

Interagency Committee on Measurement of Real Output, which has been appointed to develop comparable series in this area;

Consumer Expenditures Survey Committee, a committee specifically assigned the task of assessing Federal needs for such data on a continuing basis.

The Office of Statistical Standards also consults with the Federal Statistics Users Conference and participates in its sessions.

Of course, the advice of different users may conflict—because for different purposes somewhat differing data or concepts are needed; because one user is more interested in historical continuity and another in current measurement only; because one is interested in a quick summary report for a current indicator and another insists on geographic and industry detail, etc.

In addition to the needs of the users, the burden on respondents, the costs to the Government and the technical feasibility of alternative ways of meeting the needs must also be considered. Under the circumstances, there is no easy formula or set of guidelines for weighing needs. In my prepared testimony, I pointed to the use of the national accounts framework as one set of guidelines, which helps us weigh the importance of certain types of data, but for many areas those are not relevant. We try to assess the urgency of expressed requirements, and in particular, to anticipate developing demands for data, at the same time keeping in mind relevant costs and the availability of feasible alternatives for satisfying all or part of the need. In this process, which is obviously an art rather than a science, the hearings and advice of the Subcommittee on Economic Statistics have been particularly helpful in assembling the views of a wide group of users and in focusing on the gaps and deficiencies of the statistical system most in need of improvement.

The problems are particularly difficult when the needs of users conflict. For example, the number of questions which can be asked in a census is limited by considerations of cost, burden on respondents and impact on quality of results. Thus evaluation of such issues requires that we ask questions such as: should this limited space be devoted more to the needs of Federal or local agencies for data required to administer government programs? To the needs of economic, demographic or social theorists for new types of information? or to the needs of business for more detailed geographic data on consumer markets? It is difficult to conceive of any easy system for resolving such conflicting interests.

Q. 2. "Do you feel that there is a need for an *index* concerning the availability of Federal data including a description?"

A. 2. Yes, a really first class comprehensive index would certainly be useful. The preparation of a comprehensive index to Federal statistical data has been proposed from time to time. We have never had the resources to incur the very substantial costs involved in developing and maintaining a really meaningful index on a current basis.

If a Federal Statistical Data Center is established, its responsibilities should include preparation and issuance of appropriate guides or indexes to the data available in the Center; and, by extension, to other bodies of data that could be related to those in the Center. A comprehensive index is a logical part of the work of a Statistical Data Center and its general reference and service function.