

## REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND REPORTS IN SUPPORT OF RECOMMENDATION NO. 2

---

---

The Committee on Information, Education, and Reports submits that the *U.S. Government Organization Manual* should be a compact reference handbook designed to guide the user to effective initial contact with out Federal government, and that this *Manual* should, by the excellence of its presentation, reflect credit on the government and the Republic. Consonant with the accompanying report your Committee finds that the *Manual* cannot achieve these high standards under present procedures; that the principal faults lie in the narrative text submitted by the agencies; and that correction of these faults will require rewriting the text at the highest level of competence afforded by the submitting agency.

### I. BACKGROUND

The "Daily Revised Manual of Emergency Agencies and Facilities" of 1934, forerunner of the present *United States Government Organization Manual*, was limited to the activities of New Deal agencies. The format was broadened later to provide information on all phases of Government organization and activities. The *Manual* sought to meet the needs of libraries as a part of their basic reference works in Government; of colleges, universities, and secondary schools as textbooks or as corollary reading; of legal and professional groups, and of Federal agencies, for use of their personnel.

For a considerable period after its creation the *Manual* was a model Baedeker. Clearly written, compact, and well organized, it served the needs of citizens seeking help in threading the bureaucratic maze. But though updated annually it was never revised, and it gradually lost the qualities that had made it excellent. Subjected to frequent, piecemeal amendments, the product of a generation of ever-changing agency writers who borrowed more and more heavily from job descriptions and other papers intended for internal agency use, the *Manual* became more difficult to use.

Today it is foundering in a polysyllabic sea of Federal prose—

a handbook that is no longer handy, a guidebook in need of a guide. Unless means are found to reverse present trends, the *Manual* will continue to sink into a state of increasingly limited usefulness.

## II. FINDINGS

The Committee on Information, Education, and Reports believes that the time has come for complete revision of much of the text, for rewriting "from scratch" of the descriptions of many of the older agencies.

The *Manual* is neither a directory nor an internal management manual. In its ideal form, it should provide basic information on the organization and functions of all agencies with emphasis on bureaus or divisions with which members of the public can be expected to deal.

This goal demands brevity and simplicity. The user should not be subjected to extraneous matter couched in job-sheet language and paragraph-long sentences (see for example pages 67, 92, 134, 135, 194, 369 of the 1968-1969 edition). Material relating to the internal operations of agencies such as that on page 106 should be eliminated, thereby giving needed space for the inclusion of more newly created governmental units without swelling the *Manual* to cumbersome size. Descriptions of offices dealing with management, data processing, etc., abound in the *Manual* (see pages 92, 93, 106, 116, 182-184, 243, 297, 393, 476, 477, 548, 569). The space devoted to such units should be greatly reduced or eliminated entirely.

The usefulness of the *Manual* would be further increased if the oldline departments would follow a uniform pattern of confining the narrative text to descriptions of the operating bureaus and divisions where programs vis-a-vis the public are actually carried out. Space allotted to outlining the responsibilities of Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other individuals results in unnecessary repetition and confusion (e.g. pages 133, 242, 302, 303, 353). Personnel listings and organization charts illustrate adequately a department's lines of authority.

## III. CONCLUSIONS

The gradual deterioration of the *Manual* has taken place in spite of efforts on the part of the editors to rejuvenate it. The limited but able Federal Register staff has prepared a "Handbook on Document Drafting" Chapter II of which is entitled "How to Prepare Manuscript for the U.S. Government Organization Man-

ual." This material is used in training sessions for agency personnel and the pertinent text is distributed each year as work on a new edition of the *Manual* begins. But at best these actions have merely retarded the rate of decline.

The problem in its simplest terms is one of leadership within the contributing agencies. In a period characterized by ever greater emphasis on the public's right to know, many agencies have been unwilling to assign top talent to the *Manual*, despite substantial expenditures for information functions.

More often than not the work has been delegated to subordinate personnel or used as a training medium for new employees at the entrance grade. There is an understandable hesitancy on the part of such employees to see the problem from the public's point of view and to delete or reduce material which is of importance chiefly within the agency.

Under present conditions it is difficult, possibly even unfair, for the Federal Register editors working on the *Manual* to demand that some agencies limit the length of new material—which may be valuable—because others jealously retain space for years to describe obsolescent functions or to trace the history of present operations.

The experience of many years has convinced the Federal Register staff that the drafting of concise and informative statements of agency functions, projects, programs, and services should be the work of qualified agency staff members—employees at the highest level of competence, fully clothed with authority to act. The Committee on Information, Education, and Reports concurs in this conviction.