A graphic identity program for Rochester Mental Health Center

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A Graphic Identity Program
for Rochester Mental Health Center
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Thanks goes to Peter Carpino of Rochester Mental Health Center, who has given generously of his time and resources. His warmth, candor, intelligent appraisal of matters, and efficiency have been greatly appreciated. His patience and encouragement have been very sustaining. I attribute much of my success with Rochester Mental Health Center to Mr. Carpino, who was my prime contact there.

I wish to thank Roger Remington, who has been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration during my thesis experience.

My appreciation also goes to all faculty members who took time to critique my work.
In 1973, the first year of my graduate studies, I prepared a simple graphic identity program for Portable Channel, a local organization. Never having developed a graphic identity program, I found it quite interesting, but enigmatic. I became aware of more complex identity programs used in industry, and marveled at their complexity and coordination. It was this fascination, admiration, and desire to explore the subject further that led me to develop a more complex identity system for my thesis project.

By summer, I was looking for a prospective client. Through contact with the Urbanarium at Rochester Institute of Technology, I was aware Rochester Mental Health Center was interested in securing a graphic identity program. A mental health center would have unique characteristics and problems, but these corresponded to my interests in psychology and the helping professions.

In August, I met with Peter Carpino, Assistant to the Director for Community Affairs at Rochester Mental Health Center. His background is in journalism and mental health information. We decided to work together to develop a graphic identity program for Rochester Mental Health Center during the school year. I would give the Center my time and the products of my design skills in return for their cooperation and promise to print my designs, pending their board of directors' approval. In September 1974 we began work.
Identity Programs

An identity program is a system of graphic elements that represent, in a consistent fashion, a person, a group, a company, an industry, a place, or a thing. The program can be a symbol or logotype used only for stationery, or a complex system that employs a set of symbols and trademarks that have hundreds of applications on stationery, business forms, advertising, packaging, vehicles, uniforms, and signage.

The purpose of an identity program is to make the organization more visible; clarify or improve its image; standardize its image; and/or make its communications more efficient and effective. Besides these goals, there are several indirect benefits, such as improved employee morale, higher profits due to less money wasted on inefficient communications, more public recognition, and a more consistent image.

The rationale behind identity programs is that our society is visually oriented. We form new attitudes daily from what we see. An organization must present a viable image of itself to survive amidst the vast amount of advertising and information.

The three most important aspects of an identity program are quality, descriptive accuracy, and consistency.

Quality serves us efficiently and effectively. Visual quality is visually pleasing. It produces positive, favorable feelings in the viewer towards what is represented. If an organization is represented with quality graphics, it appears to be a quality organization. Quality graphics reflect a concern to communicate effectively and a commitment to high standards.

Descriptive accuracy is important because a graphic image communicates more information more directly than an organization's name. A symbol can say what the organization does faster than its name can. "Smith" may manufacture paint, but the name itself does not reflect this.

Descriptive accuracy can have profound effects on an organization's credibility. A quality identity program that does not reflect the organization accurately, does not fool the public. The contradiction between image and reality could produce feelings of uneasiness or public distrust of the organization.

Consistency is important for many reasons. Standardized formats for all communications greatly enhance efficiency by saving time, money, and energy. Large companies with many branches can be sure of the quality of their subsidiaries' graphics. This consistency reflects well on the company's image. Consistency presents the company as being professional,
organized, efficient, and stable. Inconsistency may appear to be the facade of chaos. An organization with a consistent image is recognized faster and more easily by the public. People have seen the image before and recognize it in the future. It is the repetition of the consistent image that imbeds it in peoples' minds.

Identity programs do not have a singular purpose, nor do they have singular results. Whatever their goals, good identity programs add to better communications and quality graphics by lessening the chaos in our ever demanding environment.
Identity Programs for Non-profit Organizations in the Helping Professions

Graphics seem to be the last budget priority in many non-profit organizations. This may be understandable, but unfortunate. Low budget graphics can be extremely offensive: the typewriter type; the amateur drawing; the out-of-date logo which looks like, and probably was, designed by a committee; the poor quality printing; the incompatible typefaces used on one page; etc. It is not necessary to have a low budget image on a low budget. Bad or inconsistent graphics can cost just as much as good, consistent graphics.

