A New Pragmatism

WITH the Distribution Committee now prepared to consider approving a principal distribution to fund the Special Initiatives, Steve Minter asked his financial officers to run a few numbers in the fall of 1987. Minter was interested in determining the optimal size for the distribution, optimal being defined as the largest sum it would be possible to remove from the endowment without seriously reducing the Foundation’s annual income and thus its grantmaking powers.

"J. T. sat down at the PC and went at it," said Foundation treasurer Phil Tobin of the rigorous analysis subsequently performed by the Foundation’s controller, J. T. Mullen. A former manager with the accounting firm of Arthur Young and Company and a past director of accounting for the Cuyahoga County auditor’s office, Mullen had, since joining the staff several months earlier, designed a computerized financial model that allowed the Foundation to predict both its income and its cash flow with greater accuracy. Among other things, the model permitted the Foundation to take better advantage of the “float” of up to several years that often existed between the time a grant was authorized and the time it was fully disbursed by reducing the size of its cash reserve. Now Mullen was to turn in another piece of solid work.

To assess the financial ramifications of a principal distribution, Mullen first reviewed the terms of most of the Foundation’s 700-plus trust funds to determine which ones could be legally tapped. Then he studied whether it would make a difference if the distribution came from unrestricted, broadly restricted or designated funds. Finally he ran the numbers on principal distributions ranging upward from $10 to $20
million to determine the impact on projected income through 1992 of each. His conclusion: A $12 million principal distribution taken in 1988 from unrestricted funds would be the optimal move.

Such a one-time distribution would reduce unrestricted income by $3 million through 1992 at a rate of approximately $600,000 per year. This was far less painful a prospect, however, than trying to extract the entire $12 million for the Special Initiatives from unrestricted income a few million at a time over the same period, as had originally been the intention. Better still, a $12 million distribution would have no negative effect on the Foundation’s absolute income over the course of the next five years, given normal growth of the endowment. (Moreover, the plan already under way to establish annual target allocations of unrestricted income for each program area would help the staff cope with the projected $3 million reduction in flexible dollars.)

Mullen’s skillful number-crunching effectively removed most of the sting from the idea of invading principal, making such a move look increasingly feasible.

Determining the doable had also been an early priority of the person chosen by the Distribution Committee after a national search to succeed Dolph Norton as the sixth director of The Cleveland Foundation. The former president of the Kansas City Association of Trusts and Foundations (and for most of his 25 years there its sole program officer), Homer Wadsworth was one of philanthropy’s most respected veterans. “He had a national reputation and everybody was pleased to get him,” said search committee member Bob Gries, who recalled that Wadsworth had declined the job when first approached because the 60-year-old father of seven did not want to uproot his life at an age when many begin to consider retiring. Indeed, in seeming contradiction to his chosen profession, Wadsworth was also a hard-eyed realist, and his pragmatism revealed itself immediately in how he chose to tackle his challenging new assignment.

Inclined by long experience not to jump into anything headlong, Wadsworth was content to spend his first few years on the job informally sizing up the Foundation’s options before he “kicked up any dirt” by recommending major new programs to the Distribution Committee. Maneuvering quietly and patiently behind the scenes to create opportunities to leverage positive change had been Wadsworth’s preferred way
of operating in Kansas City. He saw no reason to abandon this approach when he took up the reins of leadership at The Cleveland Foundation in January 1974, despite its 180-degree departure from the idealistic social commitments of Norton’s tenure.

“I suppose I might have been here four or five years before most people knew I was here,” claimed Wadsworth, who had been persuaded to come to Cleveland—when the Distribution Committee, after a fruitless national search, had approached him a second time—by The Cleveland Foundation’s progressive reputation. “I didn’t see any reason to present myself as the expert who knew all things about all matters. I was trying to get an assessment of what the community was all about and who among its leaders were people you could work with. This is not a process that happens in one day, unless you are willing to make a lot of errors.”

Wadsworth had been given his recruiters’ unwritten assurances that he could have at least 10 years at the helm—long enough to make a difference. And his unhurried and intuitive civic diagnosis would indeed prompt the Distribution Committee to refine the Foundation’s program interests as much as would the formal strategic planning of his successor’s administration.

For example, during the mid- to late seventies a new pragmatism would guide the Foundation’s work in Cleveland’s neighborhoods, many of whose residents had awakened to the decay going on around them and, following the lead of grass-roots activists in certain black wards such as Hough, were beginning to organize themselves to fight it. Although himself a product of the central city (having reached college age during the Depression, he had made his way through the University of Pittsburgh on a basketball scholarship and monies earned from coaching four nights a week and on Saturdays at a local YMCA), Wadsworth took an unsentimental view of the plight of the neighborhoods. He believed it best to “avoid the illusions that are always present in backing neighborhood affairs. There is no way you’re going to save a neighborhood; the real arm that has to save neighborhoods is the public arm.” Rather, Wadsworth believed that the Foundation’s role should be that of “rewarding people who haven’t given up.” Providing promising neighborhood groups with modest operating support and funds for small bricks-and-mortar projects, the Foundation was to engage until the early eighties in a holding action aimed at limiting the spread of blight.

Although unforeseeable at the time, one of the new relationships the
Foundation established in the neighborhoods after Wadsworth’s arrival would point the way toward a more aggressive strategy. After Wadsworth first began to “look around to see who could be counted on to do things” in the inner city, the Foundation had been approached by the Hough-based Famicos Foundation. Despite its dependence on charity for operating funds, Famicos had developed an innovative program of acquiring and rehabilitating substandard housing, which it rented at very reasonable rates to carefully screened low-income families, who had the option of taking title to the properties after 15 years. Finding the shoestring operation to be a success not only at transforming the poor into proud homeowners, but also at what he described as “seeding neighborhoods with people who could be expected in time to be good citizens and exercise a reasonable influence on the people that were around them,” Wadsworth encouraged the Distribution Committee to support Bob Wolf, the director of Famicos, in his desire to train other neighborhood groups in his organization’s production methods.

The Foundation’s backing helped to give birth to the Cleveland Housing Network—in retrospect, the community’s first important step toward a coherent neighborhood development strategy and infrastructure. It also marked the beginning of an association between Famicos and the Foundation that led to the construction of Lexington Village, the most significant Foundation initiative in the neighborhoods of the Wadsworth era (in part because it constituted civic affairs program officer Steve Minter’s introduction to the concept of a “project of scale”).

