

MEMORANDUM ON POLICIES AND ORGANIZATION OF
ROCKEFELLER BOARDS

G. E. VINCENT JAN. 29, 1927

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Memorandum on Policies and Organization of the Rockefeller Boards

I. Questions of Underlying Theory and Policy:

1. General Considerations: A reading of the letters and memoranda which have been submitted by Trustees and Staff Members of the General Education Board and of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial creates at first an impression of confusion of counsels and differences of opinion. Further reflection, however, discloses certain general agreements and brings out more clearly alternatives of policy.

- (1) Agreements: there should be (a) more clearly defined division of labor, (b) a more capable personnel, (c) better diffusion of information, and (d) closer team-work in carrying out of plans.
- (2) Alternate policies have to do with (a) comprehensiveness of programs, (b) size and character of staffs, (c) type of organization, and (d) the relation of trustees and officers.

2. Alternatives of Scope. Shall the Boards actually attempt:

- (1) To cover comprehensively the entire range of scientific research, general and professional education and applications to governmental and social administration? Can they command a personnel capable of doing this? Would their combined resources prove at all adequate? Could Trustees be found to over-see so vast an undertaking? Or shall the Board be content:
- (2) To consider a limited number of proposals which fall within the fields enumerated above, being guided in selection by considerations of value as stimulating demonstrations, range of influence, possibilities of well-rounded development, etc., etc. This comparatively modest policy can easily be adapted to personnel available, resources, etc. It would keep the organization flexible, and avoid the danger inherent in a large, permanent staff of technically trained persons. (See below).

(Note. In outlining programs is there not danger of over-simplification and suggestions of grandeur? For example, "to promote science internationally" is a fine phrase but may it not lead to grandiose conceptions? Translated into the concrete it means aid to a relatively small number of individual scientists who have demonstrated their ability to use equipment, supplies and assistants to advantage. It further means assisting the migration of research men and in a few instances contributions to the building or endowment of laboratories. This help very likely hastens developments which would otherwise have been delayed, it may even in rare cases bring to light new things that might have been overlooked, but in the aggregate this aid is a very small factor in the whole onward progress of scientific research in the world. Might not a more modest, less apparently comprehensive scheme be wiser? This applies quite as much to some of the phrases used by the Foundation as to the implication of the names and programs of other Boards.)

3. Alternatives of Staff Size and Character: A comprehensive program would call for:

- (1) A large technically trained personnel stationed or traveling in all the leading countries or regions of the world. (The International Health Board, the only unit now organized on such a basis has 50 regular and 23 special staff members with an annual salary list of \$427,500 and an annual retiring allowance payment of \$41,000.) Could enough men and women well-trained, wise, tactful, cultivated be found for such service? If so could any trustees really control a world-wide machine like this? Would not its representatives - enthusiastic, ambitious and competitive - develop projects and urge them in volume upon the home office? Would not the general officers even with another supervising field staff of unusually able and detached persons be largely incapable of making discriminating decisions? Could any organization staffed in this way by professionally expert people hope to retain any considerable flexibility? Would it not go the way of a vested interest to a privately endowed bureaucracy? Is it not wiser, therefore, to rely upon
- (2) A relatively small permanent staff of administrators and a few broad-minded technical persons, who would call in for temporary service on specific projects varying numbers of the leading specialists in different fields? Would not such a policy greatly enrich and diversify the expert counsel at the disposal of the Boards, avoid the danger of a single bias (see Zinsser in February Atlantic: "The Dangers of Magnanimity,") minimize the possibilities of bureaucratic dry rot, and keep the organization flexible?

(Note on laymen as administrators of technical organizations: Is it not true that in the Rockefeller Boards the conspicuous contributions to general policy have been made by laymen, e.g. Buttrick, Rose and Flexner? Is it not almost inevitable that the specialist as a general administrator will find it hard, if not impossible, to avoid the professional bias? Is it not likely, therefore, that with rare exceptions work of co-ordination and of larger initiative will be more effectively administered by intelligent laymen, able to enter sympathetically into the plans of their professional colleagues but capable of seeing these plans in their wider relations?)

4. The problem of trustees presents something of a dilemma. If they are chosen from the group of prominent publicists whose names command confidence, the appointees are too busy to give more than very general and largely uncritical consideration to business. The officers are likely to have very much their own way. On the other hand less conspicuous younger men or persons with leisure may be able to give more time, but they offer little assurance to the public. Specialist members of broad view are extremely useful, but too many of them might easily make for professional bias and inflexibility. Ought not efforts be made to free trustees' meetings of too much detailed business so that large questions of policy can be discussed? Ought not a careful search be made for new trustees of a type which can give more time

to the work of the Boards? Ought not the plan of asking trustees to visit work in the field be extended? (e.g. the visits of Doctors Edsall and Wilbur to Peking were highly useful.) Ought not the idea of standing committees of the trustees for special fields be given a fair trial?

II. Different Plans of Organization

1. The plan of Dispersion. It has been suggested by Embree that organizations with more or less definite and somewhat conventionalized programs be set off as detached units with their own trustees and assurances of annual support for a fixed period of 15 or 20 years. Such independent units might be:

- (1) The International Health Board - moved say to the headquarters of the National Health Council, 370 Seventh Avenue, put under a Board of self-perpetuating trustees and promised \$2,500,000 a year for 15 or 20 years.
- (2) A Medical Education Board, which would combine the Divisions of Medical Education of the Foundation and the General Education Board, and administer the special medical fund of the latter with additional grants from the Foundation.
- (3) A General International Education Board, combining in a similar way the activities of the General Education Board, the International Education Board and the educational work of the Memorial.
- (4) The Rockefeller Foundation, divested of its administrative activities, would become under Embree's plan a pioneering organization making investigations and initiating new kinds of work which in turn when once conventionalized might be turned over to Boards already in existence or to new ones created for the purpose.

