LEGISLATIVE
FISCAL
ANALYST

Key Data Sources and Research Tools

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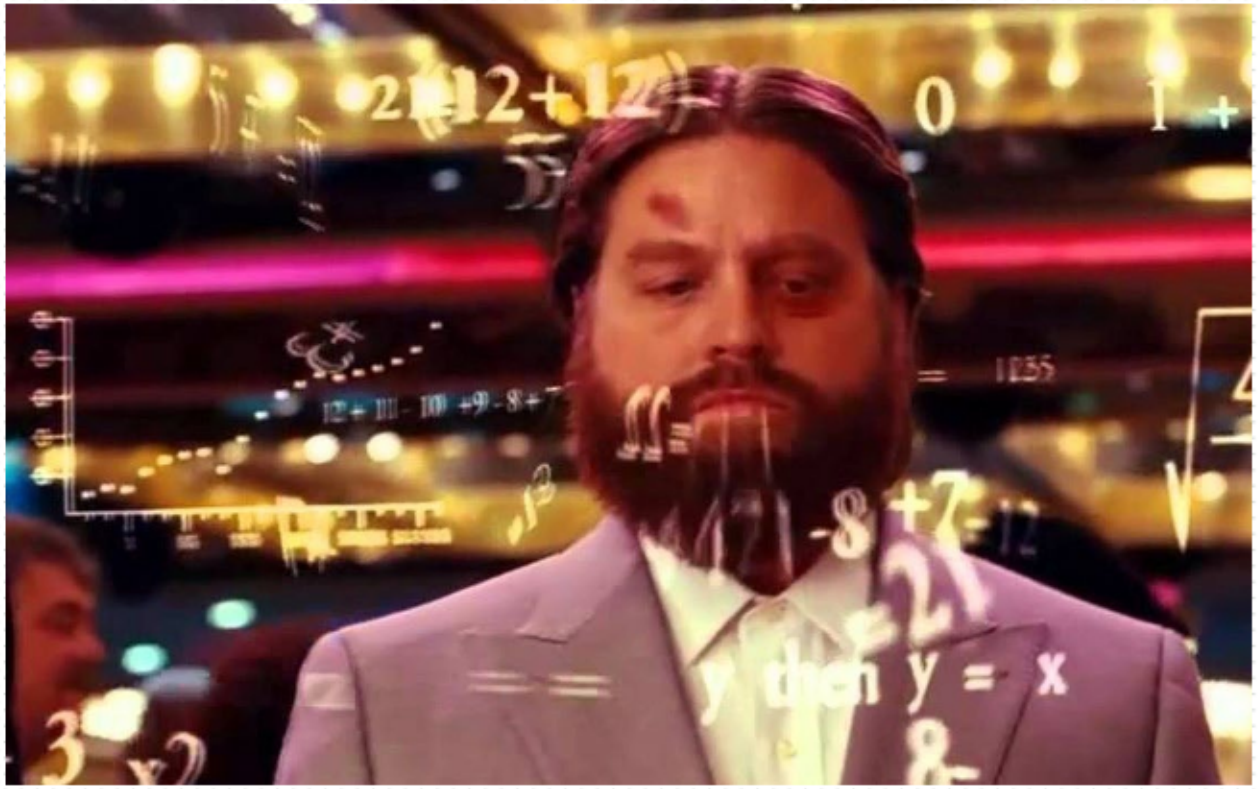
What am I Here to Talk About?

Research Tools:

- Use the internet
- Ask Siri
- Google it
- ChatGPT?

Key Data Sources:

- The internet
- Data source A
- Jargon
- More bullets in a list

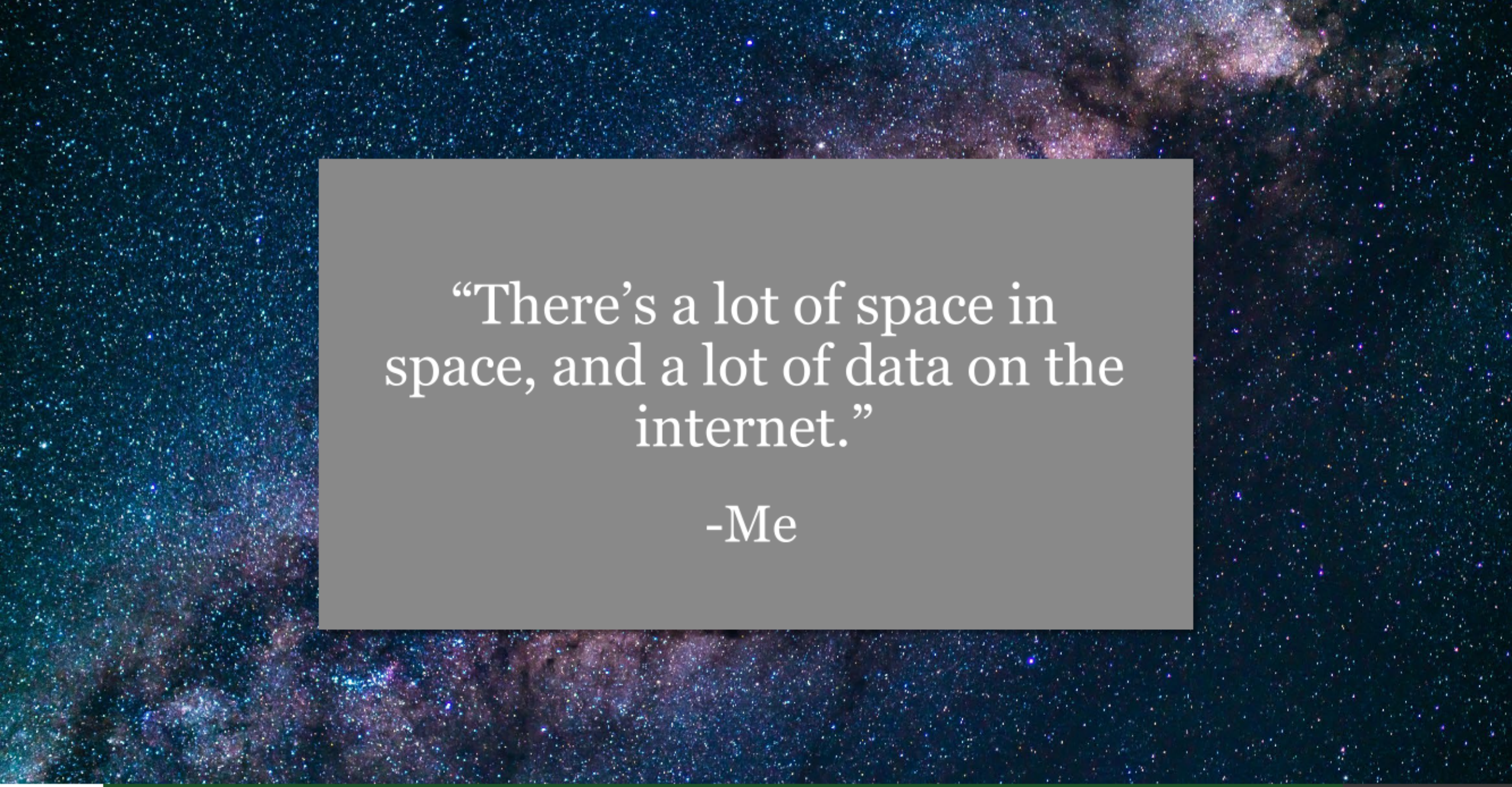


A Quick Detour…

- When you do work, it is YOUR work
- Don’t be afraid to make YOUR work your own

...And Back to Business

- Goal: ~~Dump Data~~
- Motivate a Mindset
- Why is that important?
- Something about a horse...


“There’s a lot of space in space, and a lot of data on the internet.”
-Me

Mo Data, Mo Problems

- Now the issue is not "Does the data exist?" but "How do I know what data to use?"
- The solution is NOT a certain program or a certain data source
- It's taking a systematic approach

The Farm as an Analogy

- Data is to database as corn is to silo
- If you only look at the corn, or even just the silo, you'll miss the farm
- The silo is just a single node in a broader system

The Farm as an Analogy

- Systems have a flow
- To understand/anticipate the level of corn in the silo, you must ask, “Where does it come from?” and “Where does it go?”
- The questions you ask will guide you to the data you need
- You have to ask the questions

