

Memorandum

to: Everybody interested in or working in the community center program
from: Lois Chaffee

The COFO staff will have to make some basic decisions at its general conference in December. In the general evaluation and planning of the program, I hope that the community centers will receive some special attention because the program has some basic problems which need the organization's best consideration. This memo represents my analysis of the problems, and some ideas I have about constructive action. I hope you will examine these ideas, evaluate them, send me some reply if you can, and come to the conference with ideas, plans, suggestions, etc. for improving and extending the program.

I. Functions of a community center. Following is a list of ideas which I have compiled by observing center operations, talking to a lot of interested people, and, in some cases, thinking. It represents the range of people's conceptions of what a center should be.

1. a day care program in the morning and a teenage hangout after school--or some other combination of programs presently within our reach.
2. a "focus" of dynamic community action (If we decide that we support this idea, can we make it more specific?) For instance, a program
 - a. to analyze the community's social needs, and involve local people in this examination
 - b. to make a beginning toward solutions of these problems--a pilot program approach.
 - c. to organize the community around these pilot programs to demand full-scale programs from appropriate public agencies.
3. a center, modeled after Northern settlement houses, where the main preoccupation is to broaden the cultural horizons of the people in the neighborhood. This would imply to some extent that outside staff is always needed, that the center should never be completely in the hands of neighborhood people. We would need to draw some rough boundaries of where local independence leaves off and where outside help is needed permanently if we adopt this idea.

II. Programs in the center, and some difficulties they have.

1. What is the main purpose behind our programs for small children? What do we hope to accomplish in the civil rights movement, working with 5 year olds?
2. What do we want to accomplish with teenagers, especially those who seem attracted to us only out of nothing else to do, who are not interested in working with our program, or attracted to the Freedom School program as it stands now? How can we handle these people (on some projects just handling them is a problem) best?
3. What is the outlook for our more ambitious programs, such as literacy, public health and federal programs? Have we been building the kind of base we need for them? How do you do that? What kind of resources and community cooperation do we need to have good programs in these areas of basic social need?
4. Now that we have hundreds of thousands of second-hand books, what can we do to make real libraries of them? What can we do to add better books to them? Have we lost a significant percentage of our good books through carelessness or theft?
5. Have some of our programs turned out to be, frankly, a burden on the time and energy of the staff, with no real compensation?
6. Have some of the programs become a name-only activity with little or no actual achievement and with little or no community support?
7. What is the relationship between the center's educational program and the rest of the project's activities? Does anyone work full-time in a community center or some variant thereof on your project? Do we as people interested in cc work have any recommendation to make to the general COFO staff about cooperation between various program areas? Do we cooperate sufficiently with, for instance, the political program? Do we cooperate too much, to the detriment of a strong program of educational and social services? To what extent do the goals of the

political and educational programs coincide? Is there any point of departure?

III. Staff

A. from outside the community

1. What human qualities are needed to go into a community and start a center program? What material resources?
2. What qualities are needed to inspire the confidence of community people and recruit them to work in the center?
3. Is there any role for outside center workers after they have recruited local people to run the center? Or should they leave, perhaps to start again in another location?

B. from the community

1. What qualities should we look for in people when we recruit center personnel from the local community? for instance:
 - a. reliability above everything else
 - b. ability to manage small children
 - c. respect of the town's Negro leadership
 - d. ability to work full time
 - e. deep commitment, primarily to the movement, rather than to any local project
 - f. combination of some or all of these qualities--or others not mentioned.
2. Who should be responsible for hiring local people? Same process as for other COFO workers? If not, should we spell out some recommendations here?
3. What role should teenagers play in the center administration? (We should discuss the experience of the Harmony and Hattiesburg centers in this respect. In one place the teenagers started out as an informal board of directors, but the adult leadership blandly overruled them in both large and small decisions; in the other case the teenagers have undisputed authority, and have discouraged others, especially younger children, from attending the center functions.)
4. Should the pay scale for local staff workers be different? Can we expect to recruit good people with roots and responsibilities in the community for \$9.64? If not, what should we pay them, and who should decide to pay them more? Should the same arguments apply to others who work with the project, whether in the center or in the political program?

