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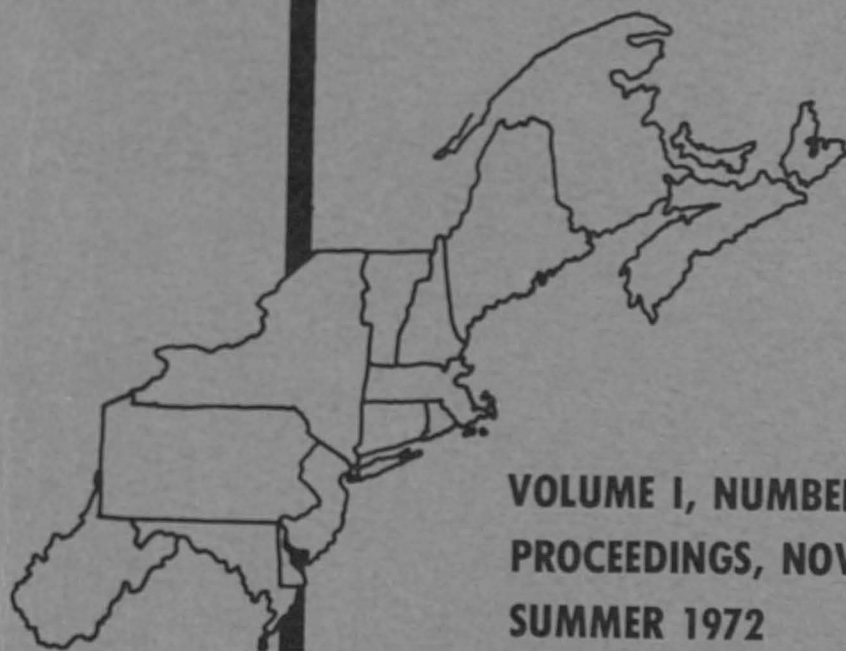
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PROBLEMS IN PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION  
FOR DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE RURAL POOR

Shirley Elias  
Economic Consultant

For the past three years I have participated in an interesting experiment conducted by the U.S. Government. The program was experimental in that it was one of the few, perhaps the only, program operated by the Federal Government where a direct federal-local relationship exists. States have no direct authority in the program; the Governor is given only veto power over the federal funds entering the state.

The purpose of the program according to the legislation is to eliminate poverty and the problems associated with poverty. A definition for poverty has been developed based on a relationship between income and family size (see Table 1). Using the definition, approximately 20 percent of the United States population is poor. One family in five does not have sufficient income to maintain a minimal living standard. It is to this group of people, approximately 200,000 in Maine and 1,700,000 in New England, that the antipoverty program has directed itself.

There have been two major thrusts in the program. One has been directed toward assisting the poor to develop the means to break out of the cycle of poverty. The specific programs operated in an attempt to reach this goal have included manpower training, adult education, economic development, family planning, counseling, and others which emphasize improving the skills of the individual and giving him new opportunity.

A second thrust, which has been much more controversial, has been directed toward assisting the poor to obtain a decent standard of living from the government. Some of the specific goals have included full enforcement of the laws - local, state and federal - which provide protection and assistance to poor people, and the creation of new laws which would guarantee a decent standard of living for all Americans. The techniques for reaching these goals have included community organization, lobbying, class action suits against the government, and, in general, pursuing activities which were designed to give the poor political power. The major thrust which an individual favors is an indication of his answer to the question, "Why are people poor?"

If one believes that people are poor because of individual deficiencies, then the first set of programs would be endorsed. If, instead, one is convinced that economic deprivation is a consequence of the various economic systems, at least to the extent that government guarantees an acceptable standard of living. I wish to direct by comments to the

Table 1<sup>1/</sup>  
OEO Poverty Guidelines for All States Except Alaska and Hawaii

Family Size	Nonfarm Family	Farm Family
1	\$2,000	\$1,700
2	2,600	2,100
3	3,300	2,800
4	4,000	3,400
5	4,700	4,000
6	5,300	4,500
7	5,900	5,000

For families with more than 7 members, add \$600 for each additional member in a nonfarm family and \$500 for each additional member in a farm family.

