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ROOM *for* DEBATE

The Commercial Use of Big Data Can Help Improve Equality



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The White House [report](#) that sounded an alarm about the misuse of big data in housing, credit, employment and education also highlighted its ability to identify health risks at early stages in communities, create efficiencies in energy distribution and uncover fraud through predictive analyses.

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And while the Federal Trade Commission and others have pointed to the potential for discrimination in big data, it is important to

remember that it can also advance the interests of minorities and actually fight discrimination.

For example, data can be used to improve diversity recruiting in the workplace. [Entelo Diversity](#), a recruiting company, uses an algorithm to sift through publicly available data and data pulled from social media platforms to find job candidates from within underrepresented segments of the population.

Big data can also be used to analyze land use for discriminatory effects. **The Cedar Grove Institute for Sustainable Development** [sic] has been able to identify disparities in city services (among other [discriminatory effects of land annexation](#) policies) in Moore County, North Carolina, through data.

Big data was responsible for a National School Board Association [report](#) that showed school suspensions affect one out of five African-American students and only one out of 20 Caucasian students, which may partly explain the large discrepancy between graduation rates of those two groups. With this information, we identify — and, then, can work to support — student populations with unique needs.

In New York, there is a new campaign to [collect coordinated data](#) to improve health and human services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, after a 2011 Institute of Medicine [report](#) showed that a “scarcity of research yields an incomplete picture of the L.G.B.T. health status and needs.”

Concerns about potential misuse of big data are fair and do deserve attention, but the newfound flood of information also represents an advance in the use of technology that has real potential for bettering society.