

COFO Program (Winter 1964 - Spring 1965)

The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) is extending its Mississippi Summer Project into a year round project. Both volunteers and paid staff will be used to implement the programs. The following programs are planned as part of the project:

1. Freedom Democratic Party and voter registration. Suits filed by the Justice Department have opened up several counties in the state to the possibility of registering large numbers of Negroes. Emphasis will be placed on these areas, but voter registration will continue to form the basis for much of the community organization throughout the state. The Freedom Democratic Party experience of the summer has provided a basis for extensive voter education. This work will be carried on by local voter groups in different parts of the state. The Freedom Democratic Party operations may be worked out of offices distinct from the COFO offices, but there will be close connections in both staff and planning between the offices.

2. Freedom Schools. The Freedom Schools will be continued in all areas where possible, but their scope will be somewhat limited as the majority of students will be in regular school full time. Freedom schools will concentrate on late afternoon and evening courses. Content will be Negro history, political education, modern languages--all not available in the regular schools--as well as remedial math and reading and writing. In some areas freedom schools will serve to intensify regular studies. In some areas freedom schools may serve in place of regular schools in the event of trouble in the regular school system.

3. Pre-school education. Plans are underway for pre-school day care centers in several areas of the state. This program will attempt to provide nursery school enrichment programs to better prepare children for school. The program will provide working mothers with a place to leave their children under supervision during the day.

4. White Community Project. Contacts in the upper middle class and power structure will be continued, but these will be on a limited basis. Emphasis will be placed on trying to organize in the lowest classes, attempting to bridge the gap between the white and Negro communities.

5. Federal Programs. The project will attempt to implement various federal programs that are available for the Mississippi rural poor. Emphasis is being placed on programs for farmers, cooperatives--both housing and consumer, public health programs, and implementing the anti-poverty bill.

6. Community Centers. During the summer community center programs began in many areas of the state. Lack of buildings and trained staff delayed implementation of a permanent program. During the year the National Council of Churches will take on increased responsibility for some of the community centers. Emphasis in program will be on day care, citizenship, library, literacy, health program, and specialized programs arising out of skills of a particular applicant.

7. Literacy Program. The state-wide literacy program will be continued. Several different systems (each one-teach one, classes, self-help, etc.) are being used.

8. Medical Programs. The Medical Committee on Human Rights, a cooperating group, will expand its work. The programs will be partly connected with the freedom schools and the community centers. The actual content of the programs will depend on local need and available personnel, but the minimum desired program will include public health, dietary guidance, first aid, pre-natal care, and instruction in available federal, state, and local aid.

9. Legal Programs. Legal assistance under the Lawyer's Constitutional Defense Committee and the Lawyer's Guild will be continued. Lawyers will be permanently stationed in the state and will work with visiting lawyers here on a short term basis.

10. Audio-visual Program. A variety of movies and slides will be shown in different parts of the state.

11. Food & Clothing Distribution. Food and clothing is being distributed to people who have suffered harassment for movement activities or who are economically destitute for other reasons. The food and clothing is collected in other parts of the country and sent here. This distribution is done in cooperation with other interested agencies.

12. Mississippi Student Union (High School Student Organization). Chapters of this state-wide movement organization are established in many areas. Other chapters will be added. The organization serves as a focus for all civil rights-connected activities on the high school level.

13. Libraries. Usually libraries will be a part of a community center program. In some areas there may be buildings only large enough to house a library. In other places mobile libraries may be used. The libraries are simple and are only sketchily catalogued. Emphasis is placed on training local people to run the libraries.