

**Office of Information and Research
Report 21**

Organizational Experiments in Local Conferences

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Introduction

This report is the first in a series of studies designed to meet the request of the North American Division Committee at the 1995 Year-end Meeting in Battle Creek. At that meeting a report was presented by the Commission on Mission and Organization. The report was adopted by the committee, including a number of recommendations for changes in the organizational structure and staffing of the division and the union and local conferences. At the same time a request was made by the committee for research that would track the changes tried by the union and local conferences, and regular reports to the committee on the outcomes from these experiments.

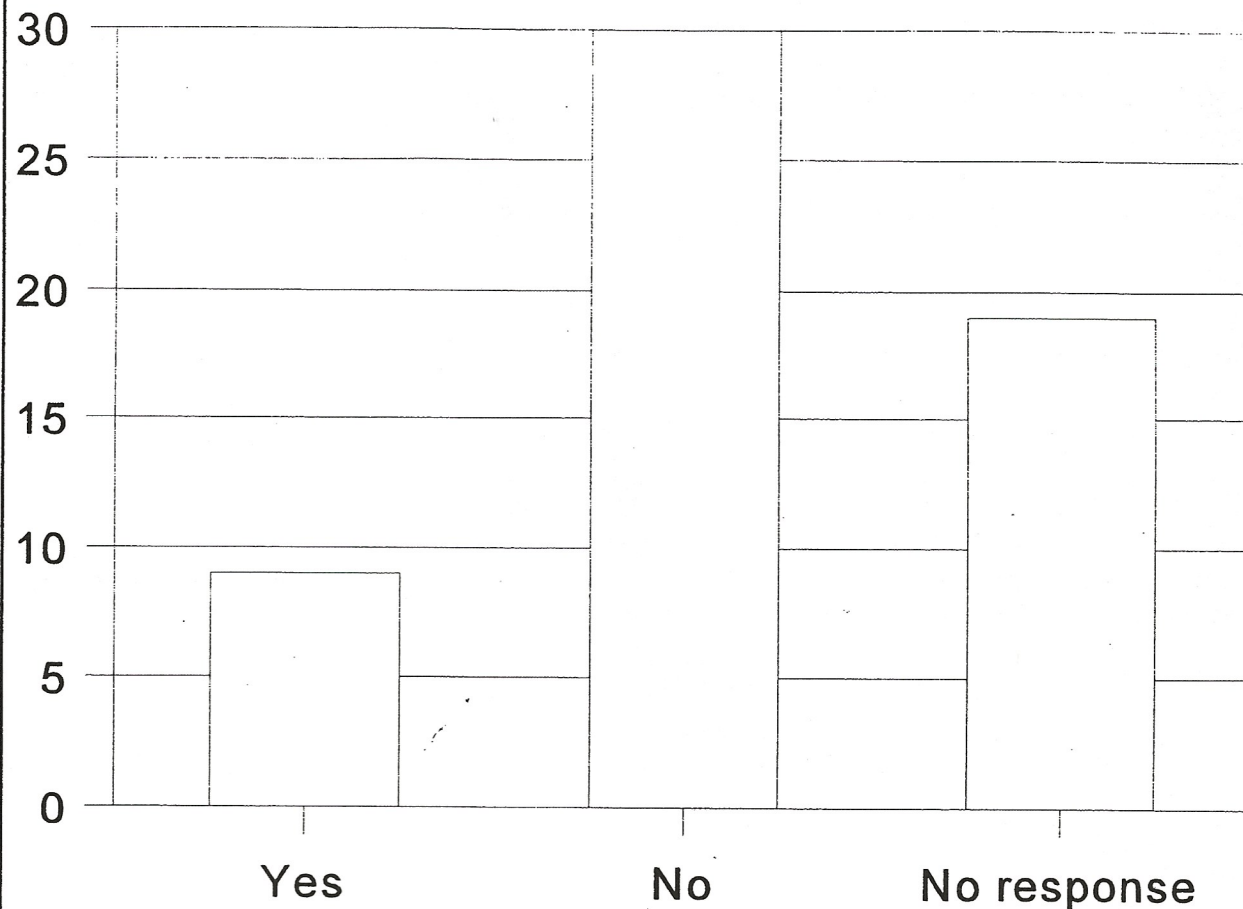
The purpose of this first study is simply to establish the number of local conferences which have taken up the recommendation voted in the fall of 1995 that conferences try new organizational approaches. This survey was conducted nearly two years later, during July 1997.

