



COPAFS

Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

Annual Report

FY 2019

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Message from Executive Director

November 13, 2019

I am writing to thank you for your support of COPAFS in 2019 and your support for me as its new Executive Director. In the past few years the leadership of COPAFS has changed more than one might have anticipated, but this very change has allowed us to reflect on the contributions that COPAFS can bring to the federal statistical system by supporting its community and supplying that which is most valued by you.

COPAFS has been best known over the years for its signature (publicly- available) quarterly meetings. We have supplemented these during the past year by engaging Nancy Potok, the US Chief Statistician, to provide an update at each of those meetings. She is also giving a members-only briefing at 9 a.m. on the second Friday of the months between quarterly meetings, hosted generously by the American Statistical Association and the American Educational Research Association. This has been extremely helpful in keeping COPAFS members apprised of the many developments in the federal statistical agencies and aware of activities mandated in the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act.

Due to the efforts of Corinna Turbes, our Associate Director for Strategic Communications and Policy Analysis, COPAFS is now issuing a greatly improved Monthly Update for its members. This expanded Monthly Update has received rave reviews for its content and scope of information.

COPAFS has also increased its educational work with the Hill and with the broader statistical community through five “Friends of Statistics” groups supporting BLS, NCHS, EIS, NASS/ERS, and the Census Project. The activities of these groups are a matter of extreme importance to many of the statistical agencies, given that they are often restrained from communication with Congress.

For the past five years, COPAFS has been operating from a reserve built-up from past workshops and activities funded primarily by the Census Bureau. This reserve has now been substantially depleted – it will only support COPAFS operations, in their current state, for two more years at the most. In addition, the annual FCSM conference that COPAFS has been supporting over the years was moved to a less frequent time-frame, which has reduced COPAFS’ revenue stream.

In June, COPAFS hosted a small but successful conference, Stats for America, to enhance outreach and communication among the federal agencies and with the media and other data users. This augmented the COPAFS budget – but not in an amount sufficient to fully cover 2019 costs.

COPAFS is actively engaged in the following activities to expand our membership and better meet their needs:

- Enhancing our website to maximize the benefit to members and supporters, and to help with recruiting new members,
- Providing new capabilities in our digital communications, such as making recordings of our quarterly meetings available to members a week after the meetings,
- Continuing to enhance our Monthly Update,
- Working closely with our Friends Groups,
- Increasing our efforts related to implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act.

To sustain these expanded activities and help put COPAFS on a sustainable path moving forward, we are taking two steps:

- We are requesting your support through a 10% increase in your 2020 dues over the 2019 amount,
- We are evaluating and rebalancing the budget for the FCSM conference to ensure that it is financially sustainable for COPAFS to continue to host the event

I am attaching for your information a COPAFS first – the 2019 COPAFS Annual Report.

We thank you for your considerable support and look forward to receiving suggestions from you on how COPAFS can enhance its scope of influence, better serve its members, and advance excellence in federal statistics.

Best regards,



Cynthia Z.F. Clark
Executive Director

Mission

To advance excellence in federal statistics, the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics collaborates with interested parties to strengthen the dialogue of policy makers with data users and producers.

COPAFS Leadership

COPAFS' Executive Director, Cynthia Z.F. Clark, is a retired federal statistical agency executive with experience in two departments – Commerce and Agriculture, and the Office of Management and Budget. After serving for two years on the COPAFS Board of Directors, she made a two-year commitment to work quarter-time for COPAFS. COPAFS will need to recruit a new Executive Director early in FY2021.

Corinna Turbes has been the Associate Director for Strategic Communication and Policy Analysis at COPAFS since February of 2018. She has a master's degree in public policy and experience helping nonprofits develop communications strategies for federal outreach. She has brought many skills to contribute to the success of COPAFS during 2019.

