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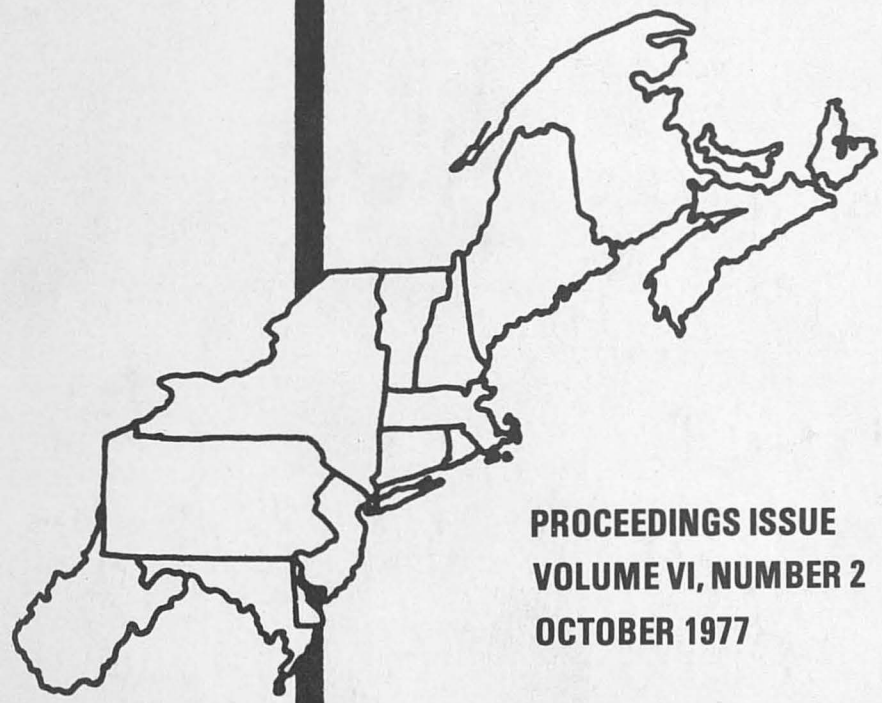
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RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:
A DESCRIPTION OF THE DELAWARE
TITLE V PROJECT

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Introduction

There are a number of lessons to be learned from the Title V Extension and Research activities recently completed throughout the U.S. Several aspects of the Delaware project are discussed in this paper. Some of the detail of our project is not presented because a fifteen minute documentary video-tape of the project was viewed at the time the paper was presented.

There are certain aspects which need amplification.

Points

- a.) How the problem and area were selected;
- b.) The kind of advisory system which is effective;
- c.) Administration structure; and
- d.) Strategies for involving other resources.

A.) Area and Problem Selection:

Selecting a unit of analysis (i.e. farm, family, group, etc.) is basic to research and extension - in many ways it is the most difficult task.

The small size of Delaware's population and territory adds a unique dimension in considering an appropriate unit. It is important to note that this smallness fosters a traditional division among the state, counties, and communities. This has given rise to a historical attachment to one's local community and county. Throughout most of Delaware's history the state has been largely a conglomeration of small towns and outlying areas. Until 1940 only Wilmington had a population larger than 5,000 inhabitants. Our approach could not ignore this fact. It recognized and incorporated this historical localism into our ultimate problem and area selection design.

Most of the rural development literature reviewed agreed that process was as important as a tangible end product. How something is done is a worthy end in itself. This standard hypothesis or process model was adopted by the Delaware Title V Project. "Capacity building" for rural local communities was set as the desired program outcome. Foremost in this approach was the concept of assisting communities to cope with self-identified problems. This method consisted of: determining what problems needed solution, providing various alternative courses of action, using local or outside resources, and analyzing the effects of these decisions.

A rural community typology was developed on the basis of economic criteria. This division provided some early clues about the potential needs of different kinds of communities. For instance, recreation communities react to seasonal population fluctuations. Likewise within other categories we hypothesized that communities would have unique problems arising from their various economic bases.

