

THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

2023 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Improved Data Access for Local Policymakers

U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC)

THE CHALLENGE – Improve access to data for local policymakers, especially those facing resource and capacity constraints, to help them better understand and serve the place they live, work, or represent.

EXECUTIVE CHAMPION –

Jed Kolko, Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, U.S. Department of Commerce

THE PROBLEM – Local decision-makers need robust data about the places they live, and easily understandable analyses of those data to make the best decisions about how to serve their diverse communities. Once decisions have been made, local leaders often rely on similar data to apply for grants, attract investments, and demonstrate progress and growth in their communities. While both data and analyses about places in the United States exist, they are scattered across government websites and tend to exist in different forms and at different levels of geography. Even more perplexing, there is sometimes conflicting data available from different data sources, and it can be complicated for non-experts to determine which data are most relevant, and difficult or impossible for lay users to combine those data sources to yield valuable insights.

Listening sessions with regional and local leaders have consistently surfaced two core data problems from local and regional policymakers: (1) Data are not always accessible to leaders in the moment when they are making decisions, and (2) Even when data are available, appropriately interpreting the data to inform decision-making requires a skillset that the staff of local decision-makers in under-resourced communities do not have. Although some subscription-based services are available to link data across sources by geography, the communities that need these services the most are often the least able to afford them.

THE OPPORTUNITY – Building free and user-friendly digital tools that bring together diverse data sets about local and regional economies would lead to better data-driven decisionmaking and could help reduce systemic barriers to economic development that have persisted across generations. Turning that

data into actionable insights will supercharge our ability to deliver on the possibilities that accessible data promises – all without the need for staff, contactors, or consultants that remain out of reach for historically under-resourced communities.

TARGET END USERS – Local elected officials, local policymakers, and economic development practitioners (e.g., Members of Congress and their staff, Mayors, City Council People, County Managers)

RELATED DATA SETS & RESOURCES

- ↳ [Regional Economic Research Initiative](#)
- ↳ U.S. Census Bureau [data.census.gov](#)
- ↳ Bureau of Economic Analysis [data hub](#)
- ↳ Bureau of Labor Statistics [data hub](#)
- ↳ Climate and Economic Justice [screening tool](#)
- ↳ National Science Foundation [data hub](#)

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