

NEW MEXICO BUSINESS

CURRENT ECONOMIC REPORT

November 2001
Vol. 22, No. 10

The New Mexico State Data Center and Business and Industry Data Center Program

As time goes by, more and more demographic and economic data from the U.S. Census Bureau are made available to the public. Most data are now released in electronic formats and much is available via the Internet. In spite of this easy access, people can be overwhelmed by the wealth of data available to them. Even if a researcher can wade through the morass of numbers and maps, there is often a need for assistance in analyzing and interpreting the data. There may also be a need to expand upon the core data produced by the Census Bureau with additional databases. Where can the average person turn for assistance when gathering information for research projects or making decisions for a business or service program? The New Mexico State Data Center and Business and Industry Data Center (SDC/BIDC) Program is designed to help data users, both novice and experienced, make sense of it all.

A cooperative effort between the U.S. Census Bureau and the states, the SDC/BIDC Program began in 1978 as the State Data Center (SDC) Program. In 1980 the State of New Mexico became part of the SDC Program, with the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration as the lead agency. The lead role was later transferred to the New Mexico Economic Development Department. Coordinators in the Program included the University of New Mexico's Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER), the Economics Department at New Mexico State University, and the New Mexico State Library. Affiliate organizations across the state were also designated, and included local planning departments, council of government organizations, and libraries (higher education and public). BBER established an ongoing commitment to the data center concept, building upon its participation in the Census Bureau's 1970 Summary Tape Processing Center Program, and its historical role of disseminating socioeconomic data through the BBER Data Bank.

The objective of the SDC Program was to expand the availability of information and provide technical assistance in data access for research, administration, planning and decision-making by state and local governments, the business community, academia and other interested users. The goal was to take the wealth of Census Bureau data and make it readily accessible at the local level to data users on a low-cost basis or without charge. The Census Bureau offered data products in hard copy and magnetic tape format to individual state data centers, along with extensive training sessions on the content and use of their data products. Additionally, direct lines of communication were established between key Census Bureau personnel and the SDC Program participants. Hence, the SDC Program became a network of organizations across the state that provided access to census data. An added benefit came from efforts of data centers to combine the plethora of Census Bureau data with local data sources, expanding and updating core

census data products, and linking data users with local expertise.

In 1988 the Census Bureau expanded the data center concept by implementing the Business and Industry Data Center (BIDC) Program. The BIDC initiative was designed to focus on the dissemination and use of economic data (for example, information from the economic censuses or County Business Patterns databases) in an effort to meet the needs of local business communities and economic development programs. New Mexico was selected by the Census Bureau as one of the original states to participate in the BIDC effort. This BIDC initiative was rolled into the existing data center, with the New Mexico Economic Development Department as the overall data center lead, BBER as the designated BIDC coordinator, and Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) as affiliate organizations. The SBDC network provides a variety of assistance to small businesses around the state and the goals of the SBDC Program are complemented by the goals of the data center initiative. Other economic development organizations were added over the ensuing years.

Nationally, the SDC/BIDC Program hosts a network of 1,378 organizations. Collectively, these organizations responded to about 1.3 million requests for information, technical assistance, or analysis in 2000, most at little or no cost to the data user. The New Mexico SDC/BIDC Program is a vital part of this national network, responding to more than 18,500 requests in 2000. The New Mexico SDC/BIDC Program now has 26 participating organizations—the lead agency, the three original coordinators, 12 SDC affiliates, and 10 BIDC affiliates. See the BBER web site at <http://www.unm.edu/~bber/affils.htm> for a current listing of the New Mexico SDC/BIDC organizations and contact persons.