Four main categories of communities were defined:

- a.) agriculturally based;
- b.) beach or seasonal recreation;
- c.) governmental/institutional; and
- d.) urbanizing/industrial growth community were defined.

It was thought that local governments have a high degree of influence and responsibility in solving problems. They also possess the legal authority to carry out decisions resulting from research findings. Therefore, local governments were selected as the unit of analysis. In order to help local governments make the necessary socio-economic-environmental and other adjustments, research and extension activities were to be conducted in the following manner. In the first year one community - representative of one of the four categories listed, was invited to participate in a four step rural development process: a.) inventory and analysis of the current situation; b.) determination of what could be - community objectives compared to alternative actions; c.) determination of what will be - involving work with community decision-makers in the choice and carrying out of group actions to achieve the objectives; and d.) assessment of what happens - evaluation of the impact of the first three steps.

Selection of Direct Services To Rural People

Guided by these criteria, the Town of Laurel, Delaware was selected. A number of factors contributed to its selection, it was thought that

First, as an agriculturally-oriented community, program results would have application to many agricultural areas in Delaware and the region.

Second, its progressive attempts to meet housing and recreation needs.

Third, the community's need for analysis and information in the areas of: code enforcement, downtown revitalization, industrial development, rail service, water and sewer, drainage, annexation, and development were evident.

The presence of an active local merchants' association and League of Women Voters suggested that the community was progressive and likely to make good use of program resources.

Available data from consultant studies done for the Town were thought to be useful for understanding the town's problem.

After a review of literature available on Laurel, contact was made with the town manager to explain the purpose of a Title V Project and how it might specifically be applied to the Laurel community.

Prior to a formal presentation at a town meeting, fact sheets describing the Title V Project were given to the manager to be distributed to the Town Council. The second contact occurred when the Title V Project was explained to the elected town officials.

As anticipated, the formal response at that time was not encouraging. Promised federal and state assistance never materialized. Cast doubt of tangible results from a federal program. Despite this skepticism the request that Laurel be the first pilot community was endorsed.

The third contact resulted in the development of a list of problem areas which the Town Council prepared.

Items in order of priority were: 1) Housing (mobile home park); 2) Recreation (Laurel River Park); 3) planning industrial site annexation with Planning Commission; 4) review of road network through town; and 5) economic development.

The priorities were reviewed by the Title V staff, University Rural Development Committee, State Title V Coordinator and the Extension and Research Coordinators. A mobile home park for low-income residents, and the management program for Laurel River Park were two areas originally selected for study.

This list of concerns was never static. It was modified several times during the project. Expansion of the list by including additional communities did not occur as planned. The complexity of the Laurel project, the success, and the uncertainty of funding caused the Rural Development Advisory Council to decide against including an additional community.

These concerns were reassessed midway in the project. Since no new communities were added the remaining staff resources were concentrated in Laurel. A second and final list of items was adopted by the Advisory Council at the January 1976 meeting. The seven mutually selected items were the development of:

- a.) A family living program for future residents of a low-moderate income mobile home park (Big Mills Run);
- b.) A mobile home park management plan;
- c.) A management plan for the Laurel River Park;
- d.) Applications for (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (Title I Housing and Community Development Act, 1974);
- e.) A town environmental assessment policy;
- f.) An evaluation process for the Laurel Police Department; and
- g.) A police department management plan.

Other Citizen Involvement

The audience field was narrowed to affected groups within priorities. For example, citizens from the target redevelopment area were formed into the Project Advisory Committee on housing. The Town's projects were supported by federal funds. These programs required citizen involvement in the planning process. The HUD Community Block Grant Program regulations stated that public hearings must be held in the pre-application and full application stages. Public notices were another requirement for application, release of funds and environmental notification phases of the program.

The Title V staff prepared fact sheets about the CD Block Grant program for town citizen information meetings. Over 200 persons attended these meetings. The project area committee met with the Town officials on an ad hoc basis as needs arose and had to be addressed. Hopefully this citizen involvement will continue throughout the remainder of the Community Development activities.