Goals and Strategies

COPAFS' goals are to:

- Increase the level and scope of knowledge about developments affecting federal statistics
- Encourage discussion within and among professional organizations concerning responses to important issues in federal statistics
- Bring the views of professional associations to bear on decisions affecting Federal statistical programs.

In support of these goals, COPAFS obtains information on developments in statistics through discussions with officials, attendance at congressional hearings and meetings of statistical advisory committees, and exchanges of documents. COPAFS advances excellence in federal statistics as it:

- Alerts members and stakeholders of important issues (through our Stakeholder Updates and action alerts) concerning items that need immediate support and attention
- Convenes meetings that facilitate conversation on important policy and research topics such as:
 - COPAFS Quarterly Meetings
 - FCSM Policy and Research Conference
 - Stats for America Conference
 - Workshop on Tiered Access to Federal Data
- Works closely with the Chief Statistician of the United States and the statistical agencies to help inform and promote modernization efforts, and to assist agencies in keeping abreast of new stakeholder data needs
- Educates members of Congress and their staff on the value and importance of federal statistics -- both in Washington and in their own states and districts

- Supports adequate funding of federal agencies to produce high quality statistics
- Builds broad support across a wide spectrum of data users, focused on promotion of the activities mandated in the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act
- Builds partnerships with foundations to fund collaborations and research on issues relevant to official statistics-

COPAFS helps:

Professional associations and other organizations

- obtain and share information concerning developments affecting federal statistical programs

Federal agencies

- disseminate information about developments of interest to the professional community
- obtain advice about professional societies' concerns and priorities

Congressional offices

- clarify issues and questions about the federal statistical system
- plan hearings related to federal statistical programs
- identify experts who might testify

The public

- learn more about the federal statistical agencies
- communicate the views of data users concerning federal statistical activities
- learn how policy and budget are likely to affect the availability and quality of federal statistics.

Activities and Impacts

Events and Conferences

In order to encourage discussions and present educational opportunities, COPAFS participates in multiple events throughout the year. This year, COPAFS hosted its own conference and began the planning phase for the Policy and Research Conference of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology.

Stats for America

COPAFS hosted the Stats for America Annual Conference on June 3rd. The goal of the conference was to connect the outreach efforts of statistical agencies with each other and with data users, stakeholders, and the media. The conference consisted of five one-hour panels with statistical agency representatives and the media. An extended lunch break featured exhibits and demonstration of outreach and dissemination resources of seven of the statistical agencies. The conference was successful in attracting nearly 100 attendees. Three organizations sponsored the conference – the Washington Statistical Society, the American Statistical Society's Count on Stats and Westat. The net revenue from the conference was \$8,900.

FCSM Policy and Research Conference 2020

Planning began in January for the next FCSM Conference, which will take place on April 14-16 of 2020. The conference will include both research and policy sessions, with a focus on the implications of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act on the federal statistical agencies. Nearly 200 submissions were gathered during the last part of FY 2019. We expect around 800 attendees, similar to past conferences.

Friends Groups

COPAFS actively supported five “Friends of Statistics” groups for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), National Agriculture Research Service (NASS), and the Economic Research Service (ERS), and the Census Project, respectively, serving as co-chair of the BLS, NCHS, and NASS/ERS groups. Through this organizational structure COPAFS has successfully increased its educational work with the Hill and with the broader statistical community. Members of the group are solicited broadly and are requested to support letters sent to Senate and House members and committees. There is no dues structure attached to membership in any of these groups. The activity of these groups is extremely important to the statistical agencies, given that they can have only limited contact with Congress. Specific accomplishments and contributions of two individual Friends groups are noted below:

Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics

COPAFS serves as the co-chair of the Friends of Bureau of Labor statistics, along with Erica Groshen, former commissioner of the BLS. Over the last year, COPAFS has focused on showing Congressional appropriators what investments are needed to fully modernize the agency. It has also discussed issues regarding the reorganization proposal put forward by the Administration as well as a potential relocation -- spurred by expiration of the BLS lease in 2021.

