

VANCOUVER COMMUNITY NETWORK

Minutes of Vancouver Community Network Board of Directors

First, thank you to Richard for organizing this, and to the school on Bowen Island for hosting it. It was a relaxing yet stimulating setting for a planning meeting, and we even got a chance to throw a frisbee around during lunch. Try that at 411 Dunsmuir, or at our offices where we've met before....

Agenda: Richard asked that we discuss possible cooperation with 1st nations.

Financial Issues:

Chantal led a discussion about VCN's finances, which are still in very good shape, despite the fact that the funding for the CAP-YI program still hadn't been received. Most interns finished the hours they were entitled to work, but there were additional hours in the original budget, especially for the mobile team. This led to a discussion about the mobile team v. CAP site interns, especially at several community based schools which are seeking interns (not to work directly with students, however, which would raise union concerns).

Chantal described the basis and current status of restricted funds. We now had \$150,000, divided between contingency funds (\$50,000), help desk replacement (\$25,000), strategic initiatives (\$25,000), and internet services (\$50,000). Funds formerly restricted for the world peace forum and content development had already been unrestricted and used.

In addition, we had approximately \$63,000 in unrestricted funds, and a CAP-YI balance of \$165,000, making a total of about \$375,000 including the restricted amounts. We ain't gonna go broke very soon.

Wireless Hot Spot Project:

Steven reviewed the current situation. There are five hot spots to date, all tightly controlled so that only the staff/members of the hosting organization can use them. None have been branded for general log-in by VCN members, as was discussed last year. Some organizations are taking advantage of the program, such as one large non-profit which asked VCN to buy it a wireless modem, although it probably has a larger

budget than ours.

PLAN: This led to a discussion of the desirability of surveying the current inventory of 100+ CAP sites, to see how many might be willing to set up truly open, public hot spots.

LUNCH AND PHYSICAL FITNESS (with Chantal demonstrating her extreme frisbee league skills and the rest of us feeling humbled...)

Wireless Mesh Networking:

Richard, Scott, and others discussed the current status of projects in Massachusetts and elsewhere, and the Board decided to investigate a possible pilot project at a Vancouver housing co-op to see whether mesh could be used to reduce members cost of accessing the internet.

PLAN: Scott will contact one or more co-ops to pursue this.

Refurbished Computer Project:

This was discussed in part because of a large number of older machines the school was willing to donate to VCN. We talked about the large time investment in upgrading and otherwise preparing such computers for use. VCN's network specialist, Leila, has been doing this to date. It's not clear how practical it would be to continue to recycle computers if she weren't available.

VCN works with other agencies. We give them the refurbished computers, without any software or even an operating system, and they distribute them to qualified users, such as low income families. If requested, VCN will provide a Ubuntu linux CD so the recipient can install linux, but there's no support for doing so, and most recipients probably don't ever look at it.

PLAN: This led to a spirited discussion about whether linux is now perhaps ready for prime time. Richard showed us a linux setup on his laptop, and said that setting it up was easier than installing windows xp. (My son, who's used linux for years, has said the same thing - it's no longer a matter of using strange console commands and manually searching for the right drivers for basic hardware.) Scott also showed up a very cool linux interface on his laptop. Inspired by these examples, and by the need to provide new users with some usable software that wouldn't violate Microsoft's licences, we decided to make this a

feature at the AGM, and perhaps to have computers set up running linux (using the Ubuntu bootable CDs, so that it needn't be installed on each one) for people to try out or at least look at.

We also decided to connect with the Vancouver Linux Users Group (see their web site at www.vanlug.bc.ca) which is the largest and most active one in Canada, for possible cooperation in training new users, including ourselves, etc. (I have joined the vanlug email list, and am very impressed by the willingness of its members to assist each other, including very new users who ask very basic questions. This would be an excellent resource for anyone receiving a VCN refurbished computer running linux.)

PLAN: Pedro will contact the VanLUG to see whether they would help provide training for new linux users, starting with interested members of the Board.

First Nations:

There is a first nations technical council which seeks to improve access to the internet for first nations communities in BC. 118 now have no broadband access, an issue on which the province is working.

CAP Planning:

Steven reported that there are now only about 105 sites remaining of the 300 plus which have been funded since the programs began. We should look at helping to organize a local network of sites to encourage them to continue offering access to the public after the CAP goes (if it does). This led to discussion about whether VCN was able (and appropriate) to buy ADSL lines in bulk for such sites, which we could resell to them at affordable prices in return for open public wireless access, for example. (It was noted that using regular ADSL lines for open access may violate some providers' terms of service, an issue that could deter CAP operators from agreeing to host a hot spot.)

VCN's General Status:

Steven noted that VCN is in a "funny phase" where we have no ongoing projects due to the suspension of CAP and CAP-YI while we're waiting for resumption of funding. Things will pick up again in February or March, however.

He also noted that we're losing users due to excessive spam, a problem that is faced by all providers.

There are possible new funding opportunities. One that was mentioned was adult literacy training - this was before the government announced the cancellation of some of the federally funded literacy programs, however.

Internationally, urban wireless continues to develop in different ways in different places, and it will be a challenge to ensure that VCN is "on the deck" when the city decides which model to adopt here.

Next Meetings:

We decided to hold the next Board meeting on Thursday, October 19th, and to schedule the AGM on Thursday, November 30th, probably on the 3rd floor at 411 Dunsmuir as in most past years.