OK, Enough About Farms Already

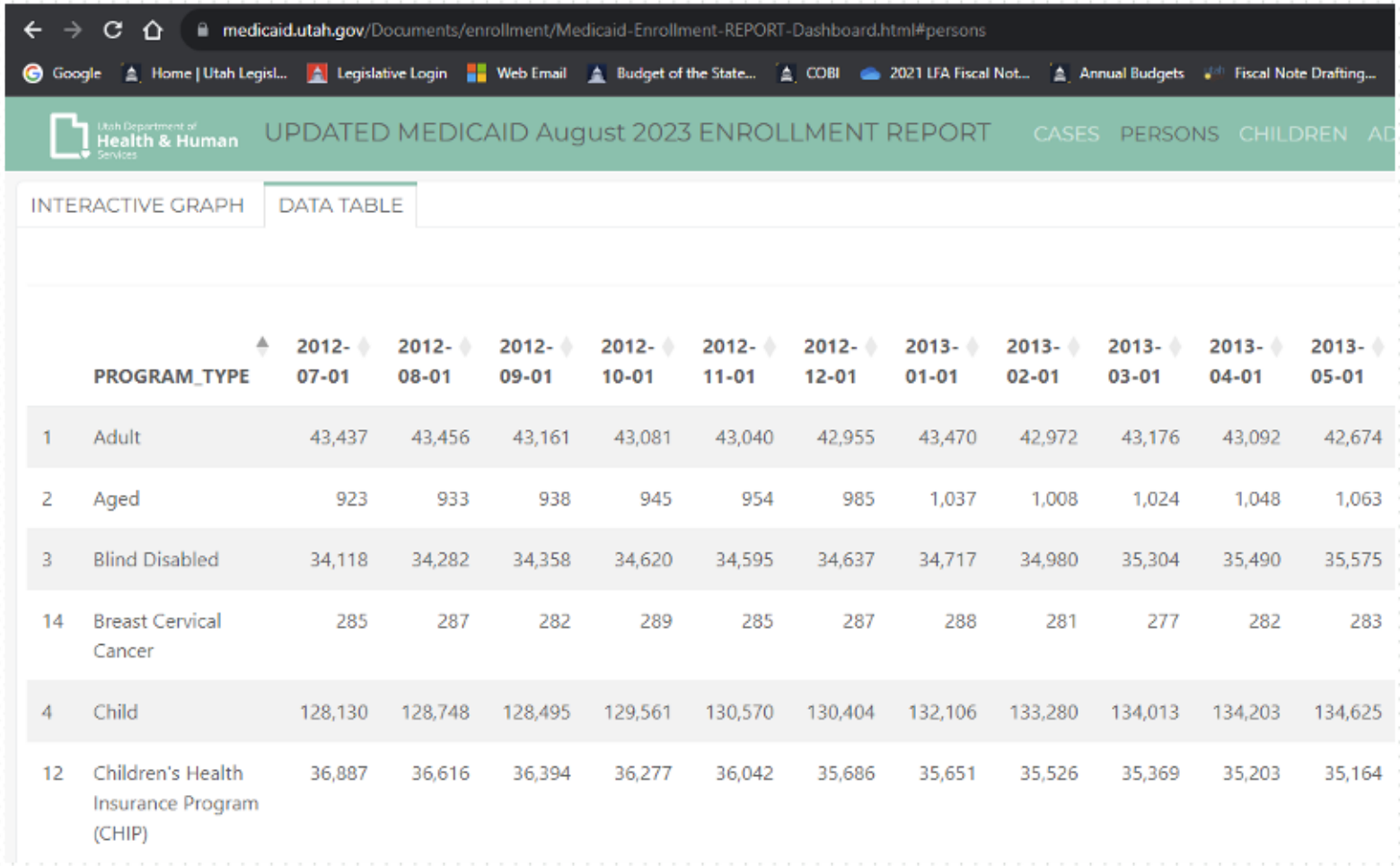
- How is this going to help me with my job?
- This systematic approach translates into problem solving generally
- Developing a framework for thinking about data is the first "tool" of research

A Real-Life Situation

- "What's going on with Medicaid enrollment?"
- Find the (obvious) data
- Plot the data - always
