

NEW YORK STATE'S STATISTICAL COORDINATION PROGRAM

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New York State's statistical coordination program is two years old. It was started at about the same time that the Governor's Conference adopted a proposal for its Executive Committee to make "appropriate investigation and recommendations to the states for the standardization of statistical data in reporting, analyzing, and evaluating governmental services." The Executive Committee made a study and recommended that each state establish an office of statistical standards and that a national conference on the subject be called. This past February the first National Conference on Comparative Statistics was held in Washington D.C.

However, the background of New York State's program goes back more than a decade, and the Albany Chapter of the American Statistical Association played a role in founding New York's program.

Background

During the 1950's New York had an organization of research directors -- the Interdepartmental Committee on Research -- which met periodically to discuss matters of pertinence to those in the research and statistical field. One concern of the Committee was the lack of data in certain areas, particularly in the field of population. A Subcommittee on Population was established to investigate the problem and in 1956 issued a report documenting the need for better and more current data. A major recommendation called for establishment of an Office of Population Research within the Executive Department, but no action was taken at that time. (Population projections, now the responsibility of the Office of Planning Coordination, Executive Department, have been made for the State for the next 30 years, with breakdowns by county, age and sex.)

During the same period, the 1950's and early 1960's, the Albany Chapter of the American Statistical Association was also concerned with the lack of data and the lack of a focal point for statistics within the State. A number of meetings were held between representatives of the Chapter and of the Division of the Budget to discuss the problem and possible solutions. The Chapter then recommended establishment of a central statistical office in a central staff agency.

Thus, there was pressure for a central statistical agency from both within and without State government.

Factors Leading to Need for Central Statistical Office

What were the "gaps" in statistics that required establishment of some sort of central statistical agency?

1. In some cases basic statistics were not available. There was no focal point within the State government to pinpoint the need for data.

2. New York State has some 40 agencies, many of which engage in research and statistical activities in the social sciences. There was no formal mechanism for an exchange of information among these agencies. In some cases, different agencies were working on the same problem, unaware of the activities of others.

3. The statistics produced varied widely in terms of coverage and quality. Some figures were simply by-products of a routine operation with no attempt made to modify them for general use. In other cases, the conditions under which statistics were originally produced had changed, but no comparable change had been made in the basic data.

4. The growth of State government, in terms of programs, people and cost, has increased its complexity and has added to the decision-making alternatives for State executives. What was needed was an improved data base for decision-making for operating programs, planning and budgeting.

Factors Considered in Establishing the Central Statistical Office

In establishing a central statistical office, two basic decisions had to be made -- the location of the office within State government, and its functions.

1. Location

In deciding where to locate the function, a number of factors were considered. Several State agencies, such as Commerce and Labor, are heavily involved in the production of statistics of a general or economic nature. Some thought was given to establishing the central statistical agency within such an operating department. However, since each of these is equal in terms of hierarchy, it was felt that a central statistical office within an operating agency might not command the cooperation of other line agencies. Consequently, it was decided

that the proposed agency should be located within the Executive Department.

Of the staff agencies in the Executive Department, the one with statutory authority, continuity, and good communications with all State agencies was the Division of the Budget. Accordingly, the central statistical function was established within the Division of the Budget.

Establishment of the Office of Statistical Coordination

The specific impetus for establishing the Statistical Coordination section came in 1964 when the Division of the Budget instituted an integrated Planning/Programing/Budgeting system. This section was charged with providing the statistical base for the system. Both budget planning and coordination were placed under an assistant director reporting directly to the Budget Director.

Functions

In broad terms the four principal functions of the central statistical office are as follows:

1. To improve statistical output so that the data necessary for decision-making, budgeting, forecasting and planning are available.
2. To promote the exchange of information within State service, and between the State service and outside organizations.
3. To act as a clearing house.
4. To provide technical assistance.

(The specific functions of the office -- current and prospective -- are enumerated in an appendix to this paper.)

Improve Statistical Output so that Data Necessary for Budgeting, Forecasting and Planning are Available

(1) As a part of New York State's long-range planning program, each agency is required to plan on a detailed basis for the next five years, and on a less detailed basis for a longer period, up to 20 years. In order to make sure that the data base necessary for Planning/Programing/Budgeting is available, we have asked each agency for information on:

- (a) Data they are now using as a base for their plans; and

- (b) Data they would use if it were available.

We plan to organize the various data needs with a view to setting up research projects to gather the needed data, either by one or more State agencies or by an outside consultant. Preliminary indications are that the basic data needs are details of population projections -- white vs. non-white, income distributions and commuting trends.

