Bureau of Labor Statistics
U.S. Department of Labor

BLS

STRATEGIC PLAN
FY 2013–2018

Table of Contents

FY 2013-2018 BLS Strategic Plan

Mission and Vision

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), is responsible for many of the Nation's most important statistical products in the areas of employment and unemployment, prices and spending, compensation and working conditions, and productivity. In all, we operate roughly two dozen statistical programs within these broad categories and employ about 2,400 Federal workers in our D.C. headquarters and in our Regional Offices and sub-offices around the country. The products generated from our statistical programs would not be possible without the dedicated work of our support office staff in the areas of administration, information technology, data collection and other field office functions, statistical methods, publications, and data dissemination.

Our data influence many aspects of American lives. For example, the Consumer Price Index is used to adjust Social Security payments and Federal income tax brackets while the Employment Cost Index is used to adjust millions of dollars in Medicare reimbursements. Several national data series, including employment, unemployment, and productivity, are used by policymakers to track the state of the economy and to drive changes in economic policy, while local unemployment data are inputs to formulas used to distribute job training resources. Trends on worker pay, health insurance, and retirement benefits have influenced legislation while workplace injury data have led to new safety regulations. We at BLS are proud of the wide variety of uses to which our data are put and we maintain a robust outreach program with an eye toward encouraging current and new users to find new uses for our data.

Our Mission

The Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor
is the principal Federal agency responsible for measuring labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the economy. Its mission is to collect, analyze, and disseminate essential economic information to support public and private decision-making. As an independent statistical agency, BLS serves its diverse user communities by providing products and services that are objective, timely, accurate, and relevant.

While part of the Executive Branch, we are "independent" in that we follow Office of Management and Budget policies that ensure that our production of these critically important statistics, and our analysis and dissemination of those statistics, occur without political influence. As is the case with other statistical agencies, we also adhere to the principles outlined in "Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency," from the Committee of National Statistics, National Research Council of the National Academies.

The statistical function of the United States Government is decentralized; that is, it is conducted by separate agencies independently located within many cabinet-level Departments in the Federal Government. Fourteen such agencies whose principal function is to produce and disseminate statistical information are members of the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, chaired by the Chief Statistician of the Office of Management and Budget. This council provides a forum for these agencies to share ideas, coordinate common activities, and improve the technical and business aspects of its members' operations.

Our Vision

The Bureau of Labor Statistics will meet the information needs of its widely varying customers in a rapidly changing U.S. and global economy. To do this, BLS will improve the content, presentation, and delivery of its products and services; expand options to data collection to make it easier for respondents to provide data; invest in its work force; and modernize its technical and business processes.

BLS in the Department of Labor's Strategic Plan

The vision underlying the Department of Labor's Strategic Plan is "Good Jobs for Everyone." "Good jobs," as outlined by Secretary Solis in her message accompanying the DOL Plan, encompasses a range of characteristics, including pay, advancement, safety, fairness, working conditions, income security, and benefits. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' products are central to measuring our Nation's status across these varied dimensions of job market success, and in evaluating improvements over time. Secretary Solis states: "…the Bureau of Labor Statistics generate(s) accurate, timely statistics reflecting the condition of workers in labor markets and the economy as a whole. These statistics allow us to know whether social and economic policies are allowing Americans to get 'good jobs'."

The DOL Plan includes strategic, outcome, and performance goals that are specific to the work of BLS. These goals are:

DOL Strategic Goal 5
Produce timely and accurate data on the economic conditions
of workers and their families.

DOL Outcome Goal 5.1
Provide sound and impartial information on labor market activity,
working conditions, and price changes in the economy for
decision making, including support for the formulation of economic
and social policy affecting virtually all Americans.

BLS Performance Goal 5.1
Improve the timeliness, accuracy, and relevance
of information on labor market activity, working conditions,
and price changes in the economy.

Our Partners

BLS shares primary responsibility for economic statistics with the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) of the U. S. Department of Commerce. Each agency produces a unique set of products, some of which are inputs to the products of the other two agencies. For example, BEA uses Census data to estimate economic output, which BLS uses to estimate worker productivity. We work together on a range of issues and share an advisory committee, the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee (FESAC), which provides advice on technical issues of common interest to the three agencies. A second advisory committee, the BLS Data Users Advisory Committee (DUAC), provides BLS programs with input from a wide variety of data users representing labor, business, government, research, academic organizations, and other groups. A third advisory committee, the BLS Technical Advisory Committee (BLSTAC), focuses on measurement issues that are specific to BLS programs.

