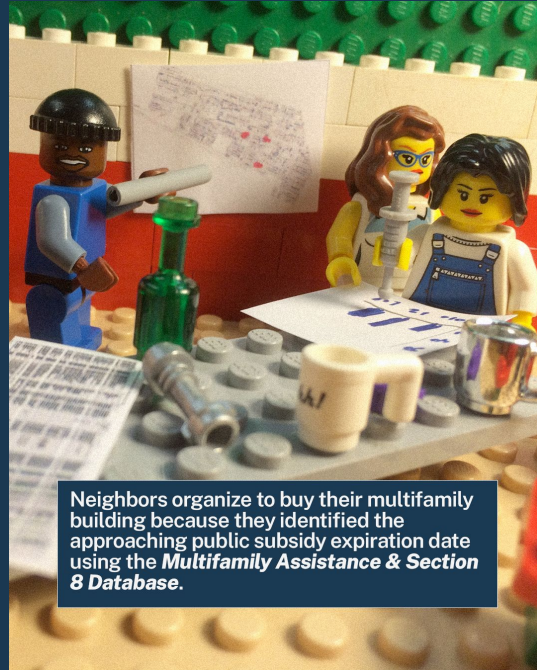
State and Local Use Cases



NATIONAL
NEIGHBORHOOD
INDICATORS
PARTNERSHIP



Residents of a neighborhood with no grocery stores now have easy access to fresh, healthy foods because city planners used the **Food Access Research Atlas** dataset to establish a farmer's market in their neighborhood.

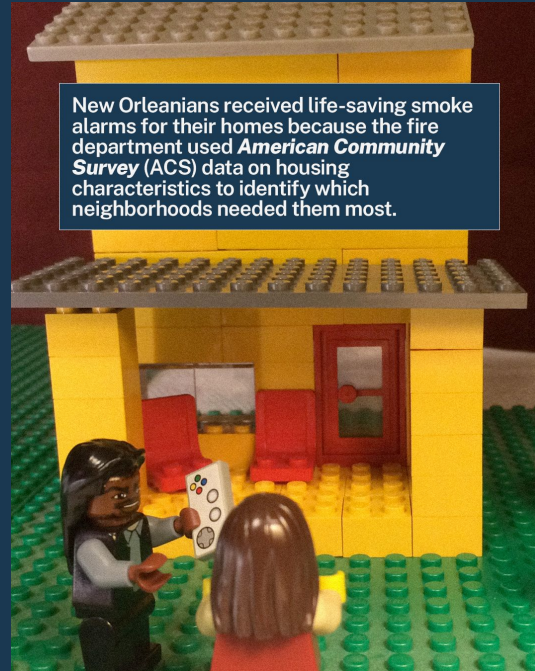
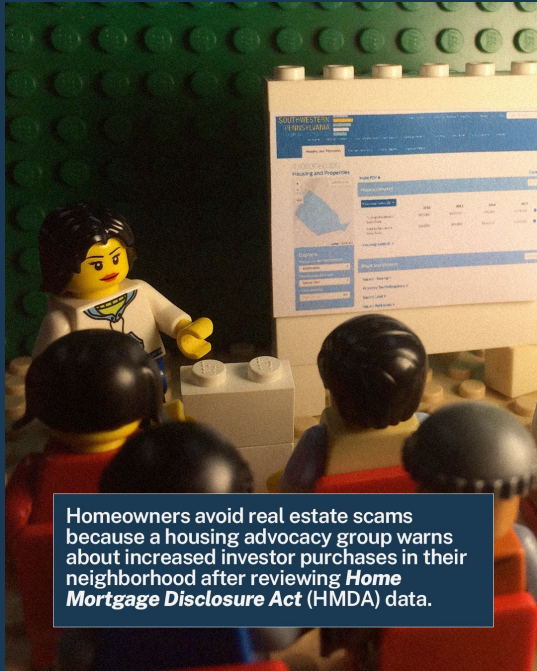


Neighbors organize to buy their multifamily building because they identified the approaching public subsidy expiration date using the **Multifamily Assistance & Section 8 Database**.



Communities of color are better protected from unfair transit plans under Title VI because transportation planners use **American Community Survey (ACS)** race and ethnicity data to identify proposed service changes that disproportionately limit access to transportation.

