NORC at the University of Chicago

FINAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2021

Improving Data Infrastructure to Reduce Firearms Violence

Chapter 6. Creating a Federal Gun Violence Interagency Working Group

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Executive Summary

In October 2020, Arnold Ventures published "*A Blueprint for U.S. Firearms Data Infrastructure,*"[1] which contains the recommendations of an expert panel that had been convened by NORC at the University of Chicago. The panel examined how better use of public health and criminal justice data could help increase understanding of causes and prevention of gun violence. The panel also identified many barriers within the current research environment that hindered the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of preventive and intervention programs. Among the problems reported were that data on public health and gun violence are collected separately and siloed into narrow categories. Data on suicides, criminal use of firearms, crime victims, firearm acquisitions, attitudes towards firearms, and other related topics are collected by separate agencies and not easily shared—in fact, sometimes prohibited from being shared. In addition, the data being collected were often not sufficiently comprehensive, had variable quality, and were often missing important topics entirely. A key finding of the panel was that relevant data need to be looked at more holistically, to understand the many complex factors that can influence gun violence. Simply studying separate, individual datasets has been insufficient to effectively inform decision-makers.

This paper focuses on two of the panel's recommendations: *"Increase federal data accessibility"* and *"Set up an interagency working group around data to create federal partnerships to address specific infrastructure gaps (that are not just reporting mechanisms)."* The recommendations are summarized below:

- **Increase federal data accessibility.** This recommendation calls on the federal government to prioritize data accessibility for qualified researchers with appropriate protections for confidentiality and use. Through the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy[2] chaired by the Chief Statistician of the United States in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the federal government should conduct regular reviews of the accessibility and usability of key firearms data and facilitate better access for researchers. Existing investments in data collection should be maximized by reducing barriers to use by researchers and assuring that data are timely, of high-quality, and being used appropriately.

[1] J.K. Roman, *A Blueprint for U.S. Firearms Data Infrastructure* (Bethesda, MD: NORC at the University of Chicago, 2020).

[2] Explain from Paperwork Reduction Act as amended by Evidence Act.

- **Set up an interagency working group around gun violence data.** This recommendation follows a model used by the federal government to tackle other cross-agency priority topics. The panel recommended that the interagency group be chaired by the Chief Statistician of the United States and include statistical officials, subject matter experts, and Chief Data Officers from agencies with relevant data.

The expert panel also created a conceptual framework through which various types of data were examined, including data that were available across the federal government and at the state and local level, and data that would result from evaluating demonstration programs focused on high risk groups or places. To put the framework in place, the panel developed several recommendations to help solve the problem of firearms data being difficult to access, collect, make publicly available, and integrate.

The recommendations, if implemented, would increase the number and timeliness of critical research questions that could be asked and answered to inform effective policymaking at all levels of government.

This paper examines implementation options for establishing an interagency working group on gun violence data. The charge of the group would be to develop and implement a strategy for 1) improving the completeness and quality of gun violence data, 2) bridging the data silos, and 3) increasing data accessibility for researchers inside and outside of government. The paper examines implementation steps that could provide the structure needed to achieve this goal, including:

- Establish a new interagency working group chaired by the Chief Statistician of the United States. (NORC expert panel recommendation).
- Coordinate the gun violence working group with the Interagency Working Group on Equitable Data established by Executive Order on Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities (EO 13985) with an explicit link in its charter.
- Establish an interagency Federal Advisory Committee with non-federal members to provide advice regarding non-federal datasets relevant to gun violence.
- Establish an interagency pilot project to begin to bring data together to answer high-priority questions about gun violence, with a charge to identify needed improvements in content and infrastructure, as well as barriers to access. (NORC expert panel recommendation).

As highlighted through the discussion section, these four implementation options can be complementary activities rather than mutually exclusive. To take advantage of the synergy created by combining all these actions rather than approaching them as separate activities, this paper recommends beginning immediately rather than waiting for all pieces to be in place. Each element could be taken independently of the rest, although all of them together would be ideal.

Recommended Immediate Actions for Implementation: The Chief Statistician should establish an interagency technical working group on gun violence that coordinates closely with the Equitable Data Interagency Working Group established in EO 13985. The gun violence working group should begin by identifying a key research question related to an urgent problem and then design and conduct a pilot project to quickly demonstrate the value in linking datasets to answer additional high-priority questions. The pilot project would also be the launching point for identifying which agencies are responsible for data that are missing or need to be improved. One purpose of the pilot would be to begin collaborations that would include non-federal data, creating incentives to improve the quality of data reported by local and state entities to federal agencies.

The pilot project should also solicit advice from an outside federal advisory committee consisting of non-federal stakeholders, data owners, and data users but should not wait for such an advisory committee to be established before starting the pilot. The advisory committee should include representation from groups or communities greatly affected by gun violence, including suicide and crime, and gun owners, in addition to state and local entities such as police departments and public health offices that collect and provide data.

The Chief Statistician does not need additional legislation or authorization to establish an interagency working group. However, some preliminary actions should ideally be taken before the group is established:

1. The position of the Chief Statistician, vacant since January 2020, needs to be filled or a strong “acting” person needs to be in place.
    - The interagency working group needs high-level support from the Executive Office of the President, including OMB and the Domestic Policy Council (DPC), to increase its effectiveness and create leverage to direct agencies to participate and provide resources to the effort.
    - Additional resources to carry out a pilot project need to be identified and supported by agencies, OMB, congressional appropriators, and non-federal partners such as philanthropic organizations and state partners.
    - Transparency and oversight need to be part of the structure for the pilot project. If evidence-based policymaking is to progress, projects that use sensitive data must be accountable and uphold the public trust. Projects undertaken in the pilot must provide value to the public through a better understanding of gun violence and, ultimately, effective approaches to reducing violence. The value proposition for the first research project must be clear.

Introduction

Gun violence is on the rise across the United States. Homicides increased 29% in 2020, but have been trending up since 2014.[3] The U.S. firearm homicide rate began climbing in 2015, leading to more than 14,000 deaths a year starting in 2017.[4] In 2020, 75% of homicides in the U.S. involved a gun.

Officials at all levels of government want the public to feel safe from crime and to enable communities to prosper without the disruptive and traumatic after-effects of violence and suicide. While there is a growing awareness that additional resources are needed to assist people in need of mental health interventions and treatment, resources are limited, and information is lacking on how best to invest public funds to tackle these complex problems. Decision-makers need timely, objective, and reliable data to understand the many interacting forces that lead to violence, injury, and death.

The expert panel convened by NORC at the behest of Arnold Ventures identified several barriers to accessing data that continue to limit the information that is available to make important decisions regarding public policies and programs. In its final report, the panel made several recommendations and noted:

The key problem to be solved through these recommendations is that firearms data are often difficult to access, collections are narrow in scope, public release of data can lag by years, and few datasets and systems can be integrated. Firearms data often cannot be accessed because of policy restrictions (ATF [the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives] data and background check data), or firearms data can be accessed and do have valuable data but need a slight change in order to accurately identify firearm injury cases (such as the UCR [Uniform Crime Reporting], NIBRS [National Incident-Based Reporting System], and hospital data systems) or firearms data are simply not collected (e.g., state-level data on firearm ownership rates). As a result, the number of critical research questions that can be asked and answered in the service of more effective policymaking is severely constrained.[5]

The panel was not the first to note these issues. As far back as 2005, the Committee on Law and Justice at the National Research Council of the National Academies convened the

[3] Jeff Asher, "Murder Rose by Almost 30% in 2020. It's Rising at a Slower Rate in 2021." New York Times, September 22, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/22/upshot/murder-rise-2020.html (Accessed October 15, 2021).

[4] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2019 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2020. Data are from the Multiple Cause of Death Files, 1999-2019, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Accessed at http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html

[5] J.K. Roman, *A Blueprint for U.S. Firearms Data Infrastructure*, 2.

Committee to Improve Research Information and Data on Firearms.[6] The committee recommended that the federal government support a systematic program of data collection and research because the current data and research were lacking. In 2009, the Committee on National Statistics and the Committee on Law and Justice at the National Research Council convened a panel charged with reviewing the BJS programs to identify priorities for data collection.[7] That panel identified several gaps in the BJS portfolio and made several recommendations for improvements. Subsequent studies by the National Academies and RAND in 2013 and 2018 found that the earlier problems of insufficient, hard-to-access data persist. The NORC 2019 report built on these reports to develop a set of specific, actionable recommendations that could result in significant improvements in the quality and availability of data related to both the crime and public health aspects of gun violence.

Some of the biggest problems identified by the NORC expert panel were:

1. Federal data are not disseminated on a timely, regular schedule that can provide up-to-date information on where and what types of violence are occurring.
    - The data collected by federal agencies are highly restricted, not well documented, and hard-to-access.
    - Public health, crime, and firearms data are not looked at holistically by the various agencies that collect these data, resulting in an inability to formulate effective prevention strategies and monitor real-time outbreaks of violence, whether they consist of suicides or violent crimes committed with guns.
    - There are no official data on firearms ownership, which are crucial for understanding suicides better.
    - Current administrative data systems are inadequate for tracking nonfatal gunshot injuries, due to multiple federal agencies collecting different aspects of this information combined with inconsistent reporting from local entities providing input data.
    - Even marginal improvements could result in major quality increases in data collected on how firearms purchases are processed through federally licensed firearms dealers (FFL), how firearms are used in violent crimes, and how firearms contribute to unintentional injury and death, suicide, and homicide.
    - The federal government has not established clear and consistent priorities for state and local data collections and reporting, leading to inconsistent quality, incompleteness, and less utility of these data.

[6] C.F. Wellford and C.V. Petrie, eds., *Firearms and Violence, A Critical Review* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2005).

[7] R.M. Groves and D. Cork, eds., *Ensuring the Quality, Credibility, and Relevance of U.S. Justice Statistics* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2009.)