IV. Miscellaneous

1. What is the relationship of the cc and Freedom School staff to the local project director, especially if he is wholly or primarily interested in the political program? If it is not exactly the same as the vr workers on the project, how is it different? In any case, how far should the project director go in transferring his staff from one program area to another? What resources other than his own does a project director have if he sees that one program area is especially weak, short of firing everybody in that program and putting in a new staff?
2. Are COFO's most serious problems on the project level those of personality differences within the project? Problems of relating to the community? problems of getting needed resources from outside the project, such as from Jackson? Other kinds of problems?
3. What kind of guidelines should we set for fund-raising?
4. Do we need more contact between people in different projects than we have now? If so, do we have any ideas for promoting exchanges, improving contact, etc.?

V. Jackson coordination

1. In the community center program, should there be a formal "coordinator" in the sense that the Freedom Schools and the FDP have coordination? (I have maintained that I am not a coordinator--I just try to tell people what other centers are doing.) If not just like the Freedom Schools, is something else needed from Jackson? Is the present system all right, but in need of specific improvements, which this group can suggest? We need to lay out a framework for Jackson coordination, if that's what we want.

Part II. Report on Immediate Problems--money and staff education.

1. Money. The general news is that the centers will have to have more money than is now available. Most towns where we work have no decent buildings available for centers, and even where we have an acceptable center building, the program needs expensive equipment and furnishings. Please remember that in estimating these needs I am cutting expenses to a minimum and counting on heavy support from the local community (to contribute labor and land, materials, supplies, etc.), but even so, the cost will be high for our resources. Each new center will cost between \$10,000 and \$12,000 in materials, and every center, old or new, needs about \$1,000 invested in good, long-term equipment. Besides field needs, the program needs some investment in Jackson coordination, in my opinion. The first thing is a bank account. The cc program presently has no separate budget, so all emergency expenses have to be drawn from the general fund. I have not been satisfied with this arrangement so far, because it takes too long, and requests for these expenses tend to get lost in the shuffle. The last three months' experience has shown me that certain kinds of expenses will arise periodically in the cc program, and should be paid more reliably than they have been. These expenses are: emergency subsistence advances for local people who have been working on the staff, but have not been put on the payroll, physical expenses in the center (plumbing repairs, heaters, and roof improvements, for example) and miscellaneous expenses such as renting a truck to get a library to a new center. Projecting the demands of the last three months for a year, I think we need a contingency fund between \$800 and \$1,000. I'm keeping it small because I'm thinking only of emergencies such as a burglary or unforeseen expenses such as opening a new center which needs \$115 to fix it up, plus a little for . . . , etc. Other kinds of expenses, such as supplies, should be planned for in each center's regular budget. The other major expense for Jackson is a car for a Jackson coordinator. For reasons I'll explain to anyone interested, I think it's necessary that the cc coordinator travel more, and have more control over the kind of travel he can manage. This proposal comes as a result of bitter experience; I started out this fall thinking that I should be able to rely on normal traffic between projects and the bus to make the necessary rounds. This really doesn't work. I'm not sure that we need exclusive use of a car, and I will certainly talk over some kind sharing arrangement with any other travelling Jackson people, but we need some kind of regular transportation in the community center program. For too long I've been travelling not where I wanted to go and felt I needed to go, but only to where there was a ride available.

This fall I've taken some steps to raise money for the overall center program. In this, I've been hampered to some extent by confusion over just what was permissible within the context of COFO fund-raising, but an even larger problem was my lack of experience and my ignorance about where the money is. I did, however, get two things started: I sent a mailing to the people who had contributed to COFO in the past and to CORE chapters about adopting projects; and I wrote a prospectus for a foundation grant, which Marvin Rich of CORE offered to present to several foundations during the months of November and December. There have been no results yet. It's too soon to tell on the foundation proposal and I have absolutely no idea of the progress of the thing since I mailed off the prospectus. The adoption plan has been going slowly; I think we can safely say that the response was disappointing. Therefore, I don't have anything exciting to report as of now, but it's possible that we will get some kind of break later in the winter. Whatever the results of these two projects are, I would recommend to the COFO staff that we make some kind of policy about fund-raising, because I have been uncomfortable about the fact that there was no up-to-date policy to guide us, and I felt the needs were quite urgent. It is my feeling that the community center program ought to be self-supporting to a much greater extent than it is right now. One reason is that COFO will probably never have the money, or want to allocate it, for building 20 or 30 community centers at \$10,000 a throw. Another reason is that the cc program is one of the least controversial of the programs in COFO. I think that if we ~~work~~ raise money independently of the political program, we probably can get a foundation support for at least part of the program. If we are able to support ourselves as a program, I think we ought to.

