

FIC Org Meeting Minutes

Fall 2012

Ann Arbor, MI

Session One:

Finances and Budget (Tony)

Note that we are using endowment resources to manage cash flow, with less than perfect accounting.

We can consider if we want to attribute auction income re events rather than as “other”.

Note that the 3 loss areas of most significance are Cmag, Web, and Art of Cmty. This year we are not covering the losses from them with income from other areas like Development.

When Tony straight-lines budget items, he comes up with a 2013 loss of \$32,000.

Places to make a difference:

Development: more funding for development to build non-Laird capacity

Sacred Cows: charge for listings in dir, cmag online?

website monetization

recognition of old line cmtys that have supported us in cmag & website

cmag ad free?

Meta-discussion about money values

Videos online

Within Reach

Look at priorities and where we want/need to risk

Is a new office space a priority?

Website (Susan Sloan)

www.ic.org - Where do we go from here? Slideshow presentation

She is looking for guidance as to what we will do from the website

Generally get about 80,000 visits per month (13,000 of these are coming from phones/mobile devices) ☐ can address this in redesign efforts

“Communes” is no longer the #1 search, now it is “Intentional Communities”

Average person staying on for 6 ½ minutes...this is actually a long time for a website

Getting more spam postings, more bogus directory listings and ReachBook is getting some spam even. When she took over the directory there were about 1,500 unreviewed listings.

Making updates and changes to the website – people responsible need access. It is slow and expensive to make changes. She does not have programming skills and that's what it takes.

Adam's Wives directory listing example of something we do not want on the site.

Many communities on the site are non-residential. At this point she's read over 2,000 directory listings.

- Camp August for example...looking for camp counselors
- She offers a series of additional categories we could add, many of which will be overlap (for example Shannon Farm would be under several)

Rename ReachBook

Cohousing often seen as a term to mean people who live in the same house.

Need to look at and address:

- Expand content offerings and product research
- New FIC Content
 - Kozeny Award
 - Bead Story
 - Board and Key Personnel Profiles
 - Membership Newsletter
 - Job Openings
 - FAQ
- Search functionality
 - customers are “shopping” and “dating” or doing both. Need ability to search and refine based on results
 - ReachBook (like our Craigslist portion of the site) listings are not searchable. Rather than fixing ReachBook, put it in the database

Christian Stalberg has indicated that if the FIC does not ride the growth rate of IC's, someone will download our listing and republish on a new website. His ideas...

- Monetize the website
- Professionalize the whole FIC
- i.e. letsliveoffthegrid.com (not yet a threat, but could be oneday)

Website redesign goals:

- Incorporate current technologies and user preferences
- Make it more up to date
- Will BALLPARK cost 20-30K programming + 10-15K project management (CHEAP | FAST | GOOD □ which two are highest priority? She would recommend GOOD & FAST for our top priorities)

Where can the \$ come from?

- Internal sources:
 - Fees for use
 - The website is not free for us to operate. Community process is to all chip in and spread the load. Communities want to support the FIC. Money is part of the sustainability puzzle. Some communities would pay \$25/month for their listing. Yes, we can switch to a fee system and retain quality listings. We can't continue to lose money and thrive.
 - We'll lose some listings. Is this bad? Maybe they should move to a free section like ReachBook or something else. 978 of the listings have fewer than 3 people...they are forming and perhaps we should deal with them in a different way. Perhaps if they had to pay a fee for their starting community, they are more serious about forming a community. Bottom line it is always up to us as to whether we want to enforce that or not...we can always waive it.
 - One idea:
 - Site viewing = FREE
 - Reachbook like (like Craigslist) listings – brief descriptions = FREE □ (MANDY...also allow a photo like craigslist, and searchable by location like CL); and they should fall off after a set amount of time.
 - Seeking community
 - Community forming
 - Community with Openings
 - Community Events
 - Directory Listings with detailed information - \$25/year
 - Currently 2,443 listings in the Directory – some will move to Reachbook and some others are not viable.
 - 1000 viable listings x \$25 = \$25,000/yr
 - Also keeps the responsibility for keeping it updated on there if they are paying for it. they treat it like a craigslist listing where they put it up and walk away. If they have a renewal fee each year they are really encouraged to go in and update this.
 - Users are very frustrated by the outdated listings!

