Chapter XIII

Office Location, Condition, and Arrangement

THE OFFICE AS THE ADMINISTRATION CENTER. The office of a social agency is the starting place and usually the scene of those activities which will be discussed in the later chapters of this book. In the office the staff carries on much of its work. There are kept the records of the agency. There its correspondence is handled. From it public relations material and procedures emanate. There financial and service programs are formed. Through it and out of it develop co-operative relationships with other social agencies and with the community. The office is the headquarters of the social agency. Its branch offices, if any, are the headquarters of its branch activities. Thus the office may be regarded as the business and professional home of the staff.

The office may be the center of the agency's contacts with board members, with committee members, with volunteers, with the dues-paying membership, with contributors, with clients, patients, inmates, and other users of its facilities, with the representatives of co-operating agencies, and with citizens who wish either to make complaints or to offer advice and suggestions. The location of the office, its appearance, its arrangement, its equipment, and the methods of its management profoundly affect all these relationships.

An office with high standards may be a vital factor in the success of the organization's program of service. Conversely, an office inconveniently located in a run-down or disreputable neighborhood and shabbily furnished, inadequately equipped, sloppy in appearance, inconveniently arranged, and slackly managed may be the chief factor in the failure of an organization either to render the service it should with the funds available or to secure the funds it needs to carry on an adequate program of service.

LOCATION IN THE COMMUNITY. Manifestly the location of the office is a matter of great importance. (We are speaking here of the location

of the office of a non-institutional agency. If the agency is an institution, the office usually is a part of the plant.)

(a) Accessibility. The convenience of the office to those who make the greatest and most important use of it should be a primary consideration. For example:

A social agency which for its effectiveness depends on the co-operation of business men as volunteers (such as the Boy Scouts or a community chest) should have its office as convenient as possible to the paths taken by these men to and from lunch or to and from their homes. Here the location will probably be well toward the center of the business district and fairly near the important clubs and financial institutions, even though the parking of automobiles may present difficulties.

An organization whose board members and volunteers are largely housewives might find it more advantageous to be in a location convenient to a shopping center and yet one where parking space for cars could readily be found. For such an agency, accessibility to pleasant luncheon facilities might be important.

Another agency which works mainly through a professional staff, perhaps with out-of-town contacts, might consider the speed and convenience of street-car or bus transportation for its staff members, or perhaps handiness to the railroad station for out-of-town callers.

A social agency in close contact with the public schools might locate its office, if such an arrangement could be made, at or close to the headquarters of the board of education. An agency that deals with the courts—for example, one that handles problems of delinquency—might try to locate its office either in or near the courthouse. An organization that has important contacts with administrators of public welfare activities might welcome the opportunity to be in the city hall or county courthouse, if the welfare department also has its headquarters there. This is often the case with family societies, public health nursing organizations, and anti-tuberculosis leagues, especially in small communities.

Again, consideration of the co-operation which results from direct contact with other social agencies might persuade a social agency to occupy space in a social service building along with other agencies of the community, even though other aspects of convenience could not be completely met.

An agency primarily for contact with clients—such, for example, as a clinic or a day nursery—should be convenient to transporta-

tion and to those areas from which come the largest and most important group of the patients or clients.

(*b*) *Avoid Made-Over Residences.* Sometimes well intentioned friends suggest that the agency take over a former residence in the "interstitial" area just outside the business district, or such a structure may be offered as a gift. The board and the executive should consider the proposal critically. They should only accept it if the proposal reasonably well meets the standards described in this chapter. A building of this character is likely to be unsatisfactory in location, difficult and expensive to alter for efficient and economical agency use, hard to light, heat, and ventilate when big rooms are cut into small ones, costly to maintain, and a hazardous fire risk. All the teeth of the residential gift horse should be closely examined. He should only be accepted if sound of wind and limb.

(*c*) *Character of the Neighborhood.* The very character of the neighborhood affects the agency. A business neighborhood of second-hand furniture stores, pawn shops, and "hand-me-down" clothes emporiums, even though cheap in rent, might cause a loss in prestige which would more than overbalance the greater expense of an office in a more dignified and reputable neighborhood. Other local conditions which may affect the location are convenience to inexpensive and satisfactory eating places for the staff members, proximity to shopping centers for employees at noon or after work, and social conditions in the neighborhood itself. For instance, the women members of a staff, though willing to go from the office to street cars and busses during the day, may be afraid to make the trip at night when working overtime, because of inadequate street lighting, lack of police protection, or proximity to the hang-outs of loafers.

