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# The Federal Statistical System: An Overview

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## The Federal Statistical System: An Overview

The federal statistical system (FSS) is a decentralized institution comprising more than 100 agencies, organizational units, and programs across the U.S. government that engage in *statistical activities*. Thirteen principal statistical agencies (PSAs) represent the largest proportion of the system. The PSAs are entities whose principal missions are conducting activities related to the collection, compilation, processing, analysis, and dissemination of data for statistical and other purposes.

The FSS has evolved over time. The Paperwork Reduction Act, Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, and other laws have aimed to increase coordination among PSAs, along with other goals.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), through the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) and the chief statistician of the United States, provides a degree of centralized coordination for agencies, units, and programs that in general operate in an independent, decentralized manner.

The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) and the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) also help coordinate statistical activities. The FCSM's purpose is to inform statistical policy-related decisionmaking and provide technical guidance on statistical and methodological issues. The ICSP seeks to improve communication among the heads of the PSAs, along with other statistical officials across executive agencies, and to advise the chief statistician.

OMB is responsible for developing and issuing Statistical Policy Directives (SPDs), which govern federal statistical activities. SPDs are authorized in statute, and OMB issues them administratively on an as-needed basis. The nine currently active SPDs cover topics such as core standards for data collection, the proper procedure for releasing statistical products to the public, and consistent standards for collecting information about race and ethnicity.

The federal statistical system operates a number of Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDCs) that allow academic and other researchers access to restricted-use data, such as *microdata* containing individual responses to federal surveys. Additionally, FSRDCs support linkage of federal data across different agencies and surveys. In 2022, Congress authorized a National Secure Data Service demonstration project, which aims to allow “governmentwide data linkage and access infrastructure for statistical activities conducted for statistical purposes.”

OMB's role in the federal statistical system and aspects of survey implementation across the system present several topics of possible interest to Congress. Much of OMB's role is clear in statute, but some aspects are not. For example, the steps OMB must take to designate an agency as a PSA, as well as the specific process for introducing, revising, and implementing SPDs, are not explicitly defined. Congress may also be interested in survey-related issues, such as declining response rates across federal surveys, costs and benefits to using administrative records for statistical purposes, protecting the privacy of federal survey respondents, and the effects of certain privacy-enhancing techniques on data quality.

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**Taylor R. Knoedl**  
Analyst in American  
National Government

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## Introduction

The federal statistical system (FSS) is a decentralized system of more than 100 agencies, organizational units, and programs that engage in *statistical activities*.

In statute, statistical activities are defined as

the collection, compilation, processing, or analysis of data for the purpose of describing or making estimates concerning the whole, or relevant groups or components within, the economy, society, or the natural environment; and includes the development of methods or resources that support those activities, such as measurement methods, models, statistical classifications, or sampling frames.<sup>1</sup>

Within this system, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) identifies the 13 principal statistical agencies (PSAs) whose guiding mission is to produce statistics.<sup>2</sup> They produce a substantial portion of official U.S. data used for statistical purposes and generally operate independently of one another.

The statutory definition of *statistical purpose* is “the description, estimation, or analysis of the characteristics of groups, without identifying the individuals or organizations that comprise such groups; and includes the development, implementation, or maintenance of methods, technical or administrative procedures, or information resources” that support the aforementioned purposes.<sup>3</sup>

Federal statistics can inform policymakers and the public about a multitude of subjects across policy and societal contexts. They are widely trusted, widely used, and often the most authoritative source of information available on a variety of topics. The public can use federal statistics to better understand information on education, commuting, health, crime, and other demographic factors. Businesses can benefit from federal statistics by using them to identify growth strategies, serve customer bases, and understand the labor force. Federal, state, and local governments can use federal statistics to learn and make better-informed decisions.<sup>4</sup>

This report provides background on the statutory authorities that underpin the FSS and OMB’s role in overseeing the system. This includes background on the OMB-issued Statistical Policy Directives (SPDs) as well as the components of the FSS. In a final section, the report discusses issues relating to oversight, OMB’s role, and survey implementation that may be of interest to Congress.

## Statutory Authorities and Legislative History

Statutory authorities relating to the FSS include both centralized and decentralized elements. The decentralized agency-level statutory authorities guide the establishment and operation of the numerous individual entities that engage in statistical activities, whereas the centralized statutory authorities apply across statistical agencies and activities.

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<sup>1</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3561(10).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Year 2021/2022*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>. For more information, see CRS Report RS21665, *Office of Management and Budget (OMB): An Overview*, coordinated by Taylor N. Riccard.

<sup>3</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3561(12). Additional relevant definitions can be found in **Appendix A**.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Shalanda Young, Director of OMB, to Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House of Representatives, February 2, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>.

## Historical Context

The FSS has deep historical roots. Article I, Section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, as modified by Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, directs a decennial census count of persons to be made for the purpose of apportionment of representation among the states. The administrative requirements of administering the decennial census, and a growing demand for data, led to the establishment of the U.S. Census Bureau in 1902 (32 Stat. 51).<sup>5</sup> The Census Bureau is currently designated by OMB as a PSA and is the largest PSA in terms of personnel and funding.

### Key Sources of Information on the Federal Statistical System

Two publications in particular provide extensive information about the FSS. They are updated periodically and help chart the evolution of the FSS since the 1990s.

*Statistical Programs of the United States Government*, which is produced by OMB, was first published in 1997 and most recently published for combined fiscal years 2021 and 2022.<sup>6</sup> OMB has published this to meet statutory requirements in the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, which are now codified at Title 44 of the *U.S. Code*, Section 3504(e)(2). The report provides budgetary information on the FSS as well as key accomplishments from each agency. OMB posts new versions of this report as they are released on its “Statistical Programs & Standards” web page.<sup>7</sup> A historical archive of editions from 1998 through 2016 is also available online.<sup>8</sup>

*Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, produced by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT)—which is within the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM)—provides background, current issues, and other information on the FSS. The first edition was published in 1992,<sup>9</sup> and the most recent version was published in 2021.<sup>10</sup> CNSTAT was established in 1972<sup>11</sup> and aims to provide an “independent, objective resource for evaluating and improving work of the decentralized federal statistical system.”<sup>12</sup> These reports are available on the NASEM “National Academies Press” web page.<sup>13</sup>

The FSS is a decentralized system. Still, it functions under centralized governance by OMB and statutory provisions that apply broadly when agencies engage in statistical activities. For example, the President and OMB have statutory responsibilities to coordinate and regulate the FSS. Specifically, the 1950 Budget and Accounting Procedures Act directed the Bureau of the Budget (the predecessor to OMB) to “develop programs and to issue regulations and orders for

<sup>5</sup> Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> For the first edition, see Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Year 1997*, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/OMB/inforeg/stat97.html>. For the most recent edition, see Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Years 2021/2022*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> “Statistical Programs & Standards,” Office of Management and Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/statistical-programs-standards/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Statistical Programs of the United States Government, continued,” Office of Management and Budget, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/regulatory\\_affairs/reports\\_previous\\_yrs/](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/regulatory_affairs/reports_previous_yrs/).

<sup>9</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1992), <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/9043/principles-and-practices-for-a-federal-statistical-agency>.

<sup>10</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Janet L. Norwood, *Organizing to Count: Change in the Federal Statistical System* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2021), p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> “Committee on National Statistics,” National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/cnstat/committee-on-national-statistics>.

the improved gathering, compiling, analyzing, publishing, and disseminating of statistical information for any purpose by the various agencies in the executive branch of the Government.”<sup>14</sup> Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1970 redesignated the Bureau of the Budget as OMB and transferred the aforementioned authority relating to federal statistics to the President.<sup>15</sup> The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 (PRA) required OMB to establish the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) as part of a reorganization. The PRA amended the statute to require the President and the Director of OMB to delegate the authority to coordinate and regulate the FSS to OIRA’s administrator.<sup>16</sup> As such, this authority was amended over time and can be found in its current form in Title 31 of the *U.S. Code*, Section 1104(d).

