



THE EVIDENCE FORUMS

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Partnership Models to Strengthen Evidence-Informed Decision Making in the Federal Government

By The Policy Lab at Brown University & the White House Evidence Forums

Event Background and Synopsis

Federal agencies released multi-year plans outlining their priority research questions. (See the Annual Evaluation Plans and Learning Agendas at [Evaluation.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov)). These documents provide a roadmap for how external researchers might want to tailor their work to be more policy-relevant, as well as present opportunities for researchers to formally partner with federal agencies to help answer priority questions. To provide illustrative guidance on how to get started on such a partnership, this Evidence Forum showcased a variety of successful partnership models and dove into specific areas where researcher help was needed. The following pages recap details and provide links to mentioned resources; you'll find actionable information on topics such as:

1. How agencies can design data sharing and licensing protocols to facilitate partnerships.
2. How the Intergovernmental Personnel Act can be used to embed researchers within an agency.
3. How competitive data challenges can effectively engage a wide range of researchers.
4. Where researchers can go to learn about open opportunities for partnering with agencies.

Key Insights

Examples of Partnership Models:

The first part of the event showcased examples of mechanisms that can help form and sustain partnerships.

- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**
The speakers reviewed HUD's data license protocols, which facilitate the sharing of data needed to conduct innovative research projects that inform HUD's policies and programs.

It is a model for how agencies can establish infrastructure and processes to more efficiently share data that can be used to advance their Learning Agendas.

Speakers:

- Todd Richardson, General Deputy Assistant Secretary, HUD
- Lynn Rodgers, Acting Director, Program Monitoring & Research Division, HUD
- Katherine O'Regan, Professor of Public Policy and Planning, New York University

Resources and links:

- [HUD User Portal](#)
- [Data License Agreement](#)
- [Dataset Reference Guide](#)

- **U.S. Internal Revenue Service**

The speakers reviewed how the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) can be used to temporarily embed a researcher within an agency. They also discussed the various use cases for IPA agreements as compared to Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

Speakers:

- Anne Herlache, Senior Manager, IRS
- Day Manoli, Associate Professor, Georgetown University

Resources and links:

- [Guidance on IPAs from the Office of Personnel Management](#)
- [Office of Evaluation Sciences IPA Toolkit](#)
- [IRS Joint Statistical Research Program](#)

- **U.S. Department of Labor**

The speakers discussed DOL's Summer Data Challenge, which awards emerging and established scholars approximately \$30,000 each to use existing data to analyze federal labor policies, protections, and programs. Speakers highlighted the value of these small, streamlined grants to bring researchers into public service.

Speakers:

- Deborah Martierrez, Senior Evaluation Specialist, Chief Evaluation Office, DOL
- Rebecca Johnson, Assistant Professor, Georgetown University

Resources and links:

- [Academic engagement opportunities at DOL](#), such as the Chief Evaluation Office Summer Fellowship Program, Scholars Program, and Labor Research & Evaluation Grants.
- [Summer Data Challenge](#)
- [Dartmouth News article](#) about the value of the Summer Data Challenge in bringing aspiring data scientists into public service
- [Challenge-funded report](#) on machine learning and labor protections

Directions and Opportunities

Live Requests for Partnerships:

The second part of the event showcased two agencies who were currently seeking research partners. Please note that this reflects the status of agency efforts as of December, 2022.

- **U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC)**

Priority Research Question: What impact are federal broadband expansion efforts having on health?

How researchers can help: DOC is charged under the [ACCESS BROADBAND Act](#) with annually reporting to Congress on the progress achieved toward closing the digital divide and assessing what impacts that progress has or is forecasted to achieve. Impacts are broadly defined, but as we saw during the Covid-19 pandemic for many Americans, high speed Internet service enabled access to telehealth services. As you can imagine, this is particularly important in more isolated rural and tribal areas. DOC seeks help in the following areas:

1. Indicator selection - What are the best indicators for assessing the health impacts of expanded access to broadband? Measures should be drawn from an underlying theory of change and be available at a granular geographic scale and at a high enough frequency for us to gauge trends over the short run.
2. Methodology - What are the most practical, defensible methods for attributing changes in health indicators with changes in broadband availability and adoption?
3. Data - What data do we need that is not currently available? Are there indicators that could be obtained from program data or estimated from existing data?

If interested in potentially partnering: Email Chris Heflin, Evaluation Officer, at cheflin@doc.gov and attach your resume and include 3-5 sentences on why you're interested and how you may be able to contribute to the question.

Speakers:

- Chris Heflin, Evaluation Officer, DOC
- Alex Marré, Broadband Program Specialist, National Telecommunication & Information Administration

Resources and links:

- [U.S. Department of Commerce page on Evaluation.gov](#)
- [U.S. Department of Commerce page on Performance.gov](#)

- **U.S. Department of the Interior**

Priority Research Question: How should DOI conduct a review of the condition of fish and wildlife habitats and populations, as called for by the [America the Beautiful campaign](#), to meaningfully measure the conservation impact of that campaign and other collaborative conservation efforts of the US Fish and Wildlife Service?

How researchers can help:

- Identify methods to evaluate the impact of collaborative conservation.
- How would you define collaborative conservation?
- How would you measure the impact of collaborative conservation?
- Develop meaningful measures to review conditions of wildlife habitats and populations.

If interested in potentially partnering: Email Brooke Hanson at Brooke.Hanson@ios.doi.gov and attach your resume and include 3-5 sentences on why you're interested and how you may be able to contribute to the question.

Speakers:

- Patty Currier, Director of Planning & Performance Management, DOI

Resources and links:

- [U.S. Department of the Interior page on Evaluation.gov](#)
- [U.S. Department of the Interior page on Performance.gov](#)
- [America the Beautiful Campaign](#)

Additional Information

About The Policy Lab at Brown University: The Policy Lab conducts applied research and, in particular, helps governments at the city, county, state, and federal levels build capacity to generate and use evidence. To learn more, visit thepolicylab.brown.edu, [sign up for listserv](#), and follow [@ThePolicyTweets](#); to connect, email thepolicylab@brown.edu.

About the White House Evidence Forums: The Evidence Forums are a series of events co-hosted by the White House, non-profits, and academic organizations that aim to co-develop concrete strategies for mobilizing research-based evidence that can make life healthier, safer, more equitable, and more prosperous for the American public. To learn more about the Evidence Forums, and more generally the White House's Year of Evidence for Action, [visit here](#) or email evidence@omb.eop.gov.