

## EMAIL FEEDBACK FROM April 19, 2011 VVC GENERAL MEETING PARTICIPANTS REGARDING ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

### Question 1. Registering the name.

The Interim Council has been asked to consider changing the name of Victoria Vipassana Community to Victoria Insight Meditation Society to distinguish us from the Goenka Vipassana group.

**Question: Should we keep our name the same, or should we change it?**

### **Results from 17 People**

Stay as VVC	Neutral	Change to VIMS
3	2	12

### **Comments on Staying as VVC**

- Suggest "Thervadan Buddhist Tradition" be included in the description on the website to distinguish the group from groups primarily in the Mahayana Tradition - eg. Zen and Tibetan
- I personally prefer the name Victoria Insight Meditation Society but as the following name-The Buddhist Insight Meditation Centre of Victoria-already exists, I think it would be confusing, so the name should stay the same.( It may also save money in cheques,pamphlets etc
- The Goenka group are called Vancouver Island Vipassana Center, located through a center and not in the community. My vote is to keep the name the same - for three reasons: 1)Vipassana is shared everywhere between the Goenka folk and the rest of the Theravadins in North America anyway. 2)I like the word Community - rather than center (which Victoria doesn't have) or society. My black sheep preference !! 3)To avoid confusion with the above 'Insight Meditation' folk.

### **Excerpts from Comments on Changing Name to VIMS**

- it shows that we are in a similar vein to all of the other Insight Meditation Society groups.
- worth changing the name, in order to align ourselves with other similar groups (Bellingham Insight Meditation Society, etc.) as well as to distinguish ourselves from the Goenka group.
- It makes some sense to change it to reduce confusion with the Goenka group and to make clearer the connection with the groups in the US.
- VVC always looks like W C, ..... (water closet). Also, the Pali language can throw off newcomers.
- I agree that the VVC name is misleading.
- people unfamiliar with this form of meditation may not know what vipassana means.
- it is more explicit about what we teach and participate in.
- weak preference for Victoria Insight Society

### Excerpts from Comments on Changing Name to VIMS continued.

- It's not a huge deal to me either way. I'm rather fond of the word *community* but consistency of the name with the Insight Meditation Society in Barre and the BC Insight Meditation Society is probably a more useful consideration.
- I don't have a strong opinion one way or the other. Keeping the name has its benefits as that's what we have been known as. When you apply to register the name, you may find out that you will have to change it in some way.
- I like the idea of being an Insight Meditation Society as that aligns us with the larger community in Canada and the USA that practice in our tradition. When we incorporate, the term "society" will be more meaningful.  
Also, I see that we are advertising in the local newspaper under "Insight Meditation" and that may be one of the factors that has brought in a steady growth for Sunday night sittings.  
I would prefer placing Victoria after IMS as I do not like the acronym VIMS. I think IMSV is better. Or we could think bigger and be "Island" instead of Victoria.  
I am also comfortable with staying with VVC if that is the wish of the majority.

### Question 2. Defining membership and how Officers of the Society (Board) are chosen.

#### **Model 1:**

A number of vipassana groups in the Pacific North-West started by defining their membership as the first people who applied for incorporation. These people choose the first Board of Directors.

In subsequent years, nominations for Board members are solicited, or individuals are invited to be on the Board based on their dharma experience and area of expertise. The first members and the current Board elect the next Board.

In this model, control rests with a small group of trusted individuals which could include the guiding teacher. This group makes decisions in keeping with the mission of the organization. Feedback from the sangha shapes and influences the decisions made by the Board.

#### **Model 2:**

In some service clubs and churches, membership is defined by anyone who wishes to make a formal commitment to the organization. This typically involves making a financial commitment and being willing to donate time and effort to the organization. Members have privileges, such as voting at the Annual General Meeting.

The Board would be nominated and elected by members at an Annual General Meeting. Members would approve an annual budget. Control of the organization is held by all those who are members using democratic procedures such as Robert's Rules of Order.