BLS also has a special relationship with partner agencies in each State. Five of our Employment and Unemployment programs are jointly operated and managed by BLS and these State Labor Market Information (LMI) agencies. Program priorities are discussed within the Workforce Information Council (WIC), established under the Workforce Information Act of 1998, which is made up of LMI agency directors elected by their peers and BLS management representatives. The WIC sponsors a set of Policy Councils, also jointly managed by BLS and State agency staff, which provide a forum to share ideas on data collection, processing, estimation, and dissemination for each jointly managed program. Funding for these five programs is provided by Congress to BLS directly; BLS then funds the States, through cooperative agreements, for specific work to be done on each program.

BLS also partners with State agencies on two programs related to worker safety—a census of job-related fatal injuries and a survey of employers covering work-related injuries and illnesses. For most States, these are operated through a cost-sharing arrangement between the BLS and the individual States.

Funded largely by contracts issued by BLS, the Census Bureau conducts surveys on the employment and unemployment of the current population, American time use, consumer expenditures, and on where consumers make their purchases. The latter two surveys are critical inputs to the BLS Consumer Price Index program. We also have developed partnerships with private research and survey organizations to conduct the National Longitudinal Surveys program, which tracks two cohorts of Americans through their work lives, and to assist us with methodological research. In addition, private contractors staff several telephone data collection centers, obtaining information from respondents for two of our employer surveys. Contract staff also provide substantial support for both our information technology infrastructure and the development and maintenance of our survey processing systems.

Several other Federal agencies have employed BLS to help them design survey instruments, conduct surveys, and analyze and disseminate the results. Within the Department of Labor, those agencies include the Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Veterans Employment and Training Service, the Employment and Training Administration, and the Women's Bureau, among others; and there are other agencies outside DOL that support our survey work as well.

BLS could not provide most of its output without the voluntary cooperation of many private businesses and government entities and individuals that provide a wide range of data on a regular basis. BLS thanks these respondents for their cooperation.

Management of the Plan

Top BLS executive staff will be responsible for the oversight of the BLS Strategic Plan. Progress of the strategic plan is monitored through program plans which are reported on a quarterly basis. Both meetings and formal BLS project management reporting systems are used to track our internal and external performance commitments.

One of the challenges for BLS in this strategic planning process is the uncertainty over the future of both overall budget levels for BLS and the particular priorities that the White House or Congress will have within those budgets. We have built this plan on the basis of the President's 2013 budget submission to Congress. We believe that our strategies and most of our goals are not particularly sensitive to short-term changes in budget levels and priorities; particular objectives, however, certainly could change with modifications in the budget environment.

Our Strategies and Goals

In November 2010, BLS completed a strategic plan. The first step in the process was to obtain and analyze data on customer satisfaction. Customer survey information, meetings with "key customers," input from our State and Federal statistical partners and feedback from our advisory committees were all used to provide a foundation for improvements outlined in the plan.

In 2012, the BLS Strategic Plan was updated for consistency with the structure of DOL's Strategic Plan. Further, the plan was updated to reflect changes in priorities.

Strategy 1 (Products): BLS will continue to produce objective data and analyses that are timely, accurate, and relevant.

Strategy 2 (Product and Process Improvement): BLS will improve the timeliness, accuracy, and relevance of our products and processes. New products will be developed that meet the needs of our broad customer base.
- Goal 2.1 – Improve the <u>timeliness</u> of BLS data and analyses
- Goal 2.2 – Improve the <u>accuracy</u> of BLS data and analyses
- Goal 2.3 – Improve the <u>relevance</u> of BLS data and analyses
- Goal 2.4 – Increase the efficiency and improve the effectiveness of our programs and processes

Strategy 3 (Customers): BLS will inform current and potential customers about the availability and uses of our information products; reach out to current and potential customers to understand their needs for economic information; and ensure that the content, presentation, and delivery of BLS information products are well-matched to customer needs.
- Goal 3.1 – Increase customers' awareness of BLS and our products and services
- Goal 3.2 – Understand BLS customer needs
- Goal 3.3 – Respond to BLS customer need
- Goal 3.4 - Evaluate and utilize new methods to deliver BLS content to our customers

Strategy 4 (Respondents): BLS will improve its data collection processes, maintain high response rates, and optimize the balance between quality, cost, and respondent burden in its data collection programs.

