

Appendix 6

Government information services

Information Canada was established in April 1970 to act as a central source for the public seeking information on federal government policies, programs and services; to co-ordinate federal information programs involving more than one department and help other federal agencies improve the quality and effectiveness of their information work, through the provision of professional personnel and resource assistance when so requested; to maintain marketing and distribution facilities for all federal publications and to initiate information programs where the public need is clearly identified and the responsibility does not fall under any one specific department.

The agency now operates regional inquiry centres in six major cities across Canada and plans to open five more, thus creating a coast-to-coast network. These centres are gradually branching out beyond the urban areas through the use of mobile information officers.

When it was created, Information Canada took over the publishing and bookselling functions of the Queen's Printer. In addition to operating its own bookstores, it is developing a network of authorized agencies, using qualified commercial booksellers for the sale of Canadian Government publications throughout Canada.

The agency is also responsible for the former Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, now the Information Canada Audio-Visual/Expositions Branch, and the former Still Photo Division of the National Film Board, now Information Canada Photothèque.

Federal government information services are not centralized in Information Canada. The information resources of the various departments are at the service of the public to answer inquiries about their specific activities, while Information Canada acts as a central contact point.

Information Canada reports to Parliament through the Minister of Labour.

Statistics Canada, established in 1918 as the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, is Canada's central statistical agency and as such is the country's main collector and publisher of information about Canadian economic and social life. The agency, given its present name in 1971, has been a separate department of government since 1965 and reports to Parliament through the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce.

One of Statistics Canada's key jobs is conducting the Census of Canada at five- and ten-year intervals; the latest ten-year Census was in 1971 and the next five-year Census will be in 1976. The bureau also undertakes a comprehensive Census of Agriculture at the same time as the general censuses and regularly surveys social and economic change under more than 20 broad subject-matter headings such as the monthly labour force and consumer prices surveys.

The growth of Statistics Canada, both in personnel and in the complexity of statistical activity, has paralleled Canada's development as a modern industrial state. The agency's staff, which includes the largest single body of social scientists in one organization in Canada, has more than doubled in the past 15 years to about 4,000 in 1973. Several hundred additional persons are employed part-time on such projects as special surveys and censuses.

Statistical collection by the bureau covers every area of Canada and ranges from the well-known national assessments such as the national accounts to minute census detail. The information produced describes quantitatively Canada's economic and social environment and is used mainly as an aid to decision-making and research. The public sector uses the information for the development of social and economic policies and the private sector uses it extensively for decisions in marketing and merchandising and the establishment of branch plants and retail outlets.

Most Statistics Canada information is made available to the public through publications but for more sophisticated users there is an increasing output on micro-film, computer tapes and special tabulations. In the most recent count, there were more than 1,100 publications. Of these, some appear monthly or more frequently, some quarterly, some annually, and others every two or three years. The publications flowing from the national censuses include 278 for 1961, 122 for 1966 and more than 300 based on the 1971 Census. Some general publications are issued occasionally and include special studies and manuals. Statistical reports are increasingly published in bilingual form or appear in separate English and French editions. About 1.3 million copies of Statistics Canada publications are issued yearly on a subscription basis.

Geocoding, known formally as the Geographically Referenced Data Storage and Retrieval System (GRDSR), is one example of the sophisticated tools the bureau uses for processing data and providing statistical information. Through GRDSR, certain statistical information can now be quickly and inexpensively obtained about areas as small as a few city blocks in major cities.

Another example of Statistics Canada's capability for the storage and speedy processing of information is the Canadian Socio-economic Information Management System (CANSIM). CANSIM stores and updates hundreds of series of information on such topics as prices, industrial production, trade, and national accounts. Most series cover statistics for several years. Information tailored to user requirements is provided on computer tapes or in table form.