Future Directions for IASSIST:
Action Group on a Five Year Plan

Introduction

IASSIST has helped bridge the interests and concerns of three distinct communities: social researchers and scientists, who – whether working in the public or private sector – are producers and consumers of micro and macro–level social data; information specialists, who preserve social data, manage facilities and provide services that promote the secondary use of social data; and computing specialists, who advance technical methods in manipulating and analyzing social data. After serving for a decade and a half as a forum for direct communication among these three communities, IASSIST is now challenged to look toward the future and to consider its directions for the 1990's as social data encompases more than statistically oriented machine– readable datasets.

During its formative years, a primary focus of IASSIST was to advance an infrastructure that would support the data requirements of secondary research in the social sciences. The development of such an infrastructure over the past fifteen years has witnessed the growth of social data information centers in a variety of institutions, including national archives, university libraries, computing centers, research institutes, governmental agencies, and private corporations. These centers have en endeavored to meet the demands for both information services and technical applications. Toward this end, IASSIST will remain supportive of the development of new and existing social data information centers, and will continue to be a forum for the exchange of ideas and techniques in managing these centers.

IASSIST's membership is composed of individuals, many of whom are professionals in social data information centers. With its individual level membership and global focus, IASSIST offers an organization concerned with the professional activities of its members, and offers an opportunity to extend beyond national boundaries the issues and developments of social science information service and technology. IASSIST is clearly in the position to advance the interests of these data professionals, to promote professional development of this new career, and to take an active role in the promotion of global exchange of information, experience, and standards.

In planning for the future, IASSIST needs to state clearly its identity and distinguish itself from other organizations tions or divisions within other organizations concerned with social and other data. While IASSIST is a premier organization in the field of social data services, others have emerged over the past fifteen years to represent interests in data services. International examples include: the International Federation of

Data Organizations (IFDO), the International Conference on Data Bases in the Humanities and the Social Sciences (ICDBHSS), the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA), etc. Within each country, as well, information science organizations are emerging. In articulating its identity, a formal statement should be prepared that expresses the vision of how IASSIST members view their organization and its purpose.

Social research consists of a wide range of interdisciplinary subjects. Some IASSIST members are responsible for managing centers that support research across many social disciplines as well as research in other fields. IASSIST will continue to focus on social science information services and technology and will recognize the wide range of interests of its members. However, the expertise of its members in data management and the operation of information centers should be promoted among professionals working in disciplines and information centers outside the realm of social research.

In the past, Committees and Action Groups have been used to address major concerns within IASSIST. Various Committees and Action Groups have produced guidelines, agendas, and formal liaisons with relevant groups. This form of organization has been productive and should be maintained. However, IASSIST should develop a comprehensive outline of goals and describe realistic objectives before assigning issues to Committees and Action Groups. The following list of goals and concerns is an initial attempt to outline those issues that Committees and Ac- tion Groups should undertake. Some of the issues can be ap- proached with clearly stated objectives and activities. Other areas will require policy development or organizational linkages that may not be as easily defined or executed. The next planning task is to establish procedures for action. This document presents these areas in the following order:

1. Professional development of STAFF in social data information centers;
2. Advancement and development of social data information CENTERS;
3. Assessment of and planning for the impact of new TECHNOLOGY;
4. Promotion of the ARCHIVING of social data and the advancement of data STANDARDS;
5. Promotion of global LINKAGES between social data centers;
6. Development of LINKAGES between social data centers and users and producers of data including the academic, public, and private sectors;
7. Evaluation of the role and contribution of IASSIST and the recruitment of new members.

Outline of Goals

1. Professional development of STAFF in social data information centers: Providing guidelines for professional development and opportunities for learning.

   a. IASSIST will outline a recommended curriculum for training staff of social data information centers located in national archives, academic libraries, computing centers, research institutes,

governmental agencies, or private corporations.[1]

b. IASSIST will coordinate the creation and delivery of short courses and workshops as part of a recommended curriculum.[2]

2. Advancement and development of social data information CENTERS: Creating awareness and assistance for solving technical, political, logistic, economic and professional problems in establishing and maintaining social data centers.

a. IASSIST will develop guidelines for creating social data information centers. These guidelines will cover the functions and services of such a center and the duties of the staff of such a facility.[3]

b. IASSIST will sponsor presentations and workshops on the applications of technology for managing existing social data centers. (E.g. tape management systems, indexing systems, or automated guides)

3. Assessment and planning for the impact of new TECHNOLOGY

a. IASSIST will sponsor presentations and workshops on the impact of changing technology on existing social data information centers, including database management systems, mass storage technology, scholarly workstations, and the use of networks for communication and for access to data collections.

4. Promotion of the ARCHIVING of social data and the advancement of data STANDARDS, e.g International Interchange Data Standards;

a. IASSIST will work with other social data organizations toward the development of guidelines and standards for the preservation of social data.

b. IASSIST will remain active in developing bibliographic standards for data files, and will promote the cataloging of social data in the international bibliographic utilities used by research libraries.

c. IASSIST will promote the archiving of social data within the social science community by developing guidelines for depositing data in social data centers, by increasing the interchange between researchers and social data centers, and by encouraging funding agencies to stipulate the deposit of data in publicly accessible archives.

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[1] A survey of the IASSIST membership is recommended to obtain information about members' background and training experiences.

[2] The ICPSR has indicated an interest in working in conjunction with IASSIST to present a Data Library Workshop at its Annual Summer Program. IASSIST should explore this further and develop a proposal.

[3] Information such as archive policies, procedures, and descriptions have been collected by participants in the IASSIST Conference Workshop on Establishing Data Archives. A collection of these documents could be a starting point for meeting this goal.

5. Promotion of global LINKAGES between social data information centers, including developing centralized data collections, policies for data sharing and cooperative acquisitions, and technological linkages for data and information exchange.

   a. IASSIST will investigate the plausibility of institutional arrangements among social data information centers for sharing the acquisition of and access to social data. IASSIST will offer a forum for social data center staff to discuss the development of centralized data collections to reduce the necessary duplication of materials among member organizations.

   b. IASSIST will advance global technological methods of communicating through national and international telecommunication networks.

   c. IASSIST will publish an international directory of social data centers.

   d. IASSIST will promote the development of an international union list of social data held in social data centers.

6. Develop LINKAGES between social data centers and users and producers of data including the academic, public, and private sectors.

   a. IASSIST will evaluate its role in communicating and developing linkages with governmental data collection and dissemination agencies, and will define its role in the development of national and international statistical policy regarding data gathering, storage, preservation and access.

   b. IASSIST will evaluate its role of mediating between the data user community with interests in data access, and public data protection agencies with interests in data privacy.

   c. IASSIST will monitor the changes in social science research and their effects upon data gathering, analysis, archiving, access, and technological requirements.

   d. IASSIST will sponsor presentations and workshops regarding the instructional applications of social data, and support the development of materials to be used in discipline-related instruction to promote the use of social data by students and researchers in the social sciences.

   e. IASSIST will address the questions of closer integration of the local social science information center into existing local information services, particularly those provided by the traditional library.

7. Evaluate the role and contribution of IASSIST and recruit new members.

   a. IASSIST will state its role in relation to other data organizations and prepare a formal vision statement that articulates its identity.

   b. IASSIST will undertake a comprehensive membership drive recruiting from all known data information centers.

c. IASSIST will evaluate its relationship with and expand its outreach to Third World countries.

d. IASSIST will evaluate the effects of action taken under the plan and develop future strategies.

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