

ferent boxes is commonly impossible or extremely difficult, the Federal system has no policy and no systematic organizational or funding provision to assure that basic statistical records will be maintained in appropriate archives. It is not uncommon for them to be destroyed after the limited publication objectives have been fulfilled. Where they do exist, they are commonly not documented, maintained or organized so they can serve as an effective basis for retrieval. There is no service to which the user can turn—equivalent to the reference librarian in the documentary library—for assistance in finding access to those elements of a labyrinth record that are appropriate for his use.

Second, even where retrieval can be effectively accomplished, it is often impossible to sort it into a box that may have special meaning for policy. For example, we may want to sort out of the basic record a measure of the number of Negro families in Appalachia with incomes under \$3,000, a family size of four or more, with less than a high school education, and who are drawing public assistance. You see, the names on these boxes can become rather lengthy. This is particularly true of information that can serve policy. It doesn't take much imagination to see how vital information of this general type may be for establishing or reviewing public policy related to poverty or education. But, in servicing such information requirements, a special problem usually arises. The attributes of income may come from tax records, the demographic characteristics from census records, the public assistance record from the Social Security Administration, or some other agency.

Even where there is no problem of retrieving these data, problems arise because the different agencies and different programs define the basic respondent unit in different ways that preclude the association of their characteristics. For example, some business data are collected on an enterprise basis and some on an establishment basis. Matching attributes of these records becomes exceedingly difficult. Again, different agencies often define the characteristics differently. The electrical appliance industry in Bureau of Labor Statistics may be defined to contain a different array of establishments than the electrical appliance industry in Census. The respondent units may carry similar tags which, in fact, mean different things.

In short, serving policy or social research often involves bringing together data which are *separately generated* in the collection process but which pertain to *inherently connected* relationships in economic and social behavior.

This means that, if the potential for serving public policy and social research in a computer age is to be realized, government statistical programs will have to take as a fundamental part of their mission providing the services that are essential. This, in turn, implies changes in program orientation that reach all the way back to the standards and procedures for collecting, classifying and tabulating data, as well as providing the hardware and software capability for file retrieval, tape translation, file rearrangements, record matching and standard statistical routines.

What is the stake or payoff involved in reforms that would provide the capability of serving public policy and social research in this way?

There is unfortunately no way of giving a precise answer. We are talking about an altogether new kind of capability. The demand upon