

# Funders' Committee for Civic Participation

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

July 20, 2023

- Good morning, everyone. It's great to be here today and an honor to be able to address you. First, thank you everyone for hosting me today. The Funders' Committee has been such a wonderful partner to the Census Bureau for many years, and we greatly appreciate your commitment to and engagement with our work.
- So here's a perspective I'd like to share with you today. I see the Census Bureau as operating at the juncture of mathematical sciences, the social sciences, and society.
- Mathematical sciences—including statistics, economics, computer and data science—they're frequently used to reduce data into compact data products and statistical estimates. Social sciences offer frameworks to develop measures like poverty, or methods for fostering survey participation by using social psychology, sociology, demography, and so forth.
- And then there's society. As you know, we're in the midst of a technological and global renaissance where society is rapidly evolving before our very eyes.
- We're changing the way we communicate with each other. We're increasing our reliance on data and new technology. We're witnessing changes to our social networks, how we work and play, and even how we live our day-to-day lives.
- All this impacts how we do our work at the Census Bureau.
- Now, here's what happens when the Census Bureau operates at this juncture. Solutions to statistical problems are no longer just a matter of optimizing squared error loss, calculating a margin of error, or publishing p values. We also must incorporate social and even ethical factors.
- Social factors can include different groups of stakeholders with competing needs based on their own use cases . . . Or laws that require confidentiality and protection of privacy . . . Or public trust that can affect the extent to which quality data can be obtained through public participation in our censuses and surveys . . . Or the availability of administrative records that can alleviate the need to solicit at least some data elements directly from individuals or businesses. It's really quite fascinating when you think about it.
- We faced with having to think differently if we wish to achieve our mission. We need new insights, new approaches, creative solutions.
- So, how are we doing that? Through a transformation and modernization initiative. We're moving from our legacy approach of public solicitation where we ask people and businesses for information. We're flipping that model on its head.
- Under our new vision, we embrace a single-enterprise operation that uses common platforms to capture, process, and deliver data products.
- It features a data lake that ingests all sources of data, from administrative records from public and third-party sources to survey and census data.
- All these data sources will be linked to offer new, powerful, and unique data tools and statistical products.
- The necessary systems are well underway. But a true transformation can't occur unless our staff similarly undertake their own personal transform through a cultural change. That change is aimed at nurturing innovation and creative thinking.

- And that comes from infusing the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion into our core values of scientific integrity, objectivity, transparency and independence . . . and then using those in our daily work and to guide our decision making. Doing this leads to better science, better designs, better methods, more accurate and relevant data.
- And while inclusivity is necessary within the over ten thousand of staff that make up our agency, it also applies externally. That's why I've devoted much time laying the groundwork to create continuous, ongoing community engagement in its broadest sense.
- I and Census Bureau staff have met with numerous scientific and government associations. We've conducted listening sessions with stakeholders representing both communities and data users. Throughout these engagements, we listened carefully, we strengthened existing ties, and we established new relationships. I must say: the experience was profound.
- And here's my bottom line: We learned that it takes a community-of-the-whole to maintain a fully functioning and successful federal statistical agency. We need to seek and act on feedback from stakeholders, partners and the public. We need to expand and nurture a trusted-messenger ecosystem of partners and stakeholders that operates continuously.
- Such an ecosystem is a key for us to collect data from historically recalcitrant segments of our wonderfully diverse population, not all of which may have administrative records to draw upon.
- Yes, we need to exploit new technologies, new methods and new sources data. But we need to do this in a way engages with and benefits stakeholders, data users, communities, tribes, government, and the public.
- That includes you. And it necessarily includes underserved communities, communities of color, rural populations, tribes—all the people who pose measurement and participation challenges to all our data collections.
- I'll conclude with a remark about perfection. We—the Census Bureau—are a work in progress, like all agencies. We aspire to perfection, knowing that we won't get there. But that we can advance the ball down that field. After all, it's about the journey not the destination.
- I hope everyone can see that through our aspirations, our actions and our engagement efforts, we're making progress towards serving the public better. Thank you.