Lafayette Citizens Seeking Additional Funds of OEO

LAFAYETTE, La. — A group of Lafayette Parish citizens interested in finding a way to secure additional funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity since the disbanding of Acadiana Neuf, met in Lafayette last week with an OEO representative.

Acadiana Neuf, former poverty war agency for six South Louisiana parishes, lost its OEO funds last month due to its refusal to reorganize according to federal guidelines. It was the only one of 1,100 poverty agencies in the United States which did not meet federal standards for representation of the poor on its board of directors, and which lost its funding for this reason.

PLANNING EFFORTS

State Sen. Edgar G. Mouton Jr., and the Rev. James L. Stovall, pastor of First Methodist Church here, are coordinating efforts in Lafayette Parish to plan at the parish level, in cooperation with five other parishes, which will meet the requirements of OEO.

Cornelius Bridges, representative from the OEO office in Austin, Tex., met with the group last week.

Renewal of eligibility for funds will depend on several factors. Each of the parishes of Lafayette, Acadia, St. Martin, St. Landry, Iberia and Vermilion will see an organizer on the parish level, and then cooperate on an interparish basis. Bridges said.

Twelve representatives from each of three categories would be chosen from each parish. The three categories are: (1) city and parish governmental bodies; (2) private agencies; (3) representatives of the poor, elected by the poor.

Two divisions each parish could be divided into urban and rural divisions and each division would be subdivided into two or three sections. Elections would be held in each section and nominations for representation would be assumed from all portions of the parish.

Bridges told the group that the above outline would be acceptable to the OEO, which would further require that eligible voters must live in the section in which they vote, and that nominees must be from those sections.

When Austin's approval of the plan is officially obtained, private agencies and governmental bodies for representation on the board will be suggested, Stovall said.

Astor Kirk, regional director of the OEO, was reported to have made assurances at a previous meeting that if the local group could meet OEO specifications, it would become eligible for about $1.5 million in federal funds.

As soon as a parish organization is formally recognized, it is expected to request funds for the Headstart program. The parish school board has said it would cooperate in obtaining funds.

An area meeting with residents of six parishes has been scheduled for this week.