The Town Recreation Committee was another group formed with the aid of the Title V staff. As in any new group the recreation committee found it difficult to clearly define its purpose and role within the Town government.

Various organizational charts, duties and responsibilities and activities were presented by the Title V staff for consideration by the committee.

The Park Management Plan prepared by the staff served as a second vehicle to illustrate to the committee the functions it might perform. It was suggested that the plan needed support from such a group in order to achieve full implementation. Small rural governments lack the funds to hire full-time park staff and the committee could volunteer their park maintenance and beautification skills in lieu of hiring staff.

The Recreation Committee operation exceeded expectations. After several formative meetings the committee began functioning entirely on its own after preliminary guidance during formative meetings.

Chamber of Commerce support was essential for the long term revitalization effort in the downtown central business district. Cooperatively the staff and Town prepared and presented audio-visual material to help gain the ideas and support of the Chamber.

An Independence Day celebration and a September weekend Bicentennial Jamboree highlighting the development projects of the Town were direct results of the meeting with the Chamber.

The West Laurel socio-economic survey, in addition to gathering data for planning purposes, incorporated attitudinal questions about redevelopment plans. Not surprisingly over ninety percent of the respondents knew about the development projects and were supportive of the effort for improving their housing conditions. The survey provided a good gauge of citizen reactions.

B.) Creation Of An Advisory System

As mandated by Title V the President of the University appointed a State Rural Development Advisory Council. Regulations (7 CFR, Part 23) in Section 23.3 stated that:

The chief administrative officer of the administratively responsible State Land Grant University will appoint a State Rural Development Advisory Council. (page 5)

In Section 23.4 the regulations further stated that:

The function of the Council shall be to review and approve annual program plans conducted under Title V. The Council will also advise the Chief Administrative Officer on all matters pertaining to the authorized programs. (page 5)

Long Term Policy

Many members appointed were state cabinet secretaries. Because of the stature of the appointments to the Council it was mutually agreed that the commitment would be limited to giving advice and counsel to the project and not direct involvement. The nature of the Council's composition expedited compliance with federal directives to jointly develop Title V plans with appropriate state agencies. The four Council members from state government acting as representatives of their departments fulfilled the obligation to coordinate with state plans. Although the Council reviewed and adopted the first Plan of Work (POW) it was not until the first progress report was due that the Council actually became closely involved in the project.

A January 9, 1975 meeting of the Council reported the progress of the Title V project and evaluated the work which had been accomplished. Non Council members who attended were the President of the University, Mayor of Laurel, The Town Manager, and several Town Councilmen.

The Mayor stated that Title V was "the best damn federal program in which the town was or had been involved in. Too often the programs don't get down to the local level where they are needed", he said.

The success of the project was apparent to all present at the meeting. When it was announced that future funding was questionable, concern was immediately voiced by several Council members. Again the uncertainty of funding made the Council hesitant to agree to select additional communities to add to the project.

Clearly, the Mayor's presence at the Council meetings was most appreciated by the Council. Whereas the Title V staff explained the conceptual framework and operations of the project, and projected the plan of work for the next year - it was the Mayor's unsolicited praise of the project that left the clearest impression of success. Through this review process the Council was exposed to a technical summary from the staff and an impact summary from the Mayor.

Short Term Policy

The Delaware project, referred to as a 'grass roots project', also had an inherent advisory network in addition to the Rural Development Advisory Council and the University rural development committee. The project's goal to increase the capacity of communities to cope with self identified problems limited the staff to the issues of the selected town. Once the town developed its 'laundry list' of concerns based on its goals and objectives, the list automatically became short term policy for the project.

The town's influence on the activities of the project were probably the most crucial to the advisory process. The town as a legal entity could make application for and receive funds to administer programs. The problems and hence solutions were "real world" considerations. Without this close local contact research and extension work would probably have resulted in a product which had little application for solving problems.

