



Informing Society in the 21st Century

Board of Scientific Counselors
National Center for Health Statistics

Hyattsville MD
January 23, 2009



“If we could first know where we are
and whither we are tending, we would
better judge what to do, and how to do
it ...”

Abraham Lincoln

Overview



- Problem** America must make progress on critical issues. But without a shared factual frame of reference, it is unlikely to marshal and focus resources effectively
- Solution** Create a single web-based source – free and easily usable for millions – to access a select set of the most relevant, high quality data on the nation’s major issues
- Impact** Achieve a new level of shared understanding, enriched dialogue, and informed choice about progress in all areas of society that underpins 21st century democracy
- Leaders** Key off a vital and historic moment to attract the leaders that can build, grow and sustain a trusted and influential institution

America and Americans Face Serious Issues



- America's Role in the World
- Civic Vitality and Culture
- Crime and Public Safety
- **Economy**
- **Education**
- Energy
- Environment
- Families, Children and Youth
- **Health**
- Housing
- Immigration
- Infrastructure
- Innovation
- National Security
- Retirement and Aging
- Transportation

It is Imperative to Define and Measure Progress



- The consequences of failure demand specificity
- Time is not on our side
- We cannot assume optimal decision-making
- Existing institutions may not be up to the challenge
- We must enhance a sense of collective accountability
- We must move beyond partisanship to problem-solving

Americans Lack the Information They Need to Assess Whether Progress Is Being Made



Growing Public Concern

The country faces increasingly complex issues

7 out of 10 Americans think we're on the wrong track

A growing number of adults believe their children will be worse off than they are

Desire for Change

Increasing rates of volunteerism

Growing voter turnout

Explosive use of the Internet as a forum for civic engagement

Need for Better Information

National debate on key issues driven by opinion, rather than facts

Trust in traditional media at a low point

Few common, credible standards to assess progress

Important Questions Need to be Answered



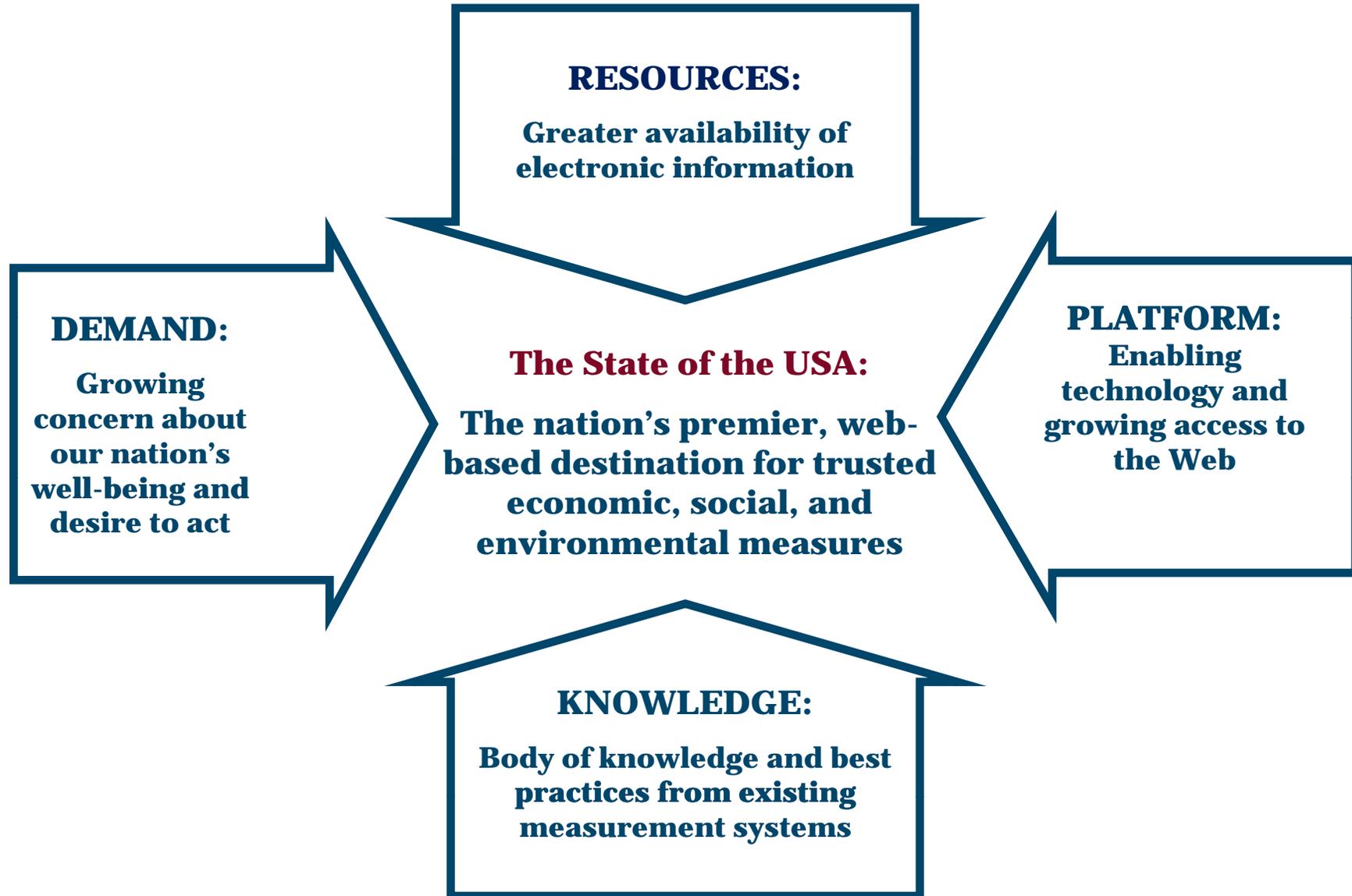
- What key facts measure national progress?
- According to whom?
- How can you tell quality facts when you see them?
- What's going well and what isn't?
- Who is being affected and how?
- Compared to what?

