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EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL



TASK FORCE ON:

LOCAL INITIATIVES PROGRAMS

The Task Force on Local Initiatives Program Grants in the Edmonton-Strathcona Constituency met twice. It concluded that constituency advisory groups were a desirable added feature to the 1973-74 Local Initiatives Program in that they allow for greater participation of local citizens and better decentralization of the decision-making process.

The principal recommendations of the Task Force are that if constituency advisory groups are used, the applicants be fully informed as to their existence and personnel make-up of the constituency advisory groups. If there is an earnest desire on the part of Canada Manpower to decentralize decision-making and thereby achieve greater participation, then it is important that Canada Manpower do no pre-screening of projects for the constituency advisory group.

These recommendations are directed principally at Canada Manpower, Job Creation Branch. They are also directed to our local Member of Parliament, Mr. Doug Roche, in the hope that he will give them his support.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations which came out of the Task Force Report on the Local Initiatives Program in the Edmonton-Strathcona Constituency.

The Task Force recommends:

1. that the Local Initiatives Program should continue.
2. that constituency advisory groups be continued with the following changes:
 - a. that the Canada Manpower officials do no pre-screening of projects except on very clear and indisputable criteria.
 - b. that the Local Initiatives Program applicants be informed, at least two weeks in advance, of the first meeting of the constituency advisory group, of the names of its members, of their addresses and of their telephone numbers.
 - c. that members of the constituency advisory group be informed of the identity of the applicants; that the deliberations and/or the priorities as set out by the constituency advisory group be sent as a news release to all local media and that it should be made available to the public on request.
 - d. that the local member of parliament chair the deliberations of the constituency advisory group.
 - e. that the constituency advisory group should include representatives from native, handicapped, women, retired and welfare groups.
 - f. that appeal procedures be established and that a small percentage of the funds allotted to a constituency be set aside to take care of appeals which may be sustained.
 - g. that, in the future, Canada Manpower give consideration to the establishment of one additional city-wide advisory group for urban centres to look after applications which have city-wide or regional implications.
3. that the major emphasis of Local Initiatives Programs should be on the creation of new facilities and services which the local community feels are valuable.
4. that the creation of employment remain a criterion in the program and that unemployment figures should not be used as a criterion in the approval of projects.

TASK FORCE REPORT ON LOCAL INITIATIVES PROGRAMS

The Task Force on Local Initiatives Program in the Strathcona Constituency arose out of the concern of a number of groups in the constituency about the way in which allocations were made this year. The Task Force met twice, on January 3, and January 14, 1974. The first meeting attempted to discuss and analyze the philosophy of the Local Initiatives Program. It examined the criteria on which grants were made and the advisability and need for constituency advisory groups.

PHILOSOPHY

The Task Force concludes that the Local Initiatives Program is both useful and desirable. Local Initiatives Program grants help in a positive way to achieve meaningful social change by creating and testing new models for emerging community needs. This is also a flexible program of providing grants on a short-term basis unencumbered by the usual bureaucratic redtape which is so time consuming and discouraging to the would-be-applicant.

PROGRAM FEATURES

There are some ways, however, in which the Local Initiatives Program could more adequately meet the needs of an urban community like Edmonton. It is the feeling of the Task Force that employment should continue to be a criterion for the approval of projects but that local or constituency unemployment figures should not be a criterion. The emphasis of the Program should be on job creation rather than the employment of unemployed

people. By creating more jobs, we would automatically solve some of the unemployment which exists and if someone leaves a job to take another job with a Local Initiatives Program, his job is then made vacant for some unemployed person. Moreover, in a city like Edmonton, the creation of employment as a major criterion for Local Initiative Projects automatically means that Edmonton would get much less money for new and innovative ways of approaching and resolving community and social problems. Thus though employment should remain a criterion in the program, it should take secondary importance to the creation of socially innovative and useful projects and services to the community. If, under these circumstances, the criterion were changed and Canada Manpower feels that they cannot continue to sponsor the program, we suggest that the program be sponsored by some other department of the federal government whose specific responsibility is community betterment and/or community participation in the decisions which governments must make. We agree that the major emphasis of the Local Initiative Program should be the creation of new facilities and services which the local community feels are valuable. However, the assessment as to what are new facilities and what is valuable should not be left to the discretion of Canada Manpower officials.

CONSTITUENCY ADVISORY GROUPS

The introduction of constituency advisory groups this year was welcomed by task force members. They insured greater participation of the public in each constituency and contributed to decentralizing the administrative decision making process of Canada Manpower. We were encouraged to note that Canada Manpower in the Edmonton-Strathcona

Constituency followed the advice of its constituency advisory group.

It is our understanding that Canada Manpower officials do a pre-screening of applications and that if in the opinion of the department officials an application does not meet the criteria, it is rejected.

