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TRAINING LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN NEW YORK

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Over the past four or five years a small group at Cornell has conducted in-service management training for county officials and employees. This program has been financed with "soft money" from federal and state sources and the County Officers Association. The program has expanded this year because of federal funds from a new source, and includes plans for work not only with counties, but also cities, towns or townships, and villages, that is, with all types of general local governments in the state.

The program leaders or project directors in the program are Professor William W. Frank, an extension specialist in the State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell, and myself. Performance is therefore a joint responsibility of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Industrial and Labor Relations School, an arrangement that may seem somewhat novel to some at this conference engaged in agricultural extension. The arrangement sometimes is novel to the administrators involved as well as the two program leaders.

Initiative in making this a joint venture originated in the College of Agriculture. At the time, the Industrial and Labor Relations School appeared to be the only other Cornell campus center with both interest in, and capacity for, conducting management training with local government personnel. That school includes among its attributes an Extension Division, which is independent of Cooperative Extension and organized differently, but which also has statewide capabilities.

During the past year, three projects have been conducted by agreement with the County Officers Association of New York State, and financed in large part by HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) funds under Title 8 of the Federal Housing Act of 1964, matched with state money of the State Office for Local Government. One project involved running an in-county management training short course in each of approximately fifteen counties. A second was a two-day seminar on conflict resolution repeated several times both on the campus and at other locations in the state. The third was an on-campus series of five two-day "work sessions," each concerned with how

to begin to resolve an important problem of county management in counties over the state, as described more fully below.

TOWARD MORE COHESIVE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

An early joint undertaking between Cornell and a group of local officials was with the Association of Clerks of County Boards of Supervisors, an auxiliary of the County Officers Association. The unassuming title of clerk of the board belied the strategic importance of this position at the hub of county government in the state.

The present New York program evolved from the interest and initiative of the clerks of boards together with the then president of the County Officers Association, who was a county public welfare commissioner. In the mid-1960's, the experience of the clerks of boards in working together on educational and informational concerns seemed to some to point toward substantial values in extending in-service training across the broad front of county agencies performing diverse public services.

One major purpose then visualized was to weld these various divisions and functions into a more coherent whole that could be widely recognized as a unified county government, a political and administrative entity, or a responsive and responsible community governmental unit in more than name. A weakness of the county as a governmental unit has been its functional fragmentation. The various administrative agencies have looked primarily to their specialized or professional counterparts in state, federal, and other circles, with too little concern for building relationships among local agencies and with local political and administrative leadership. Those interested in better intracounty coordination recognized that greater cohesion in community government might also include building closer relations among all local governments in a community—city, town, village, and school district as well as county. The first plans, however, focused upon the county as a practical start.

An In-Service Training Committee of the County Officers Association was appointed, chaired by a clerk of the board of unusual energy, initiative, and persistence in exploiting possibilities. The committee consulted with interested faculty members at Cornell and the two groups produced a trial management workshop in 1967 for county officers. The next step was a Cornell application for federal funds through the State Education Department under Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965 in order to help finance a series of management training seminars. The County Officers Association agreed to contribute part of the

required state-local matching, and Cornell provided the rest in “in-kind” contributions.

SOME TRIAL AND ERROR

A year in which two more week-long management seminars were tried on campus resulted in favorable reactions of those attending, but in too low attendance to justify continuation. Because funds were available and alternatives obviously necessary, other ideas were tried. One effective approach was decentralizing and localizing training by conducting in-county short courses on a first-come, first-served basis across the state. Collective bargaining between public employees and management, stimulated by recent state legislation mandating such bargaining, has aroused strong local interest in labor relations problems, an area in which the Industrial and Labor Relations School has obvious special capability. Training in this field has attracted attendance.

Another activity that seems to have had impact is a series of work sessions. The week-long management seminars were shortened to two days. The idea of trying to teach students was changed to inviting county officers to the campus to consult together with outside resource assistance, on how to tackle some important county problems. Instead of seeking large enough numbers to make holding a class worthwhile, a few interested county officers were enough to get at the purpose of reaching some tentative conclusions and recommending specific follow-up action for the County Officers Association. A brief report on outcomes of each session was printed and distributed to the association membership and beyond.

The subjects of the sessions held in 1971, one of three years so far, may illustrate the idea:

- Work Session 1. Better Media-County Officer Relations
- Work Session 2. Defining County Officer Responsibilities Under the Taylor Law (on collective bargaining for public employees)
- Work Session 3. Increasing Local Government's Share of Control in the Performance of Governmental Functions
- Work Session 4. Measuring County Government Results to Help Improve Decisions on Budget Appropriations

Work Session 5. Increasing Coordination Between Anti-Poverty Agencies and County Governments

An agricultural economics graduate student combined rare personal qualities with unusual background to make the work sessions go.

NEW THRUST FROM THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PERSONNEL ACT

The most recent chapter in this tale has been award of another federal grant to the Cornell partners this year, this time through the State Office for Local Government under the new federal Intergovernmental Personnel Act administered by the federal Civil Service Commission. The funds will enable us to include many kinds of general local governments in the state within the scope of training efforts. A primary purpose is to prepare instructional materials and methods, and to train trainers, after surveying training needs and resources. We plan to provide an information and technical assistance service and to lend educational support to regional local government training councils. We also seek an elusive and important object: to provide means for informing newly elected members of local governing boards, perhaps the critical group on which depends the long-run strengthening of local government and improvement of local personnel systems.

SOMETHING TO EXTEND IN EXTENSION

Major problems lie ahead of us still, including some arising from extension doctrine that seems as valid with local government clientele as with farm and other groups. For effective extension, it is important to have something to extend. In agriculture the something has been provided by decades of research in an expanding range of applied biological, physical, and social sciences. A high proportion of such research has historically been in-house because little was done outside the land-grant colleges and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In researching problems of local government, there is more support from various agencies and fields, but the results need to be assembled and used in teaching, while more research is needed that is aimed at questions as visualized by local officials and employees in the state. The funds mentioned in this talk are for training, not research. While some research can be and has been conducted with existing institutional resources, the eventual need is for sustained, broad research support if we are to conduct in-service training as a continuing activity that is responsive to clientele priorities.