



ACL Data Council

Annual Report

October 2019 – September 2020

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Overview and Highlights

The purpose of the Administration for Community Living (ACL) Data Council (Council) is to support ACL's mission by improving the coordination of ACL's data governance, including the development of improved processes and standards for defining, collecting, reviewing, certifying, analyzing, and presenting data ACL collects through its evaluation, grant reporting, and administrative performance measures. In addition, the Council will help the Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE) meet its mission to provide and promote high quality, transparent information to support sound decision-making. This annual report summarizes Council accomplishments during October 2019 through September 2020 in the following areas:

- **Council Members:** In collaboration with the Center Directors, 23 Council members were recruited to serve on the Council, representing eight ACL Offices and Centers.
- **Topics:** For the first year, the Council had identified four potential focus areas for the Council's working groups: dissemination, data quality, data governance standards focused on federal policies, and data governance standards focused on data collection.
- **Working Groups:** Based on feedback from the Council members, the Council's Executive Team implemented two working groups: *Data Quality* and *Data Governance Standards* (federal policies).
- **Working Group Members:** Members for both working groups were determined based on members' interest and availability (see Appendix A. Membership Roster).
- **Council Website:** A Council website (repository) was developed to provide Council members with access to pertinent materials, including background materials, Council/working group materials, and products developed by working groups: <http://neweditions.net/acldatacouncil>.
- **Meetings:** A total of 10 meetings were held: three ACL Data Council meetings and seven working group meetings.
- **Products:** Through the efforts of the Council and working groups, six products/tools were developed in the first year (some of which are in draft).
- **Interagency Collaboration:** The Council initiated collaborative interagency relationships with the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration.

Council Members

As part of the Council kick-off deliberations, a draft list of potential candidates was created to identify ACL staff to be invited to serve on the Council. The Council chair presented the list to the ACL Center Directors and obtained feedback and additional nominations. Based on the feedback, identified staff were invited to serve on the Council and a final membership roster was created (see Appendix A).

Council members represent staff from eight ACL Offices and Centers, including:

- ACL Regional Administrators
- Administration on Aging
- Administration on Disabilities
- Center for Innovation and Partnership

- Center for Policy and Evaluation
- National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research
- Office of Information Resources Management
- Office of Performance and Evaluation

Council Topics

Topics for the Council were identified and finalized through a multistep process, wherein each step built on the results from the previous step. The goal of this process was to build a strong foundation for selecting topics that represent key issues experienced by ACL staff.

Step 1: Identification of potential topics (pre-Council planning work)

Based on foundational work completed during the planning year for the Council (Fiscal Year 2018), a draft list of 13 potential topics was created, including each topic name and a brief description.

- Potential topics: availability, coordination, data governance, dissemination, education, governance standards, interaction, quality, timing, tools, transparency, understandability, and usability

Step 2: Rating of potential topics

Once the Council was implemented in October 2019, the list was imported into an online survey, which was disseminated to the identified Council members. For each topic, Council members were asked to indicate whether they thought the topic should be addressed in Year 1 or Year 2, or whether the topic should be put on hold for now. Council members also had the opportunity to suggest additional topics.

Ratings and responses from the survey were analyzed and summarized to show the percent of endorsements for each topic and highlight recommendations for the Council focus during Year 1 and Year 2. The summary and recommendations were shared with the Council members.