Progress Requires A Systemic View of Society



- Interrelationships among issues
- The need to involve multiple sectors and institutions
- The scope and scale of solutions
- The existence of intergenerational tradeoffs
- An increasing rate of change

Four Trends Make the Time Right For a Web-Based National Indicator System



SUSA Will Serve a Variety of Sectors

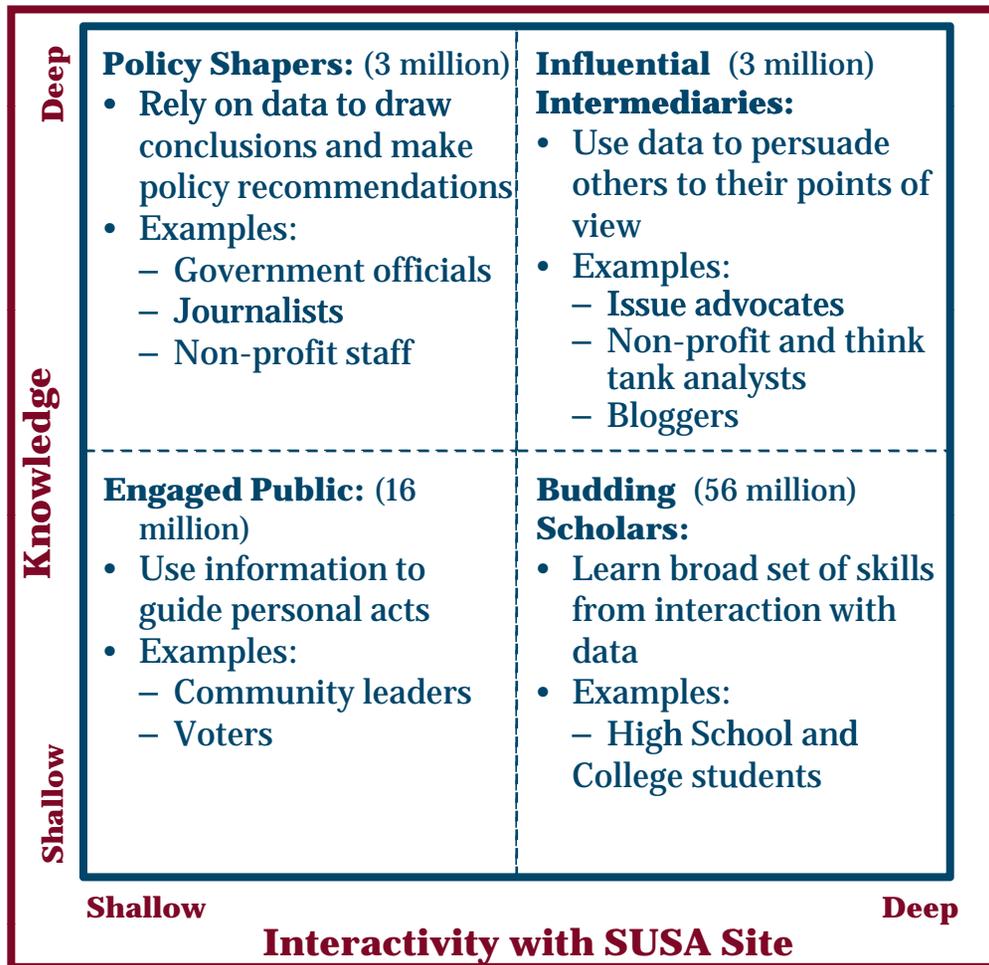


- Government policy makers at all levels of society
- Non-profit organizations and interest groups
- Editors, journalists and media organizations
- Business leaders and wholesale information providers
- Students and educators
- Interested and engaged civic leaders and citizens

SUSA Will Focus on Four Core Audiences



The Four Core Audiences Are:



- Engaged Public
 - Sufficiently passionate about an issue or geography that they conduct research
 - Have both internet access and high-school level computer, math, and reading skills
- Influential intermediaries and policy shapers expand reach of SUSA
 - Raise public visibility of SUSA
 - Add content to the site and attract users

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SUSA's Core Mission, Values, Focus and Priorities



Mission: To deepen public understanding of national progress by providing easy access to trusted facts on issues that matter

Values:

- **Quality**
- **Independence**
- **Trust**
- **Accountability**

Focus:

- **Assembly, not collection**
- **Display, not interpretation**
- **Issues, not goals**
- **Knowns and unknowns**

Content Selection

- **Inclusive and rigorous approach to selection of measures**
- **Identification of and partnership with key data sources**

User Experience

- **Balance of user accessibility and advanced data functionality**
- **Balance of collective and personalized site interactions**