State and Local Use Cases



Submit a Use Case at EssentialData.US

[Some person, community, or company] receives [a tangible benefit] because [they or someone else] uses [a specific federal data set] to [conduct some analysis or build some tool].

Changes, Terminations, and Risks to Federal Data

On Jan 31, 2025, thousands of federal webpages and datasets went dark.

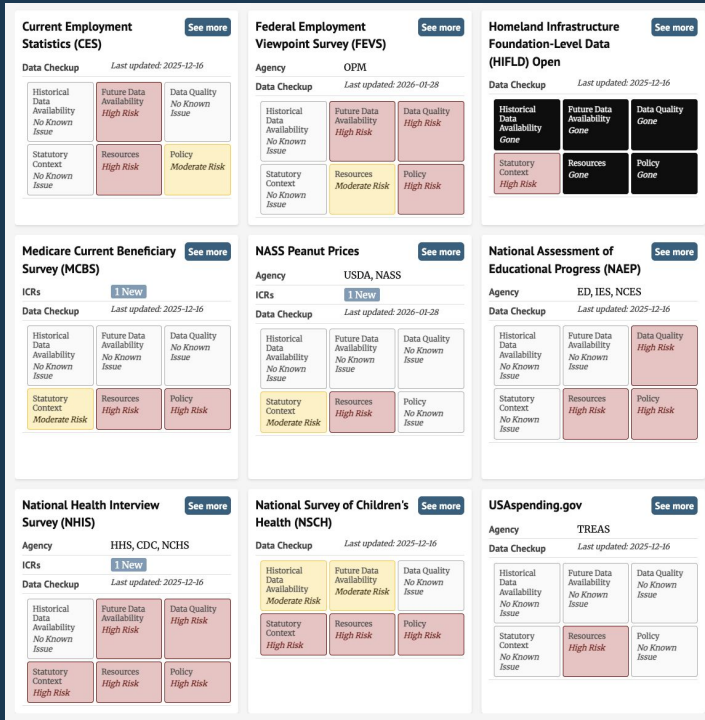
While many datasets came back online, we needed to know what changed,

We have crowd-sourced dozens of federal datasets that were terminated.

We have identified hundreds of changes to surveys and forms.

The primary question: How do we assess the risk that a dataset might disappear, change, or degrade in the future? how do we assess the risk that a dataset might disappear, change, or degrade in the future?

Data Checkup – A health check for federal data collections



A comprehensive framework for assessing the health of federal data collections, highlighting key dimensions of risk and presenting a clear status of data well-being.



Framework Dimensions

Historical Data Availability

Future Data Availability

Data Quality

Statutory Context

Staffing and Funding

Policy

Risk Levels

Gone

High Risk

Moderate Risk

No Known Issue



Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS)

Historical Data Availability The nearly three decades of data remain available.	Future Data Availability Future data and reports are terminated. No other survey provides comparable data.	Data Quality OMB re-approved the survey in April 2025 with no changes to methodology.
Statutory Context Authorized under broad research on food system, consumers, and human nutrition, but not required.	Staffing and Funding USDA placed economists and researchers for the survey & report on admin leave. Survey cost is only ~\$1M.	Policy Termination coincides with cuts to SNAP. USDA called the survey “redundant, costly, politicized, and extraneous.”

Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)

Historical Data Availability Data requests aren't being processed. 1→50 state requests.	Future Data Availability 2023 data hasn't been published.	Data Quality Concerns about accuracy, timeliness, gaps, and comparability.
Statutory Context States aren't required to participate. PREEMIE Reauthorization Act of 2018 assumes PRAMS exists.	Staffing and Funding The entire PRAMS team was placed on admin leave in April 2025.	Policy Question & response options on gender were removed due to EO 14168.

Rapid Response Data Briefings

30-minute webinars for at-risk federal datasets that have an open policy window

We walk attendees through:

1. What's in the dataset
2. Why it's important
3. The risks it's facing
4. How to take action

Goal: Mobilize data users and stakeholders to advocate for the data they rely on.

Prior Rapid Response Data Briefings

American Time Use Survey (ATUS)	Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS)	Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD)
Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS)	Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)	2026 Census Test

The webinar recordings and event resources can be viewed at dataindex.us/events

How You Can Protect Federal Data

Every time the government makes a change to a survey or a form – or introduces a new survey or form – you have the right to weigh in on that decision.