By working closely with staffers and experts, COPAFS was able to provide appropriators with concise, itemized budget items that would improve the agency’s operations. While at the time of this writing, the FY 2020 LHHS bill had not yet passed, proposals made by the Friends of BLS made it into the House’s Report Language.

Friends of Agricultural Statistics and Analysis (FASA).

This group, co-chaired by Caron Gala works with the Applied Agricultural Economics Association. It has primarily focused on issues relevant to the move of the Economic Research Service out of the DC area. The group has garnered House support and appropriations report language, but not soon enough to stop the relocation – which proceeded at an accelerated rate. Some Senators have bemoaned the move but did not gain significant influence in support of the House response to the move.

Improved Stakeholder Update.

COPAFS initiated a Monthly Stakeholder Update in the summer of 2018. This was facilitated by the hiring of Corinna Turbes, our Associate Director for Strategic Communications and Policy Analysis. As Corinna has become familiar with COPAFS, the statistical agencies, and our

constituencies she has developed this update into a **must read** for COPAFS members. It has well-designed and informative links to articles and information that expand upon the summary descriptions provided in the update.

Grants

COPAFS is actively participating in more grant-based activities in order to pursue projects that serve our members and our mission. We recently received a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which was funded in FY 2019. We also received an award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which will be funded in FY 2020.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Throughout the year, COPAFS has participated with ASA and PAA on the steering committee of a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The focus of the effort was to enhance our understanding of the sources of statistics that *measure* important aspects of the well-being of American children. It addressed, first, the products of the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the National Center for Health Statistics. The group worked with outside experts on strategy, communications and materials. We contracted with Subject Matter to conduct focus groups to develop messaging recommendations. We used social media to pursue recommendations highlighting the *data infrastructure* necessary to produce these *measures*. Additionally, we worked with Trevor Butterworth to produce materials highlighting BLS and NCES data for journalists.

Arthur P. Sloan Foundation

COPAFS prepared a grant proposal to hold an interdisciplinary workshop on new opportunities and guidelines concerning how federal statistics can safely share data with one another, with researchers, and with the public. This is in response to the requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-based Policy Act. The proposal was developed working with the Statistical Policy Office in the Office of Management and Budget. We held a workshop on September 16th, just days after receiving word that the COPAFS grant proposal to the Arthur P. Sloan Foundation had been accepted. Recommendations based on that workshop were drafted. A subsequent workshop to refine those recommendations is planned for early January. These will ultimately provide input to OMB as part of a Federal Register Notice not yet released.

Resources & Financial Management

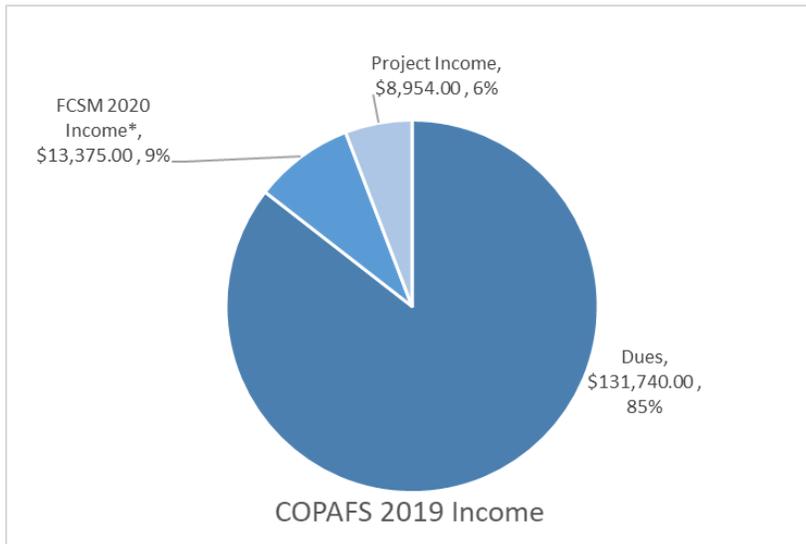
COPAFS goal for the near term is to generate sufficient income to cover all its expenses as it works to advance excellence in federal statistics. The strategies that COPAFS plans to pursue to support its expenditures are:

- Increase dues from existing members
- Find new members
- Seek outside grants
- Conduct paid conferences, other events, and webinars

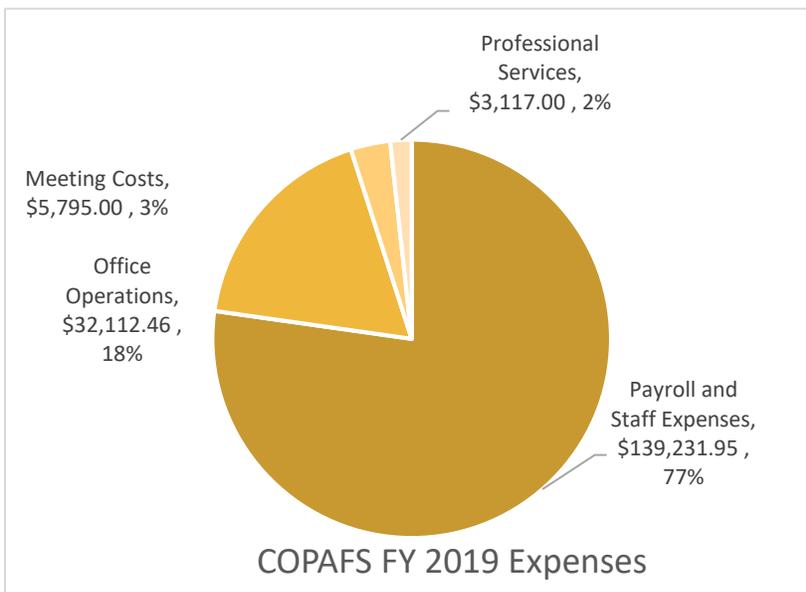
The strategies rely on a redesign of the COPAFS website to enhance our public interface, facilitate member recruitment, transmit information to members, and increase its visibility. This redesign will support an important new benefit for **members only** – a video recording of our signature Quarterly meeting made available a week after the meeting. This will inform member organizations outside the DC area about issues facing federal statistics. It will also inform member organizations that had conflicts on the day of the meeting.

The following graphs demonstrate the income gap that COPAFS must begin to close in the upcoming years.

Income vs. Expenses



Total Income: \$154,069



Total Expenses: \$180,256

Deficit: \$26,187

*Adjusted Deficit \$39,562 = \$26,187 + \$13,375 (FCSM contribution to expenses for conference in 2020)

Looking Forward

We will continue to improve our members only COPAFS Monthly Update. We will accelerate our efforts with the Friends in Statistics groups – soliciting additional partners, and even adding new areas of focus if requested. We will use these efforts as we seek opportunities, with policy makers at all levels, to enhance our support for federal statistics.

In order to align more closely with the resources that COPAFS expends in support of FCSM conferences on research and policy, we have reviewed our role in supporting these conferences. We need to recalibrate the registration fees charged for participation in conferences designed primarily to benefit the staff and leadership of the federal statistical agencies and their immediate contractors.

Yet, the structure and content of these conference sessions (and of seminars for Congressional staff or other interested parties) importantly informs COPAFS about the details of problems facing the federal statistical system. It cannot be doubted that our participation allows COPAFS to be more informed as it designs its Quarterly Meetings and other events.

We Need Your Help

As the next year materializes, we need your help and participation to keep COPAFS a viable organization. You can assist us by:

- Staying involved with COPAFS and participating in our public Quarterly meetings,
- Providing ideas for topics at our meetings – and for conferences and seminars.
- Suggesting activities or issues relevant to your organization that we can feature in our Monthly Update or through special e-mail invitations,
- Introducing other organizations and individuals to COPAFS.