Need a marketing plan:

- Christopher Kindig is someone who is interested in the ad sales person.
- He is fired up, has ideas and has even contributed to this presentation.

Our website is the face of the FIC and is the tool being used 24/7 all over the world. It's the hub of the organization where we showcase our magazine, directory, store and events. It's a fantastic resource for communities, seekers, researchers, the media, EVERYONE interested in a more cooperative way of life.

NOW IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER!

Susan is happy to manage and shepherd the project, but is not the tech person. Foxx is up to the tech side for a reasonable pay rate. The store transfer has taken way longer than it should...in May it was "it's almost done", etc.

Trying to send communities without land and people (only an idea) to ReachBook. People use ic.org

Our google rating is 6. Linking to our website is of high value to others.

Store Update. Here's what is left to be done:

- one bug left
- products to match store.ic.org
- importing store.ic.org orders
- final testing's
- moving over
- retesting
- server downtime has been an issue recently...but he thinks he's fixed that bug

Questions:

- Does she have a sense of the # of communities who list on the website also pay a Membership. Or which ones are also magazine subscribers?
 - It's unclear because they are all in a separate program (FoxPro) on McCune's desktop.
 - She feels that most communities would still be willing to pay for a listing on the directory website because it's directly related to what they get.
 - Could look at a opt-in form that involves check boxes...I want to be a member and this means "X", I want a listing, I want to subscribe to the magazine.
- History of soliciting donations to the website from the people who have listings...why do we think this will work for communities to pay:
 - Button asking people to donate on every page when they're editing.
 - Directly asking people who have listings to donate.
 - Pay for an ad on the directory...maybe a dozen communities whom have taken them up on this.
 - Evidence we've gotten so far is counter to what she is saying that people will be willing to pay for their listings.
 - When the internet first came up the internet was free and people expected it to be free. This is much less the case now.
 - People are paying for internet service other places.
 - Before you were asking them to donate and people can always say no. We would be saying this is the fee. She doesn't think they will say no.
- How many would likely pay the \$25?
 - 978 are fewer than 3 people. The # that are forming 1,200...about 50% of the directory listings. Many of these would not go to ReachBook because they have land + people. They would gladly pay the \$25/year for a full detailed listing. Those that are just an idea, one person, no land, these she expects would move over to ReachBook.
 - Tony did a search and saw that 1,000 listings are NOT forming and are greater than 3 people. If we are projecting that 1,000 would pay \$25, then we are saying that ALL of them would pay, or some forming communities would also pay.
 - Some of the forming communities would still pay...a forming community might actually see more value in paying for a listing.

- The website is losing between \$5K-\$10K each year. This is the core of our business, tending to agree that we need to monetize this if we are getting 80,000 views per month. It is a valuable thing and we want to provide this. When we open up and have categories for educational facilities and other categories and this could balloon and they would gladly pay to have a listing.
- Tony would add that if we do not to GOOD + FAST there will be competition in the market. If we do not do FREE there may be competition in the market. The last serious competition was the Intentional Communities database and they were very committed to a free and open source situation. Even if we are charging for some listings, we still provide some free forum.
 - This is why she proposes that viewing and Reachbook (like craigslist) is completely free.
 - www.growthecommunity.org has popped up and Laird has been in touch.
 - Right now, alternative sites are being formed. That will happen when the
- who is to say that communities won't just use the free portion and then our users will be frustrated that they go to the directory and not find all the communities?
 - there are several communities that have been in and out of the directory now when it is not a fee.
 - it will still be up to us to waive their fee.
- what is the value added for people who pay for their listing?
 - they get a full blown directory listing with photos and video like it is now.
 - propose that when the site starts charging, they have more function than they do NOW.
 - it will have the improved searchability
 - what else...?
- aside from paying for listings, there are some things that websites do is free registration, where the users get to capture their information via a registration and that could turn into future memberships or other non-monetized way for communities to capture income from viewers.
- Has she looked at the micro-donation idea...under \$12 donations don't have to pay the Paypal fee?
 - Could incorporate that to try to generate the \$2,000 or so per month

There are a LOT of things to think about, but we need another way to sustain our website. It is a different day now that we get 80,000 hits per day on our website.