Incidentally, the lack of an adequate data base for decision-making is most evident in the current concern in New York State over the cost and coverage for the State's new medicaid program. Eligibility under this program is based on income, family size, savings, and life insurance coverage.

However, there is no good current information on population, distributed by income, family size, and savings. Income figures are available from the 1960 Census of Population which reports 1959 income. There was a nationwide survey in 1963 which provided figures on resources by income class, but there were no breakdowns by age or family size.

(2) As a by-product in helping to establish a training course in the research field, we published Guidelines for Chartmaking, a pamphlet designed to help researchers, statisticians and others do a better job in presenting statistical data in a graphic form. This little booklet has proved to be a useful guide. Accordingly, in the future we plan to prepare a comparable guideline for tabular presentation.

(3) New York State is divided into 12 planning regions. For administrative and other purposes, each agency uses its own regions. Obviously, the Banking Department's regions differ from those of the Division of Parks. To permit each agency to maintain its own regions and still make full use of the data, we are using the county as the basic building block.

Many statistical series in New York are now compiled on a county basis -- financial data of localities, per capita income, and so forth. Others are compiled according to the geographic area of the collecting agency, as for example, by district office and municipality. County data can be obtained in some cases by addition, as for example, welfare statistics; in other cases more detailed analysis is required, such as

for employment and unemployment data.

Promote the Exchange of Information
Within the State Service and Between
the State Service and Outside Organiza-
tions

(1) As a means of eliminating inter-agency knowledge gaps of the statistical and research studies conducted by other agencies, we publish bimonthly the New York State Statistical Reporter to report on completed, current and prospective studies. Also included is other information of interest to statisticians and persons in related activities, as well as announcements of personnel changes and positions available.

Our format has apparently met with some favor. Last year New York City's Office of Administration initiated publication of its Research Reporter along similar lines as our own publication. This year the State of Oklahoma started publication of a Statistical Reporter, again along similar lines to ours.

(2) We have conducted an inventory of all State agencies to obtain information on their statistical series. The report, which provides a description of the series, frequency of issue, where published, etc., is now at the printers.

(3) As another means of improving information flow among State agencies, we helped last year to reactivate a dormant Interdepartmental Committee on Research. The Committee meets three times a year to exchange information and to hear speakers on topics of mutual interest. In addition, the Committee provides a means of meeting some of the collective needs of research directors (training courses for employees, etc.). The Office of Statistical Coordination acts as the secretariat for the Committee.

(4) Another responsibility is to bring together functional people in different agencies who are concerned with research and statistics. Last year, as a prelude to setting up a new reporting system of local expenditures for the administration of criminal justice in New York State, we called a meeting of representatives of the diverse agencies in the field. These people were given an opportunity to make their data needs known so that the reporting system would be as comprehensive and useful as possible. The system will provide current financial data from the more than 1600 localities within the State. We recently

held another meeting, of essentially the same group, to discuss the research and statistical studies underway and projected in the field of administration of criminal justice. Among those who attended were representatives from the Correction, Probation, Parole, Mental Hygiene and Social Welfare agencies, the Judicial Conference, and the Dean of the new Graduate School of Criminal Justice, State University of New York.

(5) To afford State agencies an opportunity to make their data needs known concerning the 1967 Census of Governments, we called a meeting in Albany of State people. Mr. Allen Manvel, Chief, Governments Division, described the forthcoming census while the New York people made known some of their needs.

(6) As part of our secretariat function for the Interdepartmental Committee on Research, we published one of the talks given before the committee on "The Impact of Population Changes on State Programs." We plan to continue this practice, perhaps using the instrument of "Occasional Papers."

(7) To make sure that we are in the best position to assist State agencies in learning about Federal data developments, a member of our staff spent a week in Washington last year with the Bureau of the Census to learn of its operation. We urged the Bureau to institute a regular program so that State and local employees can be brought together to learn of current and future plans of the Federal statistical agencies. The Bureau established such a program this year, and some ten states sent representatives to Washington last month. Our man participated in this program which he said was most worthwhile. Mr. Bowman was one of the Federal participants in this program.

(8) Among future programs to promote the exchange of information, is publication of a statistical yearbook. We are in the process of hiring a person for this job, and hope to issue a yearbook in 1967. We plan to emphasize county data, since we feel that the county is the most useful building block for State purposes.

(9) Another planned publication is a directory of statisticians, economists and others in the research field, probably somewhat along the lines of the comparable Federal publication.

Act as Clearing House

(1) We act as a clearing house for inquiries both on an intra and interstate

level. I expect this function to grow as the news of our existence spreads. Since the National Conference on Comparative Statistics in Washington last February, we have received requests from other states contemplating setting up a comparable office -- on what we are doing, for examples of our publications, and for suggestions in establishing statistical coordination programs.