OEO Poverty Guidelines for Alaska

Family Size	Nonfarm Family	Farm Family
1	\$2,500	\$2,125
2	3,250	2,775
3	4,150	3,575
4	5,000	4,250
5	5,900	5,000
6	6,650	5,650
7	7,400	6,300

For families with more than 7 members, add \$750 for each additional member in a nonfarm family and \$650 for each additional member in a farm family.

OEO Poverty Guidelines for Hawaii

Family Size	Nonfarm Family	Farm Family
1	\$2,300	\$1,975
2	3,000	2,550
3	3,650	3,100
4	4,400	3,750
5	5,200	4,425
6	5,850	4,975
7	6,500	5,525

For families with more than 7 members, add \$650 for each additional member in a nonfarm family and \$550 for each additional member in a farm family.

<sup>1/</sup> "Office of Economic Opportunity Instruction 6004-1C", Executive Order of the President, Washington, D.C., November 19, 1971.

efforts the antipoverty program has made in economic development and specifically to the style in which the program has been carried out. The style is important for a number of reasons. A program can be good in concept, designed to solve particular problems, yet fail to solve those problems because of the techniques used in carrying out the program. Also, the style of execution is an indication of the policy decisions being made, and these may be poor decisions which jeopardize the success of the program.

For about two and a half years, I directed an anti-poverty planning project in the State of Maine. It was one of ten projects funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity (O.E.O.) on an experimental basis. As Director of Planning I became very much involved in the two major thrusts of the poverty program and the controversies they generated. The "radicals" on one side continually exerted pressure to influence the allocation of O.E.O. resources for creating political power for poor people and changing the economic system, or they were boycotting the "establishment activities" of the programs charging that these activities were useless to poor people and only provided jobs for the middle class. The other group, which was working to improve the skills and opportunity for low income people, was continually looking for more resources and better techniques for being effective in their programs.

To eliminate poverty in the United States, the federal government provided money to local organizations known as Community Action Agencies. These agencies in rural Maine encompassed a geographic area about the size of our counties and included a population of about 50,000 people each. Some agencies were smaller; others were larger. These agencies were expected to carry out activities which would solve the problems of poverty in our country. The Board of Directors of these agencies had to have the following composition: one-third of the membership was public officials; at least one-third was low income people; and the remainder of the board was made up of private organizations or industry. The Board of Directors, with the assistance of its staff, was also expected to develop a plan for using its anti-poverty money. The federal government placed great emphasis on the development of a planning process whereby all low income groups in the community would participate in the creation of a plan which would address local problems and priorities. My program and the O.E.O. officials at the Regional level required that meetings of low income groups be held throughout an area so that the problems within the local community would be known and meaningful priorities and programs would be developed for the plan. This type of planning within each small town or city was truly communities in action.

A great deal of effort has to be made to bring about this type of planning activity. There are four major problems which must be overcome before advocacy planning can be successfully carried out in the community. They are cognizance or comprehension, techniques and skills, money, and motivation. I will discuss each briefly as they relate to the poverty program.

Cognizance or Comprehension: Formal planning is a rather new activity in our society and advocacy planning is even newer. Government, business and industry, and individuals have probably always done planning of some sort. However, since the development and widespread use of computer technology, it has been possible to become much more sophisticated in our planning techniques. In the early sixties the military presented to the civilian government its Planning, Programming and Budgeting System known as PPBS. Computer technology, statistical techniques, and systems analysis are all incorporated in the PPBS. The poverty program was the first federal agency to utilize PPBS in its own operations on a national scale, and it required all of its grantees to participate in the program on a local basis.

In rural areas, such as Maine, the staffs of the CAAs were unfamiliar with planning and PPBS. After some training, they were able to properly fill out the required forms but they did not have an in-depth understanding of the planning system or planning techniques. Advocacy planning, also, was not understood by the staffs in these rural areas. Without understanding the concept, the agency directors could hardly be expected to promote it and utilize it in their programs. Over a period of time, some training was made available to staffs and boards and, in addition, the federal and state government required advocacy planning before grants would be approved. A brave, new experiment began. During a three-year period the government spent approximately \$800,000 in training and monitoring planning activities in New England and at the end of this period the directors of these rural agencies, in general, have some comprehension of planning and are able to carry out planning activities in their agencies on a limited basis.

