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1. Basic Purpose

Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act provides for the establishment and funding of community action agencies and programs. The basic purpose of Title II, as stated in Section 201(a) of the Act, is “to stimulate a better focusing of all available local, State, private, and Federal resources upon the goal of enabling low-income families, and low-income individuals of all ages, in rural and urban areas, to attain the skills, knowledge, and motivations and secure the opportunities needed for them to become self-sufficient.”

The key phrase in this statement is “to stimulate a better focusing of all available...resources.” The Act thus gives the CAA a primarily catalytic mission: to make the entire community more responsive to the needs and interests of the poor by mobilizing resources and bringing about greater institutional sensitivity. A CAA’s effectiveness, therefore, is measured not only by the services which it directly provides but, more importantly, by the improvements and changes it achieves in the community’s attitudes and practices toward the poor and in the allocation and focusing of public and private resources for antipoverty purposes.

2. The Resources

To carry out this mission effectively the CAA must work with three significant groups in the community: the poor, the public sector, and the private sector.

a. The Poor

The Act provides that all CAA plans and programs must be developed and implemented “with the maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and members of the groups served....”. Such participation is essential not only to enable the poor to become self-sufficient, but also to insure that the community changes and improvements which the CAA promotes are, in fact, responsive and relevant to the low-income citizens to whom they are addressed. It is therefore central to the CAA’s mission to strengthen the self-help capability of the poor and to provide them the opportunity and support to

participate effectively, through both the CAA and their own neighborhood and target area organizations, in CAA and non-CAA programs which affect their interests.

b. The Public Sector

Regardless of whether a CAA is a public or private non-profit agency, its effectiveness depends heavily on its ability to work closely with, and enlist the support of, State and local public officials and agencies. No community can ever be fully responsive to the needs of the poor without the active participation and cooperation of its duly elected or appointed officials. In this regard it is also essential that the CAA develop a close working partnership with the State Economic Opportunity Office.

c. The Private Sector

The poor and the public official cannot succeed alone. Without the vast, and largely untapped, resources of the non-poor private sector. The CAA must therefore enlist the support and participation of business and labor, religious and civil rights groups, private social service agencies and health and welfare councils, civic and service organizations, foundations *and* universities, and the individual private citizen himself.

3. Developing a Strategy

To carry out this mission, the CAA must develop both a long-range strategy and specific, short-range plans for using potential resources, including OEO grant funds and other public (Federal, State and local) and private resources of all kinds, including facilities, services, *and* personnel as well as funds. These strategies and plans should be developed as part of the CAA's regular grant application process, and should be reflected in the CAP Form 81, "CAA Plans and Priorities," submitted annually. Any changes in CAA strategies or plans made in response to this Instruction shall be made *only* in accordance with regular application procedures in OEO Instruction 6710-1, "Applying for a CAP Grant."

In developing its strategy *and* plans, the CAA shall take into account the areas of greatest community need, the availability of resources, and its own strengths and limitations. It should establish realistic, attainable objectives, consistent with the basic mission established in this Instruction, and expressed in concrete terms which permit the measurement of results. Given the size of the poverty problem and its own limited resources, the CAA should concentrate its efforts on one or two major objectives where it can have the greatest impact.

The CAA must coordinate its plans with those of other agencies and institutions responsible for poverty-related programs. To the extent feasible, it should assist such agencies and institutions in developing their own plans and carrying out their own missions. However, the complexity of poverty problems and the wide range of poverty-related programs make it ordinarily impossible for the CAA to become the master planner and

coordinator of all social programs in the community. The degree to which the CAA can influence planning and coordination will depend, by and large, on its ability to work with the three groups mentioned in Section 2.

4. Programs as a Bridge to the Community

The operation of programs meeting high-priority needs is an effective vehicle through which the CAA can stimulate increased community responsiveness to the needs of the poor. Programs produce immediate, tangible benefits to the poor in terms understandable to poor and non-poor alike. By operating programs and delivering services – either directly or through delegate agencies – the CAA establishes a base from which it can inform the community of the needs and aspirations of the poor, gain practical experience in dealing with poverty problems, *and* strengthen its stature as a community resource.

While the operation of programs is the CAA's principal activity is not the CAA's primary-objective. CAA programs must serve the larger purpose of mobilizing resources and bringing about greater institutional sensitivity. This critical link between service delivery and improved community response distinguishes the CAA from other agencies. Using its programs as a base, the CAA can become the focal point for increased community concern and greater community commitment. Community organization and resource mobilization activities of the CAA will normally be an integral part of its program operations, even though these activities might be funded under separate program accounts.

5. Local Needs and National Priorities

The Congress has identified certain priorities for the expenditure of Federal funds appropriated under the Economic Opportunity Act. In some instances it has designated “national emphasis programs,” often specifically earmarking funds for these purposes. The national emphasis programs include Head Start, Follow Through, Legal Services, Comprehensive Health Services, Upward Bound, Emergency Food and Medical Services, Family Planning, Senior Opportunities and Services, Alcoholic Counseling and Recovery, and Drug Rehabilitation. While developing a local strategy to meet local needs is at the heart of successful community action, the CAA must take into account the existence of these national emphasis programs in planning for the use of OEO funds.

In addition to these national emphasis programs, the following program areas are particularly well-suited to the CAA mission of stimulating increased community responsiveness to the needs of the poor: manpower and employment, day care, health (other than Comprehensive Health Services), housing, education, and career development. A CAA may find, however, that unique local conditions warrant the identification of other program areas as priorities for its particular community. Moreover, there are significant activities other than specific programs which are essential to the operation of the CAA and its mission. Among these, for

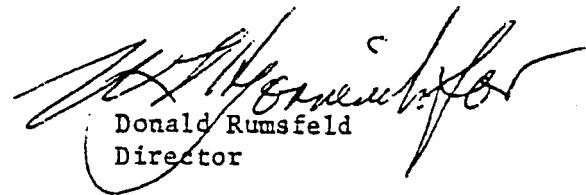
example, are CAA planning, central CAA administration, training and technical assistance, and neighborhood service systems.

The CAA has the responsibility to select and propose for funding those programs which it in its judgment will produce the maximum impact on its community. Where unearmarked funds are used, the CAA may develop and propose its own program models or adopt or modify models which OEO may develop. Where funds earmarked for national emphasis programs are used, the CAA must follow the program models established by OEO.

6. Articulating the Needs of the Poor

The CAA's mission involves a balance between strengthening communication and cooperation on the one hand and coming to grips with serious problems and deeply felt differences on the other. The CAA must address critical issues and deal with unpleasant realities, but in performing its role as an advocate of the poor the CAA must carefully choose the issues on which it takes stands and the tactics which it employs so as to maximize the chances of success.

The CAA's overall image in the community should be that of a positive voice for the poor. In all its activities, the CAA should strive constantly to reduce the isolation of the poor and to improve communications between the poor and the community at large. Its ultimate objective should not be to speak for the poor but to enable the poor to speak for themselves.



Donald Rumsfeld
Director