Each of the presidents of the 58 local conferences in the North American Division were sent a simple, one-page fax questionnaire from the NAD Assistant to the President for Research and Development. It included only four questions, and could be completed in about two minutes. It was faxed to all 58 offices on July 7, 1997.

By August 8, questionnaires had been returned by 39 of the 58 presidents. Even though this is a 67% response rate, due to the small size of the universe for this study, probability sampling and the usual cautions regarding an allowance for sampling error do not apply.

Monte Sahlin
September, 1997

Has your conference made any changes?



One in four of the presidents who responded indicate that their local conference has made some change in the way it is organized since the 1995 NAD Year-end Meeting. Most of these are conferences with larger than average membership and none of them are Regional Conferences.

Because the survey questionnaire was not anonymous and came back with each conference identified, it is possible to know that there are at least three non-responding conferences who have announced plans for changes since the fall of 1995. Consequently, it is a sound estimate that one fifth to one quarter of the entire 58 local conferences are likely to be involved in experiments with organizational change.

What kinds of changes?

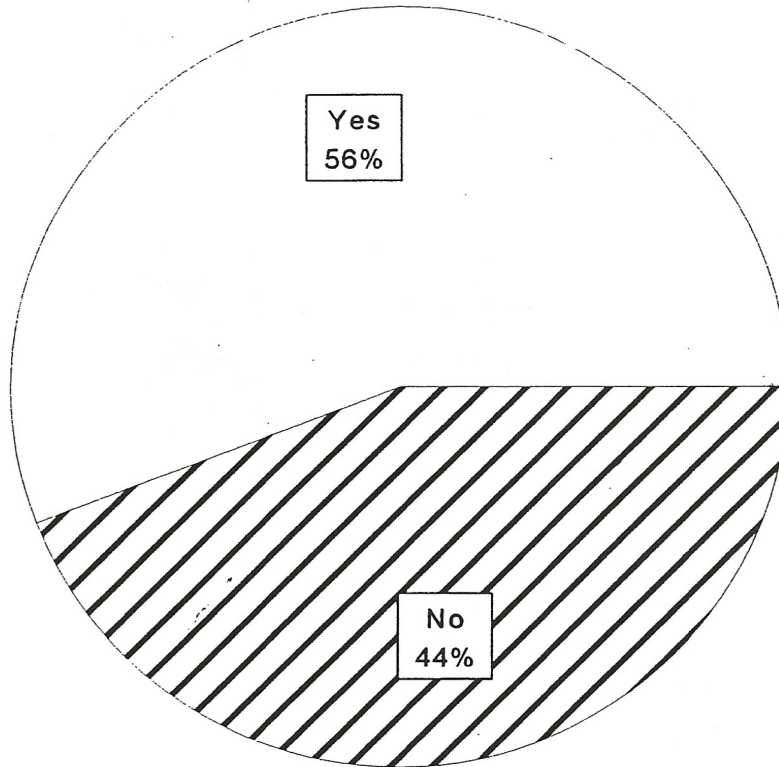
Those presidents who responded affirmatively that changes were being made in the organizational structure of their conference were also asked to describe briefly what kinds of changes "have been decided upon and/or implemented." All of the responses are displayed verbatim below.

1. "Have basically implemented the model [from the first report of the Commission on Mission and Organization adopted at the 1995 Year-end Meeting]. It is working very well."
2. "Our conference has established fixed funding for K-12 [education] in harmony with Section V [of the second report of the Commission on Mission and Organization adopted at the 1996 Year-end Meeting]."
3. "Trying the district plan in one section of the conference."
4. [Implementing a] "two-year trial basis with pastors in regions. Regional directors are [also] pastors. [There are] six regions."
5. "We have gone from a K-10 to a K-12 organization in education."
6. "Added two women in leadership positions from special funds outside the operating budget:
(1) Assistant to the President for Volunteerism, (2) Prayer Ministries Coordinator."
7. "Restructured our youth department and youth camp."
8. "We have in place two field-based associate ministerial secretaries in [region of the conference] and [region of the conference]."