Techniques and Skills: In addition to the general management of a planning process, an agency must have individuals on their staffs who have skills in conducting planning sessions with groups. Basically two factors must exist before a group or organization can plan effectively. First, the individuals have to be able to work well together; especially the group must be able to deal effectively with conflict among its members. And, secondly, the group needs to understand the activities it must carry out in order to create a plan or participate in the planning process. We have seen many poverty groups which work well together, but their activities do not go beyond knitting or braiding rugs or having cake sales. Other groups know what they want to accomplish through social action, but they are burdened with infighting and, thus, are fairly ineffective. The agency wishing to carry out advocacy planning should have individuals working with these groups who can play the role of the facilitator. This requires staff with special skills in group process - which brings me to the next point.

Money: Advocacy planning required money, money for hiring "planning staff" or for providing intensive training for staff persons who will become planners. Money is also required to pay for transportation and baby-sitting costs for the group members. If low income people are to

participate in any planning activities, these basic costs must be assumed by the agency. In the rural areas of Maine, generally some funds were provided for transportation costs for low income people, but money was not made available to hire planners to work with the community groups.

Motivation: Most agency directors are strongly motivated to acquire funds for their agencies. They are also motivated to keep conflicts within or about their agencies to manageable size. In the experimental planning activities of the poverty program, agency directors were presented with a real dilemma. The agency had to carry out community planning activities and create a plan. This inevitably generated some community tensions and sometimes conflict. When the question was asked in the community, "How is the poverty program going to spend its money?", inevitably many ideas are generated and not all can be carried out. However, the federal government required that this question be asked and that all low income groups and other community groups respond. And then, after the agencies had acquired a comprehension of community planning, the money and effort was expended to train staffs and community people in techniques and skills of community planning and perhaps hundreds of meetings were held in rural Maine in order to create a community plan, after this investment was made in community planning, the federal government funded the agencies according to the priorities developed in Washington and Boston. There was no credence given to the local planning effort in funding the local poverty agency or in creating programs there. The planning process became primarily an activity of planning just for the sake of planning. No results would be obtained from the plan according to O.E.O. posture. The agency would be funded at the same level each year (1968 was the standard) and it would be funded to carry out those programs which the federal agency in Washington and Boston required. Power struggles occurred between headquarters and the regional office, and the state office and the regional office. The local agency in the rural area had very little power and very little autonomy. Their plans didn't stand a chance.

It is not difficult to understand why these rural agency directors did not enthusiastically endorse community planning. O.E.O. policy had created a serious dilemma for them. Through their planning process they were generating demands in the community and they had almost no way to satisfy these demands.

The results of the advocacy planning structure which O.E.O. created are easy to predict. There were few, if any, new programs generated by the local communities which operated within this system. Some positive results occurred due to the planning process itself - new groups were formed, others were directed into planning and activity when went beyond the "social club" stage, and a few groups found funding from sources other than O.E.O. to carry out activities they had planned.

There were, however, some groups in rural Maine which did create new programs and got them funded. These groups were different from the groups dominated by O.E.O. administrative policies. These independent groups were strongly goal-oriented. They contained a group of people who were in close agreement on both the goals and the activities of their group. Usually there was one to three strong leaders who provided direction to the group and enabled it to work together. Independently, these groups formed cooperatives or political action organization and after demonstrating their abilities to perform, although on a limited basis, most of these organizations were able to acquire financial resources - very often from the Office of Economic Opportunity.

In conclusion, the O.E.O. experiment has shown that autonomous decision-making which occurs hundreds or thousands of miles away from the areas affected by the decisions is ineffective in generating economic or community development. Only when some planning and decision-making can occur on the local level, only then will projects and organizations develop which have vitality and the potential for future growth.