

Ensuring Data Integrity & Quality at BEA

We are a nonpartisan and autonomous federal statistical agency

The Bureau of Economic Analysis, made up entirely of career civil servants, is the world's trusted, impartial source of comprehensive data about the U.S. economy. BEA's economic statistics, free and accessible to all, inform decision-making by businesses, entrepreneurs, households, and policymakers at all levels of government. BEA is governed by rigorous statistical policies and operates autonomously from any administrative, regulatory, law enforcement, or policymaking entity.

We are required to maintain the quality, objectivity and integrity of our data

BEA does not share information about its economic statistics before they are finalized or share drafts of news releases before they are final – not even within the government or on an embargoed basis.

The process for release of information was established to preclude actual or perceived political interference and to protect against the exploitation of pre-released data, both of which are essential to maintaining trust in the data.

Data releases are prompt, preannounced and predictable; pre-release access is restricted

BEA and other federal statistical agencies are required to provide advance notice of changes in data collection, issue data release calendars, and make their processes and methodologies available to the public. Access to statistics and data prior to release is strictly controlled.

Regular, independent evaluations ensure high levels of accuracy
Accuracy levels, methodologies, and procedures of BEA and other statistical agencies are independently evaluated on a regular basis. Agencies' policies for revisions and corrections of data must be available to the public on their websites.

Overview

The Office of Management and Budget is charged by [statute](#) with coordinating the U.S. Federal statistical system. OMB approves agency requests to collect information, including those for surveys and other statistical information. The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs' Statistical and Science Policy (SSP) Office, headed by the U.S. Chief Statistician, coordinates the activities of the federal statistical system to ensure the integrity, objectivity, impartiality, utility, and confidentiality of information collected for statistical purposes. SSP establishes statistical policies and standards, identifies priorities for improving programs, evaluates statistical agency budgets, reviews and approves federal agency information collections involving statistical methods, and coordinates U.S. participation in international statistical activities.

OMB Directives and Standards

[Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units](#)

The Directive provides *“a framework that supports Federal statistical policy and serves as a foundation for Federal statistical activities, promoting trust among statistical agencies, data providers, and data users.”*

It delineates the fundamental responsibilities of federal statistical agencies and recognized statistical units and requires them to adopt policies and procedures to:

- Produce and disseminate relevant and timely information
- Conduct credible and accurate statistical activities
- Conduct objective statistical activities
- Protect the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses.

[Statistical Policy Directive No. 3: Compilation, Release and Evaluation of Principal Federal Economic Indicators](#)

“The intent of the directive is to preserve the time value of such information, strike a balance, between timeliness and accuracy, prevent early access to information that may affect financial and commodity markets, and preserve the distinction between the policy-neutral release of data by statistical agencies and their interpretation by policy officials.”

Directive Number 3 requires:

- Prompt release of principal economic indicators: estimates are approved the afternoon prior to the morning of the release
- Announcement of publication: schedules of economic indicator releases are available prior to the start of the calendar year
- Announcement of planned changes of methods or procedures: planned changes are announced at least 3 reports prior to the affected report for monthly and quarterly indicators
- Guidance for prerelease access: Staff members are in lockup from receipt of the data until publication release (usually 3-4 days). After estimates are finalized the following people are briefed: Senior Economic Directorate staff, the Council of Economic Advisers to prepare for the

President’s briefing the morning of the release, and Department of Commerce officials 30 minutes before the release

- Periodic evaluation of each indicator every 3 years
- BEA’s principal economic indicators covered by this directive are: U.S. Gross Domestic Product and Corporate Profits; Personal Income and Outlays; U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services; and U.S. International Transactions.

Statistical Policy Directive No. 4: Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies

“Designed to preserve and enhance the objectivity and transparency, in fact and in perception, of the processes used to release and disseminate the statistical products of Federal statistical agencies.”

- Scope – applies to all statistical products produced by statistical agencies, except the Principal Federal Economic Indicators, covered in Directive No. 3
- Statistical Products – full range of products produced by statistical agencies
- Timing of Release – sole responsibility of statistical agency and should minimize the time between data reference and release date
- Notification of Release – prior to beginning of calendar year, provide schedule of regular recurring statistical product releases
- Dissemination – ensure that users have equitable and timely access to data that are disseminated
- Policies for revisions and correction of data
- BEA’s data covered by this directive are: Gross Domestic Product by Industry; Gross Domestic Product by State; State Quarterly Personal Income; U.S. International Investment Position; and other non-principal economic reports.

Legislation and Related Policies

Several statutes promote the relevance, accuracy, objectivity, and access to federal statistical products.

- [Paperwork Reduction Act](#)
- The Information Quality Act ([Section 515 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2001](#))
- [Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002](#)
- [Title 22 - Foreign Relations and Intercourse](#)

BEA Policies

Information Quality Guidelines

- Information disseminated by BEA is presented in a clear, complete and unbiased manner, and in a context that enhances its usability by the intended audience.

- Sources of the disseminated information are identified to the extent possible and consistent with BEA's data security and release procedures, which includes a thorough review of the data before release, and the protection of the information from unauthorized access or revision.
- BEA strives for the highest level of transparency about data and methods for all its estimates, within ethical, feasibility, cost, and confidentiality constraints. This transparency facilitates the reproducibility of such estimates by others.

Data Dissemination Practices

- BEA releases the data based on a publicly posted news release schedule that is compiled and made available on our public website prior to the start of the calendar year.
- [BEA limits access to data prior to public release.](#) No one outside BEA is provided pre-release access or review of BEA's estimates, news releases, or other related materials before they are finalized.
- [BEA provides physical and computer security necessary to limit access.](#)
- BEA ensures that no BEA employee inadvertently provides pre-release data to the media.