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Researcher Credentialing for Administrative Data: Easing the Burden, Increasing the Efficiency

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While not collected primarily for research purposes, administrative data gathered as part of normal agency or program operations present unique and vital opportunities for researchers. However, as with other types of restricted access data, these data are often not made available or require special authorization to access. The risks of re-identification, social stigma, and privacy violations for individuals represented in the data, especially for special populations, require that data be securely held and access authorization be moderated. Obtaining this authorization, especially for multiple datasets from one institution or spread across multiple data providers, imposes a significant administrative burden on researchers and data repository staff who must repeatedly and redundantly provide and validate user identities.

This presentation will offer the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research's solution to ease the burden on both researchers and data repository staff – the Researcher Passport. The researcher passport will incorporate standardized, community-normed identity verification criteria, data security level interpretations, and restricted data access training requirements. The researcher passport, using these standards, will be issued by a central authority who carries out the identity verification process and issues a tiered-access passport to users who are authorized for a streamlined data access request process for certain levels of secure data. Visas issued by data custodians control “entry” by passport holders to particular data sets. We describe these standards, how they fit into the repository workflow, and how they make the data access process for efficient and effective for administrative data users and providers.

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