

bodies of data collected by different agencies. Although the Federal Government is continually taking steps to improve the comparability of classifications used by the different agencies, the task of integrating bodies of data is still a formidable one requiring substantial effort. For these reasons, research institutions and universities should actively participate with the Federal Government in planning the development of economic data in specific areas.

Need for a coordinating organization

In view of these specific tasks facing economic research institutions and universities, it is important to establish some continuing organization. The committee recommends that institutions outside the Government which have a sizable staff engaged in economic research involving the computer processing of large bodies of machine readable data join to form a coordinating organization on economic data. The function of such an organization would include the servicing individual research requests for economic data by providing a clearinghouse and information about the availability of data. Second, the organization should undertake an active program of data development in conjunction with the Federal Government.

Organizational structure

Although the organization might have a larger membership which would draw on its clearinghouse and information services, it would be desirable to establish an executive committee so that periodic working meetings could be held to determine matters of policy. If there is to be continuity in the organization, furthermore, there will have to be a permanent secretariat which can function on a day-to-day basis. In view of the importance of the Federal Government as a data source, it is recommended that this secretariat be located in Washington. Finally, it is also recommended that the proposed organization develop working subcommittees of scholars concerned with specific subject matter areas so they can advise the Federal Government on data development and the establishment of procedures for coordinating demands for data.

Need for early and positive action

The committee urges that at an early date the Social Science Research Council convene representatives from research institutions and universities currently engaged in research projects involving the use of empirical information, in order to develop an organization which can coordinate requests for economic data. The group which is convened should give specific consideration to (1) how the research interests of all nonprofit research organizations and universities can be facilitated; (2) what kinds of services can be provided for nonprofit research institutions and universities; (3) what kinds of coordination are considered to be desirable; (4) how the proposed organization is to be established, staffed, and financed; (5) in what way the proposed organization can assist the Federal Government in the establishment of a Federal Data Center; and, (6) in what way the proposed organization can provide the Federal Government with advice concerning the preservation and development of basic data.

The formation of a coordinating organization should not, however, be delayed until solutions are found to all of these questions. There is an urgent need for an organized group with staff support to follow through on the problems outlined in this report. Such a group would be useful to the Bureau of the Budget in carrying out the suggestions contained in part I of this report. Further delay may result in the loss of valuable data which could be saved by prompt action. Furthermore, in order to provide for the orderly flow of data in its most useful form 2 or 3 years hence, steps must be taken now to establish procedures for projects which are already in their formative stages and which, unless properly conceived, may in 2 or 3 years time present the same sort of problems which are now encountered. Finally, the very rapid growth of research needs and the large quantity of machine-readable data generated tend to produce a large number of ad hoc solutions which will make future coordination more difficult. Adequate consideration of how to meet the needs of various groups in the immediate future may forestall the development of inappropriate partial solutions.