

Federal Statistics in the FY 2015 Budget

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The programs in most statistical agencies would hold steady under the FY 2015 budget request, but remain on a thin budget margin. Small deviations could force the same kind of tough choices among important programs that had to be made in FYs 2013-2014.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics would not receive sufficient funding in FY 2015 to continue its current programs.
- Budget increases in Table 1 do not in all cases reflect increases to the statistical or research programs of the agencies.

BACKGROUND

Accurate, objective statistics and appropriate statistical methodology are raw materials for a wide swath of research endeavor, from clinical trials to models of human behavior. For research on the economy; on the American population's health, income, wages and earnings, transportation, criminal system, and access to food; or on business' size, longevity and work place conditions, to name a few, federal statistical data define the gold standard. Federal statistical programs adhere to high-quality standards and maintain integrity, accuracy, reproducibility, and transparency in the data they produce.

A new issue for statistical and non-statistical agencies that collect data is guidance from the White House about the sharing of administrative data for statistical and research purposes.¹ Administrative data are necessary information about the participants in government programs, from tax,

¹ OMB Memorandum M-14-06, February 14, 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/memoranda_default

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social security and Medicare/Medicaid records, to information on participants in programs as diverse as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and international trade assistance. The administrative data initiative is a boon to social scientific and public health research in that it could greatly improve our understanding of how federal programs interact with one another. Budget-wise, however, processes for sharing administrative data while maintaining the agencies' exceptional protection of privacy and confidentiality may add new costs to agencies that produce, or would heavily use, these shared administrative data.

Table 1. Principal Statistical Agencies in the Federal R&D Budget
(budget authority in millions of dollars)

Statistical Agency	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	Change FY 14-15	
	Actual	Estimate	Budget	Amount	Percent
Bureau of the Census	859	944	1,210	266	28.2%
<i>Current Programs</i>	238	252	248	-4	-1.6%
<i>Periodic Programs</i>	621	692	962	270	39.0%
Bureau of Labor Statistics	577	592	610	18	3.0%
Bureau of Economic Analysis*	93	99	111	12	12.1%
Statistics of Income, IRS	38	37	37	0	0.0%
Natl Agriculture Stats Service*	167	161	179	18	11.2%
<i>Census of Agriculture</i>	59	46	45	-1	-2.2%
Economic Research Service*	71	78	83	5	6.4%
Energy Information Admin	100	117	123	6	5.1%
Natl Center for Health Stats	154	155	155	0	0.0%
Natl Center for Education Stats	249	259	273	14	5.4%
Bureau of Justice Stats	53	53	63	10	18.9%
Bureau of Transportation Stats	26	26	29	3	11.5%
Natl Ctr for Sci and Eng Stats, NSF	42	47	59	12	25.5%

* All or some of the budget increases shown for these agencies would be applied to new property management responsibilities formerly paid by GSA.

Source: Agency budget justifications and statements.

Figures rounded to the nearest million. Changes calculated from unrounded figures.

Statistical budget followers should be aware that the President's FY 2015 budget proposal includes new non-statistical responsibilities for some agencies, and mandated new collections for others. For example, several agencies would be required to conduct lease management activities formerly covered by other government agencies. Thus, what appears to be an increase in an agency's budget may *not* represent an increase in funding of its statistical or analytical programs. Several other agencies

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would be given “funded mandates” that attach new funding to new statistical responsibilities not previously conducted. This phenomenon could prevent agencies from reestablishing programs they discontinued in FY 2013 or FY 2014 despite receiving new funds in FY 2015.

Over 100 distinct agencies, offices, divisions and centers collect data, mostly in conjunction with administration of federal programs, implementation of regulations, and/or in support of research functions. Approximately 40 percent of federal spending on statistics goes to 13 agencies whose principal mission is to collect statistics. This chapter focuses on the ten largest Principle Statistical Agencies of the United States.

The U.S. Census Bureau is the federal source of data for virtually all studies of the nation’s population, its characteristics and dynamics, distribution by place, age, race, ethnicity and gender, and myriad other characteristics, and the communities in which we live. The agency’s Economic and Government Censuses fuel research on the function, structure and other characteristics of American businesses and local, state, and federal governmental entities. Preparations for the 2020 Decennial Census are well underway and the bulk of the Bureau’s \$270 million proposed increase would be directed to research on adaptable survey design, address updating procedures, electronic response options, and other efficiency-boosting possibilities for the Decennial Census. The Census would be unable to maintain its momentum in this regard if there were an extended Continuing Resolution into 2015, one of the last years during which necessary investments can be made before turning to the actual operation of the 2020 Census.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) measures labor market activity; tracks consumer and producer price changes and develops price indicators, such as the principal inflation-measuring Consumer Price Index; calculates the productivity of business endeavors in a manner that can be compared across sectors and countries; and monitors working conditions. Its data are essential to any research on the labor market, wages and wage differentials, employment/unemployment, and job growth, among other topics. At \$592.2 million, the FY 2014 appropriation was \$21.6 million less than the President’s 2014 request. As a consequence, BLS has curtailed its Export Prices program and made necessary but so far marginal cuts in its Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). The FY 2015 request is nearly an \$18 million increase from the FY 2014 funding level. The request includes