We are all in agreement that it is time to try to monetize the site in some way.

Susan feels our website would easily be monetize-able if the site was updated.

A lot of possibilities.

Hiring Christopher for our advertising manager would be very helpful!

Final questions/comments while we have Susan on the line.

- \$25/year is such a small amount, especially for forming communities.

- If we're trying to generate about \$2,000/month (1,000 listings x \$25/year), that only about \$.02 per hit that we are seeking to generate, if we have 80,000 hits per month.
- Would like us to do other search criteria for community defining personal match criteria that could be generated.

Concerns/Questions after the presentation:

- how much to say what we did not agree with what she was saying. the format of the conversation did not allow for a lot of back and forth.
- the seeker-based site is what she presented. not steeped in actually living in community
- not aware of what is easy/hard from a tech point of view
- surprised it has taken so long with Foxx but the problem there is leadership...perhaps leadership that Tony has not taken on, but it is truly leadership that has prevented that project from moving forward.
- great presentation, but same things happening 6 months ago.
- maybe she would say Foxx is not available, but it is up to her as manager/leader that may not be looked at...may be worrying about. if we want \$40K to the project, someone really needs to step in and see that through.
- Foxx will not put more time in if we are not paying him.
- She is not aware that she is in charge until Foxx is done w/the store...she may see it still at Tony's territory. Thought the store was the last thing Tony is doing and he has turned it over to Foxx. The reality is that Tony has only been responsive when they are asking him questions, not driving/leading the store changeover in any way. Tony is no longer managing anything. This void has not been filled.
- Split up the job between management and tech and that can be difficult. Even where there are simple things to be done, she doesn't have the skill to do that. How can the site back-end be more usable for more non-tech-savvy things?
 - She was doing the online directory thing.
 - Wordpress back end is the main thing up to address this issue, but Tony believes our website is beyond the scope of Wordpress. There are some parts of our site that could be done on Wordpress, such as Art of Community. There are dangers to making the non-sophisticated manage a website, such as the artofcmtty.com which is not very beautiful or user-friendly at this point.
 - Great for someone that is medium-level tech savvy, but not for anyone beyond that.
 - Can there be a single login for people who are wanting to update various aspects of the site.
 - If we want our user experience to feel integrated, it is hard to pull off the shelf products and make them integrate.
- Some of the trigger was the initial statement about wanting an attractive website somehow implies that we do not have an attractive, user-friendly website already.
 - Susan did not do anything wrong in her presentation, and Tony needs to let go of any emotions coming up.
- Another issue is that she is really asking us to up the financial input. Tony has been saying for a long time that if we had more \$ we could get more stuff done. Agree that we should be putting more toward our website.
 - Not confident in her plan for revenue. Not sure that the math works out the way she does.
 - Declarative statements that "any forming community would be willing to put \$25 a year".

- Yes, forming communities would do this because they already put \$ into advertising.
 - 2,500 listings on our website. Could go through and say X hundred are in Europe and they are not going to pay. We've actually had to go out and say please keep your listing updated. They are not getting a \$25 annual value out of being on our site. Yes, there are plenty of flow-through new communities who will use the free option rather than pay.
 - There will be some # of listings who will always be putting their listing up for \$25 because they are stable or always actively recruiting, some who do it to support the movement, some existing communities who drop off and choose not to list anymore because the only thing they get is people contacting them and then they have to respond to emails and that is annoying. CELO, the Vale, Red Earth Farms will not continue to list, not because they don't support the movement, but because they don't have an outreach team or they don't have anyone in charge of that, etc. etc. Catholic Worker Houses, Coops, so many will not pay. Would need to see which ones would actually pay and perhaps only 300 will actually pay; and that's not a real movement...still need a way to include the free listings so that we have some way to say "you can search over 2,500 listings on our website!" so that we continue to be seen as a real movement to the media and to our users. While it is true that the seeker only wants to see the ones that are really in the dating pool.
- No doubt about what you are saying...can we capitalize on our legitimacy, our history, our credibility.
 - limited opportunity for that. all that is true, but when someone is going out there they are really only interested in results. the tradition is nice, there is credibility. if they have a place where they can reach more people that's all they care about.
- What about the 300 who are in the online dating pool, and inviting those listings to pay \$75/year or something to meet the needs of the higher budget for the site. Could there be a value-added piece that they WOULD pay for?
 - i.e. allow them to show their units for sale, have something MORE that they receive because they are most interested in being front and center on the site.
- This is the main way that we provide the most service, and it is not necessarily meaning that this should be our main income stream.
 - Our primary vision is a service-based organization. How do we stay afloat AND provide service. We have said in the past that each area does not need to break event.