Moreover, the location of the building should be considered in its relation to nuisances. Unpleasant odors from factories, laundries, or other industrial establishments should be avoided. So also should be the soft-coal smoke from chimneys, which causes unnecessary dirt in the office. It is well, furthermore, to keep away from noisy factories and from especially clangorous transportation systems.

(*d*) *Convenience to Meeting Places.* A further factor of importance in office location is convenience to meeting places for the board and committees of the social agency, if there are no such facilities in the building itself. It seems foolish ordinarily for a social agency to spend money in additional rent to provide a room

for the relatively infrequent meetings of its board and committees —space that would be idle between meetings. Those who are selecting the location should take into consideration the time the staff members would spend in traveling to other available meeting places if the office were not in convenient proximity to such facilities.

One may qualify all that has gone before and that follows in this chapter with the proviso that during the period of office shortage which began during the Second World War and has continued after it, all standards have been off. You take what you can get, where and at what price you can get it, and be thankful!

INTERNAL FACTORS IN LOCATING OFFICE. Although the geographical location of the building in which the social agency has its office is important, many internal factors of the building must also be considered.

(*a*) *Service.* Unless the agency wishes to discourage volunteers, board members, contributors, clients, and other possible callers from coming to it, the office should be either on the first floor—so that no stairs will have to be climbed by short-winded or weary employees or callers—or convenient to fast and frequent service in well-ventilated elevators. (The elevator which brings callers to one well-known social agency, because of its apparently direct connection with the furnace room and its passage through what seems to be a hermetically sealed shaft, is sometimes called the "smell-evator"—and not unjustly either at times.)

An urbanized executive comments, "I have the impression that there are few walk-up offices where you need to discuss stair climbing as opposed to elevator service." He evidently has not been much around social agencies in our smaller cities and towns, particularly in the South. Indeed, we know intimately a community chest office in a large city which is well located geographically but is up one flight of stairs (not through choice but because of the acute shortage of office space). We know an important agency in another city which is up two long flights of stairs in the city hall (no elevators because of war and post-war shortages of materials). It is a nice office when you get to it!

Janitor service, too, must be adequate. Floors must be thoroughly and completely swept every day, the offices dusted, and the windows washed with sufficient frequency to enable the organization to retain its self-respect and its vision of the outer world.

The building should provide adequate storage facilities in its basement, or elsewhere, for surplus supplies and equipment.

The other tenants should be of a respectable character, in keeping with the dignity of the agency.

(*b*) *Rents.* The rate of rental naturally varies from city to city, and no standards can be set here. It is wise for the social agency ordinarily to pay rent which is not above the average for the community. If possible, the agency should secure quarters, even if at some sacrifice of convenience, where the impression of economy is confirmed by the known modesty of the rent. The building should be neither so magnificent as to create the impression of extravagance nor so cheap as to be shabby or provide inadequate service.

Sometimes an agency may secure special concessions in rent through taking a long lease in a highly desirable building, the owners of which have overestimated the demand for office space and thus have too many vacant offices, or else in one that is perhaps a little older yet satisfactory in terms of actual utility. Sometimes, too, owners are willing to make concessions in rent and will forego their profit and rent at actual cost because the agency is a non-profit organization.

Again, an owner may make a concession, with the thought that a social agency as a well-known institution which brings many reputable citizens to the building will provide both good publicity for the name of the building and a satisfactory clientele. This agreeable state of affairs should in theory lure more and better tenants to the building. One social agency will often attract others to a building without definite endeavor on its part to develop central officing. A resourceful executive and board of directors will not hestitate to call attention to these potential advantages when negotiating the most favorable possible terms for a lease.

(*c*) *Location in Building.* Rent should not be saved, however, at the expense of a satisfactory location within the building. The office should be sufficiently far up to escape the noise of traffic and if possible to have an unbroken view of the sky for the sake of light. The office also should not be directly in line with a smoking chimney or exposed to disturbing sounds or offensive odors of industrial or mercantile processes. It should be convenient to toilet rooms for both men and women employees, and to drinking fountains as well unless the organization provides its own cooled drinking water.

(*d*) *Daylight.* Light, both natural and artificial, should be a factor in determining the location. Unobstructed daylight is desirable. North light, because of its evenness and lack of glare, is better than any other. Although the direct rays of the sun can be lessened by either awnings or window shades, neither of these devices is quite so satisfactory as Venetian blinds.

