



FESAC

Federal Economic Statistics
Advisory Committee

Bureau of Economic Analysis • Bureau of Labor Statistics • Census Bureau

Modernization in Data Collection and Methods in Response to COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic declared by the WHO in March 2020 elicited a strong response from US statistical agencies. Some of the initial response was discussed in the last FESAC meeting. For example, some agencies adjusted how statistics were computed—understanding that lockdowns and other social distancing measures may have induced non-response or other source data problems—while at the same time, rapidly changing economic conditions heightened the relevance of timely data, leading to new data products. In addition to these responses, the pandemic has also influenced how statistical agencies continue to go about the business of producing economic statistics. Forthcoming changes may involve either modernizing or updating data collection and interviewing (possibly accelerating existing initiatives or precipitating new ones), or studying how economic measures adhere to fundamental concepts. In this session, we will consider how the statistical agencies have responded to the pandemic in the medium term. In response to the pandemic, BEA began studying how sudden unavailability of products impacts price indices under existing price theory but is not captured under existing price measurement practice, which impacts real measures in BEA’s accounts and could be used to inform future revisions. In addition, BLS implemented several initiatives to modernize how interviewing and data collection were conducted, including changing how interviewers were trained. Likewise, Census continued to change how they conduct field work, updated existing indices, developed new products, and produced an existing product at a much higher frequency (Business Formation Statistics that had been quarterly were also produced weekly). The FESAC members will get a more in-depth look at these changes and be able to opine on agencies continuing the current course of action and what other actions could be considered.