

November 28, 1964 - Dick Kelley

I would like to offer a few ideas and get rid of a few gripes.

My basic criticism seems to be the lack of efficient, democratic structure in which COFO can operate. I am afraid that now we will adopt a very efficient structure that won't be as democratic as possible. This basic problem should occupy much of our time next weekend because without a decent structure our efforts will be wasted. I feel that the district director should be picked by the district staff out of three or four nominees which would be picked by the Jackson office. Also, it should almost always be a Negro, because of a number of reasons. First, the need to develop Negro leadership, the need of Negro youth to identify, and also the definite possibility that the white will move out.

I don't have any concrete answers to the selection of the top staff, but it should be done by the staff as a whole. Also, some provision should be made to replace those who may be incompetent. As to project director, I think he should be a Negro, but one who is willing to listen and learn and who can be removed by absolute majority vote. I also think that many staff meetings should be called in each project, maybe once a week. It should constantly be emphasized that personalities and black-white problems should be worked out through communication and understanding, not just authority. Negroes and whites must learn to work together.

Also, I feel that many younger Negroes (especially local) should have some in-service training, emphasizing reading skills and motivating them to read more. Also, local Negroes should be encouraged to give all their inside information to the staff. Whites should be more aware of some of their bad attitudes (paternalism, inability to relate to local poor, inability to take orders).

Also, we should concern ourselves with two basic concepts of policy: are we primarily a service organization and only secondarily a political organization or vice versa? This is a very important concern and should decide our further action for the year and possibly Mississippi. I know that the problem in Hattiesburg has not been resolved to my satisfaction. Many of us do not see the relationship between community centers, sewing classes and political and economic freedom. Hopefully this can be resolved somewhat.

Another topic: white people in Mississippi. Should we ignore them, talk to them, try to organize them or what? This too should be seriously discussed.

I feel that information generally is not passed out and a number of significant facts are never known by general staff as to Mississippi power structure, its problems and other data.

Too little action has been taken to get results for good movies to be presented to local communities. This is one way we could be educating and broadening Mississippi people and making them politically aware.

What relationship do we have with lawyers? When can we use them and how? This, too, would be useful to know.

As for the last problem, it is the most serious. How to organize successfully and still remain only an organizer and not a boss.