



The Federal Statistical System— A Crown Jewel, but Its History Makes It Harder to Meet Today's Challenges

Constance F. Citro, *Director, CNSTAT*
APDU – Washington, DC – Sept. 12, 2012

Priorities for Federal Statistics in 21st Century



New data sources (theme of APDU conference)—How can agencies proactively use administrative records and Internet data sources (“big data”) given the absence of quality metrics, yet the imperative from falling survey response rates, higher survey costs, and the demand for timeliness?

Innovation—More generally, how can agencies introduce new and improved measures, data series, products, collection and estimation methods, given budget constraints and difficulties of collaboration?

Structure (exec./leg.) (from history) gets in the way



Policy Needs>>Depts.>> Statistics—Key Milestones

1790—Decennial Census under Sec. of State

1790-1840>first Census of Business>>Census
Office/each decade, 1850-1900

1820—Treasury Secretary>>foreign-trade stats.

1863—Division of Statistics, USDA

1867—Office of Education Statistics

1884—Bureau of Labor (Interior Dept.)

1902—Permanent Census Bureau

New Agencies Established Throughout 20th Century



1905—Office of Farm Management, USDA (ERS)

1916—Federal income tax statistics

1950—Science and engineering statistics at NSF

1956—NCHS (National Health Survey Division +
vital statistics from SSA from Census in 1902)

1977—Energy Information Administration

1979—Bureau of Justice Statistics

1992—Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Benefits>>Rich-Array of Policy-Responsive Information



SELECTED EXAMPLES

- Current Population Survey (1942>>> unemployment, income, poverty, and more)
- National Crime Victimization Survey (1972>> includes crimes not known to the police)
- NHANES (physical exams plus survey data)
- National Income and Product Accounts (1934>> integrated data system on GDP/GDI et al.)

Benefits>>Innovation in Concepts/Methods/Tech.



SELECTED EXAMPLES

Punch cards invented for 1890 census>>IBM

Probability sampling first introduced for
predecessor to the CPS in 1942

UNIVAC1 used to help process 1950 census

Longitudinal surveys pioneered by NCES

Continuous measurement>>American

Community Survey introduced in 2005

BUT, Structure Gets in the Way of Moving Forward



- Many agencies are buried in their depts. – only BLS and EIA report to sec'y; others are 2 and 3 levels down (e.g., BJS, NCHS)
- Many agencies have miniscule budgets – only BLS, Census >\$500M; BTS, NCSES, SOI <\$50M
- Congressional coordination is fragmented – e.g., BEA/BJS/Census/NCSES in one approp. subcommittee; BLS/NCES/NCHS in another
- Data sharing and collaboration are tough



Statistical Coordination (child of war and depression)

1933—Central Statistical Board (interagency)

1939—Lodged in Budget Bureau (est. 1921)

1942—Federal Reports Act

1977-1980—Statistical policy put in Commerce

1980—Paperwork Reduction Act established
statistical policy office under OIRA in OMB

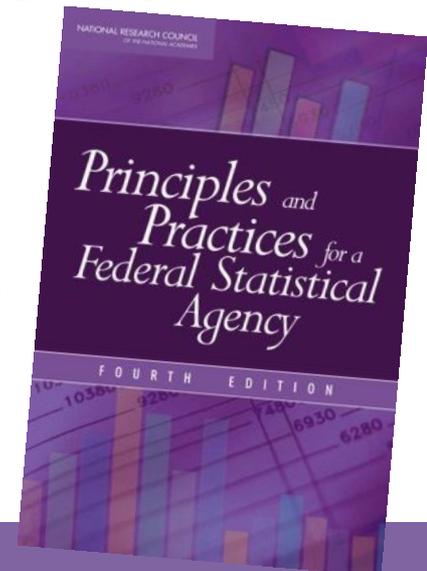
Staff progressively reduced>>Today has 6 hard-
working staff under Katherine Wallman



Statistical Coordination

Numerous commissions, beginning in 1908, have—generally in vain—recommended more centralization or some reorganization

One small exception: CNSTAT established in 1972 at NAS, recommended by President's Commission on Federal Statistics to provide scientific advice and help integrate—many cross-cutting studies on data sharing, etc., plus “*P&P*”





Challenge for APDU

Take-away should not be negative, but rather realism about the difficulties the statistical agencies face in today's constrained budget environment and stove-piped government

Organizations such as APDU more important than ever

Look forward to this panel discussion and entire conference to identify ways to help the statistical system move forward