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# *Protecting and Advancing Democracy*

Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Protecting Elections and Enhancing Participation: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation**

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**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Electoral Integrity and Voter Participation Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations on actions that should be taken to protect electoral integrity and enhance voter participation in future elections after 2020.

# PROTECTING ELECTIONS AND ENHANCING PARTICIPATION: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
PROTECT ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND ENHANCE VOTER
PARTICIPATION**

**Working Group Members**
Barry Van Lare, Working Group Chair
Edie Goldenberg
Eric Hirschhorn
Peter Hutchinson
Nancy Tate

**THE CHALLENGE**

In November 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) unveiled its [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#). One of these Grand Challenges is "[Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation](#)."

Voting at the federal, state, and local levels is fundamental to American democracy, and citizens must have confidence in electoral systems, processes, and results. Electoral integrity and voter participation are enhanced by (1) ensuring that everyone with a legal right to vote is able to do so; (2) protecting such critical election infrastructure as storage facilities, polling places, and centralized vote tabulation locations; and (3) safeguarding such information and communications technology as voter registration databases, voting machines, and other electoral management systems.

The US Constitution stipulates that state governments have the primary role in the conduct of elections. As a result, the United States has a highly decentralized election administration system, with state and local governments having the primary responsibility for the administration of elections in such areas as:
- Establishing election districts;
- Establishing ID requirements for voting;
- Administering the registration process;
- Selecting election equipment and locating polling places;
- Providing alternatives to in-person voting, including absentee voting, early voting and mail-in voting;
- Conducting elections and certifying results; and
- Addressing threats to election security, particularly cyber threats

Moreover, states and localities may also play a significant role in urging voter participation and in distributing information to assist voters in understanding the ballot and pending issues.

The Constitution also stipulates that the Congress "may at any time by law make or alter" state laws regarding "the time, place, and manner" of electing members of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. The role of the federal government has grown and evolved slowly over the last 60 years or so, becoming involved in civil rights enforcement and oversight of campaign financing for federal races. The 2000 presidential election highlighted problems in local election technology and management and resulted in the Help America Vote Act and funding to states through the creation of the Election Assistance Commission. With the more recent emergence of cyber threats to election security, the federal government has again expanded its role, taking primary responsibility for identifying cyber threats and providing states and localities with assistance in addressing those threats.

The federal role conceivably may change significantly as the Congress considers legislation to respond to voting issues raised by the coronavirus pandemic.

**THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE**

The emergence of the Covid-19 crisis serves to underscore the uncertainty that may unexpectedly challenge our election system. Similarly, it is unclear exactly how cybersecurity issues may challenge the system or the degree to which the process may be undercut by the massive spread of misinformation through the internet. In addition, due to the complex and decentralized nature of our election system, many opportunities always exist for both operational problems and impediments to voter participation.

Most likely, the newly elected or re-elected president will be called upon to address concerns relating to the recently completed election during the transition period as well as during the early days of his administration.

Most immediate may be the need to ensure public confidence in the election results. This will likely mean that a coordinated information strategy will be needed to combat misinformation and provide accurate and timely information on the nature and validity of any issues that may have been identified.

**WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW**

This section provides a brief overview of major existing federal programs, largely as described on the relevant agency websites.

**Federal Election Commission**

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) is the independent regulatory agency charged with administering and enforcing the federal campaign finance law. The FEC has jurisdiction over the financing of campaigns for the U.S. House, Senate, Presidency and the Vice Presidency.

Federal campaign finance law covers three broad subjects:

- Public disclosure of funds raised and spent to influence federal elections
- Restrictions on contributions and expenditures made to influence federal elections
- The public financing of presidential campaigns

The Commission works to protect the integrity of the federal campaign finance process by providing transparency and fairly enforcing and administering federal campaign finance laws.

The FEC has six commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. No more than three of these can be from the same political party. At least four votes are required for any official Commission acts.

**U.S. Election Assistance Commission (Help America Vote Act)**

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) was established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). The EAC is an independent, bipartisan commission charged with developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. The EAC also accredits testing laboratories and certifies voting systems, as well as audits the use of HAVA funds. The EAC provides technical assistance to the states to conduct and protect elections. In 2018

and 2019, the EAC served as the conduit for almost $800 million in grants to states for this purpose. The recently enacted Care and Relief Act of 2020 (CARE Act) provides an additional $400 million in grant funds to help states adjust to the demands imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other responsibilities include maintaining the national mail voter registration form developed in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.

HAVA established the Standards Board and the Board of Advisors to advise the EAC. The law also established the Technical Guidelines Development Committee to assist the EAC in the development of voluntary voting system guidelines.

The four EAC commissioners are nominated by the president, on recommendations from the majority and minority leadership in the US House and Senate, and then confirmed by the Senate No more than two may belong to the same political party. The EAC is required to submit an annual report to Congress as well as testify periodically about HAVA progress and related issues. The Commission also holds public meetings and hearings to inform the public about its progress and activities.

## Federal Voting Assistance Program (Department of Defense)

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) works to ensure that service members, their eligible family members, and overseas citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so, from anywhere in the world. FVAP resources can assist any service member, voting age dependent, or overseas citizen with voting so long as the individual is absent from his or her voting jurisdiction. FVAP.gov has information on state and national voting guidelines, registering to vote, using the Federal Post Card Application, and requesting absentee ballots.

The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) is a form military and overseas voters can use to register to vote and request absentee ballots for the year. Many states allow electronic submission of the FPCA. The FPCA

can be completed by using the FPCA online assistant, filling out the PDF, or picking up a hard copy version from a U.S. embassy or consulate.

The FVAP also can provide a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot if an eligible individual does not receive his or her ballot from the local election authorities.

## Department of Justice
*Voting Section – Civil Rights Division*
The Voting Section within the DOJ's Civil Rights Division enforces the civil provisions of the federal laws that protect the right to vote. Among other things, it enforces the Voting Rights Act, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, the National Voter Registration Act, the Help America Vote Act, and the Civil Rights Acts. DOJ can bring civil or criminal actions against those who violate federal voting right acts.

*Federal Bureau of Investigation*
The FBI works with the Justice Department to enforce the federal voting rights laws enumerated above.

*Foreign Influence Task Force*
The FBI is the lead federal agency responsible for investigating foreign influence operations. In the fall of 2017, the FBI established the Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF) to identify and counteract malign foreign influence operations targeting the United States.

Foreign influence operations have taken many forms and used many tactics over the years. Most widely reported these days are attempts by adversaries—hoping to reach a wide swath of Americans covertly from outside the United States—to use false personas and fabricated stories on social media platforms to discredit U.S. individuals and institutions. Influence operations by adversaries include:
- Criminal efforts to suppress voting and provide illegal campaign financing; and
- Cyberattacks against voting infrastructure, along with computer intrusions targeting elected officials and others.

The FITF is made up of representatives from the FBI's Counterintelligence, Cyber, Criminal, and Counterterrorism Divisions; the task force also coordinates with other FBI divisions as needed. Task force personnel work closely with other U.S. government agencies and international partners concerned about foreign influence efforts aimed at their countries.

Through the FITF, the FBI is taking a three-pronged approach to the threats:

- *Investigations and operations:* The FITF works with FBI field offices across the country to counter the extensive influence operations of our foreign adversaries.
- *Information and intelligence sharing:* The FBI works closely with other intelligence community agencies, as well as with state and local law enforcement partners and election officials, to ensure a common understanding of the threat and a unified strategy to address it.
- *Private sector partnerships:* The FBI considers strategic engagement with U.S. technology companies, including threat indicator sharing, to be important in combating foreign influence actors.

## Department of Homeland Security – Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) works to ensure the physical security and cybersecurity of the systems and assets that support the nation's elections. Known as election infrastructure, this assembly of systems and networks includes but is not limited to:

- Voter registration databases and associated IT systems;
- IT infrastructure and systems used to manage elections (such as the counting, auditing, and displaying of election results, and post-election reporting to certify and validate results);
- Voting systems and associated infrastructure.
- Storage facilities for election and voting system infrastructure; and
- Polling places to include early voting locations.

**National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, Director of National Intelligence**

The Intelligence Community, whose numerous agencies include the CIA and NSA, performs analyses of foreign activities as directed by the President. This can include foreign activities relating to elections, as was the case in late 2016 when the IC prepared an analysis of Russian interference in the November 2016 presidential election.

## KEY APPOINTMENTS

Filling key positions is a critical initial step in any transition, regardless of whether the incoming Administration has been reelected or newly elected. Election-oriented key positions fall into two categories. The first are those federal officials with election-specific responsibilities. Those include:

- Federal Election Commission (currently, 3 vacancies exist); and
- Election Assistance Commission (currently, there are no vacancies).

In both cases, the transition will need to work closely with congressional leaders to fill any current or upcoming vacancies in order to secure acceptable candidates of both parties.

The second category includes officials with broader responsibility but who are also charged with significant responsibility as it relates to elections as well. They include:

- Assistant Attorney General - Civil Rights Division;
- Director, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency;
- Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations; and
- Director of National Intelligence.

Because public confidence is likely to be a critical concern, special attention should be given to potential appointees who bring both significant substantive experience and a nonpartisan reputation.

**KEY POST-ELECTION ACTIONS**

After the election in November, a transition team will be formed whether President Trump is reelected or Joe Biden is elected. Although not directly related to election security *per se*, a critical challenge for this team will be to ensure the integrity of its own computer systems. And, to the extent that the transition presents a public face, it is critical that it be transparent and a source of accurate and trusted information.

Immediately following the election, the newly elected/reelected president should be prepared to publicly address any concerns that emerge as a result of the election and the planned transition. As a result, the transition team should expect to prepare such statements and signal a strong commitment to immediately addressing concerns regarding the 2020 and future elections.

The Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) faces various choices related to assessing and improving the integrity of the election process and/or enhancing voter participation. Essentially, it can:
- Strengthen the resources and support to the federal cyber security infrastructure and highlight the importance of this effort;
- Ensure that adequate funding is provided in order for all federal election duties to be performed effectively;
- Ensure that all key election-related positions are filled in a timely manner, with qualified individuals;
- Seek various legislative requirements that states must meet in regard to future elections of federal officials (various bills have been introduced in previous congressional sessions); and
- Seek to improve the capacity of states by providing needed financial and technical assistance resources. This could include:
  - Increasing federal funding to address deficiencies in state and local election systems, including equipment upgrades, enhanced staff training, etc.;
  - Expanding the capacity of the EAC to provide technical assistance and support to state and local election

officials, including support for the interstate sharing of registration data; and

■ Identifying additional steps to increase state and local capacity to address cyber security threats identified by the federal government.

In addition, state and local governments will be critical to the success of any initiative. As a result, the new administration should actively involve them in developing an action strategy. That might be accomplished in a number of ways, including:

● Convening an intergovernmental working group; and/or
● Creation of a bipartisan commission.

Such a group could analyze the completed election and recommend specific actions to secure future elections and how they can best be addressed within the intergovernmental system.

## CONCLUSION

Adequately addressing election-related challenges is a task that will require the active involvement of all the parties of the intergovernmental system. Although the federal government can act independently in some areas, many significant changes will likely need to take place at the state and local level.

**Electoral Integrity/Voter Participation Working Group**

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# *Protecting the Right to Vote: An Action Plan for 2020*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:
Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter
Participation**

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# *PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE: AN ACTION PLAN FOR 2020*

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**
**ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:**
**PROTECT ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND ENHANCE VOTER**
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# STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

**Immediate Actions Must Be Taken to Ensure an Accessible, Fair, and Safe Election.** In this critical time when threatened by COVID-19, we urge federal, state and local governments to take immediate action to adjust our electoral processes in ways that will allow every eligible citizen to participate in the 2020 elections while ensuring the integrity of the election process and the health of citizens and election workers.

Elections are administered primarily by state and local governments, and they vary widely in their legal and administrative requirements. It is incumbent upon state officials, in particular, to scrutinize their rules and procedures to see what they can do now to address the health and safety concerns of both voters and election workers for the primary and general elections in 2020. Coordination with the local election officials in their state is also important.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution or approach to adapting long time election procedures to this new COVID-19 reality. However, all components of the election administration system need to be reviewed. Those include voter registration, absentee and all mail voting, early in-person voting, and Election Day voting. It is likely that specifications that may have made sense in normal times will need to be changed or temporarily waived. Current election laws and regulations should be reviewed with consideration of voter participation, social equity, and the financial and administrative practicality of various changes. Although this is an enormous task and one that needs to be done on a short timetable, examples of alternative approaches can be found amongst the states themselves and in various studies and reports from other organizations.

We believe that, if they have not done so already, state and local governments need to utilize all the tools at their disposal to address the COVID-19 challenges to the election system. Those include legislative changes, administrative changes, adequate funding, information gathering and sharing, working with new partners, and expanded efforts to keep the public informed.

American democracy, particularly in a time of crisis, is strongest when its citizens actively participate in, and have confidence in, the integrity of the election process.  The goal of every election is to have the maximum participation of voters and to have an election administration system that ensures that every vote is counted and that the results are perceived as fair and legitimate.

Continuing concerns regarding COVID-19 and its possible re-emergence in the fall will, if not addressed, significantly reduce voter participation in the November elections.  Reduced voter registration opportunities will likely decrease voter turnout.  The impact may be particularly great on at-risk groups like the elderly and minority communities, who are not only at increased risk of the disease but also least likely to be comfortable requesting ballots online.

Voters will need expanded options for voting safely.  This includes changes to traditional in person voting and greatly expanded availability of non in person voting options. However, setting up new systems is complex and constrained by limited resources.

**The electoral system is complex.**  Eligibility to vote must be established for every first time voter, and every time a voter moves to a new address.  This means that voter registration is an ongoing process, which has traditionally been done in person.  State laws vary on the documentation that individuals need to show to prove eligibility and on the specifics of the registration process itself.  Online registration and same-day registration are in place in many states, but both still have various voter eligibility requirements.

According to the U.S. Census, nearly 40 percent of 2018 voters used an alternative to the traditional in-person voting on Election Day, with the actual percentage varying greatly by region, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**
**Percent of Vote by Method**

| VOTING METHOD | US TOTAL | Northeast | Midwest | South | West |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| In Person – Election Day | 59.6 | 90.3 | 73.5 | 56.0 | 28.5 |
| In Person – Early Voting | 16.6 | 3.1 | 11.4 | 33.3 | 5.6 |
| By Mail | 23.1 | 6.2 | 14.6 | 9.7 | 65.2 |

*Absentee Voting*

When an absentee ballot is requested, it is completed and typically submitted in advance of Election Day by a voter unable or unwilling to be present at the polls on Election Day:

- o  Variation among the states exists in such areas as what is needed to request a ballot; what, if any, signature verification is needed; when the deadline is for such requests; and what the deadline is in order for the ballot to be counted.
- o  All states will mail an absentee ballot on request. Two-thirds of those states do not require a specific reason. Of the sixteen states that do require a reason, the most common categories are physical absence from the county, disability, and illness. Others include advanced age and work conflicts.
- o  Submission requirements vary among the states as well. In some cases, the deadline is receipt on or before Election Day and in other cases a postmark of Election Day is sufficient.
- o  According to a Reuter's poll, 72 percent of Americans favor universal access to no-excuse absentee voting by mail (April 7, 2020).

*All-Mail Voting*

This form of voting occurs when the primary method of voting is a mail in ballot that is automatically distributed to all registered voters:

- o Five states – Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, Colorado and Utah – mail ballots to all registered voters.
- o California allows individual counties to opt for universal mail voting.
- o All states stipulate the details of how their system works, including detailed provisions to prevent and determine fraudulent votes.

*In-Person Early Voting*

This form of voting occurs when states open selected polling sites for voting in advance of the formal election date:

- o Thirty-nine states allow in-person early voting, most generally in county or local government offices.
- o On average, the early voting period extends for 19 days, ranging from 4 days to 45 days.
- o Many allow full or partial weekend voting, too.

# CONSIDERATIONS & OPTIONS

**Every phase of the election system is being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic—either immediately or because of uncertainty about what lies ahead.** All of these result in voter confusion and anxiety about the voting process, and likely reduce turnout if not addressed. These impacts include but are not limited to:

- The rescheduling of various primary and local elections;
- Changing rules related to those elections, particularly in terms of when mail in ballots can be counted; and
- Cancellation or postponement of traditional in-person voter registration efforts.

**In-person voting on Election Day will and should continue, but additional steps will be required to ensure that it can be done safely.** Doing so will require attention to resolving a number of issues, including the following:

- Location of polling places—They need to be accessible to the voters who rely on them most;
- Staffing—Health and safety concerns are likely to reduce the number of volunteer poll workers, particularly among senior citizens. Additional recruitment efforts will be required, and special precautions will need to be taken for the safety of staff and poll workers;
- Physical configuration—Polling sites will need to be configured in accordance with safety guidelines;
- Physical distancing requirements may significantly slow the voting process and lead to long lines; and
- Early voting is a viable option that should be expanded where possible. Decisions will be needed on the most appropriate locations and number of days available.

**Other options need to be carefully explored and implemented to the largest extent possible.** These include expanded use of absentee voting, universal no-excuse absentee voting, and all-mail voting. Governments

need to work to address the issues associated with absentee and all-mail alternatives that include:

- o Reducing the number of steps to obtain a ballot;
- o Provision of a postage paid return envelope;
- o Reducing the number of signature verification steps on each ballot;
- o Clarifying/relaxing deadline for acceptance of ballots; and
- o Election offices' capability to count major increases in mail-in ballots in a timely manner.

**Steps must be taken to address other critical issues.**  Since expansion of alternatives to in-person voting may impact voter groups differently, social equity must be an important consideration.  Enhanced public education will be required to maximize participation, manage expectations, and instill public confidence. This should emphasize the nonpartisan nature of the changes, and other messages to strengthen voter confidence in the process and the legitimacy of the outcomes. Not all 2020 changes need to be permanent, and they should be assessed for their effectiveness in terms of balancing voter participation and election integrity.

**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

**Changes to the election system in light of the COVID-19 crisis are critically important and highly time sensitive.** Planning, coordination, funding and action at the federal, state and local levels are essential now.

1. **States that have not already done so must act quickly to ensure safe election options, and ones that are sensitive to the needs of a diverse voting public.** States should:

   o Expand online voter registration;
   o Safety adapt existing in-person Election Day voting sites;
   o Expand use of safe in-person early voting opportunities;
   o Simplify absentee ballot procedures;
   o Establish universal no-excuse absentee voting; and
   o Move toward all-mail voting when and where feasible.

2. **As necessary, state officials should utilize special sessions of the Legislature and/or utilization by the Governor or the Legislature of emergency powers to make needed changes or appropriate funds.** They should also authorize staff to investigate options, and to develop or strengthen partnerships with other states, nonprofit or other organizations, and the US Postal Service. And, they should try to approve funding for additional vote counting or other technology.

3. **The federal government must provide assistance to ensure safe and fair elections across the country since state and local election operations have limited resources even in the best of times.** All relevant federal agencies need to be ready to handle their responsibilities in this new environment. This will likely include an expanded role for the US Postal Service in delivering substantially larger numbers of mailed ballots.

4. **The Congress must appropriate funds to assist states and localities** as they grapple with making major changes to their

election systems in such a short period of time.

5. **The media and civil society organizations need to be actively engaged.** Public and nonprofit organizations, working with both traditional and social media, need to develop and share clear, nonpartisan information with the public about the election system changes for the 2020 elections and the options that voters have to safely and fully participate in this important democratic process.

*Resources*

Numerous organizations are already providing information and assistance, which can be useful to election officials and others.

Examples of government resources include:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
    - Recommendations for Election Polling Locations
- Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA):
    - COVID-19 and Elections
- Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP):
    - COIVD-19 updates for service members, their eligible family members, and U.S. citizens abroad
- National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL):
    - COVID-19 and Elections
    - State Quarantine and Isolation Statutes
    - State Fiscal Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- National Governors Association (NGA):
    - Coronavirus: What You Need to Know
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC):
    - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources

Additional private sector resources include:

- Brennan Center
    - https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/how-protect-2020-vote-coronavirus
- Vote.org
    - https://www.vote.org/policy/
- Stanford University
    - https://law.stanford.edu/2020/03/24/ten-recommendations-to-ensure-a-healthy-and-trustworthy-2020-election/
- League of Women Voters / www.vote411.org

*Research Papers on the Integrity of Vote-by-Mail*

Ad Hoc Committee for 2020 Election Fairness and Legitimacy. 2020. "Fair Elections During a Crisis: Urgent Recommendations in Law, Media, Politics, and Tech to Advance the Legitimacy of, and the Public's Confidence in, the November 2020 U.S. Elections. https://www.law.uci.edu/faculty/full-time/hasen/2020ElectionReport.pdf

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
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# *Modernizing and Reinvigorating the Public Workforce: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Modernize and Reinvigorate the Public Workforce**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Modernize and Reinvigorate the Public Service Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for the American government to build ongoing capability and capacity in the public workforce to secure and advance agencies' missions.

# *MODERNIZING AND REINVIGORATING THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE: AN AGENDA FOR 2021*

### *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
MODERNIZE AND REINVIGORATE THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE

**Working Group Members**
Jeff Neal
Joel Aberbach
Mark Abramson
Alan Balutis
Stephen Barr
Don Kettl
John Palguta

**THE CHALLENGE**

The federal government faces unprecedented workforce challenges that put agency missions – including national and homeland security – at risk. When the public needs government to respond to a crisis, it is essential that government has the ongoing capability and capacity to respond to the crisis. After years of lamenting the problem and doing little to solve it, the next President must act. There truly is no time to wait.

The titles of two recent Academy Panel reports capture the most important theme: the federal government's human capital system is broken, and there's no time to wait in fixing it. On its "high risk list" of the government's biggest problems, the U.S. Government Accountability Office has identified strategic human capital—and none of the other 33 areas on that list can be fixed without first fixing the government's people systems. The federal government will not be able to serve the people unless it has the people it needs for the work to be done.

The problem will only grow as the very nature of government's work changes. Automation, and particularly Artificial intelligence (AI), will eliminate some jobs and change the rest. Some jobs, especially those responsible for building strong relationships with stakeholders and managing across boundaries, will become even more important. The pace of change will increase and punish organizations that fail to keep up. Even now, some agencies with critical missions, like FEMA and Customs and Border Protection, can barely hire new employees fast enough to keep up with departures. The Department of Veterans Affairs reports it has tens of thousands of vacancies, many of them frontline physicians, nurses and other medical staff. Other agencies struggle with managing the technology they need to accomplish their work. In the face of growing threats, the government struggles to hire cybersecurity professionals. As more missions depend on partnerships with private contractors and state and local governments, the federal government has too often proven a weak partner because it struggles to hold up its side of the relationship.

At a time when the government needs fresh ideas, it struggles to hire young people. With twice as many employees over 60 years old as under 30, the federal government faces a ticking time bomb that will create workforce issues for years to come. It is only getting worse.

Nor is the workforce the only thing that is aging: the civil service system itself is an antique. Its primary pay setting mechanism was created in 1949. Seventy-year-old rules are worse than a poor fit for the information age—they have produced a Merit System that values compliance with the rules more than merit itself. We've lost sight of the fact that the initial creation of the civil service in 1883 was about outcomes, specifically the creation of an effective and efficient workforce with people hired because they were the most capable of doing the jobs that needed to be done.

It may be tempting to reach for a grand legislative reform package to catch up, but that runs into three problems.

First, there's no support for comprehensive legislation. Second, there is a vast collection of reform proposals but deceptively little evidence about which ones would actually produce the best outcomes. And third, from our careful review, we have concluded that many of the changes we need to make—at least half and, in the estimation of some experts, perhaps three-fourths—can be accomplished by smart administrative steps, supported by data on what works. After all, many of the barnacles encrusting the current system come from Office of Personnel Management regulations, antiquated agency practices, and inflexible collective bargaining agreements, rather than specific requirements of the law.

The good news is that what was created administratively can be transformed administratively. There is no need, and no time, to wait.

The route to reform needs to build on three steps:

- *Mission first.* We need to begin by focusing on what we want government to do, and building the human capital to do it. This requires a federated system in which departments and agencies have substantial autonomy, within a broader set of merit-based government-wide regulations.
- *Principles always.* The merit system principles are as important now as they have ever been.
- *Accountability for both.* What matters most is creating a system that serves the needs of the American people and that ultimately is accountable to those the people elect to govern.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A MODERN FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Building interest in public service and government as a career

Interest in public service is a crucial driver of successfully recruiting new civil service workers. Even students graduating from Public Administration programs often conclude that their best career options lie in the private sector or in nongovernmental organizations. Federal agency recruiting typically does not include paid advertising, and virtually no advertising is done to spark interest in federal jobs.

Most federal agencies advertise almost exclusively via the Office of Personnel Management's USAJobs recruiting web site. While USAJobs provides a central source for federal job announcements, its benefit accrues only to those individuals who are actively looking for information on federal jobs. The typical recent college graduates who are not considering a federal position rarely see information regarding the types of federal jobs, agencies and current openings that would encourage them to apply.

The Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) should establish an adequately funded campaign, initiated by the White House with Presidential leadership and managed by the Office of Personnel Management, to begin to address the problem and put public service back in the mix for job seekers.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Flexible Pay and Job Classification

The federal government pays most employees based upon a job classification and pay system that was designed in 1949. In the 81 years since the "General Schedule" job classification and pay system has been in place, the world of work has radically transformed. The 1950s federal workplace was mostly clerks who processed mountains of paper. The 2020s workplace is filled with knowledge workers whose complex work affects almost every aspect of American life. Using 1950s processes to hire and pay 2020s workers is simply not working. The federal government need not be the highest-paying employer, but it should certainly not be the lowest-paying, and it must be kept up to date.

These processes can be dramatically simplified through regulatory changes (such as reducing the number of job classifications from hundreds to dozens), but this is an instance where a true reengineering will require legislation.

The Administration in 2021 should begin this process with an Executive Order (EO) that makes maximum use of administrative flexibilities to streamline the processes. Once the Executive Order is in place, the Administration in 2021 should assemble the appropriate stakeholders and propose a modern pay and job classification system that is designed to meet the needs of a 21$^{st}$ century workforce.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Hiring reform

Recent Administrations have made changes to federal hiring that address fragments of the hiring process. Those include streamlined hiring authorities, simplified applications, and more involvement of hiring managers in the process. Much remains to be done to have hiring processes that actually work in today's labor market.

The Administration in 2021 should adopt three administrative changes that would make a marked difference, without the need to wait for the Congress to enact comprehensive hiring reform:

- **Significantly expand the use of streamlined hiring authorities.** The Office of Personnel Management has the authority to expand use of "Direct Hire Authority" and other simplified hiring processes. The agency has been reluctant to dramatically expand their use and has been timid in its interpretation of its legal authorities. The next Administration's Executive Order on the Civil Service should direct OPM to extend simplified hiring authorities to the maximum extent permitted by law.

- **Use modern assessment processes to identify high-quality candidates.** Most agencies use canned applicant questionnaires that amount to little more than applicant self-evaluation. Applicants openly admit to lying in their responses to the questionnaires, with many arguing it is the only way to get an interview. The use of applicant questionnaires is so ineffective that it corrupts an already-flawed hiring process. Hiring managers in much of the federal government say they cannot get high quality applicants on the lists of

candidates that are sent for their consideration, even when they know high quality candidates have applied. Virtually all of the assessment process is within the control of the Executive Branch, yet little has been done to address the problem. Modern computer-based assessments, video interviews, and other tools in common use by the private sector are not in common use in government. Even if the government is successful in increasing interest in federal careers, hiring those candidates will be unsuccessful if the assessment crisis is not addressed.

- **Reduce the number of security clearance requirements**. Federal agencies and contractors have recognized for years that the security clearance process is one of the worst bottlenecks in the hiring process. Changes have been made to the process, background investigations have been moved to OPM, then moved out of OPM to the Department of Defense, all in the name of simplifying the process. The most fundamental change the next Administration should make is to reduce the number of positions that require a security clearance. Many positions that never have access to classified information require Secret or Top Secret clearances or equivalent. Employees who have access to employee data solely for processing personnel actions are often subjected to lengthy background investigations. The appearance is that the default decision is to require a clearance if there is any doubt at all. The result is a backlog of background investigations, millions of dollars spent investigating current and potential employees, and delays in the hiring process that can last a year or more. A combination of a reduced number of clearances and new processes such as continuous evaluation of employees, could make the clearance process a minor delay, rather than the showstopper it often becomes.

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS

The Administration in 2021 should make it a priority to:
- **Improve the quality of managers and supervisors in government.** Manager disinterest in the recruiting process is common, with much of the work delegated to Human Resources Specialists who are not experts in the work of the jobs being filled. That leads to applicant screening that is ill-informed and that produces poorly qualified referrals. In addition, many manager and supervisor jobs are filled based upon technical, rather than leadership, skills. The quality of supervision has been identified for many years as a substantial weakness, with training being the typical solution. Training is not enough. Improving the quality of leadership begins with recruiting the right talent for the jobs, then offering appropriate training as needed to fill skills gaps. The Administration in 2021 should make hiring and promoting the right talent a priority, with deployment of better assessments for potential supervisors, training of candidates in the existing workforce before they are selected for formal supervisory positions, and expansion of OPM's leader training capabilities at OPM's exceptional Federal Executive Institute.

- **Identify talent management in government as a presidential priority.** An Executive Order on the Civil Service should be signed on Day One. The EO should not only identify

federal workforce management as a crisis, but also direct maximum use of authority under existing law to develop the modern civil service in line with the recommendations above.

- **OPM should be refocused**, with an emphasis on responsiveness and flexibility in Talent Management. They must:
  - Ensure the OPM Director and General Counsel are accountable for exercising the OPM Director's flexibility
  - Focus adequate existing OPM resources on Agile policy development, including moving resources from internal support functions to policy development
  - Use targeted occupational category and agency-specific flexibilities where needed instead of OPM's historic practice of creating one-size-fits-all solutions that inadequately address critical skills gaps and recruiting challenges.

- **Identify and implement modern assessment processes**, with the goal of eliminating applicant self-assessment questionnaires within one year. The Administration should assign a Joint Committee of the Chief Human Capital Officers and Chief Information Officers Councils, supported by OPM, to identify and implement modern assessment tools and methodologies that will enable agencies to identify and hire high quality candidates.

The elevation of the importance of the public service should begin immediately following the November election, with the President or President-Elect emphasizing their commitment to take steps to lay the groundwork for a modern civil service. This should include delivering an address on public service; naming a nominee to be Director of the Office of Personnel Management prior to inauguration; and establishing an interagency team, within 90 days of the inauguration, to identify pay and hiring flexibilities that can be granted by OPM to address critical requirements and any legislative changes that are required.

**CONCLUSION**

Reinvigorating the civil service is more than a good idea – it is essential for a healthy government. We have experienced years of people in and out of government clamoring for reform, yet most reform efforts have fallen far short of what is necessary. Civil service reform is not going to be front page news, nor is it going to be the issue that will drive voters to the polls. It is, however, an absolute necessity if we are to have an effective, efficient, and equitable government.

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# NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Advancing Information Policy and Use at the Office of Management and Budget*

## *Academy Election 2020 Project*
### Select Task Force:
### Organization of Information Policy and Use at OMB

## ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

## ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of an Office of Management and Budget (OMB)-focused Select Task Force associated with the Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement Grand Challenge. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for how OMB should prioritize information policy and use in 2021.

# ADVANCING INFORMATION POLICY AND USE AT THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

## *A REPORT OF AN SELECT TASK FORCE*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**
**ELECTION 2020 SELECT TASK FORCE:**
**ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION POLICY AND USE AT OMB**

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## THE CHALLENGE

The country is facing unprecedented challenges that public officials at all levels of government need to address quickly, effectively, and decisively. The federal government has a critical leadership role to play in taking on existing and emerging policy challenges during 2021, such as basic health and safety for the nation, while leading economic recovery and renewing public trust in government. Timely, relevant, high-quality information and insights are needed to develop and implement policies that work. And the government will continue to need reliable information to address ongoing medium- and long-term issues such as social justice, climate change, homeland security, infrastructure, and fiscal responsibility. The information government collects from individuals and businesses is critical to addressing nearly every challenge facing our nation today.

The U.S. government currently collects, manages, and disseminates more information from the American public than at any point in its history. This information is intended to support the provision of services and programs, decisions about benefit eligibility, enforcement actions, improvement of operational performance, long-term analysis of program outcomes, statistical indicators measuring the economy and society, and much more. When used responsibly and for achieving social good, this information offers a vital input for decision-makers and a resource for holding government accountable. Conversely, when managed poorly, information collected by the government can cause serious losses of privacy and well-being, as demonstrated by intrusions into federal and non-federal systems.

The center of the federal government's information infrastructure is the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which substantially influences how information is collected, processed, disseminated, and used. OMB is statutorily charged with coordinating policies for data collection, data management, information technology systems, open data initiatives, organizational performance measurement and management, regulatory actions, grants management, financial management, program evaluation, statistical policy, information quality, and privacy. These responsibilities are in addition to OMB's obligation to

assemble the President's Budget, which provides the fuel for the Executive Branch's program and policy priorities, and to strengthen the management of federal agencies.

With rapid advances in data science and technology, widespread use of social media platforms, emergence of machine learning and artificial intelligence, and countless other developments, government agencies must have capable mechanisms for adapting information policy to deploy modern approaches to running programs and providing services to the public, as well as meeting emerging needs. OMB has the potential to revolutionize the ability of federal agencies and policymakers within the Executive Office of the President, Congress, and state and local governments to gain critical insights that can be used to tackle today's and tomorrow's complex problems. To date, for a variety of reasons, that potential has not been fully realized. **Unless action is taken to restructure and reprioritize information policy and use within OMB, the President's ability to make the bold, significant changes across government that address the nation's biggest challenges will be severely diminished.**[1]

Building on recent successful efforts like the Federal Data Strategy and reforms to approaches for performance measurement and management, OMB can more effectively leverage the information that agencies provide to inform the formulation and execution of the federal budget and inform economic recovery activities. But OMB's current organization is fragmented and less effective than it could be when it comes to information policy and use. This has a detrimental effect not just on fulfilling OMB's mission, but also on achieving effective and efficient implementation of important government-wide policies and programs. Now is the time to rationalize, order, and collaborate in a way that eliminates fiefdoms, promotes partnerships, and enables advances in data science and technology to take root in ways that can help our country's leaders succeed in meeting the needs and expectations of the American people.

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[1] The terms information and data are often used interchangeably. For purposes of this paper, the term "information policy and use" is meant to encompass both data and the useful information derived from data.

OMB's fragmentation is inadvertent. Numerous well-intended legislative reforms over several decades added mandate after mandate for OMB to manage, while muddying rather than clarifying lines of authority that aimed to make improvements. OMB's disjointed structure hinders its ability to create effective information policies and help agencies implement an integrated, cohesive strategy for data, evidence, and technology. For example, the President's Management Agenda (PMA), designed to address government-wide management challenges, continues to be led by the Deputy Director for Management (DDM) of OMB. The PMA encompasses cross-agency support functions such as acquisition, grants management, financial management, talent management, and IT. Legislative mandates for reform drive each of these areas, but they all rely heavily on infrastructure investment and the use of information and metrics. Other parts of OMB, however, notably the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) and the Office of Economic Policy (EP), also play significant roles in government-wide policies and practices related to information quality, data, privacy, statistical policy, and program evaluation. At times, the Administrator of OIRA has reported to the Deputy Director for Management, although the Administrator has always operated independently when conducting the regulatory review functions. The Associate Director for Economic Policy nominally reports to the position of Executive Associate Director of OMB, but when that position is vacant, may report to the Deputy Director. **Improved institutionalized processes would help uniformly and effectively integrate these activities into major budget and policy decisions,** supported by OMB's Resource Management Offices (RMOs) and White House policy councils.[2]

Central, prioritized direction, support, and constructive collaboration are critical to achieving any manner of important outcomes, such as improved public health and access to health care; economic recovery and job creation; income, housing and food security; educational opportunity and meaningful workforce training; and effective responses to climate change. Better information management can greatly amplify and accelerate progress in all policy areas.

The effects of OMB's existing structure on information policy and use are felt government-wide. OMB's siloed offices and functions have fuzzy, overlapping jurisdictions but need to collaborate to be effective. For example, the RMOs that oversee the budgets of statistical agencies, such as the Census Bureau or the Bureau of Labor Statistics generally collaborate closely with the Chief Statistician in OIRA. However, there is no single point of responsibility for information policies below the level of the OMB Director.

Exacerbating this problem are wide variations in key positions and roles and responsibilities within the OMB management hierarchy, differing and changing priorities among the political appointees that comprise the OMB leadership team, and uneven allocation of resources within OMB to meet emerging needs. To illustrate, the federal CIO has a broad portfolio (IT modernization and cybersecurity being preeminent), a public external presence, and is a political appointment reporting directly to the Deputy Director for Management. In 2020, the Office of E-Government has over 100 employees.[3] The Chief Statistician of the US also has a broad portfolio (coordinates the entire federal statistical system; ensures the integrity of key statistics such as the census, Principal Federal Economic Indicators, e.g., GDP, trade, employment, the poverty measure; develops standards for official race and ethnicity categories, Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and other official measures; and represents the US internationally at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

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[2] Examples include the Chief Financial Officers Act, Federal Acquisition Reform Act, Chief Human Capital Officers Act, Information Technology Management Reform Act, Federal Information Security Management Act, and Federal Financial Management Improvement Act created new responsibilities and offices to support the OMB management function with reporting internally to the Deputy Director for Management. The E-Government Act of 2002 removed IT oversight and policy from OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) and established a separate Office of E-Government reporting to the Deputy Director for Management. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, Information Quality Act, Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, Confidential Information and Statistical Efficiency Act, and Privacy Act, OIRA remains responsible for the coordination of government-wide policies and oversight of agency implementation for information policy, privacy, data sharing, information quality, and statistical and science policy. OIRA and the Office of E-Government both issue government-wide privacy protection guidance and policies.

[3] Note that this includes personnel supported by the Information Technology Oversight Reform account. See Executive Office of the President. *Congressional Budget Submission, Fiscal Year 2021*. Washington, D.C.: EOP, 2020. Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FY21-Budget.pdf.

Development and the United Nations) and also has a public external presence, but is a career branch chief in OIRA with a staff of five. The Deputy Director for Management allocates millions of dollars annually to cross-agency performance improvement projects and the President's Management Agenda, which supports implementation of critical management priorities. In contrast, the OIRA Administrator has limited funding to support information policy activities or advances in improving access, quality, or uses of data. The Evidence Team, responsible for building critical program evaluation capacity across government is not even a branch – it consists of a small staff and does not even have a member of the Senior Executive Service leading these important government-wide initiatives.

The uneven integration of these initiatives with the preeminent budget activities of OMB further diminishes their impact. The poor coordination and lack of prioritization of information policy, which now spans decades at OMB – Republican and Democratic administrations alike – has resulted in OMB underachieving the President's goals and priorities, supporting agencies in fulfilling their missions, or enabling the American people to have effective tools for holding government accountable.

This gap at OMB also negatively affects government-wide efforts to implement nimble, effective, and modern approaches to leveraging data in ways that improve the lives of the American people, strengthen the economy, and promote equitable treatment of the country's citizens. Outdated systems, structures, methods, and approaches to learning, improvement, and accountability across agencies contribute to the federal government not taking full advantage of the vast amounts of information it collects to inform policies and understand whether programs actually achieve desired results nor help find ways to improve them. In addition, government-wide processes led by OMB – particularly grants, procurement, and performance measurement and management – require agencies, grantees, and contractors to generate enormous amount of data that too often aren't used to improve results. Too often, instead, reporting requirements impose a burden that diverts resources from rather than supporting more productive information sharing, analyses, and implementation activities.

In recent years, Congress repeatedly acknowledged existing limitations in this infrastructure and a growing need for better evidence to inform decisions. For example, the congressional committee report accompanying the law that created the bipartisan U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking asserted:

> *Without evidence, the federal government is an ineffective fiduciary on behalf of the taxpayer. Unfortunately, in many instances, federal decision-makers do not have access to the data necessary to best inform decisions. In such instances, agencies are unable to show the benefits or impacts of the programs they administer and cannot determine what, if any, unintended consequences are created by programs, or whether programs can be improved.[4]*

Notwithstanding subsequent bipartisan reforms to improve the use of data government-wide, such as the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018,*[5] and the development of a Federal Data Strategy,[6] the federal government's information fragmentation and under-coordination limits government's ability to use information reliably and responsibly to support evidence-informed policymaking, data-driven government operations and management, and science-based regulatory decision-making.

The federal government is now at a critical crossroad. Below we present a vision for how positive change at OMB can result in major improvements in the government's ability to advance critical priorities.

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[4] Committee Report on House Bill 114-211. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/114th-congress/house-report/211/1?overview=closed

[5] P.L. 115-435. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ435/PLAW-115publ435.pdf.

[6] *Federal Data Strategy*. Available at: https://strategy.data.gov

**VISION FOR EFFECTIVE INFORMATION POLICY AND USE**

A strong information policy apparatus at OMB enables program managers and officials across government to have the tools to collect, manage, prepare, and use data for informed decision-making at all levels. It also promotes OMB coordination across its own divisions and units to provide agencies consistent support, guidance, and resources. It facilitates new technology and modern analytic approaches being integrated to address emerging needs. And it enables the availability of reliable, valid information that can support decision-makers in implementing services for the American public who, in turn, have resources to hold government accountable.

The Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking proclaimed a vision that we echo for the purposes of information policy writ large in government: where "rigorous evidence is created efficiently, as a routine part of government operations, and used to construct effective public policy."[7] The statement is applicable to the entirety of government information policy and practice, where the systems, people, processes, and institutions must work within a common ecosystem to produce meaningful and relevant insights for all manner of decisions.

The Select Task Force recommendations expand on that vision to encompass a broad array of data and information-based activities that will lead to better government. A few examples of where improvements are needed:

- **Modernizing the delivery of benefits.** Beneficiaries of anti-poverty programs must navigate and complete complex federal paperwork to apply for benefits and insurance programs, but those programs should have access to core information about eligibility through administrative data already in government systems. Improving the infrastructure for benefit eligibility determinations requires identification and agreement on common data elements, approval of federal paperwork and forms, IT systems and infrastructure, and funding allocations. At OMB in 2020, improving this infrastructure falls under the domain of numerous

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[7] CEP, 2017, p. 1.

divisions and policy officials, without a clear indication of who would spearhead improvements if any were proposed. This is further complicated by many of the programs being administered at the state level. Collaboration is ad hoc, and when disagreements arise, they can take a long time to resolve, requiring many decisions by the Director.

- **Improving data quality, access, and use.** The vast investment in new IT systems often masks the challenges with data quality and capabilities for analyzing data to make it useful. While agencies have focused attention and resources on modernizing their IT infrastructures, they have not devoted enough attention to the activities that make their data so valuable, such as creating inventories; linking data securely to create new insightful information on operations, services, and societal outcomes; assuring that their data are high quality, particularly when it is collected from state, local and tribal entities; adequately resourcing capacity for data analytics, evaluations, and program use of evidence; and providing appropriate public access to open data and secure, restricted access to important research data. The responsibility at OMB for making sure this happens is split between various RMOs, OIRA, and OCIO.