- Evaluate the data – Does it make sense? What stands out? Can you explain what is happening?
- Systematize the data - Where does the data come from? What influences it? What does it influence?
- The best analysts are like investigative journalists – follow the story

Find the Data

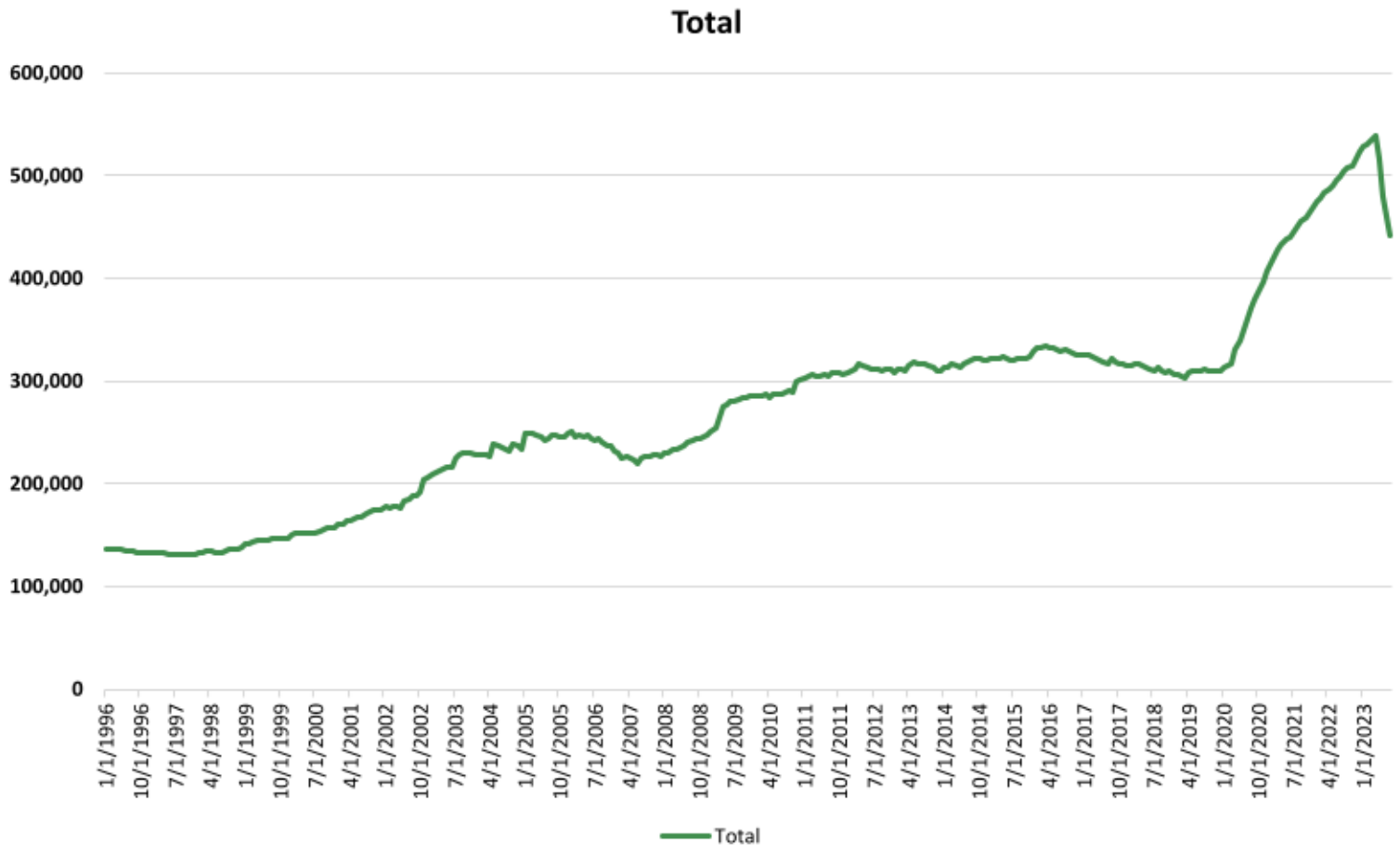
- Who (what entity) might have data on this?
- When in doubt, contact the agency directly
- Assume the data exists (because it probably does)



