

Urban Issues

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The Institute of Urban Studies





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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

VOL 1**NO 5 MARCH 1972****FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO CITIZENS GROUPS**

- L. Axworthy

One of the more important issues facing government today centers on the question of support to citizens groups. Government has been in the business of supporting various private groups and associations for a long time, with relative lack of controversy and question. But we are now in the age of participation and citizen involvement. Spurred by frustrations engendered by the insensitivity of large organizations, and propelled by means of modern communication, there are now a host of new voices demanding to be heard and insisting on their rights to become part of the decision-making system. The phenomenon of the citizen's movement could constitute one of the most significant social facts of the present decade. It is thus critical that government treat the issue with understanding and foresight. If it is poorly handled it could mean either the destruction of a social force that has the potential of giving a richer meaning to the idea of democracy or the explosion of the movement into a force of extremism.

As is true with any new social force, the new phase of citizen group activity is meeting with resistance and hostility. The primary opposition at the moment is on the local government level. This parallels the American experience with OEO projects. In analyzing the results of the community action projects in the United States, Kenneth Clark, the noted sociologist notes that both local politicians and administrators saw community groups as a threat to their power and invariably sought to defeat or co-opt them.

The target for local government attacks on citizens groups will naturally be at the source of support - the federal government. The federal government itself is relatively distant from the conflict in the local areas but is susceptible to the inside, covert blandishments of the local politicians or their Ottawa spokesmen. This is one of the

dangers of the present system of giving grants to groups. It is an ad hoc random system, with few criteria established as to which group should get support for which reasons. It is thus subject to political influence, as witnessed by John Munro's cancellation of the grant to the tenant's organization in Hamilton. When there is no clear cut policy or mechanism for administering them, there is continuous potential for abuse.

There are three main areas of difficulty related to the granting of support to citizen groups :

1. A basic reluctance to accept the principle of community action programs on the part of many officials and certainly a misunderstanding of the nature of the process of these groups in their striving for goals of self-development and community control. It goes against the traditional style of welfare liberalism.
2. There is a growing number of citizen groups, all asking for support. The question is how do you decide between them, what is the criteria for choice, what is the system of administering support?
3. There is also the question of evaluation of the role that these groups play and what the implications of continued support are. There should be a means of determining the impact they have on their own community and assessing whether they do anything other than consume public money.

To answer these questions in a fair way, the following ideas might be considered :

- A. The government should make open and public its concerns and invite views from those involved in the citizen movement. The whole philosophy underlying the citizen movement is that decision-making should be more democratic. It is, therefore, slightly ironic that present government debate on how to handle the issue is being done by civil servants behind closed doors. It is unfortunate that the only information related to the policy review on aid to

citizens groups should occur through a press leak. It is surely a subject that should involve a more open public form of discussion.

B. A system of granting support should be based on the principle that the government is prepared to offer limited initial assistance to help a group get started, but would then insist on some form of performance effectiveness as a basis for continued longer range assistance. In other words, there should be a two-step process.

Step one: limited grant for initiation of group activity, granted without almost no criteria except demonstration of potential for an organization or group to emerge.

Step two: a fairly comprehensive assessment based on certain criteria of performance to be applied as the basis for continuing longer-range support. In other words, a group would have to demonstrate after a period of time that its activity justifies a continuing grant.

The administration of this process is also very important. At present, the system is very unco-ordinated and subject to abuse. To open up the system, it would be useful to have a board which would receive applications and provide open hearings. This would eliminate the problems where political pressure can be used covertly. Critics would have to make their opposition in public and defend their stand on some reasonable grounds. A board could be composed on a regional basis, and be made up of appointed private citizens. But, it should have a small staff and have the capacity to develop criteria to measure performance.

Any citizen group, after its first initial phase, would submit an application for longer-term financing and have its submission reviewed by the board, out in the open.

The usefulness of this scheme is that it takes the decision-making out from behind closed doors, puts the onus on the citizens groups to demonstrate that its performance was of real value, and yields a public view of the value of new citizen group activity.

Needless to say, it would also be helpful to have more information from the different departments on what kind of

assistance is available, and certainly some rationalization between different departments and agencies that provide support.

A stage has been reached in the citizen movement where it can no longer operate on an ad hoc basis, nor where previous formula or principles apply. It is an important fact in the development of political and social change in our urban areas, and thus requires careful treatment. Hopefully, a good policy and a well-funded, open system of support will not be held up too long.

PEOPLE'S HOUSING REHABILITATION AND REPAIR INC. - A Local Rehabilitation Company
E. Barker

In August of 1971, after having studied the rehabilitation question in Urban Renewal Area No. 2, and having done a report from this experience on some approaches that might be used (see "A Report on the Rehabilitation of Older Houses in a Lower-Income, Inner City District "), Institute staff began to look into the feasibility of establishing a local house repair company. Initial meetings were held with people already involved in their own small-scale rehabilitation. Interest was shown but the question of the vehicle remained.