At the same time that it was redefining its objectives in the neighborhoods, the Cleveland Foundation began distancing itself from the Cleveland public schools, a system so morally and intellectually bankrupt, in Wadsworth’s opinion, that it boasted few programs worth recommending to the Distribution Committee for support. But Wadsworth had no qualms about encouraging committee members to provide leadership on the toughest educational issue then “pressing on the public’s nervous system”: the NAACP’s desegregation suit against the Cleveland public schools.

After a Foundation study group examining similar cases in other districts had determined that court-ordered desegregation was the suit’s inevitable outcome, the Distribution Committee poured more than $1 million into a community-wide campaign to educate the public about desegregation in the hopes of preventing the violent protest that had
erupted in Boston when the buses finally rolled. As a result, Cleveland schools superintendent Paul Briggs and his president of the board, who had decided to fight the lawsuit because they believed that the system was not guilty of deliberately fostering segregation, as the NAACP had charged, publicly denounced the Foundation for sowing mass confusion. Despite the discomfort certain political and business figures felt over the Foundation's leadership on this volatile issue, the Distribution Committee withstood the heat and proceeded with its support of the awareness campaign, setting an important precedent for the Foundation's role as moral leader in the future.

Wadsworth's lack of enthusiasm for the Foundation's association with the Cleveland schools arose in part from his own, freely admitted "allergy" to politicians and politics. (This outlook had no doubt been forged when he held a series of administrative jobs with the city of Pittsburgh during the thirties and forties after completing a master's degree in social science and a stint in the navy.) As Wadsworth saw it, the Foundation's past attempts to improve city governance flew in the face of an immutable political reality: "Nobody can govern the city [because] . . . you have to . . . deal with power sources . . . interested [only] in the grubbier kinds of things—jobs, contracts, money."

Fueling Wadsworth's belief that no other municipality was "more inhibited by inferior quality people in public office than Cleveland," neither Cleveland mayor Ralph Perk, the champion of ethnic Clevelanders, nor his successor, 31-year-old Dennis J. Kucinich, whose combative stance toward big business precipitated Cleveland's default in 1978, sought the Foundation's assistance. And, with the notable exception of a second-wind effort in the field of criminal justice, the Foundation did not volunteer its resources. The arm's-length relationship between the Foundation and city hall ended only when moderate Republican George V. Voinovich was elected mayor in 1979 and personally approached Wadsworth with a request that the Foundation underwrite a plan to lead the city out of its default (discussed later in this chapter).

But not all was a matter of crisis control or retrenchment. Wadsworth believed that foundations were in a better position than most organizations to nurture innovation. "This is hardly because we have superior brains and insight," he reasoned. "It is much more likely the result of our favored position. We have money to spend—a good deal of money. We are not encumbered by operational burdens and responsibilities. We
can draw upon the world at large for advice and consultation. We can afford to encourage those with whom we work . . . to think in larger terms than would normally be considered very practical from their standpoint." Thus, when Wadsworth realized that civic policymakers lacked adequate data on which to base their decisions (a problem, one may recall, that the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation had specifically been created to redress), he began searching for ways that the Distribution Committee could support qualitative socioeconomic research.

A one-time vice president and dean of New York’s New School of Social Research (a position he held briefly after leaving Pittsburgh in the mid-forties), Wadsworth had, upon his arrival at the Kansas City Association of Trusts and Foundations in 1949, helped to create an Institute for Community Studies; and he grew eager to see a similar independent research agency started in Cleveland. That dream was never to be fully realized. But the Foundation was able to arrange for studies that pointed out the precariousness of federal support for local governmental services; the insidious disintegration of Cleveland’s capital plant; and the city’s disproportionately low income tax—all of which information figured in Cleveland’s gradual digging out from under municipal default. Perhaps the most important incarnation of the Foundation’s sharpened interest in research would come in the early eighties, with its establishment of the Center for Regional Economic Issues, whose vigilant monitoring and sophisticated analysis of the business trends affecting Greater Cleveland’s future would give teeth to the economic redevelopment campaign then beginning to take shape in the city.

Similarly, Wadsworth’s appreciation of Cleveland’s strength as a major cultural center—a stature attributable primarily to the quality of its orchestra and art museum—suggested to him that the Foundation ought to allocate more of its income to nurturing other developments in the arts. At his first annual retreat with the Distribution Committee\(^2\) in September 1974, the director began to make a case for a redistribution of resources. Wadsworth pointed out that during the preceding five years fully 49 percent of the Foundation’s disbursements went to the fields of health and welfare, while cultural affairs claimed only 10 percent of all disbursements.\(^3\) By encouraging the Distribution Committee to elevate the arts to a full-fledged program area with its own program officer, the new director, among other things, made possible the Foundation’s subsequent championship of the performance facility for ballet, opera and
classical theater companies that it had in the meantime helped to transform from struggling operations into nationally acclaimed arts organizations. In the process the Foundation helped to make the arts a major tourist attraction that would add another dimension to the new economic identity then being forged for the city—not that this serendipitous outcome had been Wadsworth's primary objective.

"I think that there is merit to the notion that, with appropriate promotion, Cleveland can call attention to what it has and can attract many people to come here," Wadsworth would later explain. "I don’t think this should be the first order of business, however. The first order of importance is the people living in an area—not the people who will be passing through. You develop your natural assets in a manner that makes possible a lifestyle for people of moderate means that otherwise is not within their reach."

Just as it had driven the Foundation's work in cultural affairs, this philosophy motivated Wadsworth to promote an opportunity for the Foundation to do something about the city's neglected lakefront when it arose during his first year in the form of a $25,000 grant request. The proposal from a suburban garden club for funding to study Cleveland's run-down municipal parks was "one of those applications that once you receive it you see that there could be more involved than is intended," recalled Wadsworth, whose personal interest in the enhancement of public assets had been honed during his service as director of both Pittsburgh's planning commission and its department of parks and recreation. In what was to become a classic example of Wadsworth's adeptness at maneuvering behind the scenes, the Foundation used the completed study to effect a transfer of the ownership of several major lakefront parks from the city, which could not afford to maintain them, to the state. Largely through the Foundation's efforts, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources was subsequently persuaded to pour $40 million into the parks' renovation. The capital improvements prompted a spectacular increase in the parks' usage, with attendance skyrocketing from 750,000 visitors per year to more than 12 million; and this renewed interest in the lakefront sparked (with the Foundation again striking the match) a public-private partnership to redevelop the downtown Cleveland shoreline as a new recreational district.

