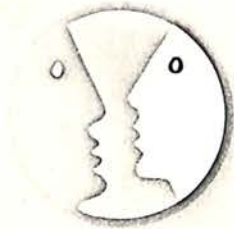


CONTENTS



A commission on human relations can be many things. It can be merely an effort to push a city's racial problems under the rug. Or it can be a sincere endeavor to seek and maintain racial harmony in a community. This booklet contains an outline for creating the type of commission that can effectively cope with the problems and tensions that may arise among people of varying backgrounds in your community.

Obviously, individual cities face differing problems. And no single outline can provide an answer for each of them. At the end of this booklet are suggestions on where you may find help in solving difficulties peculiar to your community.

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1. Getting Started

What one citizen has described as the "comfortable, self-satisfied existence" of a certain North Carolina town came to a sudden end in 1960.

Two unrelated events caused the people of this community to raise questions about their way of life which had gone unchallenged for more than 200 years.

One event forced the citizens of this community to reexamine race relations in their city. The other required that they review the entire economic structure of the community.

The latter event was the shutting down of Southern Railway yards in the area, throwing hundreds of workers out of work. The shutdown was damaging both economically and psychologically. Not only was the railroad operation the major industry in the area, but it was a symbol of industrial activity in the community.

The second event had its beginning nine months earlier in a nearby community. Four Negro college students had sought service at the segregated lunch counter of a five-and-ten-cent store in the other town. Service was denied, so the students sat.

Now, just as the sit-ins had spread to hundreds of cities throughout the South, they threatened this economically troubled community as it battled to overcome its economic plight.

Negro students at a local college picketed the segregated movie theaters of the community, and announced that they would also conduct sit-ins and demonstrations against other places of public accommodation which still had not desegregated.

The demonstrations surprised many white citizens. They considered their community further advanced in race relations than most southern communities and saw no need for demonstrations. They feared that protests would frighten off the new industry the community needed, and also bring an angry, or even violent, reaction from extremist factions. An informal biracial committee of white and Negro leaders met to consider the situation.

One request that arose from the meeting was for the establishment of an official interracial

commission capable of the continual handling of grievances. Presented to the city's mayor, the request was rejected.

But events were occurring which made it imperative that the city have such an organization. Theater owners did agree to desegregate their movie houses. Extremists, however, were threatening to do bodily harm to any Negro entering a desegregated theater. The day the first Negroes entered the formerly all-white theaters, known extremists did show up, but failed to carry out their threat.

The biracial group that had met earlier was nonetheless concerned that another confrontation might not be as peaceful. So the group began to meet as an unofficial human relations commission.

Their first act was to convince the Negro students to suspend demonstrations while they attempted to correct further injustices in the city. With the assistance of the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants Association, the group began calling on businessmen and urging them to integrate their facilities. Quiet negotiations with the Board of Education brought the beginnings of school integration. The city was well on the way to solving its major racial problems.

In 1962, a national organization named the community an "All America City" because of its success in rebuilding its economy and for other citizen action achievements. While the human relations program was not a part of its entry in this competition, the community assuredly would not have received this award had not its racial climate also been good.

Early that same year, the mayor introduced an ordinance in city council to establish an official biracial committee. On the day the ordinance was adopted, members of the original, informal committee sat in council chambers and heard their names read among the charter members of the official body.

That is how the Salisbury, N. C., Community Services Committee was formed. Today, it is an active force in the community. It has helped Salisbury immeasurably in resolving racial disputes without undue friction.

The community now has integrated all of its places of public accommodations. The committee is working to promote merit employment with the continuing assistance of the Salisbury-Rowan County Chamber of Commerce and the Salisbury-Rowan Merchants Association which now have Negro members. The committee too is working with an integrated school board in trying to find a satisfactory solution to the integration of Negro teachers in the community's school system.

Other communities can profit from Salisbury's experience without awaiting a crisis. The racial problems of Salisbury are present in every southern city, and appear in a different form in most northern communities.

A commission on human relations may have the most humble of origins. One very simple beginning may be an informal parlor meeting of a group of concerned citizens, white, Negro or interracial. If members of this initial group are all of one race, they should move immediately to become interracial. This interracial group should next seek to invite as participants representatives of a broad cross-section of the entire community.

Another approach to formation of a human relations commission may be through the avenue of already existing organizations. Almost any church, civic, fraternal, neighborhood or social group may provide the initiative for a commission. Several groups, or chapters of several groups, may act in concert.

Many communities never progress beyond establishing an interracial committee with broad representation from all segments of its population. It remains an unofficial committee, with perhaps no more than informal approval of city fathers.

Organizations such as this—and indeed those with official standing—may select a variety of names, such as "friendly relations council," "community relations committee," "friendly neighbors," "human relations committee," etc. The most commonly used designation—and the one that best conveys the nature and purpose of the organization—is "human relations committee" or "commission."