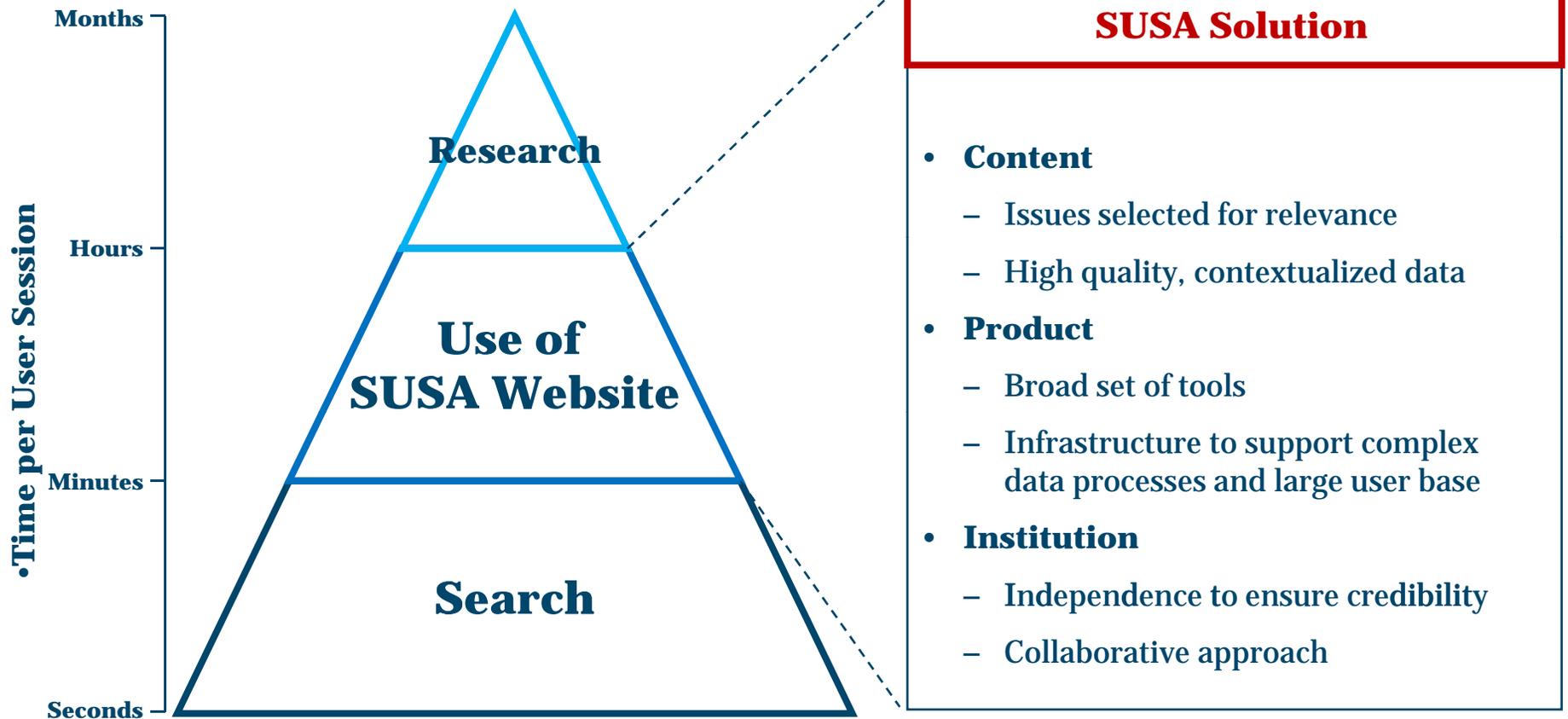
Content Delivery

- **Technology platform that supports envisioned usage**
- **Embedded quality assurance function to render data consistent and comparable**

Institutional Framework

- **Multi-dimensional governance and advisory structure**
- **Capital structure that provides independence and sustainability**

SUSA's Value is in Filling the Void Between Search and Research



How Will SUSA Will Be Different?



- **Accessible:** SUSA will provide information online in a highly user-friendly way for broad audiences.
- **Focused:** SUSA will choose about 20 key indicators for each issue, out of hundreds of possibilities, to focus discussion and debate.
- **Systemic:** SUSA will provide information on all major areas of American society – showing the relationships between economy, health, education, and other areas.
- **Multidimensional:** SUSA will span local, national, and international data, with demographic breakdowns – where data quality allows.

At SUSA's Core Is a Set of Issues Supported by Key Indicators and Data Sources



Issues

Identified as critically important to Nation by the American public and country's most knowledgeable experts. Relevant to the larger question of our nation's progress.

Example: Health

Key Indicators

Identified as a primary means to assess trends on an issue.

Evaluated and verified by members of the scientific community
Placed in context of the larger key issue.