For example, the town helped prepare draft materials to be used in the project. An interview schedule which was needed to obtain planning information from a target audience was reviewed by the town. Several suggestions were made and incorporated into the final schedule. This give and take characterized all aspects of the project.

In summary then, at least three levels of advice were present during the project. Two were administrative structures (Title V Coordinator and RD Council). Both set long term policy. The third advisory group, the town, was more immediate and continuing as the consumer group. Short term policy was framed on this level.

Having several advisory systems usually means at least several sets of advice. There is a potential for conflict or difference of policy to arise in this multilevel advisory approach. Conflicting policies could be adopted by the Advisory Council counter to those of a local unit of government (or vice versa). Having members of all levels involved in official deliberations may have helped avoid this problem. The Advisory Council meetings were always open to the Mayor for his suggestions and reactions. The Council was always sensitive to local needs and responded positively to the Mayor, usually by adopting his suggestions.

It is evident that mutual sharing must take place amongst these various groups to avoid conflict. The Title V staff should coordinate this by bringing these parties together but must avoid becoming the mediator of diverse opinions.

C.) Administrative Organization For Research & Extension

Regulations promulgated for Title V of the Rural Development Act of 1972 specified that the Chief Administrative officer of the Land Grant University should designate an official responsible for the overall coordination of a state's program. Although larger states have highly complex administrative structures, the College of Agricultural Sciences, being relatively small, does not. This is an important factor since the small scale of operation permits an informal and rapid flow of information with minimal coordination because administrative layers do not exist. Another factor is that the small staff involved in rural development research and extension must be flexible.

There is no cadre of specialists to call upon for informational support. The CRD staff has relied rather extensively on non-land grant resources. Although from one viewpoint this was a limiting factor, from another it explains to some extent why the project did not encounter long administrative delays.

After several planning sessions the Coordinator requested that the Area CRD Agent assume responsibility as project leader for the daily operations of the project once it was begun. The agent was to report directly to the Coordinator on policy and operations. This basic system was retained throughout the project. The small amount of Title V funding was adequate for one new full time position as Rural Development Research and Extension Agent.

The Dean Title V Coordinator was the Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences on the Newark Campus of the University of Delaware. The Extension Director and several members of the University Rural Development committee were also located there. The Title V project leader, directly responsible for the daily operation, and the Rural Development Research and Extension Agent occupy offices in the College of Agricultural Sciences Substation, Georgetown, Delaware.

As discussed in the previous section, the Title V Coordinator in compliance with the regulations established a Rural Development Advisory Council. In summary the duties of the Council were: deciding policy, reviewing the project's progress, approving plans of work and making general suggestions. Technical advice was also given by the University Rural Development Committee consisting of agricultural economists and Extension CRD staff.

Neither of these structures existed before. Both were created specifically for Title V. They constituted a new influence for the College of Agricultural Sciences for Rural Development Research and Extension. The adoption of the structures encouraged a new formal linkage with agency representatives and within the College where informal contacts once prevailed.

The operations of the project were carried out at the county level by the Area CRD Agent who had been located in Sussex County, Delaware two years prior to the commencement of the project. Since the CRD program was already working in the area chosen for Title V, there existed community ties with local governments and groups needed for the success of the project. For this reason it was opportune for the CRD Agent to assume responsibility as project leader. It was this local team of two agents, one working part-time as project leader and the other as the full-time Title V Agent, that provided the direct services to the selected community. The CRD Agent's role, however, was limited to being a catalyst for getting the project started while continuing other CRD programs already underway in the County.

The relationship between the research and extension part of the project was excellent. Although the split appointment was initially established due to a lack of funds, the fifty-fifty relationship worked very well. It allowed the RD Research & Extension Agent to be directly exposed to problems, to communicate directly with parties involved in the project, and to deliver services. The process also gave the agent time enough to write resource material, analyze problems and find alternatives to solve local problems.

Aside from the direct Title V Project the project leader and RD Research & Extension Agent had good working relationships with research and resource personnel at the University, particularly in the Department of Agricultural and Food Economics. Throughout the initial phases of the Project, departmental staff made suggestions for community selection and priorities. Later, on a limited basis, this type of technical advice assistance was still given.

