

ADRF Network Hosts Research Conference to Advance Uses of Administrative Data in the United States

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¹Administrative Data Research Facilities (ADRF) Network

Abstract

The Administrative Data Research Facilities (ADRF) Network is a new U.S.-based effort aimed at advancing the uses of administrative data in social science research. Together with Georgetown University's Massive Data Institute, the ADRF Network hosted its first conference in November 2017 to share approaches and build collaborative opportunities. The conference illustrated the importance of private sector data, the need for data intermediaries, and the essential process of building trust in moving forward this emerging field in the United States.

In partnership with the Massive Data Institute at Georgetown University, the [Administrative Data Research Facilities \(ADRF\)](#) Network hosted its first research conference, "Building Foundations for Data Sharing and Ethical Use," on November 13-14, 2017 in Washington, DC.

In the United States, researchers have been increasingly turning to administrative data to answer important social science questions. The ADRF Network is an evolving grassroots effort that aimed to connect researchers and organizations who are working to improve how administrative data are accessed and used for social science research. This conference served as a national venue that enabled stakeholders to connect, share approaches, and foster collaborative opportunities in advancing this emerging field.

Over 140 researchers and practitioners from government agencies (38% of attendees), academic institutions (31%), private sector companies (12%), and think tanks (8%) attended the inaugural event.

Three key themes emerged:

Private Sector Data

First, there is no doubt that large volumes of data from the private sector have the potential to open up new avenues of research. One of the conference sessions discussed private-public data sharing with speakers from both private companies and academic institutions. While opportunities in private-academic research collaborations are increasing, current partnerships mostly rely on one-off relationships rather than systematic approaches to data sharing. The speakers underscored the need to mitigate the risks that companies perceive in order to broaden the scope of their data sharing.

Data Intermediary Functions

The conference also identified the important function of data intermediaries. The U.S. federal government is poised to

move in the direction of establishing the National Secure Data Service, an intermediary proposed by the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking that would facilitate data sharing across federal agencies. But the conference also sparked conversations on how intermediary organizations can support our nation's data infrastructure beyond what is proposed at the federal level. Notably, conference speakers suggested that intermediaries could fill the role of brokering the transaction of valuable data between private sector companies and researchers in the public sector.

Building Trust

Finally, the importance of building trust resonated throughout the conference. Impactful research and policy work using administrative data requires a strong foundation of trust – between data holders and data users, and between the research community and the public. Building that foundation of trust is an ongoing process, but will be essential to breaking down barriers and making sustainable progress in this field.

Since the conference, the ADRF Network has launched three working groups in Data Sharing Governance and Management, Data Quality Standards, and Data Privacy to advance the next stages of this work. The groups are currently developing resources that will help strengthen the role of data intermediaries and create tangible solutions for building trust. In the longer term, the ADRF Network is strategizing about ways to support data intermediaries that facilitate the sharing of high-value data for social science research.

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