A group without official status can and has proved beneficial in tackling a community's human relations problems. But the most effective bodies have been those constituted as official human relations commissions under local ordinance.

2. Organizing the Commission

The most effective commission on human relations—one that is best suited to cope with racial problems and help improve intergroup understanding in the community—is one that is created with a firm legal basis—a municipal ordinance. This type of commission operates with a clear and unmistakable official sanction. The city council and the mayor, as representatives of the city, are unquestionably on record as favorable to the commission and its goals. The commission has permanency. Its members will not hesitate to tackle in a forthright manner the issues and currents that otherwise might lead to community dissension and racial turmoil. Commission members may speak and act with authority, without fear of reprisal or reproach.

About 20 percent of the human relations commissions in existence across the nation operate under local ordinances. These include commissions in Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cleveland, New York, Toledo, Ohio, Erie, Pa., Des Moines, Iowa, and Louisville, Ky.

There are alternative, but less effective, bases for a commission. It may be created by proclamation of the mayor, with approval of the city council. It may be created solely by a mayor's proclamation or executive order, without formal city council approval. These types operate with some official sanctions, but obviously not with the strong backing of city fathers afforded under a local ordinance. Nevertheless, a commission established under proclamation offers greater potential than a private citizens group or a quasi-legal body. Cities with human relations agencies without enabling ordinances include Phoenix, Ariz., Tampa, Fla., Alton, Ill., Durham, N.C., and Richmond, Va.

A proper local ordinance should spell out the scope and authority of a commission on human relations. It should specify the number of members on the commission and provide for a specific term of office. The size of a commission may vary according to local conditions and makeup of a community's population. Generally, a commission can function comfortably with between five and 15 members. A larger commission may prove too unwieldy for obtaining a consensus. One too small may not have sufficient manpower to cover its chores adequately.

A commission should meet periodically, at least monthly. Its meetings should be public, unless sensitive matters require a closed executive session.

There will be little service to the community from a commission empowered to act only when trouble is brought to its doorstep. A good human relations commission has the authority to initiate investigations into potential or actual areas of trouble and tension. Of course, much of a commission's work will be that of quiet probing and persuasion. But it should also have the power, when necessary, to hold public hearings and to request and summon the presence of citizens.

The enforcement powers of a commission naturally depend on the laws in the field of civil rights a community has to enforce. In many communities with local ordinances banning discrimination in public accommodations, housing and employment it is the commission on human relations that is charged with their enforcement. These powers should at least be as broad as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and prevailing state law.

3. Goals and Objectives

The best organized commission on human relations will be ineffectual unless it sets for itself clearly defined goals and objectives. In fact these ought to be set forth in its establishing ordinance or charter.

It should be made plain that a commission is an instrument for orderly change toward the goal of equal opportunity for all. The commission must seek actively to promote this goal.

It should do so by creating a climate of understanding, cooperation and mutual respect among all citizens. The commission should keep open the channels of communications and provide these channels when they do not exist.

Much of the racial ills of a community result from the frustrations of those without a procedure for airing their grievances. A commission should serve this function. It should strive aggressively to prevent violence and ease tensions. And it should provide the resources and research into methods for accomplishing this end.

A good commission is a leader in its community—not a mere follower. It is a mediator when turbulence erupts, but it should provide the groundwork that would make such mediation unnecessary.

4. Selecting Commission Members

Many an otherwise well organized and directed human relations commission falters because its membership is not properly or carefully chosen.

The membership should reflect the composition of the community. It should be representative of religious groups, business interests, civil rights organizations, labor unions and civic bodies. It is wise to sound out leaders of these groups before selecting commission members.

The prestige of a commission will mirror that of its members. Particularly in a young commission it is important that members be persons of respect and influence in the community. It is equally important that their commitment to the aims and programs of the commission be unswerving.

Selection of minority group members must be made with great care. For example, often white leaders search for Negroes who will merely reflect their own conception of the Negro community. They look for Negroes whom they trust. Their choice may not have the trust of the Negro community. A Negro who enjoys a fine status among white persons may not necessarily have the same standing among Negroes. Thus many, perhaps a majority of Negro citizens, will be alienated and communications

channels to them jammed. Certainly all elements of the Negro community, including those thought of as extremist, should be canvassed for advice.

The role of militant civil rights groups and even those persons sometimes looked upon as "extremists," is of vital importance to a commission on human relations. Direct contact should be maintained with these groups. This does not mean that it will be necessary, or even wise, to appoint representatives of militant groups to the commission. On the contrary, it may be that such appointments would compromise the militant's standing with his followers. He would sometimes be required to vote on issues which would be contrary to the position of his organization, preventing both the commission from functioning effectively and jeopardizing his own position of leadership.

Still, militancy must be acknowledged, understood and heard. It is imperative that the commission maintain the closest contact and mutual respect of these elements. It is an absolute necessity that the activists in the civil rights movement have a direct access to the commission's listening post. For they often telegraph the direction in which the community eventually must travel and the points of trouble it is likely to encounter.

