

2002 Visioning Retreat

Facilitated by Scott Sardy, Pat Ennis, and Fred Winter

Logistics by Toby Laverty

Retreat Objective: The purpose of the retreat was to provide the opportunity for Community members and the members of the Council to engage in deep discussion of the issue of growth of the Billy community.

Methodology: Initially, the group was asked broken into small groups to discuss the concept of “exploring growth”. In these discussions, groups defined growth, listed the positive and negative functions of growth, identified key issues, and listed the top five issues to be addressed. After each small group reported back to the larger group, participants voted on the top 5 issues to be addressed during the remainder of the retreat. A team of participants then analyzed the data (on flipcharts with stickers noting “votes”) and identified the top three issues to be addressed. These were: (I) Maintaining Heart-centeredness and Intimacy; (II) Manageability and Feasibility: Logistics, Physical Plant, Etc.; and (III) Clarity of Intentions, Core Values, and Identity. These minutes were taken verbatim from the flipcharts used during the retreat. The focus is upon the top three issues identified as priority. They are preceded by definitions of “growth” and the issues identified.

Definitions of Growth/Related Issues

Types of Growth

- Numerical
- Depth of experience
- Organizational (structure)
- Breadth
- Outreach/bridges to other communities
- Common Issues (HIV, Aging, Etc.)
- Outreach to diverse queers

Numbers—ways to accommodate growth

- Number of gatherings—6 max per year?
- Add potlucks to official roster of events to accommodate growth
- Different kinds of events—gatherings, parties, retreats, festivals
- How do we present gatherings? How to guide self selection

Clarity of intention: Party vs. gathering, what makes a Billy community unique? What is important?

Problems with Numbers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need Billy Club but large numbers dilute experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to accommodate growing numbers of people who want to /need to experience this (spiritual/heart experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the present lottery system adequate? Should we re-evaluate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do larger numbers minimize open-heartedness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of simultaneous events at any given gathering, number of participants at events
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Things that limit numbers

Physical —(1) Number of beds, sites, sanitation facilities, esp for campers; (2) Kitchen through put capacity	Quality —depth of Billy Experience (maintaining depth focuses upon commonalities of attendees)
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Characteristics of Depth:

- Heart Space
- Get to know fellow gatherers through structure/rituals (esp. new attendees)
- Involvement of “elders” who work “everywhere”
- Rural connection and vice versa

Detractors from Depth:

- Superficiality
- Volunteer overload (coordinators, attendees)
- High Numbers of attendees
- Irresponsibility (clean up)
- Sexual Frustration
- Length/size of heart circles
- Cliques (or old friends?)

Positive Aspects of Numerical growth:

- Makes Billy experience available to more people, especially men who need it.
- New friends/blood/ideas/meat
- A potential benefit of future growth: spin-off groups in other places

I. Maintaining Heart Centeredness and Intimacy

Suggestion	Purpose	Challenge	Resources Needed
Variety of structured exercises (building through gathering)- Sufi dances as one step in process or culmination. Sp-an opening evening and evening #2 instead of having a “free evening”	Foster intimacy or create communal bond. Orient new Billies to heart space; “modeling”	Individual’s physical needs; People arriving at different times Resistance	Talented facilitators
Restructuring standard order of nature of events; i.e., talent show in afternoon	Deepen heart-centeredness and intimacy; increase spontaneity; “shake it up”	Habit, attachment	Prep by event coordinators; warning of changes and reasons
Tea parties, salons; small emotional support/heart circles (eg., Murphy Group, MayDay '01) small groups, Buddy system	Provide emotional support in a different/structured setting	Is it needed? Does it work?	Facilitator
Encourage playfulness	Bonding and pleasure; fosters heart-centeredness, esp for those uncomfortable with more structured activities	Can get tough, can be hurtful, on call: “no sharp tongue”	Pool, toys, STUFF, free time in schedule, coaches
Keep purpose in mind when devising major events, eg, may pole, talent show, KISS	Foster heart-centeredness, avoiding events where production overtakes meaning, events become too complex	Tradition, laziness, require monitoring and intervention	Imagination, willingness to take risks
Mix kinds of gatherings: specific theme/focus vs. generic mix of usual elements	Appeal to various sub groups		

II. Manageability and Feasibility: Logistics, Physical Plant, Etc.

Manageability means: gatherings, outreach (service to rural communities at large utilizing the financial soundness of the Billy Foundation), administration

Outreach/Bridges

Assumptions:

- Increased outreach capacity/Billy Club is taking on increased visibility in community through programs that it supports
- Partnering with other service organizations
- More entities will seek out the Billy Club
- More volunteers are needed for recruitment, staff for programs, grant writers
- More demands on staff, office, Finances (computers, supplies, equipment, phones, utilities)
- Conservative community “Lashback”
- BC may become “de facto” community center in Ukiah area

Gatherings

Growth Assumptions:

- Increase number in populations
- There has been an increase in attendees
- Increase strain on gathering management process
 - Finding volunteers to do the work, coordinators, BC Staff has to work harder, food service, heart circles, workshops, talent shows, rituals, “sweet points”, attendee selection access, strain on scholarships, cost of putting on a gathering, need for emotional support/medical attention, site locations, quality of intimacy/experience

Issue	Possible response
Assume existing sites	Larger venue
“magic number”	Length of gathering, adequate volunteers, cooking arrangements
Qualitative measure	What generates the Billy experience?