Step 3: Discussion of “top topics”

During the Council kick-off meeting, four potential topics were recommended for working groups. The “top four” topics, based on Council members’ survey responses and Council Executive Team consideration, were those found to be of greatest interest to Council members. These topics included:

1. **Dissemination:** Identifying strategies for helping ACL staff, grantees, and stakeholders understand how ACL data can help programs and populations, what the data mean, how the data can be used, and how should they *not* be used (e.g., misleading interpretations). For example, it might be advisable to develop a text box to add to all data products and intro or text for websites to display the information. This topic also encompasses considering modes of dissemination as well as providing plain language explanations of data and formats for presenting data in an engaging manner.
2. **Quality:** Developing standards and guidelines for certifying ACL’s data submissions (e.g., how much year-to-year variance is acceptable, how many missing data are acceptable); developing advisories for ACL’s data presentation site (<https://agid.acl.gov/>) regarding possible data quality issues, especially when users cross-tabulate variables within and across data sources; considering whether, as ACL accepts data through the various grantee systems, there are clear

guidelines, and whether all of the grant/contract officers are using the same standards for looking at the data and accepting it as complete.

3. **Governance Standards (federal policies):** Helping determine which existing standards (e.g., the Evidence Act, Federal Data Strategy) apply; determining what other federal standards may be applied to ACL data; developing ACL guidance that reflects the needs and capacity of the range of programs within ACL. For example, this might include a checklist or other job aid to help ACL staff meet requirements.
4. **Governance Standards (data collection):** Developing standards for data collection to make ACL data more comparable across programs (e.g., collecting categories such as age, race, ethnicity the same way; displaying not only expenditures for Title III but also grant amounts, etc.); helping ACL to aggregate select data (e.g., demographics) agencywide.

The topics and recommendations were discussed during the Council meeting.

Step 4: Obtaining final feedback

To finalize the selection of the working group topics and obtain details regarding the importance of the topics and specific issues that the working groups may address for each topic, Council members were invited to provide additional feedback in a virtual room: <https://neweditions.adobeconnect.com/rmqaargfizeo/>

Step 5: Decide on final topics/working groups

As an outcome of the kick-off meeting discussions and Council members' final feedback, two working groups were created: one to address **Data Quality** and another to address **Data Governance Standards (federal policies)**.

Working Group Members

Once the working groups were established, Council members were invited to volunteer to serve in one of the working groups based on their interest and availability (see Appendix A). Eleven Council members volunteered to serve on the Data Quality Working Group. Ten Council members volunteered to serve on the Data Governance Standards Working Group.

Working Group Focus Areas and Goals

To help guide working group members in identifying gaps and establishing goals, a guiding framework was developed for each working group ([Data Quality](#) and [Data Governance Standards](#)).

The frameworks provide summaries of the focus areas and activities identified by ACL leadership and Council members that may be addressed in Year 1 by the working group members, background including federal guidance and strategies on the focus areas, and an annotated bibliography of key background materials.

During the working group kick-off meetings, members of the working groups discussed needs and gaps regarding the topics, determined the specific needs each group would address, identified products they would develop, and established plans of action. For a detailed list of the products considered by the working groups, see Appendix B. The goals each working group determined are provided below.

Data Quality Working Group

The Data Quality Working Group established the following goal:

1. Develop and conduct a [needs assessment](#) with ACL staff (starting with Administration on Aging [AoA] and Administration on Disabilities [AoD] staff) to determine what tools are needed by ACL program staff to ensure the quality of program data; as feasible, develop and/or disseminate tools that are identified as part of the needs assessment.

Data Governance Standards Working Group

The Data Governance Standards Working Group established the following goals:

1. Develop a practical [annotated bibliography](#) of relevant data governance frameworks, models, and guidance (resources), noting how they apply to ACL and its programs. The bibliography will serve as an internal living working document/tool for the working group to help drive decision-making and determine what ACL is legally required to do and what ACL staff must think about when making decisions. The bibliography will be updated over time as new federal standards are provided.
2. Develop an [ACL data governance primer](#) that is based on the [Department of Transportation primer](#) and is informed by guidance from the resources listed in the annotated bibliography. The primer will help the ACL Centers determine where they are and where they want to be in terms of data governance standards (current and prospective views), provide a set of guidelines to inform ACL data policies and practices, help guide what programs do, and help build data governance into program planning.

