

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
MEMORANDUM # 1

BIBLIOTECA
EL COLEGIO DE MEXICO

FROM: MILTON KOTLER

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AS POLITICAL GOVERNMENT
FROM PARISH TO NEIGHBORHOOD FOUNDATION

I. The Assumption underlying community organization. Strong attention has been given to "community organization" as a major instrument for combating urban poverty. Its supporting argument follows:

A. Poverty rests on:

1. an absence of jobs

2. an absence of the requisites of employment--
training

a. motivation

(That is to say, there are available jobs for which the poor are not trained. Their training is impeded by lack of work and achievement motivation.)

B. This diminution of jobs and absence of motivation for training to fill existing job demands is related to the widespread powerlessness of urban dissociation among the poor and the frustration and hopelessness of their alienation.

C. It is essential to combat alienation and develop urban community through community organization for the following reasons related to A (1) and (2) above.

1. Community organization can create new political pressures for more jobs and better conditions of welfare and social life.

2. New community through community organization can restore social health and spirit among the poor to motivate them for training and job aspiration, to fill existing and expanding job demands.

(Thus, new community among the poor is important for objective reasons (jobs) and subjective reasons (spirit and motivation).)

D. Such urban community must be "of the people." It cannot be created from top, but must reflect and express the people and the reality of their condition.

II. The contradiction of community organization
It is essential to relate this logic of community organization to its current approaches as seen in UPO and the Gray Areas projects.

The general form of community organization developed to date is the following. Foundations and government organize the different existing internal institutions (e.g. neighborhood, churches, business associations, political action groups, charities, settlement houses, etc.) of the lower-class neighborhood into a united organization. The thinking is that since such institutions represent the people, their united organization will strengthen the popular basis of neighborhood, -- such an organizational method can lead to real popular community, which can both express the people, mobilize expression and organize their interests and power effectively.

There may be a contradiction in this argument. While on the one hand, the alienation of the urban impoverished is accepted; on the other hand, the existing neighborhood groups and organization are considered as "popular" bodies.

My point is that these neighborhood organizations or institutions cannot be presumed to be "popular" or "representative." The very disorganization of lower-class neighborhood, means the absence of real "communal" institutions truly reflecting the people. Indeed, I would rather suggest that these existing neighborhood organizations (which the united planning organization uses as a representative body), instead represent "outside" middle-class interests which play their role in the lower-class community for the sake of their own interest, --whether redemption or social control, etc.

The problem of the current model of community organization rests on the possible fallacy of "existing-in-the-neighborhood" organizations as really being the "representative" and popular organizations of the people in the neighborhoods. If this is not the case, then these groups in a united body for community organization (which though inside the neighborhood really represent the "outside") cannot serve to politicize, communalize and motivate the lower-class neighborhood people. It is no popular structure for building community and effectively combating poverty.

III. Community organization "By the People"

Let's start from the beginning. The crucial question in promoting community organization is this: what is the "representative" body of the neighborhood, -that is, what group can express the people, and get the people to express themselves? The only real answer may be that only the people of the neighborhood can reveal this body. It may be the delinquent gang leader more than the preacher; it may be the old solitary Negro unemployed sage, who has watched the passage of things and time, more than the businessman's association. The point is that the carriers of the people's feelings and interests and views in the lower-class community may not be group organization, but persons "who have been around a long time," who have the hearts

and carry the trust of the people, etc.

If it is the representatives of the people we want to find, and their representative body, then we must go to the people. One traditional, and it seems in this case appropriate method, is the vote of the people of the neighborhood for their own representatives. (Nor need voting by the middle-class method necessarily fit the lower class community. Voting publicly or by assembly and acclamation as among the ancient plebs, might be a better method. In lower class communities, the representatives may be a source of strength that can only be determined by public communion and acclamation rather than the secret, individual voting of the middle-class who have internalized social interest structures.)

The point here is that the proper instrument or structure for the organization of lower class true community along real lines of popular value and need is popular election. (We leave aside what the unit of elector or type of vote should be.)

IV. The Community Foundation

The Community Foundation is here suggested as a model for the organization of the urban neighborhood into effective and vital communities. While suggested in connection with lower class communities, the structure is applicable to all urban neighborhoods that have community aspirations, or "natural" proclivities to community.

The Foundation, as a tax-exempt legal, corporate structure is appropriate for use as the structural instrument for community organization.

A. Neighborhoods can incorporate themselves as foundations devoted to the support of public projects within the neighborhood.

B. The people living within the community can elect a Board of x number of trustees, who carry out the decisions of the foundation in what projects to undertake and how to do it.

1. Suffrage can be universal. The Foundation may decide its own age qualifications for voting and office nomination and election can be by functional groups, sex, age, group, etc.; or it may be general.

2. The x number of elected trustees can serve for any constituted term; they in turn, can elect an executive committee among themselves. Or a method of such direct election can be developed.

C. Any and all residents of the neighborhood can contribute tax-exempt money or donation to the neighborhood foundation. A tax-exempt contribution of any amount decided among the corporate residents can be the prerequisite of suffrage. Thus all the residents of the neighborhood can contribute to its "treasury," the monies of which will be used for

neighborhood community projects. Though this is not an autonomous "tax" system, it can still build a treasury. Historically, contribution pre-dates assessment as a method of communal funding.

D. The salaried board can then get tax-exempt matching funds from other sources, --government, foundations, private industry and individuals, etc., for support of its projects.

E. The initiation of projects and their administration under this method will be subject through election to the review and judgment of all the residents of the neighborhood community, acting through its corporate government.

By this method of organization, projects will be subject to popular rule and approval. The community populace can democratically decide its own projects and thereupon seek financial assistance. Conversely, grants offered from the "outside" for particular programs cannot be imposed, but must be accepted by people through their foundation government.

F. What the instrument of foundation structure results in is in effect, --a democratic government. It is based on money and political power. Furthermore, it is likely that a political party structure will develop. The basis of money salaried office and power over projects and activities is present. The importance of this development is evident for the lower-class community in training it to better handle and promote its interests politically in the larger political context of city, state, and national government. Further, it is hoped that the development of two party system at the local, or neighborhood community level, will promote the redevelopment of a two-party system in our city government.

V. The Strategy for Developing the Community Foundation
It is evident that such a structure of organization as the Community Foundation would be viewed as a threat, if seen in its ramifications, to the larger political organizations as well as to established "external" interests and organizations operating in lower-class communities. The problem of promoting, or working toward this kind of structure then becomes one of step-by-step planning and development. A groundwork must be laid which would lead or promote the fulfillment of the Foundation structure.

The following steps in a strategy of creating the Community Foundation are suggested by one general approach.

A. In X neighborhood in Y city, the community organization may begin under a "UPO" type method, that is, uniting the so-called representative institutions in the neighborhood or area into a unified body. The government and the foundations that is, funding sources, would deal with this body and its staff. Thus it is possible to start with a

typical safe beginning.

B. Then it can be suggested that the residents should AS A SHOW OF SELF-HELP contribute a donation to the joint or united organization. This program would be welcomed since it fits into the American Way. Further, communal contribution is familiar to the lower-class community, particularly through church donations. Thus the church might be asked to get donations from all directly to the United Community organization.

C. The next state would be the popular demand that since all the residents are contributing donations, they would also "SIT-IN" on the deliberations or decisions. The model of their demand may be the CONSUMER interest argument. At first they can ask for an OBSERVER role for their representatives.

1. At first, the resident or citizen representatives need not be elected. That might appear as too dangerous a precedent. They might instead be appointed by some of the more popular organizations, in the neighborhood drawn by lot, etc.

2. This selection method would soon, by protest of inadequacy or being non-democratic, be replaced by an elective method of "citizen" observers.

D. The next stage can be the protest of the citizen group for more capacity than merely observation,--for participation in the decisions or right of advice to the United Organizations Planning Body. The basis of disagreement between the elected or citizen group, and the governing united organizations' body, goes back to the supposition that the "existing" organizations may not be representative of the real community in its desires or at least not as representative as the elected citizen group.

At this point the battle will be between the United Organizations group and the democratically elected citizen's group for joint rule with the funding sources (federal government or private foundations).

The victory will go to the citizen's group for political reasons. Since they represent the Votes in municipal, state, and federal elections; and thus possibly more electoral power than the institutional organizations in the lower-class community. The weight of political support may go to the Citizen's group to run the community organization.

E. At this point of ascendancy, the citizen group will establish the COMMUNITY FOUNDATION,--write its corporate charter, laws and by-laws, and submit it to the community for referendum. The funding sources, government and private foundations, will help the elected citizen body to write the Community Foundation Charter. The local structure of the community organization at this point will

favor the FOUNDATION form in order to operate in the same way and under the same benefits as the preceding united community organization group. Thus, the further ramifications of what the Foundation structure can yield in terms of political government and economic power are hidden by the "naturalness" of this corporate form. Its use of the foundation form will seem instead a status quo endeavor to preserve existing conditions and benefits of operations, rather than as a sign of desire for new and broader community powers.

In addition, the funding source, for example the Ford Foundation of federal government will view the new citizen rule and foundation structure as favorable, since it contains a basis for collecting community money and matching their contributions from a variety of other sources. Thereby they will see a clear way of eventually moving out, while the community foundation can continue the work with its own new basis of support. In this behalf the already instituted method of universal tax-exempt donations by all the residents will have shown good example of popular support and commitment.

F. Beyond this point the Community Foundation can develop politically as well as economically.

1. Politically it can develop a party structure to vitalize democratic and responsible community government action.
2. Economically, it can develop tax-free profit enterprises to build the communal "treasury," as well as create salaried employment for its residents.

Thus the Foundation structure can build real political community and real political government at the local neighborhood, or urban community level. A new level of local government can be established, as it must if democracy is to adapt to modern urban society. The neighborhood government, through the Community Foundation will be small enough for political life and important enough to make its participation satisfying and relevant,--particularly since its decision will intimately affect the everyday living conditions and activities of the citizens.

This eventual new level of government will attempt to keep government close to the people, in a highly organizational society. This new political community and government will create numerous new political roles for our expanding population of the leisured (employed or unemployed).

Maintaining the pervasiveness of relevant political roles is a democratic necessity. And the urban community, based on its Foundation government indeed serves this function. It is such a development as this which is necessary for the flowering of public life and healthy social life through the possibility it creates for expanding public service for real purposes and objectives. In our new, emerging society, neither "private" occupation, nor consumption are any longer totally sufficient ground for personal reward in life. A new foundation of social