A consistent format, set up by a designer, can later be specified to a printer by a non-design person. This can relieve the organization's staff from struggling in an unfamiliar area. Using the same format repeatedly not only strengthens the group's image, but saves time and money.

A designed, consistent image can do much for an organization's self-confidence too. Having a finer appearance may give employees a boost in morale. They might work harder for something that gives them personal psychological rewards.

Besides the benefits mentioned in the previous section, "Identity Programs", another important reason a non-profit organization in the helping professions should concentrate on its image is visibility. For example, traditionally health services don't advertise. However, people need health services, and need to know what and where these services are. There are too many people who need help but don't know help exists. If our helping services could emerge from the melee of commercial advertising, we would all benefit. Quality, accurate, consistent graphics can help.

Rochester Mental Health Center is typical of many non-profit organizations in the helping professions. Like other health organizations, it has recently recognized a need to make itself more visible to the community. Developing a graphic identity program was a step in this direction.
The Process of Developing the Identity Program

The first step in developing the identity program for Rochester Mental Health Center was to research the Center thoroughly.

The second step was the development of program goals and objectives. Although it had been decided an identity program would be developed for the Center, it was necessary to determine the Center's specific needs.

After analyzing these needs, the third step was the development of a symbol or logotype for the Center. The rest of the program would be built around this element.

Step four was the integration of the symbol and the name of the Center. For the Center's purposes, the symbol would always be used with the Center's full name.

The fifth step was the development of an organizational system to standardize all applications of the new signature. Several different grid systems were used to accommodate the varied applications. The organizational system was designed to accommodate stationery items (two sizes of paper, five different envelopes, a business card), numerous business forms (including a mailing label and the Center's checks), a newsletter format used for five different Rochester Mental Health Center publications, an annual report format, a pamphlet format, and signage.

In December and March, presentations to the Board of Directors were made to gain the Board's approval. Both presentations were accepted favorably.

The sixth step was the implementation of the program. I prepared mechanicals for all applications. The Center plans to print each new application as the current stock of the old item is depleted. Mr. Carpino and I calculated, according to a stock count and realistic demands, that the newsletter Reesponse, the annual report, and the Children and Youth Division pamphlet would be the first items to appear with the new format in May 1975. The business forms would be in use by the following year, and the stationery by 1977. It is unfortunate the entire system could not be implemented at one time, but economics dictated in this situation.
Research

In my research of Rochester Mental Health Center, I studied the Center's goals, objectives, philosophy, client population, staff, history, organization, procedures, reputation, strengths, and weaknesses.

The overall goal of the Center is to provide comprehensive mental health services for the residents of catchment area B. The Center's philosophy, or objective, is to provide services to the client as soon as possible after the request, with constant staff responsiveness to the client's problem as the client sees it.

Catchment area B is the northeast quadrant of Monroe County bounded by Genesee River on the west, Main Street and Webster-Penfield town line on the south, Monroe County line on the east, and Lake Ontario on the north. It contains 175,957 inner city dwellers who comprise 36% of the total inner city population. The inner city includes large Black and Puerto Rican populations.

To service this population, the Center has 160 staff members, approximately one-third of whom are part-time.

The Center was originally established in 1967 with a staffing grant from the federal government. That grant required the Center to provide outpatient, inpatient, partial hospitalization, emergency, and consultation and education services for the children and adults in catchment area B. In addition to these essential services, the Center provides diagnostic services, rehabilitation programs, pre- and post-treatment care, student training, and research and evaluation of its own programs. The Center also conducts six special programs: alcoholism, drug treatment, day hospital, day treatment, model cities, and community affairs.

Although the Center shares facilities with Rochester General Hospital, it is incorporated independently. This close association, however, has sometimes confused the public as to the Center's identity.

Space is also a problem for the Center. Parking and accessibility are especially hampered because of General Hospital construction work. Since physical space is limited, the Center is investigating alternatives such as complete decentralization.

The Center's strongest asset is its staff. The staff's friendly, but professional, attitude contributes to the Center's fine reputation. The director, William T. Hart, is well respected by his peers as a trend setter for this well established mental health center.
After research and discussions with Mr. Carpino, goals and objectives for the program were formulated. The overall goal was to inform and educate the public about Rochester Mental Health Center. The objectives were to: 1) clarify information and make its dissemination more efficient, and 2) improve the quality, graphically and journalistically, of communication materials used by the Center.

