

## USING THE OPINIONS OF MANY PEOPLE IN POLICY BUILDING

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### ABSTRACT

This paper was essentially a progress report on an effort to use systematically a wide variety of opinions in formulating policies. Of more interest than an abstract of the whole report are the following three paragraphs summarizing the writer's concepts of the relationships between competent opinions and sound policies.

Of what stuff are policies made? They are built out of opinions. Yet opinions, in and of themselves, are of no worth. It is the pattern of facts that lies back of the opinion that counts. An opinion of one who is experienced concerning the matter to which it applies may be respected because a logical pattern of facts may be presumed to lie back of it. On the other hand, it may be presumed to be colored by special personal or professional interest. An opinion on medical practice expressed by a medical practitioner would be entitled to respect, but could be presumed to be colored, probably unconsciously, by special interest.

It would be a great thing to be able to consult sources of unbiased opinion. No such sources exist. The next best thing is to obtain opinions from enough sources to bring in all the biases. Please do not, however, jump to the conclusion that the composite opinion so obtained as a sort of resultant of forces is necessarily superior to a single opinion. A composite opinion is likely to be sterile and to lean toward preserving the *status quo*.

Means must be found to work back through opinions to the supporting pattern of facts. Opinions must be validated on the basis of facts. We must get opinions. We must get only the best obtainable opinions because that is all we shall have time for. Then we must work back through them to the supporting facts. In that way, and in only that way, is it practicable to build sound policies.