- **Partnering with states and localities.** State and local implementation partners for federal programs may lack clear incentives to improve how they share and use information collected by federal agencies. These data inform policy makers on changes in the well-being of our population and the effect of measures taken to strengthen the economy. For example, administrative records for anti-poverty programs, including many operated by states on behalf of the federal government such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Assistance for Woman, Infants, and Children Program (WIC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), offer insights into the government policies intended to improve mobility. Longitudinal data systems in education provide valuable information about educational attainment that can be linked to workforce outcomes that may relate to economic conditions. Little attention is paid to how these intergovernmental

partnerships can be improved with mutually beneficial uses of the data. These issues have significant privacy and information-security components. But these are just a few of the many examples where stronger intergovernmental partnerships could reap enormous benefits. There is no area in OMB focused specifically on developing these relationships.

- **Building capacity for rigorous evaluations of spending and regulatory policies.** Agencies should accelerate their efforts to develop capacity for scientifically rigorous evaluation of the longer-term effects of federal investments and regulatory activities. More studies are needed such as those conducted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 12 communities receiving different types of services, including vouchers, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, and typical services or supports. To conduct the evaluation, HUD needed access not only to its own administrative records, but also income and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), child welfare data provided by states to HHS, and new primary data collection conducted by evaluators. Results from the project provided compelling evidence that housing subsidies had significant and cost-effective impacts, relative to other interventions. To replicate similarly valuable studies, OMB offices such as the RMOs, OIRA, and the Evidence Team would need to coordinate much more closely in order to build this capacity and push forward to keep the focus on high priority areas. There is no institutional mechanism for doing this.

- **Coordinating with other components of the Executive Office of the President (EOP).** Other organizational elements of the EOP, such as the Office of Science and Technology Policy, have an important role in pushing agencies ahead in better utilization of new technologies as they rapidly develop in the private sector. But many technologies, such as artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and others need to be supported by clear policies and integrated into existing ethical and quality frameworks. With the current fragmentation within OMB, there is not a single point of coordination with other EOP elements, leading to loss of

productivity, less effective efforts, and potentially redundant or insufficient policies.

Recognizing OMB's critical role, the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking specifically recommended improvements to OMB for coordinating government-wide data and evidence initiatives, or information policy.[8] The Evidence Commission recognized that a strong coordination function within OMB was imperative in order to successfully address cross-cutting research and policy questions in an effective and efficient way. This Select Task Force concurs, while noting the problem is more expansive than acknowledged by the Evidence Commission, because the information policy gaps are not limited to the generation of "evidence." Focused attention is needed to consider how OMB can and should most effectively organize its own information policy and other priority activities in 2021 and beyond. OMB can provide more effective leadership across the Executive Branch, using available tools, such as the President's Management Agenda, interagency councils, IT modernization funds, learning agendas, guidance memoranda, regulatory oversight, and the budget process with better internal coordination.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2021, the administration should build on recent progress in addressing gaps in information policy, while also accelerating these activities to amplify the priority of improved information utilization to support every agency's mission and the President's priorities. With the unprecedented challenges facing the country, gaps in information and information policy coordination should be quickly addressed. Step one is to rationalize OMB's information infrastructure to maximize OMB's value and role in supporting and directing agencies, including recruiting

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[8] Behind the scenes, the Evidence Commission members, many who were familiar with OMB's structure, considered and advocated for a stronger recommendation that would direct OMB to implement a new organizational unit, bringing together siloed functions related to information policy, evidence, performance management, and privacy. See N. Hart and S. Martinez. "Recommendation Memo #7: Enhancing Collaboration in the Federal Evidence Ecosystem." Memo to CEP Commissioners from CEP Staff. Washington, D.C.: CEP, 2017. Available at: http://datafoundation.org/s/Compendium-of-CEP-Staff-Decision-Memos-1.pdf.

Program Associate Directors, Branch Chiefs, and others with data literacy skills and an understanding of data analytics.

The following consensus recommendations from the Select Task Force are based on the collective experience and expertise of Task Force members, all of whom previously worked at OMB in career or political roles during both Republican and Democratic presidencies. While members may differ on some of the details of these recommendations, they concur on the importance of OMB leadership, coordination, and support across the entire government in the areas addressed in this report. Because much of the statutory groundwork is already laid, many of the important actions needed to bring about meaningful change and effective governing are now administrative, requiring no new legislation or, at most, some legislative fine tuning over time. Most of the necessary actions center on the leadership, goals, structure, and capacity of OMB.

## Prioritize Information Policy for Presidential Appointees at OMB

*The President should nominate a Director, Deputy Director, and Deputy Director for Management who commit to prioritizing and improving OMB's information policy and use responsibilities.* OMB's political leadership positions are critical to ensuring the priorities of OMB are clear to the agency's staff, including framing the processes and procedures to address major challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and planning for economic recovery. Aspects of information policy, including the role of data and evidence, should be reinforced in the budgetary, regulatory, and other policymaking processes. The OMB Director and other political leaders should clearly and repeatedly emphasize to OMB staff and federal agencies the role of information policy and use in improving government operations.

- **Why is this needed?** The OMB Director sets the tone and holds the leadership team accountable for advancing presidential priorities. Setting and achieving goals for better agency use of high-quality information are important elements for sustaining improved government-provided services, benefits, and investments in economic recovery, mobility, social justice, and the

environment. Sustainability also requires organizational and cultural change at OMB and across government. Without a clear direction and continued emphasis from the top, institutional change is not likely to occur.

- **What characteristics should the officials have?** OMB political leadership should strongly affirm interest and willingness to be held accountable for OMB's information policy functions and commit to advancing the activities that will improve the ability of information policy to be coordinated and cohesive and to integrate needed investments, evaluations, and meaningful outcome measures into the budget and regulatory processes.

- **How should the OMB Director signal the priority?** OMB political leadership should tell Congress and OMB staff at the outset of the next presidential term that data, evidence, and science are essential elements for effective implementation of government programs that meet the needs of the American people and to promote public trust in government. Then, the OMB Director and the political leadership should continue to incorporate these elements into the day-to-day activities of OMB and its interaction with agencies and other stakeholders (e.g., Congress).

## Reorganize OMB Information Policy Activities for Effective Coordination and Clarity

*The OMB Director should establish a new position—Assistant Director for Information Policy—to oversee, manage, and coordinate relevant activities across OMB's divisions and offices.* OMB currently has an Assistant Director for Budget, which is a high-level career position with responsibility for coordinating all budget related activities at OMB in order to produce the President's Budget and support government-wide budget execution. (An Executive Associate Director, a political appointee, has at times held an oversight role in this area, too.) The position has cross-cutting authority across all OMB offices. A companion position related to information policy and use should be established. This allows a point of responsibility and coordination that can bring together the disparate elements of OMB and be accountable for integrating information

policies across disciplines and closely coordinating with the budget function to assure that budget formulation incorporates the need for or results of rigorous evaluations, high-quality metrics, resource investments, and technological innovation. The position can also help assure that the Regulatory Agendas and Learning Agendas[9] of agencies are in sync. That is, if an agency is planning major regulatory actions such as evaluating existing regulations or proposing new ones, it should be including any scientific studies and data that inform the regulations as part of its Learning Agenda and the budget should reflect the resources needed to carry out those studies. Currently, budget decisions don't always provide resources to evaluate regulatory (off-budget) outcomes that enable agencies to learn and improve future regulations.

**Why is this position needed?** Creating a senior level official to integrate and align information policy functions can overcome the current challenges of coordinating the procedural information policy work across multiple political appointees, divisions, and offices without a focal point. A clearly recognized leadership role and position can support capturing policy and program improvements, while providing OMB career staff continuity and an institutional framework to resolve OMB fragmentation on this issue. While an existing position could be assigned the "lead role," the history of fiefdoms on information policy at OMB suggests there is no

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[9] Learning Agendas are described in OMB Memorandum 19-23 as follows, "The Evidence Act requires that agencies' strategic plans include a section on evidence building to be developed in conjunction with the agency's process of updating its strategic plan every four years. These evidence-building plans are systematic plans for identifying and addressing priority questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of the agency. Thus, evidence building plans are multi-year learning agendas that provide an evidence-building roadmap to support effective and efficient agency functioning. Learning agendas offer the opportunity to use data in service of addressing the key questions an agency wants to answer to improve its operational and programmatic outcomes and develop appropriate policies and regulations to support successful mission accomplishment. They identify, prioritize, and establish strategies to develop evidence to answer important short- and long-term strategic questions (i.e., questions about how the agency meets its mission(s), including about how programs, policies, and regulations function both individually and in combination) and operational questions (i.e., questions about the agency's operations like human resources, grant-making procedures, financial systems and tracking, and internal processes)."

position currently suited to the capacity. This position could also serve as the OMB liaison for EOP appointees outside of OMB looking to work with OMB on data, technology, innovation, and related matters. This position should also work with Congress on important administration initiatives around information policy.

- **Who should serve in the role?** The individual selected for this position, particularly at its inception, should be familiar with OMB history and culture relevant to addressing siloed and fragmented policies. In addition, the individual should have knowledge and expertise related to the range of relevant information policy functions to include, but not be limited to, data governance, program evaluation, statistical policy, data infrastructure, performance management, information technology, and privacy.

- **Should this be a political appointment?** Initially, this position could be a political appointment, which would enable rapid progress and appropriate stature within the organization to promote change. However, a senior career official would help sustain the role across administrations to provide long-term continuity and institutionalization. One approach would be to start the position as a political appointment, with a career deputy, and then after a few years, transition the position to a career appointment to institutionalize the new approach.

- **Is a formal reorganization necessary at OMB?** No. The proposed modification can be achieved without moving existing offices out of their current positions or chains of command. A formal reorganization would likely be unnecessarily disruptive and delay much-needed improvements. Rather, a small career staff should be assembled to report to the Assistant Director and Deputy Assistant Director to support the coordination function.

- **Who should the Assistant Director report to?** The Director – the Assistant Director would coordinate with the Executive Associate Director, Deputy Director, and Deputy Director for Management.

**Coordinate Information Policy and Practice within the Executive Office of the President**

*Within the first 100 days of the Administration, the Assistant Director for Information Policy should identify OMB responsibilities for information policy and practice and inform the other Executive Office of the President (EOP) components of OMB's roles and responsibilities in relation to the other components.* The Assistant Director should then facilitate a joint-EOP component memorandum to federal agencies outlining the vision, intent, and prioritization of information policy and practice, including to support evidence-building activities and evidence-based decision-making.

- **Why is this coordination needed?** With the establishment of a new leadership role at OMB and the onboarding of new political appointees, a coordinated approach reduces duplication of effort and maximizes the strengths of each relevant component of the EOP. A clear, consistent message from each component on information policy also ensures OMB staff and federal agencies are able to advance policies and priorities within the outlined vision and framework across the range of delivery units (e.g., 18F, United States Digital Service, General Services Administration Centers of Excellence) and agency organizational structures.

- **What EOP components should be included?** Office of the Vice President, OMB, Domestic Policy Council, Council on Environmental Quality, National Economic Council, Council of Economic Advisers, Office of American Innovation (or its successor), Office of Public Engagement, Office of Science and Technology Policy, National Security Council, Office of National Drug Control Policy, and any newly-established components.

- **Should there be on-going coordination?** The Assistant Director for Information Policy should set up an on-going coordination task force consisting of EOP components. Other agencies with key data sets such as Treasury, the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and HHS, could engage with the task force on an as-needed basis.

# LEVERAGING EXISTING ACTIVITIES

Several productive information and data-related activities are underway in OMB to support federal agencies in better leveraging their data. Below are some recommended ways to boost these activities in support of presidential priorities:

- *Reinvigorate and continue the trajectory of the Federal Data Strategy, under the leadership of the new Assistant Director for Information Policy.* OMB led the development of a Federal Data Strategy during 2018-2019 as part of the President's Management Agenda, with guiding principles and an annually updated action plan for agencies.[10] In 2019 and 2020, the strategy was co-led in OMB by the Chief Statistician in OIRA and Chief Information Officer in the Office of E-Government, under the direction of the Deputy Director for Management, with other co-leads coming from the Office of Science and Technology Policy, Department of Commerce, and Small Business Administration. A key element of the strategy is to push agencies to make their data more accessible in order to leverage that information to improve programs and regulatory outcomes, and to improve their program management and regulatory policy through informed decision-making. In 2021, the administration should signal the continuation of aspects of the strategy, including by identifying a subset of priority actions for agencies to implement that support pandemic response, economic recovery, and other administration priorities.

- *Evidence Act implementation activities should proceed, with a coordinated approach for implementation led by the new Assistant Director for Information Policy.* With passage of the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018,* OMB acquired several statutory responsibilities and mandates based on unanimous recommendations from the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking.[11] These built on existing authorities from the Paperwork Reduction Act, Information Quality Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act, E-Government Act, Privacy Act, GPRA Modernization Act, and

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[10] *Federal Data Strategy.* Available at: https://strategy.data.gov.
[11] P.L. 115-435.

other information policy statutes. Coordinated OMB guidance and technical assistance on implementation of this important law is a linchpin for agency success in implementing the law consistent with congressional intent and the Evidence Commission's vision. In 2021, the administration should set clear expectations for continued progress at agencies in implementing initial guidance on the Evidence Act and should prioritize issuance of delayed regulations and guidance under the coordination of the new Assistant Director for Information Policy.

- ***Establish a mechanism through the internal quarterly President's Management Agenda update in which senior leaders from across OMB meet to discuss major management initiatives, including information management initiatives.*** Many of the management initiatives include a significant information policy or data component and have synergies with other activities that should be more integrated across OMB. A quarterly (or more frequent) update at which senior OMB leaders discuss major initiatives and ensure awareness, assess progress, and identify further opportunities for greater collaboration, synergy, and accelerated improvement will help facilitate the cross-cutting approach needed to solve the complex issues with which the country is dealing.

## OTHER ACTIONS DURING THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF 2021

Complementing the recommendations above, the Select Task Force suggests the following series of specific actions within the first 100 days of the Administration in 2021 to reinforce information policy and utilization priorities:

- ***Inform the relevant CxO councils of the new coordinated approach.*** OMB should convene the major cross-agency councils (e.g., Chief Information Officers Council, Chief Data Officers Council, Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, Privacy Officers Council, Evaluation Officers Council, Chief Human Capital Officers Council, Chief Acquisition Officers Council, Chief Financial Officers Council, Performance Improvement Council, Regulatory Working Group), in addition to agency

general counsels, to emphasize the need for coordination, collaboration, and cooperation on the administration's priorities. In addition, OMB should clearly delineate roles and responsibilities, including how relevant officials in agencies can most effectively approach OMB for information policy and utilization support and guidance.

- *Initiate a review of the formal Information Collection Budget* in OIRA to determine a strategy for better utilizing this resource for achieving the administration's goals on evidence-building activities. Among other goals of this review, OMB can consider how existing government-wide processes for procurement, grants management, and reporting generate information that varies in level of quality, burden, and utility.

- *Assess OMB capacity and allocate sufficient resources for Information Policy*. OMB leadership should review the organization's investment in information policy activities to determine if gaps in capacity exist. Should gaps be identified, OMB should reallocate resources internally, including limited moving of some positions or functions, if necessary,[12] and request sufficient resources in the Fiscal Year 2022 President's Budget to address any remaining capacity limitations to support implementation of mandates assigned to OMB.

- *Improve agency accountability for Information Policy.* OMB should hold high-level agency officials accountable for advancing important priorities and for collecting, using, and sharing data and other evidence as needed to make progress on those priorities. To achieve meaningful improvements in health, housing, education, jobs, economic success, and climate progress, agencies must "build muscle" consisting of more intelligent systems and evidence-based approaches to designing, running, and evaluating programs and regulations. Establishing high-level cross-agency task forces of

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[12] Some reallocations that have been positively discussed during the past two administrations, but never acted upon, include creating a second Deputy Associate Director position in OIRA for the Chief Statistician and moving OIRA's information policy functions under that position to increase visibility and emphasis, moving the Evidence Team out of EP to OIRA, and combining the privacy functions of the Office of E-Government and OIRA in either office.

senior agency political leaders who have the necessary span of control over relevant functions (e.g., Deputy Secretaries), and who are supported by senior agency career officials is needed to effect change in agencies. OMB should work with the Office of Personnel Management and agencies to prioritize recruitment of individuals with data, analytics, evaluation and technology expertise who can be held accountable for improving agency capacity to utilize data and evidence to improve measurable results.

- *Focus attention within OMB on building relationships with state, local, and tribal governments.* Improvements in information access, use, and quality are often dependent on the willingness and ability of intergovernmental partners to participate in initiatives. Oftentimes, state and local governments receive mixed directions and redundant requirements from agencies, particularly on information reporting. In addition, OMB could work with agencies to devise ways to increase the capacity of state and local governments to use data to improve the administration of federal programs. Although a single agency is not in a position to resolve these issues, OMB is able to tackle these cross-agency discrepancies. When the federal government shows a willingness to work with state, local and tribal governments and listen to some of the big issues that are caused by a lack of federal coordination, everyone benefits when that results in better program administration and measurably improved outcomes for benefit recipients.

- *Devise a process for future OMB reform planning with the National Academy of Public Administration and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.* OMB leadership could call for the National Academy of Public Administration and/or the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to support convenings to plan for further reforms. As independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit organizations chartered by the U.S. Congress to improve government performance and scientific progress, respectively, these entities could serve as partners with OMB leaders to facilitate

multi-stakeholder dialogues and plans for further organizational change that may be needed at OMB in coming years.

## CONCLUSION

OMB is a critical linchpin for the achievement of important policy priorities across government. OMB's operations and effectiveness can be significantly improved, just as OMB expects every federal agency to adapt and improve. Cultural and organizational barriers that impede OMB's success on informational policy can be addressed. Resources currently divided among the management, budget, and information and regulatory policy functions of OMB can be better coordinated. Improving OMB's role in information policy and utilization is a necessity for effectively accomplishing the administration's goals in 2021 and beyond.

OMB is an essential institution that should not run on 'auto pilot' just because the nation is in crisis. On the contrary, the crisis demands that OMB undertake change to raise its and government-wide attention to information and program evaluation matters. The time for change is now so the country can make meaningful improvements in people's lives sooner rather than later.

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# NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Engaging Americans & Increasing Public Trust: An Agenda for 2021 and Beyond*

***Academy Election 2020 Project***
**Working Group:**
**Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement**

## ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

## ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for new models for citizen-government engagement.  An earlier paper of the Working Group focused on new opportunities to use greater collaborative governance in the United States..

# ENGAGING AMERICANS & INCREASING PUBLIC TRUST: AN AGENDA FOR 2021 AND BEYOND

*A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
DEVELOP NEW APPROACHES TO PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND
ENGAGEMENT

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**THE CHALLENGE**

Our country faces a crisis of national confidence in its governance processes. This crisis has deep roots that have grown silently for several decades. A recent report by a national Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship identified "a fragmented media environment, profound demographic shifts, artificial intelligence and other technological advances, economic inequality, centralized power, and climate change" as contributing to this crisis. And these stressors have reached a crescendo this year – a presidential impeachment trial; the nation's fitful response to the health, economic, and societal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; and widespread protests in virtually every corner of our country in response to police brutality toward Black Americans. Each of these has brought into a clearer focus the roots of our crisis of confidence— including poorly performing institutions and social inequity—that hinder our ability to address challenges in an effective and efficient manner.

The commission concludes: "Overall distrust of the federal government has become a persistent marker of American politics. . . . More recently, our trust in one another has also begun to show signs of decline. . . Yet the data also show that Americans do not accept this state of affairs. . . Eighty-four percent of Americans think that the level of confidence we have in the government can be improved, and 86 percent think that we can improve the level of trust we have in one another."

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW

Two multi-year commissions recently issued final reports that provide important insights and recommendations that directly inform the public dialog on revitalizing Americans' engagement in democratic life. One, a federal commission, was mandated by law to examine the role of public service in American life – military, national service, and public service.[1] The second, a national commission sponsored by the American Academy for Arts & Science (AAAS), examined the state of democratic citizenship.[2] Interestingly, both identify many of the same underlying challenges to democratic ideals, and both offer several recommendations that are remarkably similar.

Although both commissions focus on the citizen-government interface and reforms to political institutions and processes, they also emphasize the role of institutions of civil society – such as nonprofits, houses of worship, and social clubs – as important elements of democratic life. And they emphasized how essential being an active citizen is to a healthy democracy. The AAAS commission probably says it the best: "A broad ethical definition of citizenship focuses on participation in common

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[1] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (March 2020). *Inspired to Serve,* Final Report. Retrieved at: https://inspire2serve.gov/sites/default/files/final-report/Final%20Report.pdf

[2] Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship (June 2020). *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century.* Final Report. American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Cambridge, MA. Retrieved at: https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report

life, contributions to the common good, and efforts to serve common interests."

This paper focuses on the public administration aspects of contemporary governance challenges.  It does not offer insights on important issues related to voting, political disengagement, and redistricting. These are the venue of political agents. Rather, we focused on issues in the realm of public administrators and their partners: improving the responsiveness of institutions, expanding the capacity to bridge differences, and creating a commitment to democracy through education and service.

**Potential Models for Improving Citizen-Government Engagement**

We identified several models in use in the U.S. and elsewhere that may serve as inspiration:

- *White House-Level Leadership.* The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was the George W. Bush Administration's marquee initiative to build bridges between the federal government and nonprofits, including religious organizations. It created counterparts in federal agencies and worked with governors' offices across the country to create points of contact, as well. (It was continued in the Obama Administration with a lower profile and the addition of an advisory council. The Trump Administration

downgraded the office to an initiative within the Office of Public Liaison)[3].

The Obama Administration also created two higher profiles offices that engaged the public. The first was the Office of Public Engagement, which supported his marquee initiative of creating an open and inclusive government and involving Americans in policymaking. This office saw itself as a communications mediator between the public and the government, sponsoring initiatives such as a petition-the-government website.[4] The second was the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation. That office focused on specific social issues and developed tools and techniques that would get better results for people and communities in need, such as pay-for-success bonds.[5] It promoted opportunities for national service and volunteerism and championed the use of evidence-based policy. It was abolished by the Trump Administration.

- *Citizen Assemblies.* A citizen assembly is a body comprised of citizens selected at random to be representative of a jurisdiction, to deliberate on an issue of local or national importance. The goal is to foster rational and reasoned dialogue and restore trust in the political process.

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[3] Wikipedia (n.d.). Retrieved at:,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House_Office_of_Faith-Based_and_Neighborhood_Partnerships#Under_George_W._Bush
[4] Centre for Public Impact (2016). Case Study. Retrieved at:
https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/public-engagement-usa/
[5] Obama White House Archive (n.d.). *The President's Social Innovation Agenda.* Retrieved at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/sicp/about

It has been used successfully in several European countries, most notably Ireland, to help resolve contentious issues.[6]

- *Deliberative Democracy Forums*. According to Participedia, "Deliberative forums are a space in which an issue or problem is introduced in a manner that prompts thoughtful consideration and discussion so that a consensus may be achieved around the steps, approaches, or options available for its resolution."[7] For example, the National Issues Forums -- a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored public forums – brings together people from various walks of life to reason and talk about common problems, with the hope of creating a common understanding, if not agreement, about different public policy issues.[8]

- *What Works Cities.* The Bloomberg "What Works Cities" initiative is a multi-year effort to create a critical mass of analytic talent in 100 mid-size cities around the country to foster evidence-based decision making at the local level.[9]  It involves piloting analytic initiatives to solve local problems as well as a cross-city network of young professionals who share best practices. The initiative also sponsors a certification program that other communities can benchmark against. Communities compete to receive technical assistance or grants for capacity building. This initiative could serve as a model for a philanthropic effort in the realm of citizen engagement.

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[6] Wikipedia (n.d.). Retrieved at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27_assembly
[7] Participedia (n.d.). Retrieved at: https://participedia.net/method/4345 . Note: Participedia is a useful resource for a wide range of citizen engagement resources.
[8] National Issues Forum (n.d.). Retrieved at: https://www.nifi.org/
[9] Bloomberg Philanthropies (n.d.). What Works Cities. Retrieved at: https://whatworkscities.bloomberg.org/

- ***Federal Networks of Volunteers.*** There are a series of existing federal volunteer networks (IRS's volunteer tax assistance program, National Park Service volunteers-in-parks program, etc.) as potential models and practices currently in use. In addition to agency-specific volunteer programs, there are around 300,000 Americans involved with AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Peace Corps.[10] In addition, there are ad hoc volunteer opportunities, such as the cross-agency citizen scientist program where individuals can volunteer to help solve science-related challenges.[11]

**Examples of Current Practices for Meaningful Engagement**

- ***Use of Technology for Town Meetings***. In the U.S., engaging the people in the policy decision-making process has been done on a larger scale by deploying technology. In 1999, the non-partisan Americans Discuss Social Security initiative launched a series of forums that engaged more that 50,000 Americans in all 50 states and created dialogue with elected officials and policy experts on the topic of Social Security reform. These 21st Century Town Meetings and the collective decisions of the participating public gave policymakers in both the Senate and the House crucial input and political cover that influenced their debates, culminating in the decision to raise the annual cap on payroll taxes.

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[10] Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, Final Report, pg. 44.
[11] CitizenScience.gov. Retrieved at: https://www.citizenscience.gov/#

- ***National Dialogue on Mental Health.*** Another example in the U.S. took place after the school shootings in Sandy Hook in 2012, when President Obama called for a national dialogue on mental health. Creating Community Solutions produced resources for local and state-level groups to lead citizen deliberations, and tens of thousands of people took part in dialogues. As a result, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (within the Department of Health and Human Services) awarded community grants totaling $5 million to cross-sector partnerships to bring civic engagement and mental health first aid training into their cities. In addition, municipal governments, school systems, jails, and police departments created policies and deployed resources in line with citizen-established priorities.

- ***EPA Local Government Strategy Series.*** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has created a series of background papers emphasizing local energy saving by collaboration on audits with the private sector. Its public power utilities survey found that energy prices are lower for consumers in nonprofit and public power utilities. The federal government can use such approaches to provide foundational information to incentivize states toward community problem-solving on renewable energy or other public issues.[12] These

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[12] Environmental Protection Agency, "Energy Resources for State and Local Governments." Webpage. Retrieved at: https://www.epa.gov/statelocalenergy/local-government-strategy-series; See also: American Public Power Association: https://www.publicpower.org/our-members

are similar to the Issues Guide developed to conduct deliberative forums.[13]

- ***National Research Council approach to reducing local "food deserts."*** The federal government can incentivize states toward community problem-solving on local and co-production of food to ameliorate food deserts, prepare for supply chain disruptions, and adapt to changing growing conditions. See, for example, the National Research Council's research on ameliorating food deserts through local cooperative community co-production.[14]

- ***Fourth National Action Plan for Open Government***. Every two years, the Administration develops an action plan of specific commitments it will accomplish to further Open Government. The current plan, released in February 2019, "outlines a selection of Trump Administration objectives to make government information more open and accessible for developers, academics, entrepreneurs and everyday Americans–ultimately fostering increased private-sector innovation, more advanced scientific research, stronger economic growth, improved public service delivery, and greater insight into United States Government operations."[15]

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[13] National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (2016). "Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums." Retrieved at: http://ncdd.org/rc/item/11342/

[14] National Center for Biotechnical Information, National Institutes of Health, "Ameliorating Food Desert Conditions." Retrieved at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK208027/

[15] White House (2019). *The Open Government Partnership: Fourth Open Government National Action Plan for the United States* (February). Retrieved at: https://open.usa.gov/assets/files/NAP4-fourth-open-government-national-action-plan.pdf

- *Use of Advances in Technology.* Artificial or machine intelligence is now being used to facilitate wide-scale surveys and policy deliberations. In 2015, when Taiwan was wrestling with whether and how to allow the ride-sharing company Uber to operate, the government turned to an outside facilitator who used a tool called pol.is to engage thousands of citizens and stakeholders and then generate a series of recommendations around broadly agreed upon principles. The government bundled those into a new regulation.

## Reassessing Legal Authorities That May Be Barriers to Building Bridges

- *Reduce Barriers to Internet Access*. Municipal broadband has been outlawed or blocked in 25 states.[16] In 2010, the Federal Communications Commission recommended enhancing municipal broadband and internet access but little action has been taken to date.[17] The COVID-19 pandemic's stay-at-home mandate has vividly demonstrated the imperative that broadband be an essential part of an operational economy, everywhere in the nation. The federal government can incentivize community problem-solving via internet access.

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[16] Kendra Chamberlain (2020). *Municipal Broadband is Roadblocked or Banned in 22 States.* Retrieved at: https://broadbandnow.com/report/municipal-broadband-roadblocks/
[17] Federal Communications Commission (2000). Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability: Second Report. Retrieve at: https://transition.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Orders/2000/fcc00290.pdf

- ***Reduce barriers to government interaction with citizens.*** Revisit constraints at the federal level that are associated with the Federal Advisory Committee Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act. See studies and recommendations by the Administrative Conference of the U.S.[18]

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[18] Administrative Conference of the United States (2011). Recommendation 2011-7, "The Federal Advisory Committee Act – Issues and Proposed Reforms," Retrieved at: https://www.acus.gov/research-projects/federal-advisory-committee-act-%E2%80%93-issues-and-proposed-reforms ; and Recommendation 2012-4, "The Paperwork Reduction Act." Retrieved at: https://www.acus.gov/research-projects/paperwork-reduction-act

**RECOMMENDATIONS: A Vision and Agenda**

Democracy is based on trust. However, over the past few decades, Americans have broken trust with key societal institutions – government, religious, media, and civil society. More recently, we have begun to break trust with each other. We need to rebuild trust at all levels of society. Democracy cannot work without trust in our institutions and each other. Following are some recommendations to begin the process. They are just a beginning.

Our vision is to revitalize American democracy by restoring trust in each other, our civil institutions, and our government. The agenda to act on this vision is five-fold:

- The president must demonstrate national leadership by dedicating attention and commitment to revitalizing American democracy.
- Elected and appointed leaders at all levels of government must take specific actions to increase engagement with, and responsiveness to, the public.
- Every individual must commit to respectful dialogue with each other and engage with institutions of civil society.
- A voluntary commitment to some form of public service must become a rite of passage for American youth and be seen as a lifelong responsibility for adults.
- As a nation, we must commit to proactively educate our youth in the basics of civics, democracy, engagement, and service.

**Specific Actions to Be Taken**

Beginning in 2021 and thereafter, the following specific actions would serve as elements of an initial roadmap for revitalizing American democracy.

### *National Leadership and Governance*

**Establish a White House Office of Public Engagement and Service.** The President should establish a White House Office of Public Engagement and Service as a marquee initiative. Its scope would be national – not just federal - and include promoting public service, broadly defined. Its operations could be organized along the lines of the U.S. Digital Service – a central staff comprised of individuals on temporary assignment that provides expertise and project support to teams across all levels of government. It should be paired with a broadly inclusive advisory committee to inform its priorities, and engage appropriate federal, state, local, and nonprofits entities. Like the former White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, there should be federal agency-level counterparts, and state governors should be encouraged to do the same.

## *Engagement at All Levels of Government*

The baseline for democracy is voting participation. It is lower in the U.S. than many other countries.  However, as the AAAS commission notes, "Giving voice to voters is one thing, but making sure that somebody is listening to them is another." The challenge facing the nation is not just voter participation in elections, but public engagement in day-to-day governance processes outside of the electoral context.  Accordingly, the Working Group recommends a number of important steps that should be taken by governments at all levels to increase their listening and engaging efforts:

**Actions by Federal Executive Branch Agencies.** As part of its charge, the Office of Public Engagement and Service should develop a plan of action that could include, for example:

- **Updating the Open Government Directive.** To further empower the people, all federal agencies should be required to take a series of steps to become more transparent, participatory and collaborative. Each agency should produce an open government plan and review policies and rules that impede the flow of available information. A cross-agency senior working group should be established to share best practices. This would update the engagement and partnership initiatives undertaken by federal agencies under the 2009 Open Government Directive. This effort should be led by the proposed White House Office of Public Engagement and Service.

- **Creating reusable platforms/tools for use at the local level**. One example is the federal Challenge.gov platform,[19] which allows all federal agencies to sponsor competitions to solicit ideas from the public to solve particular problems. Another example is the codigital.com platform[20], which helps large groups to generate, prioritize and refine ideas for action. These platforms or tools could include dialogue forums, volunteer engagement platforms, participatory budgeting, and sentiment analytic tools. This might be spearheaded by the Office of Customer and Stakeholder Engagement, located in the General Services Administration.[21]

- **Creating platforms and tools that support real-time engagement and co-production with those outside of government.** Federal agencies need to take advantage of thinking from citizens, the private sector and academia without the constraints imposed by pre-Internet statutory requirements (e.g., Federal Advisory Committee Act, Paperwork Reduction Act). The lead for policy revisions to existing directives would be the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in OMB.

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[19] Retrieved at: https://www.challenge.gov/
[20] Retrieved at: https://www.codigital.com/
[21] General Services Administration, Office of Customer and Stakeholder Engagement, About. Retrieved at: https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/organization/federal-acquisition-service/office-of-customer-and-stakeholder-engagement

**Actions by the Legislative Branch.** Congress, both as an institution and through each individual elected member, should commit to ways of engaging citizens in a more meaningful and proactive dialog than the traditional mechanisms of congressional hearings and members' town halls. Examples might include:

- **Organizing Citizen Assemblies.** The Speaker of the House and Minority Leader, and the Senate Majority and Minority Leaders should periodically jointly convene citizen assemblies comprised of Americans representing a bipartisan cross section of the country. The assemblies would help frame and inform national issues for legislative action that cut across the traditional boundaries of congressional committees, such as racial inequality, the national response to the effects of climate change, and economic inequality. Congress should adopt legislation to create a citizen assembly at the start of each session. These assemblies would deliberate to identify some of the top policy priorities for Congress and the Administration, then use strategy mapping and other planning and budgeting tools to craft a proposed strategy and policy recommendations to address these problems.[22]

- **Sponsoring Deliberative Dialogue Forums with Members of Congress.** Deliberative forums could be convened by a third party on behalf of individual members of Congress to participate in deliberations with a representative sample of their constituents on policy issues under consideration. This could be done using

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[22] An alternative approach might be to leverage existing bipartisan congressional caucuses that include members from different committees that tackle shared concerns (e.g., The "What Works Caucus"). They could test out new ways to engage citizens using technology platforms.

technology. High-quality non-partisan information and briefing materials would inform the discussion. This effort could be organized via the House and Senate Committees on Administration, possibly with a non-partisan organization taking the lead.

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**Using Deliberative Processes**. A recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development describes how the use of representative deliberative processes is growing in member countries, including the U.S., and results in:

- Better policy outcomes
- Greater legitimacy to make hard choices
- Enhance public trust in institutions
- Empowers citizens
- Makes government more inclusive
- Strengthens integrity; reduces corruption
- Helps counteract polarization and disinformation

The report describes 12 different models, including citizen assemblies, and identifies where they have been used, how they are organized, and which model works best under different circumstances.

Source: Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (June 2020). *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave.* 198 pages. Retrieved at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions_339306da-en#page1

**Actions by State and Local Governments.** Governors and mayors should pilot the use of reusable platforms/dialog forums – one approach might be along the lines of the What Works Cities initiative--to create capacity and share best practices. State legislatures and city councils might undertake similar engagement initiatives proposed for Congress, such citizen assemblies and deliberative dialogue forums. In addition, especially at the local level, consider:

- **Expand use of participatory budgeting.** Participatory budgeting is a democratic process whereby community members decide how a portion of their community's public budget will be spent. Typically, this is done at a neighborhood level. This is practiced in over 3,000 communities around the world, including about 700 communities in the U.S.[23]

## *Cross-Sector Engagement with Civil Society Institutions*

The AAAS report observes that: "Making changes to our political processes and institutions is an insufficient response to our current predicament…The institutions of our civil society… libraries, houses of worship, parks, sports teams, universities, museums, performance space… all these institutions and more offer people ways to be involved in the lives of their communities that do not involve voting or attending public hearings or watching debates."

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[23] Participatory Budgeting Project, "What is PB?" Retrieved at:
https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb/ ;  Map retrieved at: Carto.com

It further notes that these are the places "where Americans first develop the practical skills and 'habits of the heart' that are fundamental to democratic citizenship," and "Without a set of civil society institutions that work together and build bridge across divides, no level of government intervention will be sufficient to restore cohesion to communities that are fragmented by demography, ideology, income, and suspicion."

So, "public engagement" is not just a citizen-government relationship. It is a network of relationships individuals weave across society, across institutional constructs. Inspiring and incentivizing such engagement starts from the bottom-up. It happens in neighborhoods with micro-civic actions: dog walkers being responsible, customers returning carts to the store, acknowledging people on the street. It starts in families and among neighbors.

These small actions cumulate to social cohesion and interpersonal trust. These are building blocks for societal engagement, with volunteers to help neighbors and in schools, and community associations.

While these forms of engagement are by necessity locally driven, they could be catalyzed by the proposed White House Office of Public Engagement and Service via recognition programs not unlike former President George H.W. Bush's "Thousand Points of Light" initiative that recognized unsung heroes who provided service in their local communities.[24]

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[24] Points of Light Foundation (n.d.). About Points of Light. Webpage. Retrieved at: https://www.pointsoflight.org/about-us/

Government needs to proactively support citizens in engaging in problem solving in their own communities.  This is an important aspect of a democratic system. But, notably, the AAAS report declares: "To commit ourselves to constitutional democracy, we must first commit ourselves to — and have faith in — our fellow citizens."


## *A Commitment to Public Service*

Both the National Commission and the AAAS recommend a voluntary year of public service as a rite of passage to adulthood. They see it as a way of creating a life-long expectation of service of some kind. The Commission's report says the benefit of such an approach would be that: "Service within and across communities breaks down culture barriers, builds respect, and strengthens collaboration, understanding, and dialogue. And in times of crisis, participatory civil society enables people to naturally join together, contribute to their communities, and defense the Nation."

The goal set by the Commission was one million participants by 2026 – the 250th anniversary of the country.  Something on this scale would have to be championed by the President with significant congressional support for funding such an initiative. With high unemployment and the need for up to 300,000 contact tracers in the years following the pandemic, this is not an inconceivable proposal.

But a commitment to public service should not hang on a single "silver bullet." It should include opportunities for volunteerism and co-production – where citizens can contribute to the public good through actions such as helping museums transcribe Civil War letters so they could be read by students on the Internet. Other potential initiatives to catalyze a broader public service ethos might include:

- **Set up institutionalized structures for engagement across local, state, and federal levels of government—creating a "civic layer."** As noted earlier, its precise form will evolve, but the basic concept is to establish a centralized interface within a community to engage residents in governance decision making that interweaves digital and in-person engagement. One example might be how participatory budgeting initiatives are done at the local level.[25]

- **Create incentives for individual participation, such as "citizen engagement" accounts, badges, certificates, and bonds**. Incentivize individual participation in civic activities by creating for individuals or civil society organizations some form of recognition. This could be modeled after computer games – by earning "badges." Or it could be recognition for achieving a certain level of proficiency, such as the Presidential Fitness Awards. Or, as recommended in the AAAS report, might be the issuance of a $10,000 "baby bond" as each child is born and the money would accrue upon completion of a year of qualifying

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[25] Hollie Gilman (2018). Chapter 15, "The Future of Civic Engagement," in Mark Abramson, et al (eds). *Government for the Future: Reflection and Vision for Tomorrow's Leaders*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham, MD. Pp. 232-240.

public service.[26] The National Commission report recommends, as an incentive, that completion of qualifying public service could offer noncompetitive eligibility in being hired into the federal government.[27]

### *Promote Civic Education*

The National Commission's report concludes: "… the Nation is failing to prepare the next generation of Americans to participate actively in U.S. civic and democratic life through voting, service, civil discourse, and community involvement… America, as a whole, must value civic education as a critical foundation of the health and future of the Nation… without a solid base of knowledge about the principles of the U.S. system of government, many Americans are ill-equipped to become contributing members of civil society."

A concerted national effort to reinvigorate Americans' understanding of, and contributions to, civil society should be catalyzed at the federal level by the proposed White House Office of Public Engagement and Service, with support from the Department of Education. To maximize opportunities for success, this effort should be largely driven by state education agencies and their curriculum development bodies and linked to high school and university requirements.

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[26] AAAS, Final Report, p. 58.
[27] National Commission on Military, National and Public Service, Final Report, p. 6.

This effort needs to reach beyond just the education system. As the AAAS report notes: ". . . having a healthy democracy is having the general population be educated about how to be engaged."  It also observes: "democracy depends on a more durable sense of connectedness, as well as opportunities to practice it… having faith in our fellow citizens also requires believing that they share some sense of common purpose, and that they seek to and are equipped to make ethical and informed decisions about our shared fate."

**CONCLUSION**

The United States faces a crisis of national confidence in its governing capabilities.  With great challenges, however, come great opportunities.  As discussed in this paper, the Working Group believes that each level of government—and, indeed, all sectors—need to come together to strengthen public engagement in our day-to-day governance processes.  Public engagement is critical to the development of workable solutions to today's most pressing social and economic challenges.  By creating new ways to work together across governmental and sectoral lines, the nation can lay the ground for a more collaborative governance model that will enhance public trust, social connectedness, and government performance.

**Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement: Working Group**

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Enhancing Public Governance: An Agenda for 2021 and Beyond*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:
Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and
Engagement**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for new opportunities to use greater collaborative governance in the United States. The Working Group will release a second paper on public engagement.

# ENHANCING PUBLIC GOVERNANCE: AN AGENDA FOR 2021 AND BEYOND

*A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
DEVELOP NEW APPROACHES TO PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND
ENGAGEMENT

**Working Group Members**
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**THE CHALLENGE**

The public's trust in government has been declining for decades. Restoring Americans' trust in democratic government will be a long-term effort. This paper, and a companion piece, offer an agenda to help change the way we govern and engage as citizens. We see this as foundational to longer-term efforts to restore trust in government that has been frayed by performance failures and can, at times, itself become a barrier to effective governance.

In addition to the long-term trend of declining trust in government, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted near-term weaknesses in our governance structure to work collaboratively across agencies, levels of government, and sectors of society. The literature shows that collaboration is founded, in part, on trust.[1] The pandemic's exposure of this weakness gives us further reason to try to reimagine the way the federal government and its partners can jointly address large-scale challenges.

One way to restore public trust would be to develop new, more effective governance approaches to the biggest and most complex problems facing our country and society. Recognizing the need to strengthen public governance and civic engagement, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) identified "Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement" as one of its 12 Grand Challenges in Public Administration.

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[1] Chris Ansell and Alison Gash (2008). "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice," Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 543-571. Retrieved at: .doi:10.1093/jopart/mum032

The Academy formed this Working Group to:

- Describe the current state of public governance and civic engagement activities in government, especially at the federal level, with examples of models, practices, and authorities in use;
- Define a vision and agenda for how government can be more collaborative in nature and catalyze greater public voice in democracy; and
- Propose specific actions to achieve this vision, beginning in 2021, that would include both short term, tactical steps and a longer-term roadmap for achieving results.

The Working Group believes that developing effective models of collaborative governance would make the country stronger and more resilient as a democracy. The challenge is to develop and test new models for how the federal government and its partners can effectively tackle complex societal problems that cut across the usual boundaries of jurisdiction and responsibility. This will require collaboration to define and deliver solutions tailored to the nature of each problem and diverse local conditions in a constantly changing environment.

# DEVELOPING NEW MODELS FOR COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

In the 21st Century, no significant public problem fits entirely within one government agency, or even one level of government. Our federal system presupposes that all levels and branches of government have an important role to play in the democratic process. The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are just two of the many governance challenges that ignore jurisdictional and program boundaries. The pandemic also highlights the need to develop strategies and design programs that are more robust, resilient, and adaptable in the face of inevitable shocks and uncertainty.

