

National Sunshine Week: “The Power of Open Government”

Director’s remarks as prepared for delivery

March 13, 2024

- Good morning to my colleagues from across the Department of Commerce, the federal government, and the public. I’m delighted to be here for today’s event.
- I want to especially thank the department’s Office of Privacy and Open Government and the U.S. Census Bureau’s Policy Coordination Office for coordinating today’s event.
- Each year we use Sunshine Week to nationally celebrate the public access of information. So please take some time to reflect on that. Such access is quite remarkable! Don’t you agree?
- Sunshine week also promotes dialogue about the importance of open government, especially as it relates to freedom of information. So let’s talk about both.
- *Open government* requires transparency; it should be participatory and collaborative; and, of course, it must be accountable to its people. It’s all about “We, the people,” remember?
- And what about our government’s *transparency*? Freedom of information—that is, public access to accurate information—is key to governmental transparency. It is critical for establishing accountability because it provides information to the public about what their government is doing.
- Here at the Census Bureau, we see the power of open government every single day.
- Our mission is to serve as America’s leading provider of quality data about its people, places, and economy. Our nation is big and beautifully diverse, and it comes as no surprise that the data needs of its people and communities vary.
- As I travel and speak to people and communities across America, one thing I hear frequently is the importance of data that capture local experience and reflect the rich diversity of communities and neighbors.
- We need data that better reflect our nation’s demographic characteristics such as age, sex, relationship, racial and ethnic groups, and geographic levels.
- Census Bureau data are also valuable assets that can be used by policymakers and the public to make data-driven decisions.
- Our data can assist federal, state, local, and tribal governments in equitably distributing resources and identifying underserved communities. The data can also be used to help governments and communities enforce antidiscrimination laws, regulations, and policies.
- We provide a wealth of data by age, disability, race, ethnicity, sex, income, veteran status, and other key demographic variables to help measure equity.
- Combining these data with information about housing, voting, language, employment, and education can create great potential for understanding economic development possibilities, addressing community needs, and mitigating inequities.
- These data are often by geography, which provide meaning and context to the statistical data, and can identify rural and underserved communities.
- Simply put, the data we collect and maintain and disseminate is not just a national asset, it’s a keystone to our democracy.

- This is also true for data provided by our federal statistical partners and more broadly for all our federal government. Democracy is at risk when we no longer know who we are—as a people, as an economy, and as our nation.
- It's incumbent on us to be good stewards of the data treasures we hold. That's why we continually explore new, innovative ways to integrate open government practice into our daily work.
- In this spirit, let's ask ourselves: how can we make our data more widely available? How can we provide better access of data to communities that deserve their equitable share of resources?
- Since becoming director, I've traveled across the country and have heard directly from countless local officials, community groups, tribal representatives, businesses, students and educators, and many others who need data to address issues in their communities— and they usually aren't statisticians or data experts!
- A key part of our mission is to educate the public, policymakers, and stakeholders about the data we have available and how to use them. And our goal is to make accessing our data easier than ever.
- We have a huge amount of datasets available at data.census.gov, where you can search for and filter by a wide range of demographic, economic, and social characteristics. This is a quick and easy way to easily gather the most up-to-date information on your community.
- We are working to develop new tools to help people quickly access our data. Here are some of the exciting tools we've launched in that effort:
 - The *Opportunity Atlas* is a comprehensive census tract-level dataset of children's outcomes in adulthood covering nearly the entire U.S. population.
 - The *Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics* program produces public-use information combining federal, state, and Census Bureau data on employers and employees. It fills critical data gaps and provides economic indicators that state and local authorities need to make informed decisions.
 - *My Community Explorer* is an interactive, map-based tool that highlights demographic and socioeconomic data that measure inequality and can help inform data-based solutions.
 - Our *Community Resilience Estimates* provides an easily understood metric for how at-risk every neighborhood in the United States is to disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic, winter weather, and flooding.
- We also are doing great work with The Opportunity Project and the Census Open Innovation Labs to turn federal open data into new technologies that solve real world problems.
- These data and tools illustrate our commitment to developing statistics that accurately reflect our ever-changing nation, offering the rich mosaic representing who we are.
- Our data serve and benefit everyone, including America's underserved groups, and new tools will hopefully make it easier to answer the questions facing communities big and small across the country.
- Another part of our transparency efforts is transparency in our communications and our decision-making processes. As the nation's premier statistical agency, it's so important that we communicate openly with the public.
- We engage openly with our stakeholders from all across the United States in our work. For example, we work with advisory committees, whose deliberations are open to the public.
- We also proactively provide training and assistance to our data users. By meeting with them, we are also able foster two-way communication on data usability, operational issues, and other data-user needs.

- Some of the ways we can do this are through our data dissemination specialists, state data centers, and the census information centers. These folks work directly with the public—including government officials, researchers, tribal leaders, community organizations, and chambers of commerce—to help them understand and access Census Bureau data.
- We are also part of the international statistical community, and we work with other nations' statistical agencies to understand best practices and address common concerns.
- *All* these entities have diverse perspectives to offer us. When we listen to and incorporate the perspectives of the people we measure, we'll produce more accurate, more relevant, more useful data.
- Likewise, it's critical that the public can trust us.
- That means trust in our data, and maintaining and enhancing scientific integrity is essential. To that end, the Census Bureau only releases statistical data that adhere to rigorous quality standards and are fit for intended uses.
- But it also means that the public can trust us to protect their information. Balancing transparency with the protections afforded in Title 13 is an incredibly important duty, and it's one that we take very seriously.
- The Census Bureau's mission can only be fulfilled when not only is everyone counted, but when their data needs are met, too.
- In our work, we seek to emulate the principles of National Sunshine Week. We constantly strive for excellence and are transparent about the limitations and issues we see in our work and the data we produce. And we will continue to be open and honest.
- All across America this week, government agencies, journalists, and many in the public are reflecting on how we can individually and collectively enhance our open government. I encourage you to follow suit.
- By embracing practices of open government and public access to information, we strengthen our precious democracy.
- Thank you, and