

Memorandum

To: All Project Leaders, Field Staff and Volunteers
From: The Jackson Office and Dona
Re: Freedom Registration

Holly Springs, COFO Office
received 8 July

Freedom Registration presents the COFO staff with a huge job; that of organizing communities well enough to get hundreds of thousands of people on the books by the middle of August-- in time for the Democratic National Convention. We have reason to believe that the Nation's focus at that time will be on the delegation from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the issue of their being seated at the convention. Our argument before the Credentials Committee will to a great extent be based on the signatures that we will have gotten on the Freedom Registration books. It is these people who will have participated in the precinct meetings and who, we hope, will have ratified the delegation to the Democratic National Convention from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

For these reasons it is of the greatest importance that the entire staff, those volunteers assigned to voter registration and the community center people work as hard as possible from now on in order to get atleast 100,000 people on the books. This memo will try to explian everything that the Project Director and others will need to know in order to make the campaign a success in the project area. If you think of additional organizing techniques which work well please let us know so that we can get that information to the other project areas around the state.

Some Important Facts about Freedom Registration:

- 1) Freedom Registration is for both registered and non-registered voters. (Everyone over 21 who can answer the questions on the form.)
- 2) Only those registered on the Freedom Registration books will be eligible to;
 - a) vote in the August Freedom Election
 - b) or to attend either the Precinct meetings, or County, District, State or National Conventions. (We will register everyone who comes to the precinct meetings before beginning the meeting.)
- 3) Part of the job of the Freedom Registration Campaign is to " show the state officials how they can get hundreds of thousands of Negroes on the registration books in just a few months".
- 4) The Freedom Registration Campaign demonstrates what we think to be the only necessary requirements for voting. People do not have to be able to read and write in order to register on the Freedom Registration books. Registrars will fill out for those who cannot read and write as they answer the questions. Such people will sign with "X's" in the presence of atleast two signed witnesses.

The following is a plan for the organization of the campaign.

Registrars:

- 1) We will work towards getting 82 registrars; 1 in each county. (This will be limited by our concern for the safety of those of you who work in the field.)
- 2) The registrar will be responsible for-
 - a) organizing the county seat; making sure that every eligible person there is registered on our books. In some areas such as Hattiesburg and Greenwood they have found that the best way to organize on the city level is with a " Block Captain " system.
 - b) Organizing the entire county by keeping in constant contact with the deputy registrars in his county. The registrar should hold frequent meetings with the deputy registrars; getting continuous reports from them as to how many people they have registered.
 - c) having a complete record of all the registered freedom voters in his county. This means that the deputy registrars have to turn in their forms to the registrar when they have been filled out. The registrar will then section his book off according to the towns in his county; so that when the books are handed in to the state office we will be able to see exactly how many people have registered in each area.
 - d) calling in frequently to his local COFO office and the state office in Jackson to report the number of people registered.

Deputy Registrars:

- 1) There should be as many deputy registrars as we can possibly get. Hopefully we will have atleast one in every town in a given county, with the exception of the county seat.
- 2) Deputy registrars should keep in close contact with the registrars in their counties; keeping them informed of the number of people they have registered.
- 3) Deputy registrars will probably find it helpful to organize their towns into sections with section leaders and block captains.

Mobile Registrars:

- 1) Every staff person and volunteer is automatically a mobile registrar.
- 2) Mobile registrars can register people wherever they ..

happen to be in the state. That is, they can move around the state in an attempt to get people registered.

IMPORTANT: EVERYONE WHO REGISTERS A PERSON MUST SIGN HIS OR HER NAME ON ONE OF THE LAST FOUR LINES OF THE FORM. This person is testifying that such a person as the applicant does exist. For this reason NO ONE UNDER 18 SHOULD SIGN THE FORMS. In the event that young people canvass they should take the completed forms back to the project office or to the registrar for a signature.

Project Office:

1) The project director and everyone else involved should realize that at this point Freedom Registration takes precedence over all voter registration activity. What this means is that any canvassing that is done should be done with a view to getting people Freedom Registered as a prerequisite to going down to the courthouse. All people over 21 who use the facilities of the community centers or the libraries should first be Freedom Registered.

