

FCSM Interest Group on Geospatial Methods for Federal Data Charter

March 2015

1. Objective

The purpose of the group would be to share information on geospatial methodologies across federal agencies, to identify areas of common research, to coordinate collaborative research projects in those areas, and to disseminate methodological information related to geospatial data.

2. Background

The principled use of geographical information in survey and administrative record data is becoming more important now that federal agencies are working with Big Data. In particular, this involves several challenges such as the ones listed here:

- Presenting statistics and measures of sampling error at different levels of resolution
- Constructing displays that help non-specialists to better understand the information
- Devising measures of spatial and temporal association with surveys
- Linkage of observed phenomena with predictors subject to confounding and aggregation effects
- Quantitative assessment of non-response based on geographic location
- Integrating information and estimation for geographic areas that have different boundary definitions
- Dealing with confidentiality issues, especially when linking data

A planning meeting was held on August 21, 2014 to explore agencies' interest in forming an interagency interest group. Representatives from the following agencies attended: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the Census Bureau, National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), National Center for Science Engineering Statistics (NSF-NCSES), and the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

It was determined that this interest group would provide real value for the participating agencies through the sharing of information on ways to analyze and visualize geospatial data, exploring linkage of data sources, and conducting collaborative research. It was

further decided that a charter would be developed and presented to the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM).

3. Scope and approach

The main focus of this group will be on the analysis and methodologies applied to geospatial data gathered by federal agencies. In particular, this includes the challenges listed in section 2, but are not limited to only those. Any topics related to the analysis and use of geospatial data are in-scope.

The outputs from this geospatial interest group will not overlap with those of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC), which is concerned with the development, sharing, and dissemination of geospatial data. When necessary, we will exploit the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI), which is designed to enable sharing of national geographic information.

The group will hold monthly meetings at the Bureau of Labor Statistics through December 2015. This meeting schedule will allow the group to determine the most promising areas to explore, to identify the list of activities and to plan the deliverables. We expect to move to bi-monthly or quarterly meetings after January 2016.

4. Proposed Deliverables and Dates

The team will provide the following deliverables to the sponsor in 2015:

- Proposed list of activities for the group – May 2015
- A report that could include a description of member agencies' geographic data, current research efforts, and challenges – Fall 2015
- One workshop in the DC area – Fall 2015

We expect this group to continue beyond 2015, if there continues to be interest and value-added to the agencies.

5. Sponsor

The Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM)

6. Communications

- The team will provide regular informal status reports to the sponsor.
- The team will use a Wiki or other means, e.g. collaboration site through FCSM
- As needed, the group will plan presentations to other FCSM or federal groups.

7. Group members

The members of this group must be federal civil servants. However, contractors can provide briefings and participate in specific meetings and workshops.

The members do not have to be managers. We need to have people who are familiar with the geospatial data and how they are used. The group needs members who have a background in statistics and geographic data.

Agencies can have more than one member in the group.

Rolf Schmitt (BTS) and John Eltinge (BLS) will serve as liaisons with FCSM.