## Paperwork Reduction Act

The PRA, along with its subsequent 1986 amendment<sup>17</sup> and its 1995 reauthorization,<sup>18</sup> provided a more elaborate statutory structure that centralized authority over the FSS in OMB, and more specifically in OIRA. Provisions of the PRA include the development of policies and standards for statistical data and information; the activities of OIRA; the activities of the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP); the activities of the chief statistician of the United States; and governance of related creation, collection, disclosure, maintenance, use, sharing, and dissemination of information.<sup>19</sup>

## Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002

The Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA 2002) established confidentiality and disclosure policies to be coordinated by OMB.<sup>20</sup> It also implemented fines and penalties for the wrongful disclosure of information exclusively collected for statistical purposes by agency employees or agents.<sup>21</sup>

CIPSEA 2002 also codified the term “Designated Statistical Agency” to describe the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).<sup>22</sup> The law required these designated statistical agencies to improve the efficiency of their data collection and protect data confidentiality.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, CIPSEA 2002 authorized these three designated statistical agencies to share business data with each other.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> P.L. 81-784, <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l1/lsl/l1-c81s2/l1-c81s2.pdf#page=862>.

<sup>15</sup> U.S.C. 5 Appendix, Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1970, <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title5a-node35-leaf128&num=0&edition=prelim>.

<sup>16</sup> P.L. 96-511, Section 3(a); 94 Stat. 2815, <https://www.congress.gov/96/statute/STATUTE-94/STATUTE-94-Pg2812.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> P.L. 99-591.

<sup>18</sup> P.L. 104-13.

<sup>19</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§3501-3520.

<sup>20</sup> CIPSEA 2002 was enacted by Title V of the E-Government Act of 2002, P.L. 107-347 (December 17, 2002; 116 Stat. 2962), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-107publ347/pdf/PLAW-107publ347.pdf#page=64>. Section 503 establishes OMB’s oversight and coordination of the law’s confidentiality and disclosure policies.

<sup>21</sup> P.L. 107-347, §513.

<sup>22</sup> P.L. 107-347, §522.

<sup>23</sup> P.L. 107-347, §523.

<sup>24</sup> P.L. 107-347, §524.

(The language used to describe federal statistical agencies has changed over time; see **Appendix B** for details.)

## Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (FEBPA), enacted in 2019, expanded the structure of statutory provisions governing FSS activities.<sup>25</sup> Among other provisions, FEBPA codified *Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units* into law.<sup>26</sup>

## Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2018

The FEBPA included the reauthorization of the CIPSEA,<sup>27</sup> which OMB now refers to as CIPSEA 2018.<sup>28</sup> The reauthorization provided the OMB Director greater authority to designate statistical agencies or units. CIPSEA 2018 also contained several general provisions, including expanded responsibilities for statistical agencies;<sup>29</sup> confidentiality protection standards;<sup>30</sup> statistical efficiency standards;<sup>31</sup> and standards for access to federal data for evidence building.<sup>32</sup> Many of the provisions related to evidence building introduced in CIPSEA 2018 drew upon work of the statutorily established Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking (CEP).<sup>33</sup>

## Relevant U.S. Code Provisions

Codified laws generally relevant to the FSS can be found primarily in Titles 5, 31, and 44 of the *U.S. Code*. The most detailed provisions are located in Chapter 35 of Title 44. **Table 1** provides a selection of *U.S. Code* provisions. The unique statutory authorities of the individual PSAs are generally outside the scope of this report.

**Table 1. Select Statutory Provisions Relevant to the Federal Statistical System**

U.S.C.	Heading	Summary
5 U.S.C. §314	Statistical expertise	Requires relevant agencies <sup>a</sup> to designate a statistical official to advise on statistical matters and serve on the ICSP.
5 U.S.C. §315	Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building	Established the Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building, which aimed to provide recommendations to facilitate data sharing, enable data linkage, and develop privacy-enhancing techniques, among other things. The work done by this advisory committee informed the National Secure Data Service Demonstration Project. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>25</sup> P.L. 115-435.

<sup>26</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units,” 79 *Federal Register* 71609, December 2, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3563.

<sup>28</sup> P.L. 115-435; FEBPA repealed CIPSEA 2002 and replaced it with expanded CIPSEA 2018, which inserted provisions at 44 U.S.C. §§3561-3583.

<sup>29</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§3561-3564

<sup>30</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§3571-3572.

<sup>31</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§3575-3576.

<sup>32</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§3581-3583.

<sup>33</sup> P.L. 114-140.



U.S.C.	Heading	Summary
31 U.S.C. §1104(d)	Budget and appropriations authority of the President	Provides authority to the President over statistical policy through OIRA.
44 U.S.C. §3501	Purposes	Among other provisions, includes the requirement for government data assets to be published as machine-readable data that is maintained in an online federal data catalogue by the General Services Administration.
44 U.S.C. §3503	Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs	Establishes OIRA, which is tasked with reviewing government collections of information from the public along with developing and overseeing government-wide information, privacy, and statistical policies.
44 U.S.C. §3504(e)	Authority and functions of Director	Provides general authority for the Director of OMB to carry out governance of the FSS, including development, oversight, and implementation of statistical policies and dissemination, as well as evaluation of overall FSS program functions.
44 U.S.C. §3505	Assignment of tasks and deadlines	Provides requirements for carrying out the reduction of general information burdens on the public.
44 U.S.C. §3506(e)	Federal agency responsibilities	Requires federal agencies to provide quality and transparency standards on information collected for statistical purposes, which includes protecting respondent privacy, publishing results from federal statistical surveys in a timely manner, and making data publicly available.
44 U.S.C. §3562	Coordination and oversight of policies	Provides authority to the OMB Director to oversee statistical policies, including but not limited to confidentiality and disclosure, and also to recognize agencies or organizational units as statistical agencies and units.
44 U.S.C. §3563	Statistical agencies	Establishes responsibilities of OMB-recognized statistical agencies and units.
44 U.S.C. §3572	Confidential information protection	Requires federal statistical agencies or units to only use information collected for statistical purposes and prohibits information to be shared in identifiable form without the respondent's consent. This provision also establishes penalties on federal personnel who wrongfully disclose confidential information.
44 U.S.C. §3576	Designated statistical agencies	Authorizes business data sharing among the Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and Bureau of Labor Statistics.
44 U.S.C. §§3581-3582	Presumption of accessibility for statistical agencies and units and Expanding secure access to CIPSEA data assets	Requires federal agencies to expand access to their data assets while protecting these assets from inappropriate access and use. To meet this requirement, OMB was required to create regular standards to govern the assessment of and access to each agency's data assets.
44 U.S.C. §3583	Application to access data assets for developing evidence	Mandated establishment of a standard application process used by statistical agencies and units. The standard application process is used to allow researchers access to one of the Federal Statistical Research Data Centers found across the continental United States.

**Source:** *U.S. Code.*

- a. 31 U.S.C. §901(b).
- b. P.L. 117-167.

c. 31 U.S.C. §901(b).

## Role of the Office of Management and Budget

OMB is responsible for coordinating the FSS under a number of statutory provisions that are codified at Title 44, Section 3504(e) of the *U.S. Code*.<sup>34</sup> The Director of OMB delegates these responsibilities to the administrator of OIRA.<sup>35</sup> These responsibilities include

- general coordination of the FSS;
- ensuring budget proposals of PSAs aim to maintain and improve the quality of federal statistics;
- the annual publication of a report on statistical program funding, which OMB has historically titled *Statistical Programs of the United States Government*;<sup>36</sup>
- development, oversight, and implementation of governmentwide statistical policies, principles, standards, and guidelines;
- evaluating statistical program performance and agency compliance;
- promoting the sharing of information collected for statistical purposes between agencies while maintaining privacy and confidentiality;
- coordinating U.S. participation in international statistical activities;
- appointing a chief statistician who is broadly responsible for coordinating the FSS and statistical policy;
- establishing the ICSP;
- providing training opportunities in statistical policy functions for federal employees; and
- ensuring changes to core-based statistical areas follow guidelines as enacted by the Metropolitan Areas Protection and Standardization (MAPS) Act of 2021.<sup>37</sup>

Citing these CIPSEA 2018 statutory provisions as authority, on August 18, 2023, OMB proposed a rule titled “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units.”<sup>38</sup> The content of the proposed rule is drawn from and elaborates on the CIPSEA 2018 provisions, which enacted into law some aspects of *Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units* (SPD No. 1). Under this basis, the proposed rule intends to provide additional regulations beyond the existing language of SPD No. 1 to support fundamental responsibilities of the statistical agencies. OMB states that the

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<sup>34</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3504(e).

