

## Federal Figures at Your Fingertips

The U.S. government has a wealth of economic statistics that can be very helpful. Government agencies keep increasing the amount of free information available to the public over the Internet. Here are some key sites:

### **BUREAU OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS** [bea.gov](http://bea.gov)

Topping the list of important data that the BEA generates is gross domestic product. The Commerce Dept. also calculates personal income, corporate profits, and the current-account balance -- a quarterly snapshot of U.S. foreign trade and financial transactions.

With the economy picking up steam and the stock market barreling ahead, corporate profit data are handy for seeing which industries are performing best. Go to Interactive Data, found in the menu on the left, and choose the National Income & Product Accounts link. There are many NIPA tables, so it is easiest to use the index of keywords.

### **BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS** [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

This Labor Dept. site covers all aspects of the labor market, as is quickly evident from the cluttered home page. Given the lousy job market, you may be pondering a career change or wondering which jobs will be in demand when your children graduate from college. Click on Occupational Outlook Handbook. It's under both Publications & Research Papers and Occupations. Here you can find detailed summaries on a whole spectrum of careers. Scroll down to Employment Projections (right-hand column) to see the 2000-2010 forecasts covering the entire labor market. You don't have a PhD or an MBA? The BLS breaks down job trends according to other levels of education, too.

Are you in charge of employee benefits and interested to see how your health insurance costs compare with similar businesses? Take a look at the Employer Cost for Employee Compensation report. It's a quarterly review of wage and benefits costs by industry and company size. Get there by clicking on the Employment Costs link under either the Business Costs or Wages, Earnings, & Benefits headings. The report is listed under Economic News Releases.

### **CENSUS BUREAU** [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

The home page of the Commerce Dept.'s Census Bureau site provides easy access to the 2000 census figures. These data can be useful for business planning. Say you want to start a business in California and the target customers are households with incomes over \$60,000. Click on the American FactFinder link on the left-hand side of the Census home page. At the FactFinder page, go to the Show Me menu. Scroll down to the Income and Poverty selection. Next, click on State -- City and Town, and when the screen refreshes, select California, and hit Go. Up comes a table with median and per capita incomes for even small towns in California. Detailed income, education, and population figures for individual cities are also available.

### **FEDERAL RESERVE** [federalreserve.gov](http://federalreserve.gov)

Any look at the economy wouldn't be complete without a visit to the Fed. If you want to know how the central bank sees the economy, the Beige Book is a good place to start. The report comes out two weeks before the Fed gathers to discuss monetary policy. At the home page, just

select Monetary Policy.

The Fed also tracks a plethora of interest rates. Looking to buy a house before rates get too high? Compare the best offer you receive with the weekly national average reported by the Fed. Just go to Economic Research & Data, and click on the statistics link.

If you are trying to save money to buy a house or get out of debt, the Fed can help there, too. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas has a beginner's guide, *Building Wealth*, on how to manage your finances. To get there, select the Publications & Education Resources link. The interactive site lets you plan a monthly budget or create an investment game plan, and it explains how to be smart about debt.

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