For a long time, governments have devised new programs to address social problems as these are recognized as needing a public solution: if the problem is to get to the moon and back, then design and deliver a moon landing program; if many people are hungry, then support food banks, provide food stamps, or offer school lunches. You might call this an engineering model: diagnose the problem and the best way to solve it, then fund and staff an agency and subsidize providers to deliver a solution – and eventually multiple solutions. The result has been an accretion of programs that address specific problems.

The engineering model seems to be approaching a limit to its success: a problem may be a symptom of other problems; the same problem may have multiple or different causes; and its etiology may vary from one community or population to another or over time. Problems often overlap or interact. There are some problems that we might term

*'hairy'* because they are both complex and intractable. There are some places and people beset by multiple problems that may defy a single solution or require solutions that are tailored to a particular community, or family circumstance, or individuals with unique histories. In these cases, the traditional programmatic / engineering model may not work very well.

This paper argues that the proper policy response to a complex, boundary crossing problem is not to impose a uniform pre-engineered intervention. Nor can it be to simply hand out block grants and ask state and local governments to figure it out. Instead, the federal government can play a role similar to that of orchestra conductor, helping to coordinate and harmonize the elements of an evidence-based national strategy flexible enough to adapt to local conditions.

## Redefining Roles, Building Capacity

Success in tackling complex, boundary spanning problems requires that federal, state, and local governments, with their private and nonprofit sector partners, work effectively together. Yet we have not prioritized the building of collaborative capabilities to develop and implement effective policies and programs across levels of government and sectors of society.

Media reports in spring and early summer 2020 of how different states and localities are managing reopening in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic is a clear demonstration of how fragmented and sometimes fractious inter-governmental arrangements impede action. Ongoing responses to the pandemic are also testing the ability of governments to adapt by continuously changing the way programs are designed and administered, so that governments can respond effectively to future threats and deliver intended results under varied local conditions.

Leaders from all levels of government and across sectors need to develop new collaborative mechanisms to mobilize and address issues—including emergency response, recovery, and reconstruction after the pandemic—that cut across jurisdictional and programmatic boundaries.

As an example, new governance models for the delivery of human services will require redefined roles for the federal government and others that reflect their respective roles and responsibilities:

- At the federal level, an effective strategy to address a particular social need or problem requires coordinating the relevant portfolio of services/programs targeted to individuals or families most likely to benefit. In most cases, the federal government is in a position to define national purposes and principles, goals, and targets in measurable terms, identify and support evidence-driven and otherwise promising strategies, and reshape its efforts to incentivize and support coordinated solutions at the local or regional level.
- In most cases, state and local governments and nonprofit organizations that deliver direct services should take primary responsibility for

integrating planning and services in a manner most appropriate for their local populations and conditions.

- The federal government can facilitate the blending and braiding of federal funds and data with other sources of funding and data in ways that enable strategies that are tailored to local circumstances.

- The federal government—or a neutral third party—can maintain a shared learning agenda of research questions that need to be answered to improve performance, use it to guide researchers in developing a body of evidence relevant to performance improvement, and create data tools that enable communities to benchmark their progress against that of their peers.

- In many instances, effective delivery approaches will be those that allow co-creation or co-production of services by service recipients.

Much evidence suggests that successful human service delivery strategies provide recipients with more ability to readily access and integrate services matching their individual and family needs. Experience suggests that designing and delivering integrated human services requires giving intermediary organizations administrative flexibilities, such as the ability to combine multiple resource streams.

Success also requires approaches that empower recipients to co-produce or co-create solutions. If recipients are to experience services as appropriate and effective for them, governments must shift their emphasis:

- From compliance to results;

- From standardized to individualized and family-oriented service delivery; and

- From mostly top-down planning and coordination to a bottoms-up integrated service delivery that engages recipients.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW

In recent decades, governments have developed collaborative governance models that enable them to temporarily work across boundaries when addressing time-bound or place-based challenges such wildfires, natural disasters, and threats to public health. Most notable is the National Incident Management System overseen by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.[2]

Despite these success stories, progress has been slow in developing more enduring collaborative governance models that require establishing administrative structures for systemic challenges that require sustained and coordinated human services strategies. Efforts to develop and implement coordinated responses to reduce homelessness, to treat and limit opioid addiction, or to reduce child abuse can be studied to begin identifying promising models for coordinated delivery. The somewhat inconsistent and uncoordinated responses of different governments to the ongoing pandemic illustrate both the need for and challenge of designing and implementing effective collaborate governance responses.

Several federal agencies are pioneering collaborative, integrated service delivery systems around target populations that may serve as models for others. Our Working Group has focused its attention primarily

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[2] Federal Emergency Management Agency, "National Incident Management System," Retrieved at: https://www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system

on several societal problems that demand collaborative approaches to shared, integrated delivery of services to specific target populations.

To be effective and equitable, these services should be organized around the varied needs of specific communities, individuals, and families—not a one-size-fits-all approach.  Collaborative governance arrangements need to be responsive to changing conditions and capable of quickly learning from experience.  Developing an understanding of these varied needs, and gaining the legitimacy to act on them, means directly engaging those affected. This engagement element is addressed in more depth in an accompanying white paper.[3]

**Existing Opportunities for Greater Collaborative Governance**

What follows are five existing opportunities that, if approached systematically, could provide a base of experience on which to build new models of effective collaborative governance:

- *Opportunity 1: Testing Opportunities to Integrate Health and Social Services.*  The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the differences between how the U.S.'s fragmented health care and social services approach differs from the more collaborative and integrated systems in Europe that have suppressed the spread and staged the transition to a

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[3] National Academy of Public Administration Working Group (2020). "Engaging the American Public to Restore Trust in Our Democracy: An Agenda for 2021 and Beyond."

"new normal."[4]   Adapting lessons from the European approach may be a useful near-term initiative, but there are longer-term opportunities to pilot and scale collaborative models to improve overall health, as well. Experts have found that approximately 80 percent of health is related to such social determinants as stable housing, reliable transportation, access to healthy food or other living conditions—not actual medical problems. Yet, there is no integrated public strategy or approach in place to address these interrelated issues. States and localities, however, have begun piloting models of integrated delivery of human services organized around the needs of individuals and families. These models blend dollars, data, and the delivery of services for social, health, workforce, and/or health.  These models should be evaluated and, where appropriate, scaled.

- *Opportunity 2: Supporting Veterans who have returned to their communities*. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates a vast healthcare and benefits system within a broader ecosystem of 40,000 other federal, state, local and nonprofit groups serving veterans. Cross-federal and cross-sectoral collaborations are needed.[5]

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[4] Holly Jarman, Sarah Rozenblum and Scott Greer (2020). "What US States Can Learn from COVID-19 Transition Planning in Europe (May 11). Retrieved at: https://ihpi.umich.edu/news/commentary-what-us-states-can-learn-covid-19-transition-planning-europe

[5] Zachary Huitink, Nicholas Armstrong, Matthew Hidek and Nathaniel Birnbaum (2018). *Improving the Delivery of Services and Care for Veterans: A Case Study of Enterprise Government,* IBM Center for The Business of Government. Retrieved at: http://businessofgovernment.org/report/improving-delivery-services-and-care-veterans

- *Opportunity 3: Preventing and ending homelessness*. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness has led the development of the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness.[6] In response to the federal strategy and funding priorities, local providers have formed continuums of care to share data and coordinate rehousing with services appropriate to the needs of each person served. As homelessness grows, services delivery demands more robust coordination at all governing levels.

- *Opportunity 4: Relieving opioid addictions*. Solutions must involve changes in the way prescription opioid drugs are prescribed and distributed, requiring collaboration with physicians and drug companies. States and localities will need to lead in fashioning strategies to improve delivery and treatment, but the federal government should support evidence-driven strategies and research-based innovations to continuously improve current efforts with enhanced collaboration. This would include supportive programs such as disability benefits, job training, housing, and education.

- *Opportunity 5: Protecting vulnerable children*. The recently passed Families First Prevention Services Act would shift federal child welfare spending away from what is often the worst- case scenario (removing children from their homes to keep them safe) and toward better options (evidence-based programs to strengthen families and

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[6] U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, "Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. Retrieved at: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Home-Together-Federal-Strategic-Plan-to-Prevent-and-End-Homelessness.pdf

protect children). The next challenge is integrating various human services and building evidence of what works to help do this at scale. One model may be the 12 states that have created a "children's cabinet" to better integrate services for at-risk children.[7]

Based on our review of these experiences, we have identified some common administrative barriers to construction of effective boundary crossing governance collaborative models:

- Budget and auditing rules that inhibit integrating federal program funds to create coordinated service delivery and common infrastructure;
- Privacy laws banning or impeding data sharing between programs;
- Lack of a common identity management system for individuals;
- Lack of a shared and effective way across agencies and their partners to structure, integrate and monitor large-scale, long-term strategies, and supplement or extend expertise to manage complex strategies; and
- Lack of a government-wide learning agenda and point of responsibility for assessing and refining models for effective collaborative governance.

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[7] See, for example, Virginia's "Children's Cabinet: Annual Report: 2018-2019," https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/governor-of-virginia/childrens-cabinet/Childrens-Cabinet-Annual-Report-2019.pdf

Overcoming these and other barriers will require sustained leadership at all government levels.  At the federal level, no senior policy official is now responsible for understanding these barriers and helping states and communities overcome them.  Nor is there a single federal agency or official responsible for establishing a learning agenda and building evidence to identify the most promising collaborative models.

Unless strong evidence already exists about the models or strategies most likely to deliver higher performance, program implementation should be flexible enough to allow for as much thoughtful design, structured experimentation, rapid prototyping, and ongoing learning as possible.

**Critical Current Practices and Authorities**

Creating new collaborative governance models is possible now, with existing administrative practices and legal authorities, in selected policy areas. These could be expanded and scaled in many policy areas such as those represented by the five areas of opportunity described above.

The federal Cross-Agency Priority Goal to improve customer experiences addresses 25 specific federal services—such as student aid applications, airport security checks, and visits to national parks.[8]  These could be expanded to include services delivered to individuals and families at the state and local level, where integrated delivery would

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[8] U.S. Office of Management and Budget, "Improving Customer Experiences with Federal Services," Performance.gov website. Retrieved at: https://www.performance.gov/CAP/cx/

dramatically improve the customer experience. Also, the recently passed Families First Prevention Services Act begins to scale the use of evidence-based preventative practices that involve multiple systems in serving the needs of vulnerable children.[9]

A number of recent legislative authorities provide potentially more granular accountability for federal funding. This in turn could lead to Congress and other overseers being willing to allow greater cross-agency and intergovernmental collaboration. Ideally, this would include braiding and blending of funds, data, and programs around the needs of individuals and families. The potential for greater collaboration stems from the fact that these laws will allow insight and greater accountability at a granular level, closer to real-time, with federal dollars, so federal leaders should have less concern about fraud and waste. In addition, there will be greater analytical capacity, data, and evidence about what works with specific programs at the frontline level.  These laws include:

- The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act
- The Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act)
- The Grant Reporting Efficiency and Agreements Transparency Act (GREAT Act)
- The Taxpayer Right-to-Know Act *(pending, but likely passage)*

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[9] Patrick Lester (2020)  *Scaling Evidence-Based Programs in Child Welfare,* IBM Center for The Business of Government, retrieved at: http://businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/Scaling%20Evidence%20Based%20Programs%20in%20Child%20Welfare.pdf

In May 2020, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) also began reviewing comments on proposed changes to the Uniform Guidance for grants administration that would allow awarding agencies and low-risk, high-performing grantees to streamline compliance reporting and shift to outcome-focused reporting.  The changes could potentially facilitate braiding and blending of funds around the needs of individuals and families and creation of common data and administrative infrastructure.

## RECOMMENDATIONS
## A Vision and Agenda for Creating Effective Collaborative Governance Models

Addressing the challenge of developing and testing new collaborative governance models to tackle the largest, boundary crossing societal problems requires a long-term vision and agenda for action.

***For the long term***, we recommend that the federal government test models for a more collaborative governance approach to the delivery of human services centered on individuals and families rather than the agencies or levels of government that provide the services.

The federal government should define national strategies to design and implement customer- and client-centric approaches to selected problems.  These strategies would make services and solutions for individuals and families, not agencies, the central focus. It should also support long-term societal research and development to evaluate specific delivery models.

*For the near term,* beginning in 2021, the federal government should convene state and local governments and their delivery partners to define and continuously refine a roadmap for joint action in the human service areas of opportunity described above or other areas aligned with Presidential priorities. The deep shock to society now being experienced as a result of the pandemic may require prioritization of additional policy or programmatic areas where a collaborative services approach could be applied.

The federal government should take the following actions to support a national strategy for collaborative governance:

1. **OMB should direct specified agencies to commit in their strategic planning to a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goal to improve the delivery and effectiveness of services to individuals and families through collaboration across multiple human service areas.** Lead agencies would use national strategy maps to create personalized services for each area of opportunity.[10] National strategies have been developed and used successfully in past administrations, primarily to guide national approaches in national security cybersecurity,

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[10] Strategy maps are a well-established tool for effective strategy management. They elevate the discussion from the merits, funding and impact of individual programs and organizations to the system of intentional changes (the strategic objectives) that are most important for achieving significant and sustainable progress on complex social challenges. This approach helps to prompt teamwork and catalyze innovation around how the strategic objectives can best be accomplished. For an example, see: https://vimeo.com/398352113/72ee431c34

counterterrorism, and pandemic responses, but could be used in human service areas as well.[11]

2.  **Lead agencies or cross-agency teams for each area of opportunity should design and pilot a community care coordination delivery model that best supports flexible and agile service delivery under varied local conditions.** Such person- and family-centered approaches require information technology platforms that can be used by many different programs and agencies to coordinate the plans, care and data of the individuals being served.

3.  **The Administration should establish a mechanism that enables state and local government and other community experts to participate in designing and planning collaborative approaches.** Representing these perspectives is one way to ensure that the proposed strategy is flexible enough to work for a diverse set of communities.

4.  **OMB should employ portfolio budgeting, using strategic objectives as the unit of analysis, to guide resource allocation decisions and inform regulatory and administrative reforms to support the strategy.** The budget process would replace the focus on funding individual programs with a portfolio approach that applies resources to support a shared strategy based on the best available evidence of expected returns on investment. Based on the portfolio

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[11] General Accounting Office (2003). "Combatting Terrorism: Observation on National Strategies Related to Terrorism," GAO-03-519T (March 3). Retrieved at: https://www.gao.gov/assets/110/109685.pdf

analysis, OMB could identify barriers to integration and improvement that could be addressed through coordinated regulatory and administrative reforms affecting multiple programs.

5. **OMB and other central agencies should work together to establish shared knowledge platforms and clearinghouses.** This information platform would be based on a master strategy map template that could be continuously refined as stakeholders gain new insights and help avoid a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach.

6. **OMB and the White House should establish a working group to develop a national plan, with state and local partners, for federal actions to enable all levels of government to strengthen data, analytics, and evaluation capacity**. This group would work to integrate funding, legislative and regulatory proposals into the annual President's Budget and the regulatory agenda, in coordination with OMB, and deploy the resources and expertise of philanthropy, academia, private sector tech firms, and non-profits, as permitted by law.[12]

7. **OMB and lead agencies for each area of opportunity should proactively pursue the use of existing program waivers to allow state and local governments to braid and blend funds to create**

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[12] Kathy Stack (2020). "Harnessing Data Analytics to Improve the Lives of Individuals and Families: A National Strategy," Discussion Draft (July 12). Retrieved at: https://www.dayoneproject.org/post/harnessing-data-analytics-to-improve-the-lives-of-individuals-and-families-a-national-data-strategy

**person-centered service delivery models.** There are existing models at the federal and state levels for creatively using federal waivers and data sharing agreements. Cross-agency or lead agency teams should be formed around areas of opportunity to strategically facilitate their use.[13] As they demonstrate success, Congress should provide statutory authority for more programs to allow waivers.

**CONCLUSION**

Engaging government agencies, their partners, their customers or clients, and others requires designing and implementing collaborative strategies that reflect the perspectives of those most affected and apply resources where evidence suggests they will be most effective in achieving priority objectives. Constructing effective collaborative governance approaches, starting with a limited base of relevant experience, is not the task of a single Administration. It will require sustained collaboration among the federal government and its partners in an environment that promotes innovation and learning, gradually building a base of knowledge about what works and bonds of mutual trust among the partners that will help define a new collaborative approach to governance. We recommend this effort because we are convinced a more collaborative governance

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[13] Stuart Butler, Timothy Higashi and Marcela Cabello, Budgeting to Promote Social Objectives -- A Primer on Braiding and Blending, Brookings Institution (April 2020). Retrieved at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BraidingAndBlending20200403.pdf

model will help address the many complex challenges that the nation will face in the years to come.

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *The United States in an Interconnected World: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Advance National Interests in a Changing Global Context**

## ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

## ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Individuals of the Advance National Interests in a Changing Global Context Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for new opportunities for the U.S. in a diffuse and complex international system.

# THE UNITED STATES IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

## A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
ADVANCE NATIONAL INTERESTS IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT

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# INTRODUCTION

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) recently identified "Advance National Interests in a Changing Global Context" (*Grand Challenges*) as one of its 12 Grand Challenges in Public Administration. (*Grand Challenges*)

Although the United States remains the world's most powerful nation, the unipolar moment of the early post-Cold War years has been replaced with a much more diffuse international system and a wider array of complex issues. This in turn is unsettled in unparalleled ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. Global issues requiring sustained attention are manifold, including:

- Many vulnerable nations are experiencing state breakdown, terrorism, natural disasters, and environmental degradation, accentuated and exacerbated by the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic;

- The world has the largest population flows and total number of refugees since the 1940s;

- Russia has aggressively challenged other countries' borders and political systems;

- China's rise has fueled tensions in East Asia and beyond; and

- Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and Asia could destabilize the regional and global order.

Against this backdrop, there are important opportunities to reassert and advance America's global interests, values and leadership.

- In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of effective governments and robust civil society, at all levels, to lead out of crises - whether as lenders-, givers-, or doctors-of-last-resort – becomes more clear than ever.

- The clamor for democratic and accountable governance will grow louder, reaching nations that seem cemented in autocracy today—like China or Russia.

- Globalization and supply chains will be reconfigured in a collision between the drive for cost efficiencies and a renewed impetus to protect markets.

- Technological progress will connect societies ever more tightly across geography—just think of the upcoming impact of 5G. Instant access to information, even imperfect information, will raise people's aspirations and change social norms. Cultural convergence will accelerate.

- A growing array of mega risks will materialize. Climate-related disasters, global pandemic out-breaks, cross-border financial meltdowns, conflict-driven human migration, refugee crises, other humanitarian catastrophes, and geo-conflicts capable of mass destruction are not just possible but probable.

- A new, vivid recognition will be cemented that global crises cannot be resolved through national action alone, whether the crisis at hand is a virulent pandemic, an environmental disaster, or a cyber-attack, though new models of global collaboration will be needed.

Should the United States choose to retreat from leadership on these issues, we face the prospect of a more uncertain, less free, and less prosperous world, with the many repercussions that would have for our welfare and way of life.

**INTERNATIONAL AND FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES**

The United States faces a number of critical challenges in this area that must be addressed:

- Global health;
- Public diplomacy;
- Democratic institutions;
- Internal management capacity.


**Global Health**

It is critical that the United States is able to rapidly respond to global health, climate or migration related crises, with attention to flexibility to respond to the unexpected. While the United States has long traditions of rapid response to disaster world-wide—earthquake, hurricane, flood—the United States faces heightened danger in an increasingly interconnected world – as a recent high-level commission declares (*CSIS Commission on Strengthening America's Health Security*). Population growth and movement puts more people in close proximity, climate change and loss of natural habitat increase potential for disease vectors to advance, and global health risks often track with political and social instability that inhibits effective responses.

The U.S. capacity for response—both domestically and globally— to such challenges is being tested today, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, on a calamitous scale. Multiple threats intersect – the loss of life and the medical challenges of treating patients and developing treatments and vaccines; the immediate economic effects, as the world confronts near unprecedented economic slowdown; the long-term destruction of opportunity, as for example the UN projection that the pandemic may push 130 million people into extreme poverty by 2030 (Igoe); and the complex fractures in international systems and cooperation for response. ("'Sadness' and Disbelief From a World Missing American Leadership") And there is the recurrent prospect that it can happen again.

While the final word on the response to this pandemic has yet to be written, the interconnection of safety and security of the health of American citizens with global conditions is undeniable; and the capacity of the United States to respond, and to lead, is widely questioned. The dimensions of the crisis are yet unfolding – not only detection and treatment of victims, but the ability to mobilize technologies, the capacity of economies to adapt and rebound, the equity in which treatment and protections are afforded, and the efficacy in mobilizing and coordinating leadership at multiple levels.

One thing is clear: the U.S. capacity to respond to global health crises and related disaster conditions is an essential consideration for the safety of U.S. citizens, for U.S. defense policy, and for our commercial and economic interests. It is also a cornerstone of our leadership responsibilities in the world. Issues are complex, fast-changing, and unpredictable. We have traditionally responded with generosity, intelligence, and sacrifice to crises on a one to one basis. As the recent CSIS Commission on Strengthening America's Health Security writes, now is the time: "to adopt … [an] integrated package of critical actions to replace the crisis-complacency cycle with a doctrine of continuous prevention, protection, and resilience."

In the face of the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on U.S. and global health, it is easy to lose sight of the policy initiatives that have been underway or under consideration before this current crisis struck. The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance response, of USAID, and other government agencies, for example, modeled one form of response in the 2014 Ebola outbreak through mobilizing an effective Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) (Widner).

The CSIS Commission report notes significant steps that had been advanced and taken – nationally and internationally – to build capacity, while the report also called for dramatic changes in how the United States prepares for future global health crises. Steps taken or proposed include a diverse array of recent bipartisan Congressional action in response to global biohazard threats, flu, and Ebola, and enactment into law of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act

(PAHPAI) of 2019.  The administration itself reorganized pandemic response capabilities at the National Security Council level, generalizing what had been a distinct directorate for global health security into the more broadly based directorate for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Biodefense. The U.S. has worked closely with leadership of the international Global Health Security Agenda (*Governance – Global Health Security Agenda*), generating what the CDC has recognized as five years of progress. (*Key Achievements in Five Years of GHSA*) Coordination with the World Bank and its Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (*PEFF*) is a key global linkage.

Although the U.S. has a track record of focusing on needed capacities to respond to global health emergencies that may threaten others and ourselves, we still need to fill in critical missing pieces, commit greater resources, and provide more effective central leadership and coordination.


**Public Diplomacy**

It is critical that the United States is able to conduct effective public diplomacy within the governance and capacity building agenda. Public diplomacy and international cultural and academic exchange are America's face to the world, through which trust is developed and leadership can emerge for meeting global challenges. Existing structures within the U.S. Department of State and other international facing departments for this work are outdated. Experts agree that reforms are needed. The contemporary pressures to take positive advantage of social media and to counteract threats of disinformation, aligned with new global agendas for achieving sustainable development reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), call for new or enhanced approaches. Secretary Pompeo recently called for a new Bureau of Outreach in response to these needs. (*State Department Considering Public Diplomacy Overhaul – Foreign Policy*) A recent Aspen Institute report calls for other modifications to the Department of State to communicate more effectively – including reforms to broadcasting platforms, enhanced capacity for "network diplomacy" including new

public-private-partnership platforms, and support for the United States International Communications Reform Act of 2014 that would revise U.S. international broadcasting and communications structures, missions, and objectives. (Kessler)

Building a new United States' framework for supporting cultural exchange in particular, and public diplomacy broadly, in light of the principles and objectives of global SDGs calls both for new thinking and new partnership structures. Due to the interplay of elements in sustainable development (social, economic, and environmental), it is not possible for either a single agency or even a single sector to address these issues effectively. The social aspect of sustainability, for example, requires a focus on the human element including education, housing, transportation, health, crime, migration, and so forth. The economic element requires a focus on production, appropriate regulations, investment, job creation, raw materials, etc. The environmental element requires a focus on such issues as climate, protection of natural resources, and clean water. Addressing this reality requires inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches to build adequate capacity for action.

A broadly conceived public diplomacy agenda builds as well on commitments to advance good governance – with enhanced focus on local governance and civil society. The COVID-19 crisis has made clear the essential importance of strong and collaborative governance capacities at the street level as well as in the high public offices. The public administration academic and technical support community has a role to play at these ground levels, supporting local governments and NGOs, and providing them with technical assistance. Universities can help backstop street-level public administrators globally – such as town clerks, park managers, school administrators, and trade managers, just to name a few – with training in public administration and its best practices. Students can test out, practice and share new ideas to solve issues related to sustainability and other issues.

Public sponsored cultural and academic exchanges are central to this agenda. Cultural exchange engages the capacities of soft power for persuasion and the alignment of values and outcomes. Exchanges expose individuals to different ways of thinking, different beliefs and norms, and

different ways of behaving. Such exposure allows participants to see things differently and provides motivation for them to learn the tools and methods that they need to change their own home countries and achieve social betterment. Improvement in the world's human condition, social improvement, is key to advancing the national interest of the United States (IREX).

**Democratic Institutions**

It is critical that the United States promotes democratic consolidation globally by supporting and coordinating effort to strengthen state capacities in conjunction with UN Sustainable Development Goals and related Initiatives. As described by Larry Diamond, a challenge faced by many nations is to restrain the predatory tendencies of national leaders by strengthening rules and institutions that subject leaders' actions to public scrutiny and hold them accountable to the law. To do this "requires dense, vigorous civil societies, with independent organizations, mass media, and think tanks, as well as other networks that can foster civic norms, pursue the public interest, raise citizen consciousness, break the bonds of clientelism, scrutinize government conduct, and lobby for good-governance reforms." (Diamond) Countries with fragile governing institutions and weaker democratic traditions are especially vulnerable to predatory leaders.

Autocrats and would-be autocrats use crises such as the global pandemic as opportunities to undermine democratic institutions and human rights. Very often, the actions nations are taking (for example, limiting press freedoms, delaying elections) are at best tangentially related to responding to the crisis. These actions frequently fail a basic test that Keynesians, in a completely different context, use when considering economic stimulus policies--that they need to be "timely, targeted, and temporary" in order to be successful.

Support for fragile states increases global stability and thus contributes vitally to U.S. national security. The U.S. can advance its national interest by supporting effective governance and sustainable development around the globe – both through bilateral aid and in

cooperation with an array of international institutions—including the IMF, the World Bank, UNDP, and the OECD. Among the many complex dimensions that the standards advanced by these institutions express – promotion of rule of law, reduction of corruption, non-discriminatory laws for sustainable development – we focus on two in particular: building institutional capacity for good governance in individual states and establishing productive international and public-private partnerships to support such efforts.

Coordinated action by democratic states to promote accountable government institutions is always difficult and has weakened in the face of other challenges. This weakening threatens our national interest and constitutes a grand challenge to U.S. public administration. We believe it remains a core U.S. interest to endorse and support mutually affirmed international commitments to strengthen state capacities for democratic governance.

Experience with the United Nation's Millennium Challenge Goals has led to calls for country efforts to pursue long-term public administration reforms, especially those that aim to strengthen public financial management (PFM) in fragile states. This is expressed as UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.* The UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and others have developed standards for essential capacities and institutional arrangements. (Devex) Countries that align their planning and budgeting with the SDGs also will be able to benchmark their progress against that of peer nations. To date, however, few countries have used the SDGs systematically to reorient public spending or take other steps to make their governing institutions more accountable and inclusive. ("Chapter 3: Sustainable Development Goal 16: Focus on Public Institutions")

These issues take on intense relevance in the context of fragile states, where weak state capacity or weak state legitimacy leaves citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks, risking both humanitarian catastrophe for

citizens and political openings for enemies of democratic government, international security, and sustainable development. U.S. government policy recognizes this. The current Administration supports the Global Fragility Act of 2019. (*S.727 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): Global Fragility Act of 2019*). The Act calls on federal agencies to develop a ten-year Global Fragility Strategy. A key strategy for this is to strengthen public decision processes and public financial management in fragile states. Implementation would require the President, in coordination with the Secretary of State, the Administrator of USAID, and the heads of other relevant Federal departments and agencies, to develop and pursue coordinated actions to address instability in fragile states.

**Management Capacity**

It is critical that management capacity at the State Department be increased to enable domestic staff to increase their effectiveness on global issues. Policy studies across the political spectrum have called for a review and reorganization of the structure of the U.S. Department of State. Concerns include a disconnect between Foreign Service officers and political leadership, outdated organizational structure, and inefficient partnerships with other federal agencies. The United States Agency for International Development is similarly hampered by a cumbersome personnel system.

The management challenges for domestic staff at the Department of State and other global facing departments call for effective capacity to reach across the major agencies of government – Treasury, Defense, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security as well as outside of government to private sector and philanthropic partners. The Department of State needs flexible management systems that advance these collaborative efforts.

A period of experimentation with management systems and civil service reform is needed to craft these new management approaches. We are not alone in acknowledging this. Other respected nonpartisan organizations and experienced leaders who have examined these issues

also urge a period of experimentation and priority setting for personnel systems and management capacity at the U.S. Department of State.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. can lead the world in confronting its political, cultural, and risk challenges. We have a unique combination of assets to do so:

- The world's largest economy;
- A constitutional tradition of democratic government;
- A scientific community that leads in almost every field of discovery;
- Operational and regulatory jurisdiction over the international financial market;
- Unparalleled military power;
- A system and tradition of competent, professional public management operating in challenging settings;
- A globally dominant popular culture; and
- A national heritage of liberty and individual rights.

Some of these assets operate outside of the government, but *none is independent of the government*. To deploy these national assets and position America for the new era, the U.S. government—at all levels and in its many agencies—will need to repurpose and reform. Key institutions of federal administration like the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Treasury, the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency will have to rethink their priorities, adapt their systems, and re-train their staff.

The United States needs new thinking about international development and foreign assistance. Drawing from promising early work in this field and from new models of collaboration, we can build more effective connections between defense, diplomacy and development to tackle themes like stabilization, resilience, and effective interventions in fragile states. There is a need for more and better points of leverage, with and within the private sector, and for 21st Century models of collaboration

between government, non-profit, and faith communities. Both American charities and asset management houses have demonstrated willingness to contribute to global causes. There will also be points of leverage in the array of reformed and re-energized international institutions. However, the credibility of American leadership will depend on how our public service transforms itself.

The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) take the following first steps to trigger further progress:

- Establish a U.S. Global Crises Response Corps, starting immediately with a program focused on health, particularly on COVID-19. This should soon be followed by similar programs on natural disasters, cybersecurity, and other international risks that require coordination and action across borders;

- Establish a National Commission on Cultural Exchange, charged with helping American diplomacy present and represent U.S. values abroad; and

- Develop a presidential-level Sustainable Democratic Institutions Strategy to integrate efforts from across the federal administration.

To enable these and other initiatives, we need to take steps to strengthen and redesign public management capacities for diplomacy and international affairs. As another important first step, we recommend the establishment of a new career path at the State Department that leverages "domestic" staff to increase the government's cadre and capacity to manage global issues.

Each recommendation is discussed in more detail below.

**Recommendation 1: U.S. Global Health Crises Response Corps**

As the COVID-19 crisis surrounds U.S. and draws attention, it is important that we not lose sight of our capacities to respond to potential new global health crises or to unusual hotspots. We must stay nimble and have capacities to work flexibly. In line with the CSIS Commission report, the Working Group calls for the **establishment of a U.S. Global Health Crises Response Corps** charged with responsibility to respond rapidly to global health crises in order to meet critical needs and to help frame a national response, to intervene by mobilizing and coordinating appropriate government agency, private sector, and philanthropic partners to take rapid action in the face of global health crises.

Much has been learned from past responses to Ebola threats in Arica, and to SARS in Asia. Much is being learned now about COVID-19. A Global Health Crises Response Corps would be in a position to compile these lessons, align with the varied public agencies necessary for a response, involve private sector and philanthropic partners, and identify further actions needed. The CSIS estimates costs of such an initiative would be about $50 million a year over five years; leadership might rest either in the CDC or USAID, and its deployment would be jointly conditioned by USAID, CDC, and the State Department, and of course host countries, coordinated by the White House.

We know that crises are inevitably multi-dimensional. We know that in pandemics, the behavior of those who have not yet contracted the disease is just as important as those who are ill. If they are unable to go to the factory, the farm, the market, the school, or the office, the economic impact of the pandemic grows exponentially. The perceived speed and scale of the government's response ("Are they doing something to stop it?") drive street-level decisions. Advance planning and reserve resources structure the character of the government's response.

The Global Health Crises Response Corps would offer a rapid response capability that can both deliver U.S. expertise and resources where crises are emerging, can gauge the scope and breadth of risk from crises, and can learn from interventions and responses of others. It would, in turn, help frame our capacity to respond to the associated economic,

social and political dislocations. We are confident that this rapid response capacity in health would soon be followed by similar programs on natural disasters, cybersecurity, and other international risks that require coordination and action across borders.

## Recommendation 2: National Commission on Public Diplomacy, Cultural Exchange, and Sustainable Development

To move in this new direction, the Working Group calls for a **National Commission on Public Diplomacy, Cultural Exchange, and Sustainable Development** charged with exploring and recommending new approaches for public sector and multi-sector initiatives that represent U.S. values abroad and meet sustainable development goals in light of them.

Established as a Presidential Commission under provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Stuessy), this initiative would engage members of the public, the NGO and philanthropic sectors, and relevant professional associations to help reframe and energize a mission for the future for public diplomacy, and recommend the type of matrix organization best suited for administering these initiatives.

## Recommendation 3: Sustainable Democratic Institutions Strategy (SDIS)

Drawing on its democratic traditions and the strength of its governing institutions, the U.S can enhance its collaboration with international institutions and other governments to advance standards of democratic governance while adapting these to a variety of governing systems around the world. Achieving global development goals, particularly those contributing to state capacity to support sustainable development, also calls for new collaborative relationships with corporate leaders, development professionals, and philanthropy to support knowledge development and adoption of best practices.

To do this most effectively, the U.S. government could implement the framework established by the Global Fragility Act. Using procedures established in the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010 for cross-agency priority (CAP) goals, a cross-agency team could be established in 2021 to pursue a Sustainable Democratic Institutions Strategy (SDIS). This would encompass efforts of the Department of State and USAID, along with Departments focused on U.S. commercial, trade, and labor interests, and those engaged with U.S. cultural expression. The cross-agency team would set measurable two-year targets for strengthening fragile states, including metrics for the foundations of democratic governance such as support for the rule of law and civil society as guaranteed for U.S. citizens in the Bill of Rights. The team responsible for achieving this goal would be coordinated at the Presidential level.

Other steps the U.S. should take to strengthen governmental capacity, accountability and rule of law in fragile states include:

- Establish cross-agency standards for monitoring and evaluation by Federal departments and agencies administering foreign assistance as called for in the current Administration's "Guidelines for monitoring and evaluations of foreign assistance (January 11, 2018, M-18-04)" implementing the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016.

- Extend the principle of conditionality established for the Millennium Challenge program to other foreign assistance programs and condition assistance on adherence to the principles of good governance defined by SDG 16 and the OECD's principles for public sector governance and institutions.

- Align U.S. efforts with those of other nations and the private sector to achieve the UN's SDGs, in particular with SDG 16.

- Identify and advance initiatives for public-private and philanthropic partnerships to advance the SDGs.

**Recommendation 4: Increase Management Capacity**

The challenge is broad; we recognize that there are multiple perspectives on how to develop and guide the professionals who implement U.S. foreign policy. Now is the time for innovative, promptly implemented experimentation within the civil service sector of the State Department to build the robust, nimble civil service we need in the future.

As first steps, we recommend actions that explore greater flexibility in systems for the domestic service—that is, those positions with the Department of State outside of the Foreign Service. These experimental reforms would be foundational, creating capacity within the Department to pursue its mission with greater flexibility and bringing additional focus on areas within its expertise across the government as a whole.

Pilot programs that can make significant change in our management capabilities are well within the authority and the traditions of the public service. Our recommendation is proposed jointly by the American Academy of Diplomacy and the Partnership for Public Service, and a variant is affirmed by analysis from Mark Abramson and his colleagues addressing administrative practice and public sector reform (The American Academy of Diplomacy; Abramson).

This reform proposal focuses on a system that allows greater opportunity for professional growth within the domestic based civil service at the Department of State. It allows flexibility in Civil Service (CS) rotations that draw on current strengths of the Foreign Service rotation system without competing for such positions, thereby creating a more flexible federal workforce within the agency.

The proposal, in the words of the American Academy of Diplomacy:

> … would create an exempted service within State's CS. The exempted service, which would be voluntary (no forced placements), would be a new system with many of the attributes and some of the responsibilities of the Foreign Service (FS) except that it would be limited to domestic service, i.e., it would not

compete for overseas jobs. The new service would have regular rotation and rank in person, the latter being essential to allow rotation of jobs and break the direct connection between position and rank. Those in the new system would also acquire time in class requirements.

Our Working Group's proposal would incorporate a principle from the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act embedded in the Senior Executive Service, which establishes the principle of rank-in-person in lieu of rank-in-position. Rank-in-position serves as a barrier to the full development of a strong civilian-based, agile, public service at the Department of State that has the flexibility to build experience and manage events in a cross-agency environment.

As Abramson frames this:

> As the number and importance of cross-agency policy goals continue to increase, there is a growing need for experienced civil servants who can move from agency to agency (or goal to goal) and bring their experience to bear in new situations. In many ways, that was the vision for the Senior Executive Service. The experience of the State Department demonstrates that rank-in-person can indeed be an effective tool for administrations to deploy when they need 'cool heads in hot spots.'

## CONCLUSION

Each of the recommendations in this report is a fundamental step in its own right and each lays groundwork for more extensive innovation. The Grand Challenge in Public Administration to "advance national interests in a changing global context" has been transformed during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic will change the world forever. Though the new script is not yet written, it is clear that U.S. global strategies must be nimble, that threats to U.S. power and influence will grow, and that our interests and values cannot be advanced alone.

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# *Strengthening Social and Economic Development*

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# *Promoting Social Equity in an Evidence-Based Policy Environment: An Action Plan for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Foster Social Equity**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

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# *PROMOTING SOCIAL EQUITY IN AN EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY ENVIRONMENT: AN ACTION PLAN FOR 2021*

### *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
FOSTER SOCIAL EQUITY

**Working Group Members**
Margaret C. Simms, Chair
RaJade M. Berry-James
Gary Glickman
Demetra Nightingale

**THE CHALLENGE**

Over the past 60 years, significant progress has been made toward promoting social equity in both the public and the private sectors in the United States. Prominent examples include actions on civil rights, women's rights, poverty reduction, and gender equality; and this progress has been hard won. But continued progress remains uneven and, in some cases, has regressed. The roller coaster can be partially explained by macro shifts in economic conditions and political priorities. Even in this context, social equity can be advanced by building a strong federal platform that would include increased awareness, rigorous measurement, formal evaluation and consistent application.

While equity in the distribution of public services and administration of programs should be the goal of any presidential administration, it is difficult to move programs and practices toward equity through legislative actions alone. Therefore, one of the social equity recommendations set forth for the first year of the presidential term beginning in 2021 emphasizes administrative frameworks, data collection, research and evaluation that should be put in place quickly. This would allow agencies to determine if existing services are effective and equitably distributed, if new initiatives are likely to have equitable impact, and if statutory changes are warranted.

**A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE**

The federal government, over the past two decades, has gradually expanded its focus on using evidence to improve results and inform policy decisions. Existing regulatory and performance measurement frameworks and evidence-based policy initiatives can be leveraged to incorporate social equity concepts into practices for which federal agencies are already responsible.

Several key laws include reporting, performance, and regulatory provisions that provide a framework for developing and tracking results of programs and policies, and assessing the performance of senior government managers. They feature guidelines for collecting information measuring performance and determining program effectiveness. For example, The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 established the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and required that Agencies estimate the value of new regulations that require collecting information from the public and the resulting burden of this collection effort. Regulatory policy was further revised in an attempt to rationalize and modernize how Agencies issue and implement regulations by Executive Order 12866, issued in 1993. The Order directed Agencies to consider whether existing and proposed regulations are necessary, required a benefit-cost analysis, and codified and expanded the role of OIRA in the regulatory review process. As a result of this Executive Order, OIRA developed and issued a set of important guidelines, including guidelines for conducting benefit cost analysis that federal agencies use when proposing new or revised regulations.

Later, performance measurement was more directly incorporated into the administrative fabric of the federal government as a result of the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRA-MA). This Act, and its predecessor legislation, requires federal agencies to publish strategic plans that clearly delineate specific goals, cross-agency actions, and performance measures. Some of the performance indicators are built into the annual evaluation criteria for senior managers.

**Evidence-based Policy Initiative**

The latest federal initiative for improving federal government decision-making is The *Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018* (the Evidence Act).[1] This law directs the federal government to implement a series of activities that move agencies toward greater use of evidence to measure government effectiveness. The Evidence Act and GPRA-MA provide a framework for a White House evidence initiative on Social Equity that would (1) institutionalize a government-wide focus on social equity within the evidence-based policy framework (2) prioritize equity in Federal programs and policies and measure progress toward that goal; and (3) represent a model that state and local governments and the non-governmental and private sector can follow.

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[1] Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 & Pub. L. 111-352; 124 Stat. 3866

Because the implementation of various features of these acts have specific timelines for embedding the process in federal agencies, the addition of a social equity focus can readily be initiated early in the next presidential term/administration. Moreover, since it builds on a priority objective of the federal government moving forward, it can be implemented as part of ongoing efforts to embed the requirements of the Acts into agency operations.

The Evidence Act applies to all Chief Financial Officer (CFO) agencies; addresses a range of activities related to evaluation, data, and statistical functions; and requires agencies to have an Evaluation Officer, a Chief Data Officer, and a Statistical Officer who together are to expand the use of various sources of evidence to improve decisions and results. Other (non-CFO) agencies are strongly encouraged to also implement evidence-based policies and strategies. To strengthen agencies' evidence related infrastructure and capacity, OMB issued detailed guidelines in July 2019[2] for a four-phase implementation, coordinated with the strategic and performance plans. The implementation guidelines offer a timely opportunity to incorporate a framework of Social Equity constructs and objectives into many Evidence Act activities:

- **Phase 1 (beginning in 2019 and ongoing): Learning Agendas, Personnel and Planning** (including multi-year learning agendas, annual evaluation plans concurrent with annual performance plan

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[2] Office of Management and Budget Memorandum for Heads of Executive Offices and Agencies, OMB Memorandum M-19-23.

and strategic plan, evidence capacity assessments, and open-data plans)

- **Phase 2 (beginning in 2019 and ongoing): Open Data Access and Management** (including a data inventory, a data catalogue, and a repository of tools and best practices)

- **Phase 3 (beginning in 2020 and ongoing): Data Access for Statistical Purposes** (including expanded secure access to data for researchers and other users)

- **Phase 4: (beginning in 2020 and ongoing): Program Evaluation** (including program evaluation standards and best practices)

**Public Administration and Social Equity**

Social equity is a complex issue related to access to, and distribution of, resources and opportunity in a society, with many theoretical and practical definitions.[3] Fundamentally, social equity conveys a strong notion of equal opportunity, justice, and fairness for all in society. When social and cultural norms and public administration, policies, laws, and practices do not promote equity and instead reinforce historical or institutional inequities, population disparities by race, gender, sexual and gender identity, geography, and other dimensions arise or are exacerbated.

