

RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept of a national data center is an appropriate vehicle for program reform if the concept is broadened to emphasize the role of the servicing capability and if it can be given an important role in assisting the Bureau of the Budget establish standards and monitor compliance. Accordingly, the basic recommendation is for the establishment of a national data service center whose primary mission would be to provide service to users of Federal statistical data both inside and outside of the Government.

This Service Center would have to be designed from the outset to incorporate certain basic functions:

- (1) Direct the file storage and management for significant archival records in machine readable form for all participating agencies.
- (2) Provide a central referral and reference source for the users of Federal statistics. This would include the development and maintenance of a formal reference index and the development of statistical reference specialists.
- (3) Provide explicit facilitating services for the users of Federal data. This capability would consist of the following kinds of services:
 - (a) File rearrangement and cross tabulation to meet special needs and provide an extended range of output options in the form of maps, graphs, charts, and other media in addition to traditional tabular forms;
 - (b) Tape translation and other forms of file modification to bypass some of the inconsistencies and deficiencies in file management;
 - (c) Record matching where file compatibility exists or can be developed by file rearrangement;
 - (d) Disclosure bypassing where requirements violate legislative or administrative regulations;
 - (e) Perform standard statistical routines that form an essential part of the strategy of record matching and disclosure bypassing and which join routine computation with retrieval in a manner that makes a whole set of computationally derived numbers a latent part of the file of the Federal statistical system.

The National Data Service Center would be prepared to perform these services for:

- (a) Archival records under direct management control of the Service Center;
 - (b) The current and accumulated records of administrative and regulatory agencies; and
 - (c) As a system resource or facility available to be used in connection with the current records of any agency where the need cannot be adequately met by the agency.
- (4) Develop the computer hardware and software systems essential to the file management and servicing functions.
- (5) Provide the staff support to work in conjunction with the Bureau of the Budget to develop and establish standards essential to the system capability. There are a number of areas in which new or revised standards will be essential:

- (a) Standards that define the records to be preserved in archival form;
- (b) Standards for documentation and file maintenance, and
- (c) Standards for the classification and coding of statistical data with special attention to respondent units and other forms of statistical building blocks.

(The sooner some of the standards related to the establishment and maintenance of archival records can be established the better. The review of the program [in app. B and in the next section] indicates that the most useful archives and the most economical are those that are developed under proper control and coordination from the present forward. The necessary procedures can then be built into the routine processing of data. This suggests some urgency for making as much headway with these issues as possible. The OSS should begin right away to work on establishing these standards without waiting on any formal actions on proposals for a data service center.)

(6) A research-analytic capability will be essential to the success of these functions. This does not mean developing the capability for conducting research and analysis directed toward issues of policy and management. Such analytic functions should be centered in the Executive Office and the operating departments. Policy research and analysis should be kept separate from the supporting function of supplying and servicing information.