<i>How to manage based on those parameters/constraints</i>	<p>1. Restrict number of attendees, with the process of restriction being clearly communicated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the methodology? When does check need to be there? Will a post mark count? Can you fax? Email? Only snail mail? • There needs to be flexibility within “reason”. Again look at priority based on past involvement, seniority (Old vs. New Billy) 	<p>2. Waiting List</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is this done? • Have more than one person involved in the process • Allow people to volunteer to stay out of gathering—check priority form that says you’ll opt out if there is a lottery • Link applications • Serve Rural communities in original service area • Maintain quality through integration of urban and rural cultures 	<p>3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parallel gatherings, encourage other groups to organize in other settings, have more gatherings, have larger gatherings, • Conduct a poll/research into people’s desires around this issue • Discourage attendance – go to rustic sites, plan it for bad weekends, Hyatt Vacaville
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Magic number gathering size constraints parallel gatherings serve all people supply plan more than one venue
Exclude based on: priorities, seniority, zip code, volunteering, random lottery, last year’s coordinators, past involvement, area code, first come-first serve

Natural Growth vs. Artificial Growth

1. Seed another organization that holds gatherings, refer to other organizations that have gatherings

III. Clarity of Intentions, Core Values, & Identity

Core Values—What are they?

•Heart-centeredness	•Caring for each other	•Honesty	•Openness	•Intimacy	•Value everyone's opinion
•Equal respect for self & others	•increased personal expression	•safety (HIV)	•health of our community	•Fun	•providing forum
•celebration	•spirituality	•individual & group responsibility	•diversity	•inclusiveness (body image, acceptance of unconventionality)	•Exclusivity: we are not for everyone

Intentions:

- The Billy Club will continue
- Promote why we come to gatherings (at beginning of gatherings, have old timers stand up and state why they came, how they came to be Billies, revisit new Billy info packet and send it out to all Billys too)
- Create a safe, nonjudgemental, healing space
- Patience to accept what is and who is, spaciousness
- Clarify how we talk about the Billies to nonmembers—be clear about our values, intentions
- Take responsibility to create our culture
- Recommendation to council: anyone excluded from a gathering by lottery is guaranteed to be admitted to the next lottery gathering they apply to

SUGGESTION:

- Develop a core value statement (for 6 values)
 - To give to new Billies, to guide council while decision-making, include printed material (like gathering calls, Billy Times, etc), to quick decision-making while planning gatherings, workshops, outreach, avoid jargon—write for reader, define out terms!
- We realize that the inculcation of our Billy core values operates in 3 arenas:
 - Within gatherings (taking responsibility for creating our own culture), outreach to new Billies, infrastructure (to use as guidance in making decisions—such as Council, workshops, committees, etc.)
- Outside the box
 - Bring back rural gatherings, consider gatherings (eg state campgrounds—no communal food but heart, talent show, etc.)
 - Promulgate Billy-Like Club in other regions—send seeding Billies to help create space

Ways to Inculcate Identity

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Uncle Stewart”:recitation of the Billy Creation myth• Billy 101—Rhonda’s tea party for new Billies• Spirit-elder project: Mark Weigle, ongoing archive• History project becoming workshops, ritual, talent shows act
• Intentional vs. passive inculcation of culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome New Billies brochure• Sponsorship of New Billies at Gatherings-mentoring• Stating intention more often• Creating our culture: transmitting and defining, new “Uncle Stewart” type of rituals that would be specific to different gatherings• Mid winter gathering: create a history project at the gathering: multimedia |
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Committee Work— What makes a successful committee?

At the retreat, the participants brainstormed “what makes a successful committee?” Here are the responses:

- Commitment
- Participation
- Commitment to brevity
- Follow-through
- Purpose
- Good humor
- THE PRODUCT WILL BE USED!!!
- Careful note taking
- Clarity of Intent and Vision
- Goal—end point in site
- Digestion
- Frequent Communication and Dialogue
- Facilitator?
- Committee decides implementation

Committees Formed

Core Values Committee

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Research and Evaluation Committee

This committee is intended to research and evaluate gatherings.

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Paul Loida 510.839.2462 outwestpaul@aol.com (Update: Unable to participate at this time)
Goat 510.483.5843 rnconrad@juno.com

Seeding Other Organizations Committee

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Gathering Structure and Design Committee

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