Making a sustained commitment to strengthening or creating public assets and institutions was how Wadsworth believed the Foundation
could be most useful. (Steve Minter, who served as a program officer under Wadsworth for nearly 10 years, put it more succinctly: "Homer was big on projects.") In purposeful contradiction of the old philanthropic rule of thumb, "three years and out," the Foundation under Wadsworth's direction began to recognize the advantages of long-term planning and commitments, of patiently sowing the seeds for developments that might be years in the blossoming. To ensure the fruition of select projects, for example, the Foundation would nurture them with a steady stream of funds and staff assistance, its ability to do so abetted by the fact that unrestricted income now totaled more than $2 million annually. Although his encouragement of the Foundation's ongoing leadership of these programs would trouble some members of the Distribution Committee, who sensed that they were being asked to approve actions after the fact, the concept of guiding an important venture through to its conclusion—day after day, year after year—irrespective of the money or staff time consumed, was Wadsworth's most valuable contribution to the Foundation's evolution as a civic force.

Wadsworth's early determination to beef up the program staff enabled the Foundation to provide sustained leadership on a number of new fronts while maintaining its traditionally strong programs in health and social services. The Associated Foundation's origins as a lean-and-mean operation had affected the way The Cleveland Foundation was administered after the two organizations had joined forces, with post-merger budgets kept too low to allow Dolph Norton or Barbara Rawson to hire more than one or two experienced program officers. Both made do with lots of one-year internships (although even in this matter of necessity Wadsworth's predecessors were innovators, seeking out interns of different backgrounds and disciplines in order to open up what they perceived to be a closed field).

Wadsworth was not alone in recognizing that the operation now needed additional fine-tuning. "When I came here," Wadsworth said, it was fairly clear to me that [Distribution Committee chairman H. Stuart] Harrison was committed to change. A majority of the Distribution Committee were gently 'pushing' for change. I always read the whole matter as being one in which Dolph was paying the price for the uproar of the early sixties and seventies, for which he was not directly accountable. If he had made some questionable judgments—I think Dolph's decision to put a public relations man in Stokes's office cut very sharply—Dolph was a valuable citizen here, and he
carved a different direction in which things at the Foundation could flow. There was no question that his contribution here was very large and unappreciated.

If the contributions of the Norton era have largely been forgotten, responsibility can be traced in part to the decision to drop all acknowledgment of the existence of the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation, which had long since run out of funds, from The Cleveland Foundation's annual report in 1975. The not-for-profit corporation that had been GCAF was, however, kept intact (and ultimately renamed Cleveland Foundation Incorporated) because it had certain powers—such as the ability to issue checks—that the older foundation lacked became it was not legally a corporation. The administrative structure that Norton had invented was, in fact, one of the contributions for which his successor was most grateful. "Dolph put in place a system that could grow up," Wadsworth said, with personnel first on his list of needed refinements.

Recognizing that the program staff must be expanded to meet the demands of disbursing what now amounted to more than $8 million annually, Wadsworth took advantage of the prevailing desire for change and began to assemble a team of seasoned men and women with impressive credentials in their fields. Within a year or so of his arrival Wadsworth had hired three top-notch program officers to handle cultural affairs, health and education, and social services, respectively: Patricia Jansen Doyle, a former manager of the public television station in Kansas City, whom Wadsworth had first met when she was the education reporter for the Kansas City Star; Richard F. Tompkins, a member of the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who had once worked along with Wadsworth as an advisor to a national children's health-care project; and Steve Minter, who had turned down a second term as welfare commissioner in Massachusetts in order to return to Cleveland because he wanted to provide his wife and three daughters with a permanent home.

Given the caliber of his appointees, Wadsworth often likened the program staff to the faculty of a graduate school of which he was chairperson. An individual who enjoyed both grand rhetorical flourishes and down-home phrases, he backed up his metaphorical language by treating the staff as colleagues. Thus, though he provided each program officer with direction and feedback through weekly conferences and an open-
door policy, Wadsworth otherwise granted staff day-to-day autonomy. On issues that cut across program lines, however, he encouraged collegial discussion and criticism, believing that "when you create a division and you place a person in charge, he brings with him his own baggage. The offset is in the general pressure for collective activity and action."

Wadsworth's emphasis on collegiality prompted another important change in the Foundation's internal operation. Prior to his arrival, the Distribution Committee had conferred only with the Foundation's director. Wadsworth soon made clear that he expected the program officers to attend subcommittee meetings and participate in the deliberations. "In the first place it means that an executive doesn't have to pretend knowledge about all subjects in the world," Wadsworth later said in explaining why he had initiated this interplay between the Distribution Committee and staff. "He can draw upon others who know more than he knows. Secondly, if you have matters that go across the board, then you have the possibility of a collective judgment in terms of a recommendation made to a board." There was another good reason for operating as much as possible as a collegium. "Most of the good things that I have seen in foundations came out of the fact," Wadsworth believed, "that there were some people, at a given time and a given place, who had an idea and some guts."

And no program the Foundation initiated during the Wadsworth years required more guts than its work to ensure the peaceful desegregation of the Cleveland public schools.

On the Sunday before court-ordered busing began in Cleveland in September 1979, some 1,200 marchers gathered at both ends of the Detroit-Superior High Level Bridge spanning the Cuyahoga River. Carrying placards and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the word WELCOME, the two groups of demonstrators were members of an impromptu organization called West and East Siders Let's Come Together (WELCOME). WELCOME was the culmination of three years of activities promoting peaceful desegregation sponsored by the Greater Cleveland Project, a coalition of 60 or so community groups that had come together as a result of The Cleveland Foundation's initiative to educate key civic leaders about the ramifications of the federal lawsuit the NAACP had filed against the Cleveland schools in 1973. Interestingly, neither the mayor of Cleveland nor top representatives of the Cleveland public schools, nor leaders of the business community, were to be seen in the
crowd, although the Foundation and others had tried mightily to win their support for the court decision rendered in the fall of 1976 ordering the schools to take remedial actions to end segregation.

Taking to the sidewalk on the north side of the roadway, the WELCOME brigade began walking toward the center of the bridge from both sides of the watery divide that, starting the following day, would no longer symbolically block white West Side children from attending schools on the predominantly black East Side and vice versa. They sang “We Shall Overcome” as they marched. Reaching the center of the span, many of the demonstrators shook hands with their opposite numbers and embraced emotionally. Then they all joined in a prayer for peace led by the head of Cleveland’s Catholic diocese, Bishop James A. Hickey, whose support of desegregation the Foundation had actively sought, deeming it critical in persuading Cleveland’s white ethnic populations to accept busing.

