DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION	Number: 3200-001
SUBJECT: Services of the National Computer Center	DATE: March 20, 1989
	OPI: Office of the Director, Office of Information Resources Management

1   PURPOSE

This regulation establishes policy, procedures, requirements and responsibilities relative to providing and obtaining services at USDA's National Computer Center.

2   SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS/CANCELLATIONS

DR 3200-1, dated December 20, 1985, is replaced by this regulation.

3   POLICY

a   OIRM is responsible for providing large-scale, mainframe-based information technology services to agencies at the National Computer Center (NCC). The NCC has two locations: one is the National Computer Center at Kansas City (Missouri), or NCC-KC; the other is the National Computer Center at Fort Collins (Colorado), or NCC-FC. The NCC should be considered the "First source of supply" for ADP operational services within USDA. When making the decision as to whether the NCC should be used or not, OIRM and the agencies will consider a number of feasibility and benefit/cost relationships. Included in these analyses should be considerations of such aspects as data interchange/sharing, inter as well as intra agency compatibility, systems integration, and the information needs of the Secretary.

b   In situations where agencies require large-scale computer resources, and those needs cannot be met at the NCC, such computing (usually timesharing) resources may, upon receiving OIRM's technical approval, be obtained from sources outside USDA.

c   The NCC shall be operated in conformance with all laws, regulations, and applicable Departmental policies such as those pertaining to standards, security, privacy, procurement, capacity, planning compatibility, and cost effectiveness.

4   DEFINITIONS

a   Large-Scale Computer. A computer which is among those having the largest and most versatile processing capacity within a computer age-generation. A computer that is considered to be large-scale in one computer age-generation may become classified as small-scale in subsequent age-generation. Conversely, a small computer system commonly called "super-minicomputer" may fall within the definition of a large-scale computer. Because of this changing environment, OIRM reserves the right to officially redefine what is large-scale (also frequently called mainframe) computer, within USDA, over time on a case-by-case basis.

b   National Computer Center. An organization (also called "NCC" or "Center") within OIRM designated to provide information management and processing services as well as certain research, development, testing, technical leadership, and consultation in use of computer and data communications technology to meet program needs of USDA agencies (to include staff offices) and others as resources are available.

c   User. A person who utilizes the service of the NCC (also sometimes called "end user").

d   Client. An NCC user's parent agency or organization that normally is responsible for the program, administrative and financial aspects concerning the services utilized.

e   Distributed Processing. The implementation of a processing or other information system task at remote locations connected under a data communications network architecture. The term includes the concepts of distributed computation, distributed databases, and distributed control.

f   Cooperative Processing. A conceptual approach to the sharing of responsibility for information systems design, data storage, access and processing between and within agencies and the Department for administrative and other designated systems. This concept acknowledges the requirement for both centralized data processing and local data processing, when appropriate. It includes expanded design concepts whereby all facets of technology such as personal computers, minicomputers, mainframes, communications networks, and distributed responsibility for data are considered in the respective information system design.

g   DEPNET. An acronym for DEPartmental NETwork, which is a "full service" USDA contract with a private firm to provide most categories of data communications.

5   OPERATING GUIDELINES

a   General

(1)   OIRM fully supports the view that the processing of information and maintaining of databases should be done at the location that best meets the needs of USDA's program and administrative mission, and is feasible from the standpoints of economy and technology. The NCC will work with the agencies and staff offices to help implement any/all types of automated systems, including those that involve "distributed" and "cooperative" processing. Such systems may involve various combinations of NCC mainframe(s) and agency mini/microcomputers together with appropriate software.

(2)   OIRM fully supports the Office of Management and Budget in encouraging all Federal agencies to offer data processing and related services to other government organizations (cross servicing) as a way of controlling government costs. The NCC is encouraged to enter into cross servicing agreements whenever this will reduce costs to USDA or otherwise provide economic benefit to the Government, and in accordance with OMB circulars A-76, A-97 and A-130.

(3)   USDA user agencies may have need for their applications, or data, located at the NCC, to interact electronically with other agencies, outside cooperating institutions or others with whom they have a valid programmatic or mission related relationship. In these instances, the service of the NCC will be available at normal fees and working relationships. The respective client agencies will be responsible for working with the NCC in collecting charges and for ensuring that established security and integrity procedures are followed. The NCC may also cooperate directly with State and local governments as specified in the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act. The NCC's services are not available directly to the general public.