- Goal 4.1 – Improve data collection options and processes
- Goal 4.2 – Provide respondents with a clear understanding of the value of their participation in BLS surveys
- Goal 4.3 – Minimize the impact of survey non-response on total survey error
- Goal 4.4 – Enhance staff data collection skills

Strategy 5 (Website): Customers will be able to find, understand, and use BLS data, products, and services on the BLS website.

- Goal 5.1 – Customers can find and understand information that helps them solve problems and make decisions
- Goal 5.2 – BLS website visitors who have extensive and complex data needs have the appropriate tools to find and use pertinent information
- Goal 5.3 – Infrastructure supporting the BLS website is continually modernized and improved
- Goal 5.4 – Position the BLS website to support emerging technologies and outside developers

Strategy 6 (Employees): BLS will recruit, train, and retain a talented and diverse group of individuals who are experts at the production and continuous improvement of our products and services, including employees who will support those functions, and who are well prepared to represent the agency and become our future leaders.

- Goal 6.1 – Recruitment mechanisms are in place and can be quickly mobilized as hiring needs change
- Goal 6.2 – BLS has an effective approach to identify skill gaps and to close those gaps through general and specific staff development and knowledge sharing
- Goal 6.3 – Employees are recognized and able to balance home and work life

Strategy Framework

Strategy 1 (Products): BLS will continue to produce objective data and analyses that are timely, accurate, and relevant.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics will continue to produce high-quality economic statistics and analyses to support public and private decision making. We operate two dozen statistical programs, and we devote the bulk of our resources to the outputs from those programs. Strategy 1 is unique. Unlike the other strategies, this strategy stresses ongoing production rather than improvement. Fulfilling this mission requires not only the dedicated work of staff directly involved in each of these programs, but also the high-quality work of staff in our support functions: administration, information technology, data collection and other field operations, statistical methods, publications, and data dissemination.

BLS statistical programs produce information on:
- Inflation and Prices
- Spending and Time Use
- Unemployment
- Employment
- Pay and Benefits
- Productivity
- Workplace Safety
- International Comparisons

Our statistical programs, supported by a range of in-house services, produce a wide array of products and services that allow us to serve a wide audience:

- BLS is constantly releasing new data and analyses. Each year, BLS releases data through over 170 national and over 750 regional news releases. Much of these data are collected by BLS staff working through our network of regional offices, our partners in State government agencies, and contract collection staff.

- All news releases, as well as voluminous additional data, are available on the BLS website, bls.gov, which receives 3.8 million visitors per month. Most data are also placed on the BLS online database, LABor STATistics (LABSTAT), which allows users to query, access, and format data to meet their needs.

- BLS releases a variety of analytical products (e.g. reports, periodicals, chartbooks, Web features, etc.) that provide context to and greater detail about our data. For nearly 100 years, the *Monthly Labor Review*, our flagship publication, has been a major source for analysis of BLS data. Additional analyses are available through other publication formats, all of which can be accessed at no cost at bls.gov.

While support activities run the gamut from installing new software to ensuring staff get paid, our specialized BLS staff maintain and enhance such innovative projects as BLS University (to train our staff), a cognitive psychology lab (to test survey concepts and collection vehicles), an Internet Data Collection Facility, and call centers that handle approximately 3,000 phone and email requests for BLS data each month.

BLS has a long history of making information available on the ways we obtain and prepare the economic data. This information is available through readily accessible sources such as the *BLS Handbook of Methods,* research papers, technical notes, etc. This emphasis on transparency is consistent with our mandate to be impartial in producing data of the highest quality.

BLS tracks performance measures of timeliness, accuracy, and relevance, as appropriate, for each of its statistical programs. These measures are included in the Executive Oversight Board (EOB) reports and are used by the Commissioner and senior management to monitor program performance and make mid-course corrections, where necessary.

BLS also reports on many of its performance measures externally, which allows data users to make informed decisions about the quality of BLS statistical data. Listed below are a few performance measures for a single BLS statistical program, the Current Employment Statistics program.

- Output: *National monthly and annual series (published and unpublished) maintained.*

- Timeliness: *Percent of national monthly releases on schedule.*

- Accuracy: *Mean absolute benchmark revision of total nonfarm employment.*

Strategy 2 (Product and Process Improvement): BLS will improve the timeliness, accuracy, and relevance of our products and processes. New products will be developed that meet the needs of our broad customer base.

