**OVERVIEW OF CURRENTLY HEALTHY FF CLUBS**

**AND**

**THOUGHTS ON HOW TO PROCEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE.**

**We first looked at how some of the more successful clubs arranged their governance. We found:**

* Most clubs adhere to a conventional style of leadership board. President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer, who meet regularly, be it monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly.
* Some of these clubs either invite, or allow, the general membership to attend these meetings on a non-voting basis. Generally, these seem to be those clubs which do not have regular general meetings and attendance at the board meeting allowed interested members to be fully informed of business.
* One club which found itself in a very fragile situation, when they were unable to find club officers, totally reorganised themselves into what they call ‘a leadership council’. All positions are shared throughout membership, no-one being required to serve in any position for more than one year. It seems members have risen to the occasion and, because there is no pressure to take on long-term responsibility, will act as required.
* Several other clubs made mention of sharing responsibilities across membership in an effort to lessen loads for individuals. One club even rosters leadership duties.
* It was interesting to note how many of the surveyed clubs have few general meetings, preferring to share information via email, newsletters and their website. These clubs have opted for a much more social program and it seems to be favoured by their membership.
* Those clubs which continue with regular general meetings appear to keep them as social as possible, while also conducting some business.

**Next, we asked about Membership. We found:**

* Most of the more successful clubs had memberships of 70-100+ which seems to be ‘the critical mass’ for operating satisfactorily – hosting appropriate numbers and sending out full journey groups.
* Some clubs with smaller memberships are doing quite well too.
* Word of mouth continues to be the tried and true method of recruiting new members.
* Most clubs have a large contingent of single members (mostly women)
* Average age of western clubs is mostly 60+, but most clubs are making an active effort to encourage younger recruits. Latino and Eastern European clubs are more likely to have young members.
* Several clubs reported good recruitment results from events similar to the Taupo model
* A couple of clubs advertise events through Meetup and local papers with some success
* At least two clubs make mention of personal contact between president and individual members as being vital to retention.
* It’s clear that it is necessary to have an active and responsive membership secretary
* Several clubs issue members with business cards to give to anyone at all with whom they engage in discussion about FF.
* A couple of clubs have active leadership development
* Several clubs make a practice of holding regular afternoon teas for informing enquiring members.
* One club mentioned holding several recruitment events each year, with members inviting friends and acquaintances
* It was also mentioned several times that visitors or enquiring members should ALWAYS receive a follow-up telephone call.

**In answer to the question of Social activities, we heard:**

* All clubs believe that success depends on having a strong social calendar.
* Social activities are an ideal opportunity to bring along friends and recruit new members
* Clubs in larger cities solve the challenge of distance by alternating activities at each side of town.
* Eating out seems to be the most favoured social event, particularly the 5th at 5 program, which sees members meet for a meal at 5pm on the 5th of each month. This spreads dinners over every day of the week throughout the year.
* We heard of one club which went one further and alternated their eating out to alternate between dinner, lunch and breakfast, and now are struggling to find a venue big enough for their numbers.
* One club programs a pre-meeting dinner, catered at the meeting venue, at which there is an open bar. This is a very successful idea which is attractive to visitors and new members. Each diner takes a number and sits at the table designated by that number. This is an enormous aid to getting to know each other quickly and prevents cliques.
* Several clubs mentioned family events, picnics, beach parties and the like, which are attractive to a wide number of people.
* A number of clubs mention that they plan their dinners for ethnic restaurants.
* One club shares activities with a neighbouring club.
* Another club says their president issues personal invitations to newer members to ensure their full participation.
* One club says they have regular coffee mornings
* Sharing the responsibility, across the whole membership, for arranging social events, seems to be optimum.
* Quiz nights, card afternoons, theatre outings all feature as popular events.
* One club mentions an annual weekend away to a destination within a couple of hour’s drive.
* Craft, walking and golf feature too.
* Almost every club spoke of the importance of bonded membership, and activities which actively encourage that.
* Several clubs mentioned that lunchtime events are very worthwhile.
* In fact, a number of clubs hold their meetings in daylight hours (mostly on weekends) while others find an evening timeslot more successful.
* Big cities – or spread out membership bases - caused a couple of clubs to alternate their meeting place.
* Of those clubs which held regular meetings, almost all said there was a shared meal involved.
* Several clubs are well advanced with using social media, their website and local newspapers to advertise their meetings and social occasions.