2) The project director should appoint 1 person on his project to work very closely with the registrar there in the running of the Freedom Registration program. This person will have to-

a) be responsible for filing all of the completed Freedom Registration forms. This means having a file card for each form and taking down the following information;

Name (last name first)

Address

County

person who registered the applicant

(This should be signed on one of the last four lines of the form.)

The person's precinct should be looked up on the precinct map and that information should be added to the card.

b) The cards should then be filed in separate boxes by precinct. This is because of the precinct meetings. Every person that participates in the precinct meetings will have to be Freedom Registered. We will therefore have to have a way of knowing who is and who is not already on the books before we register them at the meeting.

c) Once the forms have been filed they should be sent to Jackson for "safe keeping" and will eventually be sent on to Atlanta for even "safer keeping". It is suggested that the forms be sent in on a weekly basis.

d) The Freedom Registration person should make frequent calls to Jackson to report the developments of the campaign. He will also be the person (other than the registrar) to whom Jackson will call for information.

- 3) The enclosed Registrar's Report Form should be filled out and sent in to the Jackson office as soon as possible along with the name of the person on your project who will help to coordinate the Freedom Registration campaign there.

COFO Staff:

At this stage the staff will have the job of organizing on the district level and generally getting the Freedom Registration Campaign off the ground. The staff will be-

- 1) finding registrars in every county in the district, who will be based in the county seat.
- 2) finding deputy registrars in every town other than the county seat, who will be directly responsible to the registrar in that county. (The Registrar should be responsible for recruiting deputy registrars in the county seat.)
- 3) setting up meetings where either the local staff person or someone from the Jackson office can come and explain Freedom Registration. Such meetings also provide good opportunities for getting people registered.
- 4) Keeping in constant contact with Jackson by phone in order to avoid duplication since many registrars will be set up via the WATS line.

When the initial stages of the campaign are over and it is well underway we hope that the campaign in each county will be in the hands of the local registrar. The Freedom Registration campaign is a unique opportunity for us to build strong local leadership.

Some Common Errors:

The campaign has not progressed very far yet. Enough has been done, however, for us to have taken note of some errors which have occurred frequently.

- 1) The second line below the dotted line on the form reads:

" Sworn to and subscribed before me by the above
named _____ "

The name of
the person who is registering on the Freedom Registration books should be written here by the worker and not the workers own name. The name of the worker should

be signed on one of the four bottom lines.

- 2) The person who is registering should write the answers to the questions himself unless he is illiterate.
- 3) Care must be taken that you can understand what the applicant is writing or his form will be useless to us.
- 4) When people are being registered who cannot read and write at least two witnesses should sign on the bottom of the form to indicate that the applicant did answer the questions himself when asked them by the worker.

Materials:

- 1) Each registrar and project office should be equipped with-
 - a) Freedom Registration forms and
 - b) Freedom Registration brochures. (Be careful with these forms. People cannot fill them out themselves and send them directly into the Jackson office as is indicated on the form. They must sign them in the presence of a worker who will then take the form from them.)
- 2) Freedom Registration books can be obtained from the Jackson office only by the project director, the registrar or the Local Freedom Registration coordinator. The request should be made to Dona Moses or Karen Pate.

Some General Suggestions:

- 1) At no time (unless it is absolutely necessary) should completed forms be carried around in cars or on your person. - in large numbers. We recently lost 100 completed forms when a car was confiscated by the police in Columbus. We really have a responsibility to the local people not to endanger them in this way.
- 2) It is strongly suggested that the project leader hold a meeting of the staff and volunteers and interested community people, in which this memo and the program are gone over thoroughly. This will serve as a good opportunity to recruit a project coordinator for the program.

There will be a progress chart set up in the Jackson office and weekly memos will be sent to all registrars, project directors and project Freedom Registration coordinators so that everyone will be kept informed of the developments during the campaign.