

The background of the page is a faded, light blue-tinted image of the United States flag, showing the stars and stripes. The stars are on the left side, and the stripes flow across the page.

THE STATE *of the* USA

Educating Americans about the Position and Progress of the United States

Dear Sir or Madam:

Thank you for participating in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) second World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy. Our conversations here—building on the groundwork set during the first forum at Palermo in 2004—will play an enormous role in shaping the way we assess and foster the progress of our societies and improve the quality of decision-making among our leaders.

We are excited to share with you, at this important gathering, the results of an effort in the United States over the past two years to develop a key national indicator system. It has grown in a relatively short time from an idea and an initial planning process, to the recent formation of a new nonprofit institution, the State of the USA, Inc. (SUSA). Our goal is to establish a credible and reliable web-based source of high-quality data to measure America's changing economic, social and environmental conditions.

The National Academies have established the foundations for SUSA, and will continue to guide the initiative through the formation of the Roundtable on Key National Indicators, which will provide SUSA with scientific and technical advice. SUSA has also established its founding board of directors. The initial members include two former Directors of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, a former Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and a former Managing Director of Strategic Issues at the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Funding from several of the nation's most prestigious foundations has been critical to the formation of SUSA. The GAO, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and its Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP), as well as others in the scientific community, have offered critical guidance. The business sector, nongovernmental organizations and the media have also played crucial roles, as have local and regional indicator efforts throughout the United States.

Still, we envision that this initiative will extend beyond the borders of the United States, and will benefit from collaboration and cooperation with international colleagues. Toward this end, SUSA has forged strong relationships with the OECD and the United Nations.

The global dialogue afforded through this Forum is instrumental to the shared knowledge required for measuring the growth and welfare of our societies. We look forward to exchanging ideas and insights with you.

Sincerely,



Vincent Barabba
Chairman



Kenneth Prewitt
Vice Chairman



THE STATE *of the* USA

An Overview

The State of the USA, Inc. (SUSA) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, public-private partnership that seeks to illuminate our nation's progress with key quantitative metrics on the economy, the environment and society. When fully constructed, SUSA will offer a state-of-the-art web site that incorporates high-quality information and data from a broad range of public and private sources. They will include local, state and federal agencies; the business community; and nongovernmental organizations.

SUSA has a single overarching purpose: To provide nonpartisan, nonideological and accurate information for a range of audiences—from nonprofits, government policymakers and commercial organizations to city planners, educators, engaged citizens and the media—to help Americans assess our nation's position and progress in addressing important problems. By aggregating information, rather than collecting it and by disseminating information, instead of interpreting it, SUSA will focus on filling the void for trusted, accessible and valuable facts in a transparent and highly actionable form. SUSA will not itself articulate goals for American society, nor assess whether they are being reached. Rather, it will provide the commonly shared and reliable indicators needed for evidence-based policy discussions through which goals are set and progress is assessed.

Answers to difficult questions will prepare Americans to face the challenges of the 21st century. For example: Are certain places or groups doing better than others? Is our nation making progress on a range of goals and aspirations? How does the United States compare to other countries around the world? Hundreds of working indicator systems already exist at all levels in the U.S. and abroad, including neighborhoods, communities, cities, regions, states and nations. But the United States does not have a system for assessing the country as a whole.

In November 2006, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of the U.S. Congress, described the need to develop a single set of key national indicators as a top priority for federal lawmakers. The GAO had previously analyzed the need for an indicator system and concluded that: "To be a leading democracy in the information age may very well mean producing unique public sources of objective, independent, scientifically-grounded and widely shared quality information...By ensuring that the best facts are made more accessible and usable by the many different members of our society, we increase the probability of well-framed problems, good decisions and effective solutions."

SUSA will assemble the best measures and offer them through an easy-to-use, one-stop web site that provides a trusted source of valuable and accurate information along with context for users to understand how the data can best be used. SUSA's intention is to become an essential component of American democracy by:

- Educating people about conditions in the United States of America;
- Increasing their awareness of what we know, how we know it and where there are gaps in what we know;
- Encouraging an enriched civic dialogue about the progress of our nation;
- Supporting more informed decision-making on issues affecting our collective future; and,
- Becoming an example of American democracy, transparency and accountability to audiences worldwide.

Extensive consultation among diverse audiences and substantive experts will ensure the choice of relevant issues and indicators. The process will be iterative, with continual exploration of both long-standing and emerging issues and topics. However, while collaboration and user input are essential to the initiative, SUSA will have complete independence with regard to institutional governance, research parameters, scientific standards, evaluation criteria and other operational matters.

SUSA is in its infancy but is poised for rapid growth. In a relatively short time, the organization has established a formal institution and governance structure. It has also developed an initial version of the national indicator set. In addition, more than \$3 million in private financial support has been pledged this year alone from America's philanthropic sector, including grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation and the F. B. Heron Foundation.

The initial SUSA board of directors consists of three individuals:

- Vincent Barabba, Chairman, previously served as Director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census and is the only person to have been appointed to that position by a Republican and Democratic President of the United States;
- Kenneth Prewitt, Vice Chairman, also served as Director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census and was the President of the Social Science Research Council and the National Opinion Research Center; and,
- Janet Norwood, Director, a former U.S. Commissioner of U.S. Labor Statistics under Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan and Chair of the Advisory Council on Unemployment Compensation under Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

In July, they will be joined by Christopher Hoenig, who served as Managing Director of Strategic Issues at the GAO and is currently Vice President of Strategy, Global Business Services at the IBM Corporation. He will serve as the new organization's President and CEO.

The National Academies will provide scientific and technical advice through its Roundtable on Key National Indicators, which will be chaired by Dr. Harvey Fineberg, President of the Institute of Medicine at the Academies. The Roundtable will comprise 20 to 25 leaders of national stature from all sectors; they will manage a range of scientific and technical issues, from defining and implementing a quality-assurance framework for SUSA to developing advanced technological design and infrastructure capabilities for the web site.

The background of the page features a stylized American flag with white stars on a blue field and red and white stripes, positioned in the upper left corner and extending across the top of the page.

Key Questions and Answers

Q: How will SUSA aid the American society at large?

The democratic system in the U.S. is predicated on civic involvement—on American citizens setting national priorities directly by the selection of their elected representatives and indirectly through their market choices. SUSA will facilitate more meaningful participation in these processes by providing citizens with reliable, objective and accessible information about their neighborhoods, their states and their nation. For example, a builder in Idaho could better focus his hiring efforts by searching the labor and employment statistics from surrounding states; a journalist wishing to localize her reporting on poverty among recent immigrants from Eastern Europe could find relevant data; and a family planning to relocate to an unfamiliar part of the country could search crime statistics, local schools, traffic patterns and weather information in cities around the country.

The data provided by SUSA will also help to ensure that decision-makers at all levels are responsive, accountable and effective. A common factual frame of reference, based on unbiased and high-quality key indicators as envisioned by SUSA, will allow for stronger civic dialogue. And by providing information about changing conditions in the United States over time, SUSA will be an important tool for evaluating the impact of specific policies, thus reinforcing greater accountability for both public officials and leaders in other sectors of society.

Q: Who will be the audience for such an initiative?

Those served by SUSA will represent many elements of American life. Users will include the general public, federal policymakers, civic leaders, foundations, nonprofit organizations and state, local and county agencies. For example, the media constantly seek new and better information and tools to improve the depth and breadth of reporting on complex issues. Businesses, especially wholesale and retail information providers, are looking for better insight into broad societal patterns and trends for planning and investment decisions. In addition, teachers and educators at all levels—high school, college and graduate schools—as well as their students, are searching for new ways to generate broader insight and understanding about the country and its place in the world. Audiences abroad will also benefit from a strong U.S. indicator system to inform their own decisions and to shed light on the workings of American society.

Q: How will SUSA gauge its success?

SUSA will consider its efforts successful if, in the minds of Americans as well as international audiences, it becomes the “gold standard” for public information and indicators of progress. It must also satisfy the interests and needs of millions of people and must help to guide the decisions of government, nonprofit and business leaders. To reach these exceptional benchmarks, however, SUSA must be perceived among all of its users as an authoritative, reliable and credible source of the highest quality information—devoid of ideology or preconceptions.

Q: How will SUSA ensure independence, transparency and accountability in a way that builds a strong sense of trust?

SUSA will develop its indicator set through rigorous and open review. This process will include broad and deep input from hundreds of stakeholders—those in business, education, government, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups and citizens—as well as from experts in data collection, management, and dissemination. The institutional foundation for the effort will be independent, yet responsive, and will be insulated from influence so that its capacity to develop trust with users is preeminent—even on controversial topics.

Simple and informative documentation about the data that support the indicators will be readily available to all users. This information will include the sources of the data, details relating to how it was collected and how data collectors have defined key concepts, as well as any known limitations of their data. Users of the web site will be able to submit feedback on the data in the form of questions and comments to help SUSA fine-tune and improve quality.