The rare display of solidarity among residents from both sides of the river was closely watched by some 100 antibusing protesters. They were in turn scrutinized by about 50 Cleveland police officers (on horseback and motorcycles, in cars and on foot), whose planning and training for “D-day” contingencies had been underwritten by The Cleveland Foundation, as part of its collaboration with a Special Committee of Citizens Concerned about Criminal Justice In Cleveland. The protesters—members of Citizens Opposed to Rearranging Our Kids, the United White People’s Party and even the Ku Klux Klan—carefully kept to the south side of the roadway. A few heckled the bishop during the prayer, but this outburst was the closest the two sides ever came to trouble.

When the crosstown buses set out the following day and then the next and the next without incident, other than some late arrivals to class, it became clear that Cleveland had escaped the street fighting that had attended school desegregation in Boston. No one was more pleased than Homer Wadsworth, who was quoted in the Plain Dealer the day after busing began as saying: “A nicer thing could not have happened to Cleveland under the circumstances. It is more important than winning football games in the last minute. The stage may be set for the improvement of the quality of education in Cleveland.” Although the community would be disappointed on the latter count, Wadsworth’s instinct that extraordinary measures would be needed to keep the peace had been borne out. Believing that “places like Cleveland and Detroit have a ten-
dency to regard rough-and-tough stuff as being the right way to go" in resolving conflicts, he had encouraged the Distribution Committee as early as 1974 to begin considering how the Foundation might help to dissipate tensions he was sure would develop out of Reed v. Rhodes, Cleveland's controversial desegregation case.

The subject of the position the Foundation would take toward the suit filed against the schools in December 1973 was broached on September 7, 1974, at the first annual Distribution Committee retreat. As would so often be the outcome of its participation in this important new forum for board-staff information sharing and dialogue, the Distribution Committee took a small step at the retreat that would greatly influence the course of public affairs in Cleveland; it instructed the staff to become better informed about the issue.

In October the Foundation invited Robert Wheeler, acting deputy commissioner of the bureau of school systems of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, to visit Cleveland to appraise the situation. An old friend of Wadsworth—he had been an assistant superintendent in Kansas City during Wadsworth's tenure on the school board there—Wheeler met with Cleveland schools superintendent Paul Briggs and James O. Stallings, executive director of the Cleveland NAACP, among other community leaders. Wadsworth had set up the conference with Briggs by casually mentioning to the superintendent (whom he had first met during his Kansas City years, when both participated in a panel discussion on school governance at a national educational conference) that "the man in HEW who is handling desegregation affairs nationally is a friend of mine. I can get Bob to come in here and spend some time with you off the record and give you the benefit of what he knows." Briggs had consented. The Foundation "brought Wheeler in and we spent two long days in two long meetings with Briggs, who never stopped talking," Wadsworth recalled. "[Briggs] made no effort to find out what Wheeler knew."

Paul Briggs, who was to resign in 1978 shortly after the federal court ordered the Cleveland Board of Education to hire an independent administrative team to carry out its desegregation orders, clearly believed he had integrated the schools. (In testimony to the U.S. Office of Education in February 1975, for example, the superintendent would point proudly to the fact that 40 percent of the teachers in his system were black, as were 45 percent of the principals, 55 percent of the assistant
principals and 48 percent of the clerical employees. But he neglected to mention the fact that, at the time, 91 percent of all black students in the Cleveland system attended schools that were more than 90 percent black.)

Robert Wheeler was the first of several national experts that the Foundation consulted during the fall and early winter in attempting to anticipate and assess the probable outcome of the Cleveland desegregation case. By January 1975, according to Wadsworth, the staff felt "reasonably prepared to say that, all other things being equal, there seems very little prospect that the federal court will do anything here other than order desegregation." Having looked at Southern cities in which desegregation had been successfully carried out, the staff had also concluded that "the key element was the degree of cooperation that a school district was prepared to give. It was clear that Briggs and the school board were not prepared to give any measure of cooperation. We were in for a long and difficult period."

"The only position that seemed to us to be reasonable," Wadsworth continued, "at least in terms of how I tried to explain it to the board, was to emphasize that this was a major problem pressing on the public's nervous system and to be sure the public knew and understood what the issues were." Consequently, at the end of January the staff recommended to the education and civic affairs subcommittee that the Foundation spend $20,000 to research desegregation efforts in the North and to hire additional consultants, including attorneys who would observe and report on the Cleveland desegregation trial, which was then scheduled to begin in March (but would not actually get under way until November). But as yet the Foundation had no clear plan for publicly disseminating the consultants' reports.

Acting independently, the education subcommittee of the Businessmen's Interracial Committee for Community Affairs would soon provide one of the needed communications vehicles. On February 27, 1975, the subcommittee heard a report from BICCA staff that most of the "principal opinion-forming agencies in Cleveland were evading the issue" of how to prepare for the possibility of school desegregation. The subcommittee subsequently resolved to ask The Cleveland Foundation for $20,000 so that BICCA could create a study group or committee along the lines of a PATH or a PACE to "develop alternative means by which
substantial greater desegregation can be achieved in Cleveland, short of massive mandatory busing."

The resolution's antibusing sentiment can be attributed at least partially to the fact that Superintendent Briggs had maintained strong ties with BICCA over the years. "Paul regularly attended the monthly meetings of the education subcommittee," recalled BICCA's longtime director, Lawrence L. Evert, who had made a practice of having a breakfast meeting with Briggs several days beforehand "to discuss the agenda and get his opinion." Ironically, it had been at an education subcommittee meeting that the superintendent first learned of the desegregation suit. "James Stallings [Cleveland's NAACP director and a subcommittee member] came into the meeting and announced that the suit had been filed," Evert said. "Briggs got up and walked out of the room." Evert would later claim that the superintendent was "a little disappointed that we didn't take an active stand in support of him."

The Cleveland Foundation read the ties between Briggs and BICCA somewhat differently: The political alliance the Foundation had helped to forge a decade earlier had become too expedient. According to a National Institute of Education report describing Cleveland's efforts to prepare for desegregation:

BICCA wanted a select group to get together and study other desegregation plans in order to make "suggestions to the Cleveland School Board" or "react to the Board's plans." . . . They clearly saw a close relationship between the select committee and school officials.

. . . While the formation of a select group of established community leaders to study desegregation was an attractive strategy to Foundation staff, they did not think the group should be limited to providing advice to school officials. If school officials lost the suit, an unattached group could serve as middle ground where a sensible strategy for the entire community could be devised.

Education program officer Rich Tompkins would later describe the staff's concerns even more bluntly. As he saw it, BICCA's proposal had "Paul Briggs's fingerprints all over it." The program officer believed that the superintendent "had figured out how to work BICCA to his advantage. Like everyone else in town, BICCA believed Briggs's claims that every student who graduated from the system went on to college. The first year I was in Cleveland I attended Briggs's annual luncheon report to the Growth Association, where he made that claim to the thunderous
applause of all the businessmen in the audience. I remember Homer turning to me as we left and saying: 'Have you ever heard such horseshit in all your life?'"

