

(3) What proposals are there for a more integrated statistical system?

(4) Would further integration and particularly a national data center present a threat to personal privacy?

(5) Is the present administrative machinery adequate for the tasks at hand?

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION?

The statistical programs of the Federal and State Governments, although good by historical or relative standards, are not sufficiently integrated or coordinated. Indeed, we do not have "a national statistical system" but rather several subsystems and some rather unrelated pieces. The present situation has evolved over many years, whereby new statistical series were initiated in response to the changing forces in our economy and the changing concerns of the time. The various bodies of data were collected with different objectives in mind and by different agencies of Government. Different objectives were often unavoidable and even desirable, but they should not be allowed to lead to duplication or the neglect of general high priority statistical needs, as has too often been true.

Government statistical programs focus attention on measurements of particular economic, social, or demographic phenomena. The programs themselves are oriented to the production and publication of statistical series, and the primary device for information retrieval and dissemination is the printed publication.

In general, the bodies of data do not mesh according to any overall system and there is much inflexibility which often prevents fitting the micro data to behavioral models. Reasons for the incompatibility include the following:

(1) differing definitions, classifications, and timing of respondent reports when uniformity is needed;

(2) difficulties of access to original or source data;

(3) differing qualities of data and inconsistent documentation.

In regard to the coordination among producers and users of data, the present system appears to be pragmatic and informal. In many cases, the statistical programs are connected with the administration of particular programs, and decisions bearing on statistical matters (for example, questions concerning the publication of series and changes in definition), tend to be highly influenced by the groups most closely affected by the operating programs. In some cases, the agencies have advisory groups and in other instances, the agency contacts with users tend to be more informal. To the extent that statistical decisions are influenced by particular groups, there may be a tendency for general needs to go unmet.

The decentralized organization of the statistical system, like the programs themselves, has evolved without a detailed, overall plan. This decentralization has imparted a dynamic character to the system and has enabled it to meet many emerging needs. At the same time, the coordinating efforts of the Bureau of the Budget have prevented many of the major adverse effects of decentralized efforts. However, under present circumstances, much more needs to be done and can be done to further integration—without sacrificing the benefits stemming from the basic decentralization of the data producing processes. As