**Next, we addressed the matter of how clubs managed their hosting**:

* One club introduced a system of co-hosting (not an original idea) whereby each home host has another member (often someone who is not in a position to home host) allocated to them for the duration of the inbound journey. That person is expected to support the host in any way they can, with a minimal effort to be day hosting at least once and inviting the home host and ambassadors for dinner on one night .It also enables the co-host to feel more fully involved and to gain much more from the experience.
* Another club allocates tasks during an inbound journey, rather than asking for volunteers. This ensures that involvement is shared around the entire membership as fairly as possible.
* One club has introduced a system of co-coordinators by pairing an inexperienced member with an experienced journey coordinator. That same club sometimes employs the assistance of a neighbouring club for help with hosting, when necessary.
* It was mentioned, by another club, that they issued an invitation to the general public to attend the farewell dinner.
* A club, in a particularly unique country, said that they plan inbound journeys with attention to the visiting club’s needs. They assign roles to their members and record everything on an Excel file which shows exactly who is doing what throughout the exchange – and each member has a copy of the file so that it is clear to all who is doing what, and when.
* One club stated they have a particular liking for Global exchanges and are about to host their 5th, based on local foods, culture, art, architecture, history etc. They join with neighbouring clubs to ensure a full and varied program. They intend hosting a Japanese English learning journey quite soon and look for opportunities for all kinds of innovation.
* We noted a growing number of clubs utilising public transport – most of them having acquired travel cards which are distributed to ambassadors and collected on departure.
* Similarly, more clubs are moving toward programming totally unstructured days – encouraging ambassadors to plan their own activities where possible.
* It was rewarding to see that one club, which was smaller than others, makes the effort to enlist friends and neighbours to help with hosting.
* In one club, members are required to fill out a sheet at the beginning of each year, indicating which inbound journeys they will host for, co-host for, dinner host for - enabling co-ordinators to see clearly who to approach when beginning their planning. It is hoped that each member will volunteer for each of these roles at least once a year.

**Miscellaneous – and great ideas…**

* To ensure that new members are quickly acquainted and feel part of the membership, a system was devised in one club where each member, arriving for the pre-meeting meal, takes a number from a jar. This denotes at which table that person will dine. Initially there was some resistance, but now the membership sees this as their greatest tool for getting to know each other.
* A US club tells us they have enjoyed a relationship with the US network of US Dept of States International Visitor Leadership program. It makes me wonder if other countries have similar programs – and maybe we all need to start looking for any assistance our governments can offer.
* Of the clubs surveyed, one was part of the pioneer 'Family to Family' reciprocal program this year. It was arranged on a reciprocal basis with elementary schoolchildren attending school in two destinations, having been accompanied by a parent(s) and being hosted in families from the school which the children attended. In this instance the students were taught in French, but other language possibilities exist. Parents were able to arrange their own amusements at times while, at other times, being accompanied by hosts. This concept lends itself to other themes in other countries.
* One club, from a country which experiences a religious/cultural celebration on a weekly basis, ensures that their ambassadors have the opportunity to observe the event. This is a priceless opportunity.
* Another club says its members read the newsletters of other clubs to see what good ideas have been implemented – and can be copied.
* As mentioned in another part of this report, one club varied its ‘eat out ‘program to include lunch and breakfast has been forced to go looking for a venue capable of catering for their large numbers. Something as good as this is a great recruiting tool.
* In one club, new members are, as soon as practicable, assigned club responsibilities, in order to feel included and to learn other aspects of club membership.
* One club points out their strong support of the notion of FF not being a travel club but dedicated to cultural understanding and peace. They have a 'neighbourhood group' assisting a refugee organisation dedicated to assisting an Afghan family settle into their community.
* Another club has a craft group which makes items for sale. Along with a levy of $25pp on our outbound ambassadors, the money derived from sale of craft goes toward paying, gas, parking and entrance fees for hosts. We don’t charge hosts for welcome/farewell parties or journey events. With the increasing costs associated with hosting, this idea has great merit.
* Three clubs indicated willingness to donate to FFI, to support new projects. Some efforts have included holding a social event with moderate charge for attendance – proceeds to FFI – or a silent auction of services, including lawn mowing, a special meal, providing piano accompaniment and horticultural advice.
* Also mentioned in another part of this report is the process of one club not waiting for a journey coordinator to volunteer, but to launch right into the planning process, using tried and true past programs -it’s usually not long before a leader emerges and the journey proceeds.