In retrospect, the goals and objectives look very broad. More specific objectives developed as we worked on the program. Lessening the stigma of mental health services and presenting a positive image of the Center grew to be two important features of this program.

There were other objectives to keep in mind also. One was to develop a stronger, more cohesive image for the Center. This emphasis on cohesiveness was aimed at public and staff. The Children and Youth Division of Rochester Mental Health Center was originally founded in 1939 as Rochester Child Guidance Clinic. Even though it merged with Rochester Mental Health Center in 1967, the staff separation still exists.

Another objective was to make the Center more visible. In the past the Center chose a low profile to minimize the stigma of mental health services. However, through a survey done in 1974 by Rochester General Hospital that included adult users of the Mental Health Center's outpatient services, the Center learned its visibility was very low. This was a contributing factor that led the Center to seek an identity program.
Before beginning design work, Mr. Carpino and I formulated criteria for the logotype or symbol. The logotype or symbol should appear to: 1) be informal; 2) be warm, friendly; 3) reduce the stigma of mental health; 4) be non-threatening; 5) reflect professionalism; 6) reflect the Center as established, but trend setting; 7) reflect the Center as community oriented; 8) be a universal form to which a broad base of people can relate.

Mr. Carpino suggested a logotype using the letters RMHC be developed. He thought the Center had existed too long to introduce a symbol. Also the name "Rochester Mental Health Center" was frequently abbreviated in the Center. I worked for about a month and a half trying to develop a logotype that met the criteria.

The letterforms were confining. They are inherently vertical and horizontal which is not conducive to the people-oriented feeling I was trying to convey. Rounded edges, textures, and organic shapes either obscured the recognition of the letter or relinquished the clean cut, professional look the Center wanted to convey.

Letterforms speak first to the letter they represent and secondly to other communication. This "other communication" was crucial in establishing a positive identity for the Center that could reduce the stigma associated with mental health services. The Center needed a program to present it as a warm, friendly organization first, and secondly to identify it by name.

A symbol would be more flexible in expression, application, and design possibilities. It would also provide fewer limitations within which to work, and possibly, be more organic and literal. A name change for the Center was being considered, so a system based on an abbreviated form of the current name might be useless in the future.

After developing symbol sketches, Mr. Carpino and I invited the Center's staff to preview my work. I was aware this was an unusual procedure, however I thought staff would be a good resource for gaining more insight into the Center.

Staff reactions were mixed. Some wanted something more literal, like an image of a person or a head. Some liked the logotypes because these, too, were something they could easily relate to. Some staff liked the proposed symbol. Although the staff's suggestions were considered, the logotypes were already
disqualified because they failed to meet many of the criteria and because of the possible name change. Using a very literal symbol, such as a head or the image of a person, was also dismissed because such symbols are frequently used in the helping professions. This symbol had to be unique.
Early Logotype Sketches

RMHC
RMHC
RMHC
RMHC
RMHC
RMHC
Early Symbol Sketches
The Elements: Symbol, Typography, and Color

Symbol:

The symbol that evolved is an abstract form based on the concept of light. Appropriate to a mental health center, light can symbolize the mind and hope. The symbol meets the criteria, but may be weak in reflecting the Center as established, but trend setting, (number six in list of criteria).

To show the radiating qualities of light, I designed lines emanating from a central point. The circular format is important in communicating unity, warmth, symmetry, and stability. In the formative stages, the lines or bars were varied in width, length, and position until the right figure-ground relationship and feeling of balance were achieved. To enhance the predictability and logic of the spatial relationships, the width of one bar was used as the basic unit to determine the length of the bars and their distance from the central point.

Symmetry is an important feature of this symbol. It is an important quality in a symbol designed for a mental health center because it suggests stability. The symbol does not set up visual conflict and conflict in the individual because it is a regular figure (Gestalt Law of Prägnanz). The symbol is a very positive image.

Although the symbol is bold and direct, it is not static. The two circles of bars, created by the two different lengths of bars, create the illusion of movement. In addition to the circular movement, the bars create an in and out movement. The positive and negative space interaction contributes to the symbol's activity also.