<sup>35</sup> “Statistical Programs & Standards,” Office of Management and Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/statistical-programs-standards/>.

<sup>36</sup> “Statistical Programs of the United States Government, continued,” Office of Management and Budget, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/regulatory\\_affairs/reports\\_previous\\_yrs/](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/regulatory_affairs/reports_previous_yrs/); “Statistical Programs & Standards,” Office of Management and Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/statistical-programs-standards/>.

<sup>37</sup> More information can be found in the “Directive No. 7: Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)” section of this report.

<sup>38</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” 88 *Federal Register* 56708, August, 18, 2023, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/08/18/2023-17664/fundamental-responsibilities-of-recognized-statistical-agencies-and-units>.

proposed rule is intended to “promote trust in Federal statistics and the statistical agencies that produce them.”<sup>39</sup> The provisions would

- require each recognized statistical agency or unit to maintain a publicly accessible website that is independent of and supported by its parent agency;<sup>40</sup>
- require each recognized statistical agency or unit to produce its own budget request, independent of its parent agency;<sup>41</sup>
- require general improvements of communication and collaboration between recognized statistical agencies and units and their parent agencies, including support from parent agencies to promote autonomy of their recognized statistical agencies or units;<sup>42</sup> and
- require OMB to maintain coordination of federal information policy consistent with the provisions introduced by FEBPA.<sup>43</sup>

Similar to the CIPSEA 2018 provisions that codified SPD No. 1,<sup>44</sup> this rulemaking proposal aims to further solidify SPD guidance.

## Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

The PRA established OIRA in statute,<sup>45</sup> and it is headed by an administrator appointed by the President with Senate confirmation.<sup>46</sup> The PRA authorizes OIRA to review government collections of information from the public, and to develop and oversee government-wide information, privacy, and statistical policies.<sup>47</sup> The administrator of OIRA is responsible for appointing the chief statistician. For the most recent opening in 2020, the position was available to applicants internal and external to the federal government through USAjobs.gov.<sup>48</sup>

### Chief Statistician

OIRA contains the Statistical and Science Policy Office, which is headed by the chief statistician of the United States. The PRA Reauthorization Act of 1986 originally created the chief statistician

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<sup>39</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Announcement: Promoting Trust in Federal Statistics through the Evidence Act,” press release, August 18, 2023, <https://www.statspolicy.gov/assets/files/Trust%20Reg%20News%20Update%20for%20StatsPolicy.gov.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” 88 *Federal Register* 56708, August, 18, 2023, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/08/18/2023-17664/fundamental-responsibilities-of-recognized-statistical-agencies-and-units>, pp. 56715 - 56716.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56716-56717.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56717-56719.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56719-56720.

<sup>44</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3563.

<sup>45</sup> CRS Report RS21665, *Office of Management and Budget (OMB): An Overview*, coordinated by Taylor N. Riccard provides a statutory history.

<sup>46</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3503.

<sup>47</sup> “Information and Regulatory Affairs,” Office of Management and Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/>.

<sup>48</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “OMB Accepting Applications for Chief Statistician of the United States,” press release, June 3, 2020, <https://strategy.data.gov/news/2020/06/03/omb-accepting-applications-for-chief-statistician/>. For the job listing, see Office of Personnel Management, “Chief Statistician/Statistical Policy and Science Branch,” <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/569699900>.

role in statute,<sup>49</sup> and the role was reauthorized by the PRA of 1995.<sup>50</sup> The chief statistician has the broad responsibility of providing coordination, guidance, and oversight of the federal statistical agencies and their activities. The chief statistician also appoints the chair of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology and chairs the ICSP.

## Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology

The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) serves as an advisory board for OMB and the federal statistical system with the stated purpose of informing statistical policy-related decisionmaking and providing technical guidance on statistical and methodological issues. It was founded in 1975 by the Statistical and Science Policy Branch within OIRA and is chaired by an appointee of the chief statistician, with other members selected by OMB.<sup>51</sup>

The FCSM conducts other activities, including sponsoring regular conferences in partnership with the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS);<sup>52</sup> hosting seminars and workshops, often in collaboration with partner organizations; writing reports relating to the FSS and the federal statistical community; and creating various subcommittees and interest groups that focus on topics considered relevant to the federal statistical community.<sup>53</sup>

## Interagency Council on Statistical Policy

The Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) was created administratively by OMB in 1989 with the original goal of improving communication among the heads of the PSAs.<sup>54</sup> Congress codified the ICSP into law in 1995.<sup>55</sup> The ICSP's role has since expanded to include advising and assisting the chief statistician. There are 30 members comprised of statistical officials across executive agencies, including 11 heads of PSAs and the chief statistician,<sup>56</sup> who serves as chair as authorized by the PRA of 1995 and the FEBPA.<sup>57</sup>

## Statistical Policy Directives

OMB expects federal statistical agencies that conduct statistical activities to follow minimum requirements as identified by its Statistical Policy Directives (SPDs).<sup>58</sup> These directives are generally authorized under 44 U.S.C. §3504(e), and OMB issues them as needed to ensure the

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<sup>49</sup> P.L. 99-500, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg1783.pdf#page=336>.

<sup>50</sup> P.L. 104-13.

<sup>51</sup> "About FCSM," Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, <https://www.fcsm.gov/about/>.

<sup>52</sup> "About," Council on Professional Associations of Federal Statistics, <https://copafs.org/about/>.

<sup>53</sup> "Groups Overview," Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, <https://www.fcsm.gov/groups/>; and "About FCSM," Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, <https://www.fcsm.gov/about/>.

<sup>54</sup> "About Us," StatsPolicy.gov, <https://www.statspolicy.gov/about/>; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> P.L. 104-13.

<sup>56</sup> "Interagency Council on Statistical Policy," StatsPolicy.gov, <https://www.statspolicy.gov/about/>.

<sup>57</sup> P.L. 104-13, in 44 U.S.C. §3504(e)(8); P.L. 115-435; and "About Us," StatsPolicy.gov, <https://www.statspolicy.gov/about/>.

<sup>58</sup> Office of Management and Budget, "Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units," 88 *Federal Register* 56708, August, 18, 2023, p. 56712, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-08-18/pdf/2023-17664.pdf#page=5>.

quality and coordination of federal statistical activities.<sup>59</sup> OMB provides its own established process for updating SPDs in the 2023 proposals to revise *SPD No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*. The process includes

technical evaluation of the current standard by an interagency working group composed of career Federal subject matter experts; additional technical research, testing, and analysis to close identified gaps; and solicitation and consideration of public comment on ways to improve the standards. The final decisions regarding any changes to the standards are made by OMB.<sup>60</sup>

The subsections below detail selected SPDs that are currently in effect.<sup>61</sup>

## Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units

SPD No. 1 serves as OMB’s core directive for federal statistical agencies and affirms the fundamental responsibility of recognized federal statistical agencies in their overall handling of statistical information. OMB provides four key responsibilities in SPD No. 1:

- “produce and disseminate relevant and timely information”;
- “conduct credible and accurate statistical activities”;
- “conduct objective statistical activities”; and
- “protect the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses.”