**Question: What model do you recommend? If you favour Model 2, what would you expect a member to contribute, and what privileges would a member receive?**

#### **Results from 17 People**

Model 1

Model 2

Neither/Don't Know/No Recommendation

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9

5

3

## Comments on Model 1

- In this case, I feel most comfortable with the first model suggested. It might, however, also be useful to include a liaison position on the Board that would be filled by a sangha participant who is not an original member. As well as bringing feedback from the larger group, the position would allow for a degree of broader representation from people who want to be involved but are not original members.
- I favor model 1 especially with additional input from the guiding teacher. Hopefully this will ensure a collective of board members who have commitment, appropriate skills and wisdom.
- I favor model #1 by leaps and bounds. I think it is the more efficient way to make decisions. It also bypasses that tricky problem of how to define membership. If we cannot trust a board of meditators to make wise decisions for the sangha, then the world is a very scary place.
- VVC is a community of small communities - like house sats and individuals who come to various programmes. Very few people touch into every VVC programme. It is very easy for someone to champion one aspect of VVC without taking into consideration other aspects of VVC. So when someone says, "I'm a member of VVC" - that may mean very different things - which makes it very challenging to find a shared framework with which to make decisions. A democratic model of voting 51% with a large group of disparate thinkers are conditions for divisiveness.
- Having belonged to several organizations I strongly advise the adoption of Model 1. It's far too easy for Model 2 to go sideways.  
A couple of technical points:
  - (1.) It might be wise to have a plan for maintaining the size of the core membership to allow for attrition.
  - (2.) To minimize burnout, avoid falling into a rut, and cross train, it might be wise to gradually shuffle members through the official roles, skills permitting.
- Hmm. I'd like us to stay away from Roberts Rules as a voting or deciding body. So that exclude #2. As we are volunteer based and become of our guiding principles, I'd like to keep things simple, based on trust. Model #1 is more closely related to what I would like to see. I would like more discussion on just what that would look like and possibly some simple guidelines or principals for this approach.
- I prefer a version of Model 1, with members of a board solicited, and further individuals invited to serve based on their willingness, experience and area of expertise. I don't see a benefit in Model 2.

## Comments on Model 2

- it does not imply a hierarchy in the same way that model 1 does.
  - 1. A token membership fee. e.g. Ten or twenty dollars annually.
  - 2. Reduced rates for Society events. i.e. non-members pay a little more. The right to be consulted and vote on significant matters affecting the well-being of the society.
- Model 2 is a more democratic way of doing business and I think it can help to prevent stagnation, resistance to change etc that can occur more easily with a small core of directors.  
I think a membership fee is a good idea - enough to cover the basic costs of operating. I think members would expect to have (they

already do) a newsletter, website and insurance coverage at any events and these items should be covered by membership fees. Not having any idea of the numbers that would become members it is very difficult to establish a fee but an initial annual membership of say \$10.00 might be reasonable. Of course, there should also be no one excluded from membership if they have difficulty paying.

The question does arise as to how to run local retreats etc - if they would be open to members only or members first.... This could be dealt with once the decision is made on how the group will run.

- prefer model 2 which i believe is more flexible and will more smoothly accommodate the future needs of our community in an inclusive way and unforeseen realities. a member would be expected to be sponsored by one or two existing members, participate to activities (does this need to be codified?), and would elect the boards. i do not see privilege besides having priority in registration to events which is fair if membership rests only on commitment to participate.
- I would prefer that council be elected , but can see that model 1 would be easier. I will bow to feedback from members and input from discussion on this one.
- Suggest election of Council members at AGM. Consider fixed terms (e.g. 2 years) and stagger the slate so that only two positions become vacant each year. Unscheduled retirement of a Council member could be filled to finish the term by an appointment by the Council. Member is a person who has paid dues for the current year. Such a member is entitled to vote at the AGM. However, business at the AGM requiring a vote should be passed by *a simple majority of those qualified members present* unless the item to be voted upon concerns an unbudgeted financial outlay in which case a larger percentage of the vote is required to pass the motion (eg. 65%, or 75% -whatever figure is agreed upon and stated in the bylaws.)  
expect a member to contribute, and what privileges would a member receive:
  - Voting privileges
  - Commitment to regular meditation practice
  - Be willing to serve from time to time when Council calls for volunteer assistance

## Other Comments

- Looking only at those 2 models feels like needless constraint. Good to have some idea of how others operate, but let's think about how we want to operate. Suggest additional research for other models. But more importantly, use that info to identify the key decision points all groups face and design our own response. Above all, making sure it's in keeping with our mission and Buddhist principles.
- I don't have a recommendation. I am okay with and understand both. I think one of the disadvantages of Model 2 is the administrative effort that needs to go into formally defining who is a member – keeping membership lists etc. In terms of contribution, I'd like a one-time membership fee, (something nominal) and then opportunities for financial contribution, but not obligatory. There could be some provision for weeding out the list though. I don't know that the member would receive anything more than a member of the public, other than voting rights.
- I don't have much experience with organizational models. I would like to know what other groups found were the pros and cons of working with each of these models?

