Case Study: Advancing Federal Equitable Data Partnerships through Public Feedback Loops

Introduction:

Addressing priorities such as reducing maternal mortality, directing infrastructure benefits to historically disadvantaged communities, and combating discrimination in affordable housing access necessitates the use of disaggregated data. Data can be disaggregated into characteristics such as gender, geography, race, sexual orientation, and veteran status. Once disaggregated, these data can be used to identify and eliminate barriers to more equitable social and economic outcomes.

Executive Order and Interagency Efforts:

In January 2021, President Biden issued an [Executive Order 13985 on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities](#) calling for the creation of the Equitable Data Working Group (EDWG). This group identified inadequacies for collecting and using disaggregated data across federal agencies, and recommended strategies for addressing any deficiencies. The EDWG recommended, among other things, for agencies "to galvanize diverse partnerships across levels of government and the research community" and to "be accountable to the American public." The Subcommittee on Equitable Data (SED) published a [progress report](#) in March 2023, emphasizing the need for collaboration with local communities to make equitable data actionable.

Request for Information and Public Engagement:

To understand how the Federal government can enhance collaborations with local communities and increase accountability, the Subcommittee on Equitable Data issued a [Request for Information (RFI)](#) in September 2022. From the RFI: "We invite members of the public to share perspectives on how the Federal government can better realize the objectives of collaboration between all levels of government, engagement of communities that access or participate in Federal programs in data collection and research and create broader public access to equitable data." This garnered nearly 170 responses from diverse entities, including social service organizations, civil rights groups, universities, and individuals. Some responses included direct recommendations to improve the utility of federal data sets.

Public Feedback Loop Pilot:

A recurring theme in the public responses was the need for strong feedback loops between local communities and Federal agencies. In response, the Subcommittee on Equitable Data initiated a pilot feedback loop to 1) share specific recommendations for improving particular federal data sets with the relevant federal agencies and then 2) asking agencies to share their responses with the public.

All comments were reviewed by SED's Interagency Working Group on Community Engagement and Accountability. This report documents select [public recommendations](#) to Federal agencies received through a [Request for Information](#) and four federal agencies' response to the public recommendations. The Public Feedback Loop Pilot was published under the auspices of commitment [113.4](#) made in the [Fifth Open Government National Action Plan](#).

Participating Federal Agencies:

The following four federal agencies participated in the public feedback loop:

- U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau,
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA),
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and
- Small Business Administration (SBA).

Outcomes and Progress:

Of the more than 940 pages of [public comments](#) received, there were 37 specific suggestions that the pilot agencies responded to. Of the 37 suggestions; 7 were already implemented, 11 are in the process of implementation, and 5 are currently under consideration, and the remaining 14 will be considered or discussed in the future. The agencies provided detailed summaries of their responses, outlining the status of each idea, reasons for non-implementation (if applicable), and additional resources for further information.

Expanding the Pilot:

This case study documents the lightweight methodology used for the creation of a successful public feedback loop that additional federal agencies can adapt and use in their public engagement efforts around data collection, use, and transparency.

Data:

Link to Feedback Pilot Results.pdf