At its March meeting the Distribution Committee deferred acting on BICCA's request and instead set aside $20,000 for the Foundation to use for "research, education and analysis of the problems of racial isolation and desegregation of Greater Cleveland schools. It is the intention of the Distribution Committee [their resolution continued] that . . . no position is to be taken on matters currently before the courts. . . . The funds [should] be expended to explore and develop a range of alternatives available to the community in responding to any of several possible court decisions on the issues."

At the same time the Distribution Committee authorized the staff to determine the best mechanism for achieving its ends concerning school desegregation. Sensing that the committee would be more comfortable if the Foundation worked on this sensitive an issue through an intermediary, Tompkins engaged in a series of conferences with the staff and chairman of BICCA to see whether the concept of a study group could be salvaged. With Foundation grants then covering nearly 40 percent of BICCA's operating expenses, the organization's leaders eventually saw the wisdom of the study group's remaining strictly neutral.

On June 25, 1975, BICCA sent letters to 11 civic organizations with large constituencies, ranging from the Growth Association to the Jewish Community Federation to the League of Women Voters, asking each to appoint a member of its board to a "study group on racial isolation in the public schools" whose charge was "to analyze the developing legal, political, and educational climate" surrounding the desegregation suit and to "assist in lessening the educational and social disruption that might follow any given decision." Their work, which was to be directed by Tompkins and Minter, would be underwritten by a $60,000 grant from the Foundation.5

Even though BICCA had assured the nominating agencies that the Study Group "would not issue any report or statement until after a court decision is reached," it was hoped that each member would take back to his institution a better understanding of the ramifications of the case. To that end, the Foundation hired three Cleveland State University professors6 to develop a curriculum and reading list for the group, which met every other week throughout the summer and fall. In October and
early November 1975, teams of Study Group members (whose numbers
now totalled 19) made site visits to four cities whose school systems were
undergoing desegregation—Boston, Denver, Detroit and Minneapo-
lis—where they had a chance to talk with educational, political and
business leaders about the experience. After Cleveland’s desegregation
trial started on November 24, an attorney with the firm of Thompson,
Hine and Flory prepared weekly written summaries of the proceedings
for the group, which was chaired by BICCA and Distribution Com-
mittee member George B. Chapman.

“We began with the history of other desegregation cases,” said at-
torney Daniel R. Elliott, Jr., who chaired the Greater Cleveland Neigh-
borhood Centers Association at the time and was an impassioned
member of the Study Group, “sort of a ‘Constitutional Law 101.’ They
explained: Here’s how the cases are brought, how judges reach liability
findings based on 14th Amendment protections, and that’s why buses
roll all over the country. It was really a pretty simple issue.” Nonetheless,
the intensive program to prepare key civic leaders for the probable out-
come of the Cleveland case did not succeed in galvanizing the corporate
community, according to Elliott—a failing that would have dire con-
sequences when it came time to implement the remedial order, in his
opinion. “Despite The Cleveland Foundation’s best efforts,” he recalled,
“the business community remained monolithic in its views: Paul Briggs
was the most wonderful guy in educating kids and to even suggest that
he discriminated was heresy. The Study Group guys could have taken a
sit-down quiz on what was going on with desegregation in Boston or
Atlanta and gotten an A minus, but ask them what was going to happen
in Cleveland and they’d tell you Briggs would be exonerated from all
these wild charges.”

The Study Group seems to have met with greater success in helping
to neutralize the ever-present threat of political demagoguery; after the
desegregation trial commenced, its community relations subcommittee
quietly began setting up meetings with the mayor, members of the city
council and the media, the community’s black leaders and various ap-
pointed officials to urge support for whatever decision was rendered by
the courts. The subcommittee also began flying in officials from other
desegregating communities for a series of informal, off-the-record talks
with Cleveland politicians.

“We brought in the police chief from Boston to meet with [Mayor]
Perk and [city council president George L.] Forbes," Tompkins said of one such confab. He recalled:

Afterward Forbes said: "Can you arrange to have the chief meet with some of my colleagues?" "Sure," we said. When Steve Minter and I showed up that evening [at a restaurant in a downtown hotel], we were astounded to find the council clerk taking roll. All 33 councilpersons were there, working on their second round of drinks. Steve and I looked at each other and said: "Does the $500 for dinner go on your docket or mine?" George didn't want to see the city torn apart, and this gave him an opportunity to have someone else lead the discussion and to have three or four hours of the council members' attention in a relaxed way without the press around. Prior to the implementation of the remedial order the elected politicians in town never did demagogue the issue.

At the same time that it was engaged in a little friendly persuasion behind the scenes, the Study Group went public with what it had learned about constitutional law and desegregation planning. Between early December 1975 and late April 1976 the Cleveland State University (CSU) consultants made more than 100 presentations to interested community organizations on behalf of the Study Group. Their scheduling was handled by the Greater Cleveland Interchurch Council, an association of 700 area Protestant congregations whose executive director, the Reverend Donald G. Jacobs, was a member of the Study Group and an outspoken advocate of desegregation. Wishing to expand the informational service provided by the Study Group, the Interchurch Council that winter submitted a proposal to The Cleveland Foundation asking for $250,250 to create a formal coalition of community agencies that would seek to promote public understanding of the issue of school desegregation by locating and training grass-roots speakers, who in turn would educate their neighbors. The Foundation had partially funded the proposal, creating the Greater Cleveland Project in the spring of 1976 with the stipulation that the coalition have no organizational ties to the Interchurch Council (which was widely perceived as being pro-busing) and that plans to train neighborhood advocates be dropped as premature (given that as of yet there had been no liability ruling by the court). Instead, the Greater Cleveland Project's first-year activities centered on recruiting coalition members—a mission statement in support of peaceful desegregation and quality education for all students was immediately endorsed by more than 20 community groups—publishing a newsletter and scheduling additional presentations by the Study Group's CSU con-
sultants. After the federal court rendered a decision against the schools on August 31, 1976, the coalition began grass-roots organizing.