Council Website

A Council website (repository) was developed to provide Council members with access to pertinent materials, including background materials, Council materials, working group materials, and Council products: <http://neweditions.net/acldatacouncil>. All materials developed as part of the Council activities (e.g., meeting materials, products) are compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the site is kept updated with the most current materials.



Administration for Community Living Data Council

Home

Background Materials

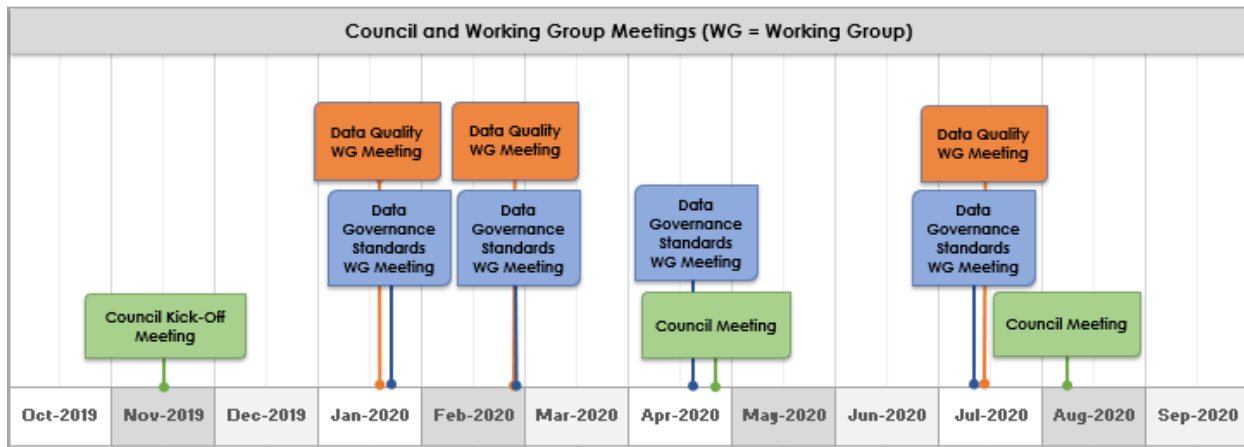
Council Materials

Working Group Materials

Data Council Products

Council and Working Group Meetings

Ten meetings were held during this year, including three Council meetings, three Data Quality Working Group meetings, and four Data Governance Standards Working Group meetings. Meetings were held in person and/or virtually. Meeting summaries and a list of homework items were provided to all members after the meetings.



Products

Through the efforts of the Council and working groups, six products/tools were developed in the first year:

1. **Council framework (final):** The document summarized the overall framework for the Council, including its purpose and objectives, its scope, and ACL's evidence-building environment. It also provides the framework for the Council and working group topic areas, Council structure and participants, meeting roles and responsibilities, products, and reporting relationships. Unless renewed by ACL action prior to its expiration, the framework for the Council will expire on October 1, 2021.
2. **Data quality needs assessment (in final draft):** Its purpose is to identify key issues ACL program staff may face that may impact the quality of the data they work with. In addition, the assessment is designed to help determine what tools are needed by ACL program staff to enhance the quality of program data. Program data are any data collected on behalf of, or by, the Office/Center (e.g., grantee data, administrative data, fiscal data). The draft is considered final until the assessment can be pilot tested with ACL staff. The assessment will be piloted first with AoA and AoD staff.
3. **Funding opportunity announcement text (final):** This product provides sample text focused on data quality for use in future ACL funding opportunity announcements. Staff from OPE are working with Grants Office staff to determine options for using this text.
4. **Data quality 101 infographic (in draft):** The infographic is intended to be a decision tool for ACL staff to guide them in reviewing/selecting data (e.g., do's and don'ts) and identifying what data to select.
5. **Annotated bibliography (final):** The annotated bibliography highlights relevant background from existing federal data standards, frameworks, and models for the Council's work. It serves as an internal living working document/reference for the Council members and working group members to help drive decision-making and determine what ACL is legally required to do and what ACL staff should consider when making data decisions. The annotated bibliography will be updated over time as new federal standards are provided.