(4)   The NCC will be operated in accordance with OMB Circular A-76. Periodic management efficiency studies and appropriate follow-up actions will be made to achieve productivity enhancements and to make its operations as competitive as possible.

(5)   The NCC is a "service organization", meaning that it is expected to be responsive to the needs of clients/users, and responsible and accountable for providing services to them. On the other hand, the services to be provided are not "open-ended" and unlimited. The clients/users

also have responsibility for certain actions in order to obtain and maintain services at the NCC.

(6)   The NCC will maintain a close working relationship with the National Finance Center (NFC). The NCC and the NFC will cooperate in making long-range plans, conducting certain procurement actions, and in providing the best utilization, interchangeability, availability, and access to data and services of the organizations to all clients/users. To the maximum extent feasible and cost effective, the NCC and NFC will support each other as contingency/back-up sites.

b   Planning. In order to meet the growing information resources management (IRM) needs of USDA it is essential to perform both short-term (tactical) and long-range (strategic) planning (also see Departmental Regulation 3111-1). The NCC as well as the clients have responsibilities concerning IRM planning activities. In this regard:

(1)   The NCC will:

(a)   Keep abreast of USDA's changing IRM needs, both present and future, and take planning actions accordingly;

(b)   Work with OIRM headquarters to establish strategic USDA IRM policies, information management plans, Departmental demand forecasting models, priorities, and service level standards;

(c)   Work with OIRM headquarters to develop planning and management control systems for the Department to ensure that practices and programs of various information handling disciplines are appropriately integrated with each other;

(d)   Work with clients to identify initiatives that may achieve substantial productivity improvement in mission delivery

using advanced information processing technology; and, take an active role in bringing new technology to the clients/users;

(e)

Work with clients concerning their plans for distributed and cooperative processing systems that interface with the NCC;

(f)

Study clients' program/administrative missions, reports, workload estimates, and plans, and work directly with clients to understand the effects of their programs and activities on a periodic/current basis;

(g)

Conduct effective, ongoing capacity management programs. The primary tools for forecasting future capacity requirements will be forecasts and modeling of agencies historical workload data at the NCC and agencies' supplied forecast of future systems requirements. These tools will be augmented, as required, with additional information regarding new applications, new user requirements, and new technology needs;

(h)

Develop detailed plans for equipment, systems and other resources to include factors for peak workloads, especially to cover the client/user needs of prime shift hours and online response time, as well as to provide reserve capacity for contingencies such as unanticipated systems needs, new technology, and underestimated clients' workloads; and

(i)

Share NCC long-range IRM plans with the respective clients.

(2)   Jointly, the NCC and clients will:

(a)   Develop work plans and service level agreements to meet program requirements, which include a description of the expected work volumes, levels of service, and cost;

(b)   Be responsible for implementing these plans and agreements; and

(c)   Implement annual agreements between the NCC and clients.

(3)   The clients will:

(a)   Share their long-range IRM plans with the NCC; and

(b)   Submit their estimated future systems requirements at the NCC, covering five years into the future.

       c   Obtaining Services from the NCC. The NCC provides a wide range of IRM/ADP services to clients/users. These services may include, but are not necessarily limited to the following areas: large-scale (mainframe) computing, including interactive and batch processing; operational trouble-shooting; systems/equipment applied research; high-speed printing; microfiche and graphics services; training and testbed services; and, consulting on requirements analysis, database design, networking, and software development. In this regard:

(1)   The NCC will:

(a)   Within its capability and resource level (which may vary from time to time), strive to provide the services requested by the clients;

(b)   Provide timely, realistic responses to service requests;

(c)
Cooperate with clients/users facing emergency priorities;

(d)
Work closely with clients/users in helping to correct and eliminate defects in systems that impact operations, or otherwise adversely effect the delivery of service;

(e)
Apprise clients/users of changes in computer hardware and software prior to the change being implemented and with sufficient lead-time so clients/users can take whatever steps necessary to ensure a smooth transition;

(f)
Participate with clients in appropriate meetings and conferences; and

(g)
Develop, maintain and distribute technical and procedural instructions, e.g., directives, user handbooks and electronic messages.

