

1530 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

As a public administrator I will readily admit that established organizations are continually plagued by the problem of updating their programs, their organizations, and their activities to meet urgent current needs. Nevertheless, I feel quite strongly that in processes as complicated as development programs, which require public confidence and involvement, it is not always desirable to have entirely new agency leadership involved. It may be entirely appropriate that a new agency be organized for some new programs in order to maintain the focus of activity intended. In this process, however, it appears that particularly in rural America, established organizations which have the confidence of local people must not and should not be bypassed or acceptance of the new program is lessened. We have found that the extension agents cannot over-identify with some programs and maintain a position of objective leadership. But the agent can greatly assist local people to understand and use programs if given the time and staff support necessary to obtain public understanding of the primary issues, program objectives, or benefits.

MULTIPLICITY OF PLANNING BODIES

The multiplicity of organizations seeking to provide assistance in rural America has already been commented upon. One factor which should be stressed involves the planning arrangements and involvement of local leadership in program development and activity.

Many of the older organizations, and this is especially true of Cooperative Extension, have for years utilized local leadership on advisory committees in order to develop programs which are of greatest effectiveness for local people. As new programs have been conceived in recent years, local leadership has also been sought in one mechanism or another to assist the program.

All too often agencies ignore the fact that the same people who are considered leaders for one program will also be used as leaders for another. When development programs involving different procedures and similar objectives involve the same people in different programs, local leadership becomes overburdened with detail, confused by differences in procedures, and disenchanted with all of the activities as a final result of the experience.

The disenchantment of overworked and scarce lay leadership is resulting in more vocal criticism of the multiplicity of planning bodies and the variance in procedures required to obtain assistance under different programs. Until or unless this can be corrected, it may be expected that serious criticism will be received from local areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not our purpose today to criticize any agency or activity. We would hope, however, that a review of problems at the local level would assist your Committee in evaluating the following recommendations:

1. *Reduced Multiplicity of Planning Bodies.*—Unless the federal government can provide some leadership in standardizing the planning procedures and in using an over-all planning group, the proliferation of planning groups and resultant disenchantment at the local level will continue. Any steps that could be taken to standardize procedures for receiving grants and to reduce planning to a single or at least a limited number of planning groups for all programs would materially increase effectiveness and reduce criticism.

2. *Establish an Educational Base for Action Programs.*—Action programs implemented without the understanding of local communities are seldom fully effective. An educational base for action programs will result in an informed public which can more effectively infuse existing local needs into programs. A continuing education-information capability to involve local leadership and inform local citizens of program concepts, purposes, and activities should be provided. Initially this function should be given far greater priority in establishing new programs.

3. *Specific Earmarking of Funds for Rural Areas.*—Rural communities do not have a professional talent to enable them to compete effectively with metropolitan regions for federal assistance. Specific earmarking of funds to be used in rural areas would protect the interests of rural Americans and equalize federal assistance.