Are we comfortable with monetizing the site in some way beyond what we are already doing?

- Advertising □ YES, already doing it
 - Not doing ads on our home page right now and we could
 - We don't have any banner ads at the top, which could increase revenue
 - Primarily chosen google text ads for most of our things, but if we chose more graphics ads that could be more revenue but possibly seen as more intrusive
 - Targeted ads like eco-groovey/lefty/etc. but yes they are doing eco-laundry detergent and hybrid vehicles backfilled with relative crap.
 - Could do something beyond google if someone wants to manage it. they could generate significantly more revenue from online ads if someone really took charge

of it...maybe double what we are making now, but also cost to pay the manager unless it is a volunteer.

- Cohousing's ad model is more effective, but takes more management on their part. They also have some like Wonderland Hill that are continually paying.
- People pay classified ads on our site and they are buried on our site and get little exposure .
- Room for a direct-to-the-viewer paid advertising area
- Right now the GFX ads bump the google ads down and google only pays when they are clicked on. Think we can make more \$ selling the targeted sales ads.
- Sounded like Susan did not want the page full of advertising, but then the new guy is willing to do more ads than Tanya was.
- Charging the viewers
 - \$12 paypal-fee-free donation requests for the 80,000
- Charging the listers – big discussion above on this.
- Donations □ YES, already doing it
- Register on our eNews list / funnel marketing, so we get their information at some point, but not paying to register up front, but may result in more money down the road (such as increased membership)
 - Could be more aggressive with inviting them to donate or register for membership later, but need better eNews and such to make it a value-added experience for the users.

Sense is that we are already comfortable about exploring this, but that we are not convinced that it is as simple as what Susan put out. We are not closed to it, not a sacred cow, but we need a good plan as to how we are going to do this.

The board is open to exploring how we might monetizing the site in a new way, either through charging the viewers or charging the listers. Added some notes above under each area to further explore how this could work.

EXISTING QUESTIONS TO MOVE FORWARD

Need a greater sense of reality about some of these choices. What do we need to know to make our discussion more productive next time we bring this up together as a group?

1. How many communities are paying the membership fee right now, and how that relates to the directory. If you are a member then you get a free listing, but if you are not a member you have to pay. How would charging for a listing affect the membership.
 - a. ASK MCCUNE HOW MANY COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIPS THERE ARE.
2. Of the important ones that Tony would want to preserve, how do these match up to who is paying for a membership...if you get a free listing as a member and those are the ones that we want on there already, are we just really wanting to increase the community membership fee instead.
3. How can the website even just break even, not losing up to \$10K/year. Maybe not bring in \$25K, but at least break even.
4. We obviously don't want the directory to shrink from 2,500 to only 300 or something, but if we mess around with our fee structure and try something, what is it we have to lose?
 - a. \$30-\$45K for building this new site
 - i. could do a portion of this update, but not the entire plan

- b. Losing premiere listings (though we can always add them back and waive the fee)
- 5. Good and Fast, Fast and Cheap, Good and Cheap...where are we as a BOD?
- 6. Funnel marketing discussion has not been explored deeply.

