

Notes from the 2009 Presidents' Workshop in Niagara Falls

Topic numerals, where possible coordinate with the Original Workshop Agenda numbering.

2. **Opening Remarks:** Bob Cole, Chairperson opened the meeting with thanks to the delegates for coming to Niagara to participate in the Presidents' Workshop. Seventeen of the 20 established clubs were represented. Special recognition was given to the representatives of new clubs of Brandon MB and Saskatoon SK.

Bill Harkness, President of the hosting FF Niagara Club, gave a warm welcome to the Presidents, their delegates and guests. Dr. George Brown and Mary Mwambay of FFI were introduced along with Alan Milne of FF Kapiti Coast NZ and Gaylord Becker of FF Lincoln Nebraska.

The Club Presidents and Field Representatives then introduced themselves and their delegates.

Opening Comments by George Brown: George provided highlights of issues and activities with which FFI is currently dealing.

He touched on various types of exchanges including "Stopover Hospitality" that will be covered later in the notes, leadership issues, a new Exchange Policy Manual that will be available in November 2009, and revisions to the fee structure. He also indicated that the economic downturn has hit Friendship Force. As worldwide exchanges this year are down 20% over previous years, it has been a difficult year for FFI economically. A financial survey aimed at informing FFI where Presidents would like to see FFI focus their resources, will be sent to the Presidents by the end of November. George asked that the Presidents respond as quickly as possible. He would like their opinion and not the consensus of their club members.

He indicated that Canada is filling its exchanges and can take a leadership role by leading an "all Canadian" exchange or "Global" exchange.

3. **FF Canada Communications**

a) **Exchange Website for Canadian Members:** The Presidents agreed that a website to report the status of Canadian Exchanges would be a useful tool for their members. Bill Harkness agreed to create the website.

Once created, and following the club confirmation of planned exchanges, each club would provide Bill with a list of confirmed exchanges and the status of each.

The status would include the **exchange director contact** information, **where and when** the exchange will take place, **whether the exchange is full or if applications from other Canadian club are being considered**. Alternately, provide the date when the clubs will be considering applications from outside their club, if the exchange does not become filled from within.

When exchange vacancies do become available, Bill will send out an e-Flyer directly to all club members or to the President depending on what each club decides.

The Club Presidents agreed to ask their membership if personal email addresses could be released to Bill, so that members could directly receive the e-flyer listing the openings.

Alternately the e-flyer can be sent to the President or his/her designate who would be expected to forward it to the local club members.

The cost for the domain name and administration per year is \$200, which will be paid from the \$1 per member fund already collected from Canadian Clubs to support the Presidents' Workshop costs. At the moment Bob Cole, presiding President's Council Chairperson will secure, track and record these funds.

Bill will advise the Club Presidents, when he will be ready to receive exchange information and optional email addresses of members.

b) Individual Club Website: A well-designed Club website was agreed to be a valuable tool for both its members as well as a means of promoting the club to prospective inbound Ambassadors. Resources to create a site are usually available locally. FFI can also help.

4. Exchanges with Fewer than 10 to 12 Ambassadors: It is often more costly per person and more work to host 12 or fewer Ambassadors than it is to host 20 or more. Some clubs set an Ambassador limit but are flexible depending on the circumstances. If the group is small and the cost per Ambassador to run your program is going to increase, it is appropriate to ask for a higher host fee.

If you think that many ambassadors from the inbound club are not going to obtain Canadian visas or are planning to go to the USA on the same exchange and are having difficulty obtaining US visas, contact Mary Mwambay as early as possible to explore other options that can supplement the exchange. George suggested that we adopt the rule “Only the Travelling club should cancel an exchange not the host club.”

b) If you have 20 ambassadors that want to travel but the host club can only accept 16, what discount does the Exchange Director get in his/her FFI fee? Mary indicated that the full \$115 per week discount is often provided. (rather than 80% which would be provided if the travelling club could only find 16 Ambassadors).

c) **Verification of the health of external applicants:** Some applicants are denied the right to travel on an exchange by their own club for health reasons, so they try to hook up with another club’s exchange. They even lie about their medical condition. It was suggested that the ED of the travelling club contact the President of the applicant’s club to see if the applicant is suitable to travel. George said that if this becomes a problem, to yell back to FFI and they will follow up with the applicant’s club.

5. Matching Restrictions:

a) FFI limits exchanges to popular clubs in Europe to one week and will not allow a second week even to an unrestricted club. George commented that this restriction makes it easier to plan. He felt that there are benefits to a one week exchange, easier to plan, ability to round out the vacation with a week of touring or some other activity.

Also keep in touch with FFI to see if there are European cancellations that you can fill.
b) Clubs are restricted from visiting Europe two years in a row. This apparently is not a restriction. However, in the normal matching process, FFI tries to be fair in providing exchanges to high demand areas.

c) The USA 100 clubs but on the application they have only one code. Would it be possible to break up the US into four codes? George thought this was a good suggestion. If you have a particular area of the USA that you want to go to, indicate this in the comments section.

6. a) Host Club Fees: Most clubs thought that the \$100 US per person is sufficient.

Some felt that the fee is insufficient to do their program.

Suggestions were offered that clubs trim their program to stay within the \$100US figure but offer additional activities as options to the base program and obtain approval from the Inbound club of any program options.

Alternately, arrange to do the expensive activities on a free day when each pays for their own. Be sure that your guests know the nature of the activities and the fees associated with each activity. Obtain their approval of the arrangement.

Shopping is a good “no cost” activity.

Communicate early with the Inbound ED if you can offer program options.

Most clubs will agree to pay if they know the attractions that are covered.

Make sure that your club does not operate as a tour operator.