### 3. Terms for council positions.

#### Question. What do you recommend for lengths of terms for Council positions?

#### Results from 17 People

1 year	1-2 years	2 years	2-3 years	3 years	4 - 5 years	No preference
1	2	5	4	3	1	1

#### Comments

- Consider fixed terms (e.g. 2 years) and stagger the slate so that only two positions become vacant each year. Unscheduled retirement of a Council member could be filled to finish the term by an appointment by the Council.
- The first year, get your feet wet, learn the ropes and develop good working relationships. The second, able to make a stronger contribution. Then opportunity for one (or more?) re-elections. Some upper limit might be a good idea, so we don't come to rely on the same people over and over and drain them dry. Give other people a chance to serve.
- One year until the next AGM. But re-election is okay if the person is willing to serve a second term. And in some organizations there is a Vice-Chair who automatically succeeds the Chair who then becomes the Past Chair ~ to use the VVS's current language ~ thus constituting a three year term if the individual is willing. And the Past Chair usually heads up the Nominating committee for the incoming board. This ensures continuity.
- Staggered terms. The first group needs a good run to keep up the momentum. So maybe some have 2 year terms and some have 3 year terms and then have 2 year terms for everyone. Some groups set it up so that the VP comes in for one year with the idea that s/he will become the President at the end of the President's term. Most people want to know their "end date" and the general sangha will want to know when they can influence the choice of the next leaders.
- More important to me than length of term, is to have a stable, well functioning council. That would mean that no more than 2 positions would change people in a given year. Based on that, there would then be a 3 year cycle. For example: year 1- secretary and retreat operations; year 2- treasurer and communications; year 3- chair. If a person wants to stay in a position for another term then the other council members would vote on that. However, there needs to be enough new people coming into positions to keep energy and ideas fresh and for the council not to be perceived as "an old boys" in crowd.
- The council should be elected on a rotating basis, maybe 2 positions at a time for periods of 2 or 3 years. I think it might also be a good idea to restrict the number of terms any individual can stay in any particular position to 2 terms unless there is no one else who is prepared to fill the position.

### Comments on Length of Council Terms cont.

- is the council a higher governance body than the board? in any event, i would expect board and council members to have 4-5 year terms and make sure that one body is re-elected when the other body is half way through their terms to maintain continuity.
- I would think 1 or 2 years -- enough that people could get their teeth into the job, but not so long that it scares people away from considering taking on the positions.
- 2 years should work well for an organization this size. Ideally, have the terms staggered so that only half of them are up for replacement in any single year.
- Some 2 years (treasurer, retreats) and some 3 years (chair, secretary, communications) so that we don't all change at once
- One year is not long enough; with a three year term the council would have a chance in the first year, to see where the pitfalls and areas that need improvement are. Then they would have the opportunity to implement those changes in the second year, ironing out any small wrinkles and then see it all come to fruition in the third year. During the third and final year, the council can make recommendations for the incoming council if there are still any glitches or areas that need improvement.
- As long as an individual council member wants is my preference, and the group as a whole is working well together. If not and someone still wants to stay than maybe some simple council guidelines to deal with such a situation. There was no discussion about a larger council. Or did I miss that? There had been some talk in the early days of council about eventually bringing CM to 7 or 8. Any thoughts on that?
- I suggest 3 years, but with flexibility to be requested to extend the term. Might that be too long a commitment for some people ? If so, 2 years . . I assume we want to ensure a healthy turnover, with no one person having disproportionate influence, while maintaining sufficiently long-term involvement to retain stability and familiarity with the workings of the activities of the community.
- I would suggest a three year term that can be served consecutively for a maximum of six years. After that, the person would be required to leave the Board for a year but may return after that. This model, as I've experienced it, provides a good mix of stability and board rejuvenation and growth.
- I'd say a term of one year, and have the membership staggered. That would mean that every year one half the positions would come up for renewal. For the first year half the positions could be for 2 year terms. In some organizations this is a good idea for continuity, but I'm not sure it's necessary.