- Much of the data at the state and local levels are covered by multiple law enforcement and public health entities and jurisdictions. There is no consistent mechanism or infrastructure in place to facilitate cooperation across these multiple jurisdictions and federal agencies.
- States need assistance to improve their ability to collect and report higher-quality data. For example, the timeliness and quality of data entered by states into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System are insufficient and contains gaps.
- There is no focused national strategy for tackling these problems to gain systematic improvements.

Statutory and Other Mandates to Improve the Status Quo

Although there is no national strategy to improve the collection, use, and dissemination of data related to gun violence, there are several new statutes, federal policies, and OMB guidance directed at improving federal use of data, supporting evidence-based policymaking, and increasing access to high-value data for researchers and the public. These new authorities and mandates can be used to address some of the traditional barriers identified by the NORC expert panel. They are explained below.

Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act

The U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking was created in 2016 through bipartisan legislation and charged with studying how government data could be used more effectively to inform public policy. The final report of the Commission included 22 unanimous recommendations, 11 of which were enacted into law in PL 115-435, the Foundations of Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act).

The Evidence Act enables federal agencies to better use and share data, making a distinction between non-sensitive or "open" data and the most sensitive data, such as data collected from individuals or businesses for statistical purposes that require appropriate privacy and confidentiality protections. Federal agencies and outside researchers are given expanded authority to link even sensitive data with appropriate protections to gain a more holistic picture of how well programs and policies are working and better understand the dynamics at play in the communities they serve. The act also established a governance structure for data management and stewardship. Key provisions of the Evidence Act include the following:

Evaluation Plans and Learning Agendas. Agencies are required to develop evaluations for their programs that are tied to learning agendas seeking to answer important questions in an agency's strategic plan. To carry out the evaluations and advance the learning agenda, agencies need data and the ability to analyze those data to gain insights. In 2019 and 2021, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget issued guidance specifically targeted to helping agencies conduct high-quality evaluation studies (OMB Memoranda M-19-23 and M-21-27).

Open Data and Data Management. Agencies are required to make data open and available to the public unless the data are otherwise determined to be sensitive or are prohibited by law from being shared openly, such as tax data. To encourage the use of their data, agencies are required to make available to the public a comprehensive data inventory, find ways to engage the public in making their data more useful, and include their data in a publicly available federal data catalogue, such as data.gov, run by the General Services Administration.

Strengthening the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) and federal statistical activities. CIPSEA was originally enacted in 2002 and created a special authority for principal federal statistical agencies to guarantee confidentiality to

respondents of federal statistical data collections. It standardized the confidentiality pledge federal statistical agencies use when collecting information for statistical purposes from the public; provided a uniform approach to protecting confidential information collected under the pledge; and required the application of sound scientific and statistical disclosure limitation techniques to minimize the risk of re-identification of respondents in statistical data products. The act named 13 principal statistical agencies (e.g., the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, BJS, NCHS), and the Chief Statistician was given the authority to grant the CIPSEA authorities to other agencies.

The 2018 amendments to CIPSEA in the Evidence Act created a presumption of accessibility for the statistical agencies: ***If a statistical agency requests data from another federal agency for statistical purposes, the agency must give those data to the statistical agency unless sharing is otherwise prohibited by law*** (such as sharing tax data or certain education data). The Evidence Act amendments also required the expansion of secure access to CIPSEA-protected data and that OMB issue regulations that would guide agencies in establishing tiers of sensitivity for their data so that appropriate access and protections would be put in place. In essence, these provisions build on the decades-long experience of the statistical agencies, making them trusted agents for creating new datasets from linked data that can provide valuable insights into decision and policymaking.

Importantly, non-statistical agencies are currently able to enter into agreements with each other to share data as well, even without the mandates of the Evidence Act. Several program agencies are engaging in data sharing activities that do not require the new authorities granted in the act. These will be discussed later.

To expand access to data for statistical purposes, the CIPSEA amendments also set requirements for OMB. The office had to establish criteria and issue guidance on how an agency might qualify for the CIPSEA designation; direct CIPSEA-designated agencies to expand secure access to qualified researchers to de-identified sensitive data; and set up one common application process for approving projects submitted by researchers who request access to sensitive data from a statistical agency.

The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995[8]

The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) requires coordination of federal information policy by OMB, with the intent of reducing the paperwork burden on the public from federal information collections. It has many little-known authorities. In particular, it created the position of Chief Statistician within OMB with statutory duties and responsibilities that include ensuring the integrity, objectivity, impartiality, utility, and confidentiality of information collected for statistical purposes. The Chief Statistician coordinates the 13 principal statistical agencies and 115 other

[8] 44 U.S.C. section 3501 et. Sec.

statistical offices across government; generates government-wide data collection standards (e.g., race and ethnicity, Metropolitan Statistical Areas, industrial and product classification systems used by the private sector); and develops methodological guidance and promotes innovation.

The PRA also created the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP), whose membership consists of the designated statistical officials of the 24 largest federal agencies, including the heads of the 13 principal statistical agencies. This Council coordinates statistical activities across the government and has several working groups that tackle important methodological issues such as privacy protection and promoting innovation and implementation of the Evidence Act.