As noted above, besides providing access to census data and technical assistance, the network's organizations offer additional products and services that vary according to areas of expertise. Examples from some of the network's affiliates include local area statistics (employment, building permits,

Table 1
SDC/BIDC Program Core Competencies

1. Administer the Program.
2. Disseminate data to broad audiences.
3. Provide data research and analysis, technical assistance and consultation.
4. Provide customized programming and product development.
5. Promote products and services of the Census Bureau and the SDC/BIDC Program.
6. Conduct training sessions and information meetings for the user community.
7. Assist with census operations as appropriate.
8. Maintain an Internet presence.
9. Attend regional or national meetings annually.

etc.); small area projections; small business assistance; statistical compendia for economic development purposes; area profiles; and links to other federal government data sources, along with assistance in using information from those sources. These varied capabilities serve to complement the data and products produced by the Census Bureau.

Several years ago, the national SDC/BIDC Program implemented uniform standards, or core competencies, that each state must meet as terms of their participation. See Table 1, on page 1. These core competencies are applied to the network. Individual organizations need not offer all services mandated by the national Program as long as the network as a whole covers all nine requirements.

As a minimum, each affiliate must agree to provide a space for the materials received from the Census Bureau and to assist data users in accessing, understanding and interpreting the data. Referrals can be made to other members of the network as appropriate.

Although each member of New Mexico's SDC/BIDC network may have a usual clientele or target audience, they also disseminate data to broad audiences when requests are made. For example, Small Business Development Centers primarily work with businesses, while libraries at universities and colleges generally assist the academic community. However, all these organizations also offer service to the public at large.

The statewide network must have the capacity to provide custom programming and product development. The Census Bureau's American Factfinder Internet site, the primary means for distributing Census 2000 data, has eliminated the need for programming new magnetic computer tapes. However, custom programming of Census Bureau CDs and efforts that combine standard data tabulations into meaningful profiles are activities undertaken by different members of the SDC/BIDC network. In addition, there is still a need to use computer tapes from prior censuses to produce historical data. Customized profiles and tabulations that compare current and historical data, along with reports that provide analytical insight or target unique geography are examples of products produced by members of the SDC/BIDC network.

The network is committed to providing educational outreach that addresses both the availability and use of socioeconomic data. In New Mexico this requirement is primarily fulfilled through the annual New Mexico Data Users

Conference. Typically held in Albuquerque during August of each year, the Data Users Conference offers training sessions on various topics, ranging from decennial census basics to specific applications of economic and demographic data. Census Bureau staff, along with Program coordinators and affiliates, are among the instructors. Open to the general public, this annual event is well attended. Smaller workshops are held throughout the year and across the state as opportunities arise and budget allows. Recently, a workshop was sponsored in Roswell by the local affiliate, the Southeastern New Mexico Economic Development District.

In conjunction with the New Mexico Data Users Conference, the network conducts an annual workshop and business meeting open only to the SDC/BIDC affiliates. This "train the trainer" session gives Program members the background they need to help their patrons and clients.

Assistance with decennial census operations is provided by SDC/BIDC members as appropriate. Affiliates promoted Census 2000 with banners on their web sites or printed reports, by arranging meeting space, and by answering questions from the public.

Many of the Program's organizations maintain an Internet presence with varying amounts of socioeconomic data. Some Internet sites, like the one maintained by the BBER (www.unm.edu/~bber), contain a great deal of decennial and economic census data. For a list of web sites for all New Mexico SDC/BIDC organizations see the BBER's site at www.unm.edu/~bber/affils.html.

Staff from the lead or coordinating agencies attend the national meeting in Washington, D.C., each year. Sponsored by the Census Bureau, this annual meeting offers state representatives the chance to meet with key Census Bureau personnel and to get the latest updates on products and programs.

The next time you need help with interpreting race and ethnic data from the decennial census, creating a population data table by age and sex for a unique service area, finding census maps and interpreting census geography, or acquiring sales data by industry remember the New Mexico State Data Center and Business and Industry Data Center network. When it comes to your specific data needs we are here to assist. Whether looking for a quick answer to a simple question or undertaking an in-depth, long-term research project, your New Mexico SDC/BIDC affiliate can help. If we can't answer your question, chances are good that we know who can. Save yourself some trouble and start with a nearby affiliate.

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