Many interpretations can be read into the symbol. The basic circular shape can represent the community, the Center, or a group of people. The activity of the spokes can suggest that the Center is moving about in the community and reaching out to its inhabitants, or they can represent people coming together and interacting. Since the Center is somewhat decentralized, the bars can represent the satellites that are extensions of the Center. The interaction of the two circles can also represent the two divisions of the Center—the Adult Division, and the Children and Youth Division—forming one unit and working together. Others may see the symbol as the positive force of the sun. Whatever its interpretations, the symbol stands as a very positive image that reflects the essence of the Center.
The Symbol
Typography:

Avant Garde is the typeface used with the symbol in the signature. (In this case the signature consists of the symbol, and the name, address, and telephone number of the Center.) Since Avant Garde's letters are based on a circle, they reflect the circular shape of the symbol. This circular shape is especially appropriate because circles represent warmth and security. Avant Garde is a clean cut, modern looking typeface. This helps give the Center a modern image.

A drawback to the use of Avant Garde is that its demi-bold and extra-light styles are not as readable or well designed as the regular. Also, Avant Garde is not easily read as body copy. For this reason, Helvetica, a clean looking, easily read typeface, has been chosen for body copy in this system. Care must be taken when combining these two faces. When used on the cover of a publication or large enough to contrast a text size Helvetica, Avant Garde can work well with Helvetica.
Color:

Warmth is the theme of Rochester Mental Health Center's identity program. Every element is used to reinforce the concept that the Center is a warm, friendly place to go for help with problems. Orange is a warm color that is not affected by the passion or alarm evoked by red or by the fading qualities of yellow. Prism orange is brash, but the earthy quality in the color of rust gives orange a feeling of depth. For these reasons, a rust color, Pantone 159 in the Pantone Color Matching System, is the symbol's color.

In the signature, the type always appears in black. Because the type is not large or bold, using another color might hamper its readability. The only exception is where both the symbol and type appear in the same dark color.

In the applications that use a white stock, a warm or cream white was chosen. The colored stocks used are warm or earth colors.
The Signature in Color

Rochester Mental Health Center
1425 Portland Avenue
Rochester, New York 14621
(716) 544-5220
The Organizational System

The organizational system is used to make the Center's image consistent from application to application. By standardizing the placement of elements, the development of new applications is easier, and they are inherently integrated into the system.

In this system the unit grid is based on a typesize: the seven point grid has as its basic unit seven points; the nine point grid has as its basic unit nine points. The unit grid is the basis of the modular grid. The modules are eight units square with a one unit wide gutter between every four modules. This creates a second, larger modular grid made up of 16 modules, four from top to bottom and four across, still retaining the same square format. The grids are based on a square because the symbol fits into a square. The entire system reflects this simplicity.

The square format grids used for the stationery items and business forms are six point, seven point, and nine point grids. The signage uses a larger version of this grid. The publications such as the annual report, Children and Youth Division pamphlet, and the newsletter have individual grids to meet their individual needs.
The Six Point Grid
The Signature

Rochester Mental Health Center's signature consists of the symbol, the Center's name, address, and telephone number. It went through many stages of refinement. In the first stage, (see page 23), the width of one bar of the symbol was chosen as the height of the capital letters in the name. This put the symbol and type at an awkward size relationship. To make the type readable, the symbol had to be fairly large. Another weakness was that the name created a strong horizontal line in the symbol. This long line of type projecting from the symbol damaged the integrity of the symbol by visually interfering with it. The symbol needed to stand alone.

After more struggling, a second format emerged. This one separated the type and symbol into three elements: the symbol, the name, and the address. This format was more flexible than the first one and more easily read. However, an unwieldy "key" shape emerged from the position of the elements. Also, the bold type competed visually with the symbol. The flexibility was not an asset either. In rearranging the elements in various applications the consistency of the system was lost.

The third format is the chosen solution because of the concise way it separates symbol and written information. The symbol is dominant because it gives the viewer more feeling for the Center than the name and address. Since the name of the Center contains the words "mental health", which have negative connotations for the public, it is appropriate to minimize this element.

Another important reason to keep the type at a tasteful size is that the Center is not advertising, but identifying itself. A large flashy name is not appropriate. This symbol/type relationship continues the Center's traditionally modest profile.