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[3] See for example, Marla McDaniel, Tyler Woods, Eleanor Pratt, and Margaret Simms (2017) Identifying Ethnic and Racial Disparities in Human Services, Washington, DC: Urban Institute https://www.urban.org/research/publication/identifying-racial-and-ethnic-disparities-human-services/view/full_report; and Brian D. Smedley, Adrienne Y. Stith, and Alan R. Nelson, eds. (2003) Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Structural barriers that limit equitable access to opportunity result in disparities in education, employment, income, wealth, health, housing, criminal and legal justice, environmental safety, business and economic development, and other desirable individual, family, and community societal outcomes. Intergenerational factors can exacerbate inequities, as centuries of structural, legal, and political discrimination compound inequity challenges for racial minority groups and communities.[4]

Many US government programs and policies are designed to provide services equitably to people and communities in the nation, and some are designed to help specific populations and communities to address the negative effects of past inequities. For example, anti-poverty programs are intended to reduce or address the repercussions of poverty, and compensatory education programs are intended to equalize educational opportunities for students regardless of community wealth or individual family circumstances. Measuring how successful individual programs are in achieving those equity objectives as well as other programmatic objectives should be part of measuring their effectiveness.

Yet identifying the metrics to measure progress toward social equity is very challenging. While there are global indicators of inequality, such as the GINI coefficient and the Inequality-adjusted Human Development

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[4] See Kilolo Kijakazi, K. Steven Brown, Donnie Charleston, and Charmaine Runes (2019) What Would it Take to Overcome the Damaging Effects of Structural Racism and Ensure a More Equitable Future? Washington, DC: Urban Institute https://next50.urban.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/2019.05.12_Next50%20structural%20racism_finalized%20%281%29.pdf

Index (IHDI), there are few existing measures that have been adopted by either the federal or state governments. A few efforts, such as Equality Indicators[5] developed by the City University of New York and the Opportunity Index[6] developed by the Forum for Youth Investment, provide examples of possible approaches to developing guidelines for measuring progress. Another promising effort being led by the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) seeks to develop a framework that will examine key considerations for social equity across three dimensions:

1. Program areas such as those discussed above (health, criminal justice, education and other areas).
2. Demographic groups such as race/ethnicity, religious, gender, geography and culture.
3. The bodies of research and data that are available to help assess likely or expected impacts.

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[5] See CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance, Equality Indicators. https://islg.cuny.edu/sites/our-work/equality-indicators/

[6] See Rackers, Hannah & Samantha Anderson. (2019, Dec). A guide to using the Opportunity Index to support your community. https://forumfyi.org/knowledge-center/opportunity-index-user-guide/

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Implement a White House Initiative on Social Equity Evidence**

Since the factors that inhibit achieving social equity are complex, policy and public administration strategies to achieve evidence-based equity objectives should be multi-faceted. A White House Initiative on Social Equity Evidence should be initiated that operates concurrently with the implementation of the Evidence Act, GPRA-MA and regulatory policy, incorporating a focus on equity to the already established principles of effectiveness and efficiency inherent in public administration and management.[7] The White House Initiative on Social Equity Evidence would include an agenda with four components:

- **A Social Equity Evidence Review** of rigorous research and evaluation on approaches that have improved social equity and gaps in research that should be filled with new research,
- **A Social Equity Data and Statistical Inventory** of public data and statistical series with periodic (e.g., annual) information on equity and inequity by nation, state, and local areas;
- **A Social Equity Cross-Agency Priority** (CAP) goal, and
- **A Social Equity Measurement System.**

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[7] See H. George Frederickson (1990) Public administration and social equity, Public Administration Review 50:2 228-237.

**Social Equity Evidence Review**

A critical first step will be to review existing research on effective strategies that improve social equity, the extent to which there is credible and rigorous evidence, and gaps in knowledge that should be filled to improve policies and strategies that advance equity. A review should include the literature and research on social equity and a systematic review of rigorous impact evaluation results using established standards as set forth in major federal evidence-based clearinghouses such as the What Works Clearinghouse, Crime Solutions, and the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research.[8] The intent is to summarize what is known, identify existing gaps in the base of knowledge, and recommend how to fill those gaps.

The review should also identify a common set of core measures and definitions of social equity. Macro definitions would be common across agencies while more micro definitions would be required to conform to agency programs and missions. Common definitions could include identification of populations that are most impacted by social inequities including race/ethnicity, gender, economic, geographic, religious and other factors. Micro definitions could include agency specific mission and objectives such as housing, criminal justice, environmental justice, healthcare, and so on. These definitions should be established based upon existing literature as well as input from agencies and external stakeholders

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[8] Federal evidence-based clearinghouses include, for example, Department of Education's what Works Clearinghouse https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/ ; Department of Labor's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research https://clear.dol.gov/  and Department of Justice's https://www.crimesolutions.gov/

including non-governmental organizations, academia, state and local governments, and people with lived experience with the issue of focus.

As noted above, among the main Evidence Act activities agencies are expected to undertake are conducting an evidence capacity assessment that includes refining the agency's evaluation policies and practices, reviewing data quality and access, and developing multi-year learning agendas to identify priority evaluations and research for the annual evaluation plan. A learning agenda ideally builds on existing research and expands (or adds to) the high-quality evidence.[9] The Social Equity Evidence Review should identify issues or topics on which evaluations, research or analysis can be conducted to fill gaps in knowledge.

Individual agencies should also be strongly encouraged to conduct an objective and systematic review focused on their specific programs or missions, or two or more agencies with complementary missions could conduct a joint review. The study could be done in-house by federal evaluation specialists or could be conducted by outside contractors. One important point is that the review should be done systematically and objectively, following standard academic research principles, with the results used to identify potential research and evaluation projects that could fill gaps in knowledge. A second critical point is that the review should be specific to an agency, program, or policy area (e.g., employment

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[9] Demetra Smith Nightingale and Molly Scott. (2018) Building Evidence Culture and Capacity in Federal Agencies, Washington: DC Urban Institute https://www.urban.org/research/publication/building-evidence-culture-and-capacity-federal-agencies

opportunity, civil rights, education, business entrepreneurship, housing, health).

The Review should therefore, feed into the learning agenda process required by the Evidence Act, informing individual departments or cross-agency partnerships on research that will expand the existing base of evidence.

**Social Equity Data and Statistical Inventory.**

Open data and access to statistical resources are also covered by the Evidence Act and OMB guidelines, along with the preexisting requirements under GPRA-MA for strategic planning and performance management and consistent with the strict privacy provisions included in the *Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002* (CIPSEA)[10]. The Federal government has many data and statistical systems and surveys that collect and maintain a wealth of information relevant to particular populations, communities, the nation as a whole, and businesses—including income, employment, education, poverty, household composition, health, and housing. Since the Evidence Act requires agencies to prepare a data inventory and catalog, data and potential metrics should be reviewed and identified for their ability to allow agencies to track progress in improving

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[10] Pub.L. 107-347, 116 Stat

social equity and reducing inequities. Those to be reviewed should include the major statistical resources, a few of which are:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics surveys (Establishment Survey, Non-standard Employment Survey)
- Census Bureau surveys (Current Population Survey, Decennial Census)
- National Household Education Surveys
- National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
- American Housing Survey
- National Health Interview Survey

The inventory should also include relevant state and local data, and any data from federal grants programs. Many federal programs collect or require funds recipients such as state and local governments and nonprofit organizations to collect data on recipients of services or funds. Federal grant reports in addition to any locally maintained data could also be a source of information on equitable distribution of funds and program activities, assuming the recipient characteristics are included in the data collection.

**Social Equity Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals**

To fully address high priority policy areas that require multiple departments, the GPRA-MA calls for the Administration to set a few CAPs and associated goals. The CAP goals and progress are to be included in the Department's Strategic Plan and highlighted in each annual budget proposal submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Social

Equity CAP would apply to all departments, since each would at a minimum be expected to set some administrative goals to improve social equity outcomes for the programs administered through their agency (e.g., reduction in income disparity across groups or communities, improved equal opportunity) as well as social equity goals for their own federal workforce (e.g., hiring and promotion policies, career opportunities, procurement and government contracting, program budget allocation procedures, stakeholder engagement, customer relations) and/or within specific programs.

A core CAP workgroup should be established to assess progress on improving social equity outcomes. The core group would consist of agency leaders from departments that have particularly relevant missions related to equity, such as reducing poverty, discrimination, or inequality (e.g., the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, and Justice). The Social Equity CAP workgroup would identify 5-6 core goals for the Federal government. Each department would set appropriate Social Equity goals and targets for its department. Establishing Social Equity as a CAP will send a strong message to all departments about its importance to the White House.

**Social Equity Measure for Assessing Programs**

A Social Equity framework could not only provide a guide for the questions that public administrators need to proactively consider but would also provide a valuable resource for accessing extant data, research and expertise. Ultimately, a framework could continue to evolve as research and data gaps are identified and as determined by practical implementation. In the meantime, some basic guidelines could be used to assess what we know about existing programs and the possible impact of new initiatives.

During the first phase of the Social Equity Initiative, the President should issue an Executive Order (EO) requiring that agencies incorporate social equity indicators into their future planning and budgetary considerations. It would also establish a cross-agency framework to oversee the initiative. The EO would require agencies to submit a preliminary action plan to assess and prioritize programs that impact social equity outcomes. Importantly, the EO should not focus solely on social programs, but should be broadly issued to encompass all agencies. For example, even certain military, tax, and other regulatory programs can impact various populations.

**Starting Up and Implementing the Initiative**

As a top priority, the Social Equity Evidence Initiative should begin as early as possible in 2021, by designating the leadership team, identifying initial agencies and programs for the review and inventory, and finalizing the CAP goal.

**Leadership**

The White House Initiative on Social Equity Evidence would receive the highest attention and momentum if it is led by the Vice President, supported by Cabinet level principals from key agencies (e.g., Education, HHS, Labor, Justice, HUD), who meet at least quarterly and spearhead actions in their own departments.

**Initial Agencies and Programs**

Recognizing that the goal of reducing social inequality within/through government programs is a huge undertaking, it will be important to identify those agencies and programs on which to focus first for the evidence review, data and statistical inventories, and the CAP goal. OMB would subsequently incorporate language into CAP guidance that both signals strong interest in social equity and uses the common definitions and metrics that emerge from the evidence reviews and statistical and data analysis. The initial set of agencies should include those responsible for programs or services that represent important potential approaches that can reduce inequality and improve Social Equity, such as:

- Department of Education (Title I Grants; Career and Technical Education; Higher Education, Federal Student Loans, Pell Grants),
- Department of Labor (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act adult and youth programs, Job Corps, Youth Build, Apprenticeship Program, Worker Protection enforcement programs)

- Department of Health and Human Services (Child Care Development Block Grant, Medicaid, SCIP, Public Health Service, Indian Health Service)
- Department of Agriculture (Farm to Early Care and Education Initiative)[11]
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Justice (Youth Offender Reentry Program, Civil Rights Enforcement Programs)
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

**First Year Deliverables**

- Evidence Reviews from at least two departments
- Initial Data Inventory from at least two departments and establishment of a metric to track progress in improving Social Equity
- CAP Goal Metrics established in CAP Plan government-wide

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[11] See the NAPA Social Equity Working Group's paper on food insecurity, *Improving Child Well-Being & Reducing Food Insecurity: An Action Plan for 2021*. https://www.napawash.org/grandchallenges

**Conclusion**

Social equity can feasibly be elevated as a national priority by incorporating it into the administrative framework and requirements of existing laws, especially the Evidence Act and GPRA-MA. Progress in achieving this critically important social objective could be made without substantially adding to bureaucracy since agencies are already required to strengthen their use of data, evaluations, statistics and other evidence to analyze and improve program results. A White House Initiative on Social Equity Evidence, led by the Vice President, would initially: (1) conduct a Social Equity Evidence Review; (2) prepare and maintain a Social Equity Information System with statistical data and analysis that can be used for research, analysis, and tracking progress; (3) establish a Social Equity Cross-Agency Priority goal; and (4) establish a process for assessing social equity in proposed programs and initiatives and through program evaluation and research.

The Initiative would benefit from the infrastructure and practices being institutionalized to improve public access to performance data, and disseminate the results of rigorous, objective research and evaluations. At the same time, the agency improvements in data, statistics, evaluation, and performance systems required by the Evidence Act and GPRA-MA will be enhanced by including social equity data and measures to more fully reflect and reinforce government's responsibility to promote well-being and equality.

In the early 1990s, there was a move toward fiscal conservatism in an effort to reign in and rationalize government spending. Through both administrative and legislative actions, the budget deficit went from 4.5% of GDP in 1991 to a surplus of 2.4% in 2000[12] and benefit cost analysis became a requirement for all new legislative and regulatory actions. Similarly, strong administrative action on social equity can yield significant results and serve to catalyze investment across the public and private sectors.

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[12] Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 and later extended it through Acts in 1993 and 1997. In addition, Executive Order 12866, issued in 1993 codified and expanded the role of Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) in the regulatory review process to include rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

## Social Equity: Evidence-Based Policy Working Group

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# *Improving Child Well-Being & Reducing Food Insecurity: An Action Plan for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Foster Social Equity**

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# *IMPROVING CHILD WELL-BEING & REDUCING FOOD INSECURITY: AN ACTION PLAN FOR 2021*

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP: FOSTER SOCIAL EQUITY**

### Working Group Members
Margaret C. Simms, Chair
RaJade M. Berry-James
Gary Glickman
Demetra Nightingale

**STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE**

Food insecurity in children is a major challenge in the United States, especially during the current Covid-19 pandemic. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "At the national level, the Household Pulse Survey data indicate that about 11.8 million children live in households that missed a mortgage or rent payment or sought a deferment, while roughly 3.9 million children are experiencing COVID-19 induced food shortages."[1] Families living in urban centers, rural communities, and tribal areas face insurmountable challenges during our current national health crisis. Directing resources toward young children is a cost-effective way to improve life chances and is an effective strategy for promoting social equity.

This paper of the Social Equity Grand Challenge Working Group includes its five recommendations for congressional and executive action to support families in the United States who are in significant distress due to social and economic conditions:

- Establish a Cross-Agency Priority Goal on Child Well-Being;
- Increase Farm to School funding to $15 million annually to improve the ratio of demand for grants to funding availability and create an accountability tracking system to measure progress toward a more equitable food system.
- Support all children in food-insecure families by giving high funding priority to ECE sites and tribal community projects.
- Increase the SNAP benefit by 15% to eligible households to help pay for food during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Establish a cross-site evaluation system that relies on standardized data and an assessment of activities and outputs contributing to the outcome of improving child well-being and reducing food insecurity.

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[1] See U.S. Census Bureau (2020, June), for more information on measuring household experiences during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/06/the-risks-children-face-during-pandemic.html

**Food Security for Children as a National Priority**

Directing resources toward young children is a cost-effective way to improve life chances and is an effective strategy for promoting social equity. Food security and adequate nutrition are key to a good start in life. A sound nutritional profile promotes many health benefits and facilitates lifelong learning. The Federal government, through the establishment of multiple programs in this area, recognizes its role in promoting food security. At the same time, some intentional adjustments will enhance the ability of these programs to promote social equity. The executive action agenda outlined here recommends using an existing cross-agency priority goal to improve child well-being through a Food Nutrition Service (FNS) initiative implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). To improve equitable outcomes in child well-being, we recommend that policy and funding shifts be made to early care and education (ECE) settings serving young children in preschool as well as early and aftercare programs. Also, we suggest a broader agenda to improve food security in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These recommendations are consistent with and respond to the general challenge for agencies to (1) address social, economic, environmental needs; (2) review policies, programs and practices that foster social equity as outlined in *12 Grand Challenges in Public Administration*[2]; and (3) promote social equity in the evidence-based policy environment[3] in the presidential term beginning in 2021.

The Working Group's five recommendations for executive action support families in the United States who are in significant distress due to social and economic conditions. Families living in urban centers, rural communities, and tribal areas face insurmountable challenges during our current national health crisis. We support a USDA federal policy change that aligns with ECE providers to increase access to fruits and vegetables for young children living in food insecure households. The Working Group

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[2] See National Academy of Public Administration. (2019), for more information on the *12 Grand Challenges in Public Administration*.
https://www.napawash.org/grandchallenges
[3] See National Academy of Public Administration Election 2020 Academy Working Group, *Promoting Social Equity in the Evidence-based Policy* Environment: An Action Plan for 2011. https://www.napawash.org/uploads/Election_2020_Social_Equity.pdf

supports a national strategy to plan and implement agricultural literacy and nutrition education activities as a core community food strategy for urban and rural areas as well as tribal communities. In addition, we lend our support to the use of current Farm to School Program agreements to procure more fruits and vegetables through local distributors, farmers, and farmers' markets and encourage states to include ECE programs in the planning and implementation of Farm to School grant activity[4]. Likewise, we support USDA efforts to provide healthy and nutritious foods for children through the summer food service programs and encourage the expansion of meal delivery to include young children attending ECE settings, (e.g., preschools, child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start/Early Head Start, programs in K-12 school districts.)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Cross-Agency Priority Goal to Improve Child Well-Being

The importance of addressing these aspects of child well-being is supported by a review of federal statistics. *Child Well-Being Key Considerations for Policymakers*, a report to Congress by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2017), summarized findings supporting a federal Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goal on child well-being. Using federal data for children living in the U.S. that were collected by several agencies over 10 years, GAO examined multiple dimensions of child well-being in three critical areas of a child's life: (1) family, physical, and social environment; (2) physical and mental health; and (3) early care and education. To collect social and economic indicators which examine federal efforts to address child well-being across many policy areas, several federal agencies are involved (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and U. S. Office of Management and Budget). GAO concluded that "child

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[4] See Center for Environmental Farming Systems at North Carolina State University for the North Carolina Farm to Early Care and Education food system initiatives. https://cefs.ncsu.edu/food-system-initiatives/nc-farm-to-early-care-and-education

well-being has improved in some areas but not in others, and well-being continues to be generally worse for children who are minority, poor, and/or from families headed by single mothers (compared to married parents)." At-risk children living in the United States fared worse than others did and measurable gaps in child well-being have persisted over ten years.

Linked federal data on child well-being underscores how young children (age five and under) are at risk because of social and economic influences, measured across race/ethnicity, income levels, and family composition. In the current CAP analysis of child well-being, GAO points out that "food insecurity, or the inability of a family to provide adequate food for active, healthy members of the household, remains the same over ten years, with the exception peaking during the 2008 recession." Obesity, cost, and quality of childcare, and enrollment in preschool also underscore equity concerns among at-risk children living in the United States (see Table 1: Child Well-being Indicators and Equity Concerns). By focusing on the early years of a child's development, the cumulative impact of these measurable gaps can be reduced as food wealth is almost certainly connected to good health.

Following the examination of Child Well-Being federal data, GAO made the following recommendation for executive action concerning child well-being:

> *GAO recommends that OMB consider developing a goal that addresses a coordinated federal approach to child well-being among its next set of cross-agency priority, or CAP, goals, including working with relevant agencies to ensure their strategic plans include related goals and objectives. Enhancing the well-being of our children – one of the nation's most valuable assets – requires a coordinated federal approach that takes into account the interrelatedness of federal actions and policies that aim to improve the lives of children.[5]*

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[5] See U.S. Government Accountability Office (2017, November), *Child Well-Being: Key Considerations for Policymakers Including the Need for a Federal Cross-Agency Priority Goal*, for highlights on key social and economic indicators as well as recommendations for executive action on a coordinated federal approach to child well-being https://www.gao.gov,assets/690/688252.pdf

| Table 1: Summary of Child Well-being Indicators and Equity Concerns* | |
|---|---|
| **Key Indicators** | **Equity Concern** |
| **Food Insecurity** | According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau Population Survey Food Security, *8% of households with food-insecure children remained the same over ten years. In 2016, Black, Hispanic, poorer, and/or female-headed households had the highest rates of food-insecure children.* |
| **Obesity** | According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services National Survey of Children's Health and data collected from the Children and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, Data Resource Center for Data Resource for Children and Adolescent Health: *Children with obesity often become adults with obesity, with increased risks for a wide variety of poor health outcomes including diabetes, stroke, heart disease, arthritis, and certain cancers. In 2016, children who were Black, Hispanic, or poor had the highest reported rates of obesity.* |
| **Cost and Quality of Child Care** | According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Survey of Early Care and Education household questionnaire and U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and Birth Cohort, Longitudinal 9-month Kindergarten-Restricted-Use Data File: *In 2012, lowest-income households spent a higher proportion of their income on child care each month compared to all other households. Center-based childcare for children around age 4 was generally higher quality than home-based care for all households regardless of income levels, report 2005-06...* |
| **Preschool Enrollment** <br><br> *Source: GAO-18-41SP Child Well-Being | According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Curing Population Survey and the U.S. Department of Education Early Childhood Program Participation Survey (2001, 2005 and 2012): *From 2005 to 2015, the percentage of children ages 3 to 5 years old enrolled in preschool stayed about the same. Hispanic (in 2015) and poor/near-poor children (in 2012) had lower percentages of preschool enrollment than White and non-poor children, respectively.* |

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** To address the Foster Social Equity Grand Challenge in Public Administration, the Working Group recommends that OMB establish a Cross-Agency Priority Goal in Child Well-Being grounded in an evidence-based approach to measuring trends in this area, including key indicators like food insecurity, obesity, cost and quality of health care, and preschool enrollment.

## Fostering Social Equity in Farm-to-School Grant Programs

This Working Group recommends that USDA establish an agency priority goal that fosters equitable resources for America's food insecure and vulnerable communities. This recommendation builds on the existing CAP strategy to implement a priority goal across federal agencies to build a stronger evidence base for enhancing national program outcomes related to child well-being. This recommendation to advance equity by prioritizing ECE in the Farm to School grant program supports policies and actions to improve the lives of all children, especially those who attend early childcare programs. This action could be part of a larger agenda to improve food security given the economic setbacks caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

## Prioritizing Early Care and Education in Farm to School Grant Programs

Through school funding agencies, many states have instituted Farm to School grant programs to improve children's health and school meals, improve access to healthy local foods, and implement educational agricultural opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips. Over the past decade, our nation's focus on early childhood nutrition has spread across several states by way of Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE) initiatives,[6] supported in part by the W.K. Kellogg

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[6] See National Farm to School Network (2020) for more information about the Farm to Early Care and Education initiatives, http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/early-care-and-education

Foundation priority area, *Thriving Children,*[7] organized by a working group within the National Farm to School Network, and implemented in several states. Farm to ECE statewide initiatives include a policy, system, and environment (PSE) change intervention to advance racial and social equity in the food system. Farm to ECE strategies "increase young children's access to healthy, local foods in early care and education settings through local food purchasing and gardening; increase the quality of the ECE setting through food, nutrition, and agriculture-related experiential education; increase children's acceptance and preference for healthy foods; increase children and family knowledge about healthy foods and local foods systems; and positively influence children, family, and provider healthy behaviors."[8] Farm to ECE activities embrace three key programmatic areas: (1) local procurement, (2) gardening and food, and (3) agriculture and nutrition education to teach young children where food comes from and how it grows, support children's health and provide experiential learning opportunities.[9] While USDA does a good job of supporting nutrition in school-aged children, grades Kindergarten through 12, it can better address food insecurity for everyone in the household by *prioritizing* resources for Early Child Care & Education settings.

Under the Farm to School Act of 2017, the USDA Office of Community Food Systems administers funding for several child nutrition programs to incorporate local, healthy foods into meal programs supported by the Farm to School Grant program. Program activities focus on local food purchasing, school gardens, and agricultural education. According to the 2015 USDA Farm to School Census, 42% of the 42,587 schools represented by 5,254 districts participated in farm to school activities to improve children's access to local foods. In 2018, the National Farm to Early Care and Education Survey on Growing Healthy Futures for All Children asked 2,030 early care and education sites across 46 states about their Farm to ECE activities. Almost half of the respondents were

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[7] See W.K Kellogg Foundation grants in focus area, *Thrive Children*, https://www.wkkf.org/grants#pp=10&p=1&f1=thriving-children

[8] See UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (2020) *SNAP-ED Toolkit for Farm to ECE,* https://snapedtoolkit.org/interventions/programs/farm-to-early-care-and-education/

[9] See National Farm to School Network (2018) for the National Farm to Early Care and Education Survey, http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/early-care-and-education

incorporating core elements of Farm to ECE (e.g., local procurement, gardens, and food and agriculture education) into their childcare centers, slightly more than one-third of participating sites were serving more than 50% low-income children and one-third of participating sites have implemented farm to ECE programs for more than 5 years to advance the health and wellbeing of young children, engage families and communities and enhance the quality of the ECE setting.[10] However, the share of funding going to these early care and education (ECE) centers is disproportionately very low.

In the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) area, the USDA administers the Farm to School Grant Program. Program funding increased significantly in FY 2019; however, a brief analysis of the list of awardees revealed that USDA supported 31 planning grants and 80 implementation programs for K through 12 schools. Of the 111 awardees receiving funding for planning or implementation, only 3 awardees (less than 5 percent) were earmarked for ECE centers.[11] In the FY 2020 school year, USDA reported that the Farm to School Grant program "supports 126 grants which served more than 5,400 schools and 3.2 million students, noting that nearly 64 percent of them were eligible for free or reduced-price meals."[12]   To anticipate the impact of the grant program and understand policy impact, key data describing program implementation must include (a) definition of local; (b) amount of money spent on local purchases; (c) most common products purchased locally; (e) the sources of local products; (f) benefits and challenges of participating in farm to school/ECE; (g) number and use of edible school gardens; and (h) the number of salad bars.[13]

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[10] See National Farm to School Network and Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (2018) survey results from 2,030 ECE sites, serving 255,257 young children in 46 states, http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/ECESurvey18-Infographic.pdf

[11] See U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (2019, July) for *FY 2019 Farm to School List of Awardees* by state and type of program, https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/FY2019FarmtoSchoolAwardees.pdf

[12] See U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (2019, October 22) *Community Foods System: Farm to School Grant Program.* https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/farm-school-grant-program

[13] See Facts About the Upcoming U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm to School Census (2019), https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/FactsAbouttheCensusFinal.pdf

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** The Working Group recommends increasing Farm to School funding to $15 million annually to improve the ratio of demand for grants to funding availability and create an accountability tracking system to measure progress toward a more equitable food system.

## Prioritize Program Goals Directed Toward Improving the Lives of Children

The USDA provides a safety net for food-insecure families and, based on scientific evidence, promotes dietary guidance for school funding authorities. The food and nutrition goal of the USDA is to "increase food security and reduce hunger by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a way that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence." [14] While the FY 2020 Farm to School Census data has not been released, new study data reveals that school closings, bans on gathering, work from home requirements, closures at work, and other types of restrictions have exacerbated food insecurity in the United States. In the absence of school, the COVID Impact Study and in the Survey of Mothers with Young Children estimated that "more than one in five households in the U.S, and two in five households with mothers with children 12 and under, are going hungry due to the economic instability of the coronavirus epidemic."[15]

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[14] See U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition for more information on child nutrition programs, https://www.usda.gov/topics/food-and-nutrition

[15] See Hamilton Project (2020, May 6), *The COVID-19 crisis has already left too many children hungry in America: Recession Ready, Effective Government*, https://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/the_covid_19_crisis_has_already_left_too_many_children_hungry_in_america

According to the Center for Disease and Prevention, "eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can help protect against some serious and costly chronic diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and obesity."[16] While health outcomes and health behaviors are influenced by policies, systems, and the social determinants of health in a child's environment, a federal policy that prioritizes funding for childcare centers will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable, food-insecure children. Several data briefs on the health and nutrition of children, adolescents, and their families justify a collaborative approach to improve policies, expand programs and sustain best practices that increase access to local, healthy foods for children in early care and education programs.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** To address the Foster Social Equity Grand Challenge in Public Administration, the Working Group encourages our nation's leaders to remain committed to poverty and inequality reduction policies by prioritizing program goals that leverage resources for children, age 5 and under. We recommend supporting all children in food-insecure families by giving high funding priority to ECE sites and tribal community projects. Currently, in areas where child well-being is worse, children who are minority, poor, or in families headed by single mothers are food-insecure, that is, they lack access to enough food for an active, healthy life. By *prioritizing funding* for Farm to School grants for early childcare programs, USDA ensures nutritional adequacy for all household children under possibly modified conditions post-COVID-19. Furthermore, this approach will improve Farm to School grant program participation of early care and education sites serving vulnerable and diverse children and their families by offering technical assistance and micro-grants for capacity building projects and programming among eligible grantees.

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[16] See Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Nutrition: State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables. (2018). https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/2018-state-indicator-report-fruits-vegetables.html

**USDA Programs and Assessments**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) measures household food security and insecurity along a continuum from high food security to very low food security.[17]  The lack of access to adequate food or *food insecurity* is defined by the USDA (2019), "as a situation of limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in a socially acceptable way."[18] For some households, *food insecurity* occurs at a low food security level or a very low food security level.  The USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) describes *Low Food Security* as when "households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted."  Similarly, *Very Low Food Security* occurs "at times during the year when eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money or other resources for food" according to USDA ERS.  Fundamentally, USDA acknowledges that food insecurity is "a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life."

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, "Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life."[19] According to Feeding America[20], there are almost 13 million food-insecure children in the United States. It is estimated that 21% of children are likely *ineligible* for federal nutrition programs because their household income is above 185% of the poverty level.  The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child warns that "children who do not

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[17] See U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2012, September) U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form. https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf

[18] See U.S. Department of Agriculture (2019, September 4) for definitions of food security, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx

[19] See Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh (2017) *Household Food Security in the United States in 2016,* https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84973/err-237.pdf?v=8107.4

[20] See Feeding America (2019) for the impact of the pandemic on food insecure children in the U.S. and food insecurity rate, https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2017/child

receive what they need for strong, healthy brain development during early childhood may never recover their lost potential for cognitive growth and eventual contributions to society."[21] In very young children, inadequate nutrition impairs cognitive development, so promoting proper nutrition advances social equity matters for many American children.[22]

Our nation's focus on food insecurity has been sidelined by the coronavirus pandemic. For people living in poverty, programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provide financial assistance for nutrition. Since the 2016 election, fewer people received food stamps and caseloads for TANF had fallen; however, greater reliance on government programs is predicted post-COVID largely due to unprecedented unemployment and economic inactivity. USDA Food and Nutrition Service program guidance in America's response to COVID-19 has been swift, allowing households to make SNAP online purchases for food, use EBT cards for Pay at Pickup purchase, and making other necessary administrative changes. However, more can be done to promote equity in the food system given the rise in food insecurity resulting from COVID-19.

As our nation braces for the full impact of the coronavirus, we are reminded of the safety net that the SNAP program has historically provided families following a recession. In addition to helping families put food on their table, researchers at the Urban Institute affirm, "SNAP is an antipoverty program, a work support program, a promoter of health and nutrition, and an automatic stabilizer in recessions." SNAP benefits reduce the rate of poverty, provide secondary health benefits to food-insecure families, and help families cope with financial hardships."[23]

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[21] See National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/national-scientific-council-on-the-developing-child/

[22] See Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) for State Indicator Reports on Fruits and Vegetables, https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/2018-state-indicator-report-fruits-vegetables.html

[23] See Sheila Zedlewski, Elian Waxman, and Craig Gundersen (2012, July) for more information on SNAP's Role in the Great Recession and beyond, https://www.urban.org/research/publication/snaps-role-great-recession-and-beyond/view/full_report

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** To address the Foster Social Equity Grand Challenge in Public Administration, and given the impact of the coronavirus on food-insecure households, the Working Group recommends that the SNAP benefit be increased by 15% to eligible households to help pay for food during the COVID-19 crisis.


**RECOMMENDATION #5:** To coordinate effort among many federal agencies, track the implementation of programs and services, and evaluate the impact in high priority areas, the Working Group supports executive action for a coordinated effort described in the GAO-18-41SP Child Well-Being. To inform Congress and provide support for the impact of the Farm to School program, we further recommend the establishment of a cross-site evaluation system that relies on standardized data as well as an assessment of activities and outputs contributing to the outcome of improving child well-being and reducing food insecurity.

**CONCLUSION**

In many ways, widespread disruptions due to the coronavirus pandemic underscore the urgency to prioritize resources that improve the health and wellbeing of children living in households experiencing economic instability, increased vulnerability, and food insecurity. The Working Group supports executive action for a coordinated effort described in the GAO-18-41SP Child Well-Being to coordinate efforts among many federal agencies, track the implementation of programs and services, and evaluate the impact in high priority areas. To avoid an eventual tradeoff between basic needs and nutritionally adequate meals, we recommend that this Executive Action to ensure early care and education settings receive priority consideration for food nutrition programs.

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Providing Meaningful Work for All Americans: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Connect Individuals to Meaningful Work**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Working Group for Connect Individuals to Meaningful Work. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for the American government to build ongoing capability and capacity in the public workforce to secure and advance agencies' missions.

# PROVIDING MEANINGFUL WORK FOR ALL AMERICANS: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

## A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
MODERNIZE AND REINVIGORATE THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE

### Working Group Members
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**THE CHALLENGE**

Today, connecting individuals to meaning work has societal urgency; it is the means by which we can address growing unemployment, disconnection from the current and future economy, and growing income disparities. Not since the Great Depression has the need to facilitate connecting individuals to meaningful work been central to the work of public administration. This working paper offers actionable recommendations to leverage existing programs as well as to develop new initiatives to connect individuals to meaning work and economic opportunities.

Humans have an innate quest for meaning. Our jobs and our work are a principal means for fulfilling that need—they have both instrumental and intrinsic value. Instrumentally, work provides the means by which we make a living and support our families. Work also has important implications for one's personal identity, with much of our self-esteem deriving from it. When work is perceived as meaningful, people have a sense of fulfillment and purpose that not only strengthens their psychological welfare, but also contributes to other aspects of life and to an individual's overall life purpose.

Work is not just important for individuals and families—it is also a critical foundation for the nation's economy, tax revenues, healthcare, and communities. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid changes to the world of work had caused many individuals and communities to experience a great sense of dislocation, income inequity and loss, even as the income and wealth of others grew substantially:

- Artificial Intelligence and globalization meant that manufacturing and production jobs were no longer pathways to economic security and a stable life.
- Individuals were facing the need to reskill and upskill in order to avoid being left behind.
- Labor force participation in our country had already fallen from nearly 70 percent before the Great Recession to approximately 63 percent.

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- Millions of working-age Americans (in particular males 25-54) were neither working nor seeking work.

Now, in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, things have gotten much worse. At some points during the summer of 2020, about 1 in 5 workers were collecting unemployment benefits. Although the unemployment rate declined in August 2020, it remained over 8 percent. Many large retail chains and tens of thousands of small businesses have closed permanently. States and localities have been laying off workers and imposing hiring freezes. Without a quick rebound, many Americans' knowledge, skills, and abilities may atrophy—putting them at-risk for long-term joblessness and economic pain.

Although there is no easy fix for these challenges, the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) can take steps to stabilize and improve the situation in the near-term while taking a series of policy and administrative actions that set the nation on a path toward broad-based meaningful work and prosperity for all Americans.

**WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW**
The global coronavirus pandemic has upended our economy and our traditional modes and models of work. While many in our country have retained work that provides sufficient income, dignity and enjoyment, millions of others have not. Our immediate and urgent challenge is to create meaningful work for all Americans. What individuals do--their labor, earnings, purchases, and the taxes they pay--is a primary determinant of economic performance and political stability. If we hope to develop a stronger economy as we recover from the global impacts of the pandemic, we must understand what is happening to work and intentionally strive to connect individuals to meaningful, reliable, productive work.

Governments at all levels—federal, state, and local—offer workforce development programs. For example, the apprenticeship program managed by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) provides information about apprenticeships in multiple industries, explains how to establish a program, and provides access to apprenticeship openings. The program serves as a one-stop source connecting career seekers, employers, and education partners to apprenticeship resources. As noted on the DOL

website, "Apprenticeship is an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally-recognized credential."

Apprenticeships support entry level positions across a wide variety of career fields, from the traditional blue-collar trades through technical and even management tracks. These programs are driven by industry, certified by the federal government, and searchable online. They offer paths to new careers for job-changers and initial entry for new workers. They are a model program, having placed almost 700,00 new apprentices since January 1, 2017, who can expect to earn an average starting salary of $70,000.

The Department of Labor has other important workforce development programs, including some that focus on youth:

- [High Growth Youth Offender Initiative](#) provides occupational training, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, internships, and other work-based learning to help former offenders gain the skills necessary to enter high-growth, high-demand industries. Projects focus on addressing the workforce needs of growing industries that provide employment opportunities and potential for advancement.
- [Job Corps](#) is a free education and training program that helps young people 16 and older learn about a career, earn a high school diploma or GED, and find and keep a good job.
- [School District Youth Offender Initiative](#) supports the development of strategies for reducing youth involvement in gangs using a workforce development approach.
- [Youth Build](#) provides job training and educational opportunities for at-risk youth, ages 16-24, while constructing or rehabilitating affordable housing for low-income or homeless families in their neighborhoods. Youth split their time between the construction site and the classroom, where they earn their GED or high school diploma, learn to be community leaders, and prepare for college and other postsecondary training opportunities.

Every state has a state workforce agency, and DOL provides information about them on its [website](). These agencies comprise the main US DOL partners who get federal grants, and combine them with state funds to address specific employment needs in their states. These state workforce agencies deliver training, employment, and career and business services. They also administer the unemployment insurance, veteran reemployment, and labor market information programs. In general, the existing system allows individual communities to tailor their workforce assistance programs to local employers and employment opportunities.

Concerns remain among DOL recipients that these programs are tedious to manage, place unnecessary limitations on their targeted audience, and use metrics that often weed out people who most need the assistance. Accordingly, opportunities exist to enhance these programs by, for example, giving greater flexibility to design and customize training to meet more regional business skill requirements or emerging industries. In addition, there are opportunities to build upon some innovative programs and models for COVID-related job displacements.

Nongovernmental organizations have been adopting new strategies to ensure that America has the workforce it needs. For example, Markle's Rework America initiative seeks to ensure that all Americans, especially those without a bachelor's degree, can be successful in the digital economy:

- The Rework America Business Network has established a network that shares and promotes effective workplace practices while advocating for a skills-based approach.
- The Rework America Alliance works to ensure that worker training is tailored to the jobs that employers will need to fill.
- The Rework America Learning Network leverages a collaboration among innovative training providers, practitioners, organizations, and leaders working to build the skills of adults without a bachelor's degree.
- The Skillful State Network collaborates with governors from over 25 states to provide a forum for state leaders to share and accelerate workforce development.

Jobs for the Future (JFF) is another nongovernmental organization operating in this space. It seeks to ensure economic advancement for all by transforming the American workforce and education systems. It works with national leaders across a wide range of areas (including education, workforce development, business, and government) to develop powerful partnerships and networks to scale impact nationwide. Among other things, it is working to expand apprenticeship and work-based learning to new industries and professions, develop strategies to match the supply of skilled workers with job market demands, run a Student Success Center network to spread evidence-based practices that lead to good jobs for students, and foster innovative education and workforce systems solutions through JFF labs.

Other examples of innovation in nongovernmental organizations abound.

## RELATIONSHIP OF WORKFORCE ISSUES TO OTHER NATIONAL NEEDS

There appears to be widespread agreement in the United States that the nation has a significant need for additional investments in the areas of research, manufacturing, and infrastructure. This consensus has driven a focus to strengthen Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) curricula at every level of education. This shift has been made more urgent by the most recent Infrastructure Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), which gives the nation's infrastructure overall a grade of D+. In their scoring, a D is considered poor; a C, mediocre; a B, Good; and an A, Exceptional. Table 1 shows the grade for 16 different categories of infrastructure. Rail scores the highest, with a B. No other category scores higher than a C+.

| Infrastructure Category and Grade | |
|---|---|
| Aviation: D | Parks and Recreation: D+ |
| Bridges: C+ | Ports: C+ |
| Dams: D | Rail: B |
| Drinking Water: D | Roads: D |
| Energy: D+ | Schools: D+ |
| Hazardous Waste: D+ | Solid Waste: C+ |
| Inland Waterways: D | Transit: D- |
| Levees: D | Wastewater: D+ |

**Table 1. Infrastructure Report Card**

Investments in these areas can deliver significant economic and social benefits.  Businesses and individuals lose "time, productivity, and opportunities due to excessive traffic, delayed shipments, disruptions in energy supplies, and connectivity issues," the House Budget Committee notes.  This Committee's September 2019 hearing with experts found bipartisan agreement regarding the economic importance of infrastructure and ways that individuals and businesses are ill-served by the nation's current transportation, water, energy, broadband, and other infrastructure systems.  ASCE estimates that the nation needs to invest an additional $2 trillion in infrastructure over a ten-year period.

Although infrastructure investments are a generally acknowledged need, there are disagreements about exactly how much is needed, how it should be funded, and what its focus should be.  This Working Group was not charged with evaluating national infrastructure needs or recommending a new national infrastructure program or a specific investment level.  However, if the Administration and Congress in 2021 choose to undertake major investments in American technology, research and development, manufacturing, and infrastructure, they should link that investment strategy to a workforce strategy that makes providing meaningful work to Americans a central component of this larger program.  Policymakers and administrators must recognize that infrastructure investment and workforce development go hand-in-hand.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONNECTING INDIVIDUALS TO MEANINGFUL WORK

The Administration in 2021 will have a significant opportunity to advance strategies, programs, and initiatives to provide meaningful work for all Americans in response to the economic devastation resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.  Our current approach to managing the labor market has used the model of the industrial revolution; we break the problem into parts and develop a solution to each part. At the federal and state levels, our legislative policymaking has established individual programs and funding streams that are supported by interest groups and constituencies. Our legislative and executive organizations at both levels of government are organized to support this behavior. This has led to workforce development and investment approaches at the local level that are program-, project- and grant-driven in separate departments.  The

complex labor challenges of today require integrated approaches involving multiple agencies and departments, made possible by shared data and information systems and platforms.

The Administration's meaningful work agenda should rest on the pillars of creating demand for employment through any new investments in infrastructure, research, development, and manufacturing; satisfying that demand through focused workforce development; streamlining the employment pipeline and making it easier to connect job seekers with employment; expanding opportunities for national and community service; and developing a longer-term social equity agenda for the workforce.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Make Workforce Development and Opportunity a Key Part of Any Infrastructure Plans and Strategies.

The Administration in 2021 should leverage infrastructure strategies, plans, and funds to create demand and to focus on future needs and sustainability. Those who work front-line jobs in the infrastructure field are getting older, with approximately three million expected to retire within the next ten years. As Joseph Kane of the Brookings Institution notes, "[h]iring, training, and retaining a new generation of infrastructure workers will help drive our recovery and create a stronger, more resilient infrastructure system for the future."[1] Infrastructure jobs do not require a college education, pay higher wages, and cannot be outsourced to other countries. Investments in this area can be used to create economic mobility for individuals of all ages without a four-year college degree.

The Administration and Congress in 2021 should take the following steps to make workforce development and job creation a central part of any new infrastructure investments:

- Make a long-term commitment to any major new investments through a multi-year authorization;

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[1] https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/04/07/covid-19-is-a-chance-to-invest-in-our-essential-infrastructure-workforce/

- Ensure funds are directed toward workforce education and training services, including those designed to reskill and upskill workers for the needed jobs of tomorrow;
- Task states and localities with identifying "shovel-ready" projects and their employment impacts;
- Allocate resources to communities where investments will have the most significant infrastructure, sustainability, and employment impacts;
- Connect workforce development to investment in public health capabilities for addressing the current pandemic and developing capacity for addressing on-going and future prevention efforts;
- Develop new intergovernmental and cross-sectoral arrangements that will bring financial resources to the economic development and infrastructure work of local governments; and
- Broaden investment in broadband connectivity to all areas of the country, as part of the national infrastructure investment strategy, to ensure that all Americans can take advantage of remote work, training, and education.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Use Collaborative Governance Models to Ensure that Workforce Development Programs Can Satisfy Demand.