If daylight is desired for all workers, the office should not be so deep that light will not penetrate to the farther parts of it. Daylight sufficient for writing, even on bright days, generally does not penetrate into office buildings more than 25 or 30 feet. Its penetration is partially affected by the color of the walls. Those of light color and smooth surface reflect more light and consequently provide more illumination than those of darker colors. Walls of cream or of "eye-ease green," a ceiling of pale yellow, green, or white, and light-colored woodwork provide an agreeable and effective background for the well-distributed light of day.

(*e*) *Artificial Light.* Artificial illumination must also be provided. The light should be adequate for close application to figuring and writing without eye strain.

Adequacy of light can be tested by engineers supplied by the local illuminating company. Indeed, it is a good plan to call in a representative of the electric light company when you are considering this question. The company is interested in selling as much electricity as possible. It will be glad to see that the illumination is adequate—aside from its scientific interest in providing satisfactory light.

It has generally been agreed that indirect or semi-indirect lighting fixtures are the most satisfactory. They should be so numerous and their light so directed that one's hand held at the height of a desk will cast no shadow on the floor.

Recently fluorescent lights have been highly commended and widely used. We like them. They, too, should be considered on the basis of the advice of a competent technician.

Glaring, unprotected lamps are manifestly bad. The popular shaded desk lamp generally causes an intensity of light and a reflected glare which are in painful contrast with the surrounding gloom. Desk lamps usually are less desirabble than diffused, overhead lighting.

Arrangements should be made for the frequent washing of all reflectors, bulbs, and tubes. Competent authorities state that ac-

cumulation of dust on these fixtures will reduce the available light by as much as 25 per cent.

Adequate lighting is obviously necessary. It enables the office force to work rapidly and without the tendency toward error caused by lack of proper visibility. Moreover, a social agency because of its altruistic purpose, even more than a business concern, is responsible for safeguarding its employees against possible eye troubles which result from poor lighting.

(f) Ventilation and Air Conditioning. Although, unlike light, the air cannot be seen (except in some cities which may have that degree of smokiness which Pittsburgh once made notorious), ventilation as a factor in the location of an office is practically as important as light.

Elaborate systems of artificial ventilation and air conditioning seem to be unnecessarily luxurious for most social agencies, even though they are becoming popular for stores and offices in those regions of our country where the summers are very hot and humid. A proper conditioning system does control the temperature, humidity, and cleanliness of the air and surely has many advantages. We recently considered offices in a building soon to be air-conditioned—until we were told that when the offices were thus equipped the rent would go up 30 per cent! Of course, the system if made an integral part of a new building would cost relatively less than if crammed into one whose builders had not envisaged this development. We did not think, however, that in our case the benefit would equal the cost. Still, an air-conditioned meeting room might promote attendance and length of stay at board and committee meetings in hot weather. Perhaps that situation can be met by using the air-conditioned board room of a bank or large business corporation.

Following the simple health rule of keeping windows open at top and bottom and providing inexpensive window ventilators should be sufficient ventilation measures for the average social agency.

Of course electric fans—adequate in number, location, and power —are necessary in hot weather, both for ventilation and for the "cooling" effect of moving air on perspiring skins.

Maybe all this is rationalizing and we are envious of the social agencies that do have air-conditioned offices. We think they are swell if you can have 'em! But some efficiency experts claim that air conditioning in hot climates adds 10 to 15 per cent to the summer output, and that is not to be sneezed at!

In winter the heat in the office should be regulated by a thermostat connected with the heating system. Or, if this is impossible, one person should be responsible for regulating the windows so as to maintain a temperature of approximately 68 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. But a problem develops when a person near a window complains of the cold while one farther away is too warm. Window ventilators will help to handle that argument. A policy of interpreting to the staff, in meeting, the importance of adequate ventilation and moderate temperature will help greatly in modifying the attitude of members who are afflicted with antiquated ideas of ventilation.

(*g*) *Breezes.* The breezes which prevail in various parts of the country may also make some difference in the location of the office. For example, in Houston the prevailing winds in summer are from the southeast (over the Gulf of Mexico). A social agency might therefore choose the east side of the building, even though this means greater glare from the morning sun.

It is sometimes necessary for an agency, before deciding on a location on the top floor of a building, to investigate carefully to make sure that there is an adequate air space between the ceiling of the office and the roof of the building; otherwise the employees may be subjected to a temperature five to ten degrees higher than that on the lower floors. That difference in temperature may make all the difference between suffering and comfort, and consequently between inefficiency and efficiency.

Furthermore, there should be windows on two or more sides of the office for cross ventilation. The windows should have free access to the outer air.