	PROGRAM_TYPE	2012-07-01	2012-08-01	2012-09-01	2012-10-01	2012-11-01	2012-12-01	2013-01-01	2013-02-01	2013-03-01	2013-04-01	2013-05-01
1	Adult	43,437	43,456	43,161	43,081	43,040	42,955	43,470	42,972	43,176	43,092	42,674
2	Aged	923	933	938	945	954	985	1,037	1,008	1,024	1,048	1,063
3	Blind Disabled	34,118	34,282	34,358	34,620	34,595	34,637	34,717	34,980	35,304	35,490	35,575
14	Breast Cervical Cancer	285	287	282	289	285	287	288	281	277	282	283
4	Child	128,130	128,748	128,495	129,561	130,570	130,404	132,106	133,280	134,013	134,203	134,625
12	Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	36,887	36,616	36,394	36,277	36,042	35,686	35,651	35,526	35,369	35,203	35,164

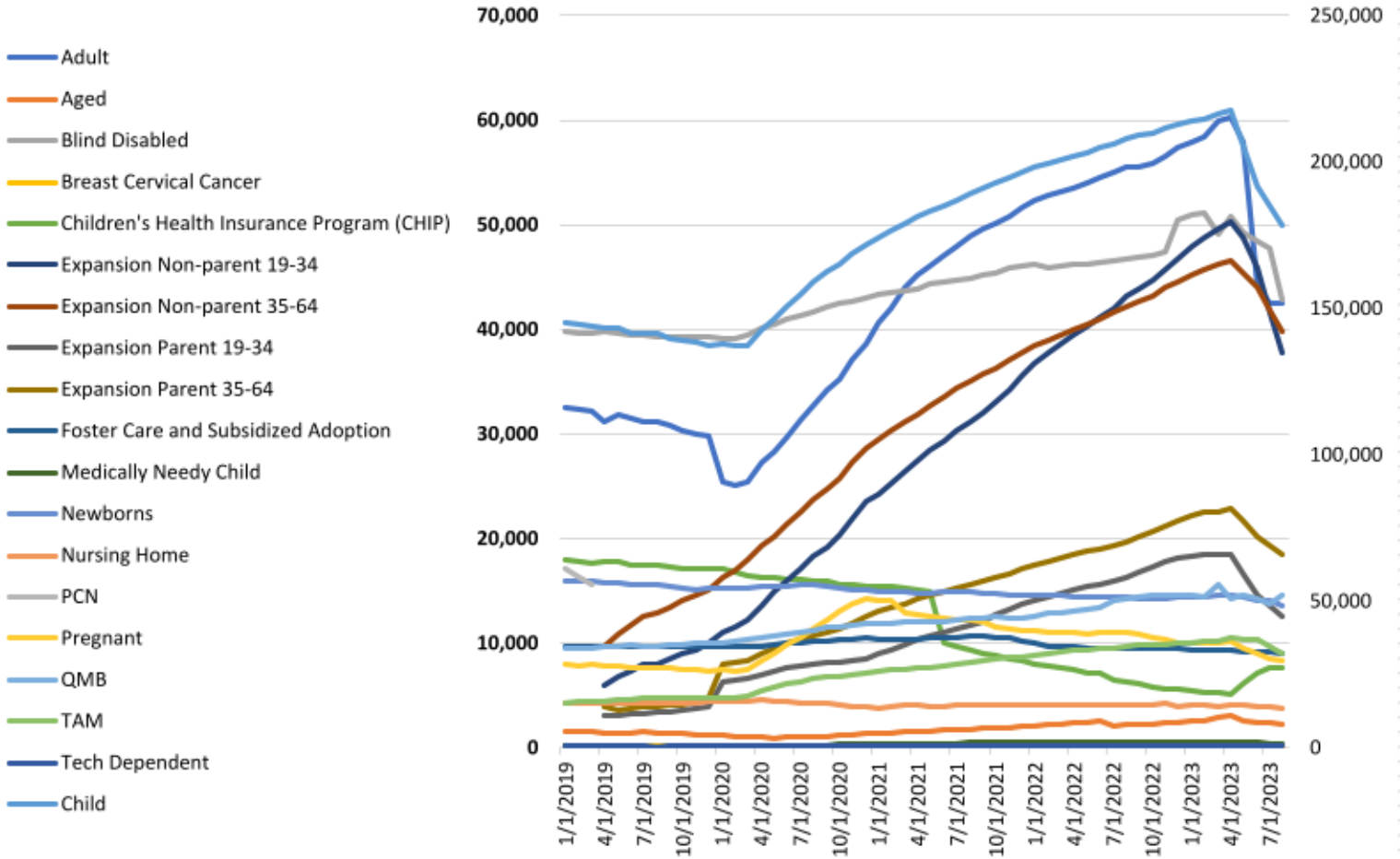
Plot the Data

- A picture is worth a thousand words, and a chart is worth a thousand rows
- Always visualize the data first