6. **Data governance primer (in draft):** The primer presents a practical tool for general ACL staff, providing background on data governance and data maturity and providing guidance on data principles, data quality, metadata, data access, and data lifecycle. The guidance includes examples from ACL programs.

Key Outcomes Identified by Council Members

As part of a focus group discussion about past and future Council activities, members identified key outcomes achieved during the first year, including:

- Identified ACL data needs and gaps
- Gained better understanding of ACL programs
- Began sharing effective data practices across ACL programs
- Strengthened interagency relationships and collaboration (see details below)

Interagency Collaboration

In the course of its activities, the Council was able to strengthen interagency relationships and collaboration on data governance. Specifically, during one of the working group meetings, staff from the Department of Homeland Security shared their experiences and strategies related to improving their department's data governance and data quality. During one of the large Council meetings, staff from the Social Security Administration shared their experience from that agency's data council activities. The Council will continue the conversations/relationships with these and other agency staff to learn from each other and share effective practices.

Next Steps

The Council Executive Team completed several activities to determine next steps for Year 2 of the Council, including identifying new working group topics, continuing activities begun in Year 1, and proposing new activities and changes to the Council processes. Specifically, the Council Executive Team discussed options during biweekly check-in calls, obtained feedback during a focus group with OPE staff, and administered a survey to all Council members.

Based on the outcome from these activities, the Council Executive Team will provide a draft framework for Year 2 at the Council kick-off meeting for discussion. The framework will be finalized as an outcome of the meeting.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

1. At times, engaging Council members has been challenging, given competing priorities for staff. For instance, generally, Council members were not very responsive to requests to complete surveys or to complete homework activities to help inform the development of the Council products. In addition, although meetings have been well-attended, active participation has been lacking at times.
 - a. Engagement of Council members needs to be strategic, to limit the burden on them. This may be achieved by narrowing the focus and/or goals of Council activities and

better highlighting the value of members' individual input (i.e., how their feedback is being used; what will be accomplished due to their input).

- b. Council members should be given ample opportunity to prepare for meetings and to engage more actively in meetings. This may be achieved by providing them with agendas, PowerPoint slides, and key questions well before the meetings. During the meetings, polling questions may be used, and members may be more strongly encouraged to use webcams to support engagement in virtual meetings.
2. Council members seem to have a strong interest in advancing ACL data governance and data capabilities. However, having members develop products/tools may not be a realistic expectation, given limited availability. During the second part of the year, Council members' engagement in Council activities was especially limited due to responsibilities related to the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.
 - a. A strategy that worked well for the first year was to shift the development of initial products/tools to the contractor and have Council members react to the draft and add to it.

Appendix A. ACL Data Council Membership Roster

Permanent Council Members

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Appendix B. Products Considered by Working Groups

Data Quality

- Needs assessment to determine what tools are needed by ACL program staff to ensure the quality of program data
- Checklist with common and specific elements to guide data entry/quality
- Standard operating procedures for ACL staff focused on the review of program data from receipt to publication
- Text for funding opportunity announcements, such as standard definitions, to communicate what data will be expected
- Data dictionaries (i.e., data elements, business rules; definitions; examples)
- Case studies/highlights from early/successful adopters of good data procedures; best practice examples for other grantees (would become template)

Data Governance Standards

- Formal data policy/guidance for ACL; minimum standards/policies that ACL applies that the working group agrees on and can refer back to
- Guide for the practical application of federal guidance/standards (e.g., What does it mean for your job? What are the rights related to data ownership? How do you define the data you use?)
- Action-oriented products that may become policy (e.g., playbook, worksheet with checklists) or may be used for implementing policy; to include broad content and tools tailored to programs
- Adaptation of existing materials/models for ACL (e.g., data maturity model)