***The Value of Public Data for Science and Society[[1]](#footnote-1)***

**Type of Project:** Consensus Study

**Study Description:**

The U.S. government strongly supports the public's right to access and use government information. For example, the OMB Circular A-130[[2]](#footnote-2) emphasizes the importance of government information availability in diverse media, including electronic formats, in order to permit agencies and the public greater flexibility in using this information. Such government information resources management policies have led to a wide range of benefits to different communities in the U.S., especially in the last two decades or so. For example, the potential value of Public Sector Information (PSI) to government agencies and the general public is well recognized in the literature. The private sector has also benefited tremendously from the commercialization of different types of PSI. It is also believed that research communities across different fields are increasingly using PSI in their research and knowledge creation activities.

However, there are still significant gaps in our understanding of how PSI is actually being utilized by these different communities. There is little systematic analysis of the utilization process that offers comprehensive and detailed empirical data. Moreover, most of the existing literature focuses primarily on the outcomes and monetary values generated as a result of PSI re-use. While this literature is important for our understanding of the value of public data, it is equally important to understand what goes through the process of acquiring the PSI, adding value to it, and finally disseminating or commercializing the outcomes.

Therefore, rather than focus primarily on the outcomes of the PSI utilization process, this study will take a step back to look at the utilization process itself and the PSI-related factors that facilitate or hinder this process. In particular, the study will focus on the utilization of public health, geospatial, environmental, infrastructure, education and census data by research communities, both in the policy and scientific research fields, for knowledge creation and scientific advancement, and by private sector for economic growth.

The study will investigate both the obstacles and opportunities associated with this process, as well as the different conditions and attributes of the PSI that may increase or decrease its usefulness and value in this process. These include, for example, information attributes (e.g., accuracy, relevance, timeliness, etc), technical issues (e.g., data formats, presentation format, interoperability, etc), and access issues. The less the barriers to accessing and acquiring this information, the less the technical problems associated with it, and the higher its quality and relevance, the greater the value of this information to the communities utilizing it.

Building a knowledge base of the factors, conditions, and mechanisms that lead to effective utilization of PSI would be very useful to the producers and users of this information. For the producers, the study will identify and document the variables, relationships, obstacles, patterns, opportunities and conditions involved in the processes of successful utilization of the PSI. This would be a useful feedback to the producers of this information, especially to gain better understanding of what works and what doesn’t work in these processes and what areas could be improved. For example, such feedback can help government agencies to “[S]eek to satisfy new information needs through interagency or intergovernmental sharing of information, or through commercial sources, where appropriate, before creating or collecting new information”[[3]](#footnote-3). As for the users, the study will provide a series of “tried and tested” transferable approaches and mechanisms of successful utilization of PSI as a means of helping and educating other communities.

**Statement of Task:**

1. Identify and document the PSI-related factors that facilitate or hinder its acquisition and use.
2. Identify and analyze the specific ways in which PSI contributes to knowledge creation and economic growth in the U.S., as well as the attributes that increase or decrease the usefulness and value of PSI to different communities.
3. Analyze the overall contribution of PSI to users’ work and the consequent benefits to the society.
4. Provide consensus conclusions and recommendations in this area.

**Potential Funders**: NIH, NSF, NOAA, DOE, others?

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2. The OMB Circular A-130 available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a130_a130trans4> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)