

**VITAL AGING NETWORK (VAN)
NOTES, FEB 14, 2001 MONTHLY MEETING**

10 to noon, 3B DHS Building, St. Paul

Present

The mailing list is being e-mailed to all who have participated in the monthly meetings to date. Everyone on the list was present except for Diane Shuck, Ted Gredvig, Greg Owen, Jim Gambone, Jon Groth, Jean Wood, and Robert Gaylord. Hal Freshley convened, Darlene Schroeder facilitated, and Jan Hively and Nan Just took notes for the meeting.

Introduction to the Network

Darlene reviewed the Organizing Statement for VAN, which describes what the group has previously agreed upon. VAN provides a forum for individuals and organizations, who may have different priorities, to share information, build partnerships, and work collaboratively. Their common purpose, expressed through VAN, is to promote self-sufficiency, community participation and quality of life for and with seniors through education, advocacy and leadership development.

VAN is an informal network that meets monthly on the second Tuesday, from 10 to noon, at DHS. The first floor cafeteria in DHS is open for those who want to have lunch together after the meeting. Hal said that he would move the March meeting to a first floor location in DHS in order to have more room.

Darlene said that Jim Gambone, the author of "ReFirement", had briefly described his intergenerational dialogue process at the February VAN meeting, and had been asked by the group to talk further about the process. A substantial portion of the March agenda will therefore focus on Intergenerational Dialogues. The meeting will also include a VAN update and discussion about next steps in relation to VAN's direction and focus. Every month, participants are invited to bring flyers or other updates about relevant activities.

VAN Website

Overview of handouts. Jan Hively reviewed materials that had been sent with the agenda:

- VAN Organizing Statement. The statement describes three functional strategies for the network: 1) supporting public policy initiatives that advance the core values and goals; 2) providing education to increase awareness about current issues relevant to the core values; and 3) developing and maintaining a website. Jan has developed a workplan to accomplish #3.

- Workplan for VAN Website Development. Jan has received approval from the College of Continuing Education at the U of M to spend time and tap staff expertise to develop a VAN website that could be up and running by July 1. It would be understood that the policies and oversight for the website would come through the VAN network. Although Jan is leaving the U in July, it is possible that part of the U's 2001-2002 budget for the Vital Aging Initiative could be used to support ongoing management of the website. The U would make this contribution, as one partner in the Vital Aging Network, in order to use the website as an organizing tool to collect and post information about relevant education programs.
- Layout for the VAN Website. Jan reviewed a first draft layout for a 50-page website with hot buttons that would link users to: a) information about VAN (partners & priorities); b) an individualized process to guide use of the website; c) an inventory of resources relevant to employment, community participation, self-sufficiency, and personal enrichment and recreation; and d) an information exchange.
- Infrastructure for the VAN Website. Jan reviewed the draft of a second chart that suggests a process for developing and updating the website. The chart shows four categories of participants: 1) the individuals and organizations in the VAN network, who would provide oversight, provide updated information, and help promote use of the site through their community connectors around the state; 2) information providers, usually representatives from public or non-profit organizations, who would contribute information on their specific area of expertise (employment, community service, etc.); 3) senior resource volunteers, who would collect updates from the information providers once a month, and relay it to the website manager at the U; and 4) users.

Preliminary comments/questions. Darlene asked for comments/questions:

- * What would keep the U from taking control of the whole effort?
- * Some kind of contract would be needed. The question then would be: How can an informal network -- a non-entity -- take responsibility for this kind of effort?
- * One of the options for a VAN network would be to pay for ongoing development and management through an association with an affiliate who would advertise some pertinent products.
- * "Advocacy" is missing from the chart. It should have it's own box.
- * What adds value to a website? What would keep users coming back?
- * The website should include an updated calendar of related events.
- * The advocacy outreach should be interactive. People should be able to describe barriers to vital aging and understand that "Someone will get back to you."
- * There should be discussion groups, perhaps with some "real time" discussion about moderated topics.

Comments from Buzz Groups. Darlene suggested that those present should divide into buzz groups to talk about whether there is energy behind the focus on vital aging, and how that energy might be brought to a website.

- * What's going to keep users coming back? Items should be flagged with a "What's New?" label that has a date on it. There should be something special at the website in addition to links to other websites. There should be some documents that they could download from the site.
- * What is unique about our relatively new perspectives about "vital aging" that will run across the subject matter categories of the website?
- * Who are the consumers? Would the website serve:
 - a) individuals looking for opportunities/activities associated with vital aging?
 - b) advocates looking for ways to strengthen community support for vital aging? or
 - c) representatives from agencies and organizations looking for what's new in thinking and programming relevant to aging?
- * The website could provide checklists for users to fill out and see what comes back -- such as "Does your community provide these supports for vital aging?"
- * New pieces should keep coming into the website. Community agencies could download a new checklist to use in meetings, etc.
- * We should integrate concepts pertinent to vital aging throughout the website. People need to see what is different about vital aging.
- * We don't need to waste time and effort linking people to information that doesn't provide an appropriate perspective, or information that is already available through other accessible routes, such as the Senior Linkage line.
- * Is "vital aging" what will bring people to the site?
- * It would be useful to match potential volunteers or advocates or employees to opportunities that match up with their interests and skills.
- * Is it bad if folks don't revisit the site, and just tell others about it so that they can find the links that are right for them? Why can't we just provide the link or information that is needed and leave it at that?
- * What about the arts? Are they in personal enrichment? What about serving people who speak different languages?
- * We need to be careful to focus only on messages that reflect the core values and combat ageism. We should not lose that through the urge to be comprehensive.
- * We want to show a new look at what aging can look like and can be. What is distinctively and uniquely "vital aging?"
- * This should be distinctively for Minnesotans.
- * But the philosophy or perspective is equally valid worldwide.
- * This website should be unique to Minnesota -- for organizations and agencies, employers and volunteer coordinators and elected officials, as well as older adults.
- * We are focusing on older people as a resource.
- * What is the mission? What problem are we solving?
- * We should focus on the principles of the network. The website is a tool to accomplish the purpose of the network.
- * We are shaping a new societal vision of what it means to grow old.

- * The website should be constantly refreshed with new content.
- * People should be able to connect with mentors for intergenerational learning.
- * Will users be able to find what they want on the site by using keywords?
- * Who are the primary partners for the Vital Aging Network? What is their role?
- * Is vital aging the right title?
- * It carries a lot of energy and captures people's imaginations. It will be important to have something that search engines will pick up appropriately.
- * Users should be invited to some pertinent questions when they first enter the website. "Do you have the feeling of being set aside?" Are you interested in exploring new things?" etc.
- * The website would be a resource for people who themselves are looking for opportunities, and/or people who are advocates for vital aging.

Next Steps

March 2. Meeting on Focus/Purpose of VAN, Friday, March 2, 10 to noon, first floor, DHS building. Those who attend this meeting will discuss the mission/focus of VAN and how that should guide the development of a website. They will report the results of their discussion at the next monthly meeting on March 13.

February 19. Meeting to discuss Specifics about Developing a Website, Monday, February 19, 2:30 to 4:00, Coffee shop, 475 Fairview (corner of Fairview and Randolph). Linda Camp will share her expertise and discuss options with Jan and Eileen Collard and whoever else is present.

March 13. Monthly meeting, 10 to noon, on Tuesday, March 13, first floor, DHS Building. Cafeteria will be available for those staying for lunch. Jane Cunningham, coordinator of the Learning in Retirement Network at the MN Humanities Commission, (volunteered by Mark Gleeson) will facilitate the monthly meeting.