Q: Where will SUSA get its information? And will SUSA incorporate data from other indicator sets from the U.S. and around the world?

Federal and state statistical systems will be critical sources of data for SUSA, along with information from nongovernmental and commercial sources. Source notes about the reliability of the data will be provided. Because the international context for an American system of key indicators is essential, SUSA will also integrate data from international sources. Assessing conditions in the United States based on comparable information from other nations, as well as global data, will enhance SUSA's overall value. Thus, SUSA will seek continuous engagement with the global community on key indicators to develop substantive connections with its international counterparts.

Q: What is the structure of SUSA's public-private partnership? And why was it important for the organization to be a nonprofit entity?

SUSA is a newly formed nonprofit entity incorporated in the District of Columbia, the capital of the United States. Its distinguished founding board of directors consists of national leaders from the scientific and statistical community, with broad experience in business, academia and the nongovernmental sector. SUSA will have scientific and technical support from the Roundtable on Key National Indicators at the National Academies. Positioning the organization in the nonprofit sector is crucial to its goal of blending public and private data, as well as its need to build a broad-based constituency and a high degree of trust and independence. A nonprofit designation also allows the organization to solicit public and private funding, and SUSA plans to seek a constructive partnership with the U.S. Congress that will allow for federal oversight, involvement and financial assistance.

What Distinguished Leaders Are Saying

Derek Bok, The 300th Anniversary University Professor and President Emeritus of Harvard University: “Understanding our nation’s progress toward widely accepted goals is imperative in an age where most of us know far too little about the problems and opportunities we face. Supplying such information requires a trusted, nonpartisan source, with scientifically credible and useful data. The State of the USA affords America its best chance to receive such information, and it deserves the support of all leaders who care about creating a new level of public discourse to meet the needs of a mature and healthy democracy.”

Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation: “The nongovernmental sector continues to grow in importance as the crucible where government, business, academia and other sectors of society can work together for meaningful societal change. The State of the USA represents one of our strategic investments in the underpinnings necessary for a 21st century civic dialogue and policy process where collective accountability for results is the norm rather than the exception.”

Paul Brest, President of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation: “Given the challenges faced by our nation in an era of ever more limited resources, all sectors of our society need a shared factual frame of reference for defining, measuring and communicating about progress. Our investments in the State of the USA are a tribute to the progress it has made in developing a key national indicator system for the United States and its strategic potential for improving our collective understanding and how that knowledge is brought to bear on decisions that affect our future as a society.”

Harvey Fineberg, President of the Institute of Medicine at the National Academies: “It has been a privilege for the National Academies to steward the early stages of the Key National Indicators Initiative, and it is very gratifying to see it now mature into the State of the USA. It can become a trusted source for the highest quality facts on our nation’s progress—where we are succeeding and where we are falling short. We at the National Academies look forward to advising the State of the USA on the scientific and technical questions it will face as it pursues its important mission.”

Enrico Giovannini, Chief Statistician and Director of Statistics at OECD: “The State of the USA represents a significant and influential effort to develop a comprehensive key indicator system for the United States. The leadership of this effort has been especially notable for its grounding in the scientific and statistical communities, developing innovative ways that technology can be applied to information dissemination, and for working closely with the international community to help catalyze a growing movement of societies that want to change how they define, measure and communicate about their progress.”

Doris Kearns Goodwin, Presidential Historian: “Chartered by President Abraham Lincoln in the midst of the Civil War, the National Academy of Sciences was created to engage in “investigations, examinations and reports” in an effort to strengthen the Union in a time of need. Now, almost a century and a half later, with its sponsorship of the State of the USA, the National Academy continues to fulfill Lincoln’s original vision.”

David Walker, Comptroller General of the United States: “To be a leading democracy in the information age means producing objective, independent, scientifically-grounded and widely-shared quality information on where we are and where we are going, on both an absolute and relative basis, including comparisons to other nations. America needs a set of credible and reliable key national indicators in order to inform national priorities, improve performance, enhance accountability and facilitate a better educated and engaged electorate.”

On the Internet

The core of SUSA's efforts will be a web-based information source that presents the key indicators in a highly accessible way to a potentially vast audience. It is envisioned as more than a basic web site. Rather, it will be custom-designed and will incorporate explanatory and educational features as well as sophisticated analytics. The heart of the web site—offered as a public service—will be free, regularly updated and universally available.

