May 18, 2021

Dear Dr. Hart and Dr. Potok,

I am writing on behalf of the National Science Foundation in response to your letter of April 30, 2021. We are grateful for your support of the National Science Foundation and for your efforts to improve quality of life for Americans through expanded use of evidence-based approaches. We are also grateful for an opportunity to follow up on the question asked by representative Don Beyer.

Our answer to the Congressman's question begins with our pride in the work of NSF's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES). As one of 13 federal statistical agencies, NCSES provides important information about the nation's science and engineering enterprise. It offers comprehensive information about a full range of topics including: evolving career opportunities for young scientists and engineers, the many ways in which America's scientists and engineers strengthen communities and fuel innovation, and the cumulative effects of America's science and engineering enterprise on the nation's global competitiveness in fields like artificial intelligence, quantum information, and other areas that create jobs and opportunities across the country. Beyond these activities, NCSES actively supports government-wide implementation of the Evidence Act in several ways, including but not limited to the establishment of a Standard Application Process for requesting access to restricted data and by chairing the federal Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building (ACDEB).

For the prospective National Secure Data Service (NSDS) that Rep. Beyer asked about, NCSES has the necessary skills, expertise, independence, and authority to manage to this effort. Already:
- NCSES collects different types of data from many different sources.
- NCSES links and aggregates data in ways that allow for dynamic analyses of vital topics.

- NCSES designs, tests, and implements privacy protection methods that safeguard individuals and organizations.
- NCSES has strong relationships with, and enjoys the respect of, many high-value partners. These partners include federal statistical agencies and data contractors, labor economists, privacy researchers, computer scientists, and many more.
- NCSES has the necessary data protection authority under the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) of 2018 and the Privacy Act of 1974.

NCSES's existing expertise and intellectual assets, and CIPSEA authority, when combined with NCSES's longstanding history in securely and safely protecting confidential information and experience in successful contract oversight, offers a unique opportunity for our nation to link data more effectively in ways that increase American competitiveness and leadership in a wide range of areas.

Through NCSES, we are working internally, and with external stakeholders, to determine the best way forward. Key elements of the proposed NSDS are based on assumptions, including critical technological and legal assumptions, that are not well tested. To help the government scale up responsibly, and as quickly as possible, we are designing a series of pilot activities. We refer to these activities as America's DataHub. While we started planning the America's DataHub in response to a 2018 Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) report, the DataHub's capabilities align with the Evidence Commission's NSDS recommendations.

Given a sufficient appropriation of FTEs and funding, the DataHub pilot activities will provide informational and analytic value quickly in their own right. At the same time, the DatHub pilot activities will test key safety assumptions and clarify the most effective, efficient, and expeditious ways to build the NSDS. This will also support the ACDEB in their deliberations related to the NSDS. Our work to support government-wide efforts to securely link and responsibly analyze restricted-use data does not stop there. NSF's Social, Behavioral, and

Economic Science Directorate (SBE), Computer and Information Science and Engineering Directorate (CISE), and other directorates support research needed to advance the underlying science on essential dynamics of privacy, transparency, and secure linkages in a wide range of data contexts.

We are grateful for your support of efforts to increase evidence-based decision making through smarter uses of data. In this and other domains, NSF seeks to fuel innovation with greater speed and scale. Through these activities, and those of so many agencies and public-serving organizations, we have tremendous capacity and to increase opportunity and improve quality of life in every part of the nation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Arthur Lupia

Arthur Lupia
Assistant Director