

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967 4015

we were pursuing our field inquiries. In addition, the field research took place during the summer when there were severe riots, demonstrations and other violent mass actions in some of the areas where we were working. It is felt that in certain cases the unusual circumstances served to illuminate problems, relationships and other aspects of center operations. It is suspected that in other cases the tensions and suspicions of those interviewed resulted in answers that were somewhat less than candid. For the most part, however, our personnel received the full cooperation of all those contacted and it is believed that responses were truly revealing of facts, attitudes and viewpoints. Therefore, the information presented in this report is considered reliable and can be utilized confidently as a basis for judgments and plans concerning neighborhood service centers.

III. CONCEPTUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

To understand neighborhood service centers one must have some knowledge of the conceptual and organizational environment in which they exist. This section of the report is designed to provide the type of background information which is well known to those intimately involved with OEO operations but which may not be known to all those who may be concerned with the content of this report. The focus of this section is only on those factors of the environment which appear to relate most directly to the goals, activities, problems and accomplishments of neighborhood centers.

Neighborhood service centers are members of the CAP family and thus this section is focused on describing the aspects of CAP's that are relevant. The materials are arranged to present the basic conceptual framework for CAP's and neighborhood centers and then the organizational devices utilized to carry out these concepts.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 broadly defines a community action program to mean a program which (1) mobilizes and utilizes public and private resources of an area in an attack on poverty; (2) provides services, assistance and activities of sufficient scope and size to give promise of progress toward elimination of poverty or a cause or causes of poverty through developing employment opportunities, improving human performance, motivation, and productivity, or bettering the conditions under which people live, learn and work; and (3) which is developed, conducted and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served.¹

This broad legislative mandate proposes significant changes in prevailing attitudes, institutions and modes of operation with respect to the past. The traditional concepts of dealing with poverty are regarded as inadequate and new ones have been proposed in administrative interpretations of the basic legislation. These concepts are reviewed below under separate headings but they are all closely related under the broad goal of changing the basic relationships of poor people to the society in which they live.

One clear legislative and administrative emphasis of the program is on involvement of all groups, including the poor and minorities, which are concerned with the elimination of poverty. Pre-existing efforts are believed to have been fractionated, narrow and inadequate to the magnitude and complexity of the problems confronted. Moreover, they have been conceived and executed with little or no active participation of the groups to be served. The CAP approach is to be comprehensive in scope and involvement at the local level.

There are a number of corollary concepts to the one above. First, the capabilities of existing organizations are to be integrated into the program. Second, the overall program control is to be such that the traditional relationships of these organizations to the poor are modified by operation in the context of the CAP. Third, that the relationships among groups concerned with poverty will be reorganized and re-focused to provide a more comprehensive and enlightened approach.

Another clear emphasis of the legislation and its subsequent administration has been on the thought that the local community should develop its own solutions to its own problems. The emphasis is away from professional guidance

¹ Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Title II, Part A, Sec. 202.