Almost from its inception, the Greater Cleveland Project came under attack from the leaders and allies of the Cleveland Public Schools. The district's attorneys, Squire, Sanders and Dempsey, were its chief loyalists, assuring school board members a few months before the trial had begun that "no admissible evidence has been uncovered by the NAACP during almost two years of investigation to substantiate the charge." Now they sought to head off those whom they perceived to be rallying to the NAACP's cause. "Attorneys for the school board called members of the Distribution Committee of the Cleveland Foundation to complain on behalf of school officials about the activities of the groups funded . . . ," noted the National Institute of Education report on Cleveland's desegregation efforts. "According to the attorneys, the presentations to community groups were not accurate and might prejudice the pending litigation. The senior school attorney also called David Parham, attorney for the Study Group, and complained that the presentations were . . . inflammatory." Although the Distribution Committee held fast, the firm's activities would exact a toll. "Squire, Sanders told the business community that this case was a loser for the NAACP," said Dan Elliott, who by this time had become the first chairman of the Greater Cleveland Project. "He really undid some of the work of the Study Group."

Arnold R. Pinkney, the black president of the school board, made the system's differences with The Cleveland Foundation public on May 13, 1976, blasting the Foundation at a school board meeting for attempting to usurp the power of the board to plan for desegregation, if and when that day ever came. "Feud Periling School Peace," the Press headlined a front-page story published the following day that reported Pinkney's questions about the Foundation's motives in creating the Greater Cleveland Project. The story read, in part:

The Foundation group, involving three Cleveland State University professors, has been blamed by schools Supt. Paul Briggs and School Board President Arnold Pinkney for creating confusion in the minds of parents and encouraging them to think that school busing is inevitable.

Underlying the [situation] . . . is apparently a long-standing feud between Briggs and the Foundation, particularly its executive director, Homer Wads-
Last year the Cleveland Foundation made two grants, totaling $28,918, to Cleveland schools, more than it has for several years. ... unlike the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, which last year gave the schools several hundred thousand dollars and the Gund Foundation, which contributed about $750,000.

... Briggs told *The Press* there has been no controversy between himself and Wadsworth, but a source close to both Briggs and the foundation, however, notes the clash between Wadsworth and Briggs started eight years ago when Briggs visited Kansas City. ...

Briggs is reported to have observed that the Kansas City schools had only one black on its staff, a remark Wadsworth apparently did not like.

... Briggs' unhappiness with the foundation apparently soared recently when he saw some of the results of community meetings held by the three professors. ... He saw kindergarten enrollments for the [autumn] fall off by some 40%.

"This is no time for endowing professors to hold a lot of meetings and make a lot of speeches if the presentations create an atmosphere that would appear to create confusion in the minds of Clevelanders," Briggs told *The Press*.

... Pinkney noted ... "None of these professors has ever called me or discussed anything with me about the board's role in desegregation. ... I consider that to be a direct insult, or at least I question their motives."

Wadsworth hastily labeled the charge that he and Briggs were feuding as "nonsense," insisting to the *Press* that he regarded the superintendent as a friend. If Wadsworth's comments left some observers unconvinced of his charitable feelings toward the superintendent, there was no doubting where the Foundation stood. A letter to the editor of the *Plain Dealer*, quickly authored by Distribution Committee chair Stu Harrison, explained the Foundation's commitment to neutrality while declaring its determination to provide accurate information on desegregation to the community. At the Foundation's annual meeting on May 20 both Harrison and Wadsworth reaffirmed the Distribution Committee's position, with Wadsworth observing: "Although there is hardly any room for being neutral, that is where the Foundation must be." And the 1975 annual report left no doubt that the Foundation regarded its grants to the Study Group and the Greater Cleveland Project to prepare for desegregation as among the most significant it had recently made. "There is no matter of greater importance facing Cleveland today nor more worthy of the thoughtful attention of its leadership," the report stated.
In fact, the Foundation was already taking action to expand the circle of leaders working to promote peaceful desegregation by meeting privately with Bishop James Hickey. "The Catholic Church was the crucial point," Wadsworth later explained. "Not only did they reach into the ethnic neighborhoods in the city, they operated a very large school system of their own. This is what led us to open up discussions with the Bishop. I wanted to see the Bishop about the fact that people run to Catholic schools to avoid busing. The Bishop appreciated everything we produced for him." Well before the federal court issued its ruling against the schools, Bishop Hickey publicly announced that he would not permit the Catholic schools to become a haven for those fleeing court-ordered desegregation, declaring that children were to be admitted to parochial schools only at normal entry points, such as kindergarten and the first year of secondary school. (Given the fact that the diocese had suffered declining enrollments for more than a decade, the bishop's stand—scrupulously executed by the superintendent of the Catholic school system, Sister Frances Flanigan—seemed all the more courageous to the Foundation's director.) "He not only announced it," Wadsworth explained, "he enforced it. He simply said that these were the rules, and there will be no further discussion on the subject. His decision had a tremendous influence on the acceptance of busing here."

The bishop simultaneously announced the formation of a Committee on School Desegregation, whose activities the Foundation sponsored for four years. Led by Sister Brigid Griffin, the Bishop's committee trained nuns and priests to lead discussions of desegregation in their parishes, organized desegregation workshops for the 900 persons who taught weekly religion classes to Catholics attending public schools and held meetings with church groups, senior citizens and parochial school faculties, students and parents. Most remarkably, the committee's outreach workers (primarily nuns) arranged for nearly every Catholic family in the diocese to be counseled at home the week before court-ordered busing began, and they mounted ecumenical prayer vigils and recruited peacekeeping forces. "They really worked the neighborhoods to get the message out," Rich Tompkins said.

Also in the final days before school desegregation a flood of public service announcements urging peaceful compliance with the court order inundated the Cleveland airwaves and newspapers. The media blitz had
been organized by the Bar Association of Greater Cleveland with the support of two grants totaling $135,000 from The Cleveland Foundation.

The idea for the bar association's taking such a forthright public stand had originated with certain members of the Study Group, who, Tompkins would later assert, were concerned with the apparent reluctance of many business and civic leaders to accept the court's finding. The media project itself had encountered resistance. Efforts to raise the requisite funding from private sources floundered, necessitating the Foundation's grant (and even there the subcommittee's vote to recommend support had been very close). Then the bar association's first choice for chairman of the campaign was not permitted to accept the assignment by his law firm, and executives from four or five major local corporations began pressuring individual attorneys in an unsuccessful attempt to block the entire effort. After Tompkins informed a gathering of the National Council on Foundations in Washington D.C. about these occurrences, a member of the Distribution Committee aired his concern over the program officer's public criticism of Cleveland's business community with Wadsworth. Ultimately, it was the quiet but steady leadership of bar association president Patrick F. McCarten, a Jones, Day litigator, that enabled the organization to carry out its plans for the controversial media campaign.