(2) We assist State agencies in locating qualified research and statistical employees. Our "want-ads" in the Statistical Reporter is one aspect of this operation. I am on the Governor's Manpower Committee for Statisticians. The Committee has proposed that the Office of Statistical Coordination act as a clearing house for statisticians, economists and research analysts. (The very existence of our Office has stimulated various groups to assign responsibilities to us in terms of employment, publications, standards, etc.).

(3) The Office has acted as a clearing house for requests originating both within and without the State. A current example is the request for co-operation made by the recently established New York Regional Statistical Center. The goal of the Center, established by the New York City Chapter of the American Statistical Association, is to encourage production of comparable data for the 22 counties in three states comprising the New York Region. One plan of the Center is to test the feasibility of putting local data (health, welfare, police, etc.) on a block basis so that they can be aggregated by different districts (welfare, police, etc.). (The street index guides that will be forthcoming from the 1970 Census of Population and Housing should facilitate organizing data on a block basis.) The Center is also interested in coordinating local data systems so that they are compatible.

Provide Technical Assistance

(1) We have assisted some smaller agencies without professional statistical personnel, either to obtain data or to establish plans for data collection.

Thus, when the State Office of Economic Opportunity was established, it needed figures to measure poverty. We compiled the figures, on a county basis, for various items measuring education, income, welfare cases, etc. We ranked the counties by the specific measure to obtain some idea of relative poverty. We also prepared a pamphlet of the data sources which was made available to

localities to assist them in applying for grants.

(2) Our Office has assisted a number of agencies in establishing training courses in statistics. In addition, under the impetus of the Interdepartmental Committee on Research, we helped initiate a course in sampling for research directors.

(3) Skilled statisticians are scarce. To make the maximum use of such personnel, we are considering retaining such persons to be available to operating agencies on a consulting basis for specific assignments; they would not be concerned with operating functions.

Conclusion

The problems of statistical coordination are many; our period of existence is short and our staff is small. Hopefully we have made a beginning. I know that we have a long way to go.

The need is such that I am sure that our work will expand, particularly with regard to basic data -- such as production of more and better economic indicators, revision of existing statistics to be more comprehensive, increasing the availability of local area data, etc.

The establishment of statistical coordination agencies in other states should prove to be a stimulus to the existing ones. We should all grow together so that better data will be available, and hopefully better informed decision-making.

Appendix

New York State's Office of Statistical Coordination

Current and Prospective Functions

Improve Statistical Output so that Data Necessary for Budgeting, Forecasting and Planning are Available:

1. Review and analyze statistical output to encourage agencies to improve the quality of their series, initiate series not now produced, and eliminate duplication.

2. Determine needed data not now collected and promote collection.

3. Establish standards in reporting (graphs, charts), in terminology, bases, areas, etc.

4. Promote more current reporting of statistical data.

5. Provide, or encourage production of, the basic data needed for agency forecasting.

6. Review department questionnaires addressed to the public to eliminate duplication, meet the needs of other agencies, conform with State policy, etc.

Promote the Exchange of Information Within State Service Agencies and Between State Service Agencies and Outside Organizations:

1. Act as secretariat for reactivated Interdepartmental Committee on Research, to facilitate interchange of research ideas and data.

2. Hold periodic conferences of State statistical and research personnel, both with and without their counterparts in private industry and other governmental jurisdictions, to discuss topics of interest to the State -- economic, financial, population forecasts, new techniques, operations research, etc.

3. Publish bimonthly New York State Statistical Reporter containing news of studies under way and research reports available.

4. Conduct inventory of State statistical series and publish compilation in Statistical Series of New York State. This publication could list -- by agency and by function -- series that are available, how often compiled, and where and when available.

5. Compile State statistics for publication in annual Statistical Abstract of New York State.

6. Act as liaison with the U.S. Bureau of the Census to determine availability of data and the needs of State agencies to obtain the maximum amount of information and at a minimum of cost (e.g., eliminate duplicate purchases of unpublished data and make purchased data available to other interested agencies).

Act as Clearing House:

1. Handle inquiries to the State (from both within and without the State) concerning sources of data, availability of statistics, publication dates, etc.

2. Assist research and statistical units in locating qualified employees and in placing employees with agencies.

Provide Technical Assistance:

1. Assist budget examiners in determining needs of statistical and research units in staffing and related aspects.

2. Upon request, counsel agencies in planning research projects.

3. Recommend to Budget Director and Governor what the State's official position should be on statistical issues in representations to the Federal government and other outside organizations; upon request, represent the State before such bodies.