Queries: To be consistent ought not such a plan call for a distribution of the capital? Otherwise would not the Rockefeller name be involved without responsibility? Would setting loose in society a group of quite separate Boards be a real service?

2. Simplification Looking Toward Liquidation. There is another possible plan which would contemplate the distribution of capital within a period, say of 25 years, and meantime would avoid the recruiting of a large permanent staff and the development of an elaborate world-wide program. The main features of such a plan would be:

(1) A consolidation of Boards and Funds. This might be accomplished by the securing of a new charter but preferably by identity of membership under two existing characters.

(2) Transition from largely staffed operating organizations toward gifts to outside operating agencies such as National Research Councils, the League of Nations Health Section, National Health Societies, Universities, etc.

(3) A small staff of lay administrators with a limited and decreasing number of specialist appointees.

(4) The temporary employment of experts for special studies and other forms of professional service which would at the same time be useful to the Board and of advantage to the specialists themselves.

(5) Transition from many small gifts to the concentration of large sums on especially significant projects, like universities of strategic importance: e.g. Johns Hopkins, Chicago, Paris, London, etc., medical and health centers, etc.

(Note. There has been a good deal of discussion about aid to "projects" as contrasted with assistance to institutions. If by "project" one means a definite detailed problem of research there is no ground of dispute, but if "project" be interpreted as a general inquiry by an exceptional man - for example an expedition by Breasted or a comprehensive investigation by Pearl - temporary support for such a project would seem to be precisely the kind of thing for a private foundation to undertake. Why insist on endowing a department when the income for a few years would insure the contribution of a great man? His successor to the use of an endowment might be a very different person. On the other hand very often a contribution toward the endowment of a department manned by a strong group and maintaining a fine tradition might be the soundest policy. Why talk about being opportunistic and at the same time tie our hands with bureaucratic "principles"?)

3. Progressive Steps toward Unification. There are, however, quite obviously practical considerations of work in progress, personal interests, etc. which probably make an immediate drastic or doctrinaire change unwise and undesirable. Are there not steps which might be successively taken in the direction of unification if that is deemed good policy? Here for example are possibilities:

(1) The first step: two closely cooperating groups:

(a) The unification of the Foundation in accordance with the plan which has already been approved in principle.

(b) The unification of the General Education Board, International Educational Board and the educational work of the Memorial to include the consideration of projects in Public Education, College Education, Graduate Education and Research, Professional Education including Medical Education in the U.S.A. with a special liaison committee with the Division of Medical Education of the Foundation.

(2)

(2) The second step: certain transfers between groups

(a) Transfer of Medical Education from the General Education group to the Medical Education Division of the Rockefeller Foundation.

(b) Transfer of Graduate Education and Research in Physics, Chemistry and Biology from the General Education group to a new Division of the Foundation with a liaison committee with the Graduate and Research Division of the General Education Board.

(Note: The Liaison Committees not to be merely conference groups but duly constituted agencies which must pass officially upon all border-line projects which involve cooperation.)

(3) Final step: the unification of all activities in the Rockefeller Foundation with some such division of labor as the following but with the clear understanding that the program is not to be grandiose or inclusive, that the permanent technical staff is to be kept at the minimum, that administrative responsibilities are to be turned over to other agencies so far as possible and that the policy will be to mass resources on a relatively few highly influential centers.

(a) Division of Graduate Education and Research: The Physical Sciences, the Social Sciences, Language, Literature and Art.

(b) Division of General Education: Secondary, Collegiate and Teacher Training.

(c) Division of Professional Education: Medicine and Public Health, Law, Engineering, Agriculture, Business.

(d) Division of Government Administration:
Health, City Management, Crime, Finance, etc.

(Note. "Graduate Education and Research" would seem to be an appropriate and useful combination. (It is) not important to distinguish more sharply between graduate and undergraduate work, i.e., between university and collegiate studies? Does not all true graduate work get its inspiration from the ideals of research and does not all research involve the training of younger men who serve as assistants? Does not the proposed combination offer at least a slender bridge between the "promotion of science" idea and the "co-operate with the educational system" theory?)

III. A Clearing House Secretariat. It is agreed by all that whatever the organization there should be a diffusion of information between the different administrators as to what is being considered and done by the various groups and divisions. This clearing of information will never be carried out systematically, continuously and promptly so long as it is left to chance and the spasmodic efforts of busy people. The task must become the special duty and responsibility of some one person and his aids. Why not experiment at least with a clearing-house service? The Information Service of the Foundation might be charged with this work which would naturally include:

1. The maintaining and circulating to all officers of all Boards of lists of projects under consideration.
2. The acting as a reference channel for all communications of one Board to another.
3. The preparation and circulation of summary digests of minutes of all committees and Boards.
4. The furnishing of digests of reports of other Foundations and Funds.
5. The circulation of newspaper clippings bearing upon the work of the Boards.
6. The calling of the attention of officers to all possibilities of overlapping.

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