5. Staffing the Commission

A commission without an adequate staff is seriously handicapped in its efforts to serve the community in the field of human relations.

As a bare minimum every commission should have a full-time, trained professional staff member and a secretarial assistant. They should operate from a permanent office.

Careful attention should be given to staff qualifications. This is an essential for a commission with a lone professional. He should be a college graduate, preferably with a master's degree in the social sciences or social work. He should have experience in the fields of community relations and community organization. It is desirable that he be a good public speaker, resourceful in dealing with others and an effective writer.

Above all, the post should never be considered a political plum or a refuge for cronies. It is not necessary to limit the search within the community. Often, in fact, a likely candidate may be a staff member of a larger commission in another city. He may be willing to accept a position as director of an agency in a smaller community for the challenge of helping to organize and develop such an agency.

It is difficult to specify a budget for a commission. Obviously this depends on the size of the staff, the work it is expected to accomplish and the facilities it is given. A commission's resources are expanded, of course, by organized volunteers and committees.

6. The Commission in Operation

A good starting point for any commission on human relations is to learn more about the community it serves. A commission ought to be a source of expert knowledge on all matters pertaining to human relations problems in the community. It should undertake detailed surveys to determine the patterns of employment, housing, educational opportunities and leisure life of its minority groups. For the financially limited community, a cross-section of volunteer community organizations might provide this service.

This type of research should be a continuing concern of the commission. There should be periodic dissemination of all of the material gathered through an active on-going public information program.

The commission should not overlook the importance of publicizing itself. Even the most elementary brochure or leaflet on its organization and function should be given wide distribution. Its executive director should not be a stranger before local groups, to local newspaper columns or on community airwaves. A periodic newsletter is highly effective in keeping the commission before the community and speaking to its citizens.

A good human relations commission is well known within local government. It should not hesitate to provide advice to city fathers. It ought to see that all arms of government oper-

ate under policies and practices of nondiscrimination and equality of opportunity. Local government must be a model for the rest of the community.

When moments of crisis arise, the commission must be prepared through advanced planning. It should arrange procedures with local law enforcement officials for coping with trouble and violence. Similar arrangements should be made with the mass media.

But a commission cannot merely operate a fire bucket brigade. It should develop long range programs that will minimize the chance of serious flareups. It should lead the efforts to erase all discrimination in places of public accommodations. It should search for realistic programs for eliminating racial segregation in schools, whether under law or *de facto*. It should plot methods for improving the living standards of minority groups confined to the ghetto and enabling them to move freely and orderly to neighborhoods throughout the community. It should make certain that discriminatory barriers to any citizen's right to vote are dropped. It must encourage and push forward equal opportunities for employment for all its citizens, both in private industry and in government. In most cases, to give official sanction and direction to these efforts, a commission will find it necessary to work for local ordinances. Throughout all its activities, a commission must attempt to educate its community to an awareness of and desire to pursue these goals and objectives.

7. How Other Commissions Work

Creation of human relations commissions is not a recent occurrence in our nation's history. As early as the 1920's there were committees in many Southern communities. Today there are more than 200 cities with some type of human relations agency. Here are some examples of how they have worked in some of these communities.

New Rochelle, N.Y.—On June 21, 1964, the same day that three civil rights workers disappeared in Philadelphia, Miss., a New Rochelle

policeman clubbed a 17-year-old Negro teenager over the head, requiring his hospitalization for a possible concussion. The Negro community became aroused over what it considered police brutality. Several thousand persons, including angry teenagers, prepared to demonstrate. A critical confrontation developed between the Negroes and the police department. Working swiftly, the New Rochelle Human Rights Commission opened lines of communication between police and municipal officials and Negro leaders. The result: the police department held a human relations course for all of its patrolmen; the hearing of the accused officer was speeded up; New Rochelle's City Council agreed to press the city's business community to hire more teenagers; the housing authority began to acquire more integrated living units; and the recreation commission expanded its entire program.

Chicago, Ill.—During the summer of 1964, the Mayor's Commission on Human Relations observed that potentially explosive conditions which had led to riots in other urban cities also existed in Chicago. Feeling the urgency of the situation, it brought together representatives of the mass media, and the top city and police department officials to explore the situation. The result: mass media cooperated fully in adopting guidelines for reporting racial incidents in a non-provocative manner. The police department instructed its officers in the proper handling of arrests in predominantly Negro areas. Not one case of police brutality was reported during the entire summer. Chicago remained peaceful.

Louisville, Ky.—In May, 1963, the Louisville Human Relations Commission conducted an extensive testing campaign to determine whether public places were open to all the city's citizens. The survey found that 35 percent of the city's restaurants were still segregated and not likely to desegregate voluntarily. The result: the commission helped obtain an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation.