

VCAM Board Retreat Draft Meeting Notes

Monday, May 23rd, 2011

In attendance: Chris, Deidre, Bradley, Bear, Bryan, Llu, Sam, Selena, Michael, Dave, Rob. Steffi Lahar, guest facilitator.

Missing: none.

VCAM Quick Business:

- The board decided to allow checks will be signed by Rob & Seth in the interim while we are awaiting the election of new executive officers.
- The director at large position needs to be filled. The board candidate who came in 6th place & a current VCAM Director (who was also considered for this position last year) was Kwacha Davis. The board unanimously voted to appoint her to this position.
- Rob was recently appointed as the chair of the SEABA board and presented to the board the opportunity to sponsor a SEABA event in June (\$500). The board unanimously voted to approve the sponsorship.

VCAM Board Retreat Notes

A) Snapshots of History

- *Rob*: 1992 became involved with VCAM as a producer, then as the first director of VCAM (helped to create the NPO we see today). Rob was drawn to VCAM by the chance to create a NPO instead of a department of a cable co. (Executive Director)
- *Bear*: 1995 knew Rob from their past and was approached to join the VCAM board, got elected, became chair of the board for a few years. In 2001, Bear was hired as a staff member (ten years now!). Bear was drawn by the chance to be part of the creative new way to do cable access.
- *Dave*: a new board member this year, he started at VCAM in 1997 (prior he started an access station in Bennington), became a production coordinator for channel 16 (for work) and produced at VCAM and other places. In 2005, Dave began working full-time for a statewide cancer coalition, while being part-time with VCAM as a tech staff supporter until about a year ago. (New Board)
- *Bryan*: met Rob and joined up based on his desire to make creative programs back in the 90s and in 2007 joined up with the VCAM board. Was drawn by the possibility of innovation possibilities in public access TV and freedom of access for all.
- *Deidre*: came to VCAM to take a class in 2008, was new to Vermont, and discovered Bill Simmons (a VCAM staff member) via social media. She is drawn to VCAM because it is a strong and important local non-profit and the mission is great.

- *Chris*: came to VCAM in fall of 2009, as the student media advisor for UVM student media clubs he was introduced to VCAM via PSAs (at WRUV) and the possibilities of VCAM helping UVM TV. He got his students involved and had a few retreats with the UVM TV students at VCAM. He loved to work at VCAM and was encouraged to run for the board. (New Board)
- *Llu*: works at UVM joined in 2010 as a board member, recruited by Rob and was excited to get involved in local public media and help to take VCAM as an organization into the next phase of development.
- *Bradley*: joined in 2010 as a board member, but first became aware of VCAM with some of the VCAM staff who were on social media outlets. He was interested in a number of public media issues and he ran for the board. He likes the ability to be able to create media.
- *Selene*: has been a user of VCAM from many years ago, joined in 2010 as a board member. She is a librarian at UVM and is drawn to the VCAM mission because there is many overlaps with library information challenges---what is the role, etc. She is most excited by the work that is being done at VCAM (highlighted at events like producers' dinner, etc).
- *Sam*: is a new board member and joined in 2011, and is currently a videographer and film-maker. Became involved in local public media outlets when she came to Vermont, volunteered with channel 17 (gov access) and worked full time with them for 5 years. She used her knowledge of the PEG stations in Burlington as the means by which she became interested in VCAM. She also works with local schools to help students discover ways to connect with media and the community.
- *Michael*: was involved early in VCAM's history and made a show about democracy (as a recent law school graduate). He left and came back to Vermont in the early 2000s, reconnected with VCAM as a viewer and is a current producer of two shows on the air (mixed martial arts and motorcycle maintenance). He sees VCAM as an opportunity for the community to express itself outside of corporate media.

B) Discussed Community Needs Assessment Themes

- ✓ *The visibility (invisibility) of VCAM in the community*: the needs assessment captured some specific ways to verify and address it---some ideas about how to increase awareness, the appreciation of those who do know and use VCAM, and confusion of the differences between the public access stations. People also felt after reading assessment that the community might respond to VCAM in paying for some services and in supporting VCAM in other ways. The board could take a stronger role in pushing the visibility of VCAM forward, in a thoughtful and strategic way.
- ✓ *The brand of VCAM (how we are different)*: Needing to strengthen how we market ourselves. If VCAM can identify what we do that is unique, board members think will easily attract the local community's support.

- ✓ *The need for VCAM to stay on the cutting edge of media growth & the chance to use the expertise of our staff: how to craft a program plan to make this happen?*

The results of the board mini-survey about the VCAM priorities for sustainability over the next 3-5 years:

- Diversify our funding.
- Collaborate with sister PEG stations.
- Develop a long-term plan for VCAM.
- Strengthen board leadership.

C) Envisioned VCAM in 2016 (Activity): How to reinvent our organization to thrive alongside expanding social relationships to media and industry changes.

