

perform the essential tasks of record association. The agencies require the same kind of system capabilities. Beyond this, a number of the programs have a joint interest in the same sorts of file extensions. The new welfare agencies, for example, have a strong joint interest in longitudinal data about the welfare attributes of people that are not currently available. Even where these agencies might have discrepancies in the attributes of specific interest, there is a good possibility that the same collection vehicle could be used in servicing their needs.

It is interesting to note that many of these agencies have had substantial resources given to them by Congress explicitly for the purpose of generating or accessing the information essential to the conduct of program. This constitutes a formal recognition by the administrative-legislative process that the established statistical programs are not meeting these needs. So far, the remedial choice has been to fund programs to meet special requirements rather than system modification. This kind of bypass, however, has proved largely ineffective for several reasons.

(1) These agencies have no effective way to apply these resources to system reform that would improve record compatibility.

(2) The funds are dissipated because, though significant in total amount and perhaps even adequate to support major improvements, they are fragmented by their attachment to specific and narrowly conceived missions with not appreciation of the overlap or jointness of interest.

Thus, while the new welfare agencies could probably finance a collection vehicle adequate to their joint requirements, no one agency can really accomplish this satisfactorily alone and there exists no coordinating authority that can identify and exploit their joint interest.

Further fragmentation occurs even within agency programs. The Corps of Engineers, for example, has for years spent enormous sums of money on information to serve water resource planning requirements. Much of this expenditure has been duplicative and wasteful because the money for this purpose has always been funded on a river basin project basis so that it was virtually impossible to take advantage of the scale economies for building the servicing capability for the entire set of projects. As a consequence, each river system has tended to be planned in functional isolation without the opportunity to define the linkage between projects or to trace economic and social costs and benefits in an appropriately general context.

The stakes in program improvement in the Federal statistical system are high because the amounts of money being ineffectively spent on statistics in these programs is very large. They are also high because the improvement in the utility of the information base could have an unmeasurable but substantial effect upon the quality of public administration. The ability to ask relevant questions and get prompt relevant answers in planning, administering, and evaluating programs is of considerable importance.

All of this is only by way of recognizing the Federal interests involved. The stakes of State and local public officials, and the business and research community are equally large. These are the decision units which, by the nature of their responsibility, require disaggregate data sets that are especially affected by the problems of file compatibility. They have a common interest in extending the capabilities of the Federal statistical system.

This common interest has an especially important new dimension. The major opportunities that exist for extending the scope of the file available for analysis with some reasonable economy of effort in the near future rest in an exploitation of the records that are (or can be) generated by the State and local public agencies. However, their utility, and the utility of the file of the Federal system, will be immeasurably enhanced if these records can be brought into reasonably compatible association.

We are witnessing a burgeoning interest on the part of the State and local groups in developing the mechanisms for setting standards for these files and for maintaining and servicing them over time. This source of information is bound to emerge in importance and size. It is particularly important, therefore, that improvements in the Federal program lay the groundwork that will permit effective integration of the Federal file with other sources as they emerge. Furthermore, these emergent efforts are going to require guidance and leadership in setting standards and designing systems in a way compatible with total requirements. Much of this leadership must be supplied by example and by cooperative effort by a Federal system that is moving in response to modern requirements and opportunities.