When SUSA's web site is fully developed, anyone with Internet access will be able to enjoy the same quality of information as policymakers, journalists and the business and scientific communities by visiting the site. The site will be designed to stimulate suggestions, critiques and ideas in dynamic ways that make it responsive to its users.

The site will be comprehensive, yet customizable. Drawing from an evolving catalogue of about 900 indicators, users will be able to slice across issues (e.g., water quality, health insurance cost and coverage, crime rates). Users will also be able to disaggregate national information (where supporting data are available) to state, regional and local levels, and make comparisons along a variety of dimensions, including time, income, demographic categories (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender) and geography (e.g., city, state, region).

When fully constructed, users will also be able to personalize the site to their interests (e.g., creating customized indicator sets) and request electronic notification when SUSA makes content updates that are personally relevant to specific users. Further, it will also allow users to access information in a variety of ways, such as through search functions, by choosing a topic, by exploring a question or by selecting from the entire set of key indicators.

The site will be interactive, engaging and educational. The design team for SUSA's web site is exploring various ways to showcase and communicate indicators, ranging from standard charts to more dynamic visual graphs, maps and analyses. In addition to an interactive display of information, SUSA's site will ultimately offer community features, like discussion forums that will enable users to become engaged around certain issues. They will also be able to create social networks and communities of interest using the web site. It will also offer explanatory and educational features for some of the more technical indicators, as well as analytical tools for users who seek assistance to perform more sophisticated analyses.

The site will be responsive to feedback. The web site's usability and value to its audience will be enhanced continuously by its capacity to track which indicators are accessed most frequently and which functions are most popular among its users. The web site will also offer direct feedback, allowing users to pose questions, request information and offer commentary.

The following screenshots provide a glimpse—using actual data—of the look and feel of the SUSA site. For further information regarding the site and its capabilities, please send inquiries to info@stateoftheusa.org.



Demonstration Site
Only Underlined Items are active.

Browse by
Topic

- Animals, Plants, Ecosystems
- Business
- Children & Families
- Civic Involvement
- Crime and Safety**
- Ecosystem Goods, Services
- Education
- Employment, Labor Markets**
- Financial Markets
- Government Finance**
- Health
- Housing
- Immigration
- Income & Poverty
- Landscape
- National Security
- Population
- Prices & Inflation
- Production & Output**
- Research & Development
- Sell, Water & Air**
- Values & Culture

[Home](#) [Features](#) [Events](#) [Forums](#) [About Us](#) [Feedback](#) [MyUSA](#) [Help](#) Version 2.0



Welcome to The State of the USA

Sound decision making depends on accurate, understandable information about the society in which we live. We hope this site, sponsored by a consortium of public and private organizations, will encourage citizen engagement, facilitate informed dialog and give all of us a clearer picture of who we are.

[Send Us Feedback](#)

[Behind the Data](#)

[Key Indicator Map](#) [View](#)

[Indicator Finder](#) [Go](#)

Ask a Question:

[Go](#)

[Under Construction](#)

Selected Key Indicators:

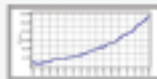
How is the U. S. population changing?



Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Every state in the U.S. gained population between 1990 and 2000 (map), although the U.S. rate of population growth is slowing over time. About one-third of the growth comes from immigration. More than half of all Americans are now over age 35, a substantial increase over the past 50 years. [More>>](#)

How much is our economy growing?



Source: [U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis](#)

The total output of the U.S. economy (or Gross Domestic Product) grew by about 3.2 percent in 2005 after adjusting for inflation, a decline from the 3.9 percent growth rate in 2004. Growth over the second quarter of 2006 as a whole (measured at an average annual rate) was about 2.9 percent after inflation. [More>>](#)

How many Americans lack jobs?



Source: [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

The unemployment rate in August (after seasonal adjustment) was 4.7 percent, about the same as it has been since the start 2006, but lower than the average 5.1 percent in 2005. About 63 percent of Americans over age 15 are now employed. [More>>](#)

[Click on the employment graph to explore the section.](#)

How Clean is Our Air?



Source: [EPA](#)

An index representing five widespread air pollutants that have implications for human and ecosystem health, shows that between 2001 and 2003 air pollution in the U.S. exceeded U.S. Environmental Protection Agency health standards an average of 4.7% of the time. [More>>](#)

How successful are America's students?