Three presidents who answered the first question negatively, indicating that their conference has not voted or implemented any organizational changes since the 1995 Year-end Meeting, wrote explanatory or general comments. These are displayed verbatim below.

1. "We had re-organized during the late 1980s. Our constitution is different than most; we make provision for 'program committees' that run much of our conference activities."
2. "We have the district plan in effect already."
3. [My conference is] "too small for the district plan."

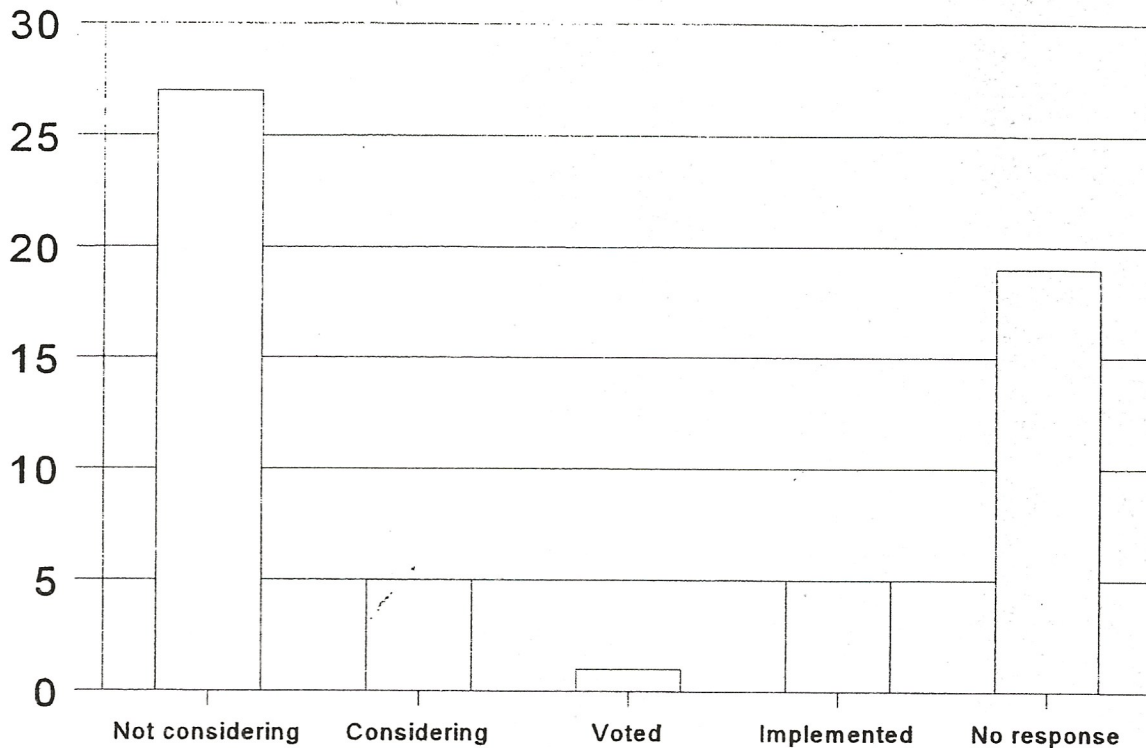
Did the 1995 Year-end action open the door to your changes?



Five of the nine presidents who indicate that their conferences have made some changes in organizational structure say that the vote at the 1995 NAD Year-end Meeting helped the change process in their field. This means that a solid majority of the innovators report that support from the division was important to them.

The affirmative respondents to this question tend to come from the smaller conferences among those who have made changes. These are also conferences more distant from the west and east coasts of the division.

Is your conference considering or implementing the "district" plan?



The conference presidents were asked a very specific question relative to the "district plan" which is a key recommendation from the report of the Commission on Mission and Organization adopted by the 1995 Year-end Meeting. Two-thirds of the responding presidents indicate that their conference has given no consideration to this concept. A third report that their conference is at some point in the process of considering and/or implementing this option.

Five conferences were in the process of considering the idea when this survey was completed in July, 1997. One conference had actually voted the concept, but not yet begun implementation. Five conferences had already begun to implement the plan. At least one conference which did not respond to this survey has indicated in correspondence that they are implementing the district plan. Also, two of the presidents who responded to this question with "no consideration given" have indicated in marginal notes that their conference has had a structure with district leaders for some time.