Last updated in 2014,<sup>62</sup> SPD No. 1 became effectively enacted in statute in 2019 when FEBPA was signed into law.<sup>63</sup>

## Directive No. 2: Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys

Originally issued in 2006, SPD No. 2 provides overall guidance for federal statistical agencies to follow in their surveys. These generally include

- development of concepts, methods, and design;
- data collection;
- data processing and editing;
- data analysis;

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<sup>59</sup> “Statistical Programs & Standards,” Office of Management and Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/statistical-programs-standards/>.

<sup>60</sup> “About OMB and the Chief Statistician of the United States,” OMB Interagency Technical Working Group on Race and Ethnicity Standards, <https://spd15revision.gov/content/spd15revision/en/omb-about.html>.

<sup>61</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017), p. 143.

<sup>62</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units,” 79 *Federal Register* 71609, December 2, 2014, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/12/02/2014-28326/statistical-policy-directive-no-1-fundamental-responsibilities-of-federal-statistical-agencies-and>.

<sup>63</sup> FEBPA inserted the requirements into law at 44 U.S.C. §3563.

- review procedures; and
- dissemination of information products.<sup>64</sup>

### **Directive No. 3: Compilation, Release, and Evaluation of Principal Federal Economic Indicators**

According to the Committee on National Statistics, SPD No. 3 was originally issued by OMB in “the 1970s and strengthened in 1985.”<sup>65</sup> It is intended to ensure federal data and estimates used for current economic conditions meet quality standards.<sup>66</sup> The guidance requires agencies to announce planned changes in data collection, analysis, and estimation methods. Under SPD No. 3, executive branch employees are prohibited from publicly commenting on economic indicator data until at least 30 minutes after the data are officially released.<sup>67</sup>

### **Directive No. 4: Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies**

OMB originally issued SPD No. 4 in 2008. It is designed to provide “guidance to Federal statistical agencies on the release and dissemination of statistical products.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the directive sets the expectation for agencies to “maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information, including statistical information, provided to the public.”<sup>69</sup> The directive is intended to ensure data quality standards, which include timeliness, transparency, and policy neutrality.

### **Directive No. 7: Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)**

Under SPD No. 7, OMB provides standards for metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, which are collectively referred to as core based statistical areas (CBSAs).<sup>70</sup> A metropolitan statistical area contains a county or counties, which can cross state borders, and is associated with at least one core urban area with a minimum population of 50,000. Micropolitan statistical areas

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<sup>64</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 2: Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys; Addendum: Standards and Guidelines for Cognitive Interviews,” 81 *Federal Register* 70586, October 12, 2016, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/10/12/2016-24607/statistical-policy-directive-no-2-standards-and-guidelines-for-statistical-surveys-addendum>.

<sup>65</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017), p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 3: Compilation, Release, and Evaluation of Principal Federal Economic Indicators. Timing of Public Comments by Employees of the Executive Branch,” 84 *Federal Register*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/04/11/2019-07172/statistical-policy-directive-no-3-compilation-release-and-evaluation-of-principal-federal-economic>.

<sup>67</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Update of Statistical Policy Directive No. 3: Compilation, Release, and Evaluation of Principal Federal Economic Indicators-Changing Timing of Public Comments by Employees of the Executive Branch,” 89 *Federal Register* 11873, February 15, 2024, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/02/15/2024-02972/update-of-statistical-policy-directive-no-3-compilation-release-and-evaluation-of-principal-federal>.

<sup>68</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 4: Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies,” 73 *Federal Register* 46, March 7, 2008, p. 12624, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2008-03-07/pdf/E8-4570.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 4: Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies,” 73 *Federal Register* 12622, March 7, 2008, p. 12624, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2008-03-07/pdf/E8-4570.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12704, *Core Based Statistical Areas*, by Taylor R. Knoedl.

contain a county or counties with at least one core urban area with a minimum population of 10,000 and a maximum population of 49,999.<sup>71</sup> Both metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas may include adjacent counties with what OMB considers a “high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured through commuting ties.”<sup>72</sup>

Early standard delineations of CBSAs can be traced back to 1949.<sup>73</sup> OMB overhauled them to the current system using the term *core based statistical area* in 2003.<sup>74</sup>

The standards are revised following every decennial census, with the current standards in place since 2020.<sup>75</sup> In 2021, the MAPS Act set methodological requirements for SPD No. 7 revisions, which must be published in a publicly available report.<sup>76</sup>

## Directive No. 8: North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)

Issued in 1997, SPD No. 8 adopts the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is a standard used by federal statistical agencies to classify many industries.<sup>77</sup> NAICS codes are used for economic and business analysis. NAICS are jointly developed through collaboration among OMB and its Mexican and Canadian counterpart agencies.<sup>78</sup>

## Directive No. 10: Standard Occupational Classification System (SOC)

SPD No. 10 adopts the Standard Occupational Classification System (SOC), a standard used by federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories. SOC was first adopted in 1977 and most recently revised in 2017.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “2020 Standards for Delineating Core Based Statistical Areas,” 86 *Federal Register* 37770, July 16, 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/07/16/2021-15159/2020-standards-for-delineating-core-based-statistical-areas>.

<sup>72</sup> “Metropolitan and Micropolitan,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about/glossary.html>.

<sup>73</sup> “Metropolitan Areas,” U.S. Census Bureau, [https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/metropolitan\\_areas.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/metropolitan_areas.html).

<sup>74</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Bulletin No. 03-04: Revised Definitions of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, New Definitions of Micropolitan Statistical Areas and Combined Statistical Areas, and Guidance on Uses of the Statistical Definitions of These Areas,” [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/bulletins\\_b03-04.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/bulletins_b03-04.pdf).

<sup>75</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “2020 Standards for Delineating Core Based Statistical Areas,” 86 *Federal Register* 37770, July 16, 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/07/16/2021-15159/2020-standards-for-delineating-core-based-statistical-areas>. Note: OMB does not explicitly refer to this as SPD No. 7 in the *Federal Register* notice.

<sup>76</sup> P.L. 117-219; 44 U.S.C. §3504(e)(10).

<sup>77</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “1997 North American Industry Classification System 1987 Standard Industrial Classification Replacement,” 62 *Federal Register* 17288, April 9, 1997, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1997-04-09/pdf/97-8101.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “North American Industry Classification System-Revision for 2022; Update of Statistical Policy Directive No. 8, North American Industry Classification System: Classification of Establishments; and Elimination of Statistical Policy Directive No. 9, Standard Industrial Classification of Enterprises,” 86 *Federal Register* 72277, December 21, 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-12-21/pdf/2021-27536.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System-Revision for 2018,” 82 *Federal Register* 56271, November 28, 2017, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/11/28/2017-25622/standard-occupational-classification-soc-system-revision-for-2018>.

## Directive No. 14: Specifying the Definition of Poverty for Statistical Purposes

OMB issued SPD No. in 1978.<sup>80</sup> It uses Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data to create an official measure of poverty.<sup>81</sup> This measure is not required to be used to determine eligibility for government aid programs.<sup>82</sup>

## Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity

OMB developed SPD No. 15 to establish consistent standards for data on race and ethnicity to be collected and presented in federal data. First published in 1977,<sup>83</sup> SPD No. 15 was revised in 1997 to allow for the collection of more detailed racial data.<sup>84</sup> OMB implemented further revisions to SPD No. 15 in 2024, including the required collection of more detailed racial data, the introduction of the Middle Eastern or North African racial category, and combining the race and ethnicity categories.<sup>85</sup>

## Components of the Federal Statistical System

The FSS contains over 100 agencies, units, and programs that engage in statistical activities. Of these, OMB has identified 13 that are principal statistical agencies (PSAs), which conduct statistical activities for statistical purposes as their primary missions. In addition, OMB has recognized another three statistical units (components of larger organizations) that also predominantly engage in statistical activities for statistical purposes. These 16 organizations are generally housed within their relevant agencies and are responsible for collecting and providing relevant statistical information for the benefit of governments, businesses, researchers, and the public. OMB has defined statistical “programs” for purposes of its reporting on budgets associated with the FSS as agencies or administrative units that have budget authority of \$3 million or more for statistical activities in the current or either of the two prior fiscal years.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Statistical Policy Directive 14 (May 1978),” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/about/history-of-the-poverty-measure/omb-stat-policy-14.html>.

