

# CORNELL'S EXTENSION ACTIVITY ON STATE AND LOCAL REVENUES

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Operation Advance is a code name for an extension activity that has evolved out of thinking and planning how to develop extension work in public affairs issues related to local and state finance.

At the National Agricultural Policy Conference three years ago, a task force presented subject matter materials on local and state finance. At Cornell an extension bulletin was prepared from this material directly afterwards, and other publications and articles were written in the traditional manner. The question arose how we could expand educational work in this area of local and state finance. We were concerned among other things with how to:

1. Reach community leaders who are motivated to do something about public problems.
2. Provide a university-level education on a widespread enough scale and in such a manner as to make a difference in alleviating public problems.
3. Make most effective and economical use of specialist resources.
4. Meet the concern of some county agents and others in extension who had been coping for some years with the question of how to do a better and more intensive job in the public affairs arena.

The Farm Foundation suggested two men, Warren Rovetch and Philip Van Slyck of Education Research Associates, Boulder, Colorado, both of whom had had experience with the Foreign Policy Association in its educational activities. During the more than two years since the spring of 1960, Rovetch has contributed imaginatively and intensively to Operation Advance, and Van Slyck has rendered valuable help in design, layout, and preparation of materials.

Between June 1960 and June 1961, Operation Advance got underway in five pilot counties around Ithaca with the close collaboration and cooperation of the county agents in those counties. During the winter of 1961-62, the first stage was conducted in 25 additional counties, while at the same time, a second phase was initiated in the five pilot counties. During the coming winter, 46 of 56 counties will have conducted the two stages with varying degrees of intensity. In prospect

next year is a similar effort with simpler materials aimed at a broader segment of citizenry than community leaders. During the coming winter, a related activity is planned, directed broadly toward interest in "Land and People" expressed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and by various New York state agencies.

Operation Advance is neither a "program" nor a one-shot spasm. It is seen as a continuing and varied educational activity of training for public action, the full implications of which we at Cornell certainly do not yet grasp. Such organization as exists is highly informal and has coalesced around an idea rather than a boss, around a venture in extension education that appears to have new dimensions and new potential sufficient so far to inspire cooperation, coordination, and priority attention without benefit of organization charts.

The objective of Operation Advance has been to provide education for a broad and diverse group of community leaders to develop more effective public action on problems of common concern; to help make community leaders more competent and more confident in their roles of leadership. The educational method has been self-administered, small, discussion groups unattended by subject matter experts or trained discussion leaders. The materials have consisted of attractively designed and printed fact sheets and work sheets supplemented by mimeographed statistical and other data pertaining to the individual county. Handbooks have also been prepared for the county agents suggesting in detail steps for soliciting the interest of community leaders and for helping them in organizing discussion groups and in making the discussion meetings effective educationally.

#### PREPARATION OF MATERIALS

Our educational aim has not been to provide answers to policy problems, but to provide the knowledge and a framework of understanding that will contribute to the improvement of individual judgment relevant to the public business. The materials include facts, background and framework, and questions for discussion. The leaders taking part in the groups provide answers for themselves.

The five fact sheets for the first stage discussions are 12 pages each and have the following titles:

1. What's Ahead for Our Schools? (New York state and local governments make larger outlays for education than any other public purpose; the same is true in almost every other state.)
2. Roads for the Future. (Highway maintenance and construction is the second leading purpose for which state and local funds are expended.)

3. Outlook for Local Government.
4. Paying for the Future. (A discussion of taxes and public finance.)
5. Looking Ahead. (Oriented toward community economic and other development.)

These five sheets were accompanied by an introductory pamphlet, "Leadership and the Democratic Dialogue," explaining the purpose of Operation Advance and outlining the series. The fact sheets treat the respective subjects, not as separate and distinctive problems, but as interrelated concerns. Decisions reached in one problem area influence possible decisions in another.

A second stage series of materials has been partly prepared and all are to be ready for use within a month. An introductory pamphlet explains the purpose of the second stage. The first fact sheet, "Framework for Decision," deals with the larger framework of economic, social, and political change within which every community works on its problems and leaders make their choices. A second fact sheet, "Tools for Action," discusses the means by which public decisions are reached and action is initiated and controlled. Politics is one such tool for organized public decision and action, a means by which a community accomplishes what it wants most to do.