Assessment Of New Extension - Research Relation

The Department of Agricultural and Food Economics was the only College of Agricultural Sciences Department which could directly supply needed research capacity to the project. A fully staffed Department consists of six economists, two of whom were associated with rural or resource development. Unfortunately one of the faculty resigned shortly after the project started. The second faculty member left on his sabbatical during the middle of the project.

In effect the University Rural Development Committee, which initially had representatives from Agricultural Economics and CRD staff, was reduced mainly to participation by CRD staff. The original committee was heavily involved in the first Plan of Work (POW) submitted to USDA. In fact the research design was formulated by an agricultural economist and the outreach design was outlined by the CRD Extension staff.

Throughout most of the project greater emphasis was placed on Extension. Probably this was one of the weakest links within the Delaware Title V Project. It could be argued, however, that even if the staff vacancies had not occurred close relations would not have been maintained. Likewise, the argument could be taken one step further by questioning the assumption, in this case for Delaware, that there exists an ample research base to rely upon for rural development work.

It may be helpful to the relationship between Research and Extension, especially for the smaller Northeast Land Grant Universities, to give greater responsibility to the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, located at Cornell University in New York. Another possibility is the funding of joint or regional projects or staff consultants to assist similar state projects, i.e. government capacity building. These specialists could increase the resource capacity which is presently absent in the Northeast.

In the absence of this type of supportive relationship, Title V functioned quite well for two reasons:

First the Rural Development Research and Extension Agent had to perform research on a need-request basis. Much of this research could be classified as type 1 research as defined in the Task Force Report to the Northeastern Regional Agricultural Research Planning Committee:¹ Decisions are constantly being made at local and state levels about rural development matters on which useful information exists in diverse and widely scattered sources. It would be very helpful if that information were collected and focused upon the types of problems frequently encountered in rural development. Such knowledge consists of results of past research, known trends in economic and social data, experiences of other communities in dealing with similar problems, sources of assistance in planning and implementing programs, applicable economic and sociological principles and still other matters.²

Second, the Research & Extension Agent was in fact responsible to the town through the rural development commitment made. In other words, the Delaware Title V Model built into its system the type 1 research from its inception. This accounted for an accepted definition of research as "a comprehensive search for and generation of relevant rural development information both for local consumption and for potential users."

D. Involvement Of Other Institutions and Agencies

As mentioned the University of Delaware does not have the full array of resources at its disposal that characterize the much larger midwestern land grant systems. The Delaware project relied heavily on agency resources when University sources were not available.

^{1/}"Rural Development Research in the Northeast for the next five years - A framework". September 1973.

^{2/}I bid. p. 18.

The closest associated University Department, for this type of project, was the College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy. The College has an Urban Services Division which supplies on a 'fee basis' services to local and state governments. The division as established by the University Board of Trustees must be self supporting. Although many rural communities need assistance through this Division, few can afford to pay for technical consulting fees. The Division, which is located on campus, has assisted a few of the rural communities but primarily centers its efforts in the northern urban/industrial part of the State.

The College also has a small library containing materials useful for the activities undertaken by the project. The College was helpful in providing management materials, reports, studies and advice, even though this type of aid could cause competition between Title V and the Urban Services Division. In one instance information collected on municipal salary levels by the Title V staff was shared with the Division to avoid a duplication of effort.

The institutional cooperation between the University of Delaware and Delaware State College (1890 institution) was an important structural aspect of the project. The Delaware Cooperative Extension Service through the auspices of Delaware State College provided funds for hiring a part-time housing counselor to survey residents living in substandard housing in Laurel. The counselor, who had himself resided for thirteen years in the surveyed area, had an excellent rapport with the low-income minority residents.

The interview schedules were developed by the Title V staff and the Town for the housing counselor. He conducted interviews of residents identified by Town officials as living in the worst conditions.