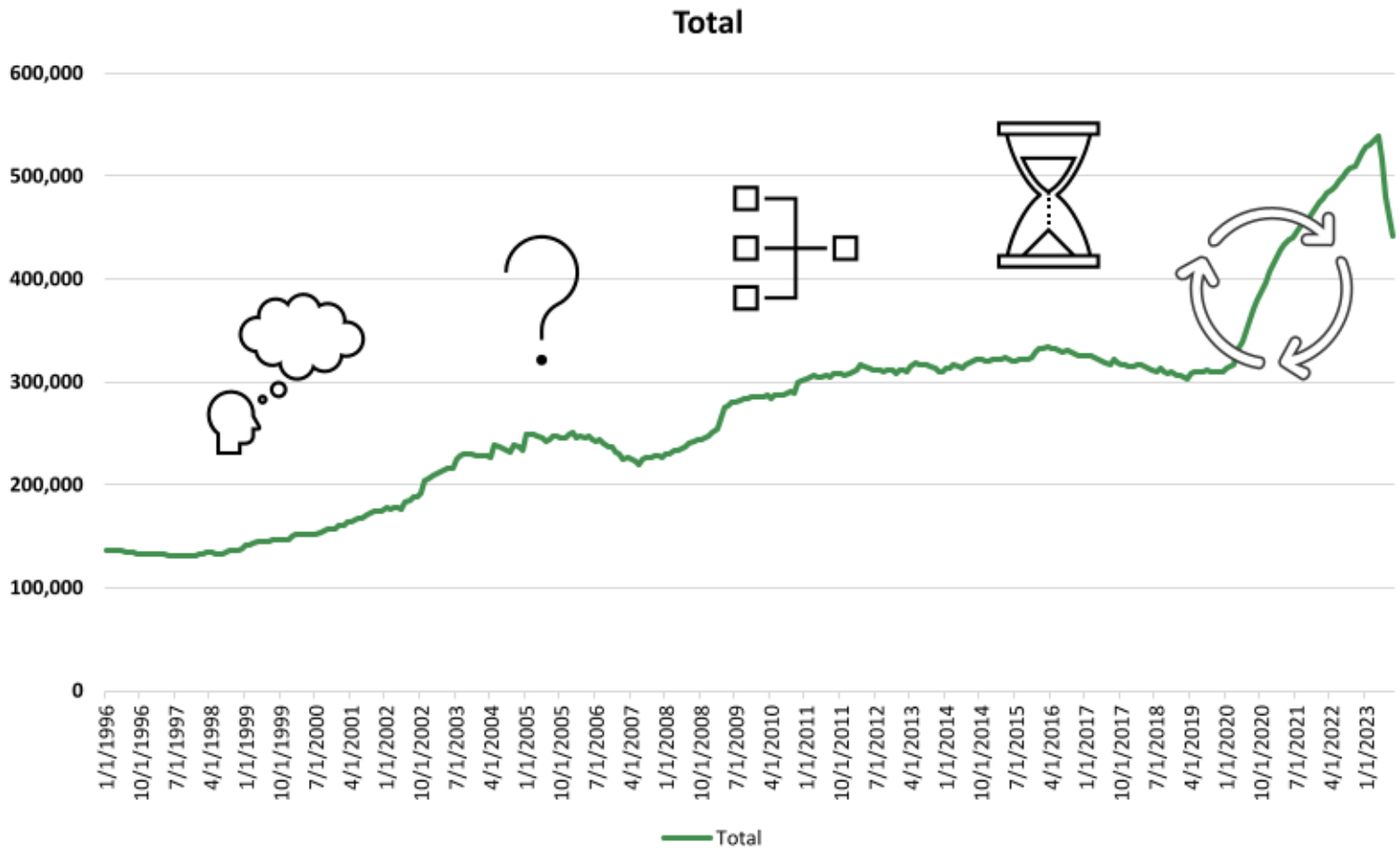
Evaluate the Data

- What can you say about what you see?
- Trends? Anomalies?
- Weird = look into
- Think beyond the corn or the silo
- Data is never just data – these are people



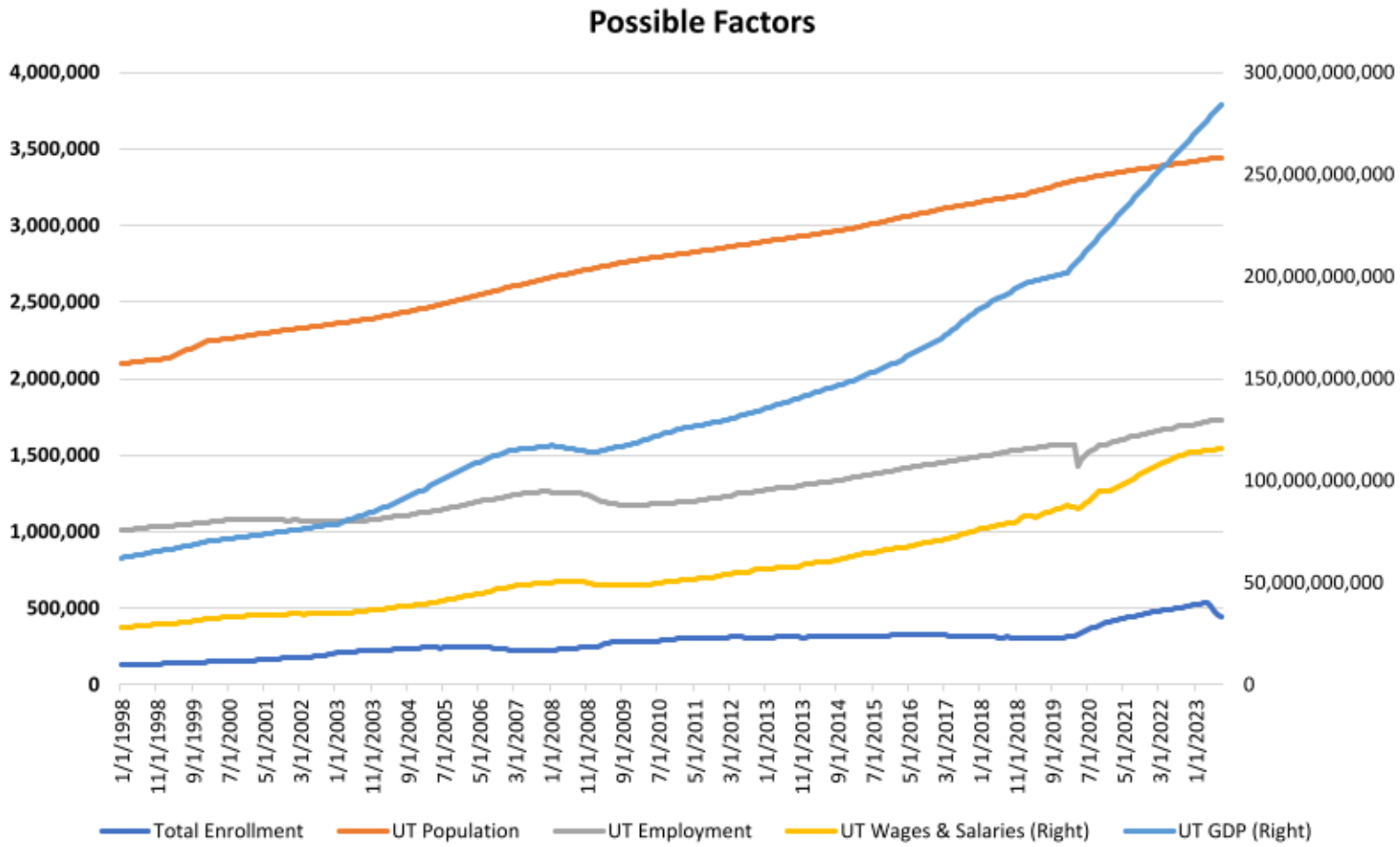
Systematize the Data

- **Who** uses Medicaid?
- **What** factors impact enrollment?
- **When** has policy changed?
- **Where** are those factors/policies headed?
- **Why** do we see the data we do? (synthesis of the above)