2. Staff education. The next pressing need of the program is staff training. Plans on that are in somewhat better shape than with the money problem, but here, too, we need more ideas and better ones. I think we need to accept the fact that this program is going to grow into whatever it grows into not with the help of experts drawn from many fields of excellence, but from our hard work and best judgment. This means running a center with local people, who may or may not be trained for center work, and with college students and young married couples who almost certainly do not have any special training. However, the program does have demand for specialized skills, and so I think we need a fairly elaborate in-service training program for center workers.

The first part of the program is already in the planning stages. This is the 6-week training program proposed by Frederick Johnson. The details are not finally decided, but it will be, hopefully, a comprehensive and intensive course in

community center administration and programming. Beyond this general goal, the planning is not decided. The program will involve local people and possibly staff people as trainees, with various kinds of outside resource people and us as staff. We need to decide what we need to train people for, i.e. what kind of centers we want to have, what kind of activities we want to train ourselves and others for, etc. In order to decide these basic things intelligently, we need to have as much discussion on the subject as possible. If you have ideas and proposals or just want to talk more about a training program, please talk to Lorne Gress and/or me; be sure to contact one of us if you know about any local people who should and can be a part of such a training program.

A second proposal under "training" is one which I have talked over with people in several projects, but which has not been formally approved by the staff. I would like to hold a series of small specialized meetings at various centers to talk about specific problems, one at a time. We can plan the program more specifically at the December meeting, but here are some of the ideas I have discussed for subjects of particular meetings: ideas on dealing with rowdy teenagers who hang around the center and tend to discourage other people from attending; how to improve the libraries; arts and crafts ideas for various age groups; literacy workshop; starting golden age clubs for elderly people; techniques for recruiting and using part-time help from local people; and anything else staff people suggest, such as a meeting to discuss possibilities for a health program. Having the meetings rotate around the state is important, I think; many staff people feel isolated and have expressed a desire just to see other centers and become more familiar with the people on other projects. The cc coordinator would undertake to find resource people (probably drawn from among us), and make arrangements for getting there. The main difficulty of this, and the reason that previous attempts along this line have had only limited success, is that it involved a lot of travel, and many staff people are reluctant to come from all over the state for one day, especially when the quality of the meeting, and its immediate relevance cannot be guaranteed. For this reason, I am reluctant to recommend it unless the field workers involved endorse it and plan the schedule of meetings. However, I will say in support of the idea that the two experimental meetings of this kind which we held late in the summer were felt to be a great success by the people who came--but few people came.

In evaluating this fall's work, I think that we have extended the general work of getting a "base" in the community, despite a pretty chaotic staff situation. Some of the centers have gone downhill from the summer rather than growing. In other places there are growing center programs where there was nothing this summer. Good local people as administrators have not appeared as fast as we naively hoped they would, and not all staff workers know just how to recruit local help. In common with other COFO workers, not all, or even most, community center workers know just how to relate local workers to their own work. During the fall, I think we have "survived", but the program has not grown and improved as fast as it did during the summer. For the winter, I think we need to come to some consensus about the function of a community center in the community, to make greater efforts to consolidate the program and to carry it into areas which touch the community more deeply.

In conclusion, this paper is a reflection of my conception of the center program, not an unchangeable model. I'm asking staff people about their ideas partly because it is now the COFO creed, but also because I think that the center program is still very much in an experimental stage, that the field is far ahead of the office, and therefore, that the people who know about the centers are the people in the centers, not the people in the office. As we get more experience, and form better generalizations about how a center program operates, we will certainly share them with others on the staff, and we will perhaps be able to administer the program in a standard "from the top down" kind of way, if that is what the staff wants. For now, however, you should be conscious that everything you try is something of an innovation here, that you are not operating a center according to a field manual, but that in a real sense you are field-testing what is still basically a proposal, not a standardized program. Therefore you should be willing to report on the success of your attempts, analyze the reasons for success and failure, and generally to do your part to increase the amount of knowledge we have about community centers. Thank you.