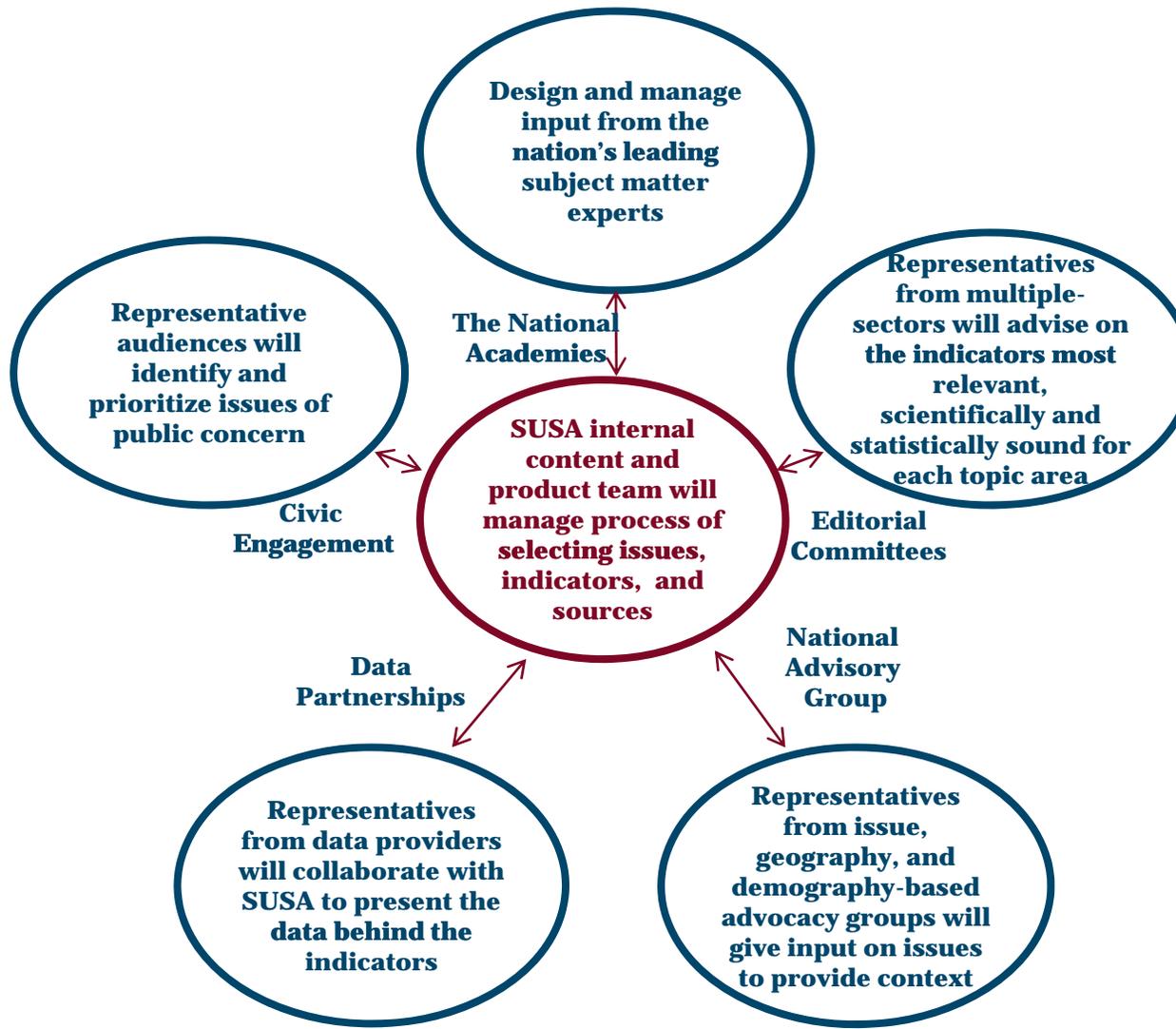
Example: Life expectancy at birth; per capita health care expenditure

Data Sources

Most reliable sources for facts on chosen measures. Gather and submit relevant data to SUSA. Providers partner with SUSA to ensure information is presented accurately

Example: NCHS, CMS, NHEA

SUSA Will Use a Multi-faceted Approach to Content Selection and Development



An indicator selection and development process that:

- Engenders public trust in the quality of information presented on the SUSA website
- Balances the goals of audience relevance, scientific credibility, and public legitimacy
- Facilitates an ongoing, evolving, and responsive selection of indicators for the website

SUSA's Web Site Will Help Users Understand and Interact with the Measures - and Each Other



•Educational Content:

- Helps users contextualize data for each measure:
 - Explanation of measure relevance
 - Limitations of quantitative approach
 - Emerging consensus on topic
 - Links to related sources

•Analytical Toolset:

- Helps all users dynamically interact with the data
 - Disaggregation of data by demographic group, geography, time and sub-measure
 - Ability to compare across data sets

