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VISTA -- NEW DIRECTIONS

New directions for the programming, training and assignment of VISTA Volunteers were among the topics discussed at a press conference on April 21, 1970, by the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Donald Rumsfeld.

VISTA will strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the Volunteer presence by giving preference in the assignment of future Volunteers to projects with defined program emphases. "Projects that are poorly defined, general in nature and without specific program emphasis" will be reduced and/or discontinued. Mr. Rumsfeld identified the following program emphases for which Volunteers will be specifically recruited and trained and then assigned for service: Health (nutrition, family planning, alcohol, drugs, etc.), Education and Manpower (adult education, high school equivalency, "Right to Read", etc.), Economic Development, Housing, Community Planning and Social Services.

In responding to questions about the role of community organization in the work of the Volunteer, Mr. Rumsfeld indicated that in some cases community organization may be an element in achieving well defined program goals. He expressed concern, however, with the concept of "community organization for community organization's sake."

Mr. Rumsfeld further stated that in the future preference will be given to increasing the number of Volunteers who are assigned to projects in the region of their home residence.

At the same press conference, the Director also announced a new OEO policy on draft deferments. Volunteers in the field have recently received copies of the new instruction. Under the new policy, OEO will no longer support the granting of occupational deferments for service in Office of Economic Opportunity programs, including VISTA. Mr. Rumsfeld indicated that he based this change in policy on his belief that such deferments tend to shift the burden of the draft to others, often to the poor, a result inconsistent with the purposes of the Economic Opportunity Act. He stated, "For every individual deferred, someone else must serve - an individual who in many instances has not had access to the educational opportunities and experiences which would enable him to meet the qualifications for deferment."