



Victorian Environment Friends Network Summary of Seminar: *How to Win Friends and Satisfy People* 14 April 2007, 60 Leicester St Carlton

Maelor Himbury, Convener, VEFN, welcomed 74 participants to '**How to win Friends and Satisfy People**'. John Robinson (PP&WPCMA Werribee and Maribyrnong Landcare Coordinator) explained his role in fostering land care and assisting in strategic and action planning. John observed that a recent survey showed that one of the weakest elements of group health was leadership development.

Geoff Durham, VEFN committee, set the scene with extracts from Dale Carnegie's '**How to win Friends and Influence People**': be genuinely interested in other people, smile, use a person's name, be a good listener, talk in terms of other people's interests, make the other person feel important.

Friends of Well Known Creek, aka VEFN Players, role-played **The New Volunteer**, scripted by Sue Wright. Players Sue Wright, John Munday, Michael Howes, Jenny Harrington and Thelma Christensen illustrated how project day organisation can really impact on a new member.

Workshops lasting for 45 minutes each recorded action points related to **Recruiting New Members**, **Retaining Members**, and **Matching the Expectations of Management & Friends**. Each workshop group reported back in an afternoon session.

Lunch and tea breaks, sponsored by Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority, were greatly appreciated.

Friends of Well Known Creek performed a convincing vignette of **The AGM** (from hell) and set the scene for a discussion of group goals and constitutions.

Michael Norris chaired **The Base on which to Build** with a focus on formal group organisation. A number of participants expressed the view that a set of written group goals and a constitution were unnecessary on the basis that they get out of date, that Friends groups are not formal structures like companies, and a constitution does not ensure success. Several of the groups represented operated without a constitution and were not incorporated.

Those advocating a constitution and set of objectives suggested that a constitution provides a point of agreement, makes leadership transition clear, can help in recruitment, provides direction, and is required prior to incorporation. Those favouring group incorporation mentioned the transfer of legal liability, the creation of an entity that is recognised as ongoing, the ability to gain funding as an independent entity and the frequent requirement in grant applications to be incorporated.

During this discussion the issue of legal liability was mentioned. It was agreed that people working with local councils should clarify their position regarding legal liability. For Parks Victoria groups the signing in for activities is evidence of a volunteer's presence and their liability cover. Sjaan Fields of Parks Victoria will publish information on the VEFN website about legal liability and children. A one-page constitution is available on the VEFN website for groups to consider.

The **base on which to build** agreed actions –

1. Every group should consider incorporation and adopting a constitution.
2. Risk of take-over dictates the need for a constitution.
3. Each group should review group objectives.
4. Constitutions help manage people.
5. The Network Committee will produce a paper outlining the pros and cons of a constitution and incorporation.

Pat Moriarty spoke on behalf of 'Our Community', formed to support not-for-profit organisations with resources. There is a website and a subscription-based 'Easy Grants' directory (\$45-00 pa). The web site, www.ourcommunity.com.au has help sheets and ideas on things like leadership, risk management, treasure's jobs etc. Pat urged incorporation. He said to those people that don't think they need a constitution: wait until you get into trouble. Because that is when you will need one. (See summary of Pat's talk on page 2.)

Nigel Caswell chaired **Leader Burn-out & Succession Planning** and began with a hands-up session showing those who were foundation members of their Friends Group. The response revealed many raised hands. Reasons for leaders staying on were: enjoyment in leading; personal satisfaction; a sense of duty; the need to advocate for the environment; some people seem to be the embodiment of the group; relaxation; to gain life experience; 'because I was asked', and others.

Pat Moriarty was invited to comment on leadership change. His list includes: don't just find anyone, find and mentor the right person for the job, ask members for their input, make sure of people's skills and interests, don't put barriers up, keep meetings short and efficient, use sub-committees to break up work, share roles, change is helpful – young people have a new set of ideas.

