

- (a) the number and size of relevant file sets,
- (b) their taxonomic descriptors,
- (c) their mode of preparation (census, survey, etc., questionnaire forms, etc.),
- (d) their quality characteristics including (1) quality of the data (sampling and response errors, etc.), and (2) quality of the files (state of documentation and file maintenance),
- (e) the extent to which the taxonomic and qualitative characteristics of the data will support merging and collating series for various purposes,
- (f) where the data are located and how they may be accessed including such information as the form of the file (published, machine readable, machine language and format, etc.) and access costs in both time and money;

3. To perform a switching service so that the user can access the needed records efficiently. (The uninitiated user needing to access several data sets in different divisions of several agencies can be faced with a complex switching problem difficult to handle efficiently unaided.);

4. To provide a "semiautomatic Joe finder" to facilitate access to informal and specialized intelligence concerning the records and their characteristics. This would need to be a person-oriented service that would revolve around the role of the professional reference specialist who would deal with the client by person, by mail, and by phone.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN IMPLEMENTATION

A general consensus emerged from the committee discussion about the principal issues or problems to be resolved in the process of implementing such a goal. There was also agreement about the general form of the solutions. The most important issues revolve around three points:

The reference file

In order to perform his role effectively the reference specialist would have to have access to a set of formal reference aids that would constitute the elements of an emerging reference system. The principal aid is visualized as a formal reference index that would probably be machine oriented. This index would attempt to bring into a reference file the kind of reference intelligence implied in the previous sections (2 a through f) that could be gathered and formulated in a formal system. Such a file would be designed to facilitate an iterative search procedure and to generate documentation to service each inquiry. After some initial period of development this file might have the capacity to generate, periodically, one or more condensed summary index documents that could serve as visual reference aids not only in the reference center itself but in documentary and service centers throughout the United States.

The construction of such an index would be a professional task of considerable magnitude and complexity. It would take time and resources to develop and maintain on a current basis. Indeed, the development of such a file would represent an ongoing task that, by its very nature, would never be completed.

The order in which the components of this reference intelligence are selected for development and the form of their organization into a file should not be random but governed by systematic priorities. Furthermore, it should be only marginally controlled by the ease with which such reference material can be organized out of existing materials. The development of the file should be controlled by a research-analytic effort on the part of the staff that would provide guides to the emergent usage. Accumulating knowledge about request incidence will be only partially helpful. Maximum effectiveness of the file will rest upon an explicit effort to identify the principal classes of users (in terms of their analytical requirements and problem orientations), the way in which their requirements are common or disjoint, the way in which they generally intersect different statistical records, and, therefore, the nature of the reference intelligence necessary to serve each class of user. Some idea of the systematic character of the requirements is essential in order to do an effective job of designing a responsive reference system.

The reference specialist

The reference file is only a tool. The key to successful data referencing is the reference specialist.

In the context we are discussing here he has three recognizable functions. First, the professional reference specialist is the essential human link in deal-