**Issues, Measures
and Data Sets**
(Click to View Demonstration Site)

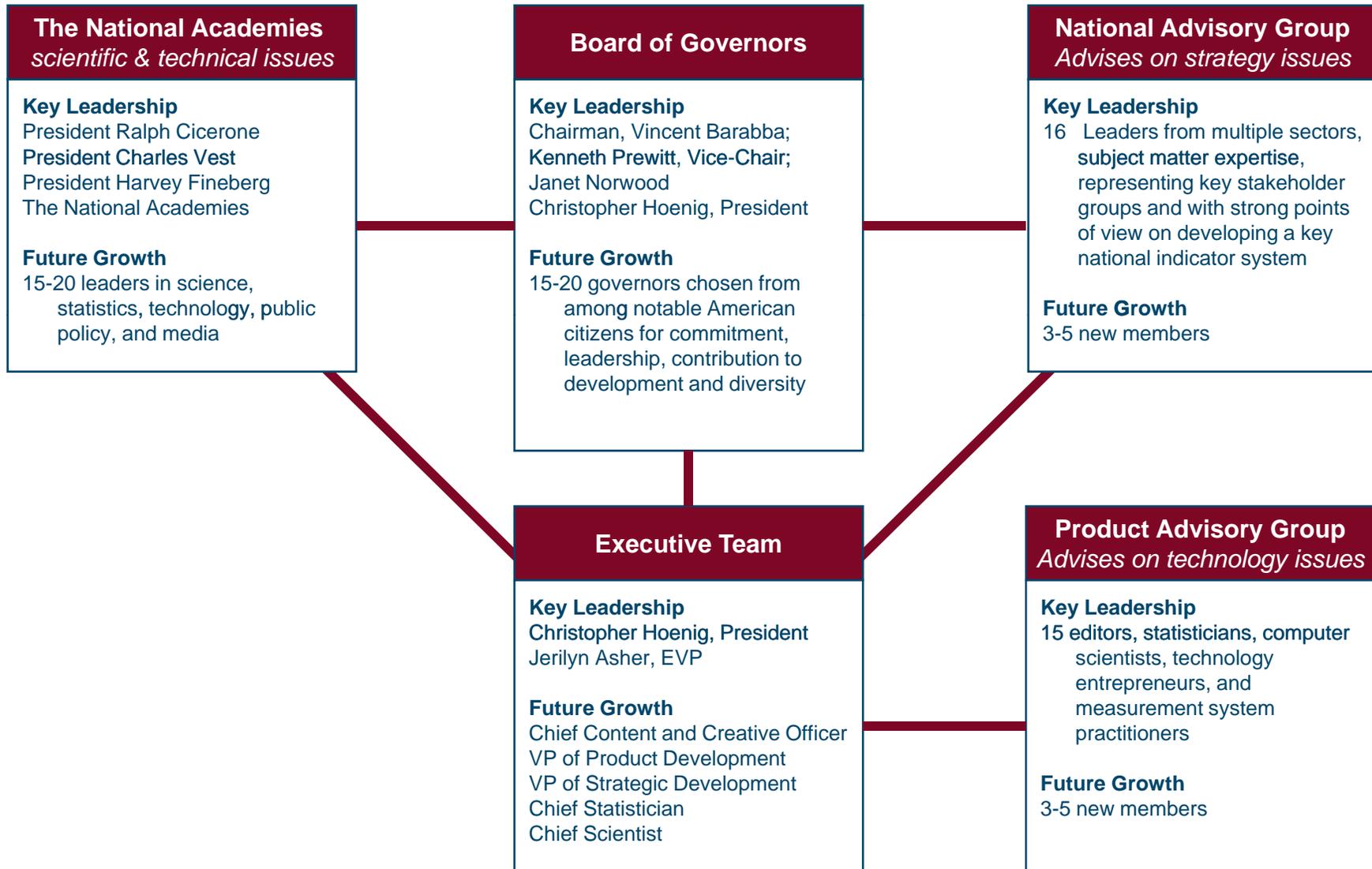
•Social Networks:

- Facilitates user discussion of issues, measures, and data sets
 - Forum for users to post their own analysis of the data
 - Feedback loop that SUSA uses to continually improve its product

•Visualization Capabilities:

- Helps all users see and present data in the format they find most compelling
 - Ability to present data in all standard presentation formats (e.g., numeric, bar, pie)
 - Discussion of presentation biases