The next three publications in the second stage series are work sheets dealing with "clusters" or broad areas of community activity and concern. The first work sheet treats "Community Growth and Development." The second is entitled "Managing Education in the Community," and brackets the wide range of formal education. The third, "You and Your Community," is a basis for group discussion, but is intended to conclude the two stages by passing the charge from the group to the individual, and by asking him to assess his deepest concerns and what he can do about them as a self-propelled citizen and local leader. Accompanying the second stage series of pamphlets is a "Community Reference Book," containing mimeographed data and other information pertaining to each county and to the subjects under discussion.

#### OPERATIONAL ASPECTS

A major factor in the effectiveness of Operation Advance has been persistent and painstaking attention to the administrative implementation and support needed for so wide a departure from traditional extension work. The work on Operation Advance differs from customary county agent responsibilities in at least two important respects. One is

that the clientele sought is not farmers and related interests alone, but leaders and interested citizens wherever they may be in country or city, and New York has an overwhelmingly urban population. The other is that in the public problems field, the agent cannot be an expert with the answers to the extent that he can, for example, in farm production technology. The work, so far as the specialist is concerned, also differs from the usual in the kind, range, and depth of subject matter; in the assumption that material is being written for an audience of experienced and busy people; in orientation of text toward action which leaves to the "student" the choice of kind and means of action; and in the discipline required in fitting text to layout.

The functions of the county extension offices have included recruiting core leaders who would head the discussion groups and in helping these individuals as needed to locate ten to fifteen other community leaders who would be interested in joining their group for five or more meetings at weekly or other intervals. The county agents have provided the published materials, counseled with core leaders, and appraised the effectiveness of the various discussion groups in their respective counties. They have not had to be subject matter experts, but they obviously have had to be acquainted with the purpose and scope of the materials in soliciting the interest of community leaders.

In the initial effort in the five pilot counties, the county agents were consulted at frequent intervals. An operations handbook was prepared. Agents and core leaders were invited to a one-day meeting on the Cornell campus, at which plans were made for recruiting discussion group members and conducting discussions.

In extending Operation Advance into other counties, and in moving into the second stage materials, state-wide, regional, and county meetings of agents and core leaders were organized. Another operations handbook has been prepared for this fall and winter, and more conferences are in prospect. Budgetary and other support for specialist work on the educational materials has been obtained.

## EVALUATION

During the past year, approximately 6,000 community leaders in thirty counties participated in Operation Advance. Less than 15 percent of the participants were farmers. Other participants included professional people, businessmen, public officials, journalists, and housewives. Reactions of participants were obtained through questionnaires in seventeen counties. Opinion analyst Sam Lubell conducted 100 intensive interviews in five counties. Rural sociologists and the agents interviewed 40 more individuals in four more counties. In addi-

tion, response has been evoked in the form of oral comments, letters, newspaper articles, and editorials.

Those of us who have observed Operation Advance at close range have been impressed by the rapid and enthusiastic acceptance of the activity among people who previously had little if any familiarity with extension work in the land-grant colleges. One of the counties with the largest number of discussion groups is in the New York metropolitan area.

A newspaper editorialized, "Operation Advance . . . brought out the factors which make a community great, . . . and the importance of self-expression from people who seldom have an opportunity to express themselves on matters pertaining to the welfare of the community." A businessman said, "This program stimulated a lot of interest which can be a springboard for plenty of action." Another commented, "This proves that just because you live in a small town, you don't have to think small."

Though county agents tended to lean over backwards in stressing that discussion groups were organized for education and not for action, one group told its school board that it would do a selling job in the community when the board decided what was needed to get better education. Another planned to reconvene to study proposed community projects whenever necessary in order to help circulate ideas through the community. Another set out to get an area vocational high school established.

Many participants examined the fact sheets critically to find the axes the writers sought to grind. Very few were able to read biased treatment of controversial issues into the sheets. One thought that the writing was slanted toward political conservatism; another that it encouraged a trend toward socialism—a nice balance as long as it comes from a small minority.