(2)   The client will:

(a)
Allow reasonable lead-time in requesting/arranging for services;

(b)
Communicate their services requirements effectively to the NCC, channeling official requests for such services to the respective director (of NCC-KC or NCC-FC);

(c)
Participate with the NCC in appropriate meetings and conferences;

(d)
Maintain and make available to their users pertinent USDA regulations, circulars, etc., and the technical and procedural instructions covered in the NCC's directives system, such as user handbooks and electronic messages;

(e)
Cooperate with the NCC in helping to overcome emergency situations, such as the need for priority changes due to unexpected workloads, power failures, equipment breakdowns, etc.; and

(f)
Cooperate with the NCC to correct and eliminate defects in systems that impact operations, or otherwise adversely affect the delivery of service.

d   Managing and Securing Information at the NCC. The vast majority of the information processed and stored at the NCC is owned by the clients. Both the NCC and the clients have responsibilities concerning the management and security of this information. In this regard:

(1)   The NCC will:

(a)
Provide data management software, limited to file backup, dictionary procedures, microfiche services, and consulting on the proper use of data management concepts, transaction processing and other data handling technology;

(b)
Ensure the physical security of the equipment and information located there;

(c)
Establish and manage methods and procedures to meet basic security requirements, including the referral of requests for access to various databases to the appropriate agencies;

(d)
Conduct risk analyses and develop contingency plans;

(e)
Work closely with their designated back-up site(s) to ensure availability, adequate capacity, and back up operating procedures designed to minimize disruption of critical processing;

(f)
Specify to clients/users any alternate back-up sites and off-site storage that are available for their use.

(g)
Work with OIRM headquarters to develop, test, and implement new security policies and techniques; and

(h)
Encourage clients/users to utilize effective security measures.

(2)   The clients will:

(a)
Accomplish data definition and make choices of the information tools to be used;

(b)
Define the back-up for contingency planning, and other security requirements for the information that they need to maintain, as well as that processed and stored by the NCC;

(c)
Cooperate and participate with the NCC in making risk analyses, identifying critical systems, locating alternative back-up sites as needed, periodically test critical systems at the primary back-up site, and doing such other

contingency planning prudent or required;

(d)
Ensure integrity of their application programs, including the proper testing of them prior to placing into production;

(e)
Periodically assess, from the standpoint of efficiency, and take appropriate action on their applications operating at the centers, e.g., to determine whether to run in prime vs. non-prime time, to redesign and eliminate obsolete system "packages," and to eliminate the use of obsolete computer languages;

(f)
Ensure integrity of their application programs' data, including its collection, transmission, format, retention and management;

(g)
Identify the appropriate records, fields, files, etc., to be secured and the level of security needed;

(h)
Ensure the protection of the keys and access to their systems data;

(i)
Ensure that appropriate passwords, user identifications, account numbers, etc., are used relative to their processing at the NCC, and that any necessary corrective actions being taken;

(j)
Ensure that their programs can be run at specified alternate back-up sites; and

(k)
Authorize any releases of

their information, and follow the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts.

e   Providing a Network Management and Communications Services. The NCC provides various support services to OIRM headquarters and to clients/users relative to networking, including the implementation of the Departmental Network (DEPNET). Virtually all classes of data communications are encompassed by DEPNET. It is possible to use various terminal and computer-to-computer communications protocols within the contract. In this regard the NCC will:

(1)   Work with OIRM headquarters and agencies in determining network policies and procedures that provide the most efficient access to NCC;

(2)   Manage and provide technical support of the necessary capabilities to interface users' data transmissions to the NCC host systems;

(3)   Work with OIRM headquarters and agencies to define and adopt intercommunication protocols and network systems architectures that will permit data and applications sharing that is versatile enough to accommodate growth and change, as well as comply with Federal standards;

(4)   Provide technical consulting, design, and problem definition services to help client agencies improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their data networking; and

(5)   Separate network management, operating system generation and testing, and other critical processing systems from the normal production systems at the NCC to minimize mutual interference and to maximize system accessibility/availability.

f   Charging and Billing for Services. The NCC operated on a non-profit basis, i.e., charging for their services only the amount necessary to meet expenses and to provide appropriate reserves for replacement of equipment, space, facilities, etc. In this regard the NCC will:

(1)   Calculate estimated billing rates and yearly client costs in accordance with the provisions of OMB Circulars A-25 and A-130;

(2)   Maintain appropriate records of NCC resources expended by each client, broken down to a reasonable level of detail as requested by the respective clients;

(3)   Provide accurate and timely billing and related management information on resources usage information to clients on a monthly or quarterly basis;

(4)   Adjust cost/billing rates on a periodic (usually annual) basis; and

(5)   Provide cost adjustments to the clients during and at the end of each fiscal year as needed to balance the respective working capital fund accounts.