Under the authority of the PRA, the Chief Statistician has established many interagency working groups since 1995. Ongoing interagency working groups, with members appointed by the ICSP, make recommendations to the Chief Statistician on updating the Standard Occupational Codes, North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), North American Product Classification System, and the Metropolitan Statistical Area designations. There are also working groups that have been established to tackle particular issues such as changing how the Poverty Rate is calculated, how data on race and ethnicity should be classified and collected, and consumer inflation measures. The membership of these interagency groups varies, depending on which agencies have programs and data related to the topic. For example, the membership of the working group looking at alternative ways to estimate inflation included agencies such as Housing and Urban Development, Social Security, and HHS, due to the significant impact inflation adjustments have on their programs.

Information Quality Act of 2000[9]

The Information Quality Act of 2000 requires OMB and other federal agencies to maximize the quality of information provided to the public. It required OMB to issue guidance that applied to the sharing and accessing of information disseminated by federal agencies. The OMB Government-wide Information Quality Guidelines, first issued in 2002 and updated in 2019 (M-19-15), require agencies to institute procedures to ensure the objectivity, utility, and integrity of information, including statistical information, provided to the public. The updated guidelines consider the growing use of administrative program records for creating evidence and conducting program evaluations by including a new section on re-use of existing agency program data. This section includes the following requirements:

Update 2.3: Agencies should consider the potential for using existing data sources from both inside and outside the agency for statistical and research purposes, while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

[9] Section 515 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2001, Pub. L 106-554.

Update 2.4: When designing or improving data collection systems, Departments should actively solicit comment from their statistical, research, and evaluation agencies about potential downstream uses. Agencies should describe such uses in the Information Collection Request submitted to 0MB for review under the PR. Implementation.[10]

In addition, the updated guidelines encourage increased access to data while protecting privacy for sensitive data, for better transparency, reproducibility, and assessing the fitness of purpose for using the data.

OMB Memorandum 14-03: Guidance for Providing and Using Administrative Data for Statistical Purposes

M-14-03 was written with the goal "… *to help both program and statistical agencies and components (including evaluation and analysis units) use administrative data more fully in a manner that respects privacy and protects confidentiality. Specifically, this guidance will help program agencies manage their administrative data with statistical purposes in mind.*"[11] The memorandum calls for departmental and agency leadership to foster greater collaboration between program and statistical offices and encourages federal departments and agencies to promote the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. It specifically directs, "*Heads of departments shall identify effective internal mechanisms to communicate the importance of identifying those administrative datasets with potential for statistical use. They shall establish an ongoing process for program and statistical agencies and components to collaboratively identify such datasets."*[12]

Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (EO 13985)

Executive Order 13985 directs each federal agency to assess whether and to what extent its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups. The goal is for agencies to develop policies and programs that deliver resources and benefits equitably to all. Section 9 of EO 13985 establishes an Interagency Working Group on Equitable Data (Data Working Group). The Chief Statistician and the United States Chief Technology Officer are co-chairs of the Data Working Group and coordinate its work. The membership of the group includes representatives of OMB, the Council of Economic Advisors, Treasury, Commerce/Census Bureau, and other agencies as deemed appropriate by the co-chairs. The function of the Data Working Group is to identify and provide recommendations on "…*inadequacies in existing federal data collection programs, policies, and*

[10] OMB Memorandum M-19-15, 6. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/M-19-15.pdf.

[11] OMB Memorandum M-14-06, 1. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/memoranda/2014/m-14-06.pdf.

[12] Ibid. p. 5.

infrastructure across agencies, and strategies for addressing any deficiencies identified; and (ii) support agencies in implementing actions, consistent with applicable law and privacy interests, that expand and refine the data available to the federal government to measure equity and capture the diversity of the American people."[13]

Federal Data Strategy

The Federal Data Strategy is intended to help agencies leverage their data as a strategic asset. OMB issued the mission statement, principles, and practices of the strategy as a memorandum to agencies, M-19-18. The strategy is part of the President's Management Agenda as a cross-agency priority goal and includes four components:

1. *Enterprise Data Governance* includes data management, standardizing metadata, creating inventories, safeguarding confidentiality and privacy, etc. The more expansive governance vision includes collaboration across agencies and agency program silos to bring multidisciplinary expertise together.
2. *Access, Use, and Augmentation* calls on agencies to make data available to the public more quickly and in more useful formats. In addition, agencies should increase access to sensitive, protected data while protecting privacy, confidentiality, and security, including the interests of the data providers. The strategy's action plan calls for the creation of toolkits and methodologies to help agencies build their own competencies as well. Agencies are also expected to seek out new sources for building datasets, which could include commercially available data and data from state and local governments.
3. *Decision-Making and Accountability* addresses the need for policy- and decision-makers to increase their use of high-quality data and analyses to inform evidence-based decision-making and improved operations. In addition, increased government accountability and transparency should be achieved by providing accurate and timely spending information, performance metrics, and other administrative data. Agencies are expected to use the most rigorous methods possible. Using outside expertise is encouraged, and agencies need to facilitate the use of government data assets by external parties, such as academic researchers, businesses, and community groups.
4. *Commercialization, Innovation, and Public Use* requires agencies to reach out to partners outside of government to assess which data are most valuable and should be prioritized for public use. There are many examples of entrepreneurial companies that have taken public data to create new apps that benefit the public and found new economic engines, such as weather and geographic mapping companies. This part of the strategy seeks to accelerate that long-standing practice by releasing more data to the public.