Brainstormed outstanding features of the future VCAM. Themes and ideas included:

- **An Amazing Board of Directors:** they are visionary; connected to national resources for community public stations; stays up to date with the best practices of other stations; they draw in new constituents for the organization; exceptional visibility (that uses models of advisory boards (content vs. connectors/\$\$: the celebs/big donors/influential people) to help inform the organization's work); there is careful leadership succession of the board to ensure org institutional knowledge and board effectiveness; 100% board giving and meaningful participation in the diversification of the financial support of the organization.
- **Strong and Savvy Staff:** aware of and responsive to the community needs around media use/trends;
- **Revenue Stream:** Using a business model, VCAM is able to create a fee-for-services or an income-generating mode; grant/foundational support; and franchising fee—all while staying focused to our mission as an org.
- **VCAM has outstanding community partnerships and collaboration:** including all the Burlington sister PEG stations, using VCAM programming (or even merger?), VCAM is the primer place for the local non-profit sector to develop their marketing strategies, consulting and long-term projects.
- **Using educational workshops and other means, VCAM is a cutting edge media making hub for the community,** for learners of all ages (schools, adults, etc). Using "mobile media kits," VCAM is able to take their tools on the road to go to community locales to attract new users and producers.
- **A facility that motivates viewers to get involved and engaged** with the issues that are raised in programming, in tandem with programming is meant for pure entertainment.
- **VCAM helps producers to hone show quality and messages.** VCAM's diverse programming draws in diverse programmers (identity) as well as the variety of

media modes (old school and most cutting edge). With a commitment to continue to train producers with a variety of skills with a variety of tools to become top-notch media makers.

VCAM helps producers become true storytellers of under-represented people and beyond.

- **VCAM has created a truly interactive media approach**, that allows for viewers, producers, staff, and supporters to be connected via the content.
- **VCAM was able to bridge the gap between the emerging millennial generation media mastery with the older folks and media users.**
- **The VCAM staff has grown and adapted along the way to meet the needs of the organization:** development, marketing, education, and producer support.
- **VCAM's brand is very clear and is conveyed in all organizational materials cleanly and boldly** (graphics, vision, mission, etc) and is able to be understood and used by all members of the org (producers, board of directors, staff, etc).

D) Small Group Work:

Quick synopsis of 5 themes from visioning exercise. The group elected to work with the first three. Small group focus questions were:

1. *What would the Board's highest and best role be in furthering this? (may also note what coordination with staff would look like).*
2. *What are the first action steps: WHO would do WHAT, WITH WHOM?*
3. *Are there issues/topics relating to this area that may need more in-depth discussion or information-gathering?*

1) Diversified & Sustainable Funding

Discussion notes

- A. Develop fee-for-services model build on expanded services to existing users (who are used to getting services for free) and value-added services for new users.
- B. Begin soliciting sponsorships/underwriting of programs and/or events.
- C. Donor/subscription fee – consider membership (like Shelburne Museum) with benefits that could include invitations to membership/insider events, and/or media expansion, e.g. website access to things that are free on TV.
- D. Franchise fee

Action steps

- Internal review – what are we best at? What do we think would have dollar value to the community?
- Prepare our org. documents for future fundraising, e.g. rock-solid financials, profile pieces. Rob is already enhancing annual report.
- BOD sets a fundraising goal, including a BOD contribution target. Make it reasonable.
- Have a mini-committee to advise Rob on Development.

- Start modestly and gain experience and a track record, e.g. a couple of sponsors for a producers dinner and BOD target.

2) Essential Programs & Services

Discussion notes

- E. Board role assisting in building bridges with other channels.
 - Pursue expansion of programming through a possible merger.
 - Build bridges among the 3 channels, appoint a subcommittee that includes two people from each Board.
- F. Define and implement a greater focus on “Motivation to Action” Programs
 - Turn members into advocates?
 - Use of NDN-TV media
 - Partner with other institutions
 - Work to foster partnerships
- G. Establishing a more recognized Vermont voice, like a local newspaper
 - Focus on government programming as a base
 - Follow up with advocates with their own production
- H. Support for more mobile production and production services
 - Camera is the tool, but our best value may be to help people focus on what the issue is – at their site. Expand our service delivery to more on-the-road.

Note: Expansion in this area pushes a more in-depth discussion about a possible merger or combination of the three stations/facilities.

3) Marketing & branding

Discussion notes

- A. Hone our message about what’s unique about VCAM in context of other stations.
 - Define a process for further articulating this and then testing messages to see what the community values. This may involve working with a consultant, or using internal resources.
 - What’s our “bumper sticker verbiage”? If RETN is “Education” and CCTV is “Government,” what are we? “Your Story. Your Voice” maybe?
 - Test these messages. As in, we can have our own bumper sticker, but what does the “all 3” bumper sticker look like. What’s our niche and how do we articulate that?
- B. Train BOD and staff and other ambassadors to deliver our messages and raise our profile. This may be done with the guidance of a board marketing committee, and include staff.

- C. Look at who our key partners are and strategically choose who we want to be more active with. May include schools, for example – be sensitive to partner stations (e.g. RETN).

This group also noted that collaboration/potential merger discussions are relevant to the future in this area.

D. Board Development

E. Community Alliances & Partnerships

E) Board Roles & Next Steps

- Have staff tasked with next steps:
 - VCAM Annual Report (for development process);
 - Identify the most valuable programs for VCAM;
 - How to recruit more producers and interested folks to our work.
- Topics identified in this meeting that don't go to committee work (e.g. cross-cutting discussions like collaboration/merger, and other themes from the visioning exercise that didn't have dedicated discussions, board development and community alliances and partnerships, can become future Board agenda discussion topics.
- Board tasks:
 - Revamp and change committees? & board leadership/create chairs!!!!---11 people total.
 - Standing committees (programming, outreach, executive).
 - Development Committee (advising Rob)
 - Marketing Committee
 - Programming Committee (board & staff)
 - Executive Committee (chair, vice chair, treasurer, secretary).--- evaluation of ED. (add a non-officer member?).
 - Set a minimum time commitment per month (for each board member).
 - Ad Hocs (strategic planning; board retreat planning).
 - Create an Access Plan (through our committees) of setting goals and timelines within each committee (by the end of the summer)?