"To have major power sources opposing law and order was exemplary of the problems facing the desegregation movement," Tompkins had concluded. "The climate in the community made doing constructive things very difficult, everybody was so preoccupied with crisis and contention."

The Greater Cleveland Project's Dan Elliott, who went on to serve as cochair of the Office on School Monitoring and Community Relations (OSMCR), a watchdog agency charged with reporting to the court on the school district's progress in implementing the remedial order, shared Tompkins's sense of opportunities missed. "If the business community had been with us, we could have had a model school district," said Elliott of the remedial order written by the court-appointed Special Master on Desegregation with input from such community organizations as the Study Group. He explained:

The remedial order was one of the most thoughtful and most comprehensive of any ever written. In addition to busing, it had 13 other components gov-
erning student testing, teaching assignments, reading, discipline—item after item speaking to the quality of education. It could have been a good-government group's recommendations on improving the schools. Yet the pillars of the business community prided themselves on not reading it. They just wanted to argue with me at parties about the liability finding.

The Cleveland Foundation continued to support the operation of the Greater Cleveland Project as an information clearinghouse until 1981, long after it had become clear to Foundation staff and associates that the school district had neither the financial and intellectual resources nor the political will to comply fully with the court's orders. "I feel disappointed," Elliot would confess in 1989, "that we put so much time and energy into planning for desegregation and we still have so little to show in terms of the quality of the schools, although we can unabashedly take credit for keeping the lid on. At least no one got killed."

Compounding the community's troubles, the year before involuntary desegregation began, the city of Cleveland defaulted, becoming the first major American municipality to do so since the Depression. On December 14, 1978, the city's principal banks refused to roll over $14 million in municipal notes due that night at midnight, casting the city out of the bond market and its financial woes into the national spotlight. Cleveland Trust chairman (and Distribution Committee member) M. Brock Weir would tell a subcommittee of the House Banking Committee investigating Cleveland's default that he had insisted that the banks take this drastic action because they faced the prospect of an additional $100 million in obligations coming due in 1979, with the city having no apparent way to meet them. Other observers would claim that the banks, which had rolled over notes for previous administrations, had cried halt in a pique over Mayor Dennis Kucinich's anti-big business rhetoric, which grew especially vehement when the mayor, under considerable pressure from all quarters to sell the city-owned Municipal Light Plant in order to pay off its debts to the privately owned Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, justified his refusal by pointing out that Muny Light provided inexpensive electricity to the "little people."

Cleveland's default did not come as a particular shock at The Cleveland Foundation, where program officer Rich Tompkins was engaged in a number of research projects attempting to make sense of the city's "ma and pa" accounting system, documenting its dangerous dependency on
federal grants and assessing the extent to which its physical infrastructure had been allowed to deteriorate. "Municipal financial stress doesn't occur overnight," Tompkins would observe more than 20 years later. "The signs are well-known in the literature; but in the early seventies there were a fair number of people in Cleveland with their heads in the sand. They didn't have a sense of the seriousness of the problems or their accumulation." That the Foundation was beginning to understand the roots of the fiscal crisis—and thus would be prepared to provide assistance in resolving it when a new mayoral administration took office in 1979—could be traced to Homer Wadsworth's unbending commitment to community studies.

At the first annual Distribution Committee retreat in 1974, Wadsworth had raised the question of the Foundation's replicating in Cleveland a research-action agency similar to the Institute for Community Studies, which the Kansas City Association of Trusts and Foundations had created to provide civic leaders with continuous and systematic social research and data, all directed toward improving planning for and coordination of community services. Although Wadsworth, upon his arrival at the Foundation, may have been "almost instantly satisfied that Cleveland did not have an adequate information base on which to manage its community affairs," the Distribution Committee had asked for an evaluation of the community's existing research capabilities before taking action.

Wadsworth assigned the evaluation to Tompkins, who spent a large part of the following year assessing the Foundation's past work in the field of community studies and conducting site visits at the city's major research institutions. On January 22, 1976, Tompkins sent Wadsworth a memorandum on his findings entitled "Points to Emphasize with the Board on Community Studies":

During the years from 1964 to 1974 the Board has allocated grants in excess of $7.3 million for activities of research, analysis and planning. Annual expenditures during the period have averaged $664,837.

... [One hundred ninety] grants have been made to 51 different institutions. The historical data suggests that ... major foundation investments have been made ... without any clear pattern of purpose or strategy and with limited overall effectiveness.

Many of the same issues and ideas have been considered again and again ...
with little indication of success or progress. . . . The Distribution Committee has good reason to question support for "just another study."

. . . [However] it would appear that we could invest $500,000 annually for a studies operation, [and] still have $500,000 annually to invest in strengthening key existing agencies where it makes sense.

Wadsworth forwarded the memo to Stuart Harrison with a letter apprising the Distribution Committee chair: "We will move forward from this point, anticipating that within a six-month period we will have ready for review a proposal to establish some kind of research agency here . . . with relationships [to] other groups indicated." But the proposal never materialized because the Foundation staff was unable to resolve to the Distribution Committee's satisfaction the delicate issue of turf: Where did an independent research organization fit into what Tompkins would later describe as a crowded playing field? "When Homer set up Community Studies in the fifties," Tompkins explained, "Kansas City didn't have strong universities or a Welfare Federation or other organizations that viewed themselves as the rightful recipients of research grants."

When it became clear that the idea of creating a community studies institute in Cleveland was unworkable, the staff had recommended that the Distribution Committee declare four areas of research interest so that the Foundation could better target its own study programs, as well as begin evaluating the research proposals it received more strategically. Not surprisingly, given the mounting evidence of the city's fiscal distress, assessing the financial health of state and local government occupied a position at the top of the Foundation's research agenda.

"Solutions are not easy to conceive let alone implement," the Foundation's 1978 annual report observed of the city's financial straits. "Yet the beginning of all wisdom in community affairs, and particularly during periods of great stress, is sure and certain knowledge of the facts. This was the preoccupation of The Cleveland Foundation during 1978 [when] many important facts [were] obscured by rhetoric and by the politics of adversary relationships. So the Foundation attempted . . . to bring light where light was needed and to look for talent that could provide information and professional views on a continuing basis to those who govern this community's civic affairs."

After it became known in 1977 that the city's books were unauditable, for example, a Foundation grant paid for the development of a mu-
municipal balance sheet as a preliminary step in upgrading the city's accounting system so that the books could be subjected to a full audit by an independent certified public accountant. Completed by the Cleveland accounting firm of Ernst and Whinney in October 1978, on the eve of default, the balance sheet uncovered the fact that the city's single-entry cash accounting system hid interfund transfers and total accumulated debt, thereby issuing a warning that millions upon millions of dollars borrowed from various departments, special accounts and even bond funds to pay operating expenses would eventually have to be restored. Mayor Kucinich had cooperated with the effort because the city stood to lose federal revenue-sharing monies should it be unable to meet new federal audit requirements by 1980.