[13] EO 13985 section 9 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/.

The current annual action plan for the Federal Data Strategy identifies actions that agencies must take to build their capacity, establish processes, and align their existing efforts to better leverage data. Of note, agencies must identify their data needs to answer priority agency questions, among other things. The strategy also includes quarterly reporting milestones for agencies and mechanisms for how progress will be reviewed in conjunction with agency budget requests.

Summary of Mandates

The recommended actions to improve data related to firearms and gun violence fit well within the federal statues, mandates, guidance, and data strategy. An interagency working group could get resources and recognition for a pilot project through the President's Management Agenda framework and individual agency funds. Several projects that advance the management agenda are funded through appropriations provided to OMB to distribute to agencies to carry out priority items on the President's Management Agenda. The Deputy Director for Management at OMB, who chairs the President's Management Council (made up of the Deputy Secretaries of the Cabinet agencies), is in charge of allocating these funds. If a pilot project were designed to make generalizable infrastructure or data sharing improvements that other agencies could use in advancing the data strategy, some funding for a pilot potentially could be obtained through these means to get a project started.

Implementation Options

The expert panel recommended that an interagency working group be established by the Chief Statistician in OMB to tackle improving firearms data integration. The panel would include chief statistical officers from the 13 principal statistical agencies on the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy and other key agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ATF, and the FBI. The interagency workgroup would coordinate policy development and implementation for data collection and sharing, improve access to the data, and establish a pilot project with a small number of states and federal agencies. The pilot could also be used to create tools for data dissemination and a delivery system that supports the use of those products to optimize use. The expert panel recommended that the ICSP agencies consider funding and embedding the implementation supports through an intermediary organization that specializes in these issues.

The following discusses four possible approaches to implementing the expert panel recommendations.

Establish a New Interagency Working Group Chaired by the Chief Statistician of the United States

As mentioned earlier, the Chief Statistician currently has authority under the PRA to establish interagency working groups as part of coordinating the federal statistical system. Indeed, such interagency groups already exist that focus on specific topics. However, the working group would need high-level support within the executive branch to maximize the gun violence interagency working group's effectiveness and have sufficient leverage to prioritize resources devoted to a pilot project, as well as implement data quality and coverage improvements. Ideally, relevant agency heads and OMB would support the goals of the working group and allocate funds in agency budgets to improve data through investments in infrastructure and data collection. In addition, support would be needed if funding legislation is required to incentivize efforts by states and local partners to improve and share their data for input into federal systems. Providing financial incentives and other value to states has been successful in other instances discussed in section VI.

The Chief Statistician, assisted by stakeholders, would need to garner support for the interagency workgroup. At OMB, it would be helpful for the Director of OMB or the Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to send a letter to the relevant agency heads announcing the formation of the group and soliciting participation. The workgroup should also have a charter laying out its mission and authorities, including establishing a pilot project, developed by the Chief Statistician with input from the participating agencies.

The Chief Statistician also would need to regularly inform the ICSP of the group's progress and solicit input and advice from the council on the pilot project.

This approach would result in the working group functioning primarily at the technical level and giving recommendations to the Chief Statistician to be incorporated in ICSP activities and agency budgets. This would be advantageous from the standpoint of depoliticizing data on gun violence, but also runs the risk of not attracting sufficiently high-level support and resources from OMB and the agencies to advance the recommendations of the group and fund pilot project activities.

Executive Order. Another approach would follow the model of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, which was chartered in 1997 by Section 6 of Executive Order No. 13045. Twenty-three federal agencies participate in the forum, which collaborates to produce cross-agency statistics on children and families, including 41 indicators of well-being spanning seven domains. The forum was established by OMB, is run as one agency as designated in the executive order, and is guided by the Chief Statistician. However, this approach would require a new executive order, which could take a significant time and delay implementation. Forum activities do not include running an intergovernmental pilot project involving multiple agencies and states sharing data; however, a new executive order on gun violence could incorporate those activities for a forum.

Establish an Interagency Subgroup Under the Umbrella of the Interagency Working Group on Equitable Data Established by Executive Order on Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities (EO 13985)

As mentioned, section 9 of EO 13985 establishes an interagency working group on Equitable Data. The Chief Statistician and the Chief Technology Officer co-chair this working group. The membership of the Equitable Data Working Group is, for the most part, at the discretion of the co-chairs. Potentially, the Equitable Data Working Group could establish a small number of subgroups that focus on particular topics, with the first, for example, being data on gun violence. Gun violence does not affect all communities equally, and more data are needed to see whether federal programs and dollars are advancing equitable outcomes for the public. An in-depth look at gun violence data focused on improving data quality and data access would be in scope and appropriate for the Equitable Data Working Group.

However, becoming a subgroup of the Equitable Data Working Group has pros and cons. On the positive side, the relationship would give high-level support and visibility to the work. And because the Chief Statistician would be leading both groups, bringing them together could increase the ability of the Chief Statistician to coordinate efforts between the groups. The Chief Statistician would be responsible for keeping the effort nonpartisan.

Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the Chief Statistician, a data subgroup on gun violence established through EO 13985 could take on a political aspect that may detract from needed bipartisan support for improving the data and the data infrastructure. Both firearms and advancing equity in underserved communities currently are polarizing issues, so it would be important for the interagency working group to conduct its work using a nonpartisan, objective approach to the data and the pilot project. The charter of the subgroup would need to clearly give the group a measure of independence to assure that it was perceived to be apolitical.

Another risk is that a different Administration could rescind the executive order and the Equitable Data Working Group would be disbanded. An interagency working group under the wing of the Chief Statistician and the ICSP would have a much better probability of surviving multiple changes in Administration.

Because the Chief Statistician would be leading both groups, a hybrid solution may accomplish both objectives of independence and high visibility. The Chief Statistician would convene the interagency working group on gun violence under the authority of the PRA, but that working group would stay in close contact with the Equitable Data Working Group and regularly report on its progress and findings to keep multiple components of the Executive Office of the President and interested agencies engaged and supportive.

Establish an Interagency Federal Advisory Committee With Non-federal Members to Provide Advice Regarding Non-federal Datasets Relevant to Gun Violence

One way for the interagency working group to understand the value of sharing data from the perspective of states and localities would be to establish an advisory committee with representation from stakeholders, such as public health authorities, police departments, criminal justice nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), suicide prevention organizations, and researchers in these fields. A cross-disciplinary advisory committee could help identify approaches to improving data quality, access, and usage that would create value for the stakeholders and the federal agencies. Many federal agencies already have advisory committees, but they are not cross-agency in their focus. Just as the working group needs to have representation from multiple federal agencies, an advisory committee should also bring multiple disciplines together.

Additional legislative authority is not needed to set up a federal advisory committee. However, OMB itself is not set up to provide the necessary administrative support for such a committee. Two possible approaches would be 1) OMB sponsors the advisory committee but delegates the support to another agency, and 2) multiple agencies sponsor the advisory committee and one of the agencies provides the administrative support.

Examples of both of these models currently exist. For example, OMB established the Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building, which is reviewing, analyzing, and making recommendations to the Director of OMB on how to promote the use of federal data for evidence building, with a focus on infrastructure and privacy. However, the day-to-day support of this advisory committee was delegated by the OMB Director to the Department of Commerce and is handled by its Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

The Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and BEA share responsibility for the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee (FESAC). The charge of the committee is to advise the three statistical agency heads on statistical methodology and other technical matters related to the collection, tabulation, and analysis of federal economic statistics. It is chartered by the Secretary of Commerce, but has participation from BLS, which is in the Department of Labor. FESAC is supported administratively by BEA.

Because OMB has a historical inclination not to sponsor federal advisory committees, the second model of having multiple agencies sponsor the advisory committee would likely be easier to implement. The HHS or Department of Justice leadership would need to be willing to take this on and assign one of their bureaus to provide the administrative support on behalf of the participating agencies. Most of the participating agencies have extensive experience managing federal advisory groups. Each agency could participate in the process of selecting from among the nominees to the committee and developing the agency charter. Establishing

this committee is likely to take at least 12-18 months, given the need to organize and then advertise for member nominations and give other public notice in the Federal Register.

Establish an Interagency Pilot Project to Begin to Bring Data Together to Answer High-priority Questions About Gun Violence, With a Charge to Identify Needed Improvements in Content and Infrastructure, As Well As Barriers to Access.

Establishing a pilot project should be one of the first action items that the interagency working group takes up. It is through a pilot project that agencies will develop partnerships with states that provide value. Agencies will learn more about data sharing and access, and creating a blueprint for further collaborations. The pilot project should be relatively small initially to demonstrate value and bring in more interest and partners. The pilot project should tackle a high-priority area with major impact that can inform federal policy and programs and state operations of programs.

If start-up of the pilot waits to identify additional data needs until all the work is done, the interagency working group will have trouble sustaining support for its efforts. By contrast, if the pilot can demonstrate value, some of the barriers to data sharing and improving data will be much easier to tackle as the data owners will see a reason to invest resources in this effort.

A key question that the interagency working group will need to answer is how to pay for the pilot project. The pilot could be paid for through agency appropriations, states could contribute a share of funding, and philanthropic organizations could also contribute, particularly to sponsor sessions and workshops to organize the pilot. However, the cost and the sources of funding will depend on exactly what high-priority issue the pilot will address.

Recommended Immediate Actions for Implementation: The Chief Statistician should establish an interagency technical working group on gun violence that closely coordinates with the Equitable Data Interagency Working Group established in EO 13985. The gun violence working group should begin by identifying a key research question related to an urgent problem and then design and conduct a pilot project to quickly demonstrate the value in linking datasets to answer additional high-priority questions. The pilot would also be the launching point for identifying which agencies are responsible for data that are missing or need to be improved. One purpose of the pilot would be to begin collaborations that would include non-federal data, creating incentives to improve the quality of data reported by local and state entities to federal agencies.