As economic trends and issues change, BLS is committed to updating our product lines to meet the needs of our data users. In addition, BLS strives to improve the usefulness of our existing products by making them available more quickly, improving the accuracy of our data, communicating the strengths and limitations of the data to our customers, and expanding the products and analyses available from our existing programs. BLS will conduct periodic, comprehensive reviews of our programs and support processes, the scope of which will include strategic vision, methodologies, products, and customer interactions. We will use these reviews to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our programs and processes.

Goal 2.1 – Improve the <u>timeliness</u> of BLS data and analyses

Objective 2.1.1 - Reduce lag between reference date and release of data.

Objective 2.1.2 - Publish data on a more frequent basis.

Goal 2.2 – Improve the <u>accuracy</u> of BLS data and analyses

Objective 2.2.1 - Update population controls.

Objective 2.2.2 - Reduce sampling and non-sampling errors.

Objective 2.2.3 - Provide variance and other data quality measures.

Objective 2.2.4 - Conduct research on long-standing data quality issues.

Goal 2.3 – Improve the <u>relevance</u> of BLS data and analyses

Objective 2.3.1 - Develop and introduce new data products.

Objective 2.3.2 - Expand industry coverage and increase the number of series published at the industry level.

Objective 2.3.3 - Improve and expand occupational data.

Objective 2.3.4 - Update classification systems.

Project 2.3.5 - Expand economic data by geography.

Goal 2.4 – Increase the efficiency and improve the effectiveness of our programs and processes

Objective 2.4.1 - Conduct internal reviews.

Objective 2.4.2 - Participate in external reviews.

Objective 2.4.3 - Improve production processes.

Objective 2.4.4 - Maintain and enhance information technology infrastructure.

Objective 2.4.5 - Develop structure for corporate decision making on information technology investment.

Strategy 3 (Customers): BLS will inform current and potential customers about the availability and uses of our information products; reach out to current and potential customers to understand their needs for economic information; and ensure that the content, presentation, and delivery of BLS information products are well-matched to customer needs.

BLS will establish and nurture two-way communication with customers and potential customers concerning the vast array of BLS information products and services. We will assess and improve continuously our data presentation, analysis, and methodological work. We will utilize a broad range of communication tools to reach our audiences in ways that are convenient to them.

Goal 3.1 – Increase customers' awareness of BLS and our products and services

Objective 3.1.1 - Develop and implement an ongoing BLS outreach program.

Objective 3.1.2 - Promote and expand the use of a unified visual identity to promote public recognition of BLS and associate the agency with useful, high-quality products and services.

Objective 3.1.3 - Enhance BLS' reputation as a leader in labor market statistics through collaboration with the international statistical community.

Goal 3.2 – Understand BLS customer needs

Objective 3.2.1 - Gather customer requirements and feedback on the usefulness of BLS information products.

Objective 3.2.2 - Evaluate BLS' analytic and methodological content.

Goal 3.3 – Respond to BLS customer needs

Objective 3.3.1 - Expand analytical and methodological content based on feedback from customers.

Objective 3.3.2 - Identify and address "hot" or emerging topics of interest to the BLS customer base.

Objective 3.3.3 - Evaluate BLS' wide array of publications and revise as necessary.

Goal 3.4 - Evaluate and utilize new methods to deliver BLS content to our customers

Objective 3.4.1 - Continue exploring the feasibility of using other social media as dissemination tools, considering the cost (time and other resources) and the potential benefits (in terms of increased exposure of BLS products and services).

Strategy 4 (Respondents): BLS will improve its data collection processes, maintain high response rates, and optimize the balance between quality, cost, and respondent burden in its data collection programs.

BLS depends on the willingness of respondents to participate in our surveys. Collecting high quality data is critical to BLS' ability to deliver on its mission. Achieving and maintaining high quality response in a voluntary collection environment is a challenge. BLS continuously works to improve the options for collecting data, provide respondents a clear understanding of the value of their participation, expand BLS' knowledge of the collection and response experience, and enhance staff skills in data collection. Achieving these four objectives will position BLS to build on its success, while continuing to deliver high quality data.

Goal 4.1 – Improve data collection options and processes

Objective 4.1.1 - Evaluate and expand electronic data collection in BLS.

Objective 4.1.2 - Develop new evidence-based methods for prioritizing data collection.