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\$2.5 million to fund new BLS responsibilities to support the Census Bureau in its development of a supplemental poverty measure and \$1.6 million to fund an Annual Current Population Survey Supplement on labor force trends, including data on contingent work, alternative work arrangements, workplace flexibility, and work-family balance issues. However, the President's FY 2015 budget would not be sufficient to restore any of the programs BLS has cut or curtailed since FY 2013.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) produces the gross domestic product (GDP), the national income accounts, and other measures that are critical in understanding our trillion-dollar economy. For FY 2015, BEA would receive an increase of \$12 million, *but* would be required to use at least \$8-10 million of that to cover newly transferred costs of lease and building management. The remaining increase, approximately \$2 million, would be used to initiate "Big Data for Small Business," a new data program that would facilitate a Small Business GDP measure. BEA's FY 2015 programs could be less affected by their own appropriations than by the inability of other budget-squeezed agencies – most critically the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) – to provide BEA all of the survey data the agency requires to measure GDP and compile the National Income and Product Accounts.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity collecting and analyzing data related to all aspects of education in the United States. NCES also manages a grants program for which Requests for Applications are issued several times a year. In 2014, NCES decided to collect data on post-secondary educational financial aid half as often as in the past, a cost-saving measure that will likely forestall discontinuation of any major data collection effort in the near term. The President's FY 2015 request for the NCES is \$19.7 million greater than the FY 2014 appropriation. The increase is targeted for the launch of several substantial new programs, including a state-representative sample of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data and the collection of data on elementary school teachers and administrators every two years rather than every four years.

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) collects entirely unique data on the health status, health attitudes and behaviors, history, and nutritional profiles from a large number of individuals in the United States. The FY 2015 request for the agency itself would allow the agency's core programs to stay on track. However, while the agency had received funds under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to oversample

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individuals in its surveys to create a data base for ACA evaluation, that funding ceased in FY 2014 and is not incorporated into the President's request for FY 2015.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is the only source of national data on farmers' production intentions, in-year status of crops, and final production of crops and livestock. In the FY 2015 request, NASS would receive an additional \$18 million over FY 2014, but \$8.5 million of that increase would fund new responsibilities to manage property accounts rather than to conduct statistical programs. The remaining \$9.5 million would go to brand new USDA priorities such as bee production and geospatial data. The new responsibilities accompanying the FY 2015 funds would not permit NASS to reinstate all of the commodity-specific programs it cut in FY 2013 and may mean a discontinuation of some of those that were actually reinstated in FY 2014.

The USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) transforms data from NASS, Census, and other statistical agencies and administrative data from USDA programs to illuminate the distribution and implications of farm, food, and natural resource conservation program benefits to inform policy decision making. With NASS, ERS also conducts and releases data from the only representative survey collecting data on production practices, farm and ranch business operations, and the households that operate sampled businesses. The FY 2015 request would increase the agency's budget by \$5 million, but that amount is *less* than the cost of newly transferred rental management responsibilities also included in the FY 2015 budget. The actual impact is thus an effective *decrease* in funding for the agency's data, information and intramural and/or extramural research programs.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA) provides a wide range of information and data products covering energy production, stocks, demand, imports, exports, and prices. EIA would get a \$6 million increase in 2015 to continue its current programs and to: make EIA a repository for well-level petroleum data from States; study domestic energy market dynamics in the context of the global energy system; and develop crowd-sourcing for building technologies that conserve energy.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) collects, analyzes, publishes, and disseminates data and information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government.

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The FY 2015 request for BJS would provide new funding of \$10 million to: improve statistics derived from the National Crime Victimization Survey on rape and sexual assault; launch statistical collections regarding public defender programs; examine the potential of administrative records to provide new statistics on arrests, offenses known only to police, and recidivism; and expand surveys of inmate populations.

The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) of the National Science Foundation collects, interprets, analyzes, and disseminates objective data on the science and engineering enterprise, providing data for and conducting research on research. It is responsible for statistical data on R&D; the science and engineering workforce; U.S. competitiveness in science, engineering, technology, and R&D; and the condition and progress of advanced U.S. science and technology education. Under the President's FY 2015 request, NCSES would get a \$12 million increase to: continue current programs; enhance its survey of those who receive doctoral degrees in the United States; plan and conduct the first survey of R&D in the non-profit sector; and examine recent post-doctoral appointments.