(*h*) *Adequate Heat.* Conversely, adequate heat should be assured in the winter. A staff that shivers at a temperature around 60 degrees on a cold day, has to work in sweaters and overcoats, and operates office equipment with numbed fingers is no more efficient in its production than that which has to suffer from excessive heat in summer. Adequate guarantees of satisfactory heat should be provided in the lease. That guarantee should be enforced, even if it is necessary to "put the heat" on the landlord by withholding the rent.

(*i*) *Humidity.* Humidity, also, is held by medical authorities to be an important factor in the preservation of health. In some sea-level cities there is no need for artificial humidification, at least in the summer. In the winter it may be wise (ask your local heating

and ventilating engineer) to have well-filled pans of water under or on the radiators or hooked behind them; for which ingenious devices of that kind can be purchased. In this way the indoor air may be kept healthfully moist to supplement the moisture-laden currents from the outside. If such devices are used, the office boy or his functional equivalent should be given the responsibility of keeping them filled. Naturally you do not have to bother about all this if you have an air-conditioned office.

(*j*) *Rest Rooms.* The building or the social agency should provide for its women employees a rest room, clean, convenient, and quiet. It should be supplied with a couch and a clean couch cover, or a cot with sheets and pillows which are frequently changed. If space permits a separate smoking room, loafing room, or lunchroom, it is usually desirable that the rest room should not be used for these purposes but only for its specific purpose. Supervision of the rest room may be put in the hands of a committee of women employees who are held responsible for its management. Sometimes lack of space may require that the rest room "double" as a lunchroom. This, however, should be considered an emergency condition, to be corrected as soon as possible. Some buildings and some of the larger social agencies provide reading rooms or libraries for their employees' use during their lunch hours.

(*k*) *Luncheon Facilities.* Luncheon facilities for employees constitute another factor in selecting an office. Social service buildings in some cities provide lunchrooms where good food can be purchased at a reasonable cost. Some agencies with large staffs operate their own lunchrooms. People not connected with the agency or with the building are sometimes served in lunchrooms of this character, in order to increase the volume of business and thus to make possible both a lower cost of operation and a greater variety in menu.

A lunchroom has many advantages. It supplies wholesome, hot food at a low cost. This discourages employees from bringing their own cold lunches, which cannot be considered unsatisfactory. It provides a place where employees may eat their lunches and prevents the scattering of crumbs around the office. It prevents sickness, since there is no necessity for going out of the building for lunch on cold or rainy days. It makes eating together by the staff members of one or more agencies a convivial event—one that is productive of acquaintance and good fellowship and may help to develop effective working relationships. It will be convenient for

the service of coffee and cold drinks during the morning and afternoon recess periods, a practice which many agencies authorize, and by its convenience it will save time that would be lost if employees left the office for their refreshment. It may provide a good meeting place for committees.

There are disadvantages, however. A lunchroom may lose money through insufficient patronage. If not well managed, the room will cause disagreeable odors in the building and attract vermin. It may keep employees indoors when they should be out getting sunshine, fresh air, and exercise during their noon hours. It may make employees ingrowing in their acquaintance instead of encouraging varied outside contacts. Then, too, a lunchroom operated by the social agency itself may involve indirect costs which, although they are not usually computed, are nevertheless high. One such cost would be payment of rent for a space that might be used more satisfactorily by the agency for other purposes; another would be the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of time and attention on the part of the executive or staff member in charge.

An arrangement that is sometimes satisfactory is for a social agency or group of agencies to lease space for a lunchroom to an outside organization or individual who will assume full responsibility for its management and for serving good food at reasonable prices. With the incentive of adequate service as a basis for profit, this arrangement may save the agency itself both from a possible deficit in its operation and from the complaints which its employees are likely to make about the food served by the organization for which they work. The fewer activities the social agency operates in which it is likely to incur blame and complaint on the part of its employees, the better off it is from the point of view of morale.

Some social agencies provide lunchrooms in which members of the staff, either individually or in groups, may heat soup and make coffee or tea. Such arrangements, however, usually present problems of dish washing and garbage disposal. If this kind of lunchroom is provided, it should usually be managed by a group elected by the employees.

The agency might properly specify in the office manual that both rest room and lunchroom will be maintained so long as they are satisfactorily managed and used by the employees, and that abuse of these facilities will result in their withdrawal.

Certainly, if adequate and reasonably priced luncheon facilities are conveniently available to the office, it would be unwise for the

agency to provide competing service. Each shoemaker to his own last!

SIZE AND ARRANGEMENT OF THE OFFICE. In renting office space, economy should not be secured at the cost of long-time efficiency.