Goal 4.2 – Provide respondents with a clear understanding of the value of their participation in BLS surveys

Objective 4.2.1 - Develop high quality materials on the value and uses of BLS data for distribution to respondents and targeted industry groups.

Goal 4.3 – Minimize the impact of survey non-response on total survey error

Objective 4.3.1 - Gather information on reasons for non-response and respondent preferred collection methods.

Goal 4.4 – Enhance staff data collection skills

Objective 4.4.1 - Maintain and enhance competency in data collection.

Strategy 5 (Website): Customers will be able to find, understand, and use BLS data, products, and services on the BLS website.

The BLS website is the "face of BLS" to the vast majority of our customers. BLS' top priority is to measure the important economic phenomena within our areas of responsibility and to produce the highest-quality products that resources allow (see Strategies 1 and 2). The value of those products, however, can be limited if the public cannot easily access and understand them. We will improve users' ability to find what they need, improve the usefulness of our products, provide improved data retrieval tools, and modernize the systems and processes we use to load data and other content onto our website.

Goal 5.1 – Customers can find and understand information that helps them solve problems and make decisions

Objective 5.1.1 - Explore options to direct more Internet search results to the appropriate BLS website locations.

Objective 5.1.2 - Deploy simplified versions of Web pages for selected program or topic pages that will provide visitors quick access to commonly-requested information and advertise these simplified pages. Following implementation, analyze usage results (Web hits, user comments, other criteria) and expand this concept to the BLS home page and other pages as merited. Deploy simplified versions of our current Web pages and invite user feedback.

Goal 5.2 – BLS website visitors who have extensive and complex data needs have the appropriate tools to find and use pertinent information

Objective 5.2.1 - Develop an easy-to-use tool for retrieving data (including multiple data series) in usable formats from databases across BLS programs.

Objective 5.2.2 - Expand data available in the online database (LABSTAT).

Objective 5.2.3 - Develop alternative approaches and tools to allow customers to retrieve selected BLS data.

Goal 5.3 – Infrastructure supporting the BLS website is continually modernized and improved

Objective 5.3.1 - Modernize production systems for the creation, approval, and deployment of content on the BLS website (both database updates and Web pages).

Objective 5.3.2 - Continue adding programs to the Bureau's publication system (Unified Publication System, or UPUBS).

Objective 5.3.3 - Enhance table production capabilities in the Bureau's publication system (UPUBS).

Goal 5.4 – Position the BLS website to support emerging technologies and outside developers

Objective 5.4.1 - Permit non-BLS systems to directly query the LABSTAT database.

Objective 5.4.2 - Encourage outside developers to develop applications using BLS data.

Objective 5.4.3 - Make all pages on the BLS website easy to access and read on mobile devices.

Objective 5.4.4 - Research features and functionality of websites of other statistical agencies and related organizations and identify features that are lacking at the BLS website; explore options for incorporating these types of features into the BLS website over the next five years.

Strategy 6 (Employees): BLS will recruit, train, and retain a talented and diverse group of individuals who are experts at the production and continuous improvement of our products and services, including employees who will support those functions, and who are well prepared to represent the agency and become our future leaders.

People are the most important asset at BLS. We will strive to maintain a diverse and highly skilled workforce. We must utilize approaches to attract a diverse pool of skilled candidates, train our workers to facilitate their productivity and advancement, implement plans to retain our staff, and ensure that a pool of qualified candidates is available to fill our critical skill and management positions.

Goal 6.1 – Recruitment mechanisms are in place and can be quickly mobilized as hiring needs change

Objective 6.1.1 - Develop and implement an annual recruitment program for BLS.

Goal 6.2 – BLS has an effective approach to identify skill gaps and to close those gaps through general and specific staff development and knowledge sharing

Objective 6.2.1 - Develop and implement an annual training program through BLS University.

Objective 6.2.2 - Enhance training and employee development for employees in highly specialized occupations.

Goal 6.3 – Employees are recognized and able to balance home and work life

Objective 6.3.1 - Refine and support telework.

Objective 6.3.2 - Seek opportunities to expand employee recognition.

Acronyms

BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics
BLSTAC	Bureau of Labor Statistics Technical Advisory Committee
DOL	Department of Labor
DUAC	Data Users Advisory Committee
EOB	Executive Oversight Board
FESAC	Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee
LABSTAT	LABor STATistics (online database)
LMI	Labor Market Information
UPUBS	Unified Publication System
WIC	Workforce Information Council