Opening Card Pulled was the 2 of Cups

Frog Song was 1 yr ago and ride after Art of Community, Mandy Cycled, she was having a positive experience but was also remembering that FIC is human with flaws and has difficulty and facilitation, Frog Song Finally got their hot tub, Within reach was coming out

Fall of 2007 Austin co-op, word that Geoph Died, sleeping on couches, Local help fell through, turkey wandered, Laird talked Turkey, local politician showed up, Laird did a house party, there was a piñata, talked about taking C-mag on line, Risiome collective and got lost on the way, GPS saved us, Maikue gave Laird a hat and a tutu, Dan grabbed it and put it on

Some sort of Booze fest, room to room, contact person could not find a place for folks to stay, Park added a lot to the meeting, Alyson was so pregnant, sharing circle about Geoph, Mindy's mom, called and told Jenny about the passing experience, of Geoph, Special meeting and a hard meeting for Jenny and all

10 years ago, Good Enough to Whoya, eat a lot of salmon, Laird brought a proposal to put Communities Directory for free, Tree was there,

15 years ago, Fall of 97, Sunrise, Marty remembers first Art of Community event, hours of computer work, Tony remembers Nathan and Kirina, Tony just got Dancing Rabbit, Laird and Alex and Josepha drove out together, basement of big temple, spiral dance, Caroline and Betty led and Tony misses their energy

20 years ago, High Wind Wisconsin, fascinating mediation on definition of intentional Community, Dan says definition was problematic so they went to a variety of descriptions, Harvey says that they needed to withdraw from the center of communal studies, there was a giant bill, Betty got us unstuck with a guided meditation

25 years Eastwind in 1987, Harvey met Laird, and learned about income sharing, Eastwind, choose to do not consensus with fractional votes, and fierce alpha males, Saturday was a party, everybody was in the corner complaining about bad decisions that were made in groups of 2 and 3 people

East wind makes rope sandals, Dan got purple rope sandals

What do we remember about this meeting:

Mandy: Humility, cheering on the cause,

Jenny: Balanced view of Past Present and Future

Alyson: Heart Essence and faith

Marty: Discerning objectivism

Harvey; History

Dan: helpful work, outer circle support

Tony: Realism and enthusiasim

Lincoln: Focused energy

Mandy's Item, Within reach Movie is a for profit, LLC model, spreading the word on community, Community is the secret ingredient in sustainability, Raines is a great supporter of the project

We want a screening Kit wave of realease, 35 film festival applications have been submitted, Kit is based on audience size to get cost, \$100 screening get means you will show it to 100 people, comes with postcards and questions, you can invite the team to come out for the meeting.

Proposal, out of every kit, FIC gets \$10 a kit, and FIC fulfills the Kit order, 1000 kits is the goal, there is 800 kit requests, Evolver wants kits for all, its chapters, Kit requests are world wide.

3500 to produce the kits, FIC gets \$15, shipping is over and above, mandy preps the kits, FIC could make \$12,720 of which the hard costs are \$3290, based on selling 850 \$100 Kit, FIC gets \$20 per kit on a larger size screening kit

Break Even is 275 kits for FIC, Tony says that 300 of a New We were sold. Mandy says you can get ticket sales and sponsors to pay for a screening Kits. You can not by a dvd, its for presentaion only

FIC can add promotional material, lots of free promotion of FIC.org,

Harvey askses what the timing is, Lairds time, is this a fundraising priority to get money for materials is this worth doing. Raines said that if we do not raise the money in 2 weeks

Harvey is willing to loan the FIC \$3000 for the materials to do this project with no interest for 3 months, we, there is a lot of support for this, we need to here from Laird, Within Reach will buy back the remaining inventory, if it goes bad. DVD will be a new separate agreement

FIC fiscal sponsorship for DR

We agreed to do this.

DR application for 501©3 will not be reviewed for some time.

DR is in the midst of a major capital fund and is looking to lower costs. Current arrangement is 5% to FIC.

Laird suggested a lower % on individual donations. <1k 5%, 1-5k 4%, 5-10 3%, >10 2%.

Each stage of a multi stage donation would be treated separately.

Other suggestions included a cap on FIC take.

The only cost to FIC is accounting energy and sending a note to DR.

As with other fiscal sponsorships we would be providing minimal services.

We have a special relationship with DR and that is a reason for us to consider this proposal.

FIC has a vested interest in that we are hoping to have a space in the building and them paying a higher fee would necessitate more fundraising.

We have consensed on the schedule Laird suggested.

TASK: Tony and Laird will compose a new agreement between FIC and DR.

The Future of Video

At our last board meeting we recognized the value of both videos for sale and videos for on-line.

We sent a note to the video folks we know for advice on how to take advantage of the media.

The biggest barrier is getting someone knowledgeable about video to manage our efforts.

