

The logo consists of two concentric, semi-circular arcs. The outer arc is a vibrant green, and the inner arc is a dark charcoal grey. Both arcs are open at the bottom, creating a stylized, upward-pointing shape.

# SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

**Report by Theresa Harriford and Alí R. Bustamante, PhD**

December 2019

## **The SEAP Tracker**

Developing a Solution to Critical Data Gaps

# **ABOUT** THE SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT (SEAP)

SEAP is your partner and resource. We amplify the efforts of existing organizations and networks that work toward broadening economic power and building a more equitable future.

Broadening economic power brings attention to how race, class and gender intersect social and economic policy in the South. We explore policy ideas designed to directly address these connections. SEAP focuses on 12 Southern states and marginalized/vulnerable populations within the region and is a fiscally sponsored project of the Roosevelt Institute.

## **POLICY DATA GAPS AND THE SEAP TRACKER**

Accurate and consistent data that is both easy to access and clear to understand is crucial to policy makers, administrators, non-profit organizations, and anyone else working in a capacity of public service. Data is the foundation upon which we assess what needs are not being met in a society, where the need is greatest, which programs have measurable results to meet those needs, and which may be the most effective use of time and resources (Hogan 2005). However, gaps and inconsistencies in data access make it difficult to see issues clearly and create a path forward (Esty and Rushing 2007). For many, policymaking, and public policy work more generally, can be like “driving through a dense fog in the middle of the night” (Esty and Rushing 2007).

The Southern Economic Advancement Project’s Tracker (SEAP Tracker) is an attempt to address these data limitations by increasing the access to and usability of existing credible data. With a focus on 12 states in the South, the SEAP Tracker aims to standardize data across numerous issues to improve consistency in the reporting of social and economic indicators. The SEAP Tracker will be a platform where users can retrieve objective data from primary-sources on various policy related issues concerning poverty, race and ethnicity, the environment, health, labor, and incarceration at both the state level as well as the county/parish level. Users will be able to download data suitable for further analysis along with data visualizations and heat maps.

## **BUILDING THE SEAP TRACKER**

Many types of data are difficult to obtain or simply are not available. When data are obtainable, they may not be in a usable form. Those who use and rely on data in their daily work life are rarely data scientists or analysts. Additionally, policy makers themselves often do not have the time to be their own analysts and must rely on others to disseminate data for them in a way that is usable. As a result, objective data-based analyses and interpretations are not always available in a timely manner for many public policy issues (Hogan 2005). A consequence of this data gap is policymakers’ frequent reliance on interpretations of data made by individuals or special interest groups that do not prioritize society’s broader economic wellbeing.

The SEAP Tracker is a compilation of unaltered data from numerous sources into a single platform. Having one source for much of the relevant data related to public policy work in the South is

instrumental toward the goal of helping policy organizations and relevant stakeholders across all skill-levels access the data they need to make their own interpretations.

## **The SEAP Tracker is a compilation of unaltered data from numerous sources into a single platform.**

Most of the data in the SEAP Tracker was collected from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Additional data sources include:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS);
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS);
- U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS);
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Interactive Atlas of Heart Disease and Stroke;
- and Yale Climate Opinions Map.

### **SEAP TRACKER LAUNCH**

Launching the SEAP Tracker requires extensive testing from within the SEAP team and in collaboration with local, state, and national partners. We invite users to provide additional feedback on December 11, 2019 when the SEAP Tracker is publicly available. In many ways, the SEAP Tracker represents an ongoing commitment to providing accessible, up-to-date, and quality data that informs the most critical issues in the South and a tool to all seeking to broaden economic security and power in the region. Furthermore, SEAP will offer data trainings, webinars, and additional services to promote best practices in policy analysis. SEAP will be responsive to the data needs in the South and will continue to update data and develop features that enhance understanding of the South's challenges and opportunities.

### **References**

Esty, Daniel, and Reece Rushing. 2007. "The Promise of Data-Driven Policymaking." *Issues in Science and Technology* 23(4). URL: <https://issues.org/esty-2/> (Accessed December 2, 2019).

Hogan, Timothy. 2005. "Data for Effective Policy and Decision-making in Indiana: Assessing its Availability, Accessibility, and Analysis." Central Indiana Corporate Partnership. URL: [http://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/studies/Indiana\\_data\\_environment.pdf](http://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/studies/Indiana_data_environment.pdf) (Accessed December 2, 2019).

## Authors

**Theresa Harriford** was a research intern for the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP) during fall 2019. Theresa is a student pursuing a Master of Applied Sociology at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, LA where she also was awarded a Bachelor of General Studies. Theresa has experience as an intern for the Louisiana Budget Project and is a member of the Louisiana Chapter of Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) and the Sociology Honor Society.

**Alí R. Bustamante** is the Research Associate for the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP). His professional experience includes serving as chief economist at the Louisiana Workforce Commission (formerly the Louisiana Department of Labor) and as faculty at Loyola University New Orleans and at Florida International University's Green School of International and Public Affairs, associated with the Department of Economics and the Center for Labor Research and Studies. Alí earned a Ph.D. from the University of Miami, specializing in political economy.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the local, state, and national partners that assisted in the development of the SEAP Tracker and to Southeastern Louisiana University.