

Office of Statistical Standards in the Bureau of the Budget, to produce a higher degree of integration and centralization. Although the Office of Statistical Standards has led to considerable improvement and rationalization, the Federal statistical system continues to operate on a highly decentralized and uncoordinated basis.

In 1959, the Social Science Research Council appointed a committee to study the problems of the preservation of data and access to data in the different agencies of the Federal Government. After considerable study of the statistical activities of 20 Federal agencies producing some 600 bodies of data represented by 100 million punchcards and 30,000 computer tapes, the committee came to the conclusion that the present organization of statistical information in the Federal Government resulted in loss of important data, inaccessibility of information, and excessive duplication. Despite the use of computers and punchcards, Government agencies were still primarily geared to producing statistical tabulations.

Because most agencies had operating functions, they did not consider the preservation of data to be an important function, and they were unable to service the legitimate requests for information by other Government agencies or by outside users. Although disclosure sometimes represented a proper obstacle to the interchange of information, it was often used as a cloak for inefficiency and as a device for avoiding the performing of service functions for others. Even internally, many Government agencies were careless in the preparation and preservations of their own statistical materials. The basic computer tapes were often left in an unedited and uncorrected state, so that they could not be used over again, and documentation concerning the tapes was almost always inadequate. Because each agency was concerned with the development of its own data without respect to the activities of other Government agencies, there was excessive duplication in the procurement of information from respondents. The same reporting unit was required to provide approximately the same information to a number of different Government agencies. In brief, although the decentralization of the Federal statistical system was acceptable in the precomputer period in a situation where the effective limits on the use of data were imposed by difficulties of processing and handling of data, this same decentralization poses serious problems of coordination and integration given the data processing potential of the new computer technology.

PROPOSALS FOR THE COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL PROGRAMS

In view of these findings, the Social Science Research Council's Committee of the Preservation and Use of Economic Data recommended the establishment of a Federal data center which would have the authority to obtain copies of computer tapes and other machine readable data produced by all Federal agencies. Such a Federal data center would have the functions of providing data and service facilities, so that within the proper safeguards concerning the disclosure of information both Federal agencies and users outside the Government would have access to basic data. The Bureau of the Budget, in response to these recommendations, undertook its own evaluation of the desirability of such a facility. A report prepared by Edgar S. Dunn, of