<sup>81</sup> “Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Current Population Survey (CPS),” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/saie/guidance/model-input-data/cpsasec.html>.

<sup>82</sup> “Authority Behind the Official Poverty Measure,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/about/history-of-the-poverty-measure.html>.

<sup>83</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Policy Handbook*, May 1978, p. 37, <https://www2.census.gov/about/ombraceethnicityitwg/1978-statistical-policy-handbook.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” 62 *Federal Register* 210, October 30, 1997, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Revisions to OMB’s Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” 89 *Federal Register* 22182, March 29, 2024, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-03-29/pdf/2024-06469.pdf>.

<sup>86</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Years 2021/2022*, pp. 4-5, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>.



## Principal Statistical Agencies

OMB recognizes 13 statistical agencies under the authority codified by CIPSEA 2018.<sup>87</sup> Traditionally referred to as the 13 *principal statistical agencies*, these PSAs have guiding missions to produce statistics, and their predominant activities are collecting, compiling, processing, or analyzing information for statistical purposes.<sup>88</sup>

OMB first recognized 11 statistical agencies and 1 unit in 1997 through the “Order Providing for the Confidentiality of Statistical Information.”<sup>89</sup> OMB recognized two additional statistical units in 2007,<sup>90</sup> and then recognized the remaining agencies in 2014.<sup>91</sup> The 2023 “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units” (also known as the “Trust Regulation”) recognizes 13 PSAs and 3 statistical units.<sup>92</sup>

Within the overall guidance provided by OMB, the PSAs generally operate as a decentralized system with each agency operating independently. The agencies remain interconnected through common frameworks for collecting data for statistical uses, protecting identifiable data, and securely disseminating statistical products under the statutory authority of CIPSEA 2018.<sup>93</sup>

CIPSEA 2018 additionally authorized the Census Bureau, BEA, and BLS to share business data exclusively for statistical purposes.<sup>94</sup> There are also instances of direct collaboration among PSAs, such as the cosponsorship of the Current Population Survey by the Census Bureau and the BLS.<sup>95</sup> **Table 2** provides general information about the PSAs.

**Table 2. The 13 Principal Statistical Agencies**

Principal Statistical Agency	Parent Agency	FY2023 Budget (in millions of dollars)	Relevant Citation
Bureau of Economic Analysis	Department of Commerce	\$121.9	DOO 35-1A <sup>a</sup>
Bureau of Justice Statistics <sup>b</sup>	Department of Justice	\$42.0	34 U.S.C. §10132
Bureau of Labor Statistics	Department of Labor	\$698.0	29 U.S.C. §1

<sup>87</sup> U.S.C. 44 §3562(a).

<sup>88</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Years 2021/2022*, p. 4, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>.

<sup>89</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Order Providing for the Confidentiality of Statistical Information,” 62 *Federal Register* 124, June 27, 1997, pp. 35044-35049, at 35049, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1997-06-27/pdf/FR-1997-06-27.pdf#page=444>.

<sup>90</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Implementation Guidance for Title V of the E-Government Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA),” 72 *Federal Register* 115, June 15, 2007, p. 33368, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2007-06-15/pdf/E7-11542.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units,” 79 *Federal Register* 231, December 2, 2014, p. 71610, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2014-12-02/pdf/2014-28326.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” 88 *Federal Register* 159, August 18, 2023, p. 56710, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-08-18/pdf/2023-17664.pdf#page=3>.

<sup>93</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3576.

<sup>94</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3576(a)(1).

<sup>95</sup> “Current Population Survey (CPS),” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>.

Principal Statistical Agency	Parent Agency	FY2023 Budget (in millions of dollars)	Relevant Citation
Bureau of Transportation Statistics	Department of Transportation	\$29.3	49 U.S.C. §6302
Economic Research Service	Department of Agriculture	\$93.0	5 U.S.C. §901-912 <sup>c</sup>
National Agricultural Statistics Service	Department of Agriculture	\$211.1	7 U.S.C. §2204
National Center for Education Statistics	Department of Education	\$369.8	20 U.S.C. §9541 <sup>d</sup>
National Center for Health Statistics	Department of Health and Human Services	\$187.4	42 U.S.C. §242k
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics	National Science Foundation	\$90.8	42 U.S.C. §1862p
Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics	Social Security Administration	\$40.9	42 U.S.C. §902 <sup>e</sup>
Statistics of Income Division	Internal Revenue Service	\$41.7	26 U.S.C. §6108
Census Bureau <sup>f</sup>	Department of Commerce	\$1,503.9	13 U.S.C. §2
Energy Information Administration <sup>g</sup>	Department of Energy	\$135.0	42 U.S.C. §7135

**Source:** Office of Management and Budget, “Leveraging Federal Statistics to Strengthen Evidence-Based Decision-Making FY2025,” in *Analytical Perspectives: Budget of the U.S. Government Fiscal Year 2025*, p. 98, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ap\\_10\\_statistics\\_fy2025.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ap_10_statistics_fy2025.pdf).

**Notes:** Budget values are in millions of dollars.

- a. Department of Commerce, *Department Organizational Order 35-1A*, [https://www.commerce.gov/opog/directives/DOO\\_35-1A](https://www.commerce.gov/opog/directives/DOO_35-1A).
- b. CRS In Focus IF11857, *Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Role in Criminal Justice Data Collection and Dissemination*, by Emily J. Hanson and Kristin Finklea.
- c. ERS was established administratively in 1961 by the Secretary of Agriculture under the authority of the Reorganization Act of 1949. Allan G. Bogue, *Agricultural History*, Vol. 64, No. 2, The United States Department of Agriculture in Historical Perspective (Spring, 1990), pp. 244-251.
- d. Created as part of the Office of Education’s reorganization in 1965. Maris A. Vinovskis, *Changing Federal Strategies for Supporting Educational Research, Development, and Statistics*, National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board, p. 11.
- e. ORES was originally established in §702 of the 1935 Social Security Act. This section was repealed in 1994.
- f. CRS Report R47847, *The U.S. Census Bureau: An Overview*, by Taylor R. Knoedl.
- g. CRS Report R46524, *The U.S. Energy Information Administration*, coordinated by Ashley J. Lawson.

## OMB-Recognized Statistical Units

OMB recognizes three statistical units, which are agency components that carry out predominately statistical activities for statistical purposes.<sup>96</sup> CIPSEA 2018 also authorizes the designation of the three statistical units in statute.<sup>97</sup> There does not necessarily appear to be a

<sup>96</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” 88 *Federal Register* 159, August 18, 2023, pp. 56710-56713, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-08-18/pdf/2023-17664.pdf#page=6>. As of August 2023, OMB was still working on updated guidance.

<sup>97</sup> U.S.C. 44 §3562(a).

clear distinction between statistical agencies and statistical units, although statistical units are generally smaller than the PSAs.

**Table 3. Three Recognized Statistical Units**

Statistical Unit	Agency	Activities
Microeconomic Surveys Unit	Board of Directors, Federal Reserve System	Conducts research on microeconomic topics. Notably, it produces the <i>Survey of Consumer Finances</i> .
Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services	Conducts surveys that track population-level behavioral health issues.
National Animal Health Monitoring System	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Department of Agriculture	Conducts national studies on the health and health management of domestic livestock, equine, aquaculture, and poultry in the United States.