The type is arranged to emphasize the name of the Center by leaving a space between the name and address. The name is broken by putting "Rochester" on the first line and "Mental Health Center" on the second line for aesthetic and functional reasons. "Rochester Mental Health Center" on one line is too long; "Rochester" on the first line, "Mental Health" on the second line, and "Center" on the third line appears too choppy; and "Rochester Mental" on the first line and "Health Center" on the second line does not communicate well.

The type size determines the symbol/type size relationship. When seven point type is used, the basic unit of the underlying grid is seven points. The symbol is always eight units square and either eight or four units to the left of the type block. Although an eight unit space is preferred, many applications can not accommodate a large space between symbol and type. The size relationship of the symbol and type never
changes. Even where certain type elements are omitted, such as on envelopes, the remaining type is placed exactly where it would be if all type were in position.

The type block is centered top to bottom within the eight unit height of the module. The type is flush left, ragged right which sets a precedent to be maintained throughout the system with all typography. The imaginary line created by the flush left side of the type defines the simple modular structure used in this system. This identity program has been designed to be simple not only for ease of implementation, but to maximize its straightforward, honest appearance.
Rochester Mental Health Center
1425 Portland Avenue
Rochester, New York 14621

(716) 544-5220
Auxiliary Elements: The Ruled Line and Paper

The Ruled Line:

The ruled line is a secondary element of the system, but a functional visual device. In most applications the line separates the signature from the body of the application, but on other applications such as the business card, it is used as a writing guide. Although it was impossible to redesign the Center's preprinted business forms, the ruled line is used as consistently as possible.
Paper:

The papers used in this system have a warm quality, whether it be color or texture. Expensive papers were avoided since the Center has a limited budget, but often rich looking laid finishes were within the budget. To give the Center a rich, warm look, a warm white laid finish Strathmore Writing Paper was chosen for the stationery items. For the annual report a textured rust cover stock with a contrasting smooth cream colored text was used. Slick looking coated stocks or extremely smooth paper finishes which appear cold and businesslike were avoided. Care should be continued in choosing paper to maintain a consistently warm image of the Center.
Stationery and Envelopes

Strathmore Writing Paper
White, laid finish
24 pound

Business Card

Strathmore Bristol Cover
White, laid finish
80 pound per 2 sheets

Newsletter

Hammermill Bond
Cafe
20 pound

Annual Report, Cover

Telemark Cover
Rust
65 pound

Annual Report, Text

Warren's Uncoated Papers
White, vellum finish
70 pound

Pamphlet

Carrara Text
Yellow, vellum finish
80 pound
Applications

The stationery items—full sheet of paper, 2/3 sheet of paper, number 10 envelope, personal envelope, and business card—are a laid finish white Strathmore Writing paper. The paper and envelopes are 24 pound and the business card comes in a matching 80 pound per two sheet cover bristol. The symbol appears in color on these items. Despite the expense of two color printing, and the rich, warm appearance of the paper, the price quoted from Tanya Printers and Thermographers, Inc. in Rochester was less than what the Center paid for the same amount of letterheads printed in one color (black) from another printing firm last year. With this information, I felt no reservations in designing two color stationery items for the Center.

On the full sheet of paper, 2/3 sheet of paper, and the business card a list of the Center's services is included to acquaint people with the kind of services the Center provides.

The ruled line is applied to all of these items. On the writing paper and envelopes, it separates the signature from the body of the item. On the business card, the ruled line indicates where a person's name may be written.

The envelopes have a special application of the signature. Since the Center's clients are often embarrassed to receive mail bearing reference to mental health services, (because of the stigma associated with mental illness), only the address appears with the symbol. Thus, no outside sources are aware that the person is receiving mail from the Center. To outsiders, this may seem trivial, but to one victimized by the stigma of mental illness, this is very important.

The business forms are printed in black only. Many of the forms are color coded in pastel colors for operating efficiency, so no papers have been specified. Several of the forms are pre-printed such as the bill, the purchase order, checks, and receipts. I was limited with what I could do with these forms, so in each case the signature is applied in the most reasonable space available.

Redesigned were some of the other business forms, such as the window envelopes, (which have the same format as the stationery envelopes); the return envelope, (which uses the signature as the mailing address); the patient card, (which has a list of the Center's services like the business card); the mailing label; and the consultation bill.

