Methodology -- 1994

(Source: E.D. Tabs - Federal Libraries and Information Centers in the United States: 1994)

Background. The Federal Libraries and Information Centers Survey is the sixth Federal library survey, the first since 1978, and the first to include information centers. Since 1991, the Federal Library and Information Center Committee (FLICC) and its Survey Working Group worked to develop the survey in cooperation with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Bureau of the Census, the survey collection agent. Major projects involved in developing the survey instrument and defining the universe included dissemination of a survey pretest to a sample of 200 facilities in the fall of 1993, the mailing of a locator questionnaire to 3,000 facilities in the spring of 1994 to determine universe eligibility, revision of the survey instrument based on the pretest, and dissemination of a second pretest to a sample of 50 facilities in the fall of 1994.

A variety of sources were searched to develop the initial universe list of approximately 3,200 facilities used as the basis for the locator questionnaire mailing. The primary source lists are the Oryx Directory of Federal Libraries and the Federal Library and Information Network (FEDLINK) mailing list. Additional source lists include the Federal Health Care Libraries Directory, the U.S. Department of Navy Libraries list, a list of Government Agencies with Public Document Rooms, the Department of Defense (DOD) schools list, the Air Force Library and Information System Address list, and the U.S. Government Manual.

The final universe excludes approximately 800 facilities that are overseas (United States Information Service (USIS) and DOD) and/or elementary and secondary school libraries (DOD and Bureau of Indian Affairs). The overseas facilities were removed because of logistical problems in data collection. The elementary and secondary school libraries were excluded, since they have a different mission and function than most Federal libraries and to reduce reporting burden. NCES conducts a separate survey of School Library Media Centers and Library Media Center Specialists which includes these schools.

In addition, approximately another 800 facilities were eliminated from the initial universe for any of the following reasons: out-of-scope of the survey definitions, combined with another facility, duplicated other facilities in the universe, or facility closed.

Scope. The Federal Libraries and Information Centers survey was mailed to 1,571 facilities in the United States in January 1995.

Of the 1,571 facilities, 337 facilities were excluded from the survey because they were not Federal libraries or information centers as defined by the survey. For the purposes of this survey, a library is defined as an organization that includes among its functions the following: selection, acquisition, organization, preservation, retrieval, and provision of access to information resources. An information center is defined as an organization that performs the function of linking requestors with appropriate information resources through established mechanisms, such as database searching, providing referrals, answering specific questions, or by other means. Facilities were included in the survey which (a) are either a library or an information center as defined above (not a public affairs office, an agency locator service, a records management facility, a publications distribution facility, or a computer center), (b) are staffed with at least one paid part-time or full-time librarian, technical information specialist, library technician, archivist, or other trained person whose principal function is to assist others in meeting their information needs, (c) are considered to be a Federal Government operation or receiving a majority (at least half) of its funding from Federal appropriations, and (d) support the information needs of a Federal agency or supply information as part of the agency's mission. Thus there were 1,234 Federal libraries and information centers in the 50 states and District of Columbia.

Note in Table 2 and in the 'A' tables (by type of library/information center) that the National libraries includes National Archives and Records Administration branch libraries/information centers.

Data Collection. Due date for return of questionnaires was March 3, 1995, but response was slow, with only 35 percent response by the due date. Repeated telephone reminders, additional mailings, and special appeals by the FLICC members had increased response to 73 percent by June 16. Because of the need to raise survey response to an acceptable level, an additional letter mailing with questionnaires was followed by an intensive telephone follow-up operation. Additional questionnaires were sent by fax and returns were encouraged by fax instead of mail. Follow-up efforts were closed out the end of August and brought final response by September 1 to 94 percent. Table 1 provides more information on unit response rate.

Editing. The data were manually edited before keying for reporting errors, such as more than one box marked for items allowing only one answer. dBASE computer programs included many edit checks and provided edit warning/error reports after the data were keyed. Examples of these edit checks are listed below:

1. Relational edit checks--The program compares data entries from one section of the questionnaire with data entries from another section of the questionnaire for consistency. For example, if CD-ROM searches were reported, the program would expect CD-ROM technology available to be reported. If CD-ROM technology available is blank, the record is listed on the edit report as a possible error. Another example is if the number of contract staff is equal to the sum of other employees, the record is listed as a possible error.

2. Numeric checks--Numeric data were listed by size and data checks were established based on pretest data to verify the largest data values. For example, if total staff equals zero or is greater than 99, the record is listed as a possible error. One problem requiring special follow-up by Census Bureau staff involved libraries/information centers reporting reference requests and searches on an annual or other basis instead of weekly. A sample of all cases was called to evaluate the extent of the problem. Based on the sample findings, all of the largest values were verified since they were most often incorrect. *(NOTE: Approximately 10 percent of the requests and searches data required corrections. Caution should be exercised in using these data since only a sample of the lower values were verified.)*

When possible errors were identified by the edit checks, Bureau of the Census personnel contacted the facility to resolve the problem.