If the Administration and Congress in 2021 choose to embark on a major infrastructure program, the demand for workers will increase significantly. To meet this demand, federal workforce programs will need to use a more collaborative governance and management model. Intentionally focused workforce development programs will be critical given that manufacturing jobs now not only require technical knowledge but also use a range of other competencies; newer assembly lines are based on systems of flow that require line members to function and be accountable as a team and require workers to be interchangeable across positions and roles. Both technical and team skill development can certainly be built into formal education curricula.

The Working Group believes that it is necessary to establish a more collaborative governance approach to the delivery of workforce

programs centered on individuals and families rather than the agencies or levels of government that provide the services by:

- Expanding partnerships between community colleges and vocational/technical schools and industry;
- Continuing to support reemployment services and apprenticeships;
- Increasing opportunities for distance learning;
- Facilitating integrated service delivery through enhanced grant flexibility by proactively using existing program waivers to allow state and local governments to braid and blend funds to create person-centered service delivery models;
- Providing flexibility to states to test a range of reemployment solutions and target populations to build a stronger evidence base on what works under different conditions.
- Designing and piloting community care coordination delivery models to support flexible and agile service delivery under varied local conditions;
- Enabling state and local government and other community experts to participate in designing and planning collaborative approaches;
- Ensuring that the voice of the worker is heard by encouraging state and local workforce development organizations to form inclusive working groups;
- Establishing shared knowledge platforms and clearinghouses;[2]
- Developing intergovernmental partnerships across federal, state and local agencies specifically focused on connecting individuals to meaningful work;
- Collecting effective practices and successful models of workforce development, disseminating across states and localities; and

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[2] For additional information about collaborative governance approaches and a broader set of recommendations to this end, see the Academy Working Group's Election 2020 paper on Public Governance: https://www.napawash.org/uploads/Election_2020_Public_Governance.pdf.

- Expanding federal funding for the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.[3]

Development of an effective national workforce strategy must recognize that, while there is certainly a global labor market and that access to that market is getting progressively simpler for many sectors, many employment decisions are made locally. Ensuring meaningful work for Americans is fundamentally an intergovernmental challenge that requires leveraging regional and industry partnerships for learning, reskilling, upskilling, and professional development. In fostering development of such partnerships across levels of government and sectors, the Administration should ensure that federal workforce programs work in partnership with states, localities, and nonprofit organizations consistent with the Guiding Principles identified in Appendix A

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Improve Connections Between Job Seekers and Employers By Streamlining the Employment Pipeline.

It will be necessary to coordinate the many existing educational programs to create a continuous ladder of worker development from high school to graduate school, or from high school through increasingly demanding technical credentials. Workers in these skill areas have the potential to earn at middle to higher income levels. The Smidt Family Foundation enlisted the University of Chicago (NORC) Center to undertake an attitude survey of parents, students, and educators on this approach to education, developing skills for excellence in technical education. Their findings provide overwhelming support for this approach.[4]

The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 work with Congress to:

- Invest in Reemployment Services that accelerate return to work for individuals receiving unemployment compensation;

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[3] This Act promotes program alignment at the federal, state, local, and regional level and builds upon proven practices such as career pathways, regional economic approaches, and work-based training.

[4] *"Skilled trades in high schools: what voters, parents and students want from policymaker and educators, University of Chicago NORC Center, supported by the Smidt Foundation, (June, 2020).*

- Expand and scale-up apprenticeship programs and other earn-and-learn strategies that upskill employees of all ages in a wide range of high-demand industries;
- Establish new industry-recognized programs;
- Develop new analytical capacity and new data sets that help identify new solutions for implementation; and
- Expand remote training and work opportunities.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Expand National Service Programs.

The federal government has a number of agencies—including the Peace Corps and the Corporation for National and Community Service—that offer more than 300,000 national service positions annually. As documented by the National Commission on Military, National, and Community Service, these programs benefit individuals and communities by enhancing education; providing economic opportunity; meeting healthcare and other long-term needs; advancing environmental conservation; and providing support for disaster preparedness and recovery. Individuals benefit in numerous ways. Not only are they connected to something larger than themselves, but they also develop practical new skills that enhance their future prospects for higher-paying jobs. Communities are able to use these programs to meet unmet needs and ultimately to improve their civic life.[5]

The Working Group finds great value in the National Commission's report, *Inspired to Serve*, and recommends that the Administration in 2021 work with Congress to expand opportunities for national and community service by:

- Significantly increasing the number of available service positions;
- Enhancing the compensation and benefits associated with these programs to ensure that individuals of all economic circumstances have a meaningful opportunity to participate;
- Using national service to reintegrate ex-offenders into the social and economic life of the nation and improve the

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[5] https://inspire2serve.gov/sites/default/files/final-report/Final%20Report.pdf

workforce re-reentry prospects for those who left the workforce involuntarily due to disability or job loss;

- Launching new pilot programs at the Corporation for National and Community Service;
- Establishing new public-private partnerships to leverage private investments in service, including by considering the establishment of new tax credits to incentivize private investment;
- Strengthening interagency and intergovernmental collaboration and coordination; and
- Convening the various program staff to share best practices and program outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Develop a Longer-Term Strategy to Enhance Social Equity and Meaningful Work.

Over the longer-term, the United States needs a national strategy that coordinates our social safety net programs with the implementation of these longer-term workforce development actions. Individuals and families should have access to meaningful work and a secure personal livelihood. However, those who are willing and able to go to work but whose work does not provide a living wage should not be disadvantaged by their employment status from supportive programs. Work offers dignity and should not disqualify people from needed assistance.

To this end, the Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 undertake a review that designs strategies to address critical social equity issues as they pertain to the world of work. This review should:

- Examine the tax system and minimum wage structures to determine how to provide additional support for the lowest-income workers, including support for transportation and child care;

- Evaluate the impact of non-compete clauses in contracts with the working poor and identify policies to address this issue;[6]
- Determine how the banking system can more effectively provide the working poor access to savings accounts, checking accounts, and loans to prevent them from using alternative sources that take advantage of their shortage of resources;[7] and
- Encourage career leadership at DOL to take a more proactive national coordination role in working with other relevant federal agencies and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies.

**CONCLUSION**

The nation has a long-term need to rebuild its economy to provide meaningful work to all Americans. A strong, highly trained and motivated workforce undergirds so many national priorities and is fundamental to both national pride and productivity. There is no easy fix for these challenges. Still, the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) can take the policy and administrative actions identified above to not only stabilize and improve the situation in the near-term, but also set the nation on a path toward broad-based meaningful work and prosperity for all Americans. The Working Group's five recommendations above seek to operationalize a national commitment to connecting individuals to meaningful work. At the core of these recommendations is a recognition of

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[6] For example, Princeton economists have estimated that "no-poach agreements", which prevent moves between companies and even between franchises of the same company, affect employees of 70,000 restaurants in the U.S. Some of these restaurants have been challenged, and as of as August 2018, Applebee's, Church's Chicken, Five Guys, IHOP, Jamba Juice, Little Caesars, Panera Bread, and Sonic had all agreed to remove these non-compete clauses from their contracts.

[7] According to a 2014 Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation report, 25 million Americans had no bank account at all. Another 68 million are inadequately served by banks. Although they may have bank accounts, they also rely on alternative financial services. It is not that people are simply unbanked, but that banks are becoming too prohibitively expensive for many people to use them. The Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis encourages policymakers and other to promote economic resiliency not only through cash payments but by helping to build families' wealth among the high-school educated, younger Black, Hispanic and white working-class Americans.

the value of partnerships across each level of government: federal, state, regional and local, as well as with the private sector and nongovernmental organizations.

# APPENDIX A
## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE
## INTERGOVERNMENTAL ACTION

In fostering development of partnerships across levels of government and sectors, the Administration should ensure that federal workforce programs work collaboratively with states, localities, and nonprofits to advance the following ten practices for effective intergovernmental action:

- **Outcomes.** Focus on improving outcomes for individuals, communities, and industries, with attention given to minimizing undesirable side effects and unintended consequences.
- **Communications**. Communication arrangements must be established to transmit and receive information in ways that help all levels of governments identify, define, and explain problems, strategies, results, and causal factors and decide next steps.
- **Prioritization.** Working within and across organizations, problems are prioritized using evidence, as is the selection of interventions to reduce problems.
- **Problem-Solving.** Problems should be solved and opportunities pursued at level closest to the problem with agility, efficiency, and respect for scale economies and geographical variance in surge demand and with accountability for sorting out who and which level of government needs to do what, when, and why and executing accordingly.
- **Work Across Silos**: Problem-solving within and across organizations taps and builds networks and trusted professional relationships and negotiates with respect for the interests, capacity, and constraints of others.
- **Shared Knowledge**: Data, analytics, and pilots inform decisions and actions within and across levels of government.
- **The Right Incentives**: Effectively and efficiently designed incentives (both financial and non-financial) encourage continual evidence-informed improvement without discouraging individuals or tempting gaming.
- **Efficiency:** Costs and resources are routinely integrated into decisions and actions for more effective, cost-effective results.
- **Equity**: Policies and actions consider impacts on all affected and seek to generate net positive impact for all without favor or bias.

- **Effective Leadership:** Leaders step up, are designated, or are agreed upon to guide their organization's development and deployment of knowledge, skills, resources, authorities, and relationships for improved outcomes while also developing, nurturing, and strengthening relationships with others to advance shared objectives.

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Developing & Empowering a National Resilience Agenda in 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Build Resilient Communities**

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# DEVELOPING & EMPOWERING A NATIONAL RESILIENCE AGENDA IN 2021

### *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

### Working Group Members
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**THE CHALLENGE**

In November 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) announced 12 [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#). One of these Grand Challenges is [Build Resilient Communities](#). Across the nation, America needs resilient communities with the capacity to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. Such communities can bounce back from disruptions while providing a high quality of life for all residents. Resilient communities must be able to address preparedness, mitigation, and response for the whole panoply of potential and actual stresses facing communities.

The threats to our nation are multiple – climate change and its resulting impacts in serious weather-related natural disasters, our reliance on telecommunications and the Internet that is threatened by cyber criminals and state actors, and the continued threats in future or continued pandemics. The time is now to identify the paths to resilience, which will allow us to withstand these threats.

The need for resilient communities has been greatly highlighted by the current COVID-19 pandemic. The gaps in resilience and the disconnects between the various governmental layers and organizations are laid bare in a crisis of national impact. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly stressed the relationships between the federal, state, and local governments and highlighted existing gaps in trust and understanding. A patchwork of state and local lockdowns, testing and critical medical acquisition has proven to be a poor substitute for a collaborative federal, state and local approach to a national crisis that knows no state and local boundaries.

At the same time, there are examples of governments working together to solve the very serious, complex, and multi-faceted issues. The challenge is to identify and strengthen what is working while at the same time identify and repair the breakdown in the federal, state and local intergovernmental partnership.

In recent years, often in the absence of Federal leadership and support, we have seen increasing state and local skepticism that the federal government is a reliable intergovernmental partner and the related rise of the independent state, local and public-private partnership initiatives to

address the most urgent threats to community resilience. No path should be undertaken without a full understanding of the work that has been done, and the inclusion of key stakeholders in any new programs and initiatives.

Restoring the trust and partnership among the levels and agencies of government for building resilient communities is a critical challenge. In this paper, the Academy's Election 2020 Working Group on Resilient Communities proposes a path forward to build and repair these relationships.

## TOWARD A NATIONAL RESILIENCE AGENDA

Resilience as an essential dimension of societal continuity is not a new idea. Universities, nonprofits, think tanks, and government agencies have conducted myriad projects and studies over many years to understand resilience. A credible body of research now points toward how communities can successfully anticipate, withstand, and recover from calamity. Despite this body of knowledge, and growing threats to security, continuity, and health, our nation has not taken the steps needed. Consequently, the nation needs a more comprehensive approach to operationalize this knowledge and empower communities to take advantage of what theory and practice show can be helpful.

Motivated by this imperative, a national resilience agenda has been under active discussion and development for at least a decade, and there is now robust doctrine available. For example, the National Research Council and the National Academies' Committee on Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters published Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative in 2012. FEMA followed up with its Interagency Concept for Community Resilience Indicators and National-Level Measures in 2016 and its National Mitigation Investment Strategy in 2019. The Government Accountability Office published a Disaster Resilience Framework: Principles for Analyzing Federal Efforts to Facilitate and Promote Resilience to Natural Disasters in 2019. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published Building and Measuring Community Resilience: Actions for Communities and the Gulf Research Program in 2019. In 2015, the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense published the National Blueprint on Biodefense and in 2018

the White House published the [National Biodefense Strategy](). NIST has established a National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence which regularly publishes on the rapidly changing topic of cyber security and defense.

It is imperative that we move forward from these policy foundations and strategies, not reinvent them. Doing so successfully requires four things:

1. We must understand essential truths about the nature of resilience and what it takes to create it;
2. We must incorporate the on-going work of State and Local government, organizations, and academia;
3. We must organize, manage, and resource our national-level efforts accordingly; and
4. We must build critical capacity.

Fortunately, there are many existing initiatives at all levels of government, in the private and nonprofit sectors, and in academia upon which to build. An important element of trust-building is recognition of the value of these initiatives and the inclusion of key players. In this section, the Working Group includes a non-exhaustive list of existing organizations and initiatives to be built upon by the Administration (whether reelected or newly elected) in 2021.

## Existing Federal Initiatives

*Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)*

To a large extent, the current national resilience agenda has been promulgated by FEMA, which a few years ago added an Associate Administrator and reoriented itself more explicitly around resilience. This position supports FEMA's long-standing mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery programs. FEMA has articulated a sound nationally-oriented resilience concept and general strategy. This is an important foundation for national action, but it has yet to generate substantial action, meaningful investment, or demonstrable outcomes.

In response to COVID-19, FEMA received $45 billion to support states and localities with medical responses and the purchase of protective equipment. This appropriation also funded shelter and food services and enhanced sanitation at airport security checkpoints.

*U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

The *Agriculture Resilience Act*, introduced to the house in February 2020, would increase research, improve soil health, protect existing farmland, support pasture-based livestock systems, boost investments in on-farm energy initiatives, and reduce food waste.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA received $9.5 billion through the CARES Act to provide financial support to farmers and ranchers impacted by the pandemic. The act also replenished the Commodity Credit Corporation, the funding mechanism for agricultural programs dealing with income support, natural resources conservation, and disaster assistance.

*Department of Commerce (DOC)*

DOC established the Opportunity Zones initiative from the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*. This program provides tax incentives for socially-impactful investments to support locally-driven economic development strategies in distressed communities. Since the program's inception, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) has invested $347 million in 239 projects around the U.S. to support these zones.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DOC allocated $1.5 billion of CARES Act funding to a variety of programs including those planning the economic recovery, preparing technical assistance strategies to address economic dislocations, and preparing or updating resiliency plans to respond to future pandemics.

*Department of Energy (DOE)*

In May of 2019, DOE began an $8 million investment led by its Cybersecurity for Energy Delivery System program to enhance the reliability and resiliency of the nation's energy infrastructure against both manmade and natural threats.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DOE received $30.9 billion from the CARES Act for flexible funding directly to states, local school districts, and institutions of higher education to facilitate the transition to an online learning environment and to mitigate the damages to institutions and students in urgent need of support.

*Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)*

HHS supports community resilience through programs geared toward health epidemics, extreme weather conditions and natural disasters, and unaffordable housing.

In 2017, HHS began the *Combating the Opioid and Drug Overdose Crisis* program, which includes continuing the State Opioid Response program, expanding access to treatment in health centers, and establishing the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Program.

In 2019, HHS enacted the *Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America* initiative, which plans to give better access to treatment, prevention, and recovery services through several efforts including grants to key jurisdictions, expansion of access to preventative medication, an HHS global-domestic HIV meeting, and a further community outreach.

HHS continues to prepare and respond to natural disasters through several programs including a regional preparedness program, which improves local, state, and regional medical responses to a large-scale incident; a pandemic exercise, which includes intergovernmental and intersectoral collaboration; and the deployment of responders, medical equipment and supplies, and recovery specialists to emergencies.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HHS provided $150 billion to hospitals and healthcare providers. HHS distributed $50 billion

to general fee-for-service Medicare providers and the remaining funds to targeted providers in particularly impacted communities.


*Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*

HUD's *Strategic Goal I: Advance Economic Opportunity*, part of its FY 2018-2022 Strategic Framework, mitigates damages from economic dislocations, extreme weather conditions and natural disasters, and unaffordable housing. HUD plans to accomplish this goal through several efforts including supporting fair, sustainable homeownership and financial viability, reducing homelessness, enhancing rental assistance, supporting effectiveness and accountability in long-term disaster recovery, and bolstering growth in opportunity zones.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HUD distributed $3 billion from the CARES Act to communities and non-profits to support the homeless, citizens with compromised immune systems, and Tribal communities. In a second wave of funding, HUD allocated $685 million to support low-income citizens living in public housing.

*Department of Transportation (DOT)*

DOT adopted the *Resilient and Sustainable Transportation Systems Steering Committee Action Plan*, led by AASHTO, to promote resilient transportation systems and support states' quality of life and economic vitality.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DOT allocated $25 billion from the CARES Act to support urban and rural public transportation capital, operating, and general expenditures.

*Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*

Per the 2018 *America's Water Infrastructure Act*, the EPA requires completed risk and resilience assessments and emergency response plans from community water systems serving more than 3,300 people.  EPA did not receive funding from the CARES Act in support of community resilience.

**Non-Federal Initiatives**

*National Governors Association (NGA)*

NGA has established the Center for Best Practices comprised of teams and divisions focused on the following resilience issues:
- Economic Opportunity--Economic & Workforce Development, Employment, Human Services;
- Education--Early Childhood. K-12 and Postsecondary Education;
- Energy, Infrastructure & Environment--Transportation, Water, Electric Grids & Broadband;
- Health--Delivery & Reform, Quality, Workforce, Public Health, Drug Abuse & Maternal & Child Health
- Homeland Security & Public Safety--Cybersecurity, Public Health Preparedness, Corrections Reform
- Link: https://www.nga.org/bestpractices/divisions/

*National Association of Counties (NACo)*

NACo has taken the broadest possible approach to resilient communities including the following initiatives:
- Disasters--Adaptation & Recovery from Economic & Natural Disasters;
- Workforce--Retooling Workforce after Plant & Business Closure;
- Recovery & Prevention--Fires, Flooding & Storms Related to Climate Change;
- Public Health--Public Health Focus in Managing Disasters
- Social Impact--Mitigating Impact of Economic & Natural Disasters on Economically Disadvantaged;
- Alternate Energy--Clean Energy Alternatives to Fossil Fuels;
- New Economy--Job Training for Emerging Workforces
- Link: https://www.naco.org/topics/resiliency

*National League of Cities (NLC)*

NLC through its Center for City Solutions, Sustainable Cities Institute and general sustainability has the following resilience initiatives and areas of focus:

- Climate Change--Adapting to Natural Hazards-Flood, Fire, Storms;
- Applied Sustainability Research--State/Regional Collaboration, Translating Large City Success to Medium and Small Cities;
- FEMA Challenge--Rebuilding an Overwhelmed FEMA System to Meet the Increasing Number & Size of Natural Disasters;
- Urban Sprawl--Relieving Environmental & Economic Stress on Aging Infrastructure;
- Infrastructure Approach--Reimagining Federal Funding from New to Repair, Maintenance & Operation of Old Infrastructure;
- Link: https://www.nlc.org/program-initiative/sustainability

*U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM)*

USCM through its Alliance for a Sustainable Future in a joint effort with the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) has the following resilience initiatives:

- Climate Change--Resilient Communities Focus is on Climate Change Mitigation;
- Legislation--Effort to Provide Federal Infrastructure & Energy Block Grant for Climate Change Mitigation;
- Federal Resources--Lack of Federal Resources to Address Drinking Water & Wastewater Mitigation;
- Rising Sea Levels--Extended Days of Flooding Threatening Everglades, Drinking Water and Causing Wastewater Overflows;
  - ✓ American Flood Coalition www.floodcoalition.org
- Integrated EPA Planning--Compliance with EPA Unfunded Mandates;
- Rebuilding for Resiliency--Green & Gray Infrastructure to Mitigate Flooding
  - ✓ Mayors' Institute for Design www.micd.org

- Link: https://www.usmayors.org/programs/alliance-for-a-sustainable-future/

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

The Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) should take a number of specific actions to ensure that the nation has the capacity to build resilient communities throughout the land.

### Recommendation One: Develop a Comprehensive Resilience Strategy

To pursue resilience successfully, we must first understand the threats we face and their implications. Specifically, we call for the implementation of a strategy that includes and addresses the following key considerations:

1. **The nation faces myriad serious threats**. The most significant threats are in the areas of natural disasters and climate change with its wide-ranging effects (including intensified storm activity, flooding, wildfires, heatwaves, and drought), public health (including global pandemics, emerging infectious diseases, high threat pathogens, lack of access to care, and vaccine hesitancy), and cyber (including both malicious threats and unintentional weaknesses in our information systems, including data, applications, processes, and hardware). These threats have unpredictable and long-term impacts on economies, ecosystems, the environment, agriculture and food, transportation, housing, and utilities. These threats are exacerbated by the state of our national infrastructure (roads, bridges, water and sewer systems) and our health system (hospitals and public health agencies), as well as challenges with the affordability of housing.

2. **Resilience requires long-term commitment from all participants**. A fundamental dilemma of our policymaking and governance processes is that our very short-term perspective is ill-suited to long-duration agendas. We tend to live in the moment, focusing on the problems immediately apparent before us and seeking immediate solutions. Politically, we have a strong desire to realize success quickly, making it difficult to commit to an agenda

that must span decades. This leaves us vulnerable to problems that emerge slowly and solutions that take a long time to develop.

3. **Resilience requires ongoing investment by the public sector (at all levels of government) and the private sector.** A lesson of COVID-19 is that devastating calamity will strike, but the complex nature of our society and the threats we face make it impossible to predict what will happen when it does. Causes and effects are not proximate in time and are not linearly related. There are so many variables in play, and they are so interdependent, that we do not know how things will evolve. In the many cases where crises appear to have been averted, we mistakenly believe we are safe, and we are likely to presume we are more capable and less vulnerable to risk than we really are. As a result, the public and private sectors underinvest in resilience, deepening our vulnerability to risk.

4. **Resilience must be considered from a global perspective**. With increasing interdependence, threats propagate broadly, and solutions require collaboration across borders. Given the fragility of global supply chains, it is difficult to bring adequate and appropriate resources to respond quickly and effectively to crises. Resilience requires a focus on global continuity of operations and national continuity of government. COVID-19 and climate change provide instructive examples that we are globally inter-dependent.

5. **Resilience must become a societal characteristic**. Resilience practitioners and theorists have generally approached resilience within particular domains, oriented around specific disciplines or functions. This overlooks the inherently holistic nature of resilience. Resilience is created at the intersections of efforts like sound environmental programs, sustainability initiatives, a vibrant economy, and robust economic development initiatives. It also has a great deal to do with infrastructure writ large—from transportation to utilities to cyber to health—because infrastructure is what ties people and communities together. To build resilience therefore requires a comprehensive view that considers the whole picture of what makes communities survive and thrive when calamity strikes. We are built on stove pipes and functional boxes; we need a new paradigm.

**Recommendation 2: Establish a National Resilience Director and National Resilience Office**

To achieve resilience across the nation, the resilience agenda must be funded and operationalized—to move from a high-level concept to a comprehensive, detailed, meaningful, actionable blueprint for how to rebuild appropriately in the wake of a disaster. The links from theory to action must be made, so that when a community is affected, we know how to deal with everything from the electric grid, to transportation, to housing, to the economy, and beyond. FEMA is an important partner in this agenda, and has a substantial mission focused on helping and supporting states, tribes, territories, locals and communities prepare for disasters and saving lives and property when disaster strikes.

A national-level coordinating office that has the stature and authority to lead the national resilience agenda is needed to give concerted attention to solutions that will limit the impact of threats, enhance national ability to provide national security and domestic strength, and ability to bounce back after being faced with major hazards of all kinds, enabling rapid and intelligent recovery. These challenges require dedicated leadership that cuts across all federal agencies, capabilities, and disciplines, that focuses on long-term programs, that builds enduring relationships with communities, that breaks down policy silos, and that fosters intergovernmental collaboration and cross-sector partnerships. We should, therefore, elevate resilience above existing cabinet agencies to create a new interdisciplinary interagency effort.

Effective practices for this effort may be drawn upon a variety of other interagency and intergovernmental efforts, including the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to create an intergovernmental and intersectoral partnership to address this issue; the Director of National Intelligence to coordinate across the intelligence agencies and functions; and the Joint Commands in the Department of Defense, established to increase unify across the services.

Drawing upon relevant effective practices from these examples and other models for accomplishing interagency and intergovernmental goals, this new entity should:

- Operate in a joint way to facilitate decisions and commitments across the federal government;
- Work continually as an integral part of the life of communities across the nation;
- Engage top practitioners and academics to bring evidence to bear;
- Build strong partnerships with states, local governments, nonprofits, and the corporate and business community;
- Operate in a collaborative manner within both the spirit and the letter of established authorities;
- Recognize that states and local governments have already accomplished a lot and build upon this success by generating a national forum for shared learning effective state and local initiatives already underway.

To move forward, a resilience directorate should be established and staffed in the White House, at either the Domestic Policy Council or the National Security Council, and a Director of National Resilience appointed.

## Recommendation 3: Increase Critical Capacity Across the Nation

A new federal effort and organization must focus on how to build critical capacity. Although the concept of resilience is broadly accepted, it has been hard to get traction on it. Since resilience is fundamentally operationalized at the community level, a central challenge to creating widespread resilience is figuring out how to mobilize and support states and local governments. The federal government should ensure that its strategies and actions rest on three core levers:

1. **Resources are central**. It is very expensive to do what is really needed, especially given how expansively the resilience agenda is cast. Everyone wants to know who is going to pay, and incentives to invest in resilience are limited. Solving this puzzle requires more creativity. At the federal level, funders should embed resilience requirements in their programs across the spectrum of grant sources and uses, including tying funding to resilience-based outcomes. The HUD CDBG-MIT program and the FEMA BRIC program could be models for consideration in this regard. Such an

approach can incentivize resilience more powerfully than pursuing requirements through standards and compliance, which get debated endlessly without producing results. Creativity at the state level can also make resources more available. For example, one proposed approach would have states direct resources toward resilience efforts by creating special districts—analogous to school districts or fire districts—that collect local taxes and can also receive state and federal funds. To engage private investment, the Opportunity Zones program in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA, formally the Act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to titles II and V of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2018, Pub.L.115–97) can be leveraged. Innovations like this are already being developed and initiated by organizations like Global Resilience Institute at Northeastern University.

2. **Education is a capacity multiplier**. We already have vigorous professional education programs around traditional disciplines relevant to resilience (such as engineering, public health, and law enforcement). New interdisciplinary programs in areas like environmental sustainability are gaining strength. We could extend this educational agenda to create a multi-disciplinary resilience education program that would develop a new generation of researchers, teach public administrators about resilience, and teach policymakers how to be proactive in policy and program design. This approach can be operationalized as new stand-alone programs and also imported into existing undergraduate and professional graduate programs. Some universities are already experimenting with these sorts of programs.

3. **Infrastructure is the foundation upon which resilience rests**. There is near universal agreement that the nation's infrastructure is crumbling, insecure, and inadequate for contemporary needs. Even absent a resilience imperative, this would need to be addressed. Though the level of investment required is enormous—some argue a program of the scope, scale, and commitment of Roosevelt's New Deal is required—infrastructure is one area of bipartisan agreement even in our extremely polarized political environment, and affords an opportunity for progress. Any level of investment should be grounded in a new orientation: we should not automatically repair or rebuild what we had, but should build new

infrastructure and systems that are explicitly designed for the conditions we expect to face a half century hence.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, for America to be resilient in addressing the growing risks we face, the nation cannot continue its current approach. We must instead orient ourselves toward whole communities, operate in a broadly collaborative way across levels of government and sectors of the economy, explicitly incentivize action, increase our knowledge, and invest more. If we do not, we will face severe social and economic disruption and great loss.

Becoming resilient will require a collaborative effort across all levels of government and economic sectors that builds on the work done to date. We cannot emphasize enough that collaboration is key to building the trust that is the foundation of any successful national resilience agenda.

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# NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Building a Stronger Fiscal Foundation: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Advance the Nation's Fiscal Health**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

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**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Advance the Nation's Fiscal Health working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for the U.S. to strengthening governments' financial management systems.

# *BUILDING A STRONGER FISCAL FOUNDATION: AN AGENDA FOR 2021*

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**
**ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:**
**ADVANCE THE NATION'S FISCAL HEALTH**

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**THE CHALLENGE**

Recent federal budgeting has been characterized as a series of deals between the Administration and the Congress to raise the spending caps imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 and to lessen the magnitude of the spending controls included in that statute. Adding to the fiscal stress resulting from that additional spending, a package of tax reduction measures was enacted that have had the effect of substantially increasing the size of annual budget deficits.

In January 2017, CBO estimated near-term annual deficits at about half a billion dollars – $1.6 trillion over the 2017-2019 period. Given higher spending caps and new tax cuts, actual deficits over the 2017-2019 period totaled $2.4 trillion, about $800 billion more than forecast. The 10-year (2018-2027) forecast at that time was for an additional $9.4 trillion to be added to the national debt. By January 2020, CBO had significantly increased its estimates to show deficits exceeding $1 trillion each year, totaling $13.1 trillion over the 2021-2030 period.  Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual deficit will be $3 trillion or more in FY 2020—and possibly beyond.

The practice of routinely spending significantly more than available revenues has caused some policymakers to question whether deficits matter. The generic question, at least, returned as part of the popular discourse after the 2018 Congressional elections and again during the 2020 Presidential election because a number of candidates have proposed ambitious spending programs (e.g., Green New Deal, Medicare-for-All, major infrastructure improvement programs) that would require substantial additional federal spending—and larger deficits if not offset with higher taxes.

## I.     The Federal Government

Even in the pre-COVID-19 world, the United Stated faced serious current and long-term fiscal challenges at every level of government:  The federal government, which spent nearly $4.5 trillion in 2019, has more than $22 trillion dollars in debt, and a revenue base unable to keep up with continual spending increases.  In early FY 2020, when the robust economy's unemployment was in the 3 percent range and before the COVID-19 pandemic, federal debt was about 78 percent of GDP—or double the average over the past 50 years—with the national debt growing by about $1 trillion a year.  Even with interest rates at historically low levels, interest payments on the debt will begin to exceed defense spending by 2023.  Entitlements are a long-term issue, with trust funds for Medicare and Social Security possibly being depleted in 2026 and 2035, respectively.  Existing spending commitments have created significant unfunded liabilities. Consequently, a structural budgetary imbalance now exists that has left the federal government's financial condition reeling from years of neglect.

## Potential fiscal implications of the coronavirus pandemic

Federal policymakers have already adopted a $2 trillion emergency spending bill to reduce the economic and social costs of the COVID-19 outbreak. In doing so, they were largely flying blind because of the extraordinary nature of this shock. In contrast to the Great Recession, this event is not a financial, but a biological, phenomenon.  At the macro economy-wide level, the virus outbreak is reducing both aggregate demand and aggregate supply. Demand has dropped sharply because people rationally are avoiding public and work spaces to reduce the risk of infection. This decline in demand recently contributed to the largest single-week filing of unemployment claims. Supply of goods and services is declining for the same reason. This will unequivocally reduce sales, production, employment and income, precipitating declines in consumer spending.  But it is also unlikely that those underlying causes of slowing

aggregate economic activity can be offset by increased government transfer payments to individuals, purchases from producers, or tax cuts.

Rather, this stabilization effort will succeed primarily to the extent that it encourages and enables people to do what they are already doing: avoiding social contact and slowing the rate of infection.  This legislation also attempts to shift scarce resources toward hospitals and medical service providers. In the short-run, supply is only weakly responsive to increases in demand and funding. Worse yet, some decrease in supply should be expected as providers themselves become ill. Yet, in the longer term, financial assistance can avoid financial insolvency of institutions that were struggling before the pandemic outbreak. Increased assistance to individuals and families will also reduce the economic hardship of those whose own resources are insufficient to permit them to deal with the financial losses that will not be equally distributed across the US population.

While individuals have strong incentives to avoid social contact and reduce their risks of infection, individual avoidance also produces social benefits from the associated reduction in risk to others. Just as the social benefits from inoculations provide an efficiency justification for public subsidies to promote vaccination, similar benefits require social sharing of the cost of avoidance, including lost wages.  Increases in unemployment insurance benefits and public payments to employers to avoid layoffs are a logical means of assuring that the costs of obtaining social benefits are widely shared. A social gain might also be obtained from public financial assistance aimed at avoiding the insolvency and dissolution of complex specialized business enterprises.

It is noteworthy that the $2 trillion increase in spending is financed by an increase in federal debt—and unexpected emergencies such as the coronavirus are precisely the type of extraordinary event for which the federal government has borrowed in the past to finance an appropriate response. What is different in this case is that the federal government already has an outstanding debt to income ratio equal to its previous historical peak. That means that the risk of fiscal crisis is greater in this

instance than in previous emergencies. The source of this increased risk is broad, bipartisan agreement, that borrowing continuously to finance consumption in good times as well as bad, is preferable to requiring any living generation of beneficiaries and taxpayers to pay their own way. Clearly, an emergency is no time to suddenly get on the "fiscally responsible" wagon. But we need to note now that the dire structural deficit that motivated the establishment of this Grand Challenge panel now poses a significantly greater risk than before the emergence of the coronavirus crisis.

In the aftermath of COVID-19, it will be essential that Congress and the President put the government on a more responsible fiscal path. To get back to a sustainable budget from where we are now could take years, so interim benchmarks or targets are needed to create a manageable and sustainable path. Absent a financial or other large sector implosion, or a national emergency that negatively impacts the economy, there appears to be little public or political will to address the long-term structural imbalances of rising debt, growing spending (much of which is on autopilot) and revenue failing to keep pace with spending. On our current path, these structural imbalances will worsen in the years ahead.

Key matters to consider in assessing the impacts of deficits include the following.

- Persistent large structural budget deficits result in rising debt-to-GDP ratios and lead to unsustainable levels of debt. Current large structural deficits and high debt-to-GDP ratios are historically high given the recent long period of sustained economic growth and the looming demographic challenges of baby boomer retirement.
- Large structural deficits can limit long-term economic growth by crowding out private investment and putting upward pressure on interest rates as private borrowers are forced to compete with the government for loans.

- Rising public debt levels require a growing portion of the federal budget to be directed toward interest payments, potentially crowding out other, more worthwhile sources of government spending.
- Deficit spending can act as a drag on a full employment economy given there is a finite amount of investable resources available and deploying (borrowing) capital for public sector purposes crowds out other uses and takes those funds out of the private economy where innovation is more likely to occur.
- Running deficits has a direct impact on the economy. They can be used appropriately as a countercyclical tool during economic downturns to generate additional aggregate demand and initiate (hopefully) a virtuous pattern of public sector stimulus, more investment, new jobs and greater income leading to stronger growth. Alternatively, deficits incurred while the economy is strong can reduce national savings and weaken a country's ability to respond to downturns when they occur.

Deficits can result in a low rate of national savings if they reduce the perceived cost of government spending to taxpayers, allowing them to feel wealthier than they would if they had to pay taxes for all the current services they are receiving right now. The key drivers of the nation's increasingly unsustainable fiscal path are growth in programs driven by an aging population (major health care programs and Social Security), rising interest on the national debt, and a more general concern: the failure of the revenue base to keep up with such growth. Cutting across all of those drivers is the unmistakable fact that the fundamental nature of the budget—annual appropriations-driven discretionary vs permanent-law mandatory spending—has shifted in one direction over the past 50 years and that trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

In 1970, about 62 percent of federal expenditures funded discretionary programs and agencies involved with national defense, education, transportation, housing, justice, veteran's services, and many other programs. The remainder of the budget, or 38 percent of yearly spending, was used to pay for mandatory entitlement programs, like major health care programs, social security and interest payments on government debt. By 2019, the mix had more than fully reversed with 70 percent spent on entitlements and interest expense and 30 percent going toward discretionary spending activities.

Such a shift from discretionary to mandatory spending means the U.S. cannot solve its long-term fiscal challenges by continuing to do what it has done through the first two decades of the 21st century: 1) capping discretionary spending and then passing subsequent legislation to increase the caps; 2) funding large portions of the defense budget as emergency expenditures not subject to the caps; 3) cutting taxes; and 4) mostly ignoring the growing costs of entitlement programs and interest on the national debt. That four step foxtrot is becoming a tiresome choreography continually making the country's fiscal outlook worse, not better.

A balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is clearly too rigid as it would irresponsibly lock the nation in to revenues equaling expenditures every year no matter the circumstance. Yet any deficit reduction targets short of that, whether in congressional budget resolutions or even in statute, represent a plan or a law that Congress can easily override with a new law. This is what makes it so difficult to correct the pattern of fiscal irresponsibility.

The U.S. budget process has become antiquated, cumbersome, and ineffective. To illustrate, consider that federal budget process results have produced an on-time budget only four times in 40-plus years (1977-2019), and only four balanced budgets (all consecutive during the 1990s) in that same time, while producing 186 continuing resolutions, 20 funding lapses, and numerous debt ceiling crises. Such budget process failures erode

citizen trust that that our elected officials can effectively carry out the business of the nation.

From a tactical perspective, funding delays and uncertainties adversely affect the proper planning and execution of major programs across government, imposing a hidden inefficiency tax. That process is made haphazard when agencies – due to budgets not being enacted on time – don't have operating and program budgets until deep into the fiscal year. Operating programs and getting money out the door during the course of a full fiscal year is challenging, but when those activities are crammed into a partial year, prudent financial management suffers. It becomes difficult to plan responsibly, even for relatively straightforward budget execution, much less to do the types of data, risk and programmatic analysis needed to assess agency and program performance. More certainty in the budgeting process would provide agencies with the flexibility to focus on those bigger, and in many respects, more important analytical and planning exercises.

Moreover, current fiscal and programmatic policies are putting an inequitable burden on future generations.  In the years since the modern budget process began in 1977, an average of 15% of federal spending each year has been deficit-financed. Is it equitable for current consumers of government programs simply to pass on a significant share of the costs of their benefits to future generations? There are many divergent views on how best to tackle the nation's fiscal challenges spanning generations. While there is some degree of wisdom in many of the proposals that have been offered to address fiscal imbalances over the long run, they typically disagree on required policy reforms. However, nearly all agree that if current policies remain roughly in place, spending will grow at a rate over next several decades that will far exceed expected revenues, and future generations will be left to pay tab. A structural budget deficit exists because our current policies lead us down an unsustainable budgetary path, a path that will become untenable as the ratio of workers to retirees continues to decline.

The central question is: What fiscal condition do we plan to leave to our children, grandchildren and generations beyond? This question really is the crux of the matter and is ultimately a statement of our values. The notion of conducting a grand fiscal and economic experiment – let's borrow as much as we can until we can borrow no more – sounds more like the reprise of a country music song than sound public policy.

## II.    The US Federal System

The fiscal health of the federal government cannot be considered in isolation.  States and localities account for more than one-third of all government spending.  Their finances have only recently recovered from the Great Recession, and they continued to face near-term difficulties due to such factors as rising healthcare costs before the COVID-19 pandemic. Some states have cut taxes without corresponding spending cuts, while others have increased spending without corresponding revenue increases. Balance sheets for some state and local governments have a time bomb of unfunded pension liabilities that could easily crowd out public investments in such areas as education and infrastructure over the next decade.

The key features of a strong fiscal partnerships among governments are sustainable initiatives that balance revenues and spending where all parties have a common interest. To achieve that, there needs to be appropriate incentives and transparent sharing of information among the parties and the public. Incentives should not encourage over-spending or should stimulate private participation where there is private benefit.

Four major functional areas of federal grants include health care (largely Medicaid), income security, natural resources, and transportation. Some of these programs fund capital spending, while others are payments to individuals or to service providers. Recent work by Brookings, the Urban Institute and others provide strategies (such as "braiding and blending") that facilitate combining grant revenue from various sources to

increase flexibility and provide more comprehensive, holistic health care services that are focused on outcomes.  These strategies have also been applied to education, income security and environmental grant programs.

The balance of cost sharing between federal and state-local governments is a critically important decision in the design of capital grants. Many federal aid programs for infrastructure were originally designed under a "one size fits all" strategy, which led to over-subsidizing some recipients and under-funding others, and not putting the right infrastructure in the right places. Flexible matching rates are becoming more common. Some infrastructure programs require recipients to perform cost-benefit analyses, which can help determine customized matching rates that can vary depending on the ratio of national benefit relative to local benefit.

Some of the key challenges facing the federal system from a fiscal standpoint are described below.

**Preemptions and Tax and Expenditure Limitations**.  State complaints of preemption by the federal government are analogous to local governments' complaints of state preemptions. Increasingly, states have exercised their preemption rights to restrain primarily urban governments' authority. As a consequence, challenges to local autonomy have accelerated in the past decade.  Tax and expenditure limitations have a similar effect on the behavior and consequences of local governments in fulfilling their responsibility of protecting the health, safety and welfare of their residents.

**Fiscal base slipping from the economic base.** More than a decade after the Great Recession, constant-dollar municipal general fund revenues are only now beginning to reach the levels they enjoyed prior to 2007. By contrast, states' general funds rebounded to pre-recessionary levels by 2013. Almost exactly the same phenomenon was experienced by the federal government. Cities' revenue bases have responded slower than the federal government's and the states' revenue bases, which indicates slippage.

**Spatial mismatch** exists between "payers" and "users" of services in governmentally fragmented areas. How we pay for government services (e.g., public safety, water, roads and bridges) ought to reflect how much we use and value those services. State and local governments should systematically evaluate the link between service delivery and the users of such services. Certainly, a revamped financial architecture must be cognizant of residents' ability-to-pay so that the most vulnerable have access to clean water, safe streets, and public safety, but it also must ensure that the beneficiaries pay their fair share to the extent they have the financial resources to contribute.

**Infrastructure.** The American Society of Civil Engineers infrastructure grades reflect the fact that state and local governments have effectively used infrastructure as a piggybank, bankrolling current service costs by borrowing from future generations. State and local governments must address the challenge of an infrastructure deficit caused by decades of underinvestment in maintenance and repair activities while also anticipating future infrastructure needs as technologies, transportation modes, and other factors change. Most state and local governments create a separate capital budget with funding sources that include debt. Access to municipal bond markets, aid from other levels of government, own-source revenue (especially fees) vary over time and vary by use (consumer demand).

**Pensions and Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB)**. Another intergenerational problem that is not as ubiquitous as infrastructure underfunding for many states and localities is the unfunded pension and OPEB obligations. The long-term liabilities associated with pension and OPEB underfunding, which Pew Charitable Trusts estimates conservatively at more than $1 trillion, constrain the budgets of state and local governments, and threaten intergenerational inequity.

**Changing demographics and budgets**.  States have reduced support for higher education and increased support for K-12 education, including English as a Second Language and special education. The demographic outlook is the graying of the nation. The aging of the population places higher demands on service providers for the elderly, which will demand an ever-increasing share of state and local budgets. The complication is in part that as the nation ages, work force participation declines, pushing increased costs of elderly services on a dwindling taxpaying population.