SUSA Is Recruiting World-Class Leadership to Manage and Advise the Organization



Fundraising Strategy



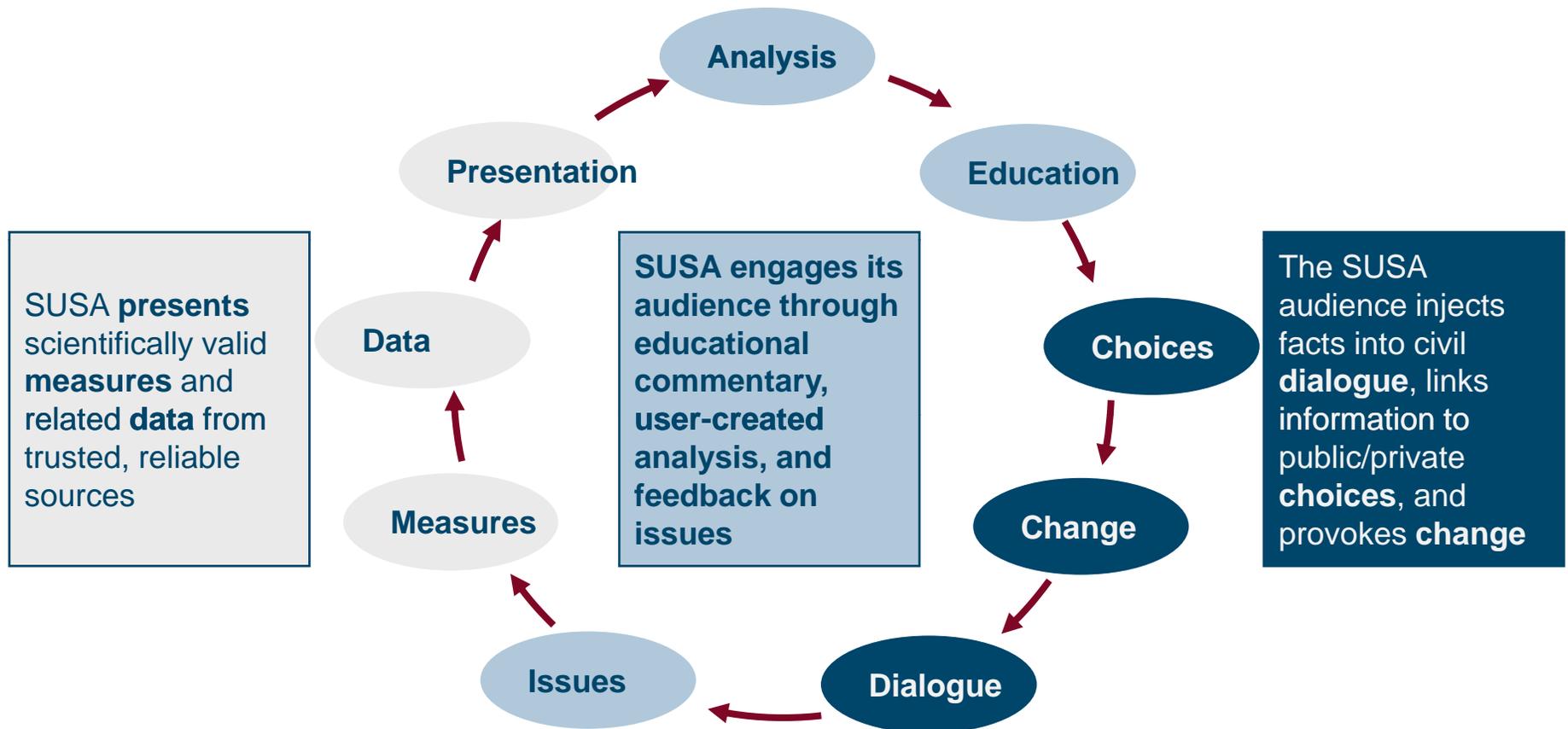
- Build a board of prominent Americans
- Grow support from the nation's leading foundations
- Establish a partnership with the federal government
- Solicit major contributions from individual philanthropists
- Pursue simultaneous operating and core funding campaigns

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SUSA Will Give Americans a New Way to Face the Facts on the Issues that Matter Most



Impact and Value



- Broader audience understanding of changing conditions
- Improved base of shared factual knowledge
- Enriched civic dialogue
- More informed choices
- Enhanced collaboration and problem solving

Impact and Value – Illustrations by Audience



- **Non-Profits and Governments** – Better strategies & resource allocation choices on investments in complex issues
- **Media** – New information and tools that improve productivity, depth of coverage and accuracy
- **Business** – Better insight into broad societal patterns and trends for planning, investment and product/service creation
- **Education** – Improved quality of curricula, increased statistical literacy, better understanding of public issues, and increased levels of meaningful civic engagement
- **Citizens and Interest Groups** – Increased confidence and better understanding of issues and how they are affecting their interests

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Exploit Historic Moment



- Extraordinary national and global challenges
- Transparency and accountability for change
- Distinctive national election cycle
- High levels of public participation in politics
- Emergence of new generation of voters
- Importance of web/social networking in politics

An Opportunity for 21st Century Leadership



- Investing in a more informed and accountable society
- A steady dose of reality on the state of America
- Pivotal role of philanthropic community
- Our watch -- accountability for future generations
- A meaningful statement to the world



THANK YOU

Christopher Hoenig
President and CEO
c.hoenig@stateoftheusa.org