The counselor also identified socio-economic problems, health needs and cases needing referral to other agencies. Local minority leaders were also contacted and identified for future cooperation.

Delaware State College's cooperation did not end with the housing counselor. The College's home economists prepared family living workshop materials. Next they provided an educational program in home management for prospective residents of an interim relocation mobile home park.

The Title V staff kept Delaware State College staff apprised of developments and exchanged information.

The involvement and close relationship developed by the Title V staff with the selected town government was the most important factor for assuring that good results would be achieved. The "grass roots" approach to guarantee mutual agreement included: asking the town council members to list their development priorities, informing them what the staff could do, then deciding together what would be attempted to accomplish town goals.

On the state level, therefore, linkages were established and maintained. The Title V staff compiled a mobile home park management guide with the help and advice of the State Division of Housing. Draft copies were reviewed by the Division and credit was given to the state agency staff who assisted in the publication.

Another state contact was the Delaware State Planning Office. As the A-95 Clearinghouse for all projects involving federal funds, the staff worked closely with planning personnel in preparing federal funding applications.

One reinforcing factor on the State level was the membership of the Secretary of Community Affairs and Economic Development, Secretary of the Department of Labor, and Director of the State Planning Office, on the Rural Development Advisory Council.

Other state agencies involved were the Office of the Governor, State Legislature, and Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

Cooperation extended beyond the state level to include federal agencies. Levels as high as the Federal Regional Council (FRC) were involved in the development work. The FRC was instrumental in the final decision to release federal property (mobile homes in this case) for town housing. The USDA, FRC representative successfully responded to a request on behalf of the Town to clear away bureaucratic red tape which was delaying the delivery of the mobile homes.

On the local level the First State Resource Conservation and Development Project (RC&D), Soil Conservation Service, USDA and the Title V staff collaborated on park development. As a major rural funding source for water-based recreation, RC&D funded a recreation park in the Title V assisted town.

The District Conservationist in Sussex County, Delaware aided in the preparation of park management guide by supplying Soil Conservation Service (SCS) material and by reviewing drafts of the publication.

Delmarva Advisory Council (DAC), a three state planning agency working with the Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Department of Commerce, assisted in several town planning sessions. Two projects, a water system and a well-storage tank, were funded by EDA through DAC.

On one occasion the town manager, a DAC representative, a town minority representative and Title V staff jointly attended a project planning and monitoring session with EDA in the Philadelphia Region III Office. Other informal sessions also occurred during the water system development.

The Title V staff was closely associated with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Region III and Washington, D.C. on various Community Development Block Grant Applications, submittals and performance reports.

Congressional staff worked on occasion with certain grant problems. The Town and Title V staff met with and spoke to congressional staff to resolve funding delays and to gain support for pending fund requests.

As this brief narrative indicates linkages were formed at the local, substate, state, regional and federal levels as the need arose within the project to seek and use outside resources to solve community development problems.

F.) Some Lessons Learned

- The joint appointment field staff approach is effective. Most agents must have research competency and organizational ability. These two capabilities must be integrated. Hiring one person helps insure both are used;
- If extension and research structures are not changed then a second approach should stress cooperation. This becomes a matter of emphasis, a reawakening of the possibility to involve researchers or vice versa;
- Involve all potential agencies in the planning process;
- Share credit for program outcomes with all of those involved;
- Select a local advisory approach;
- Require a clear line of authority and responsibility for research and extension;
- Insure permanence of funds so that long-term commitments can be promised. (Program continuity helps build credibility);
- Work towards quick tangible results early in the process;
- Demonstrate a competency and responsiveness to local, identified problems;

- Redefine education to clearly indicate the concept of development (i.e. going beyond a mere exploration of alternatives) to mean assistance in selecting choices to act upon;
- Clarify any hesitancy to include grantsmanship as part of the rural development research and extension process.

REFERENCES

1. "Rural Development Research In The Northeast For The Next Five Years - A Framework". Task Force Report to the Northeastern Regional Agricultural Research Planning Committee. September, 1973.