**Source:** Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

## Other Statistical Programs

There are almost 100 other statistical programs within the FSS that produce and disseminate statistics to support other mission areas of their parent agencies. These other programs are intended to conduct several “evidence-building functions,” which include program evaluation, scientific research, data collection, policy and program analysis, and provision of funding and other support for external research. OMB has identified these programs as each conducting at least \$3 million in annual statistical activities.<sup>98</sup>

## Federal Statistical Research Data Centers

The ICSP established Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDCs) to provide researchers with access to certain restricted-use statistics produced by PSAs.<sup>99</sup> The FSRDC program is intended to promote coordination, quality, utility, transparency, and openness in federal statistics through increasing access to microlevel statistical data and supporting linkage of this data across different agencies. The Census Bureau, in partnership with the PSAs or units and research institutions, manages the 33 FSRDC locations across the continental United States.<sup>100</sup>

The FSRDC program is governed by the FSRDC Executive Committee, which was established in July 2017. The executive committee’s stated purpose is as follows:

provides strategic vision and guidance; makes policy decisions that resolve interagency issues, capitalize on new opportunities, and strive for consensus; guides transformation and provides executive sponsorship of the FSRDC program.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Years 2021/2022*, p. 5, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> “Restricted-Use Data,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/topics/research/guidance/restricted-use-microdata.html>.

<sup>100</sup> “Federal Statistical Research Data Centers,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/about/adrm/fsrdc.html>.

<sup>101</sup> “FSRDC: Governance,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/about/adrm/fsrdc/about/governance.html>.

The executive committee charter states membership should include the chief statistician and an institutional partner as cochairs, heads of participating federal agencies or their designees, the chief information officer of the Census Bureau, the FSRDC program director, and four representatives of the institutional partners that host the FSRDCs.<sup>102</sup>

Researchers who wish to access certain restricted-use data available at FSRDCs must complete a standard application process then go on-site to one of the 33 FSRDC locations found at partner institutions (e.g., universities, nonprofit organizations, and Federal Reserve Banks). The standard application process is developed in compliance with CIPSEA 2018 and OMB memorandum M-23-04.<sup>103</sup> Not all datasets are necessarily available at each of the 33 FSDRC locations.<sup>104</sup> The standard application process can take an expected 12 to 24 weeks to receive final determination, depending on whether the applicant needs data from multiple agencies or units. This process can take longer than the expected 24 weeks for applications that require approval from organizations outside of the standard application process.<sup>105</sup>

## National Secure Data Service Demonstration Project

In 2022, P.L. 117-167, known as the CHIPS and Science Act, authorized the establishment of a National Secure Data Service (NSDS) demonstration project, as recommended by the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking (CEP).<sup>106</sup> The CEP described an NSDS as being able to “temporarily link existing data and provide secure access to those data for exclusively statistical purposes in connection with approved projects.”<sup>107</sup> The CHIPS and Science Act describes the NSDS as a “governmentwide data linkage and access infrastructure for statistical activities conducted for statistical purposes.”<sup>108</sup>

One of the CEP’s responsibilities was to consider whether a “clearinghouse” program for federal statistics should be established. The CEP interpreted a *clearinghouse* as a “data storage facility that permanently stores records from multiple databases from multiple agencies and, therefore, grows with each new data linkage.” The CEP rejected this model out of concern that it could introduce risks to data privacy and recommended the NSDS model instead.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (FSRDC) Executive Committee Charter,” U.S. Census Bureau, [https://www.statspolicy.gov/assets/files/FSRDC%20Executive%20Committee%20Charter\\_%20June%202024.pdf](https://www.statspolicy.gov/assets/files/FSRDC%20Executive%20Committee%20Charter_%20June%202024.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3583(a). See Office of Management and Budget, “Establishment of Standard Application Process Requirements on Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” M-23-04, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/M-23-04.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> “About Us,” ResearchData.gov, <https://www.researchdatagov.org/about>.

<sup>105</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions: Agency Review of Applications,” ResearchData.gov, <https://www.researchdatagov.org/faq>.

<sup>106</sup> P.L. 117-167.

<sup>107</sup> Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking, *The Promise of Evidence-Based Policymaking*, September 7, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> 42 U.S.C. §19085(a).

<sup>109</sup> CRS Insight IN11717, *Proposals for a National Secure Data Service, in Context*, by Meghan M. Stuessy and Clinton T. Brass.

## Budgets

Because the FSS is a decentralized system, its funding is appropriated in a decentralized manner.

The Director of OMB is statutorily required to prepare an annual report,<sup>110</sup> *Statistical Programs of the United States Government*, that discusses budgetary and programmatic information about the FSS.<sup>111</sup>

Some statistical agencies may perform work on behalf of other agencies under reimbursable agreements. They may also fund statistical work through purchase agreements maintained with private contractors or other government agencies.<sup>112</sup> In other cases, agencies may purchase statistical activities, which range from smaller contracts for specialized statistical services to ongoing work to implement national household surveys.<sup>113</sup> Further details of these arrangements are captured in OMB's annual *Statistical Programs of the United States Government* report.

**Figure 1** and **Figure 2** provide the enacted budgets for the 13 PSAs from FY2013 to FY2023. (Due to its larger size, and the its variability around decennial census taking, the Census Bureau budget is omitted from Figure 1 and presented in Figure 2, so that it does not obscure details about the other 12 PSA budgets).

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<sup>110</sup> 44 U.S.C. § 3504(e)(2).

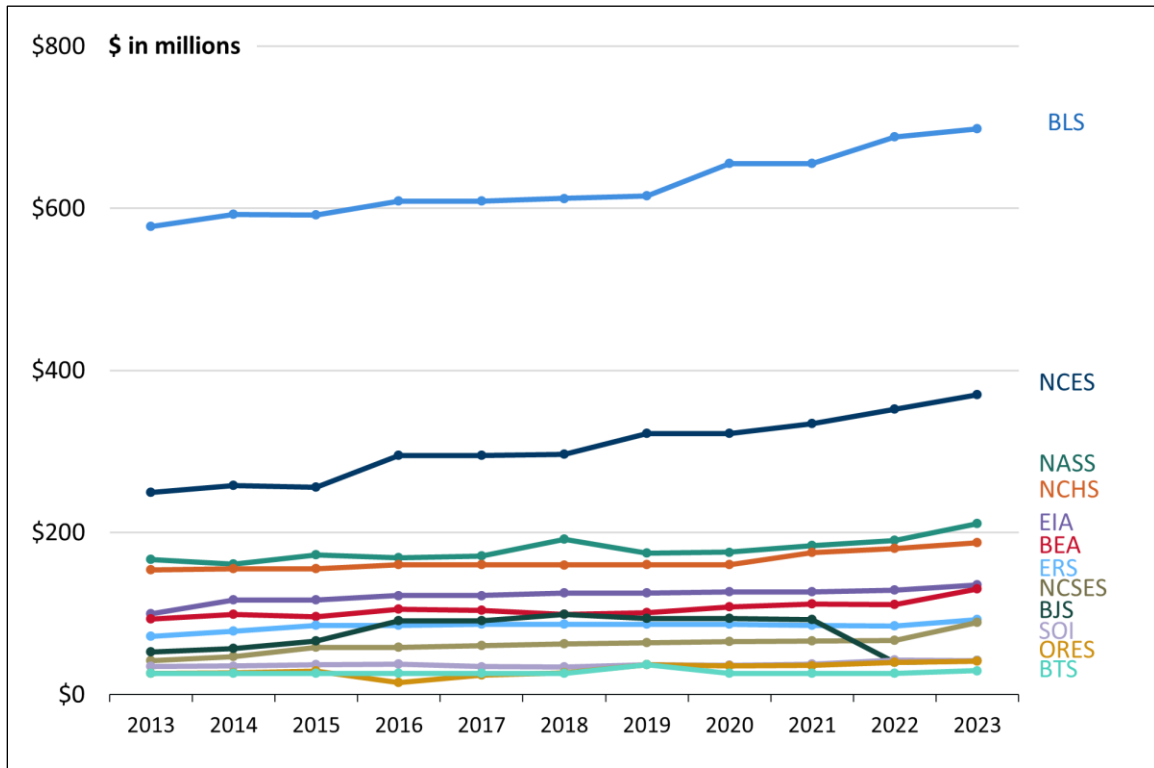
<sup>111</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government: Fiscal Year 2021/2022*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/statistical-programs-20212022.pdf>.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

**Figure 1. Enacted Budgets of 12 PSAs from FY2013 to FY2023**

Figure is interactive in the HTML version of this report.