In September of 1971, it became apparent that winter works grants would be available. The Institute then, with the urging of several levels of the federal government, decided to submit an application for a grant to pay the salaries of men doing limited house repairs. Needless to say, confusion, negotiation, waiting and frustration followed as the application was withdrawn and re-submitted with final approval coming in early February of 1972. The final application was made by men we had worked with from within and without the community, and who had building and administrative skills. The final approval then went to the "People's Housing Rehabilitation and Repair, Inc." for \$40,000.00 of Federal Local Initiatives money and \$5,200.00 of Provincial P.E.P. money. The Institute played the role of initiator of the project, organized the men, helped them submit the application, and agreed to act as advisor and monitor the project when underway.

The grant covered the salaries of

25 staff members - 18 labor-trainees, 1 recorder, 1 office clerk, 1 cabinet maker, 3 supervisors, and 1 co-ordinator, for a period of 3 months until the end of May. An attempt has been made to hire men from Urban Renewal Area No. 2, where unemployment is a severe problem.

The goals of the project are :

1. To test the "limited-repair" concept of house repair. The basic thesis of this concept is that perhaps a resident's satisfaction with his living environment is affected more by those things he must deal with everyday in his house - doors, stairs, floors, windows, walls, counters, etc. as opposed to the larger problems of foundation, wiring, etc. which are more critical to the life of the house but which he cannot see. Thus, part of the rehabilitation program could involve putting a small amount of time, money, and effort into repairing the "small" annoyances in many houses rather than restricting a program to totally renovating a few houses. This work would be done in houses regardless of their condition (is it worth it?), its ownership (what benefits will the landlord reap?) This is possible because of the small amount of time and money spent in a house. Also, a family can remain in a house because of the short construction time.

2. To provide on-the-job training for unskilled men to better equip them to compete in the job market. This training includes :

- learning to work as a team and develop a "work habit"
- estimating jobs
- learning skills

3. To assist people, whether tenants or resident owners, who cannot afford to have the work done privately and who are living in a house in need of repair.

4. To monitor the project and provide an evaluation of :

- "limited-repair" effectiveness and efficiency
- job training
- organizational methods
- effect of repair work on residents and community

Since the grant covers only labor and operating expenses, the owners of the property must pay for the cost of the materials involved. Work is presently being done in houses of senior citizens under the provincial government program as well as in houses of resident and non-resident owners, not only in Urban

Renewal Area No. 2, but all over the city.

The project is organized whereby the co-ordinator is responsible for administering and co-ordinating the project from their office at 155 Isabel (an office for which IUS pays the rent and the People's Committee, Inc. use for meetings). The three supervisors are responsible for the six, 3-man crews. Each supervisor has two crews. They supervise each job, estimate, keep job records and teach the men. The 3 supervisors and 1 co-ordinator form the legal incorporated body and act as an administering team, with decisions being made as a group, avoiding a "boss" as such. The clerk works with the co-ordinator in the office, and the cabinet maker works out of a local workshop where material is stored and cabinets and cupboards are fabricated for jobs. The recorder is responsible to IUS to record what happens on the jobs. The recorder is responsible with the supervisors to record what happens in their area of responsibility. Weekly reports are made to Institute staff, and a specific job file kept with the original application, cost estimates, time spent on the job, comments from the recorder, supervisor and co-ordinator, as well as job photos. Special care is taken to record the residents' priorities of what should be repaired, as only two weeks of work can be done in any one house.

As of this writing, the project has been functioning for a month, having gotten over its growing pains. The whole staff meets Monday mornings to plan the week's work and Friday afternoons to discuss how the week went. These meetings are held to give everyone an awareness of what is going on and to discuss problems with the men. The men have established ground rules for the project. These rules cover staff relations, hiring and firing, limiting the work in houses to 2 weeks in duration, criteria for selecting houses to be worked on and general procedures. Advertising has been carried on with leaflets, signs, and word of mouth. Applications for work trickled in slowly at first, but is beginning to build. The quality of work in the houses has been surprisingly high, with the men doing floor tiling, drywall application, patching and painting, rough carpentry, and window installation. The credit must go to the supervisors, who

have been stressing a "take your time and learn" attitude. When mistakes are made, it is simply redone. Understandably, problems have developed in certain areas - the men working in cramped quarters, the supply of necessary materials, applications from non-deserving candidates, and surprisingly a lack of a full work-load of houses. But, when one goes into the house of a family sorely needing the help and sees how happy they are with the work and how they are pitching in to help, any difficulties encountered are worthwhile. The men are anxious to continue, and we can only hope for an extension of this exciting project.

THE POLITICS OF INNOVATION - Report No. 2 in the Future City series, is now available from the Institute of Urban Studies at one dollar per copy.
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