Expanding the Toolkit for Equity Assessment: State-of-the-Art Methods for Federal Agencies

Session Descriptions

Track 1: Simulating Program or Policy Effects for Federal Poverty Prevention Programs

As agencies try to advance equity in their work, microsimulation models and Robust Decision Making (RDM) approaches can provide a powerful resource to consider policies' and programs' potential to remediate or exacerbate inequitable outcomes. Experts from the Urban Institute and RAND will discuss how these tools are currently being used or enhanced to inform equitable decisionmaking. Following their brief presentations, the group will discuss the following questions:

- How can agency staff better draw on these models and approaches for equity analysis?
- What investments need to be prioritized to improve modeling tools to satisfy the detailed disaggregated information requirements for racial analysis in the medium and long terms?
- How can equity leaders draw on these types of analyses to hold government accountable for significantly improving the lives of millions of people living in or near poverty?

Speakers:

- Greg Acs, Vice President for Income and Benefits Policy, Urban Institute
- Jessica Banthin, Senior Fellow, Health Policy Center, Urban Institute
- William G. Gale, Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Federal Economic Policy, and Senior Fellow, Economic Studies Program, Brookings Institution; Codirector, Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center
- Tracy Gordon, Interim VP and Acting Robert C. Pozen Director of Tax Policy, Urban Institute
- Benjamin M. Miller, Economist; Professor, Pardee RAND Graduate School; Quality Assurance Manager, RAND Social and Economic Well-Being Division
- Jonathan Schwabish, Senior Fellow, Income and Benefits Policy Center, Urban Institute *(moderator)*

Track 2: Privacy-Preserving Technologies for Expanded Administrative Data Use and Sharing

Administrative data contain a wealth of information that is potentially valuable for research and analysis, but privacy concerns have halted using and sharing these data. As agencies seek to collect data and build evidence to reflect underserved individuals and communities and support greater equity in policymaking, balancing data privacy and data utility presents a challenge. Experts from the Urban Institute and the Massive Data Institute at Georgetown University will discuss some of the innovative privacy-preserving technologies and methods that have emerged in response to this challenge, including synthetic data and multiparty computation, and will dive into some applied-use cases at the local and federal levels. Following brief presentations, the group will discuss the following questions:

- How can these methods improve data usefulness and accuracy for people of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people, in rural areas?
- How can more federal agencies build on past and current technological innovations that some agencies are using to expand access to highly confidential data?
- What can agency staff and analysts do to engage underrepresented communities in meaningful conversations to weigh the privacy risks and potential benefits of research?

This event is hosted by the Racial Equity Analytics Lab (REAL) at the Urban Institute.

Speakers:

- Claire Bowen, Principal Research Associate, Data Privacy and Confiden, Urban Institute
- Amy O'Hara, Research Professor in the Massive Data Institute and Executive Director of the Federal Statistical Research Data Center, Georgetown University; Nonresident Fellow, Urban Institute
- Leonard Burman, Institute Fellow, Urban Institute *(moderator)*

Track 3: Leveraging Data without Increasing Burdens

Administrative data often lack racial identifiers or are aggregated and reported to the federal government by states in ways that limit racial analysis. In this session, we will discuss two approaches to overcoming these challenges to enable racial analysis. The first is imputation methods to append racial identifiers to data, and the second is spatial analysis, which in some cases can allow proxy or contextual analysis. Experts will demonstrate applied-use cases at the local and federal levels and share recommendations for imputing race and ethnicity data with more empathy and greater regard for ethical risks. Following brief presentations, the group will discuss the following questions:

- Where is imputation and spatial analysis being used successfully by federal agencies?
- How valid are these methods for predicting and assigning race and ethnicity?
- How can imputation and spatial analysis be used in an empathetic and ethical manner?

Speakers:

- Steven Brown, Senior Research Associate and Associate Director of the Racial Equity Analytics Lab, Urban Institute
- Ajjit Narayanan, Data Scientist, Urban Institute
- Alena Stern, Senior Data Scientist, Urban Institute
- Graham MacDonald, Interim VP and CIO, Technology and Data Science, Urban Institute *(moderator)*

Track 4: Examining Algorithm-Based Decisionmaking Tools for Bias

Algorithm-based decisionmaking has been heralded as a method to reduce subjectivity and improve efficiency, but many have voiced concerns about the inherent racial biases embedded in these tools and the data that power them. Experts will explore case studies involving algorithmic bias in housing valuation and textual analyses as examples of how these "objective" machine models can perpetuate racial inequities and biases. Following brief presentations, the group will discuss the following questions:

- How can agencies leverage available research and private-sector insights to more effectively examine where bias and inequities are being reinforced or attenuated?
- How can agencies mitigate bias in developing and using algorithmic decisionmaking?
- What can agency staff and analysts do to engage underrepresented communities in meaningful conversations about algorithmic bias?

Speakers:

- Judah Axelrod, Senior Data Scientist, Racial Equity Analytics, Urban Institute
- Jessica Coates, Racial and Social Justice Fellow, IBM
- Michael Neal, Senior Research Associate, Housing Finance Policy Center, Urban Institute
- Emily Joy Bembeneck, Director, Center for Applied AI at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business
- Anna Zink, PhD Candidate in Health Policy, Methods for Policy Research, Harvard University
- Matthew A. Rogers, Senior Advisor, Institutional Initiatives, Urban Institute *(moderator)*

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