Long-term fiscal sustainability will require many difficult decisions by elected officials who will be forced to make challenging tradeoffs. Tackling these issues earlier rather than later will make it possible to strengthen the economy and meet other goals while achieving fiscal stability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the nation's fiscal problems are significant, there is no shortage of proposals to begin addressing them. The six recommendations discussed below include proposals aimed at: 1) fixing a broken federal budgeting process; 2) identifying policies for long-term fiscal sustainability; 3) optimizing the performance of investments; 4) enhancing financial management and controls; 5) developing fiscally sound intergovernmental partnerships; and 6) better harmonizing federal efforts to intervene in the economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# 1. Fixing a Broken Federal Budgeting Process

The U.S. government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a series of fiscal assistance packages that will result in multi-trillion dollar annual deficits through at least 2021. Given the urgency of the perceived need, that response largely bypassed usual budgeting norms, procedures and constraints. Looking beyond the pandemic – or at least to the return of a relatively stable fiscal state – attention should be directed at instituting a revised budget process that is effective in ordinary times and better able to anticipate, mitigate, respond to, and recover from national emergencies.

Even before the pandemic, it was clear the U.S. budget process had become antiquated, cumbersome, unused, and ineffective. The current process has produced an on-time budget only four times in 40-plus years (1977-2019), with only four balanced budgets (all consecutive during the late 1990s), while producing 186 continuing resolutions, 20 funding lapses, and numerous debt ceiling crises. That performance erodes citizen trust that elected officials are competent to carry out the business of the nation – trust that is critically needed if the country is to emerge stronger from the pandemic crisis.

Funding delays and uncertainties adversely affect the efficient planning and execution of major programs across government, imposing a hidden inefficiency tax. That process is made haphazard when agencies – due to budgets not being enacted on time – don't have operating and program budgets until deep into the fiscal year. More certainty in the budgeting process would provide agencies with the flexibility to focus on strategic activities such as performance planning and assessment, effective program delivery, and the attainment of policy objectives. It would also help to restore citizen trust that elected officials can go to Washington and effectively conduct the government's business.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the real prospect that an emergency of that magnitude could recur, presents an opportunity to consider the adoption of a more visionary, strategic, and anticipatory budget process. Policymakers must focus both on how best to deploy marginal tax (and, increasingly, borrowed) dollars, and to assure sufficient budgetary

resources are applied to realize intended public policy goals. Two recommendations to support this effort are offered here.

**First, future Administrations should consider adopting a four-year strategic financial plan that would articulate a clear, mission-directed vision of resources required to accomplish specific policy objectives and guide budget formulation**. The Department of Defense, which has been creating rolling five-year Future Years Defense Plans for several decades, has realized significant budgetary planning and execution benefits from having a longer-term view of its finances. Biennial budgeting, a practice used in 16 states during the 2019 legislative cycle, could also be implemented. Notwithstanding the current emphasis on year-by-year budgeting by OMB, the executive branch could revise its own budgeting procedures to have a more anticipatory, longer-term, and mission-focused budget.

Off-year activities at executive branch agencies and OMB could be directed at program evaluation and reviews including increased emphasis on mandatory programs, tax policy, and tax expenditures. These activities should be undertaken so that the budget process does not duplicate what is done during the first year of a presidential term. Modern budgeting software allows agencies to readily automate off-year requests to Congress with little staff time and input required. Using such an approach could enable the executive branch to put more analytical emphasis on critical needs (anticipatory), consider longer-term funding needs and revenue sources (sustainable), and more closely scrutinize whether programs and policies materially achieve their missions (mission focused).

While such a plan will likely be met with stiff resistance in Congress – which prefers to exert control by providing most funds on a year-by-year basis – a less frequent (or at least less intensive) budget cycle could free up the legislative branch to provide better oversight of programs and executive branch operations and to address more proactively other challenges facing the country. While not a panacea for all current budgeting shortcomings, such a move to reduce the time spent on annual budget debates and development could drive considerable efficiencies across both the executive and legislative branches.

**Second, the federal government should more clearly articulate, anticipate, and budget for its crisis finance and management roles**. Catastrophic 21st century events such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the 2008 financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic have made clear that the unexpected happens. Whether involving military, humanitarian, financial, or technical and scientific leadership and assistance, the application of substantial budgetary resources can mitigate social harm. In the past, however, policymakers have done little to plan for low-probability, high-consequence events – notwithstanding that they are occurring ever more frequently.

Given the pace of crises of all sorts affecting the U.S. in the 21st century – and the tendency to provide increasing levels of resources to address them – there should be a more systematic and transparent recognition of potential budgetary consequences. Risk-adjusted costs arising from the government's role in this regard should be recognized and reserved in the budget, not unlike rainy day funds used by state governments. Moreover, a federal countercyclical program could be created to leverage such funds that would be triggered in the event of extreme circumstances, such as a recession or pandemic. At a minimum, such an approach would ensure the government is mindful of such risks and is planning for such eventualities.

## 2. Fiscal Sustainability

U.S policy makers initially responded quickly and appropriately to support the economy during the economic contraction resulting from the rapid contagion of COVID-19 and the social distancing needed to slow the spread of the pandemic. While the sums obligated were the largest ever to address an economic shock, never had the country experienced an abrupt withdrawal of such a large share of the labor force from the workplace. The suddenness of the event and the urgency of the need left the government with no choice but to borrow massively to sustain the nation's productive capacity.

Once the health concerns have been mitigated, we will need to shift our focus to identifying equally effective, follow-on policies for longer term sustainability. One essential feature of a strategy to enhance resilience to future shocks, ironically, will be to continue our current, virus-induced practice of reduced consumption. That is, we will need to save a larger share of post-pandemic income than we did before this public health crisis.

In the simplest terms, the COVID-19 virus has sharply lowered standards of living because we had saved too little to sustain our lifestyle during a temporary loss of production and income. It is as if a farmer had saved too little of a year's crop to avoid the deprivation of a famine. As a society, we have consumed more government-provided benefits than we were willing to pay for in taxes. Instead we have financed a significant portion of our "good life" by borrowing from future generations.

Going forward, we need to flatten this debt growth curve by planning more effectively for unknown, but certain, future shocks to our well-being. As a society, we need to save and invest in assets that will continue to deliver resources and benefits in the face of a variety of threats such as war, health crises, geophysical shocks, and adverse events beyond our imagination. We also need to address the public debt that exceeds the combined annual income of every living person in this country.

In sum, we must recover an appreciation of the reality that resources are scarce; that we are all pulling on the same blanket. We need to stop pulling, get up, and either find more blankets or make this one bigger.  Going forward, our spending and revenue policies should be designed to grow our economy and the productivity of our workforce while being mindful of the need to live within our means while doing so.

Some specific, immediate policies, such as the Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform bill,[1]  that could improve our ability to deal with future real and financial shocks include:

- **An intergenerational debt relief surcharge**, consisting of a small personal and corporate income surtax in 2020 (e.g., <0.5%) that automatically and gradually increases as the infection rate of COVID-19 recedes. The modest revenue collected from the levy would not be a drag on the economy but would effectively commit the current generation to bearing some of the costs of relief incurred during the pandemic.
- **A budget policy of planning for fiscal emergencies** through a mandatory annual outlay of the expected cost of urgent, unexpected events, as estimated by the Congressional Budget Office, to a budget stabilization reserve fund. Fund balances would be available to pay such costs without further legislative action. ,

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[1] The bill, (S. 2765, 116th Congress) according to the US Senate Committee on the Budget, would incorporate "debt-to-Gross-Domestic-Product (GDP) targets into the budget resolution and the budget process, adopt biennial budgeting while keeping annual appropriations, link debt limit increases and discretionary spending caps to passage of a budget resolution, and add transparency requirements such as including interest costs in Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scores."

To regain and sustain an enduring way of living, we must accept responsibility for addressing both the immediate biological threat of deadly infection and the less tangible one of our own fiscal policies.


## 3. Investments Criteria

For decades, the de facto decision criterion for federal investments – defined here as investments in highways, water systems, airports, and other infrastructure assets – was that those investment ought to yield higher returns than an equivalent private sector investment.[2] This criterion was based on the assumption that the pool of investment capital is finite. Every dollar of additional federal investment, either from current taxes or borrowed, is a dollar not available for private sector investment. A corollary is that every investment in one region or project happens at the expense of another region or project. Conventional wisdom has held that investments capable of meeting the "greater returns than the private sector" criterion are the most likely to successfully balance across these difficult trade-offs.

But that criterion is rarely applied in theory or practice. There are sharp disagreements over how to measure return on investment, and parochial political dynamics often drive federal investments toward politically popular projects that produce less-than-optimal economic effects. The result is an uncoordinated, inefficient, zero-sum game that has left our national infrastructure in uniformly bad condition.

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[2] Returns in this context have been broadly defined to include economic growth, productivity gains, and human capital accumulation among many other measurable improvements.

Yet the old assumptions may no longer apply under all circumstances. For more than a decade, interest rates and inflation have both held at record lows despite unprecedented new federal government borrowing. This suggests the pool of investment capital, especially from debt financing, might not be as finite as once thought. Meanwhile, as the country has grown and local economies have simultaneously diversified and specified, so too have regional infrastructure needs and the federal government's role in helping to meet those needs. Federal investment in one region need not necessarily happen at the expense of another region if both regions' investment needs are quite different.

All this suggests a new key criterion that could drive federal investments going forward: Investments should seek to optimize an asset's long-term performance. Infrastructure assets are essential to grow local economies, support community development efforts, and move people safely throughout a region. And yet, these goals are only background considerations when the federal government defines its investment priorities and measures infrastructure performance.

This new criterion has several advantages. First and foremost, it is consistent with recent state and local experiences with public-private partnership models that successfully incentivize the condition, safety, and economic impact of infrastructure assets over time rather than simply building new infrastructure at the lowest possible cost. It also acknowledges differences in how infrastructure is built and maintained across the country, and the tremendous differences in how the federal government partners with states and localities throughout the investment process.

This approach would require a few immediate practical steps for OMB:

- **Define thorough and standardized life-cycle cost analysis**. Federal agencies should extend and standardize life cycle costing standards for infrastructure assets. The Department of Transportation and the Defense Department's Cost Analysis and

Program Evaluation (CAPE) team have developed a variety of infrastructure cost analysis methodologies that could serve as models for other agencies. New government-wide life cycle costing standards could be the foundation for better decisions.

- **Develop comprehensive asset management strategies**. A comprehensive asset management strategy would include key performance indicators, estimates of the costs of given performance levels, and estimates of financing and funding sources available for specific investments funded by fuels taxes, tolls and other revenues. Investments expected to produce and sustain a desired level of performance over time given the available financing and funding are most likely to pass the long-term optimization criterion. Note that asset performance could include a variety of region-specific performance measures and infrastructure delivery models.

- **Leverage New Technology to Optimize Efficiency and Reduce Costs**. Recent technological advances have transformed large segments of the infrastructure industry. The "internet of things" makes it possible to decentralize infrastructure monitoring and reporting literally to the ground level. Distributed infrastructure systems in areas like electricity transmission allow individuals and businesses to both use and contribute energy to the grid. Vehicle monitoring systems allow drivers to pay for road use by the mile rather than through fuels taxes. These technological advances allow investments to serve more people with a greater degree of efficiency and effectiveness than ever.

## 4. Enhance Financial Management and Controls

As we emerge from the devastating impacts of the pandemic, both in human costs and economically, there are mechanisms we can use to better assure transparency and accountability in budgeting in dealing with program costs over the long-term. We can also look to the federal agencies and departments for contributions they can make in supporting the nation's long-term fiscal health.

**Expand the use of accrual accounting for long-term federal liabilities.** Currently the federal budget uses a cash-based approach to account for most program costs. Such an approach can often understate commitments affecting future budgets. A change to bring more transparency to the long-term obligations would be to adopt accrual basis budgeting for deferred cash payments.

An accrual approach, which records the net present value of these commitments in the year they are made, regardless of the actual flow of cash payments, could more accurately reflect future obligations for select programs. With the enactment of the Federal Credit Reform Act in 1990, government loans and loan guarantees shifted to an accrual accounting and budgeting methodology to reflect the estimated longer-term costs of defaults and interest-rate subsidies provided by the government.[3]

As CBO has noted[4]: "Cash-based estimates used in the budgeting process generally reflect costs over the 10-year period on which the process focuses, but that period may not be long enough to capture the full extent of some activities' effects. Accrual-based estimates that consider

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[3] "The Better Budget Process Initiative," The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget

[4] *Cash and Accrual Measures in Federal Budgeting* (January 2018), www.cbo.gov/publication/53461. p. 1.

long-term effects provide more complete information about programs that involve longer time frames. Such estimates could give lawmakers a tool to use in setting and enforcing targets for long-term deficit control because, for the purposes of Congressional budget enforcement procedures, legislative proposals would receive credit (or be charged) within the 10-year budget horizon for the ultimate effects of provisions that would save (or cost) money over a longer period."

Accrual treatment is particularly relevant for those commitments that are long-lived and mandatory including federal pensions, health benefits, long-term insurance programs and environmental clean-up costs.

**Tighten controls over obligations.**[5] Obligational limitations are designed to control the federal government's exposure to spending requirements. Budget authority constitutes the most common limit on obligations. However, various practices minimize the upfront use of budget authority in order to circumvent limits (e.g., structuring capital leases to look like operating leases, cash instead of accrual-based accounting for deferred payment programs, annual funding for multi-year projects, etc.). Restrictions on such approaches would help to reduce back-door spending pressures that often escape full disclosure in the current budget process. More uniform practices would also create a more level playing field between competing priorities.

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[5] National Academy of Public Administration Forum on Fiscal Futures: The Role of Budget Process and Concepts, and Academy Fellow David Mathiasen's paper, The Fiscal Challenge: Federal Budget Concepts and Practices.

**Federal agencies have opportunities to contribute toward fiscal health.** Public agencies and administrators have an important supporting role to play in advancing the nation's long-term fiscal health. For example, they can identify more effective ways of managing the public's business to help prioritize spending and tax policies by advising elected officials on fiscal options and impacts; educating, informing, and engaging the public about these issues; and using evidence-based approaches, including rigorous evaluations of existing programs to determine which ones are worthwhile investments.

Executive actions alone cannot put the federal government on a sustainable fiscal path, but they can contribute to it. In testimony[6] before the Senate Budget Committee, Comptroller General Gene Dodaro noted steps federal agencies could take to contribute to a sustainable fiscal future including reducing improper payments (which agencies estimate totaled $175 billion in fiscal year 2019); addressing the $381 billion annual net tax gap; better managing fragmentation, overlap, and duplication across the federal government; and improving information on federal programs and fiscal operations to aid agency decision-making.

## 5. Recommendations for Fiscally Sound Intergovernmental Partnerships

The need for strong fiscal partnerships among governments has never been more urgent. The economic impact of the recession induced by COVID-19 runs the risk of becoming a depression without swift action. Yet, as important as it is for the federal government to stimulate the economy immediately, it is of crucial importance that the funds be used wisely. Federal partnerships with state and local governments are a key tool for effective interventions.

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[6] Statement of Gene L. Dodaro Comptroller General of the United States (GAO-20-482T) March 12, 2020

The timing has never been better for a major federal program to improve infrastructure. Unemployment has spiraled and interest rates are low. The multiplier effects of construction spending are high. Not only is there an urgent need to improve a wide variety of infrastructure - including public health systems in the wake of the pandemic - both presidential candidates in 2016 called for a major infrastructure program, indicating a rare consensus between the two parties.

The ability of the federal government to run deficits and stabilize the macroeconomy makes it a key partner. Local governments have capital improvement programs which identify the most important community needs. State agencies can be key conduits to target funds to the highest needs. They also have their aid programs for highways, airports and transit, infrastructure banks, and revolving loan funds.

The major needs for infrastructure improvement are in transportation infrastructure, water supply, wastewater, energy, and flood control. The Academy's Grand Challenge in Public Administration, Create Modern Water Systems for Safe and Sustainable Use, highlights the difficulties with the nation's aging water infrastructure – the issues discussed there are relevant to this set of recommendations. In the area of transportation there is a need to repair and expand highways, improve and expand transit, and improve rail and port connections for freight. Flood control is increasingly important with the changes caused by global warming.

As the economy recovers, federal aid can shift from providing funds to leveraging state, local and private funding. Improvements that benefit businesses should require private financial support. Where appropriate, user fees can be part of the financing plan. Revolving loan funds and state infrastructure banks can reduce the demand on tax funding and encourage recipients to prioritize projects. Where possible, a new administration should move funds to programs that encourage broader sources of revenue. Over time, policies should be changed to encourage federal assistance as opposed to federal financing.

## 6. Federal Intervention in the Economy in Response to Coronavirus

After over four decades in which deficits averaged about 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the public debt averaged about one third of GDP, the United States entered the Great Recession a decade ago with public debt at nearly 40% of GDP in FY2008. The debt to GDP ratio then rose to 60% in just two years, and the U.S. exited that crisis with debt having risen to 70% of GDP by the time the Budget Control Act took effect in 2012. Despite that effort to control discretionary spending only, plus a decade-long economic recovery, by the time the coronavirus pandemic hit, the U.S. public debt had risen to 80% of GDP.

This left our nation poorly positioned for the devastating economic and fiscal impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which has, in just a few months, completely altered our economic situation in the near term and our fiscal situation for much longer than that.  Preliminary estimates by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) are a deficit of $3.7 trillion in fiscal year 2020, far exceeding the highest deficits previously recorded, and at 18% of GDP the largest relative to our economy since World War II. CBO also projects that the public debt will exceed 100% of GDP by the end of this year and grow larger still after that.

As with any national economic crisis, the lead role in our response rests with the federal government, which has economic tools – including monetary policy and borrowing authority -- to stimulate or stabilize the economy that state and local governments do not. We look to the federal government, including the Federal Reserve, as the primary source of macro-economic relief.

Unlike the financial crisis of a decade ago or the Great Depression ninety years ago, the root of this crisis does not lie with trade policies, asset price bubbles, or business cycles.  The current economic crisis is at its core a public health crisis. The states have by and large taken responsibility for the public safety decisions, most notably stay-at-home orders and school closures, that are directed at controlling or preventing the spread of the virus. The federal government and the states have had shared, and at times conflicting, roles in their response to this underlying health care crisis.  For example, the purchase and distribution of medical supplies for health care workers and the treatment of those already infected were both shared and discrete.

Given this shared and divided set of responsibilities, close federal-state coordination is essential to minimize the spread of the virus and the resulting number of fatalities and illnesses, as well as to craft appropriate economic responses. Yet at the end of the day, only the federal government has the tools at its disposal to cope with the large-scale economic impact.

The federal economic response to this pandemic has had two primary branches: fiscal policy in the form of legislation (and to a lesser extent regulatory actions), and monetary policy actions by the Federal Reserve. That combination is not, by itself, unusual. However, the unique aspect of the response to this current crisis is that it is not a classic counter-cyclical one. The near-term goal in this situation is not to provide an economic stimulus (for example, to get more people working immediately) but rather simple economic relief, to allow people to stay home from work without losing their homes in a situation where avoiding the spread of a contagious disease, not a lack of demand, is responsible for rapid increases in unemployment or under-employment.

In terms of legislation and fiscal policy, four bills were enacted in March and April of 2020.  CBO estimates the total cost of these four packages at $2.3 trillion in additional spending and revenue losses, of which nearly $2.1 trillion will occur in 2020. Approximately 75% of these

costs are in the form of federal spending, mostly mandatory spending, and 25% of the cost impact represents revenue losses or tax rebates.

The first bill was devoted mostly to medical research spending to address the health issues. The second bill began the focus on economic relief, which remained the focus for the third and fourth bills. The second bill (known as Families First) devoted resources to programs such as nutrition assistance, Medicaid and Medicare, and tax credits for paid family and sick leave.

The third bill, known as the CARES Act, contained discretionary disaster response money but was primarily devoted to small (and larger) business relief in the form of loans, to unemployment benefits, and to tax relief known as Recovery Rebates for individuals below specified income levels. The fourth bill, known as the Paycheck Protection Act, funneled additional money into the small business loan program established in the CARES Act that provides incentives to employers to keep employees on their payrolls while at under stay-at-home orders, rather than moving them all onto unemployment insurance and Medicaid rolls.

On the monetary policy side, the Federal Reserve has taken a number of significant steps, including lowering the federal funds interest rate to zero, broadcasting its future plans more clearly ("forward guidance"), purchasing large quantities of federal and mortgage-backed securities ("quantitative easing"), reducing bank reserve requirements to zero, encouraging banks to use the Fed as their "lender of last resort", and reviving its emergency lending authorities for nonbank entities last used in the 2008 financial crisis to support, for example, the commercial and municipal bond markets.

The size of the total federal response is difficult to quantify, because the gross dollar amounts of liquidity the Federal Reserve has injected into the economy cannot be added to the $2.3 trillion cost of the four legislative packages in an apples-to-apples fashion. The large scope

of the federal response is driven simply by the size of the perceived problem we face.

Policymakers have struggled with how to respond to this unique crisis, most notably in balancing public health precautions that depress economic activity with the desire to limit such economic damage, and with making short-term vs. long-term tradeoffs. Even within the realm of economic responses, both the legislative and executive branches have floated ideas such as payroll tax cuts or infrastructure construction packages that are far better suited to a more traditional aggregate demand problem than they are to the current situation. Those approaches have been held in abeyance to date. And some needed new steps have been taken, most notably in providing unemployment assistance to workers in the so-called "gig economy."

**CONCLUSION**

The fiscal position of the federal system has been severely stressed since the end of the first quarter of 2020. Yet, even before the economic downturn due to COVID-19, the programs, procedures, and financial management systems within the government designed to ensure an efficient and effective process of service delivery and governance have been long overdue for reform. While the federal government as well as state and local governments are challenged to address the fiscal realities we face today, this Working Group offers many recommended changes for the short term and the long term that are designed to improve and enhance the contemporary system of public financial management.

The set of recommendations identified above are summarized below. We advise the next administration to increase focus on using scarce fiscal resources more effectively and efficiently. In particular, we recommend these actions:

- Create a 4-year strategic resourcing plan;
- Tighten the link between goals, priorities, and funding;

- Provide more emphasis on evidence-based policy choices;
- Increase engagement of line agencies & state and local governments;
- Implement accrual budgetary accounting for long-lived commitments; and
- Budget for infrastructure.

The Working Group also recognizes that the events of the last few months require a reexamination of governments' preparedness for emergencies. Budgeting explicitly for emergencies and for the long-term sustainability of governments at all levels of the federal system must be a priority. The strength of the democratic system requires a fundamentally sound and appropriately managed financial base. Improvements in effective, efficient, and equitable service delivery by federal, state, and local governments should be a high priority, and this Working Group's recommendations are offered as a way to strengthen governments' financial management systems.

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
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# *Ensuring Environmental Sustainability*

**Steward Natural Resources and Address Climate Change**

**Create Modern Water Systems for Safe and Sustainable Use**

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
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# *Steward Natural Resources and Address Climate Change: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Steward Natural Resources and Address Climate Change**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Working Group for Steward Natural Resources and Address Climate Change. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for first steps that the Administration can take to begin addressing this Grand Challenge in 2021.

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# STEWARD NATURAL RESOURCES AND ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
STEWARD NATURAL RESOURCES AND ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

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**THE CHALLENGE**

America's natural resources—including our public lands—are a rich heritage that have made enormous contributions to our economy, health, environment, and society. It is critical that the public, nonprofit, and private sectors effectively steward natural resources and protect the environment for ourselves and future generations. As a nation, we have made significant progress reducing air and water pollution, managing waste materials and preserving threatened species and habitat. In the early 1970s Congress enacted the modern environmental legal system that delivered these changes from which we currently benefit, and now we must determine how best to meet the significant challenges of the 21st century. Climate change and habitat stress from development are major "force multipliers" creating deeper challenges. They are also national security threats. For example, a report from the Under Secretary of Defense in 2019 on climate change stated: "The effects of a changing climate are a national security issue with potential impacts to Department of Defense (DoD or the Department) missions, operational plans, and installations." Beyond the direct impact of climate change on U.S defense installations, it is already destabilizing sensitive and vulnerable regions around the world.

Given the litany of disasters in late summer 2020—all related in some way to climate change—it is more important than ever that we rise to the occasion:

- The Western United States are on fire, with over 8 million acres burned by over 100 fires in 10 states as of October 1, 2020 (Interagency Fire Center)
- The 2020 Atlantic hurricane season is breaking records, with 21 named storms as of mid-September 2020—second only to the 2005 hurricane season.
- Sea levels are continuing to rise and the frequency of sunny day flooding is increasing in coastal areas.
- 2020 is on track to be the warmest year globally since records started in 1880. With that, 8 of the hottest years since 1880 will have been in the last decade. (NOAA)

- The entire world, including the United States, has suffered from the global COVID-19 pandemic. The United States has over 8 million cases and over 220,000 deaths.

Climate change and changing ecosystems are critical factors in these seemingly disparate disasters. For example, the destruction of natural resources and ecosystems is closely connected to disease outbreaks. "As the global wildlife trade persists and human activities expand deeper into tropical forests, humans are increasing their exposure to wild animals and the diseases they may carry. When mining and logging degrade or destroy wildlife habitats, animals are forced into different or smaller areas increasing their likelihood of becoming stressed or sick. They are also more likely to come into contact with people and domestic animals, driving the transmission of disease from wildlife to humans. We know that wildlife species threatened by exploitation or habitat loss are more likely to be sources of disease, and new research suggests that outbreaks of animal-borne illness will become more frequent due to the accelerating destruction of nature."[1]

Similarly, because weather is frequently hotter, forests are drier and more susceptible to burning—which is especially concerning as more Americans live in communities near forests (the wildland-urban interface). As noted by the Environmental Defense Fund:

> Rising temperatures, a key indicator of climate change, evaporate more moisture from the ground, drying out the soil, and making vegetation more flammable. At the same time, winter mountain snowpacks are melting about a month earlier, meaning that the forests are drier for longer periods of time. Meanwhile, shifting meteorological patterns can drive rain away from wildfire-prone regions, a phenomenon scientists discovered in California and have linked to human-made climate change.

These are immense challenges, and the nation needs to take more aggressive action to address them. This Working Group on Steward

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[1] See https://www.conservation.org/stories/impact-of-covid-19-on-nature.

Natural Resources and Address Climate Change was tasked with identifying specific near-term actions that the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) could take to address this Grand Challenge.  The actions proposed here are necessary and important steps, though not nearly sufficient to effectively deal with the scope of the Academy's Grand Challenge itself. They are steps that can enhance the nation's ability to address the challenge, but other more ambitious actions will be necessary and are not the focus of this paper.

The Working Group believes that significant actions should be taken at the domestic and international levels by the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) to adequately address this Grand Challenge.  These efforts require major improvements to current law and regulatory practices, and they can be achieved only if new and innovative partnerships with the private sector and between the federal, state, tribal and local governments are established. To mitigate climate change, the country needs to engage the world in strong diplomatic efforts to reduce global emissions. This Working Group report does not attempt to identify the robust and ambitious legislative and regulatory efforts needed to fully address the Grand Challenge.  This set of recommendations are geared toward early action while larger plans and policies are debated and developed.

The Working Group's recommendations are intended to help the Administration as it gets started in 2021.  If the Administration does not seek to undertake comprehensive action in this area, it still may wish to implement some elements of these recommendations.  Alternatively, if the Administration in 2021 seeks much more comprehensive legislative and regulatory changes, it will have time before such an ambitious program is enacted, in which case the Working Group's proposed actions could be implemented early in 2021 as foundational elements of a broader set of actions.

The Working Group foresees significant economic and health advantages that can accrue from these actions, and the jobs associated with sustainable natural resources and clean energy investments can help with economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

**WHAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS DOING NOW**

Climate change and pollution are having negative impacts on oceans and their ecosystems and are changing temperatures and rainfall patterns on land. As demand rises for resources and while fossil fuels continue to be extracted, communities throughout the United States must reconcile strongly held, but sharply differing, views regarding jobs, habitat protection, private property rights, open space, recreation, and cultural values.

Since the passage of major federal pollution control laws in the 1960s and 1970s, the United States has reduced the release of many pollutants into the country's air, water, and land.  Despite this progress, emerging health and environmental threats must be addressed.  In addition to protecting natural resources, the nation must address new and emerging environmental issues, especially greenhouse gasses, which contribute to climate change and the loss and fragmentation of habitats.  For example, while domestic greenhouse gas emissions have slightly decreased recently with the retirement of coal power generation, they are still higher than they were in 1990. The recent decline is positive but insufficient to avoid significant future adverse effects on public health, ecosystems, and infrastructure due to climate change.  Other key emerging issues include the rising levels of persistent chemicals and plastics, including microplastics and pharmaceuticals, in our food and our drinking water extracted from oceans, rivers, and lakes.

**FEDERAL RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATIONS ON CLIMATE SOLUTIONS AND TECHNOLOGY**

While there are agency plans to expand and coordinate climate solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, this Working Group notes that additional actions need to be taken to fully implement these plans.

Key activities in this area include:

- **USDA Climate Hubs.** A series of workshops were held that culminated in a report (2016) that points out opportunities within USDA programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration. In 2017, the Caribbean Climate Hub responded to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which damaged 30 million of Puerto Rico's trees, by training the island's producers and manufacturers on sustaining and improving the viability of forestry and agricultural production, soil and water resources, and food security given climate variability and change. The Northern Plains Climate Hub developed the Grassland Productivity Forecast, an online tool that enables ranchers to predict the amount of vegetation on rangelands. Over the course of five years, the Climate Hubs have provided technical expertise to more than 17,000 people through hundreds of webinars and podcasts; 410 peer-reviewed publications and 690 other papers; education of more than 15,000 youth through more than 50 events; and formal curricula for a wide range of people including K-12 students and USDA staff.

- **D.O.E Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E)** funds projects that develop new ways to generate, store, and use energy in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These projects advance clean energy use and can potentially bring said practices into commercial use. Since 2009, ARPA-E has provided approximately $2 billion to transformative energy and technology projects.

- **US Geological Survey Climate Adaptation Science Centers** is a network of collaborative science centers that provide data and tools on the informational needs of natural and cultural resource managers to understand the impacts of climate change on fish, wildlife, ecosystems, and the communities they support.

- **Green Racing.** This program, sponsored by the EPA, DOE, and Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) International, uses motorsports competitions to promote the development of cleaner, fuel efficient technologies that can be used in consumer vehicles. The program prompts the motorsport industry to use clean fuels to gain the highest performance with the lowest environmental impact.

- **National Labs**. The US Department of Energy houses 17 national laboratories. These labs are conducting significant research and demonstrations on critical energy and climate change solutions technology. As examples:
  - The National Renewable Energy Lab, as its name implies, is at the forefront of breakthroughs needed to continue the acceleration of renewable energy deployment.
  - The Idaho National Lab has important demonstration capacity for advanced nuclear development.
  - The Oak Ridge National Lab conducts important research on carbon capture and fossil fuel efficiency and
  - The Pacific Northwest National Lab is looking closely at building efficiency. These labs continue to provide high value.

- **Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)** was established in the Executive Office of the President by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and it oversees the implementation of this act. The CEQ coordinates federal environmental efforts and advises the President on national and international environmental policy matters. Furthermore, the CEQ works closely with agencies and other White House offices to develop environmental policies.

**Natural Infrastructure**

As noted by other Working Groups in previous Election 2020 reports, there appears to be widespread agreement in the United States that the nation has a significant need for additional investments in infrastructure. The most recent Infrastructure Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), which gives the nation's infrastructure overall a grade of D+. In their scoring, a D is considered poor; a C, mediocre; a B, Good; and an A, Exceptional. Table 1 shows the grade for 16 different categories of infrastructure. Rail scores the highest, with a B. No other category scores higher than a C+.

| Infrastructure Category and Grade | |
| --- | --- |
| Aviation: D | Parks and Recreation: D+ |
| Bridges: C+ | Ports: C+ |
| Dams: D | Rail: B |
| Drinking Water: D | Roads: D |
| Energy: D+ | Schools: D+ |
| Hazardous Waste: D+ | Solid Waste: C+ |
| Inland Waterways: D | Transit: D- |
| Levees: D | Wastewater: D+ |

Table 1.  Infrastructure Report Card

Investments in these areas can deliver significant economic, environmental, and social benefits. Although infrastructure investments

are a generally acknowledged need, there are disagreements about exactly how much is needed, how it should be funded, and what its focus should be. This Working Group was not charged with evaluating national infrastructure needs or recommending a new national infrastructure program or a specific investment level. However, if the Administration and Congress in 2021 choose to undertake major investments in American technology, research and development, manufacturing, and infrastructure, they should link that investment strategy to the role of natural systems in supporting alternative approaches to infrastructure, such as coastal risk reduction, water purification, flood management, and other purposes. A growing body of research suggests such infrastructure, either in combination with traditional "hard infrastructure" such as levees and sea walls, or as a "whole solution" can be cost-effective and efficient, while providing multiple benefits beyond the direct infrastructure services.

For example, one 2015 study by The Nature Conservancy and CH2M Hill studied the costs and benefits of investing in varied flood risk-reduction projects in Howard Beach, Queens, NY. The study analyzed the cost-benefit of two natural infrastructure projects, two hybrid natural and grey infrastructure projects, and one grey infrastructure project as alternatives. The study found that a hybrid project, in that case, could provide the greatest community flood protection, while also bringing environmental benefits.

The federal government over many Administrations has made modernizing the infrastructure permitting process a cross-agency priority by enlisting a core group from the Office of Management & Budget (OMB), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (FPISC) that is partnering with the Departments of Energy, Defense, Homeland Security, Agriculture, Interior, and others. In the Obama Administration, the Council on Jobs and Competitiveness helped to develop a Presidential Memo to the agencies on expediting permitting processes. The goal of expediting reviews struggles to balance the need to create predictable timelines with, at the same time, assuring social and environmental impacts are adequately considered and mitigated when not avoidable. On July 16, 2020, the Council on

Environmental Quality finalized its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) rules, imposing time and page limits on environmental impact statements (EISs). But, with a lack of policy convergence on the balancing of time and page limits with the need to fully disclose potential impacts, litigation is likely. More work is recommended to build needed policy convergence. Other major permitting processes, including state actions, still need coordination. At the end of Q3 of FY 2020 (April - June), an OMB scorecard showed 48 major infrastructure projects (MIPs) being tracked on the permitting dashboard.

Currently, a number of federal agencies have undertaken interagency efforts to use natural infrastructure to promote climate resilience. Significant examples include:

- **Green Infrastructure Collaborative.** In 2014, EPA joined with other federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private-sector entities to form the Green Infrastructure Collaborative, a network-based learning alliance created to help communities more easily implement green infrastructure. Other agency partners include U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of the Interior, and U.S. Department of Transportation. Additional partners in the Collaborative include: National Association of Clean Water Agencies, Natural Resources Defense Council, Low Impact Development Center, and Association of State and the Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators. The Collaborative works together and shares resources, tools, and research to advance green infrastructure implementation.

- **National Coastal Zone Program.** This voluntary partnership between the federal government and U.S. coastal and Great Lakes states and territories was authorized by the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972 to address national coastal issues. The program is administered by NOAA. Key elements of the program include protecting natural resources, managing development in high hazard areas, giving development priority to

coastal-dependent uses, prioritizing water-dependent uses, and coordinating state and federal actions. Each state prepares and submits reports evaluating their accomplishments within the program roughly every two years.

- The **Engineering with Nature Program** at the Army Corps of Engineers begin in 2010 to align natural and engineering processes with a goal of collaboratively delivering "economic, environment, and social benefits." In January of 2019, this program launched its Engineering With Nature book, "An Atlas," which brings attention to successful projects and inspires readers with the possibilities that come from engineering with nature. The Army Corps of Engineers also recently launched a partnership with the University of Georgia to establish the Network For Engineering With Nature. The $2.5 million award will help develop a "clearinghouse for tools, products and outreach for researchers and practitioners" from a wide variety of organizations. EWN also launched its Engineering With Nature Podcast.

- **Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council** was established by the RESTORE Act in July 2021. The Council works to restore the Gulf Coast's natural ecosystem that was previously disrupted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and ultimately, to improve the region's climate resiliency. The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council is a state and federal intergovernmental body made up of governors and federal agency secretaries and serves as a model for governmental coordination in this area.

**Renewable Energy Siting Decisions**

Federal agencies are promoting renewable energy siting and decarbonization by funding state, local, and community projects. The next step could be more action within or administered directly by the federal government. The next Administration, whether re-elected or new, should consider re-introducing approaches pioneered by the Department of the Interior regarding siting of renewables on federal lands using a large-scale spatial planning approach such as was applied in a collaborative effort

with the State of California in the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. Recent research by The Nature Conservancy also demonstrates significant potential for [siting renewable energy on degraded, reclaimed mine land sites](#).

Key activities and examples in this area include:

- **EPA Brownfield Program** empowers states, communities, and other stakeholders to work together to assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. This is accomplished through different grants. Other federal agencies provide financial and technical assistance to communities for brownfields and land revitalization projects. Several other key agencies have programs that support the conversion and restoration of brownfields:

  o **USDA Response and Restoration Programs (R&R):** USDA R&R assists and serves as the point of contact for communities needing assistance with Brownfields projects. USDA is also a key federal partner in the national Brownfields program that is managed by the EPA.

  o **U.S. Department of Transportation:** The Federal Highway Administration funds research to understand how transportation infrastructure can facilitate the redevelopment of brownfields. Consequently, several states, including New Jersey, Oregon, and Missouri, are using federal highway funds to redevelop brownfields while improving the transportation system.

  o **U.S. Department of Labor:** The agency's mission and discretionary grants often support local redevelopment efforts that require workers who are trained to clean and redevelop brownfields. The job training grants and technical assistance issued to states and localities by the DOL often end up subsidizing the conversion of brownfields.

- o **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development:** the agency provides nationwide block grants for community development, which can be and are often used to clean and repurpose brownfields.

- o **Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services:** the agency provides job training grants which often create jobs in brownfield cleanup. U.S. HHS also provides grants to community development corporations that can repurpose brownfields.

- **EPA Superfund Sites:** Officially known as the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, Superfund gives the EPA the funds and authority to clean abandoned or improperly managed sites that have been contaminated with hazardous waste. There are superfund sites in almost every state, and there are seventy-five sites that are producing or planning to produce renewable energy. Superfund sites have great potential for siting renewable energy technology, and they help communities create jobs and diversify the economy.

- Although most production of both fossil fuel and renewable energy sources take place on land, the federal government also maintains vital oversight responsibilities for both forms of offshore production. Major reorganization of responsible federal units within the Department of Interior occurred after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, and a 2017 Academy study examined progress and enduring challenges facing the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement as oil and gas production appeared likely to increase and expand to a broader set of coastal regions. However, BSEE also maintains formal authority for offshore siting of wind turbines and many coastal states have begun to both study the potential for this source and also design supportive policy.

**Forest and Ecosystem Health**

The federal government has four agencies responsible for managing approximately 610 million acres of public land held by the U.S. government:

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): 248 million acres (10.5 percent of all land in the country);

- U.S. Forest Service (USFS): 193 million acres (8.5 percent);

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): 89 million acres (3.9 percent); and

- National Park Service (NPS): 84 million acres (3.7 percent of the country).

This means that federal agencies can have a significant impact on climate change based on the way that they manage public lands under their control. Key activities and examples in forest and ecosystem health include:

- **Cooperative Forestry Unit**. The USDA Forest Service works closely with partners to enhance and maintain forests across watersheds and ecosystems, both on private and public land, for the benefits they provide to the American people by leveraging additional resources and fueling innovation. The Cooperative Forestry Unit consists of several individual programs, most of which require a government or organization to propose a project for which they need funding. The programs promote conservation of landscapes and wildlife, protect cultural heritage (tribes), enhance community resilience, and provide technical assistance. Programs include the Urban and Community Forest Program, Community Forest, and the Open Space Conservation Program

- **National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.** The U.S. Forest Service and other federal, tribal, state, and local partners work together to promote resilient landscapes, fire adapted

communities, and safe and effective wildfire response. The federal partners include the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fire Administration (FEMA), Department of the Interior Office of Aviation Services, National Weather Service, and the U.S. Military.

- **National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans.** Local communities, state conservation agencies, and partners such as Defenders of Wildlife play an active role in working with wildlife refuges to develop their comprehensive conservation plans (CCPs). The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 mandates that every wildlife refuge complete such a plan every 15 years, as needed. In developing these CCPs, refuges create a framework to improve the condition of habitats and restore the ecological integrity of the refuge. CCPs lay the groundwork to shape the future of wildlife conservation in America. Federal partners include the National Wildlife Refuge System, governed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

- **National Park Service Management Plans.** These plans provide basic guidance for how the 421 park units (including large national parks as well as smaller cultural sites) on 85 million acres in all 50 states carry out their statutory responsibilities for protecting park resources unimpaired for future generations while providing for visitor use and enjoyment. The Service develops many different types of plans, such as general management plans, wild and scenic river plans, wilderness plans, and others.

- **EPA National Estuary Program.** The EPA has designated 28 estuaries as National Estuary Programs (NEPs) in accordance with section 320 of the 1987 Clean Water Act. The purpose of the designation is "to protect and restore the water quality and ecological integrity" of these 28 nationally significant estuaries. NEPs partner with state and local agencies, universities, and individual nonprofits. Each estuary develops and implements a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) and receives funding, guidance, and technical assistance from the EPA. Examples of NEPs include the San Francisco Estuary Partnership,

the Massachusetts Bay National Estuary Program, and the San Juan Bay Estuary Program. NEPs involve community members to tailor their CCMP to the local context.

- **BLM National Landscape Conservation System.** The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) oversees 873 federally recognized areas that span 35 million acres, or 10% of the 258 million total acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The NLCS defines its mission as conserving, protecting, and restoring these nationally significant landscapes. These areas can be designated as one of 10 units, including national monument, wilderness area, national historic trail, and forest reserve. The system was created by an administrative order of the Secretary of the Interior in 2000, codified by an act of Congress in 2009.

## Federal Grants

Key grants and programs in this area include:
- The **Indian Environmental General Assistance Program (GAP)** authorizes EPA to provide grants to federally recognized tribes for planning, developing, and establishing environmental protection programs in Indian country, and for developing and implementing solid and hazardous waste programs on tribal lands.  In 2020, EPA released the GAP Success Stories web app that highlights environmental progress made using this program.

- **EPA Grants to States and Tribes** cover a variety of purposes relating to climate change, including for air quality, transportation, climate change, indoor air and other related topics.

- The **BIA Tribal Resilience Program,** through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), provides resources to federally recognized Tribal Nations and Alaska Native Villages for projects and training programs that promote climate resilience and curtail harmful environmental trends. The program also includes a specific initiative to encourage tribes to pursue ocean and coastal resiliency. In 2020, the BIA Tribal Resilience Program awarded a

little over $14 million in funds for 159 projects, including drought resiliency workshops in the Choctaw nation and an evaluation of the Kuskokwim Watershed.

- The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund**, established in the Endangered Species Act, provides grants to states and territories that engage in voluntary conservation projects for endangered species. This program funds conservation actions taken on non-Federal lands. USFWS recognizes that successfully protecting endangered species depends on cooperative efforts with landowners and communities on private lands, but these grants are given to states because states play an integral role in beginning these local efforts.

- The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grant Program** provides funds to state fish and wildlife agencies so they may formulate and implement programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats, including species that are not hunted or fished. Grants can be used to address a variety of conservation efforts, such as research, species restoration, habitat management, and monitoring, that are identified in a State's Wildlife Action Plan. SWG funds can also be used to update, revise, or modify a State's Plan. Congress appropriates funds for the SWG Program annually.