Source: [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

Students in different states have different likelihoods of completing high school (map), but overall the graduation rate for young adults (aged 25-29) is about 86 percent. Average reading scores for students at various ages have remained fairly constant since the 1980s, but average math scores have improved substantially. [More>>](#)

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Text Size [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

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1. U.S. Violent Crime Fire
2. Voting Trends
3. Total Species Diversity

Most Active Forums [more>>](#)

1. State of the Union Address
2. Census Report
3. Economic Conference

Top Gallery Downloads [more>>](#)

1. Income Distribution
2. Growth States
3. Home Prices

Today's Quiz [more>>](#)

Americans work longer hours than they did 75 years ago.

True

False

[Submit](#)

Upcoming Conference [more>>](#)



Health Care Summit 06



Demonstration Site
Only underlined items are active.

Browse by Topic

- Animals, Plants, Ecosystems
- Business
- Children & Families
- Civic Involvement
- Crime and Safety**
- Ecosystem Goods, Services
- Education
- Employment, Labor Markets**
- Financial Markets
- Government Finance**
- Health
- Housing
- Immigration
- Income & Poverty
- Landscape
- National Security
- Population
- Prices & Inflation
- Production & Output**
- Research & Development
- Soil, Water & Air**
- Values & Culture

Environment > Soil, Water & Air



Soil, Water & Air

The air we breathe today is cleaner and more healthful than it was decades ago. Since 1970, total national emissions of the six most common air pollutants have been reduced 25 percent.

Simply stated, the environment is composed of air, water and land. But trends in ecological condition reflect the outcome of many different events and activities. Ecosystem condition is the result of a complex combination of resource management at national and state levels, local zoning and land-use decisions, pollution and pollution-prevention activities, natural disturbances, and many other factors. The inter-connection of environmental elements combined with the lack of complete, comprehensive data makes it difficult to track the big picture.

Air Quality

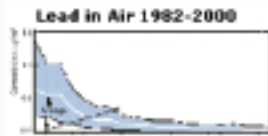


U.S. EPA, National Air Quality Status and Trends, 2001

On the whole, air quality has improved in real terms since 1970, while, during the same period, the U.S. Gross Domestic Product increased 161 percent, energy consumption increased 42 percent, and vehicle miles traveled increased 149 percent. Nonetheless, some 133 million Americans, especially those on the west coast and in the Midwest, currently live in areas with concentrations of pollutants that sometimes exceed recommended limits.

Lead in Air

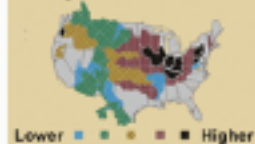
Because of the phaseout of leaded gasoline, lead emissions and concentrations decreased sharply during the 1980s and early 1990s. The 2001 average air quality concentration for lead is 94 percent lower than in 1982. Emissions of lead decreased 93 percent over that same 20-year period.



The State of the Nation's Ecosystems (update 2001), Movement of Nitrogen, H. John Hoyle III, Center for Science, Economics and the Environment

Nitrogen

Nitrogen From Watersheds



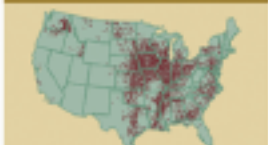
The State of the Nation's Ecosystems (update 2001), Movement of Nitrogen, H. John Hoyle III, Center for Science, Economics and the Environment

Nitrate, an important plant nutrient, and other forms of nitrogen occur both naturally and as a result of human activities. In excess, however, nitrogen can cause significant water quality problems. The amount of nitrate carried by two of four major U.S. rivers ("load") has increased over the past several decades. The nitrogen load carried by the Mississippi River has approximately doubled since the 1950s.

Soil Erosion

Agricultural soil erosion reduces soil quality and degrades water quality. Even relatively small movements can reduce fertility and make normal cropping practices difficult. From 1982 to 1997, the area within the U.S. with the greatest potential for water erosion decreased by nearly one-third, to 22% of U.S. croplands, due mostly to changes in management practices.

Land Most Prone to Water Erosion



The State of the Nation's Ecosystems (update 2001), Soil Erosion, H. John Hoyle III, Center for Science, Economics and the Environment

Text Size **A A A**

Search Site

type keywords or phrase

Advanced Search

- Related Topics**
- Plants, Animals and Ecosystems
 - Natural Resources
 - Landscape
- Questions:**
- What is the condition of our native plants and animals?
 - What are the levels of contaminants in our bodies?
 - What diseases are caused by environmental contaminants?
- Commentary**
- Ten Steps to a Healthier Planet
 - Ecology Center
 - Balancing Competing Environmental Interests
 - Rand Corp.
- Show Me**
- How to Interpret Environmental Indicators
 - Understanding Terminology