Indeed, a national study by the Brookings Institution of the "Impact of Federal Grants on Large Cities 1977-78"—which included Cleveland, thanks to the Foundation's good offices—concluded that without federal revenue sharing the city's financial house of cards would have collapsed long before. By agreeing to free Rich Tompkins from most of his grantmaking responsibilities for six months so that he could supervise the study in Cleveland and contributing nearly $80,000 in underwriting, the Distribution Committee had ensured the city's inclusion among the municipalities that were examined.

Tompkins and his team of six researchers examined the budgets and financial statements not only of the city, but also of the public school system and 17 major governmental agencies. They discovered that the city of Cleveland was virtually a ward of the federal government because of a $100 million annual federal subsidy of basic city services—an amount almost equal to that provided by local income and property taxes and by the state. Yet the city often ignored federal objectives, the study found. For example, the city used CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) funds designed to hire the unemployed to retain city workers who otherwise would have had to be laid off. "LEAA [Law Enforcement Administration Act] money slated for new initiatives to make inner-city neighborhoods a safer place to live paid for the salaries of patrolmen already on the beat and even, somewhat imaginatively, purchased electricity for street lighting from the city-owned Municipal Light Plant," the Foundation's 1978 annual report noted.

"The point was the city wasn't able to stay afloat on its own," Tompkins explained. "The city was using federal money as a gimmick to avoid solving its fiscal problems."
As another cost-cutting measure, city administrations for years had deferred routine maintenance of Cleveland’s capital stock. Recognizing the disastrous implications for the future economic health of the city if its physical underpinnings were allowed to crumble, the Foundation persuaded Dr. George E. Peterson of Washington’s Urban Institute to include Cleveland in an assessment of the country’s infrastructure, after Tompkins became aware that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development had commissioned the analysis in 1978. Comparative case studies focusing on streets, bridges and water, sewage and transit systems were ultimately performed in five cities.

After three years of investigation, “The Future of Cleveland’s Capital Plant” (a study to which the Foundation had contributed $5,000) concluded that the city faced a staggering backlog of needed physical improvements. “The city-owned water system . . . needs $250 to $500 million in replacements and renovations . . . ,” Peterson reported. “The condition of 30 percent of the city-owned bridges has been rated as unsatisfactory or intolerable, and in need of more than $150 million in major repairs. The city’s sewer collection system is plagued with frequent overflows and basement flooding; an estimated $340 million would be needed to alleviate flooding alone. . . . About 30 percent of the street system needs to be resurfaced or repaired. . . .” The total estimated price tag to bring Cleveland’s physical plant up to snuff: $2 billion.

After former county auditor George Voinovich unseated Dennis Kucinich in November 1979, civic leaders began to mobilize for action. The following September, The Cleveland Foundation awarded the Greater Cleveland Growth Association $5,000 to commission George Peterson to work with local government to develop a master capital improvement and financing plan for Cleveland, with the implication that the Growth Association would then take responsibility for overseeing its implementation. “After default, heads came out of the sand,” Tompkins said of the new spirit of cooperation. “The business community realized there were tough, accumulated problems, but they were solvable because we now had them clearly defined. By letting them see where their interest was in terms of economic redevelopment, we were able to take the infrastructure study and transfer it on to their action agenda.”

Although it was never to meet its goal of financing $1.3 billion in physical improvements, the Growth Association’s Community Capital Investment Strategy (CCIS) proved the efficacy of research-action plan-
ning. With relatively modest operating support from local government and the Cleveland and George Gund foundations, the project leveraged $107 million in non-budgeted governmental allocations for sewage, road and bridge work, including $34 million in federal discretionary funding to complete Interstate 480, which linked the East and West Sides of Cleveland. In addition, its leaders believed that CCIS influenced the sale of bonds or the return of federal dollars to the city for capital improvements totaling $240 million. Perhaps the most important of these improvements was the rebuilding of bridges carrying traffic around the Terminal Tower (financed with the help of a $2.35 million Urban Development Action Grant). Without this improvement, the Tower's new owners would have been unable to proceed with their plans to build a new shopping mall, two office buildings, a hotel and housing on the site—an unthinkable prospect since Tower City and Playhouse Square constituted the only hopes for downtown redevelopment at the time.

With Kucinich out of the picture, the business and political establishment also moved decisively to end default. The day after his election as mayor, Voinovich approached Homer Wadsworth with a proposal. In exchange for his agreement to run for mayor, Voinovich had extracted a promise from a small group of corporate leaders that they would provide him with volunteer experts from business and industry to conduct a massive city management assessment once he took office. Now he needed funding for what he was calling the Operations Improvement Task Force.

In less than a month the Foundation decided to go ahead with a grant of $150,000 to help create the Operations Improvement Task Force, provided that half of its money be set aside for implementation of task force recommendations and that its entire contribution be matched ($800,000 was ultimately raised). In early January some 90 loaned executives began fanning out in teams to every city department, observing procedures, asking questions, reading documents. By the spring of 1980 the Operations Improvement Task Force (headed by Eaton Corporation chair and chief executive officer E. Mandell de Windt, who had recruited Voinovich to run) had produced more than 800 recommendations, ranging from computerizing the city's record-keeping to amending the city charter to provide a four-year term for the mayor. The Voinovich administration implemented some 75 percent of the suggested cost-cutting and efficiency measures; and indeed, with additional guidance from the state-imposed Financial Planning and Review Commission, the city was
able to balance its budget and refinance its defaulted notes during Voinovich's first year in office.

Another critical turning point in Cleveland's financial recovery came when voters approved a .5 percent increase in the city income tax the following February. A Foundation-underwritten study of urban taxation showing that Cleveland's taxes were disproportionately lower than those of other cities figured prominently in the success of the campaign, as did the mayor's guarantee that half of the anticipated $35 million in annual proceeds would be reserved for capital improvements.

"Many projects of merit and substance are beginning to make a difference," a Foundation occasional paper subtitled "Helping the City Do Its Work" noted in 1982. It continued:

Cleveland did, after all, win this year's All-America City Award from the National Municipal League—an award not given lightly, nor granted for the creation of earthly paradises, but for "citizen action, effective organization and community improvement." What the award means—and what Cleveland is currently demonstrating, as Neal R. Peirce wrote in his recent column on Cleveland—is that "this country, at its grass roots, can still work magnificently well."