- The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Tribal Wildlife Grant Program** allocates funds to federally recognized tribal governments so they may formulate and implement programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats, especially wildlife that is of significant importance in Native American culture. The funds are provided through the annual appropriation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

- The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program** annually provides millions of dollars to coastal states, Great Lakes states, and U.S territories so that they may restore and enhance coastal wetland ecosystems.

These grants are funded through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. The coastal states and territories eligible for this program include states such as Delaware, Michigan, Washington, Texas, South Carolina, and New York.  The National Wetlands Conservation Grant Program was founded on the understanding that coastal wetland conservation is critical to the well-being of wildlife and coastal communities for future generations. In accordance with this mission, USFWS awarded $18 million to support 22 projects in 10 coastal states in 2020. State and local governments, private landowners, conservation groups, and other partners contributed more than $12.2 million in supplementary funds to these projects. These projects represent 8,000 acres of coastal wetlands and adjacent upland habitats.

- The **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA**, enacted in 1989, authorized the USFWS to provide matching grants to wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. NAWCA was passed, in part, to support activities of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international plan to protect the upland habitats of migratory birds in North America. Therefore, NAWCA grants are intended to increase bird populations and wetlands, while also supporting local economies. Wetlands protected by NAWCA provide climate resiliency measures, such as flood control and reducing coastal erosion. Projects and funding under this program are reviewed by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council and the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, both established by NAWCA. In the past two decades, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act "has funded over 3,000 projects totaling $1.83 billion in grants."

- The **U.S. Forest and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program** provides technical and financial assistance to landowners who are voluntarily restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat on their land. Since the program was established in 1987, it has helped approximately 50,000 landowners to finish 60,000

restoration projects. Because private land-owners manage more than two-thirds of America's land, this program recognizes the importance of private landowners to the health of the country's fish and wildlife.

- The **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Resilience Grants Program**, administered by NOAA's National Ocean Service and NOAA Fisheries, awards funding to projects that build resilient U.S. coastal communities and ecosystems. U.S. states and territories, higher education institutions, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, Native American tribes, and local governments are eligible for this grant program. In March of 2020, the 2020 Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund was added to this program. This emergency fund aided projects that received presidential disaster declarations related to Hurricanes Florence and Michael, Typhoon Yutu, and the coastal California wildfires in 2018.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STEWARDING NATURAL RESOURCES AND ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

The Administration in 2021 will have a significant opportunity to move forward with strategies, programs, and initiatives to improve stewardship of natural resources and address climate change. This Working Group recommends that the initial actions of the Administration in 2021 should rest on the pillars of expanding federal research and demonstration on climate solutions and technology, embracing natural infrastructure to promote climate resilience, expediting renewable energy siting decisions, enhancing forest and ecosystem health, and improving interagency and intergovernmental coordination. Existing laws provide authority for recommendations here. For example, the Clean Air Act following EPA's endangerment finding and the Supreme Courts's ruling in *Massachusetts v. EPA*, requires the consideration of greenhouse gasses as pollutants and consequently allows provisions in permitting programs to provide requirements for efficiency and greenhouse gas

controls/minimization. In addition, EPA is required under the Clean Air Act, to develop standards for greenhouse gas emissions from mobile sources, such as passenger vehicles and trucks.

The Working Group recognizes that coordination across the many federal programs is essential for progress on natural resource stewardship and climate solutions and therefore offers an overarching recommendation. There have been many approaches to enhance and focus coordination. The Executive Office of the President (EOP) is made up of many coordinating councils including for example the National Economic Council, the National Security Council, the Domestic Policy Council, the Council on Environmental Quality and the Office of Science and Technology Policy. All of these councils have significant portfolios in their areas but have three things in common:

1. They are designed to coordinate involved cabinet and subcabinet agencies.
2. They have strong interests in natural resources and climate change; and
3. They themselves are managed by the President's Chief of Staff (COS).

Creating another council or appointing another individual coordinator would be creating a peer to these councils. That can be helpful, and was helpful in the past, but a stronger approach would utilize the existing chain of command, make the COS directly responsible for these councils, and create a new Deputy Chief of Staff for Climate Change. As we outline below in all of the areas of recommendation, enhanced interagency coordination and collaboration among federal agencies will be key to progress. Hence, this recommendation underpins all of our additional recommendations below.

The Working Group also recognizes that a more comprehensive set of actions will be required to truly address climate change both domestically and internationally. The recommendations presented here

should be seen as a starting point for a longer-term agenda to deal with this Grand Challenge.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Optimize and Expand Federal Research and Demonstration on Climate Solutions and Technology to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

The Administration in 2021 should enhance federal research on climate solutions and technology by:

- **Empowering and effectively resourcing such agencies as ARPA-E, DOE National Labs, NASA, NOAA, USDA Climate Hubs, and EPA** to ensure that the nation has the needed basic research capacity and can conduct demonstrations on climate solutions and technology.

- **Strongly supporting and enhancing coordination between the National Labs, housed in the Department of Energy.** These Labs have the capacity to deliver meaningful and timely research on, and demonstration of, climate solutions. Extending relations with universities will further enhance the opportunities.

- **Under the auspices of the President's COS office, assuring coordination in research and demonstration** with federal land management in the areas of resilience planning and adaptation, batteries, carbon capture, hydrogen, advanced nuclear, manufacturing improvements, advanced renewable technology, and power grids.

- **Conducting research to identify the most effective innovative land management approaches** to enhance adaptation and resilience, and to ensure that the nation's forests are a net sink of greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Conducting research, building on many existing efforts, to take advantage of recent technological advances**—drones, satellites, and other techniques—to build a more reliable measurement system, particularly as the United States seeks to expand natural gas export markets but faces growing concerns about methane release levels from potential importers with rigorous climate regimes. Methane releases from oil and gas production on both public and private lands are an example of where stronger federal science and demonstration efforts can accelerate action. Major advances in technology that can detect and measure methane releases have not yet been transferred into federal and state agency practice and represent important opportunities for the United States to begin to develop world-class capacity to accurately measure methane losses and target strategies to minimize waste.[2]

- **Increasing outreach to land grant colleges and others** that are working on natural resources and climate solutions research. This should include bringing universities with strengths in community planning and social sciences more completely into the discussions on technology. Focus on equity and community impacts to assure just transitions and benefits are equitably distributed.

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[2] These releases remain an ongoing challenge and provide an opportunity for constructive federal oversight. Methane has more than 25 times the global warming capacity of carbon dioxide during its first century in the atmosphere and is estimated to have triggered one-quarter of the global warming that has already occurred. It also contributes to air quality concerns that include volatile organic compounds. Moreover, methane is the constituent element of natural gas and so its direct release into the atmosphere through venting or conversion into carbon dioxide through flaring represent the permanent waste of a natural resource that has energy value and a loss of royalty and state severance tax revenue. A diverse set of studies in the past several years confirm that methane releases from the oil and gas sector greatly exceed reported data, including the vast reserves of the Bakken and Permian Basins where gas production can rapidly supplant oil output and often lacks proper measurement and capture capacity for sale and ultimate use to minimize waste.

- **Advancing agricultural sequestration strategies** through practices that improve soil health and retain and store more carbon.[3]

- **Conducting federal research on technologies that will provide the nation with net reduction options** for greenhouse gasses (bioenergy with carbon capture, for example or direct air capture).[4]

- **Beginning the development of a systematic inventory of orphan wells and a constructive intergovernmental plan** to pursue closure to reduce climate, air quality, and safety risks from these facilities.[5]

## RECOMMENDATION 2: Embrace Natural Infrastructure as a Key Contributor to Climate Resilience

The Administration and Congress in 2021 should take the following steps:

- **Create a career SES-level working group to address climate resilience and natural infrastructure** under the auspices of the

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[3] Improving soil health on U.S. agricultural land holds the potential for achieving meaningful conservation and economic benefits, as well as mitigating the growing threat of climate change. The Conservancy scientific analysis suggests that managing for soil health serves as a nexus for achieving increased production while reducing the societal and environmental impacts of the current U.S. row crop production system.  For more information, see this Nature Conservancy report on pathways to improving soil health; https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/rethink-soil-executive-summary.pdf

[4] Given that many of the decarbonized energy scenarios rely on some sort of carbon removal strategy, it is critical that these technologies be ready in the next decade.

[5] Currently, neither state nor federal governments have been able to develop robust programs to seal orphan wells, abandoned units that continue to release methane for decades after production ends.  The recent proliferation of oil and gas-sector bankruptcies raise additional questions about long-term site stewardship.  Varied government estimates of the current number of orphan wells ranges from a half million to more than three million.

Deputy Chief of Staff for Climate Change recommended earlier, taking stock of the many federal programs that touch on the topic and enhancing effectiveness through coordination and enhanced information sharing.

- **Utilize recovery programs** under the Stafford Act to help communities make natural infrastructure enhancements following disasters and apply what is being learned before another disaster.

- **Sustain and enhance the Army Corps of Engineers' initiative on Engineering with Nature.** The Administration has a great opportunity to learn from these efforts and apply these ideas to other existing federal planning and land management actions.

- **Provide additional funding for the conservation reserve programs**[6] of at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service[7] and the Department of the Interior.

- **Establish incentives in federal procurement programs through the General Services Administration**, for the use of lower carbon products.

- **Develop tools through a multi-agency effort to assess and address the disproportionate impact of climate change** on

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[6] The Conservation Reserve Programs provides financial incentives through payments, to keep highly erodible and ecologically sensitive farmlands out of production to provide a broad set of complementary conservation objectives, including carbon sequestration. https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/climate-and-ag-in-2016/ https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/606586_hr.pdf

[7] For example, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) issues grants that support large-scale demonstration projects that will accelerate the adoption of new and innovative approaches to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and promote carbon sequestration on America's private lands.

frontline communities and those historically marginalized in planning processes.

- **Develop a labeling program for carbon content** (like calories) and natural resource attributes of major products, including, for example, the carbon required to make the product.[8]

- **Build on efforts of the Restore Council created after the BP oil spill**, which includes resilience for climate change as one of its criteria, in deciding which projects to fund.

- **Begin the development of a strategy and near-term steps for a long-term grid modernization** that will develop and implement the needed charging infrastructure to allow for the electrification of transportation, integrate variable renewable energy into electricity grids, and enhance opportunities for energy efficiency through the use of advanced technology.

- **Play an active role in supporting climate-resilient planning** for new projects and for adapting existing ones by expanding and utilizing Community Development Block Grants. Many of the impacts of climate change pose direct threats to critical infrastructure in water, energy, transportation, and communications. Among these threats are the effects of extreme weather and heat, flooding, and sea level rise.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Coordinate and Expedite Renewable Energy Siting Decisions to Accelerate Decarbonization of the Power Sector, including a focus on siting on degraded lands**

The Administration and Congress in 2021 should take the following steps:

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[8] Such Environmental Product Declarations are beginning to be developed (for example, see California's Buy Clean program or the International EPD concepts https://www.environdec.com/What-is-an-EPD).

- **Utilize spatial planning** to efficiently and effectively identify low-impact areas, lands previously modified for agriculture, infrastructure, and other development activities, that can serve as renewable energy sites. Key low-impact area sites include superfund sites, reclaimed mine lands, orphan wells, and brownfields, all of which can be used to avoid or minimize conflict and accelerate the clean energy transition.[9]

- **Strengthen coordination with state, local, and Tribal siting programs** to ensure that federal, state, and local decisions work together to advance the goal of enhancing renewable energy siting decisions.

- **Establish renewable energy projects and related essential infrastructure (such as transmission lines) as high priorities** within existing interagency efforts to accelerate infrastructure projects and investment.

- **Utilize biodiversity offsets to enhance habitat.** In the United States, under section 404 of the Clean Water Act, government agencies are required to mitigate the disturbance or destruction of wetland, stream, or endangered species habitat. Biodiversity offsets are "measurable conservation outcomes designed to compensate for adverse and unavoidable impacts of projects" such as the building of new infrastructure, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUNC). The goal of any biodiversity offset is to achieve No Net Loss (NNL) or even a Net Gain (NG) in biodiversity. Through a system known as "mitigation banking," developers may buy and sell credits that permit such projects. More common in the realm of habitat enhancement is voluntarily developed offsetting, whereby industrialists choose to

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[9] There is a good discussion of what types of lands constitute low-impact areas comes from the Nature Conservancy's report:
https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/TNC_CleanAndGreen_Full

offset the impacts of projects with other habitat enhancing mechanisms. Federal agencies should seek to foster greater connections with industry leaders to encourage such voluntary offsets.

- **Expand efforts to expeditiously complete any needed impact reviews for offshore permitting for large-scale wind turbines.** Offshore renewable energy projects have unique siting and permitting challenges. As discussed earlier in this paper, the Department of Interior's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement will need to accelerate the diversification of its expertise and capacity to deal with the growing potential and demand for a more varied set of ocean-based energy production in future decades, especially large-scale wind.

- **Continue to provide financial incentives**, including production tax credits and investment tax credits, for renewable energy infrastructure.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: Undertake a National Effort to Enhance Forest Health to Build Resilience to Wildfire, Enhance Natural Carbon Storage, and Strengthen Habitats**

Through effective management of our public lands, the nation has the opportunity to conserve nature and slow deforestation; enhance reforestation; enhance protection and restoration of wetlands, grasslands and other ecosystems; and enhance their carbon sequestration capacities. The EPA Greenhouse Gas inventory shows the important role land use plays as a "sink" for carbon. In 1990, total greenhouse gas emissions were 6,437 million metric tons (MMT). Carbon sinks were 853 MMT making the net emissions 5,583 MMT a 13% reduction. In 2018 (the latest inventory) total emissions rose to 6,676 MMT with carbon sinks dropping to 773 MMT or 11%, so net emissions were 5,903 MMT. We are losing ground on sinks and the recent wildfires are likely making that even more

problematic. We need to focus on both reducing emissions and increasing sinks to get to net zero by mid-century.

The Administration and Congress in 2021 should take the following steps:

- **Reinvigorate and strengthen collaboration on forest health and wildland fire management through the Wildland Fire Leadership Council**, an interagency and federal, state, Tribal and local group. There are many tools to use, including the Shared Stewardships and "Good Neighbor Authority" under the 2014 Farm Bill that allows state, tribal and federal land managers to work together in a focused and shared set of actions.

- **Provide significant financial and institutional support to the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy** and increase its focus on carbon sequestration. It is critical that coordination between state, tribal and federal forest managers find the balance of management approaches that maximize forest carbon sequestration while minimizing forest fire risk. Growing the sink capacity to cover the increasing emissions from wildfires is an essential ingredient for growing the carbon sink capacity of U.S. land.

- **Make use of the USFS Coordination and Expand Shared Stewardship Agreements.** In the U.S., about 56 percent of forest lands are privately owned, but that varies from region to region. For example, the 62,000 square mile Chesapeake Watershed is 60 percent forested, and 80% of that is privately owned, with the bulk of the forest lands being in 5 states: NY, PA, MD, VA and DE. Forest land managers face a range of urgent challenges, among them catastrophic wildfires, more public demand, degraded watersheds and epidemics of forest insects and disease – all exacerbated by increasing climate change impacts. The USDA Forest Service is using a Shared Stewardship Strategy that has a

structured, outcome-based framework to set priorities with partners to improve forest conditions. This effort can be expanded and can increase its focus on forest carbon sequestration capacities. Congressional attention to increased funding will create significant incentives for expanding these stewardship agreements.

- **Manage federal forest land to become more resilient to wildfire and a net absorber of carbon.** All of the 155 National Forests must have a management plan. Coordinating with partners under the Shared Stewardship efforts is essential, but the foundation of many of those partnerships with state and private land owners will be the management plans for the National Forests. Building fire management and carbon sequestration goals into the plans along with habitat and recreational uses will be essential.

- **Authorize a USDA third party certification system to ensure the credibility of the accounting for the carbon sequestration of soil and vegetative land** such as forests. This will apply to forests, wetlands, grasslands and actively farmed and ranched lands. USDA should accelerate its work now on this effort and coordinate with other agencies like DOI and EPA as well as land grant colleges and universities. Congress has been active in this area with as-yet-unenacted bills such as the Grow Carbon Solutions Act. Getting private capital to flow to lands that increase carbon sequestration is vital, and credibility in the generated "credits" will accelerate the markets.

**RECOMMENDATION 5: Improve Federal Coordination Across Federal Agencies and with States, Tribes, and Local Governments**

To maximize both the effectiveness and efficiency of climate change mitigation efforts, the Administration in 2021 should leverage, modify, and rework existing programs and streams of funding between the federal government to states and tribes. Attempts to combat climate

change are not limited to allocating new funds because, with adaptations, current federal grants and infrastructure can lend themselves to reductions in emissions, carbon sequestration, and conservation of natural resources. Slowing the effects of climate change requires action from almost every industry, sector, and level of government.

The Working Group recommends that the Administration 2021 take the following steps:

- **Use the full authority of the Executive Office of the President** through the new Deputy Chief of Staff for Climate Change and new SES-level council to coordinate across the federal agencies.

- **Encourage or require that states and regions add greenhouse gas emissions to their decisions about funding eligibility under the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)**. Under the Federal Highway Administration, CMAQ "provides a flexible funding source to state and local governments for transportation projects and programs to help meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act." When choosing projects to fund, state and Tribal governments can consider ancillary benefits such as greenhouse gas reduction, but these environmental benefits alone do not constitute eligibility for CMAQ. By allowing states and regions to award CMAQ funds only to projects that meet the jurisdiction's greenhouse gas emission standards, this existing program could facilitate more extensive climate change mitigation without additional appropriations.

- **Expand support for non-academic organizations to engage in natural resource and climate change research** through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). NIFA issues grants to states for climate change research relating to forest conservation and sustainable agriculture. However, the research must be conducted through land-grant institutions. Issuing these research grants to companies in the auto industry, oceanic conservation groups, or other non-academic organizations may lead to deeper, diverse knowledge and practical implementation of research findings.

- **Diversify the location of federal assistance by dividing the use of these funds between public and private lands**, leading to more innovative proposals and broader beneficiaries of climate improvements.

## CONCLUSION

The Academy has identified stewarding our natural resources and tackling climate change as a Grand Challenge in Public Administration. Addressing this challenge will require a major national effort led by the federal government. States, tribes, cities and businesses all have significant responsibilities to their citizens, employees and customers. The ingredient of national leadership is essential to make it all work. The Working Group's recommendations can help the Administration in 2021 get started quickly. These recommendations can guide individual departments and agencies to take steps that will immediately help the United States address its urgent natural resources and climate change challenges.

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
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# *Enhancing Water Delivery and Waste Water Systems in the United States: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Create Modern Water Systems for Safe and Sustainable Use**

**ABOUT THE ACADEMY**

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

**ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Create Modern Water Systems for Safe and Sustainable Use Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for the American government to build safe, sustainable, and affordable water systems for all.

# *ENHANCING WATER DELIVERY AND WASTE WATER SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES: AN AGENDA FOR 2021*

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**
**ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:**
**CREATE MODERN WATER SYSTEMS FOR SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE USE**

**Working Group Members**
Scott Fosler
Gerry Galloway
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**THE CHALLENGE**

In November 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) announced 12 [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](). One of these Grand Challenges is [Create Modern Water Systems for Safe and Sustainable Use](). Across the nation, America needs collaboration from all levels of government to address the pressing issues of climate change and create new water plans to ensure safe drinking water and efficient distribution of water to industry, agriculture, and the general public. While each aspect of the country's water systems needs attention, the Administration in 2021 can make an immediate impact on the quality of life of its citizens and foster social equity by improving the public's access to clean drinking water and sanitation systems. Clean water across every community is essential to improving Americans' health, for achieving social equity, and for developing the economy. While state and local governments enact the majority of policy concerning water systems, the federal government establishes a minimum policy and regulatory framework that the states are free to exceed. Leadership from the federal level is necessary to ensure the standards for clean water systems are equally and uniformly applied. Leadership from the federal level can also accelerate the adoption of new technologies and tools that can achieve greater public health and environmental protection at less cost.

As America plans its economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, it has the opportunity to address stubborn challenges that have continued to harm U.S. economic growth including an outdated workforce system, deteriorating infrastructure, and climate change. These issues are multi-faceted and cut across several sectors of the economy. A focused strategy to improve the infrastructure supporting America's water systems, and especially the water supply and treatment systems, could lay the foundation for success in each of these related.

Before going to work or school, each American must first be assured that the water for themselves and for their household is safe to drink. Teachers, staff, and children going back to school amidst a pandemic must have safe water to drink and wash their hands. We assume that in America, a first-world country, everyone has access to safe and

clean water. Unfortunately, our deteriorating water supply and treatment infrastructure and a lack of safe and sustainable water are not outdated issues. While the Flint water debacle brought home to Americans how risky their water system can be, it is not an isolated instance. The latest indicator came in August 2020, as schools around the country reopened, only to find bacteria causing Legionnaire's disease in their water. In 2019, just before the eruption of the pandemic, the U.S. Water Alliance and the DigDeep Water organization found that at least 2,000,000 Americans do not have access to safe sanitation and clean drinking water. If we hope to ensure recovery from this pandemic, it is imperative that every resident has access to clean drinking and sanitation water, and yet that is still not the case. At the international level, the United Nations has made Clean Water and Sanitation one of its primary Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 6 is a topic of international focus, and the United States is not in any way at the head of the pack in terms of meeting the goals.

Water supply and treatment are critical issues of social equity and environmental justice, as seen in places like Flint, MI; Newark, NJ; and California's Central Valley. In some communities, unsafe drinking water means that individuals have to pay for bottled water in addition to their monthly payments to water districts, and this has a disproportionate impact on the economically disadvantaged. Similarly, issues of persistent flooding from storm water and rising rivers often have disproportionate effects on historically marginalized communities. Approximately 58 out of 1,000 Native American households lack complete clean water plumbing and 5 out of every 1,000 African-American and Hispanic families are without working plumbing systems in their homes. A Food and Water Watch study found that 15 million people in the U.S. in 2016 experienced a water shutoff, with the highest shutoff rates occurring disproportionately in cities with higher rates of poverty, a higher rate of unemployment, and more people of color. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue as citizens were asked to use more water for frequent cleaning of hands, clothes, and household areas, while many citizens also found themselves unemployed and unable to pay their water bills. (Fortunately, quite a few states put moratoria on water shut-offs, but big bills are likely to come due when those moratoria end). According to CDC documents, COVID-19 has infected Black and Hispanic people at three times the rate of white

people. While there is incomplete data on Native Americans, COVID-19 appears to disproportionately affect them at even greater rates. There are many factors at play in this disparity, but the absence of clean, affordable water and sanitation is likely significant.

## RECENT FEDERAL INITIATIVES

The Administration's efforts to combat these various challenges include the following:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is implementing several programs.

- **2018 America's Water Infrastructure Act** requires community drinking water systems serving more than 3,300 people to develop or update risk assessments and emergency response plans;
- **2019 Water Workforce Initiative** helps cities and communities across the country that are facing critical staffing shortages for the operation and maintenance of essential drinking water and wastewater infrastructure; and
- **2020 Financial Capability Assessment for Water Services in Disadvantaged Communities** helps local communities afford services required by the unfunded Clean Water Act mandate. Through a proposed financial capability assessment, the EPA plans to identify the extent to which customers and communities can afford CWA requirements.

The EPA, through its National Compliance Initiatives for FY 2020-2023, is also working on the following efforts:

- **Reducing Noncompliance with Drinking Water Standards at Community Water Systems**. This effort, through the EPA's Office of Water, initiated a circuit rider program to provide effective on-the-ground assistance to help public water systems and wastewater systems achieve and sustain environmental compliance. EPA worked with state partners to identify facilities in need of circuit rider technical assistance and also developed resources to aid small systems.

- **Reducing Significant Non-Compliance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permits.** In order to improve surface water quality and reduce potential impacts on drinking water by assuring that all NPDES permittees are complying with their permits (public agencies and not just industrial contributors), this effort identified permittees that were in significant noncompliance and increased the number of state inspections of permittees.
- **Keeping Raw Sewage and Contaminated Storm Water Out of Our Nation's Waters**. This effort, a collaboration between EPA and state co-plaintiffs, builds on previous initiatives since 2000 to enforce Clean Water Act standards in the largest municipal sewer systems. The goal of this initiative is to ultimately reduce unlawful discharges of raw sewage that degrade water quality in communities.

While these initiatives contribute to improved water quality and reliability, far more can and should be done.

## Collaboration with Other Levels of Government

The federal government must consider its state and local partners when making decisions for both the short- and long-term. The issue of clean and sustainable water use is primarily delegated to state, county, and municipal governments, with the federal government providing guidance on regulations and financial support. However, this current approach faces challenges, especially in an era when federal financial support has dwindled from its significant role in funding the nation's water infrastructure upgrades in the 1970s and 1980s. The federal government can also take a more collaborative role working with state and local governments, and should take advantage of their vast experience in dealing with thorny issues in protecting public health and the environment. When the federal government employs an inclusive decision-making process with its partners, it can help foster creative solutions tailored to local needs and can do so without sacrificing its bottom line focus on meeting drinking water and clean water minimum standards.

Climate change, which may limit the availability of water in many basins, will exacerbate tensions stemming from access to increasingly limited water supplies. In other basins, increased precipitation may increase the threat of flooding that causes loss of lives, housing, businesses, farms, and infrastructure. At the local level, some financially constrained communities do not prioritize investment in updating water infrastructure or lack the resources, whether technical, managerial, or financial, to do so.  This, in turn, leads to poor quality water in low-income households and inadequate drainage in neighborhoods. Outdated water infrastructure increases water prices in these communities as 50-70% or more of their treated water is lost to leaks, and repeated fixes are required.  Rate increases can force families to decide between paying for water, rent, or food. While an increase in federal funding to these communities would certainly help, the Federal government can and must also help find long-term solutions as quickly as possible.  The Federal government is uniquely positioned to leverage dollars, apply technical innovations, and share best management practices.  A strategic approach to bring best management practices, new technologies, and supportive funding to state and local communities could yield enormous results, especially if focused on the most disadvantaged communities.  While the total cost of action might be steep, the cost of inaction is greater in terms of public health, public wellbeing, and confidence in government.

## CONNECTION TO NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES

The majority of these issues stem from the inadequately maintained water infrastructure in the U.S., a system that simply has not kept up with demand or opportunities to find multiple benefits in innovative water supply and treatment.  While this paper focuses on water quality and supply, the country's water systems as a whole are in decline and will also need to be addressed. The grades for water categories in the latest infrastructure report card from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)—which has a scale of D as poor, C as mediocre, B as good, and A as exceptional—are shown in Table 1 below.  ASCE

estimated that water infrastructure would need [$472.6 billion over the next 20 years](#) to improve these grades.

| Infrastructure Category and Grade | |
|---|---|
| Dams: D | Inland Waterways: D |
| Drinking Water: D | Levees: D |
| Hazardous Waste: D+ | Wastewater: D+ |

**Table 1. Infrastructure Report Card (2017)**

Inadequate or poorly maintained water infrastructure limits a community's resilience toward natural disasters and pandemics, hinders the country's economic growth, and harms the health and quality of life of citizens. A September 2018 [House Budget Committee](#) hearing found bipartisan agreement regarding the importance of infrastructure and the nation's current water systems. Attendees at the hearing noted that the lack of investment in infrastructure causes citizens or communities to shift their money away from other areas of the local economy to pick up the tab for water (such as buying bottled water) and that those community members also have a poorer quality of life, lower quality drinking water, and inadequate flood control structures. This combination can be literally lethal to a community's resilience. Increased investment in water infrastructure will lay a solid foundation for the rest of the country's infrastructure needs. Further, investment in water infrastructure appears to provide a significant return. The American Water Works Association (AWWA) posits that:

- Each $1 investment in water and sewer infrastructure could [yield $6.35 in GDP](#) in the long term.

- Every increase of $1 in revenue in the water and sewer industry increases economic output in all industries by $2.62 in that same year.
- One job in water and sewage can create as many as 3.68 jobs in the national economy to support that job.
- Investing in water promotes longer term economic growth, builds community resilience, and raises the quality of life for citizens.

The aging of the water sector's workforce, especially in the water supply and treatment area, poses its own challenges to the country's water systems. A 2018 Brookings Institution study on the overall water workforce—which includes utilities and water infrastructure such as dams and levees—identified issues in hiring and retaining water workers throughout the sector. It found that:

- Workers in the overall water workforce tend to be older and lack gender and racial diversity in certain occupations. Brookings noted that, in 2016, 85 percent of these workers were male and two-thirds of them were white;
- Water sector employees earn more, on average, compared to other occupations nationally;
- 53 percent of water sector employees have a high school diploma or less; and
- On-the-job training and familiarity with the trade's tools and techniques are more important for success.

That same study recommended several actions, including:

- Federal support of a dialogue among national organizations to assess water workforce needs;
- Forming a national advisory "Water Workforce Council" among relevant entities to plan for current and future challenges; and
- Expansion of federal and state grants for workforce training and development programs.

The 2018 Task Force on Workforce Sustainability Report by the Government Accountability office further noted the need for future water sector employees and divided the needs among different areas of the

sector. The GAO report projected that, in the next 10 years, 37 percent of the water utility workers and 31 percent of wastewater utility workers would retire. This report also found:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates from May 2016 show that 77 percent of water operators were employed by local governments; 12 percent were in water, sewage, and other systems, which are primarily in privately owned drinking water and wastewater utilities; and 11 percent were employed in state government or in various other private industries, such as waste treatment and disposal.
- At that time, the current water sector workforce population aged 55 or older was approximately 25 percent, while the national average was approximately 23 percent.  The median age for water operators was 46, while the overall national median age was 42.

Table 1: Annual Average Projected Growth Rates and Occupational Separations Rates for Various Occupations Employed by Drinking Water and Wastewater Utilities, 2016 through 2026

| Occupation | Projected growth rate (percentage) | Projected labor force exit rate (percentage) | Projected occupational transfer rate (percentage) | Projected total occupational separations rate (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average of all occupations nationwide | 7.4 | 4.7 | 6.2 | 10.9 |
| Electricians | 9.0 | 3.5 | 7.4 | 10.9 |
| Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters | 15.8 | 3.6 | 6.7 | 10.3 |
| Stationary engineers and boiler operators | 4.8 | 3.2 | 7.0 | 10.3 |
| Machinists | 2.1 | 3.5 | 6.5 | 10.0 |
| Maintenance workers, machinery | 5.6 | 4.3 | 5.8 | 10.0 |
| **Water and wastewater treatment operators** | **-3.2** | **2.8** | **5.3** | **8.2** |

Source: GAO analysis of BLS data.  |  GAO-18-102

## Table 2.  GAO Occupational Analysis.

As noted in the table from the report, the GAO further found that the number of water and wastewater treatment operators was projected to decline for the period of 2016 to 2026. As of the GAO report, neither industry associations or the EPA had analyzed whether unmet workforce needs would contribute to compliance issues.

The EPA has undertaken several important actions to address water workforce issues:

- A Memorandum of Understanding between EPA and USDA captures an understanding designed to help rural water systems

with the challenges of aging infrastructure, workforce shortages, increasing costs, limited management capacity, and declining rate bases;

- M.O.S. to J-O-B: A Guide for Applying Military Occupational Specialties (M.O.S.) to Civilian Drinking Water and Wastewater Operations offers a reemployment program for veterans of the armed services who held Military Occupations Specialties;
- A Selection of Training Programs for Water and Wastewater Operators provides a guide for new and experience water operators to training programs, internships, and mentoring programs;
- A Memorandum of Understanding between EPA and Department of Veteran Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service documents joint promotional activities to connect veterans with disabilities to career opportunities in the water sector;
- EPA's "Water You Waiting For?" created recruitment videos for water sector employment targeted toward high school and vocational technical school students; and
- Work for Water Campaign presents a public outreach campaign informing the public about water careers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE NATION'S WATER DELIVERY AND WASTE WATER SYSTEMS

### RECOMMENDATION 1: Strengthen Federal Interagency Coordination and Build More Cooperative Relationships with States and with Local Partners for Water Delivery and Waste Water Systems

In a previous Election 2020 paper, the Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement Working Group recommended several actions to enhance collaboration among federal, state, and local governments. The Administration in 2021 should take into account those recommendations when crafting efforts to enhance intergovernmental collaboration on water supply and treatment. Specifically, the Administration should:

- Establish a mechanism that enables state and local government and other community experts to participate in designing and planning collaborative approaches to their water challenges. More frequent interagency and intergovernmental communication cycles will promote a more closely matched supply and demand of services to meet the specific needs of communities. The convening power of the federal government is an under-appreciated tool for empowering communities and transferring knowledge and experience.
- Work with OMB to include water sector issues, especially water supply and treatment, in national strategies and encourage all levels of government to strengthen data, analytics, and evaluation capacity.
- Use the federal government's powerful convening, research, and technology sharing capacity to harness, accelerate, and illuminate rapid advances in technologies that can employ satellites, sensors, and data analytics to improve water treatment at less cost and assess infrastructure repairs in a more cost-effective manner.
- Embrace and support the "One Water" movement led by local governments across the nation to integrate multi-benefits and integrated planning in implementation of water projects, including "green" infrastructure to meet flood control, water supply, water quality, and urban greening or ecosystem needs—to get more results from each scarce dollar.
- Bring back federal investment in water infrastructure as part of our collective investment in the health of all our communities. Federal investment leverages state, local, and philanthropic resources to do more now, at a time when interest rates are low and the need for jobs is high (see below).
- Ensure that coordination among federal, state, and local governments follows effective practices of:
  - Mutual respect among the parties to allow for constructive discussion on current regulations and future planning;
  - Clarity of the mission, which states the concrete objectives of the collaboration efforts;
  - Networks of entities focused on achieving a common mission, which includes not only the government actors but also private and non-profit actors;

o Use of facilitative technology that will allow the public to observe the process and progress of the mission; and
o Use of financial, enforcement, and regulatory tools to encourage watershed or community-based integrated water planning across the flood control, water supply, and water quality organizational and planning regimes.

## RECOMMENDATION 2: Incorporate Water in Social Equity Goals

In a previous Election 2020 paper, the [Social Equity Working Group](#) recommended a White House Initiative on Social Equity Evidence responsible for conducting a Social Equity Evidence Review, developing a Social Equity Data and Statistical Inventory, establishing a Social Equity Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goal, and incorporating a Social Equity Measurement System.

Access to clean water is a major environmental justice and social equity issue. Accordingly, the Water Working Group concurs with the Social Equity Group's recommendations—and further recommends that the Administration include water as a core part of these initiatives. Specifically, this Working Group recommends that the Administration set goals for community and demographic access to clean sanitation and drinking water, establish an intergovernmental strategy, and track the nation's progress by:

- Including data on the country's water systems in a Social Equity Data and Statistical Survey;
- Incorporating Water into the Social Equity CAP Goal, charging appropriate agencies (including EPA, USDA, HHS, DOI, DOE, and HUD) with responsibilities to work individually and collectively to achieve these goals, and coordinating with their state and local counterparts;
- Including water equality in any overarching social equity measurement framework, which guides public administrators on social equity issues through relevant data, research, and expertise; and

- Start collecting, analyzing, and reporting data for the small systems below which national standards apply (communities that service fewer than 25 people or serve water for less than 60 days per year) to elevate the issue and consider whether further federal regulation is appropriate.

Although there are several aspects to achieving a more equitable society, the administration in 2021 must prioritize access to safe, sustainable, and affordable water across all demographics. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the critical importance of safe and sustainable water supply and treatment systems. As America moves forward, it must identify the underlying causes of this inequity and create a sustainable plan to secure this resource for every citizen of future generations.

## RECOMMENDATION 3: Strengthen the water supply and water treatment workforce through an overall water workforce initiative for current and future needs

The coronavirus pandemic provides an opportunity to address the water sector's workforce issues. The interruption of businesses during the outbreak led to one of the highest unemployment rates in U.S. history. Some of these unemployed individuals could be reskilled to perform work in the water sector. In order to meet current and future workforce needs, the Administration in 2021 should work to strengthen the water supply and water treatment workforce through a water workforce initiative that encompasses all areas of the water sector. As the American economy rebounds, it needs an intentional increase in the workforce focused on water infrastructure assets to improve the quality, sustainability, and equity of this country's water systems. Special attention must also be given to the workforce in the water and wastewater area of this sector as its population is expected to decline.

The water workforce has seen a demographic imbalance similar to other parts of the U.S. workforce. The average age of this sector's workers continues to rise, and increasing demand for these workers has left a shortage in supply. Opportunities for those working in the water sector, however, are plentiful.

With a large increase in permanent job losses from the coronavirus pandemic distributed across the country, the Administration in 2021 should include specific investment in the water sector's workforce as a whole, especially in the water treatment and sanitation areas, as part of any recovery plan, and:

- Work with Congress to obtain multi-year authorizations to demonstrate a long-term commitment toward the water workforce;
- Solicit frequent feedback from state and local entities, with the goal of more accurately assessing demand for water sector jobs and resource needs;
- Begin and sustain a dialogue across all levels of government to evaluate and improve current reemployment services, apprenticeships, and partnerships between community colleges and vocational/technical schools and the industry;
- Provide funding for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs;
- Provide incentives for employers to provide on-the-job training that would facilitate reemployment and help local economies in every region of the country;
- Establish a point of contact for the water sector workforce within each relevant federal agency including DOL, EPA, USDA, HHS, DOI, DOE, and HUD; and
- Ensure that federal funding in the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act supports initiatives in the water workforce.

## CONCLUSION

Humans cannot survive without water. As discussed in this paper, the United States faces serious challenges to ensure that Americans have safe, secure, and clean water for drinking and the necessary wastewater systems to protect public health and the environment. This Working Group's recommendations are intended to identify concrete actions that the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) should take to improve interagency and intergovernmental coordination, address social inequities, and ensure that the nation has the water workforce it needs.

## Create Modern Water Systems: Working Group

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# *Addressing Technological Changes*

**Ensure Data Security and Privacy Rights of Individuals**

**Make Government AI Ready**

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Data Privacy and Security:*
# *An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Ensure Data Security and Privacy Rights of**
**Individuals**

## ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

## ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Ensure Data Security and Privacy Rights of Individuals Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for new opportunities to engage American citizens in a dialogue on data security and privacy issues and to develop the IT Workforce.

# DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

## A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
ENSURE DATA SECURITY AND PRIVACY RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS

### Working Group Members
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# THE CHALLENGE

In the digital age, the American people knowingly and unknowingly produce huge amounts of data on a daily basis, and governments at all levels increasingly rely on digital systems to manage their internal operations and deliver public services. Through widespread e-commerce, ubiquitous GPS maps, and regular social media interactions, the public transmits their sensitive financial, health, and other personal information through online platforms.

Americans need assurance that all sectors will keep their personal data private and safeguarded from abuse, but our data security infrastructure in both the public and the private sectors is vulnerable to exploitations, hacks, and breaches. With malevolent foreign intelligence entities, the hacking of public agencies, the infiltration of hostile agents in private organizations, and other dangers, the threat of data insecurity and exposure to breaches is real and immediate for governments, companies, and individuals.

Nonstate cyber actors and nation-states have developed sophisticated mechanisms for exploiting the vulnerabilities of government systems. Not only do they steal information and money; they increasingly disrupt, destroy, or threaten the delivery of essential public services. For example, hackers have been targeting local governments for ransomware attacks, with important systems and data being blocked until a ransom payment is made. In the summer of 2019, a host of local governments—including Baltimore, MD; Albany, NY; Laredo, TX; and 22 small Texas towns—had their operations disrupted by such attacks. The City of Baltimore experienced a hack that prevented the locality from issuing health alerts and delayed water bill delivery. Similarly, the City of Atlanta's systems for police reports and employment applications were down for days due to a March 2018 cyberattack. State and county governments, school districts, hospitals, and court systems have also become common targets of ransomware attacks.

The emerging threats to data privacy and security from the increasing use of digital technology are widely recognized but have gone largely unaddressed as the pace of technological change has surpassed government's modernization efforts.[1] Advances in information technologies have created situations where U.S. citizens are largely unaware of the extent and scope to which their personal data is collected, how it is being used, and who is applying that data to influence their, or others', actions. Over the next decade, technology will continue to evolve, and data privacy and security programs in both the public and the private sectors will inevitably face new vulnerabilities for which they will be unprepared.

From a somewhat different perspective, the coronavirus pandemic has brought privacy and security issues into sharp focus for most Americans. Not only are more Americans reliant on digital platforms to conduct their professional and personal lives and thus more aware of privacy and security risks, but an effective, longer-term response to the pandemic appears to necessitate tracing the spread of the virus. All citizens will be forced to decide about the necessary tradeoffs between privacy and security in attempts to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Will Americans tolerate tracking the movement of individuals for the greater public good? Are Americans willing to sacrifice privacy for security to mitigate the coronavirus and/or terrorist threats?

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[1] Security and privacy in law enforcement, defense and intelligence are critical issues but are largely beyond the scope of this white paper. Security and privacy each are quite broad areas. In some cases, security and privacy are positively correlated in the sense that strengthening one strengthens the other. In other cases, the two outcomes are traded off, when, for example, some dimension of privacy is traded off for increased security. Decision makers are challenged to craft administrative and legislative rules that optimize both privacy and security.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) has an opportunity to act quickly and strategically on these issues by leveraging the policy and administrative work that has been done over the last several years and the expertise that exists in the federal and state governments, as well as in the private sector and in academia. In this white paper, the Working Group on Data Security and Privacy recommends a number of actions that should be taken next year. Some are new, while others build upon efforts currently underway.

## Create a Presidential Commission on Privacy and Security

The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 engage the US population in a long-term dialogue on data privacy and security through the creation of a presidential commission.

- **Who should serve?** Primary participants should be federal policy makers at the Assistant Secretary level or higher, and corporate officials at the Executive Vice President level or higher, ensuring action orientation and a strategic perspective. Academic, research community and accreditation/service delivery organizations may be included but only after a first defining meeting to ensure laser focus on results.

- **What should its powers be?** Review and coordinate existing frameworks, recommendations and requests; develop an action plan; and facilitate implementation either through administrative reforms or legislation.

- **Why would it succeed? (critical success factors):** A public-private membership, engagement of the White House, and brevity of output will be key. In addition, a road map to accomplish practical steps forward will guarantee action orientation.

- **How will it be resourced?** It needs to be staffed by a team of competent and subject matter experts.

## Create a Workforce Advisory Commission on Cybersecurity and Privacy

The Working Group recommends that the next administration address the urgent and growing skills crisis in the IT workforce for data privacy and security and for federal and private sector entities alike by creating a Workforce Advisory Commission on cybersecurity and privacy:

- **Why is this needed?** A pipeline strategy organized by synchronizing efforts of agencies such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and academic and training organizations in a comprehensive, coordinated approach help to prepare the cybersecurity and privacy workforce of the future. The Administration in 2021 can build on several key initiatives in the federal government and on the recommendations of the recent Cybersecurity Solarium Commission report to develop programs to foster cybersecurity and privacy skills. The technology has been defined by technical experts, but the administrative, policy and leadership dimensions required for success have not yet received adequate attention.

- **Who should serve?** Senior HR leaders, career advisors, and educators should serve in order to determine skills needed to provide a workforce for the future that is both security and privacy aware at all levels of the organization.

- **What should its powers be?** To not only review existing frameworks, recommendations, and requests, but also design new frameworks, talent management strategies, and career paths.

- **Why would it succeed (critical success factors)?** A public-private membership, engagement of the White House and brevity of output.

- **How will it be resourced?** It needs to be staffed by a team of competent and subject matter experts.

## Develop and Implement a Policy Framework to Protect Data Security and Individual Privacy

The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021:

- Work with Congress to craft and enact a policy framework and standards to protect consumer online data.
- Work with Congress to complete and enact a comprehensive national data privacy law to protect consumers and to foster innovation and economic growth for American companies.
- Build on the large-scale initiative, the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bipartisan congressional commission, to implement its recently released recommendations.