If you want to tell the government what you think about the changes they are making, check out our page to see what opportunities are open for public comment.

The Importance of Comments from State & Local Data Users

- You are the front line of federal data use.
- You see impacts before anyone else.
- Your expertise carries legal and policy weight.
- If you don't weigh in, agencies may assume the change works.

Public comment is how practitioners shape policy!

What Makes a Strong Public Comment

1. Be specific and substantive.
2. Bring implementation experience.
3. Offer workable alternatives.
4. Know your goal.
5. Quality > quantity.

Take Action

Due Date	Collection	Agency	Summary	Main Issues
2026-02-23	Annual Survey of Jails in Indian Country	DOJ/BJA	This survey collects data on items like the number of inmates confined by demographic information, number of new admissions and final discharges, the average daily population (ADP) and peak population, the number of attempted suicides and deaths, the rated capacity to hold inmates, and the number of staff employed in Indian country jails. Although the listing indicates that changes are being made to the survey, supplemental documentation indicates that changes to the prior iteration of this survey will be maintained and no further changes will be made in this fielding. Earlier changes included collecting data on inmate population changes over a 12-month period and utilization of jail beds during the year, identified additional crimes in Indian country committed against vulnerable populations (human trafficking, kidnapping, and elder abuse), and measured the demographic differences (male and female) among correctional staff.	Criminal Justice
2026-02-23	Transparency in Coverage	HHS, IRS, DOL	Among many other things, this proposed rule is intended to improve the standardization, accuracy, and accessibility of public pricing disclosures from health insurance providers. New requirements include new contextual files and additional data elements like product type, network name, and enrollment counts; changing the reporting level for aggregation of data; removing in-network rates for unlikely provider-to-service mappings; increasing the reporting period and lowering the	Healthcare



How to Submit a Public Comment

1. Click on the name of the survey or form.
 - a. The link will bring you to a listing in the "Federal Register" – a daily newsletter filled with the government's regulations, surveys, forms, public meetings, and other actions
2. Skim the listing to find instructions on how to submit a comment.
 - a. For most listings, this information will be found in a section titled "Addresses"
3. Write in to tell the government what you think!
 - a. Most listings allow you to either:
 - i. Send an email to the point of contact for that survey or form
 - ii. Send your thoughts to the agency or the White House through the [reginfo.gov](https://www.reginfo.gov) website

Current Opportunities Open for Public Comment




TAKE ACTION

**Head Start
Program
Information Report**



TAKE ACTION

**Medical
Expenditure Panel
Survey—Household
Component**



TAKE ACTION

**2026 Operational
Test in Support of
the 2030 Census**

Current Opportunities Open for Public Comment



TAKE ACTION

**SNAP Review of
Major Changes in
Program Design and
Management
Evaluation Systems**



TAKE ACTION

**Household Trends
and Outlook Pulse
Survey**




TAKE ACTION

**Occupational
Employment and
Wages**



Current Opportunities Open for Public Comment




TAKE ACTION

**State
Unintentional Drug
Overdose
Reporting System
(SUDORS)**



TAKE ACTION

**2027-2028 Free
Application for
Federal Student
Aid (FAFSA)**



TAKE ACTION

**Housing Choice
Voucher Program
and Tribal
HUD-VASH**

Keep Up-to-Date on Public Comment Opportunities

Check out our Take Action page for current and past opportunities.

<https://dataindex.us/datawatch>

Sign up for our newsletter to get weekly summaries of new opportunities.

<https://dataindex.us/newsletter/subscribe>

What We Can Do in the Present

- Harvest data closer to the source if feds falter
- Lean into collaborations (like NNIP)
- Work on data governance and building trust with your community
- Engage the people you serve about how their data will be used
- Be transparent about the collection of sensitive data
 - E.g., reproductive health, sexual orientation, gender, immigration status
- Advance the implementation of disaggregated data at the state level
 - E.g., race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, veteran status

Thank you for caring about public data <3

dataindex.us

Register for our newsletter: dataindex.us/newsletter/subscribe

LinkedIn: [@dataindex.us](#)

Bluesky: [@dataindex.us](#)

YouTube: [@dataindex-us](#)

EssentialData.US

Submit a use case: find the form on the homepage

Check out our social media campaigns at [@DeniceWRoss](#) on LinkedIn