(*a*) *Peak Loads and Growth.* The space should be adequate not merely for the normal size of the organization, but also for times of "peak loads" when extra space is needed in special seasons or in preparation for a financial campaign or similar large-scale activity. Furthermore, the growth of the organization should be estimated in terms of past experience and present prospects, with a view to providing space which will not be outgrown before the lease expires. On the other hand, if a small space is taken, arrangements should be made with the building manager to provide additional contiguous space when necessary, through the shifting of other tenants.

(*b*) *100 Feet per Employee.* The amount of space necessary may be computed on the formula that in general from 75 to 100 square feet of working space are necessary for each clerical or stenographic employee. Those staff members with executive or professional responsibility who have to interview clients and callers may require 100 square feet or more. Still, an office ten feet square ought to be large enough for such an individual, unless he has to have an unusual amount of furniture and files or has to entertain more than two or three callers at a time. An organization which does a large amount of mechanical work, such as one that carries on extensive propaganda with elaborate duplicating and mailing equipment and large stores of printed matter or other supplies, may need more space. Nevertheless, the figures given will hold in the case of the ordinary social agency.

On the other hand, the amount of space necessary depends in part on the arrangement of the office itself. If all the workers are in one large room—a practice quite general in banks and other business offices—less space will be needed than if executives are given private offices and various departments also have rooms to themselves. Moreover, in a large office, supervision and control are more easily maintained, communication between individual employees is more direct, and better lighting, heating, and ventilation are possible than if the space is cut up into a number of rooms.

The amount of space needed also depends on whether each executive has his secretary in his office with him, or whether all the secretaries and stenographers are put together in a "stenographic pool" from which they are called when necessary. The more the

clerical force can be centralized and the less it is broken up into separate units, the less space will be needed and the more effectively can that space be used.

(*c*) *Private Offices Not Always Necessary.* Many executives and sub-executives mistakenly think they need a private office. The private office is often a concession to vanity and to the desire of its owner to increase his importance and to have his name on a door. It has been suggested that private offices sometimes take the place of deserved increases in pay. If the decision rests between these two alternatives, most agencies will find it cheaper to raise the pay than to provide private offices, which involve extra space and the additional cost of partitions. Ordinarily executives and professional staff members who do not have to hold confidential conferences with clients or citizens in general can be given space in a part of the general office set apart for their use. A general conference or committee room, to which staff members may retire if they need complete seclusion or in which conferences and meetings may be held, will eliminate the need for many of the private offices which otherwise might be considered necessary. Frequently case work agencies have small dictating rooms in which case workers can dictate in turn, according to schedule, to a stenographer or a dictating machine.

Every social agency which deals with clients must, however, have at least two special rooms—one perhaps a combined reception, information, and waiting room; the other a private room in which clients may be interviewed without interruption so that the confidential relation between interviewer and client may be maintained.

A sound method of deciding upon the number of private offices required is to count carefully the cost of the extra space and partitions required and to measure this, not against the individual's wish for a private office, but against the actual increase in the efficiency of the organization which will result if a private office is provided for him.

If a large number of private offices is necessary (although low railings will sometimes be suitable as barriers between the rank-and-file and the executive) an excellent arrangement is to have partitions that do not go all the way to the ceiling and stop a foot or so from the floor, with clear glass from desk height to the top. In this way the maximum amount of light and ventilation will be provided. Such offices usually will provide sufficient privacy for all practical purposes.

The effect of having the whole office within view of the executive

—either because there are no partitions or because they are of clear glass, so that he may see all that goes on—is often decidedly stimulating to the industry of workers and to the elimination of gossip.

(*d*) *Easy Access for Callers.* Private offices should be easy of access by callers. The most desirable arrangement for a large office, in general, is to have a reception room from which doors or hallways lead to the private offices, with the general office behind and beyond these private offices. In this more remote area all the clerical, stenographic, and mechanical processes may be carried on without interruption from callers.

QUESTIONS

1. In the case of a social agency with which you are familiar, what functions are served by the office?
2. What are the good and bad points about its location in the community?
3. If it is an office building, what are the good and bad points about that location?
4. How adequate are the arrangements for light?
5. What provision is made for ventilation and air conditioning?
6. How adequate is the heating arrangement?
7. What arrangement, if any, is there for a rest room?
8. What is done about luncheon facilities?
9. Is this office large enough to provide for peak loads and for growth?
10. How many square feet does it have per employee?
11. What arrangement does it have for private offices?
12. What facilities are there for handling callers?
13. How do you think this office's location and arrangement might be improved?