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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

Group II

LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

OCT 18 1975



The Honorable Jack Tokard  
Administrator, General Services  
Administration

Dear Mr. Tokard:

During a recent inquiry into the management of Federal records, we discussed forms management with representatives of the General Services Administration (GSA) and other agencies. Considerable concern was expressed by various agencies over the noncurrency of GSA's Standard and Optional Forms Yearbook Handbook. This handbook is used by agencies to identify standard and optional forms currently in use for possible application within their agency, in lieu of developing new agency forms. A revision of the handbook has not been issued in over 2 years. However, during this timeframe the number of standard and optional forms has increased from 432 to 472 (an increase of 35 standard forms and 133 optional forms). Agencies, unaware of the availability of the new standard and optional forms, develop their own forms without reference to the standard or optional forms already in existence. This, in addition to the condition of this handbook can be a contributing factor to the increase in the number of different forms developed by agencies and result in increased costs.

From 1964 to 1972 the estimated number of different Federal forms doubled from 243,000 to over 700,000. Although current estimates are not available, forms proliferation may be continuing. The annual cost to manage Government forms is an estimated \$4 billion.

GSA's Standard and Optional Forms Program, operated by the National Archives and Records Service (NARS), is designed to check forms proliferation and the associated management costs. General Property Management Regulations describe the purpose of the forms program as follows:

"Similar forms and systems frequently are used for essentially the same purpose in different agencies of the Government. In such instances, the development of a Standard or Optional form can result in substantial benefits."

\* \* \*

"The benefits \* \* \* include uniform and improved procedures for processing forms, reduced printing and stocking costs, reduced training time of employees, and simplified direction and application."

Standard forms are developed by various agencies and approved by GSA for mandatory use by all agencies. Optional forms are developed by various agencies, used by two or more agencies, and approved by GSA for optional use by all agencies. Standard and optional forms are available through GSA's supply system.

In order to identify those forms which may meet their needs, agencies use the Standard and Optional Forms Facsimile Handbook prepared by GSA; the handbook is the agency key to the availability of these forms. A preface to the handbook states "the value of the handbook depends almost entirely upon its being maintained in current condition \* \* \*". However, the most current handbook has not been updated in over 3 years. We were advised by an agency official that, presently, the only way to obtain a facsimile of a new or revised form not included in the outdated handbook would be to buy an entire bundle of the form from the GSA supply system, an unnecessarily costly procedure.

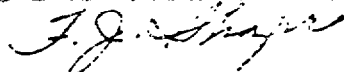
Our discussions with agency officials indicate that the Government-wide Standard and Optional Forms Program is being severely hindered because a comprehensive and up-to-date facsimile handbook is not available for use in the agencies. Further, past experience in forms growth would seem to indicate that agencies are developing and using forms when standard or optional forms already exist. This practice can result in considerable cost to the Government in terms of agencies' design, development and printing of forms when suitable forms are available but not known to the agencies.

We have been advised that a complete revision of the forms facsimile handbook has been prepared, but printing is still awaiting the availability of funds. According to a GSA representative, the problem of inadequate funding has been, and is, a major factor in delays in updating the handbook.

A final thought which I believe is worthy of your attention. While the Standard and Optional Forms Program is the responsibility of NARS, the Federal Supply Service in Region 3 is responsible for preparing and updating the forms facsimile handbook. Thus, an essential tool for successful implementation of the Standard and Optional Forms Program is outside the control of the manager of the program. In our opinion, elimination of this divided responsibility should help improve management of the Standard and Optional Forms program. Therefore, we believe consideration should be given to transferring the facsimile handbook responsibilities to NARS.

We would appreciate your comments on any current or planned action regarding this handbook. If you or your representatives wish to meet with our staff to discuss this matter, please contact Mr. Robert M. Gilroy, Assistant Director, (202-275-3997).

Sincerely yours,



Fred J. Shafer  
Director