Harmonize the Data

- Data sources come in all shapes and sizes
- Comparability requires a common scale



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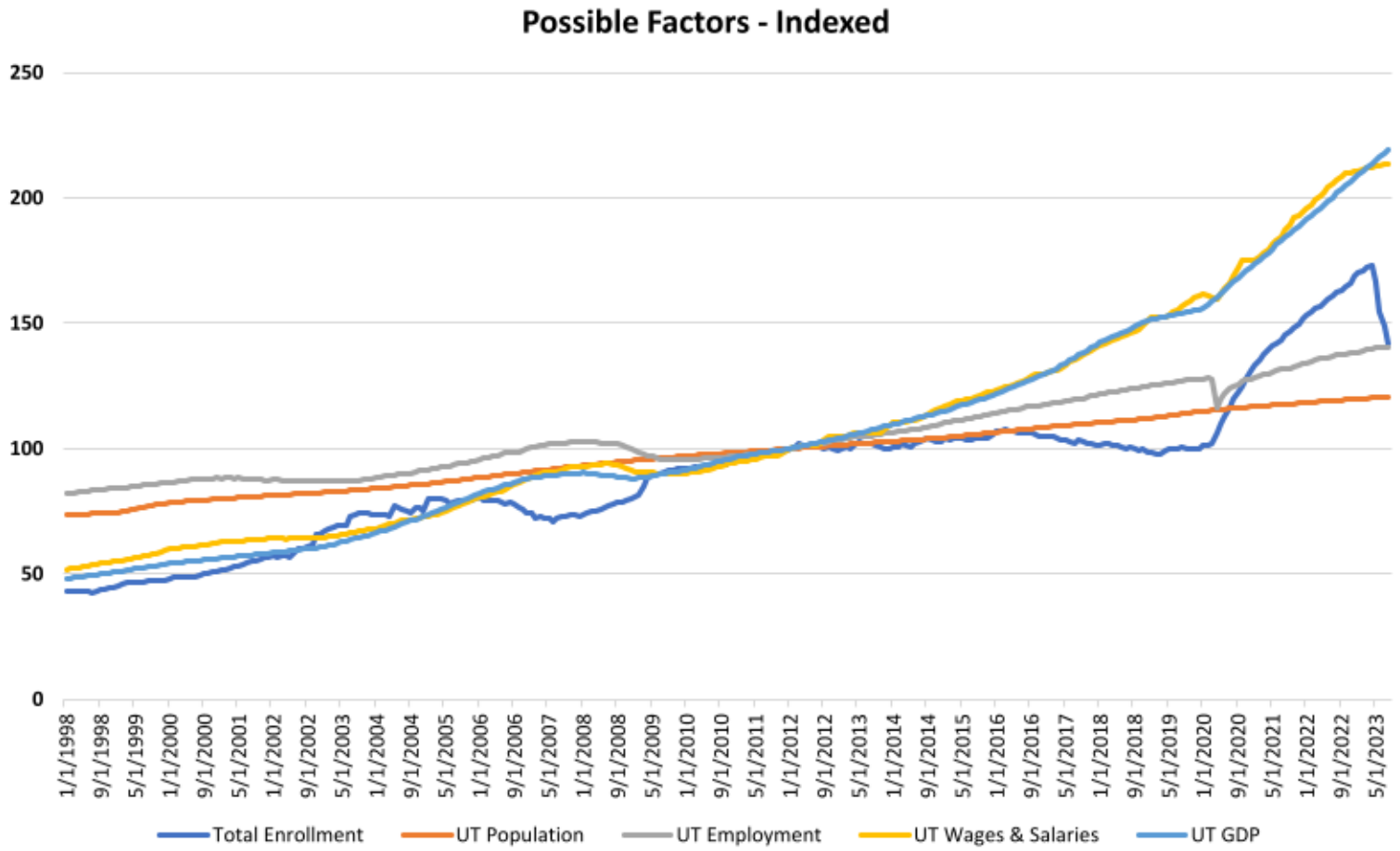
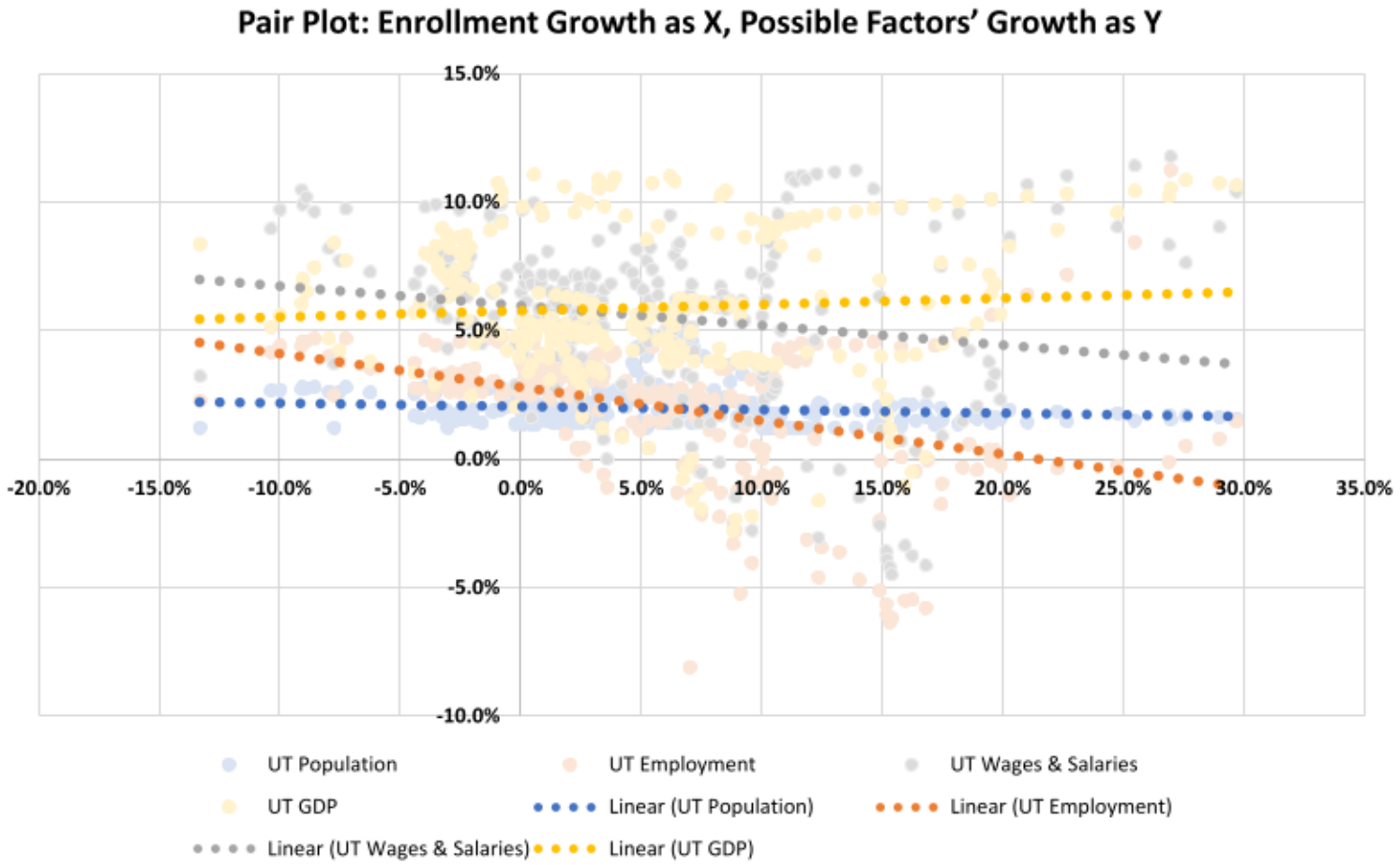