As an independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit organization chartered by the U.S. Congress to improve government performance, the National Academy of Public Administration stands ready to assist the Administration in 2021 in implementing these recommendations. The Academy can foster multi-stakeholder dialogues that lead to actionable plans.

## LEVERAGING EXISTING ACTIVITIES

The Administration in 2021 has an opportunity to act quickly and strategically to advance data privacy and security, and to build the workforce in these areas by leveraging administrative and policy initiatives that have already been successfully undertaken and that already incorporate the expertise that exists in the federal and state governments, as well as in the private sector and in academia. Privacy and security concerns pervade every federal agency and policy domain of the government. This section identifies some of the related key initiatives ongoing in the federal government to provide a starting point for the next administration.

In this paper, the Working Group focuses on two dimensions of privacy in addition to security and related workforce needs: (1) strengthening individual and corporate privacy with respect to government datasets and their use; and (2) strengthening consumer online data privacy.

A number of important initiatives have been undertaken in the area of data security and privacy.

### President's Cross-Agency Priority Goals

The GPRA Modernization Act of 2013 mandates that each presidential administration develop a set of Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals These are meant to prioritize areas of the President's agenda that require government-wide or cross-agency collaboration. The current CAP goals include two goals directly related to privacy and security: IT Modernization and Data, Accountability and Transparency. The Working Group recommends that the next administration build on current efforts in these CAP goals. Just as the current administration continued several CAP goals from the previous administration while putting their own stamp on them, the next administration should continue to build on previous work in priority areas.

The CAP goal titled Data, Accountability, and Transparency focuses on leveraging data as a strategic asset by developing a [Federal data strategy.](#) To do so, the data strategy must respect and maintain privacy and confidentiality, as noted in the CAP goal team's [action plans](#), while leveraging the value of the federal government's data to serve the public. This CAP goal represents a whole-of-government effort, not surprisingly, and is led by data experts from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and other departments and agencies.

**Protecting Confidentiality While Leveraging Data**

A critical issue in using data strategically is confidentiality protection, which is growing in importance in a data rich environment. The more data that becomes available in private or public settings, the more difficult are the challenges of ensuring individual-level confidentiality and anonymity. This is a fundamental element of the federal statistical system's work (Census, Bureau of Economic Adjustment, Bureau of Labor Statistics, etc.). Recommendations of the [U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking](#) on applying privacy-preserving approaches/technologies are currently being examined.

That Commission outlined a vision for a National Secure Data Service, including the role it would play to balance transparency and data security. OMB established an advisory committee in March 2020 to plan development of the Federal Data Service with $5 million awarded to the Census Bureau and $2 million to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. An [advisory committee](#) with nonfederal members will assist in building tools to facilitate data sharing and data linkage while also preserving and enhancing privacy. As statistical and other agencies integrate, analyze and release data, they must be sure that data reconstruction and other methods cannot be used to disclose personal information.[2]

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[2] See [https://federalnewsnetwork.com/big-data/2019/10/where-does-the-federal-data-strategy-go-from-here-evidence-panel-members-revisit-ideas/](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/big-data/2019/10/where-does-the-federal-data-strategy-go-from-here-evidence-panel-members-revisit-ideas/)

**Student Privacy**

Student privacy has gained visibility and urgency as education has moved online in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education (ED), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), state legislatures (several of which have recently passed laws in this area) and state departments of education. Student privacy has become an issue for two primary reasons: the need to reconcile the requirements and accountability frameworks of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) of 1998 with the increasing use of educational technology at all levels of education and for a variety of purposes. Both have been topics of FTC and ED workshops and requests for public comment, and Congress has considered multiple bills on the topic. Much of the policy groundwork has been laid with developing consensus on the steps needed to protect student privacy in technologically-mediated educational settings. But action needs to follow. The focus of the Commission should include endorsement of a bill that reconciles FERPA and COPPA, as well as the jurisdictions of the FTC and ED, and addresses the accountability of educational technology providers.

**Authentication & Unique Identifiers**

A recent National Academy of Sciences report notes: "As authentication becomes ever more ubiquitous, understanding its interplay with privacy is vital."[1] There are important trade-offs to be debated concerning convenience, personal and data privacy, and data security across a wide range of applications including medical records, fraud detection, public transactions and services ranging from tax filing to benefits transfers. Companies often share data with each other that identifies customers allowing the industries not just to gather their personal information for marketing but also to prevent fraud and to provide better and faster service.

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[3]Who Goes There? Authentication Through the Lens of Privacy.
https://www.nap.edu/read/10656/chapter/1

Government policies and administrative procedures in the areas of authentication and identity protection face a higher standard than do entities in the private sector because they are obligated to protect democracy and privacy while also seeking to modernize government services and information provision. Any comprehensive government data privacy policy will require exploring the trade-offs inherent in cross dataset and cross agency sharing of personal data and authentication.

## CONSUMER ONLINE DATA PRIVACY PROTECTION

In 2018, responding to increasing public concern and serious breaches of consumer data, the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) began stakeholder meetings to build shared understanding and to develop broad principles for data privacy. The White House National Economic Council working with Congress stated at that time that it "aims to craft a consumer privacy protection policy that is the appropriate balance between privacy and prosperity."[3] **The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 move quickly and purposefully to work with Congress to craft and enact a policy framework and standards to protect consumer online data.**

These initiatives follow massive data breaches in some of the largest companies in the U.S. Facebook announced in 2018 that the information of approximately 70 million U.S. users was shared improperly with Cambridge Analytica and, more generally, that Facebook has shared consumer data with four Chinese companies prompting congressional inquiries. In 2017, Yahoo reported a data theft in 2013 that hacked the personal information of all of its three billion accounts. Other large-scale breaches that have compromised consumer personal data have been reported by Target Corp., Equifax Inc., and Home Depot, Inc., among other firms. As a result, citizens have expressed increasingly growing concerns about privacy protections.

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[3] See https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-internet-privacy/trump-administration-

working-on-consumer-data-privacy-policy-idUSKBN1KH2MK ;
https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/07/27/trump-administration-is-working-new-proposal-protect-online-privacy/

The federal government currently lacks federal rules or laws that protect consumer online privacy by regulating how firms gather and monetize Web data. In 2018, the European Union (EU) developed a set of standards called the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that took effect on May 25, 2018 and is expected to have far-reaching impacts on how business is conducted worldwide with respect to the collection and use of personal data. For example, the Institute of Electrical & Electronic Engineers (IEEE), a global organization incorporated in New York with 400,000 members in more than 160 countries has been carefully reviewing the GDPR. Among the steps IEEE has taken is the formation of a cross-organizational task force that is working to ensure consistency in how volunteers, members, and professional staff worldwide collect and use personal data.

Moreover, the State of California, the world's sixth largest economy, adopted the California Consumer Privacy Act in June 2018 to protect consumer rights regarding "access to, deletion of, and sharing of personal information that is collected by businesses." If other states follow California's lead, business would be faced with a patchwork of fragmented regulatory environments domestically and internationally that would be unworkable.

In light of these developments, in September 2019 more than 50 Business Roundtable CEOs from several industries wrote to Congressional leaders urging them to enact, "as soon as possible," a comprehensive national data privacy law to protect consumers and to foster innovation and economic growth for American companies. They noted the urgency of restoring consumer trust and the importance of a national policy framework to guide corporate behavior. They included a Framework for Consumer Privacy Legislation to provide a roadmap of issues for the law to address in requiring businesses to protect consumers by holding firms responsible for "collection, use and sharing of personal information."

**The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 move quickly and purposefully** to **work with Congress to complete and enact this legislation. Given the difficulties experienced by the EU in monitoring and enforcing their new regulations, the federal government should strengthen existing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.**

## CYBERSECURITY

The [IT Modernization CAP goal](#) is co-led by the federal Chief Information Officer and OMB, and is meant to increase productivity and security while also building a modern IT workforce, thus aligning squarely with the Academy's Grand Challenge. Among the problems it is meant to address are limited federal agency accountability for reducing cybersecurity risks, acquisition and authorization processes that hinder adoption of current commercial technologies, and reliance on legacy IT systems and a patchwork of network architectures that are difficult to modernize and secure. This cross-agency network already has developed cybersecurity KPIs, is working on several initiatives to build the federal IT workforce, and has worked to protect networks and data. It is a whole-of-government effort led by the OMB CIO in coordination with General Services Administration (GSA), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), related units in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other key partners including the U.S. Digital Service and the NSC Cybersecurity Directorate. **The Working Group recommends that the Administration in 2021 continue and accelerate these efforts.**

**The Working Group also recommends that the Administration in 2021 build on the large-scale initiative, the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bipartisan congressional commission, to move its recently released recommendations to action.** The Commission issued its [final report](#) in March 2020. It includes 75 recommendations for the public and private sectors meant to address not only the threat of a major cyberattack but also the "millions of daily intrusions disrupting everything from financial transactions to the inner workings of our electoral system."[4] The report includes several draft bills for Congress in an appendix, one indication of the urgency for action in security. The Chairman's letter introducing the report reads:

> The reality is that we are dangerously insecure in cyber. Your entire life—your paycheck, your health care, your electricity—increasingly relies on networks of digital devices that store, process, and analyze data. These networks are vulnerable, if not already compromised. Our country has lost hundreds of billions of dollars to nation-state-sponsored intellectual property theft using cyber espionage.

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[4] Final report, p. v.

The report recommends that "deterrence requires government reform" (p. vii). It calls for the elevation of existing cyber agencies, noting the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) as the lead agency for the federal government and the "preferred partner" for the private sector. The report also stresses the need to improve the coordination of cybersecurity across the executive branch and Congress; to make election security a priority (Academy Grand Challenge 1); and to make CISA a preferred employer for young professionals on a par with the NSA, Google and the FBI. The report recommends that Congress establish House Permanent Select and Senate Select Committees on Cybersecurity to integrate oversight of efforts currently fragmented across the federal government. Further, Congress should establish a Senate-confirmed National Cyber Director (NCD) supported by an Office of the NCDG in the Executive Office of the President to advise the President and lead national coordination of cybersecurity strategy and policy for the government and with the private sector.

To address the critical need for workforce development, the report recommends that Congress and the executive branch pass legislation and implement policies to recruit, retain and develop "cyber talent" and to expand "the pool of candidates for cyber work in the federal government." The report recommends that Congress create an Assistant Secretary of State in a new Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies to develop and lead promotion of international norms in cyberspace. Several other recommendations bear directly on this paper, including strengthening the Election Assistance Commission to secure elections by supporting state and local entities and the recommendation to "promote digital literacy, civics education, and public awareness."

Reiterating the urgency of privacy protection, the report also recommends that Congress "pass a national data security and privacy protection law … establishing and standardizing requirements for the collection, retention, and sharing of user data."

## BUILDING THE IT WORKFORCE FOR PRIVACY AND SECURITY

The Administration in 2021 can draw from several current federal initiatives. By coordinating these efforts and driving toward an actionable strategic plan, the next administration can take material steps toward building the workforce needed to ensure security and privacy in the federal government and in related workforces. What is needed is a workforce strategic plan that will produce the numbers and quality of experts required to enhance data privacy and security. The next administration should revisit the idea and results of the Chief Information Officer Council's Federal Cyber Reskilling Academy, which provided hands-on training and reskilling in cybersecurity for Federal employees who do not work in IT. The pilot project trained two cohorts and is evaluating the program. The CIO Council includes in its focus areas the federal cybersecurity workforce strategy; federal information security; and several priorities related to privacy, security and related workforce strategies.

The U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology houses the National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education (NICE), whose mission is "to energize and promote a robust network and an ecosystem of cybersecurity education, training, and workforce development." It is a partnership among public, private and nonprofit stakeholders. NICE heads an interagency coordinating council with members from 17 departments and agencies. The National Initiative for Cybersecurity Careers and Studies (NICCS) is "managed by the Cybersecurity Defense Education and Training (CDET) subdivision within the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) Cybersecurity Division. CDET promotes cybersecurity awareness, training, education and career structure, with the added goal of broadening the Nation's volume of cybersecurity workforce professionals." Related initiatives include the National Centers of Academic Excellence (CAE) and the National Cybersecurity Workforce Framework.

In addition to the initiatives just described, one of the CAP goals is Developing a Workforce for the 21st Century. Its focus is alignment of personnel processes to serve agency missions. This goal might be expanded to focus on the data privacy and security workforce requirements of the federal government. Although the salary differential for IT professionals between the public and private sectors is typically cited as the key limiting factor in building an IT government workforce, there are tools available to overcome these limitations that could be designed into OPM's processes.

## OTHER ACTIONS DURING THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF 2021

In addition to the recommendations identified above, the Working Group recommends that the following series of steps be taken in the first 100 days of the Administration in 2021 so that clear and effective pathways can be laid down for all agencies in the volatile and priority fields of data privacy and security:

1. Develop two Presidential Commissions populated by experts drawn from multiple fields: a Privacy and Security Commission and a Workforce Development Commission. Data privacy and security are issues with well-elaborated nonprofits, think tank activities, lobbying and interest groups and university research. Most experts in these areas are likely to be ready to engage because of the shared sense of the importance of these challenges and their growing urgency in increasingly data-intensive environments

2. Appoint a bipartisan group of experts to the Commissions within 30 days of taking office, within the following guidelines:
   a. Privacy and Security: the 15-20 members must have expertise that cuts across several dimensions and be weighted towards the policy, not the technology, domain. These dimensions should include law, human rights, technology, business management, risk management, cybersecurity and affiliated fields.
   b. Workforce: the 15-20 members must have expertise that cuts across several dimensions and be weighted towards the

policy, not the human resource field alone. These dimensions should include academia, certification industry, human resource professionals from public and private sector, risk management, relevant federal agencies including OPM and Department of Labor, and affiliated fields

3. The two Commissions should be provided staff resources from involved government agencies and be given a 60-day roadmap along the guidelines of this report.

4. All efforts should be made to use existing federal structures to assist the Commissions and prepare implementation roadmaps that can be quickly deployed. For example, the next administration can elevate and draw from the achievements, staffing and resources of the Modernizing IT CAP goal, and build on CAP goals using the teams already in place. OMB and the President's Management Council can also play key roles including the sharing of knowledge, experience of what works and what doesn't, and be prepared for new names, new appointees, and new teams.

OMB guidance is critical to shaping agency actions and understanding of new initiatives. Using existing CAP goal structure and methodology, each CAP goal group should (1) draw up a plan to enhance data security and privacy or to contribute to the workforce recommendation; (2) summarize their key initiatives that contribute to the plan; (3) describe the key next steps, resources needed and any additional authorities required to advance toward these goals. Using the quarterly meetings with OMB, GSA and other Executive Office of the President staff that have been so successful in moving cross-agency initiatives forward, the next administration should build privacy, security and workforce recommendations into the next set of CAP goals. In the first 90 days, OMB should direct agencies to specify in their Agency Performance Goals how their Chief Privacy Officers and others with responsibility for data privacy and security are taking steps toward strengthening privacy and security.

**CONCLUSION**

In the digital age, the American people knowingly and unknowingly produce huge amounts of data on a daily basis, and governments at all levels increasingly rely on digital systems to manage their internal operations and deliver public services. Americans need assurance that all sectors will keep their personal data private and safeguarded from abuse, but our data security infrastructure in both the public and the private sectors is vulnerable to exploitations, hacks, and breaches.

The Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) has an opportunity to build on existing activities and take additional actions to protect data security and individual privacy. The leadership challenge for new appointees will be great; new appointees should be prepared to quickly be brought up to speed by their staff and interagency groups on these issues, particularly where action steps have already been deliberated, drafted and advanced. If new appointees are selected and confirmed relatively quickly, they will be able to lead more quickly. Career federal executives who have been leaders in these challenge areas should be ready to move forward and support the Administration in 2021 as it seeks to address this Grand Challenge.

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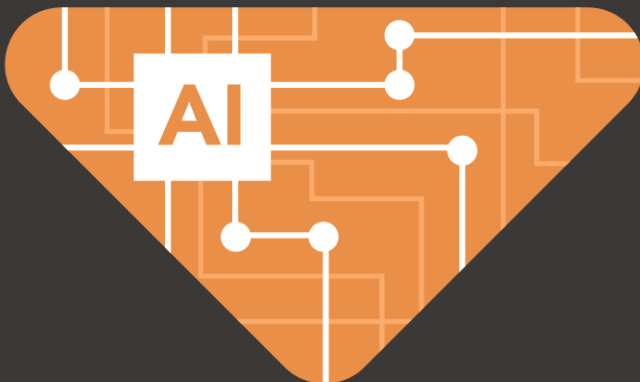
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# NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION®

# *Artificial Intelligence: An Agenda for 2021*

*Academy Election 2020 Project*
**Working Group:**
**Make Government AI Ready**

## ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

## ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the Make Government AI Ready Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations for the U.S. to maximize the benefits of AI while protecting America through core values, safeguards, and collaboration.

# *ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: AN AGENDA FOR 2021*

## *A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP*

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:
MAKE GOVERNMENT AI READY**

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**THE CHALLENGE**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) allows computerized systems to perform tasks traditionally requiring human intelligence: analytics, decision support, visual perception, and foreign language translation. AI and Robotics Process Automation (RPA) have the potential to spur economic growth, enhance national security, and improve the quality of life. In a world of "Big Data" and "Thick Data," AI tools can process huge amounts of data in seconds, automating tasks that would take days or longer for human beings to perform.

The public sector in the United States is at the very beginning of a long-term journey to develop and harness these tools. Chatbots are being used in citizen engagement systems; AI technology is augmenting decision-making in the areas of cyber security monitoring, public policy modeling, database anomalies, and waste and abuse identification.

Although AI in the public sector can yield numerous benefits— including improving customer service and efficiency, while allowing employees to focus more on core agency missions—it also raises concerns about bias, security, and transparency. With biased data, AI systems will produce biased results. Cybersecurity will be more important than ever to protect against malicious actors that, by taking over AI systems, could do significant damage very quickly. Without transparency, the public may be confused about how key decisions were made. And governments may need to revamp their budgeting and procurement processes to be able to quickly acquire and deploy advanced technologies.

This panoply of issues is why the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) identified Make Government AI Ready as one of the Grand Challenges in Public Administration. This paper by the Election 2020 Working Group for this topic provides information on the key elements of AI and its public administration and policy drivers. The Working Group has several recommendations for actions that the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) should take to address this Grand Challenge. These recommendations are designed to

maximize the benefits of AI while protecting America through core values, safeguards, and collaboration.


## KEY DRIVERS OF AI

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, AI is:

*1: a branch of computer science dealing with the simulation of intelligent behavior in computers*

*2: the capability of a machine to imitate intelligent human behavior*

Other definitions include this one: "Basically, AI is the ability of a machine or a computer program to think and learn." Definitions of AI abound and these, like most definitions, have many different elements complicating many discussions about AI. But, there are some commonalities among these definitions. The most common and useful elements are drawn on in this paper.

The concept of AI is based on the idea of building machines that are capable of thinking, acting, and learning like humans. A more accurate definition might start by stating that AI is not a specific technology unto itself but is instead a broad concept whereby machines are programmed to perform tasks that one could call intelligent or smart. AI is often confused with machine learning, with the latter having been around for some 50 years. In reality, machine learning, at least today, is the most recognizable application of AI. It can be said that AI encompasses a collection of technologies that include machine learning as well as other technologies like natural language processing, inference

| Drivers of AI in 2020 |
| :--- |
| 1. Advancements in complex algorithms. |
| 2. Dramatic increase in computing speed and power. |
| 3. Ability to digest data from various sources. |
| 4. Ability to store and retrieve massive amounts of data. |
| 5. Ability to "self-learn". |
| 6. Advancements in artificial speech and recognition. |

algorithms, and neural networks. We are already active participants with AI every time we interact with Alexa or Siri. To more fully understand AI in its current form, it may be useful to recognize the specific drivers that make it all work (See Text Box).

From the early 1950s through the 70s, neural networks were developed, allowing machines to do things such as compete against humans in chess. From the 1980s through 2010, machine learning became popular. In our present day, deep learning has driven AI growth. Today, AI systems have been designed to interact with humans through speech recognition as well as through the written word. These systems have the ability to mimic the human voice. AI systems have had the most successful outcomes in recognizing patterns, anomalies, and thought process which includes the ability to contemplate, anticipate, and provide judgement. Some have stated that AI is more about "augmented intelligence" than "artificial intelligence".

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has introduced the concepts of the "three waves of AI." The first wave encompasses AI in its simplest forms – expert knowledge of criteria transposed into logical reasoning to be encoded into a computer program (such as an online tax form). The second wave includes machine or statistical learning, which includes voice recognition, natural language processing, and computer vision technology. GAO claims even the most complex AI systems today are in the second wave. The third wave is reserved for the most sophisticated AI, of which most AI has not broken the threshold. The third wave combines the characteristics of the first two waves and is also capable of contextual sophistication, abstraction, and explanation. In terms of risks, GAO claims AI utilization could result in personal data being used against the individual from which it came, such as medical records being used to deny them insurance or employment.

Clearly, as we learn more about AI, more questions arise about the trustworthiness of AI systems and the quality of the data that drives those systems.  There are legitimate concerns, for example, about machines circumventing human intelligence and action, poor or flawed decision

making, concentration of power in a few computer systems, the potential for algorithms that deviate from socially accepted and cherished norms, and decisions that are made too quickly. There are other concerns about the basic quality of data in terms of accuracy and completeness, as well as growing concerns about bias in data and the impacts of big data use in AI on privacy. With biased data, AI systems will produce biased results. These concerns are shared by computer and data scientist but also by social scientists and public administrators.

A majority of Americans see the need to carefully manage AI (Zhang and Dafoe, 2019), with the greatest importance placed on safeguarding data privacy; protecting against AI-enhanced cyber-attacks, surveillance, and data manipulation; ensuring the safety of autonomous vehicles; accuracy and transparency of disease diagnosis; and the alignment of AI with human values. Public trust in AI must be created; otherwise, useful AI products may be rejected, and government decision making may lose its legitimacy. Ethical frameworks, now plentiful, are rarely accompanied by tangible implementation in AI development (Hagendorff, 2019, Crawford, 2019). Indeed, there is little guidance on how to design policy and governance structures that implement even the most broadly accepted AI ethical principles.

AI holds great promise, but raises concerns about transparency. Without transparency, the public may be confused about how key decisions were made and therefore may not trust them.  For example, if AI is applied in procurement, how will these processes be made transparent and understandable to the public? Accordingly, governments at all levels must work collaboratively to promote public trust in the development and deployment of AI tools; train an AI-ready workforce for both the public and the private sectors; and address the ethical concerns about AI's potential downsides in the areas of discrimination, civil liberties, and privacy.

Questions that policymakers and administrators must consider include:

- What are the conditions under which an AI system can be considered explainable?
- Is it appropriate (and, if so, under what conditions) to use unexplainable AI systems in ways that significantly impact human beings?
- How should departments and agencies adjudicate between different (and incompatible) conceptions of fairness, and which data-collection and data-interpretation practices are important for avoiding bias and discrimination?
- What are leading practices for developing AI systems that can be used by humans in ways that improve the human condition?
- What incentives should be established for data sharing?
- How can safe and security be improved?
- What reforms should be made to the current regulatory approach?
- What are acceptable risks?
- How can ethical decision-making be ensured?
- What is the impact of AI on jobs and training?

## RECENT ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS

On February 11, 2019, President Trump signed Executive Order 13859 announcing the American AI Initiative — the United States' national strategy on artificial intelligence. This strategy is a concerted effort to promote and protect national AI technology and innovation. The Initiative implements a whole-of-government approach in collaboration and engagement with the private sector, academia, the public, and like-minded international partners. It directs the Federal government to pursue five pillars for advancing AI: (1) invest in AI research and development (R&D), (2) unleash AI resources, (3) remove barriers to AI innovation, (4) train an AI-ready workforce, and (5) promote an international environment that is supportive of American AI innovation and its responsible use. The U.S. is also actively leveraging AI to help the Federal government work smarter in its own services and missions in trustworthy ways.

In February 2020, the White House released the American Artificial Intelligence Initiative: Year One Annual Report. In the year since the AI Executive Order was signed, the Administration called for record amounts of AI R&D investment, led the development of the first international statement on AI Principles, issued the first-ever strategy for engagement in AI technical standards, published the first-ever reporting of government-wide non-defense AI R&D spending, and released the first-ever AI regulatory document for the trustworthy development, testing, deployment, and adoption of AI technologies.

The White House also claims to be focused on introducing regulatory principles for AI in American industries and maximizing benefits for the American worker. They have introduced 10 principles on AI:

- Public trust in AI
- Public participation
- Scientific integrity and information quality
- Risk assessment and management
- Benefits and costs
- Flexibility
- Fairness and nondiscrimination
- Disclosure and transparency
- Safety and security
- Interagency coordination

In September 2019, the White House hosted the Summit on Artificial Intelligence in Government to spark ideas for how the Federal government can adopt AI to better achieve its mission and improve services to the American people. More than 175 leaders and experts from government, industry, and academia came together to identify best practices in the use of AI, opportunities to foster collaborative partnerships, and ways to develop a Federal AI workforce. The Summit highlighted innovative efforts at Federal agencies that have already adopted AI, and looked ahead to future transformative AI applications that will make government more effective, efficient, and responsive.

To improve the coordination of Federal efforts related to AI, the White House chartered a Select Committee on AI under the National Science and Technology Council. The Select Committee consists of the most senior R&D officials across the Federal government and represents a whole-of-government approach to AI R&D planning and coordination. This Committee advises the White House on interagency AI R&D priorities; considers the creation of Federal partnerships with industry and academia; establishes structures to improve government planning and coordination of AI R&D; and identifies opportunities to prioritize and support the national AI R&D ecosystem. The Select Committee also provides guidance and direction to the existing Machine Learning and AI Subcommittee, which serves as the Committee's operations and implementation arm. ([www.ai.gov](www.ai.gov))

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW: KEY FEDERAL AND STATE AI INITIATIVES

### NOAA

NOAA has instituted its AI strategy goals, which include establishing an efficient organizational structure and processes to advance AI across NOAA, advance AI research and innovation in support of NOAA's mission, accelerate the transition of AI research to operational capabilities, strengthen and expand AI partnerships, and promote AI

proficiency in workforce. The goals align with the White House's Executive Order on AI. NOAA is developing an AI Strategic Implementation Plan that defines detailed action items, deadlines, and responsibilities. Until then, its strategy is already improving performance in lifesaving and economically impactful missions, setting the course to strengthen environmental science and technology leadership.

- NOAA AI Strategy goals:
  - Establish an efficient organizational structure and processes to advance AI across NOAA
  - Advance AI research and innovation in support of NOAA's mission
  - Accelerate the transition of AI research to operational capabilities
  - Strengthen and expand AI partnerships
  - Promote AI proficiency in the workforce

**DoD**

The Department of Defense (DOD) is using its AI strategy to "harness AI to advance our security and prosperity." Realizing this vision requires identifying appropriate uses for AI across DoD, rapidly piloting solutions, and scaling success across the enterprise. The DoD's AI strategy aims to drive the urgency, scale, and unity of effort necessary to navigate these transformations. To further accomplish these goals, the DoD is collaborating with those in government, academia, non-traditional centers of innovation in the commercial sector, and international partners. The DoD strategy echoes the importance of America being a leader in AI and having an AI-ready workforce. Additionally, DoD has committed to be a leader in military ethics and AI safety. There are four Strategic Focus Areas: delivering AI-enabled capabilities that address key missions, partnering with leading private sector technology companies, academia, and global allies, cultivating a leading AI workforce, and leading in military ethics and AI safety.

DoD's 5 Ethical Principles for AI:

- o Responsible
- o Equitable
- o Traceable
- o Reliable
- o Governable

## DoD – Military, Navy

The Navy Center for Applied Research in AI focuses on several areas of research: intelligent systems, adaptive systems, the interactive systems, and the perceptual systems. Currently, its research has led to projects like 3D Audio-Cued Operator Performance Modeling, Adaptive Testing of Autonomous Systems, Chat Attention Management for Enhanced Situational Awareness, Cognitive Robots and Human Robot Interaction, and several other topics regarding adaptive AI. The center is directed toward understanding the design and operation of systems capable of improving performance based on experience, efficient and effective interaction with other systems and with humans, sensor-based control of autonomous activity, and the integration of varieties of reasoning as necessary to support complex decision-making.

## DoD – Military, Air Force

The Air Force's AI Strategy serves as a framework for aligning their efforts with the DoD's AI Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. It provides definition, context and purpose for AI in the Air Force. While echoing and complying with the DoD's AI strategy, the Air Force's strategy goes further by defining five specific focus areas: drive down technological barriers to entry; recognize and treat data as a strategic asset; democratize access to AI solutions; recruit, develop, upskill, and cultivate the workforce; increase transparency and cooperation with international, government, industry, and academic partners.

## DOT

The Department of Transportation's (DOT) website says: "[DOT] is committed to safety and innovation and sees AI as a promising capability to help achieve these aims." DOT believes AI can be applied within transportation by enabling the safe integration of AI into the transportation system and adopting and deploying AI-based tools into internal operations, research, and citizen-facing services. Its research guidelines for AI support the development of regulations, policies, procedures, guidance, and standards for drone operations. DOT currently seeks data in critical areas such as detection and avoidance, communications, human factors, system safety, and certification to enable it to make informed decisions on safe drone integration.

## NSF

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is a recognized leader across the US Federal Government in both advancing the use of AI in the public sector within NSF and across the Federal Government, and in advancing both fundamental and use-inspired AI research in the United States. NSF carries out this leadership role along three parallel paths: providing leadership on AI for the US Government, guiding AI use within NSF, and enabling and advancing AI research and development nationally.

NSF plays a significant role in advancing AI across the U.S. Government. The Director of NSF serves as co-chair, with the Director of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and senior leadership from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), of the Select Committee on AI, a committee of the National Science and Technology Council. The Select Committee serves as the high-level budget authority setting the direction for USG investments for all facets of AI.  NSF also co-chairs, with NIST and OSTP, the operational arm of the Select Committee on AI, the Subcommittee on Machine Learning and AI. These committees work together and across the USG to coordinate investments, the directionality of those investments, and what impact they are trying to have concerning AI research, education, and infrastructure.  *For additional information on AI activities within NSF, please turn to the Addendum.

## NASA

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is utilizing machine learning and applying it to space science. To make sure the agency is using machine learning in research, NASA's Frontier Development Lab brings together innovators for eight weeks every summer to brainstorm and develop computer code. They aim to advance machine learning techniques to quickly interpret data revealing the chemistry of exoplanets based on the wavelengths of light emitted or absorbed by molecules in their atmospheres.

## USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is testing out FarmBeats, which collects data from multiple sources, such as sensors, drones, satellites, and tractors and feeds it into cloud-based artificial intelligence models that provide a detailed picture of conditions on the farm. This is designed to maximized agricultural outputs based on the weather inputs detected by the sources. USDA partners with public and private organizations to develop tools and practices like robots for agriculture, instruments for crop and soil monitoring, and predictive analytics. Their objectives include developing crop production systems to intensify plant and forest production with continuous improvements and adoption of new technology while reducing environmental impacts, advance science-based approaches to combat outbreaks of emerging pests and diseases, enhance plant product quality, and evaluate the adoption and use of enhanced technologies such as data analytics and precision agriculture. They are also using AI to enhance animal production, health, and genetics.

## NASCIO

The National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) has identified five emerging best practices and recommendations. These include: consider creating a framework for AI adoption; create multidisciplinary teams to address change management; assess data availability and capitalize on automation to make the data underlying AI more trustworthy; modernize legacy infrastructure with targeted technology investments; and choose AI projects where success can be clearly measured. NASCIO also identifies the obstacles to AI implementation. In short, the most difficult task is overcoming the constraints of current IT infrastructures; current designs are not equipped to handle the large volumes of data necessary for advanced analytics or AI applications. Other barriers include cultural concerns inside organizations, lack of necessary staff skills for AI, organizational data silos, and lack of executive support. "The roles and responsibilities for policy development are still being ironed out…" NASCIO claims that the focus of AI today

should be educating policymakers and increasing their confidence in governing and understanding AI.


## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group offers recommendations that are aimed at making government AI ready. This includes the federal government taking actions to set the conditions for success through data sharing, create a regulatory environment that fosters both innovation and citizen protections, enable public-private partnerships to advance both the state of the art and the deployment of practical tools, and address the significant issue of workforce readiness.

The Working Group's recommendations for making government AI ready are presented below organized in five themes:

1. Build Trustworthy AI
2. Use Ethical Frameworks to Identify and Reduce Bias
3. Build Intergovernmental Partnerships and Knowledge Sharing around Public Sector Uses of AI
4. Increase Investments in AI Research and Translation of Research to Practice
5. Build an AI Ready Workforce


**1. Build Trustworthy AI**

According to the National Science Foundation, "increasing trust in AI technologies is a key element in accelerating their adoption for economic growth and future innovations that can benefit society." However, NSF further points out that our ability to understand and analyze the decisions of AI systems and measure their trustworthiness is limited. Aspects of trustworthy AI include reliability and explainability.

Recommendations:

- Establish a single, authoritative, and recognized federal entity with a focus on trustworthy AI's long-range social, cultural and political effects (Crawford and Calo, 2016) that industry and government organizations can go to for guidance, to find solutions, or to propose challenges in Trustworthy AI.
- Leverage existing investments such as NSF's AI Institutes to create guidance and solutions including connecting AI research to public policy and governance, to ensure a broad social systems approach to trustworthy AI that will address a fundamental adoption barrier, namely, public trust in AI.

## 2. Use Ethical Frameworks to Identify and Reduce Bias in AI

Making government AI-ready necessitates a perpetual commitment to earning and sustaining community trust. In advancing an AI agenda, the Administration and Congress should consider a range of issues, including (a) ethical and moral questions; (b) greater public education about the benefits and risks of AI; (c) regulatory frameworks and guidelines; (d) legislation linked to current and future ethical issues; and (e)the proper relationship between technology, society, and public law. Introducing AI applications without an effectively structured system of oversight could lead to public concerns about "technological dystopia."

Recommendations:

- Demonstrate a federal government-wide commitment to ethical principles and standards in AI development and use, such as those included in the American Society for Public Administration's Code of Ethics.
- Collaborate with the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the largest professional society for computing, in incorporating industry guidance in AI ethics training.

- Require departments and agencies to implement AI ethical frameworks, such as the AI ethical principles adopted by the DOD in February 2020.
- Institute a moratorium on the use of facial recognition technologies and conduct research on eliminating racial bias in AI applications.

## 3. Build Intergovernmental Partnerships and Knowledge Sharing around Public Sector Uses of AI

States and local governments are already utilizing basic forms of AI in practice. State and local governments have a keen interest in applying AI to other areas of government but often lack the resources and expertise to do more. This working group urges more intergovernmental sharing of information and research opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Establish an interagency and intergovernmental mechanism to develop a comprehensive AI strategy that addresses the following:
- The need to share leading practices for governance of AI with state and local governments. In a recent survey of state CIOs, 72 percent said that they do not have a policy regarding the responsible use of AI to ensure that it is governed by clear values, ethics, and laws. Leading practices regarding governance of AI can be applied across all levels of government.
- A call for broader use of AI in cybersecurity and sharing of federal developments with state and local governments. In the same survey, 78 percent of state CIOs chose cybersecurity as an area where AI could make the most measurable improvement and impact in their state. Finding a qualified cybersecurity workforce is very difficult for state and local governments who cannot compete with private sector salaries. AI solutions supporting threat detection can augment the workforce. The federal government should share with state and local governments any resources

developed for federal agencies using AI to protect from cyber-attacks.

- The need to incentivize and stimulate broader AI adoption in state and local governments through Federal agency programmatic funding. For example, appropriate use of AI and machine learning for fraud detection in federally-funded benefit programs. Recent UI claims fraud is a noteworthy example.
- Gaps in readiness to build an AI workforce that can work on all levels of government. In the same survey of state CIOs, 27 percent agreed that a lack of necessary staff skills was a significant challenge or barrier to AI adoption. Support and fund the AI Scholarship for Service Act (S3901) that contains provisions for eligibility by state and local governments.

## 4. Increase Investments in AI Research and Translation of Research to Practice

The White House's *National Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Strategic Plan: 2019 Update* ("2019 Plan") denotes the priority areas for federal investments in AI research and development and identifies specific goals under these key strategies: *make long-term investments in AI research; develop effective methods for human-AI collaboration; understand and address the ethical, legal, and societal implications of AI; ensure the safety and security of AI systems; develop shared public datasets and environments for AI training and testing; measure and evaluate AI technologies through benchmarks and standards; better understand the national AI R&D workforce need;* and *expand public-private partnerships to accelerate advances in AI.* Each of these strategies are designed to address the need for research into AI. Upon completing such research, the White House has made commitments to share the information to further the United States' advantages in AI. Executive Order 13859 requires agencies to 'increase public access to government data and models where appropriate'. Additionally, other

measures have been put in place to ensure the government research and information about AI is widely accessible, discoverable, and usable.

The current Administration has made several strides in maximizing AI utilization. A key component to achieving this goal is increasing public access to AI research. This will require that more research into AI is unclassified. In 2018, the White House committed to prioritizing Federal investment in unclassified research and development for AI and related technologies. In the same year, investment in such research was shown to have increased over 40% since the year 2015. This is absolutely necessary in advancing AI and other life-enhancing technologies; however, measures must be taken to protect individuals' personal privacy. Further research must be conducted to understand how AI can be utilized without relinquishing privacy at the individual level. Additionally, research into removing biases from AI must be prioritized. Presently, AI is allowed to perpetuate the injustices that plague human history, whether they are racial, misogynistic, or homophobic. These biases must be eliminated to reflect democratic norms and values. Life-altering technologies should not be exclusionary, and their objective should be to bring the American Dream closer to every American, rather than pushing it away. Without ethical principles to guide AI policy, the risk of AI being used to further oppress minorities increases. The key to preventing this lies within research and the communication of AI research.

Recommendations:

- Increase public access to federal government data.
- Increase by at least 50% investment into unclassified AI research.
- Ensure the protection of privacy at the individual level.
- Remove biases from programming to ensure equitable treatment.

## 5. Build an AI Ready Workforce

There is much concern that the workforce of today and possibly tomorrow lacks the skills necessary to fulfill the needs and requirements of an AI-Ready Government. With every advancement in AI, governments at all levels will continue to face the ongoing challenges of ethics, privacy,

human control, policy bias, predictive analytics, decision-making, citizen engagement, planning, and the future of work.

Those who desire to enter public service will need to have an entirely new set of competencies that cut across traditional program offerings found at most institutions of higher learning. Over the next decade, lawmakers and senior public managers will be making monumentally important decisions about the role of AI in society. It is therefore imperative that we provide them the skills, tools and knowledge in order to make the most effective and ethical use of AI in all levels of government.

Recommendations:

- The federal government should provide direct funding to support the growth of a federal workforce with AI competency, including through funds to train the next generation of faculty, researchers, and graduate students.
- Federal agencies must leverage expertise in the AI R&D workforce that spans multiple disciplines and skill categories to ensure sustained national leadership.
- Studies, supported by the federal government, are needed to increase understanding of the current and future national workforce needs for AI R&D. Data is needed to characterize the current state of the AI R&D workforce, including the needs of academia, government, and industry.
- The federal government must develop policies and fund incentives that encourage the AI R&D workforce to use multidisciplinary teams comprising not just computer and information scientists and engineers, but also experts from other fields key to AI and machine learning innovation and its application. These include cognitive science and psychology, economics and game theory, engineering and control theory, ethics, linguistics, mathematics, philosophy, and the many domains in which AI may be applied.

## CONCLUSION

AI holds great promise for the public sector, but also raises important questions about bias, security, and transparency. The Working Group's recommendations are designed to help the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) maximize the benefits of AI while protecting America through core values, safeguards, and collaboration. By implementing recommendations to build trust AI, identify and reduce bias, build intergovernmental partnerships and knowledge sharing, increase investments in research and its translation to practice, and develop an AI-ready workforce, the Administration will ensure that AI is implemented for the benefit of all Americans.

# Appendix

## *AI Use Within the National Science Foundation

This section was added as a supplement given its illustrative example and substance to the reports overall findings and recommendations.

NSF is exploring, and in some cases adopting, the use of AI for increased efficiencies in business processes and for increased effectiveness of program managers. Through the efforts of NSF Innovation Management Group, who developed a set of tools using NLP and a variety of algorithms, two of NSF's most critical and time-intensive business processes, suggesting reviewers and determining reviewer conflict of interest have been greatly enhanced. Of particular note is NSF's examinations of the potential of both Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and blockchain. Two key investments are being made in RPA; 1) providing access to tools for NSF staff to create RPAs to support their work and 2) to build capacity among NSF employees through training and the development of a community of practice. Eight RPAs are in place and operational at NSF. NSF is experimenting with the use of blockchain to optimize funding. The question being explored is can the use of blockchain in the proposal submission process make it possible for NSF to identify overlapping proposals both within NSF and cross-agency.

## ENABLING AND ADVANCING AI RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

NSF provides AI Research and Development (R&D) leadership in three ways: 1. Furthering research in and about AI, 2) Building an AI workforce, and 3. Ensuring an enabling infrastructure for AI.

**Furthering Research In and About AI**

Every year NSF invests about $500m in research in AI, including investments in core areas of AI such as reasoning, language processing, knowledge representation, planning, machine learning, deep learning, and computer vision. About $150m of this is core AI foundation research. The remainder supports use-inspired research that brings AI and other disciplines or sectors together to advance both areas. For example, in research that brings together biologists and computer scientists to extend new or existing techniques to solve biological problems. The most recent budget request for 2021 calls for increasing the budget from $500M to $868M. the overall budget is down, but the AI budget is up.

NSF also has several other programs and partnerships providing research support, including the AI Institutes Program, a year-on-year program funding Institutes that focus on one or more of six key themes. This program is envisioned to provide a blend of use-inspired and foundational research that is domain focused. NSF is seeking to scale this program to fund an Institute in every state so that each can tackle a range of domain-specific issues. For example, a single institute in the Southeast could focus on resilience capability with ML. The total cost of such a program, one institute per state, $20 million per state, is approximately $1 billion. This total represents a small percentage of USG's overall AI spend. Other programs include a collaboration with The Partnership on AI that brings together social scientists and computer scientists to support socio-technical AI systems and one with Intel focused on bringing AI and next generation wireless technologies and spectrum to explore the use of ML in assigning spectrum dynamically.

**Building an AI Workforce**

NSF's CS for US program, is focused on encouraging and exciting a diverse cadre of students to pursue advanced degrees in computer science and then specialize in AI. Today there are 35,000 undergraduate computer science majors in the US; this number rapidly falls off at the graduate level.  New programs are being designed to incentivize US undergraduate computer science majors to pursue advanced degree programs. This program is a lever to address a whole host of science, security issues, and diversity issues and ensures the continuation of US leadership.

**Ensuring an Enabling Infrastructure for AI**

The NSF Office of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure plays a pivotal role in providing HPC, access to cloud computing resources and hybrid computing resources to specialize high-end computing for the real-time streaming data and machine learning and deep learning applications it is seeing today. For example, it funded a supercomputer, Frontera, to provide a leading-edge resource for AI discovery to the research community. Partnerships are leveraged in this area as well. For example, a cross-government partnership with DARPA is enabling research on real-time machine learning. Data of interest to DARPA, and others, streams from numerous sources simultaneously. To generate insights and predictions in real time, the hardware state must be reengineered. DARPA and NSF are working together on this challenge.

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