

We further wish to emphasize that the program will require a major investment in finding and training skilled personnel.

Staff must be put to work who can stimulate the participation of those unused to planning together. Personnel will need to serve as the catalysts through whom tentative and unsophisticated ideas can become practical plans for action. The ability to listen; to be patient; and to persist are some of the qualities of effective community workers. They also need to be able to introduce practical alternatives; to share ideas that have worked elsewhere; and to use their imaginations to bring needed resources into a situation at the right time. This requires, first of all, an attitude of respect for the people and for the work to be done. It is also based on a set of learnable skills. Major training programs will be called for.

We cannot stress too urgently that there must be room for experimentation; for new and imaginative approaches. Pioneering is called for in the war on poverty. Such pioneering has been the traditional role in our society of the smaller private agency, with its flexibility and freedom to test out new ideas. We stress the need for funds directly available to groups free to work on the cutting edge. This is not to underestimate the role of the comprehensive plan and the large coordinating group, but the administrators of the program will need the resources to introduce the innovation more likely to come at points through the small voluntary group effort.

We support the provision in the act, therefore, for direct grants to private agencies. In this regard we would make the point that the skills and talents of many groups will be needed. We urge that support be given to a wide variety of groups, drawing the line only where the primary purpose of the work is the propagation of a creed.

We call your studious attention to an aspect of the pioneering necessary to really reach the poor and; that is, a change in the usual timetable for producing statistically measurable results as a justification for the expenditure of funds. There is an urgency to the need, true. And who can feel it more clearly than the poor themselves? They want jobs or better jobs, better schools, and a better place to live, and they want these things now. But hastily conceived plans produced with an eye to quick results and omitting, in that haste, the development of the capacity of the poor to solve their problems, will not produce the results sought. People emboldened by being allowed to try things out for themselves and, therefore, better able to cope with their problems in the future, must be the primary measure of success.

In stressing these three general points, we speak out of the successes and failures of our own operations over the years. In work with American Indians, seasonal farm laborers, Negroes excluded from the job market—denied equal educational opportunities and decent housing—and with Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking American citizens facing similar handicaps, we know that a step forward, without the participation of those for whose benefit it is taken, can amount to a step backward. We are aware of the sensitivities and skills required to gain the respect of people who have reason to suspect that there must be a catch somewhere in any help offered them or that at least the helping hand will be withdrawn before the job is done. And we have learned that the most freewheeling, unstructured approach can produce the most results in certain situations; especially in those