Members of the Task Force would prefer that Canada Manpower do no pre-screening of projects except on a very clear and indisputable criterion. Such criterion could be the financial criterion which is listed on the Information for Applicants sheet that accompanied the last Local Initiatives Program Application. Criteria such as "proposals must clearly demonstrate the ability to achieve positive results like creating new facilities or services which the local committee feels are valuable" are subjective criteria and should not be used by Canada Manpower officials. Such criteria are better dealt with by people who live in the local community or in the local constituency. It has been clearly demonstrated in the past that the more remote the decision makers are from the people for whom they are making decisions, the poorer the decision is for those intended to be served.

The introduction of constituency advisory groups created problems in that it changed the rules by which Local Initiative Program applications were approved. Thus, if an applicant did not know that constituency advisory groups had been established and if he did not know anyone on the constituency advisory group, he did not know how to influence the decision making process. In the past, it was a matter of presenting your case to Canada Manpower officials. The new rule of the game therefore is one of influencing the members of the constituency advisory group. If constituency advisory groups are used, it is important therefore that the

applicant know that constituency advisory groups exist and it is also important that he also know the names of the members of the constituency advisory group so that he can make contact with them. Thus, the Task Force would like to see all Local Initiative Program applicants informed, at least two weeks in advance, of the first meeting of the constituency advisory group, of the names of its members, of their addresses, and of their telephone numbers. If this were done, the applicant would have the opportunity to phone or meet with the constituency advisory group members and advise them of their application and inform them about the details of his application.

It seems equally important, to the Task Force, that members of the constituency advisory group be informed of the identity of the applicants. Therefore, we would also recommend that members of the constituency advisory group be informed of who the applicants are at least two weeks in advance of any constituency advisory group meeting, together with the telephone numbers and addresses of the applicants.

Some of the members of the Task Force felt that certain kinds of groups, and most particularly women's groups, did not get a very sympathetic hearing from the constituency advisory group. Therefore, it is recommended that if constituency advisory groups are used, they should include representatives from native, handicapped, women, retired and welfare groups in accordance with general representation within their constituency. This is to ensure that input is received from the economically and socially disadvantaged.

It was the practice this year for Canada Manpower to write profiles on the various applications received and to give these a few hours in

advance to members of the constituency advisory group. It would be better, in the view of the Task Force, if members of the constituency advisory group received the original applications rather than a profile or summarized version written by the Canada Manpower officials. If Canada Manpower feels that it is necessary to write profiles to keep the reading down to a manageable size, we would suggest that applicants be asked, either at the time of application or some time later, to write their own profile or summary of their project.

In an urban constituency like that of Edmonton-Strathcona, it is important that information about constituency advisory groups and the decisions of these groups be communicated in the best way possible. Therefore, to facilitate the information flow, with regard to the priority listings of the constituency advisory group, we recommend that the deliberations and/or priorities as set out by the constituency advisory group be sent out as a news release to all local media. It should also be available to the public on request. It is also felt that the operation of the constituency advisory groups would be much improved if the local member of parliament would chair the deliberations of the constituency advisory group. As in the past, we would also recommend that the criteria used by Canada Manpower for the constituency advisory groups must accompany the application forms.

One of the most frustrating problems which applicants this year experienced was the lack of appeals from the decisions of the constituency advisory groups whose advice the officials of Canada Manpower took. In such a situation, errors in judgement, errors of a technical nature cannot be redressed. Therefore, we would recommend that if constituency advisory groups are used in the future that appeal procedures

be established. It would follow then that a small percentage of the original funds assigned to the constituency should be set aside to take care of appeals which may be sustained.

Members of the constituency advisory group noted that in many of the applications they dealt with, the projects were of either a city-wide nature or of a regional nature. Such applications should be dealt with outside of the local constituency advisory group. Since we understand that this was a problem with a number of constituency advisory groups that were set up for the City of Edmonton, we would suggest that in the future a fifth advisory group be established and that this advisory group be composed of approximately nine people who are appointed by the members of parliament for Edmonton-Strathcona, Edmonton East, Edmonton West and Edmonton Centre. The purpose of this fifth constituency advisory group would be to consider and give advice on either projects which are of city-wide nature or which have regional implications.

CONCLUSION

The Task Force thus feels that the Local Initiatives Program is serving a useful function and the introduction of constituency advisory groups was a wise decision in that it has brought with it the opportunity for greater participation in the decision making that must go on in a funding agency. Not only does such a group provide for greater participation, it also provides for some administrative decentralization of the decision making process. We hope that these recommendations are useful to Canada Manpower officials and that it may be useful in any future deliberations Canada Manpower may have in regard to the Local Initiatives Program.