Harmonize the Data

- Data sources come in all shapes and sizes
- Comparability requires a common scale
- Index/ Normalize/ Percent Change
- Interrelationships are key



Tell The Story

- "What's going on with Medicaid enrollment?"
- "It's down."
- "Enrollment is down 13.3% YoY, as shown in this chart, due to the unwinding of continuous enrollment amid a strong labor market, which historically…"
- One of these is clearly more helpful than the other
- Anyone can look up data – it's the context that's value added
- You are the expert

Some Common Data Sources

State Specific Resources

- Your own budget data
  - Work products/publications
  - Internal Databases
- State Agencies
  - Required reporting
  - Many are data rich
    - Health
    - Transportation
    - Economic Development
    - Education
    - Revenue/Tax
- Other States' Code, fiscal notes, rules/regulations
  - Look for similar issues/policy elsewhere
- Other Fiscal Analysts

State Specific Resources - Continued

- Universities and Extension Offices
  - Professors don't just teach theory
  - Bureau of Business and Economic Research
- Local/regional government entities
- Local "think tanks" and policy advisors/consultant groups
- Build your own!

National Level Resources

- FRED
- Federal Reserve Bank Publications
- U.S. Census Bureau
  - Economic Census
  - American Community Survey
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
  - Consumer Price Index
  - Consumer Expenditure Survey
- Bureau of Economic Analysis
- Internal Revenue Service
- Federal Funds Information for States
- National Association of State Budget Officers
- National Conference of State Legislatures

Some Key Considerations

Things to Keep in Mind Regarding Data

- Data are sampled
- Data are often estimated
- Data are often revised
- Statistics are only as good as the data
- Data/Statistics are only approximations
- Data sources can be biased/partisan
- Time series data represent a sample at a given time – the process which generates that data is only inferred
- Seasonality/cyclicality/trend/ outliers can bias estimators
- CY/FY, raw/indexed, nominal/real, etc.
- Scale and units are important

Thank you for listening!

- Any further discussion or questions?

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