

Confidentiality, Privacy Protection and Other Constraints on Stewards of Public Administrative Records

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Panel on The Use of Administrative Records in Economic Research: Rewards, Risk and Demand

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Statistical and Scientific Uses of Administrative Data

- Long history of “re-”use of administrative records for statistical purposes by federal statistical agencies:
 - As frames for sample surveys
 - For direct measurement
 - Survey enhancements
 - Adrec based statistical products
 - For quality assurance

Advantages of statistical re-use of administrative data

- Full or near universe coverage
- Typically contain high quality linkage keys
- Good data quality for items important to program agencies
- Cost effective
 - Programs like LEHD, QCEW, etc impossible otherwise
- Decreased respondent burden

Access to Federal Administrative Records is Limited by Statute and Regulations

- Government wide - Privacy Act
- Agency specific authorizing legislation – Title 13 U.S.C. (Census Act), Title 26 U.S.C. (Internal Revenue Code)
- Statistical Agencies – CIPSEA

Provisions for “Statistical” Use

- Specific exemptions in the Privacy Act for the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Section 6103(j) of Title 26 for provision of limited FTI to Census and BEA
- Section 6 of Title 13 – directing Census Bureau to use records rather than direct collection to greatest extent feasible
- CIPSEA – sharing of business data among BEA, BLS and Census
 - Still need “Data Synchronization” to allow sharing FTI

Research Access

- No provisions for research access in legislation
- Some statistical and administrative agencies provide access for research consistent with their mission
 - For example – Census Bureau RDCs
- Burdensome process and inconvenient access modes almost certainly lead to suboptimal under provision of records for scientific use

Murray – Ryan Bill

- Establish a 15 member “Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking”
 - Examine the data infrastructure and protocols currently in place
 - Examine if and how to create a “clearinghouse” of administrative and survey data to support evidence-based policymaking
 - Make recommendations within 15 months

But we've been here before...

- National Data Center Proposal of 1965
 - Proposed by prominent social scientists
 - Supported by several agencies
 - Useful for evaluating Great Society social programs
 - Raised concerns among privacy advocates and in Congress
 - Led to the Privacy Act

Lessons

- Benefit of general research access has been a hard sell
- Under appreciation of privacy concerns by the research community proved counterproductive in the past
 - These concerns are likely even greater today
- If implemented, the Murray-Ryan commission will need to carefully address these issues
 - Make-up of the committee members will help
 - As does focus on program evaluation