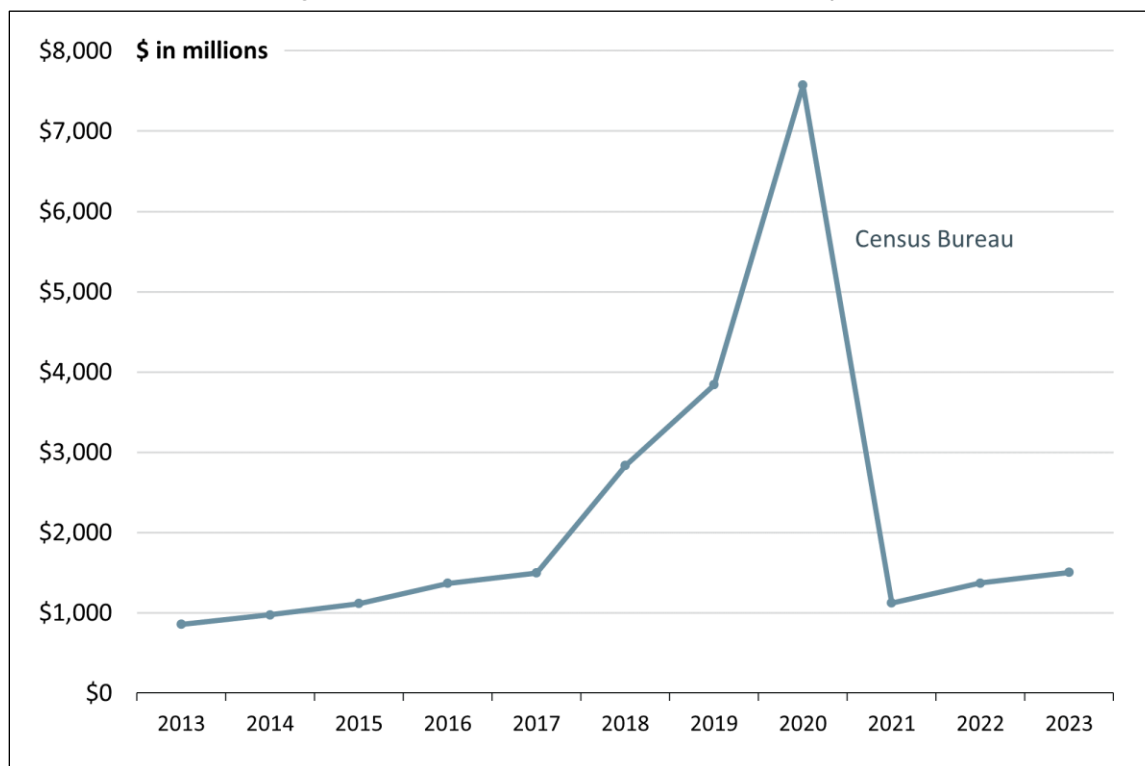


**Source:** Office of Management and Budget, “Leveraging Federal Statistics to Strengthen Evidence-Based Decision-Making FY2014-FY2025,” in *Analytical Perspectives: Budget of the U.S. Government Fiscal Years 2014-2025*.

**Notes:** Due to its larger size, the Census Bureau budget is omitted. It is available in Figure 2. NCES=National Center for Education Statistics; NASS=National Agricultural Statistics Service; NCHS=National Center for Health Statistics; EIA=Energy Information Administration; BEA=Bureau of Economic Analysis; ERS=Economic Research Service; NCSES=National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics; BJS=Bureau of Justice Statistics; SOI=Statistics of Income Division; ORES=Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics; BTS=Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

**Figure 2. Enacted Budget of the U.S. Census Bureau from FY2013 to FY2023**

Figure is interactive in the HTML version of this report.



**Source:** Office of Management and Budget, “Leveraging Federal Statistics to Strengthen Evidence-Based Decision-Making FY2014-FY2025,” in *Analytical Perspectives: Budget of the U.S. Government Fiscal Years 2014-2025*.

**Notes:** Census Bureau budget presented separately due to its larger size compared to the other 12 PSAs.

## Selected Potential Considerations for Congress

Congress may be interested in several topics related to the FSS, including OMB’s oversight and coordination role, as well as broader challenges related to survey administration and data quality, such as declining survey response rates, use of administrative data, and data privacy.

### OMB Oversight and Coordination

The authority for OMB to develop SPDs is codified in Title 44 Section 3504(e) of the *U.S. Code*. OMB has an established administrative process, which was specifically described in the 2023 proposed revisions to SPD No. 15.<sup>114</sup> This particular administrative process is not described in prior SPD revisions. Clarity about this process may be of interest to Congress.

OMB recognizes 13 statistical agencies and 3 statistical units under CIPSEA 2002 and as reauthorized under CIPSEA 2018.<sup>115</sup> The 13 agencies and 3 units now known as statistical

<sup>114</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Initial Proposals for Updating OMB’s Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards,” 88 *Federal Register* 5375, January 27, 2023, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/01/27/2023-01635/initial-proposals-for-updating-ombs-race-and-ethnicity-statistical-standards>.

<sup>115</sup> 44 U.S.C. §3561-3563.

agencies and units predate these acts; the FSS essentially grew by the additions of separate agencies as the need for select data arose.<sup>116</sup> This recognition is also found in several notices.<sup>117</sup>

## Survey Response Decline

Federal statistical agencies face common challenges in survey administration. Survey response has generally declined in both federal and private surveys.<sup>118</sup> Many observers consider a steady decline in survey responses to be a risk for overall data quality.<sup>119</sup> The American Community Survey, one of the largest surveys carried out by the U.S. Census Bureau, has experienced this steady decline, with recent response rates below prepandemic levels.<sup>120</sup> Census Bureau research has identified survey burden (also known as response burden, this term refers to the effort required by a respondent to complete a survey) as a factor in declining response rates.<sup>121</sup>

## Use of Administrative Data

In an effort to reduce respondent burden (among other reasons, such as reducing data collection costs), federal statistical agencies have looked to administrative records and data to support information collection.<sup>122</sup> Administrative records are collected and maintained by public or private entities to carry out administrative processes or programs and are not necessarily collected for statistical purposes.<sup>123</sup> Several challenges may arise when including administrative records with other data sources for statistical purposes.

The CEP identified several challenge areas in implementing the use of administrative records for statistical purposes. Legal barriers in federal and state laws prohibit or limit data sharing among different agencies. Inconsistent policies can cause confusion among agencies about what is or is not permitted in data sharing. Varying data management practices across different agencies or

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<sup>116</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Committee on National Statistics, *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2021), p. 166, <https://doi.org/10.17226/25885>.

<sup>117</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Order Providing for the Confidentiality of Statistical Information,” 62 *Federal Register* 124, June 27, 1997, p. 35049, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1997-06-27/pdf/FR-1997-06-27.pdf>; Office of Management and Budget, “Implementation Guidance for Title V of the E-Government Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA),” 72 *Federal Register* 115, June 15, 2007, p. 33368, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2007-06-15/pdf/E7-11542.pdf>.

<sup>118</sup> Courtney Kennedy and Hannah Hartig, “Response rates in telephone surveys have resumed their decline,” *Pew Research Center*, February 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/02/27/response-rates-in-telephone-surveys-have-resumed-their-decline/>.

<sup>119</sup> John L. Czajka and Amy Beyler, *Background Paper: Declining Response Rates in Federal Surveys: Trends and Implications*, Mathematica Policy Research, June 15, 2016, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/private/pdf/255531/Decliningresponserates.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> “American Community Survey: Response Rates,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/sample-size-and-data-quality/response-rates/>.

<sup>121</sup> Jessica Holzberg, Jonathan Katz, and Mary Davis, *Measuring Respondents’ Perceptions of Burden in the American Community Survey (ACS)*, U.S. Census Bureau, November 4, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2021/adrm/rsm2021-04.html>.