Ben Zolno and Derrick are suggested by Mandy.

We don't have money to pay a video manager.

Currently communities can post videos with their listings.

We are not searching for appropriate videos to link to or in any way making an effort to compile references to relevant videos.

We could make \$\$ by having a graduated fee structure for escalating levels of information.

The letter we sent asking general questions got little response.

We might get better response if we sent out a note with a more narrow focus.

FIC commercial, or commercial promoting ics

DVD and other videos for downloadable sales or hard copy sales

UTube, etc.

film festivals – sponsor, host, submit videos

FIC as curator

sponsor a video contest with fees for recognition

review and refer to videos

video blog

We would need someone to manage this project without knowing how much effort it would take or where the compensation would come from.

Sending an enews soliciting someone to manage a video contest could be problematic in that we would have to vet the responders.

Mandy is willing to write up our ideas for us to use and will send it to the board before we send it out to a select list to solicit volunteers.

The most viable ideas are: running a contest for an ic “commercial”, and linking to and reviewing videos that are already available.

Its possible Chris would have leads on people who would be active in this area.

Tony replacement on ERB

The current ERB is Tony, Debra Altus, and Marty.

Most of the work is generated by Chris and cmag.

The work is sporadic and not heavy, but generally calls for quick response.

The skill set mostly involves familiarity with FIC culture and an ability to discern what would be appropriate public presentation.

Potential candidates: Harvey, Valerie (TO), Betty Ditscot, tree, Jillian, Kim, Molly, Parke.

Board Issues from the Reports not Already on the Agenda

Giving the Kozeny award in the year to its date.

Oz, who is on the awards committee, objected to giving the 2013 award to Caroline in 2012.

We feel like we can do it if we want and in the circumstances of Caroline's age and the convenience of her being at the AofC, it seemed appropriate.

We'd prefer not to do it that way, but circumstances could indicate a better time to do it.

We like to do it in a public venue and a small event could be planned to do the presentation in the year of granting the award.

We don't want to consider the presentation to Caroline as a precedent.

New and more shelves for Bookshelf

Contact for enews needed

Need for houseparty hosts

Community liaison host for Arizona meeting

What to Do about Cmag

Cmag is losing money.

Possible courses of action:

Ad-free

No print – just on-line articles

Ramp up ad sales

Sponsorship section for communities or other value based sponsored

Better Graphics

Raise sub rates

More subscribers

Become membership perk as newsletter

Last year we sold 11k in ads. If we eliminate the ads the revenue change would have been a loss of about 5k. Could that be made up by getting sponsors? By raising sub rates? By getting more subs?

On the other sides, the ads carry value

Lincoln will talk to a neighbor who made the transition to on-line for his publication.

On-line would save printing, fulfillment, renewal, some office costs. We could reduce our expenses to about 25k from 62k. It could require an entirely different staff.

On-line can be paid or unpaid subscribers. An unpaid subscription would involve cutting our costs enough to be comfortable giving it away. Maybe we could get costs, and loss, down to 5k.

We think that it would be difficult to get subscribers for an on-line magazine.

We could offer a hard copy sub or an on-line sub at a different rate. We expect that some current subscribers would opt for on-line and there would be more labor needed to get it on-line.

Reviewing our history of ad sellers, we don't think we've had much dynamism. We have a current resume that looks like a more dynamic presence and maybe we should give it a shot as one aspect of bringing the mag more into balance.

Sponsor/Donors could happen independently of what we do with ads. The return here would be difficult to project. Would there be conflict for communities that were members in terms of where they put their money?

Article titles, sub heads, photo options, some layout is not appealing. The current design doesn't grab attention, particularly for younger audiences.

If we spent more, could we generate more \$\$ because it would be higher quality.

We haven't raised sub rates for 5 years. Raising it by \$4 would bring in about another 5k if we kept all the subscribers.

Could we change our editorial focus to expand our potential audience?

We could cut costs by cutting the size of the mag, but that might negatively affect our sub count.

We could compare the look of the mag to other mags that are being successful.

It seems like its inevitable that we will end cmag as a print publication.

We can't sustain the current rate of loss.

Some more radical action is needed, i.e., go on-line immediately; cut pages, new ad manager, raise sub price.