Leader burn-out & succession planning agreed actions –

1. The Art of the Ask! Ask someone to do the job!
2. Delegate tasks, recognise effort.
3. Organise mentoring and training.
4. Be willing to let go, get people to replace themselves.
5. Provide support for new leaders.

Workshop reports and summaries were chaired by Geoff Durham. These included **Recruiting New Members**, **Retaining Members** and **Matching Expectations of Friends and Managers**.

Recruiting new members agreed action plan –

1. Use personal contact to recruit.
2. Link activities to major and community events and contemporary issues.
3. Have a plan.
4. Promote through phone trees, media and word of mouth.
5. Diversify activities, provide something interesting.

Retaining members agreed action plan –

1. Be organised
2. Welcome people.
3. Recognise people and what they do.
4. Provide a variety of activities and achievable tasks. Enable people to gain a sense of achievement.
5. Provide social contact.

Matching expectations between Friends and managers agreed actions –

1. Build personal relationships between Friends and management. Develop trust and honesty in communication. Welcome new staff.
2. Develop a joint vision or management plan. Do joint planning. Clarify responsibilities. Ask, don't assume that managers know what you want. Understand resource limitations. Communicate your intentions.
3. Provide recognition both ways, Friends and management. Thank people for their efforts. Thank management publicly.
4. Find your way around changed rules.
5. Carry out monitoring and maintenance of projects.
6. Don't lose information with staff changes.

Seminar conclusion by Bob Reid

1. Try using an event-led membership recovery such as Clean-up day, Frog Watch, World Environment Day etc. Get prospective members to take part in an event.
2. Keep members by planning worthwhile activities and giving a sense of ownership.
3. Develop agreed goals and use personal contact in dealing with managers.
4. Give perspective, have an eye on the bigger picture.
5. Develop networks with other groups and land managers. This will become more important to achieve biodiversity, for group strength and for future funding.
6. Develop an orientation plan for new members.
7. Don't be scared of group goals and the paperwork of a constitution.
8. Use the 'Art of the Ask' in succession planning.
9. Remember, we are all out there because we love what we do!

About Our Community – summary of a talk by Pat Moriarty (Director, Training & Learning, for *Our Community*)

Our Community was established in 2000 to support grass-roots community organisations throughout Australia. It is based in Melbourne, but it is a national organisation. In short, anything that you need to get support, advice or resourcing on, related to a not-for-profit community-based organisation, should be available on our web site.

For those who are not familiar with *Our Community*, probably the one thing that you will get greatest value from is our grants newsletter called 'Easy Grants'. It has every Federal, State, Local Government and philanthropic and corporate grant throughout Australia. You can get it in email version—a lot easier to use and manipulate. It is about 50 pages of grants every month.

Across the whole spectrum of grants—Federal, State, Local, corporate and philanthropic—there is, on average, some 10 billion dollars available every year. Probably the key thing I would encourage you to do is to think a bit more laterally about what your organisation does and is. You are not just an environmental group—you are a community organisation, a youth group, a Seniors group. You could be a whole range of organisations and projects rather than just an environmental group, so please think laterally about who is involved in your organisation and what programs you undertake, because there is a lot of money out there that you can access.

Other things that we help groups with... there is a whole series of resources about marketing, so if you want to develop a newsletter template, there is information there about templates for you to use. A whole series on risk management. The main thing I would encourage you to do with those insurance checklists or risk management checklists is to make sure that they are relevant to your own organisation. Don't assume that someone sitting in Canberra is well and truly aware of everything you come up with and do, so make sure your practices do work for you. There is information on finance—how to be a good and effective communicator as a Treasurer. There is information and support for leadership programs. There is information and support for almost anything a community organisation does.

I agree with the person who just said that you need a constitution. If you don't think so, sooner or later you will strike trouble, and that is when you will really need a firm statement of your policy and procedures. It is the best form of protection for your organisation's long-term sustainability.

Our web site is www.ourcommunity.com.au

Our Grants Newsletter is \$45 a year to community organisations.

On insurance for small groups, GIO has produced a low cost solution.