25 November 1977, Volume 198, Number 4319 **SCIENCE**

Intergovernmental Cooperation in Science

One of the uncomfortable truths about the postwar arrangements for science and technology in the United States has been the small role of state and local government. A trilateral relationship took form, linking the federal government with private industry and universities. Only in the last decade, mainly through the initiative of the National Science Foundation, have the states and cities been invited to the table. In President Carter's reorganization of the White House offices, the short and happy life of the Intergovernmental Science, Engineering and Technology Panel came to a premature close when it was abolished and its functions "transferred to the President."

With chronically slim resources, the National Science Foundation has supported a versatile array of experimental projects aimed at linking state and local governments with scientific research and technology. Among other things, NSF is nourishing a network of cities and science advisers to match needs with available know-how. In another experiment, it is testing linkages between local governments and industrial firms. And a third experiment connects state governments with a supportive federal laboratory consortium. In the face of skepticism, NSF has hung tough in its belief that modest but strategic investment in intergovernmental science will yield benefits in terms of productivity and service delivery. It is a refreshing glimpse of the better side of government.

Inflated expectations of a blessed union between science and state and local government, on the other hand, are not helpful. Enough has been learned to tell us that progress will be slower than we might like. True, state and local governments are fighting a storm of dilemmas of urban decay, modernization, law enforcement, air and water management, energy conservation, and human services. But defining needs in terms that science or technology can address is a thorny business. Simplistic jargons of technology transfer are not helpful. Applications of sophisticated technology often are not affordable within tight budgets. Problems of uncertainty, in many ways, are more intransigent at these levels of government than at the national level. The Balkanized state of power centers and the mixture of "strong" and "weak" governors and other elected officials are barriers to introducing change with economies of scale.

Still, with all of these problems, governors and mayors and legislators are reaching for scientific and technical advice, and the profile of state and local government is changing. Public interest groups such as the National Governors Conference, the National Conference of State Legislators, the Conference of Mayors, the National Association of County Officials, the National Municipal League, and the International City Managers Association are all converging in the sponsorship of new arrangements to bring science and technology into the act. A National Conference on Earthquake and Related Hazards, arranged by the Council of State Governments and the University of Colorado, will inform state government officials about risk assessment, hazard reduction, and earthquake prediction.

An important dimension is being added to the commonly perceived agenda of science and technology. Although it comes tardily, its value should not be underestimated. If science and technology can offer a brighter future to federalism, a new measure of utility can emerge where public and private investment in research and development is argued. But there is a great deal still to be done to test and develop a better match between state and local needs and federal research and development priorities. This will not be accomplished by arm's length relationships, and certainly not if the states and cities are viewed simply as passive markets for the end products of federally oriented research and development. Congress knew what it was doing when it legislated entrée for the states and cities to the science policy staff of the President. If that opening is not somehow assured, a useful initiative will have been checkmated.—WILLIAM D. CAREY