

Membership on these boards, viewed from the vantage point of the poor, appears to be a truly democratic place where "the little man can express his mind," make decisions about his own life and community.

Center Staff members are, for the most part, drawn from the area surrounding the Center. Though economically in need of the jobs, most personnel which we interviewed expressed an altruistic attitude, wanting to help others to help themselves. They have a sincere desire to "help the poor." It was mentioned previously that the majority of this group does not consider itself poor.

To this date, participation and attendance at meetings is limited to a minority of the population. There are usually from five to fifty persons at most general meetings. As in any community, there are those who are more active in civic and political affairs than the general population. These are the people who participate actively in center programs, and contribute ideas at the board meetings. At this time, there still exists a great majority of the population in this area which is ignorant of the Center, uninterested in its programs, and apathetic about the conditions the Center is attempting to reform.

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1. Relationship of Center to Other Organizations

Relations with the city government and its political machines have been especially stormy due to an early schism between CAA and city officials. At this early date there was a struggle for control of the new CAA organization in which funds and jobs were soon to be available. The victorious CAA officials claimed that city officials had wanted to take over the program to exploit its patronage possibilities, while city officials claimed that the other groups wanted to utilize the program to build a new political machine. As a result of this power struggle, the city almost completely disassociated itself from the program, allegedly worked (successfully) to reduce its federal appropriations and did not contribute its support toward the required ten percent local matching funds.

Delegate agencies of the CAA corporation carry out many of the city's anti-poverty programs including remedial reading, preschool, Head Start, recreation, employment, Neighborhood Youth Corps, legal services, and small business development. These organizations generally have their own boards of directors and staffs. The neighborhood center works closely with these agencies and its programs are interwoven into theirs and the Center is viewed by these CAP agencies as a locale for extension of their influence in the community.

The three groups that appear to be a source of conflict with the Center are the members of the Democratic political ward machine, the militant civil rights activists, and the clergy of a particular religious group.

2. Boards and Committees

As previously indicated, the Community Action Agency was established as a corporation. It was decided that this corporation should have a membership composed of all those wishing to join who live in, work in, or perform a direct service to the city. At this time over 7,000 members are carried on the rolls of membership, although actual participation is very considerably less. A board controls the corporation and membership on this board is composed of representatives of city government, traditional agencies, religious groups, civil rights organizations, and the poor. Members are elected to the board at the annual meeting of the corporation. The mayor of the city is Honorary President of the corporation and two members of the City Council are Honorary Vice Presidents. Each neighborhood center board elects three CAA board members. There are, in total, sixty-five CAA board members. The board elects its own officers.

The full board meets monthly and an executive committee of the board (composed of corporation officers and standing committee chairmen) meets weekly.

The standing committees are budget and finance, membership, nominating, personnel, and program.

In addition to the CAA boards there are task forces for each unit of program concern—community action, education, employment, and special projects. Each task force is composed primarily of residents of the city who are members of the CAA. Their function is to evaluate proposals and recommend courses of action to the board of the corporation. In this manner they provide a link between the board and the members of the corporation. Each task force has a membership of from 35 to 100 members which is supposed to insure that there is broad-based participation in the programing process.