The pilot project should also solicit advice from an outside federal advisory committee consisting of non-federal stakeholders, data owners, and data users but *should not wait for such an advisory committee to be established before start-up.* The advisory committee should include representation from groups or communities greatly affected by gun violence, including suicide and crime, as well as gun owners, in addition to states and local entities such as police departments that collect and provide data.

Some preliminary actions ideally should be taken before the group is established:

1. The position of the Chief Statistician, vacant since January 2020, needs to be filled or a strong “acting” person needs to be in place.
2. The interagency working group needs high-level support from the Executive Office of the President, including OMB and the DPC, to increase its effectiveness, and create leverage to direct agencies to participate and provide resources to the effort.
3. Additional resources to carry out a pilot project need to be identified and supported by agencies, OMB, congressional appropriators, and non-federal partners such as philanthropic organizations and state partners.
4. Transparency and oversight need to be part of the structure for the pilot project. If evidence-based policymaking is to progress, projects that use sensitive data must be accountable and uphold the public trust. Projects undertaken in the pilot must provide value to the public through a better understanding of gun violence and, ultimately, effective approaches to reducing violence. The value proposition for the first research project must be clear.

Role of State and Local Governments and Organizations

State and local governments have important roles in the collection and use of data in the gun violence data ecosystem. Several important data collections originate with local programs that input data into a federally run data collection system. Examples examined by the expert panel include the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program that reports aggregate numbers on state-level totals of firearms-related crime; the NIBRS, which collects detailed data at the incident-level from police departments; and the CDC NVDRS, which compiles detailed, individual-level data on homicides and suicides.

However, in order for state and local organizations to devote resources to collaboration and improving data, the value proposition needs to be clear. Across other topic areas, state and local governments have found immediate value in sharing their data across silos. One example is the MidWest Collaborative. The MidWest Collaborative grew out of a need for states to understand the transitions of people from education to work across state lines. The collaborative began to organize in September 2018, and piloted some training programs around specific high-value projects. The pilots were successful and the group began to monitor and support the health of the region's interconnected economies and societies. Initially the products and analyses were intended to assess workforce and education outcome measures, particularly student and worker in-flows and out-flows within their states and among the states in the collaborative, but this model could also be adapted to share and analyze data about gun violence and public health.

Some examples of the MidWest Collaborative's work include the Multi-State Postsecondary Report (MSPSR; https://kystats.ky.gov/Reports/Tableau/2021_MSPSR) and an unemployment dashboard created during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MSPSR is a state-driven dashboard produced by the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) using shared data to identify education through workforce flows in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee for Ohio and Kentucky postsecondary graduates. MSPSR allows the user to filter by the credential level, academic major, state of origin, and postsecondary institution to show employment and wages both in- and out-of-state for 1-, 3-, and 5-years out.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the collaborative was able to quickly assemble dashboards to guide these decisions, helping states to quickly increase their capacity to interpret, analyze, and disseminate millions of Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims for evidence-based policy. Local workforce board administrators needed more information at lower levels of geography than could be provided through surveys, so they could quickly decide how and where to deploy scarce resources for remediation to best assist newly unemployed populations, particularly for traditionally underserved subpopulations.

The MidWest Collaborative's success demonstrates that the possibility of overcoming barriers and improving the utility of state and local data when there is a shared need for the information, an organizing force, and a ready platform and training for pilot projects to launch the efforts.

These general attributes can also be applied to gun violence data to create momentum to improve data quality and begin to combine data across silos in meaningful ways.

Another example of quick mobilization was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Pub. L. 117-2) contains $500 million in funding in section 2404 for the Director of the CDC "*to support public health data surveillance and analytics infrastructure modernization initiatives at the [CDC], and establish, expand, and maintain efforts to modernize the United States disease warning system to forecast and track hotspots for COVID–19, its variants, and emerging biological threats, including academic and workforce support for analytics and informatics infrastructure and data collection systems.*"[14] A similar approach to funding firearms data improvements could be enacted with sufficient congressional support, particularly if investments were geared toward implementing the recommendations for better data utilization and quality from a nonpartisan interagency task force. A bipartisan bill introduced in the House (H.R. 8080, the Health STATISTICS Act of 2020) could also be used as a model for a gun violence data improvement. One key element that would be transferable to gun violence expanded the existing data linkage program at HHS for the "…*purpose of facilitating statistical public health research on trends and patterns across specifically defined, statistically relevant populations, with a particular focus on linking social determinants of health data, including with respect to—(1) food insecurity; (2) housing instability; (3) transportation access; (4) safety; (5) social connection and isolation; (6) financial resource strain; and (7) stress.*"[15] The demonstration project established in the bill was meant to assess the availability of datasets held by federal, state, local, and non-federal entities that would be useful to the research, and to use existing authorities and linkages of data, using the NCHS as the linking agent, as authorized by the Evidence Act. A similar multiagency approach to gun violence data could be housed at the BJS or the NCHS.