The mailing label and the consultation bill use an unusual signature position. On the other applications the signature tends to the upper left hand corner, but here it appears almost centered. The upper left hand corner was inappropriate here.
The newsletter format was designed to accommodate at least four publications for the Center. It is so versatile that it was also used as a special "fact sheet". The other publications the format serves are Response, a client newsletter; Newsletter, a general public newsletter; Information Bulletin, a list of meetings for employees; and a news release form.

The newsletter format's grid is based on pica size typewriter type and is a simple modification of the square format grid in this system.

The annual report introduced the new identity program. Its textured rust colored cover corresponds to the symbol color. Its cream white text adds to the overall warmth of this publication.

The cover displays an eight sequence development of the symbol, depicting the process of developing the identity program over the past eight months.

The body copy is in a 15 pica wide column of 9/11 Helvetica for easy reading. For quick, efficient communication, the ruled line at the top of each page separates the headlines from the copy.

The pamphlet format was designed to accommodate all pamphlets at the Center. The cover design is a pattern of the symbol that builds into three sizes. The pattern with seven rows of the symbol is used for pamphlets concerned with the entire Center; six rows of the symbol are used for pamphlets concerned with major divisions of the Center; and five rows are used for pamphlets concerned with programs at the Center. It is recommended that the stock colors differ on the pamphlets and that warm colors be used.

The pamphlet format is nine by three inches—an eight panel pamphlet from a nine by twelve inch sheet of paper. In addition to having an unusual format, it is also a very economical pamphlet that provides for a fifteen pica column width. The copy, like that of the annual report, is 9/11 Helvetica.

Signage for the Center was designed to identify the Center and in some cases indicate direction. Identification signs use a variation of the signature that omits the address and increases the size of the letters from one unit to two units. Leading has also been adjusted to accommodate the increase in size. Directional signs use the same signature variation with a ruled line to separate signature from arrow.
In retrospect, I am very glad I chose to develop an identity program for an organization that would actually use it, instead of developing a hypothetical project. The realistic considerations make a project more challenging and more applicable to a designer's actual working conditions. A realistic project can become complicated with red tape, but the earlier a designer learns to deal with organizational red tape, the more experience he has behind him.

Nine months seemed like more than enough time to develop a graphic identity program for Rochester Mental Health Center. Actually, it was minimal. I tend to be compulsive and work tediously. This is not regrettable though, because time sifts out what is important and what is not. Although I feel I did more than required for a thesis project, I wanted to do even more for the Center. Many more applications could have been designed, but time did not permit.

My time schedule allowed me the opportunity to discuss my program with many instructors at Rochester Institute of Technology. James Bare, Konrad Bruckmann, Rob Roy Kelly, Robert Kerr, Roger Remington, and Joseph Watson gave willingly of their time. Each of these men gave me a different opinion and perspective to developing a graphic identity program. Initially, this was frustrating, but eventually I digested the information and applied it to the Center's identity program.

It was also frustrating to find so little written on graphic identity programs. I looked through many, many graphic standards manuals and examples of existing identity programs, but found no obvious answers to my questions. I wanted to know why others set up their programs as they did, why they arranged the elements as they did.

My frustration continues. Although I have developed a usable identity program, I feel I haven't quite "broken through the ice". I need to know more in this area to have a firm grasp of it. I want to continue my education in this area by possibly securing a position with a company that specializes in identity programs.

In reviewing what I have learned from this project, I see that I have increased my knowledge of formal design values. I have learned to use the grid with more expertise. I found type and symbol elements that could be used consistently, though flexibly. I coordinated a system of varied applications. For the first time, I designed every element in a system to communicate, not only be aesthetically pleasing. Working within a large organization gave me glimpses of its inner politics. I presented my own work to a board of directors.
for the first time and discovered that I greatly enjoy client contact. I also gained more experience dealing with printers and typesetters, and further developed my mechanical preparation skills. Perhaps most important, a commitment and confidence for using my design skills to help people developed within me.

My only reservation about my thesis work is its future. I am sure my associate at the Center, Peter Carpino, will carefully oversee the program's implementation. If he leaves the Center, what will become of the program? I am sure the Center's staff and administration, no matter how enthusiastic, are not as dedicated to the program as Mr. Carpino and I are. However, I can only take the program so far. It is now the Center's responsibility.
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