

Notes on Organizing

by Charles McLaurin

Since I am under the impression that SNCC workers are organizers, I think that this is what they should do.

A SNCC worker should never take a leadership role in the community unless he is in his own community. A SNCC worker should give the responsibility of leadership to the community person or persons whom he has or is building. The SNCC worker should give form and guidance to the peoples' organization, and/or their programs.

I think that in each area one faces different kinds of problems. I've attempted to state some of the problems found in small communities such as Ruleville and Indianola, Miss.

The larger, more middle-class communities will be somewhat different.

I think you at first meet the people on their own terms, or you loose.

Entering the Community

There are two ways to enter a community: the invited and the uninvited way.

The invited is the easiest, because you know that somebody wants you. Somebody will put you up for a while, and through this person or persons, you will meet others.

An invited person goes to live with X person in Y community, Mr. X carries the person to church on Sunday. He introduces him to his friends and neighbors. You are there to do a job which at this time is undefined; so you act friendly, smiling and greeting the ladies as they approach you. Then, with your warm, friendly face you say to the people; "I want to do something for this community." That afternoon you are asked out to someone's home for dinner. Go, because this is one time you will be able to talk with a family, or maybe several families. Remember, try to answer all questions asked of you at this point, because you are on trial. You must impress, as well as express.

An uninvited worker faces many difficulties; first, he is unexpected and in many cases unwanted by the do-nothing leaders of the community. He is a stranger to the people, and therefore, he is alone in a strange place. If he is to be successful, he must become a part of the community.

How One Becomes a Part of the Community

First, get a place to stay. It is best to get a place in the community, with a well-known family. Once you have a place to stay, you have made the first contact in the community; however, in many cases it will not be as easy as writing words on paper.

It may just happen that you are not able to find a place for weeks; but do not give up. You may have to get a room in a rooming house; but try to stay as close to the community as possible. This will enable you to spend long hours in the community without worrying about a way home afterwards.

Making Contact

Since you have found a place to stay, say with a family, then the work starts, and it starts just as do most things, in the home.

You should spend as much time as the family has talking to them, because they have information about the people -- both white and black. They have been there all of their lives; they know the community; they know the people who will help. Take time and talk to them; ask questions, for it is here that you get real community education.

Now you know the key people in the community, from this talk with the family. But some of them work work out; do not get discouraged. Keep on pushing.

Canvas the whole community one afternoon. Talk with the people, laugh with them, joke with them; do most anything that gets some attention on you, or on some kind of conversation. It is very important to learn what bugs them. It may happen that they are thinking about trying to get the vote. You'll know when they talk.

The most important thing is to move the community by action; the community will move when the people move. The people will move when they are motivated.

Some Ways of Motivating People

Canvass two or three days, the first week. Do not worry too much about what you hear from the people. If you just talk and ask questions, some of them may talk about Chicago or Welfare checks; this is good, this is what is on their minds presently.

During canvassing, be sure to take down the names and addresses of the people who talked, who seemed to you that there is hope in them. This could be only two people; or it could be ten. No matter what the number is, these are contacts. You have a small group of people. Now you need a place to meet with them. Try to get a church or an empty building if you cannot get either, use one of the person's homes for a meeting place. Again, start with the people where you live; ask to hold the meeting there.

BUILDING LEADERS

- 3 -

The reason for using this home is that you have now found that dependable leadership does not exist. You must, from this little group, find and build a leader or leaders. How?

In this meeting, plan some kind of action. You put suggestions before the group. Let them talk over the suggestions, about paved streets, stop signs, street lights, or recreational facilities, and how the vote can get these and more.

You may need to hold ten or more of these kinds of meetings; at the same time, trying to get a church, getting the word out about the house meeting by leafletting or word of mouth. But let it get out! Elect a chairman to chair the meetings; you should not do this after the first meeting. Each meeting, give more and more of the responsibilities to this group, and as the group grows, form committees so as to involve more of the people.

To overcome the fear, many of the things above mentioned will apply. By getting the people together, they will see that they are not alone. By stopping by each one's home as much as possible, you will let them know you are sincere, in what you say and do -- that you not only care about the meetings but you are interested in continued progress in their community and family life. The feeling of being close together will help overcome the fear.

Apathy will disappear when you give the people some responsibility. When you subject them to association with each other, through the conversations of personal and community problems, the apathy will disappear. At first the family educated you; now together they are educating each other.

Suspicion comes from mistrust. So many have led us wrong, that it is hard to trust people we don't know. You must be friendly, reliable, and most of all trustworthy. With this, suspicion will disappear. When the people trust you and trust your judgment, suspicion will be a thing of the past.

Charles McLaurin