These examples illustrate the importance of a federal interagency working group to build state and local partnerships that also produce value for these partners because so much of the public health and crime data originate at the state and local levels. Without considering the value proposition for those organizations and recommending ways to provide resources, improving data quality and filling in the data gaps identified by the expert would be much more difficult. At a minimum, the interagency working group needs to incorporate state and local interests in data sharing among states, easing federal reporting requirements to make them more meaningful and less redundant, increasing capacity to conduct program evaluations, and improving their own program operations.

[14] https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22CARES+Act%22%5D%7D&r=1&s=2 Section 2404.

[15] https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/8080/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22HR+8080%22%5D%7D&r=1&s=3 H.R. 8080, Section 3113.

Other important partners to bring in would be researchers from academia, particularly those with strong ties to state agencies. Academic partners can conduct research in privacy protection, work with states and federal agencies to link and analyze data, assist with quality measures development, advance and apply innovative computer science approaches such as machine learning and rich text analysis, and continue to conduct related social science, public health, and public policy research.

Current Federal and State Data Sharing Efforts

Some existing successful state, federal, and academic data sharing partnerships are worth examining because their approaches could also apply to evidence building for gun violence. These are governance and data sharing models that a gun violence interagency working group could adapt for appropriate pilot projects. Notable examples include:

1. Statewide ***Longitudinal Data Systems grants*** to 41 states and the District of Columbia are administered by the National Center for Education Statistics and support the development of data to assess K–12 education outcomes and investments. These grants are used to create data systems at the state-level similar to those prohibited by the student unit record ban at the federal level. A similar approach could be considered for firearms data that have sharing restrictions at the federal level. These data help states, school districts, schools, and teachers make data-driven decisions and facilitate research on improving achievement and closing gaps. Mississippi LifeTracks is one state longitudinal data system that allows for the analysis of administrative data from multiple state agencies to assess education and workforce outcomes in the state. LifeTracks is funded through a combination of National Center for Education Statistics grants and annual state appropriations. Mississippi devotes a portion of its website to public accountability, listing approved projects and completed projects, and cites state-level statistics based on their results. This demonstration of the program's value and the useful information it provides has been suggested as the key to the system's sustainability.
2. ***Census-Economic Research Service (ERS)–Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Joint Project*** is a long-term joint research project to acquire administrative data on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food assistance programs from states and link them to Census Bureau surveys. The linked data provide insights on how program participation affects participants, who does not participate, and why. State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) agencies in participating states send their confidential microdata to Census in exchange for state-specific analyses and reports. ERS researchers participate in joint research projects. Census has been able to conduct linkage between Veterans Administration and Department of Defense data to gain specific insights into the decisions of veterans. The project successfully overcame several barriers to share records between two federal agencies and multiple states.
3. ***Purchasing Patterns of Households Participating in the Women, Infants, and Children Program*** was a 2019-2020 USDA-sponsored training program for agency employees to address questions about characteristics and buying habits of WIC and non-WIC households using commercial datasets. Commercial datasets may be available to help inform information about firearms.
4. ***Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Data Collaborative Pilot initiative*** sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) includes eight pilot sites supported for 30 months. It includes funding, intensive training, and technical assistance to

support state and local efforts and build strategic partnerships. The goal is to build TANF agency capacity to improve TANF program performance through applied data analytics. ACF also engages outside partners from academia and nonprofits. The data analytics training program has included TANF receipt data and Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data for Illinois and Indiana and examines questions such as what characteristics increase an individual's risk of returning to TANF, what factors increase an individual's likelihood of not finding stable employment after leaving TANF, and what factors increase an individual's likelihood of not finding any employment after leaving TANF.

5. ***The UMETRICS Initiative: Universities Measuring the Impacts of Research on Innovation, Competitiveness, and Science*** effectively communicates the results of federally funded research to donors, policymakers, and other key stakeholders. The consortium of 31 universities was made possible by the federal STAR METRICS project and advances in the methods and tools to combine, mine, and analyze big data on federally funded research. UMETRICS examines the economic results generated by research in the form of 1) the benefits to and generated by students produced by universities, 2) spillovers to regional and national economies, and 3) the public value added to social well-being across the scientific spectrum, including innovations in health care, the environment, energy, and food system interventions, and improvements in policies from social science research. It provides individualized reports to each member of the consortium. Data come from the participating universities, the National Science Foundation (NSF) Survey of Earned Doctorates, the Census Bureau's LEHD and Non-Employer data, health care (Medicare), innovation (USPTO), finance (VentureXpert and CRISP, IPO databases); dissertation databases, industry announcements and information from curricula vitae, which are linked to each other. The resulting large-scale, structured, linked, updatable dataset permits new, high-quality, large-scale analyses of the scientific enterprise at a variety of levels. The STAR METRICS project was supported by the Census Bureau, NSF, NIA, and USDA. The Alfred P. Sloan and Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation supported the establishment of the Institute for Research and Innovation at the University of Michigan, which manages the UMETRICS effort and continues to add new universities.
6. ***Local Employment Dynamics Partnership*** is a voluntary federal-state partnership started in 1999. States agree to share historical and ongoing administrative records of UI earnings data and QCEW data with the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau then produces a longitudinal data infrastructure from which new statistics about the dynamics of local employment and the locations of jobs and workers can be produced.