<sup>122</sup> ICSP Private Data Steering Group, *The Use of Private Datasets by Federal Statistical programs: Extent, Challenges, and Lessons Learned*, Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, <https://www.statpolicy.gov/assets/docs/ICSP-The%20Use%20of%20Private%20Datasets%20by%20Federal%20Statistical%20Programs-1-6-2023.pdf>; Office of Management and Budget, *Using Administrative Data to Build Evidence*, July 15, 2016, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/mgmt-gpra/using\\_administrative\\_and\\_survey\\_data\\_to\\_build\\_evidence\\_0.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/mgmt-gpra/using_administrative_and_survey_data_to_build_evidence_0.pdf).

<sup>123</sup> “Administrative Data,” U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/topics/research/guidance/restricted-use-microdata/administrative-data.html>.



nongovernment entities can lead to difficulty in integrating administrative records, creating a need for more sophisticated data curation techniques and infrastructures.<sup>124</sup> The CEP referenced a series of studies conducted by the Census Bureau and the ICSP on public attitudes toward use of administrative records in federal statistics, which found that privacy and confidentiality were among respondents' most significant concerns.<sup>125</sup>

## Data Privacy

Data privacy and confidentiality remains a concern beyond the context of administrative records. Several privacy-enhancing data-sharing analytic methods exist, but they have varying attributes, which include impacts on data quality. The FCSM's Subcommittee on Updating Statistical Methods for Safeguarding Protected Data is responsible for updating and revising the Statistical Policy Working Paper #22 (SPWP22) "Report on Statistical Disclosure Limitation Methodology"—now known as the Data Protection Toolkit.<sup>126</sup> This toolkit is intended to "enable agencies across government to improve their implementation of statistical disclosure limitation and secure/tiered data access."<sup>127</sup>

Efforts to prevent re-identification and record linkage of protected federal datasets have driven innovations in privacy-preserving data sharing and analytics (PPDSA). Federal agencies use a PPDSA process known as *disclosure avoidance* to protect the confidentiality of respondents' personal information. For the 2020 decennial census, the Census Bureau used a disclosure avoidance framework known as *differential privacy*, which injects statistical "noise" into a dataset as a means of hindering re-identification of respondents' data.<sup>128</sup> Because of the statistical noise infusion, differential privacy impairs data quality relative to the original collected data, which occurred with 2020 decennial census data.<sup>129</sup> A study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine indicated that the bureau's use of differential privacy contributed to delayed release of data products, cutbacks in available data, and reduced quality and credibility of some data.<sup>130</sup> Although the Census Bureau has opted to use differential privacy techniques, there are no recent widely adopted standards for the use of PPDSA technologies in federal statistics.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Barriers to Using Administrative Data for Evidence-Building*, July 15, 2016, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/mgmt-gpra/using\\_administrative\\_and\\_survey\\_data\\_to\\_build\\_evidence\\_0.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/mgmt-gpra/using_administrative_and_survey_data_to_build_evidence_0.pdf).

<sup>125</sup> Jennifer Hunter Childs, Ryan King, and Aleia Clark Fobia, *Confidence in U.S. Federal Statistical Agencies*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2015.

<sup>126</sup> Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (2022), *Data Protection Toolkit: Report and Resources on Statistical Disclosure Limitation Methodology and Tiered Data Access*, November 2022, <https://nces.ed.gov/fcsm/dpt>.

<sup>127</sup> "Subcommittee on Updating Statistical Methods for Safeguarding Protected Data charter," Subcommittee on Updating Statistical Methods for Safeguarding Protected Data, <https://nces.ed.gov/fcsm/dpt>. <https://www.fcsfm.gov/assets/files/docs/Subcommittee%20on%20Updating%20Statistical%20Methods%20for%20Safeguarding%20Protected%20Data%20Charter%20Signed%20042619.pdf>.

<sup>128</sup> Population Reference Bureau and U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Census Data Products and Dissemination Team, *Why the Census Bureau Chose Differential Privacy*, U.S. Census Bureau, March 2023, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/2020/census-briefs/c2020br-03.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, *Disclosure Avoidance for the 2020 Census: an Introduction*, November 2021, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/2020/2020-census-disclosure-avoidance-handbook.pdf>.

<sup>129</sup> National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, *Assessing the 2020 Census: Final Report*, p. 320, <https://doi.org/10.17226/27150>.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 320-325.

<sup>131</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Disclosure Avoidance for the 2020 Census: an Introduction*, November 2021, p. 13.

## Appendix A. Definitions of Key Terms

The federal statistical system utilizes several specialized terms, many of which can be found in the *U.S. Code*. This table provides definitions of selected terms for the reader's convenience.

**Table A-I. Specialized Terms Relevant to the Federal Statistical System**

Term	Definition	U.S. Code Location
<i>Recognized statistical agency or unit (or statistical agency or unit)</i>	“an agency or organizational unit of the executive branch whose activities are predominantly the collection, compilation, processing, or analysis of information for statistical purposes, as designated by the Director under section 3562.”	44 U.S.C. §3561(11)
<i>Statistical purpose</i>	“the description, estimation, or analysis of the characteristics of groups, without identifying individuals or organizations that comprise such groups; and includes the development, implementation, or maintenance of methods, technical or administrative procedures, or information resources that support the purposes [previously] described.”	44 U.S.C. §3561(12)
<i>Statistical activities</i>	“the collection, compilation, processing, or analysis of data for the purpose of describing or making estimates concerning the whole, or relevant groups or components within, the economy, society, or the natural environment; and includes the development of methods or resources that support those activities, such as measurement methods, models, statistical classifications, or sampling frames.”	44 U.S.C. §3561(10)
<i>Nonstatistical purpose</i>	“the use of data in identifiable form for any purpose that is not a statistical purpose, including any administrative, regulatory, law enforcement, adjudicatory, or other purpose that affects the rights, privileges, or benefits of a particular identifiable respondent; and includes the disclosure under section 552 of title 5 of data that are acquired for exclusively statistical purposes under a pledge of confidentiality.”	44 U.S.C. §3561(8)
<i>Confidentiality</i>	“a quality or condition accorded to information as an obligation not to disclose that information to an unauthorized party.”	44 U.S.C. §3563(d)(2)

**Source:** *U.S. Code*.

## Appendix B. Change in Language for Federal Statistical Agencies Over Time

The way OMB has defined statistical agencies of the FSS has changed over time. OMB used the term *designated statistical agency or unit* in the 1997 Confidentiality Order to identify a mix of 12 statistical agencies and units for purposes of that order.<sup>132</sup> This order also used the term *principal statistical agencies*.<sup>133</sup> The enactment of CIPSEA in 2002 codified the term *designated statistical agencies or units*.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, when OMB published the 2007 order implementing the E-Government Act and CIPSEA, designated statistical agencies or units were also considered as recognized by OMB.<sup>135</sup> OMB signaled in the 2023 Trust Regulation that it would henceforth differentiate “designated” and “recognized” by maintaining the CIPSEA-determined usage for the term *designated*.<sup>136</sup> Though commonly used, the term *principal statistical agency or unit* does not appear to be defined in statute.

### Author Information

Taylor R. Knoedl  
Analyst in American National Government

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<sup>132</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Order Providing for the Confidentiality of Statistical Information,” 62 *Federal Register* 124, June 27, 1997, p. 35049, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1997-06-27/pdf/FR-1997-06-27.pdf#page=444>.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35044.

<sup>134</sup> 44 U.S.C. 3562.

<sup>135</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Implementation Guidance for Title V of the E-Government Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA),” 72 *Federal Register* 115, June 15, 2007, p. 33368, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2007-06-15/pdf/E7-11542.pdf>.

<sup>136</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” 88 *Federal Register* 159, August 18, 2023, p. 56710, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-08-18/pdf/2023-17664.pdf#page=3>.

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