Transportation from the airport is not covered by the host fee. Ambassadors pay for this separately. The host club can help to organize transport for the visiting club.

6 b)Transferring Host Club Fee: Sending the fee directly in the host club’s currency is likely the easiest in many cases.

This can be a bank draft, often referred to as a Money Order or a bank wire.

A caution re transferring funds: Check with your bank for the cost of transferring funds by wire and bank draft. There may be a large cost to the sender to arrange the wire and a cost to the receiver to cash it in the county’s currency.

Some countries, particularly Brazil, have difficulty in sending money out of the country so they bring in cash or withdraw through an ATM once they arrive.

This can become an issue in that the host club may have to confirm venues or other bookings prior to the arrival of the Ambassadors and the expected Hosting Funds.

It is important to communicate to the visiting club that you will be expecting the host fee at least 45 days in advance of the exchange date.

George Brown mentioned that if there were difficulty in paying these expected Funds, FFI can and will support and if necessary, facilitate resolution.

7 Club Expansion in Canada:

Barbara Main spoke of the two new clubs, in Brandon, MB and Saskatoon, SK.

To attract new members, Brandon has published articles in the local paper.

Barbara suggested approaching other groups like the retired teachers as a good way to attract new members.

Vancouver has picked up on a garden theme and involved the gardening club as a means of attracting new members.

A group in Victoria has expressed interest in forming a club.

Diane Roy commented that FF Montreal has 70 members, many of whom are currently on exchange to Japan.

Quebec Region has 35 members.

There has been interest to start a Friendship Force Club from groups in St Mary’s, ON and Moncton, NB.

8 Short Term Stays:

These short term stays of 1-3 nights will be costly except if it is a domestic exchange within Canada or if it is a stopover for a few days when a group is on its way to a full exchange outside Canada

A new fee schedule to be implemented in April 2010 has the following changes:

- No change in the FFI annual membership fee of \$6 per single and \$10 for a couple
- Standard International exchange is still \$115 US for each of the first 2 exchange weeks but the third week cost has been increased to \$115 as well

- Domestic Exchange is **No Charge** for the first 3 nights and \$50 pp for 4 or more nights
- Domestic is defined as Canada only. That is Canadian Clubs visiting within Canada. If a club has a short term stay to a club in the USA, each ambassador would pay the full fee of \$115 unless it would be a Stopover-Hospitality stay
- Stopover-Hospitality is a short-term stay when you are on your way to an international exchange. So if you were on your way to Adelaide, Australia and you stop over in Sydney for 3-4 nights then you have a Stopover-Hospitality. The FFI fee is \$20 per night per person. Stopover-Hospitalities are registered with FFI and the host club is credited with days that they hosted.
- There are exceptions:
The Rocky Mountain FF Conference home stay program may continue as is current.
In Europe, countries in the EU can travel as if part of the same country.

9. Club to Club Gift Giving:

Several clubs exchange club gifts.

One club has a place in its local library where club members exhibit the gifts and use the display as a means to promote Friendship Force.

Some clubs clarify early that they do not plan to give a club gift.

Some suggest to the inbound club that if they want to give a gift: they can purchase a metre of TransCanada Trail for \$50 or make a donation to plant a tree or to the FFI Legacy Fund.

The Japanese, as one country give gifts as part of their culture. Policy is up to the clubs. The key is to sort this out between the clubs early in the exchange.

10. Presidents Workshop Fee:

The fee of one dollar per member for the Presidents' Workshop provided a total of \$992.

Expenses in addition to the \$40 registration fee to provide food and facilities for the 2009 Workshop totaled \$180.

In addition, it was agreed to cover the cost of the Canadian Exchange Website from this fund - \$200 per year. The current balance in the account is \$612

MOTION # 1: made by May Seguin from FF North Bay that the surplus funds remain in the account called the Presidents' Workshop Account to be used for items agreed to by a majority of the Presidents.

Seconded by Diane Roy, Capitale Canadienne. Motion carried

MOTION # 2 made by Herb Durda from FF Medicine Hat that each Canadian Club collect one dollar from each club member in the conference year for the Presidents' Workshop Fund. This fee will be voluntary. Seconded by Joy Fretz, Niagara. Motion Carried

Thank you to Bob Cole for serving as Chair of this Workshop and for his preparations in involving all Canadian FF Clubs- given by Joy Fretz on behalf of all present.

11. Future Workshop and Conferences:

It was agreed that we should continue to have a Canadian Conference every two years.

No one volunteered to host the next conference. If there is a club that would like to host the next conference after it approaches its members, please contact your Field Rep.

With respect to the next Presidents' Workshop, Andrew Stirling suggested that we combine it with the FF Conference in Washington in October 2010. He agreed to look into this and then get back to the Presidents.

12. Communication with FFI:

Joy Fretz expressed concerns with the lack of response from FFI particularly regarding issues involving other clubs.

Also when a concern is expressed about another club on the post-exchange survey, in specific instances, there has not even been an acknowledgement that the survey had been received and reviewed.

George responded by saying that the reputation of Friendship Force is in the exchanges. He added that surveys are reviewed at various levels in their organization depending on the concerns expressed.

If you are not getting a satisfactory response to these concerns, give him a call.

About six of 350 clubs have been put under review and watched very closely.

Clubs with not enough members to sustain themselves are declared inactive.

FFI would like to receive all post-exchange surveys, whether the report is favorable or not. It is not necessary to put all the financial reports in the survey unless there is a financial issue. Send only what is necessary.

Larry Kurtz expressed concern that FFI will not give out the name of the contact with the club that his club plans to visit.

George explained that during the matching process, exchanges are not confirmed and some clubs take several months to decide and respond.

This creates concern for the clubs that are trying to finalize their exchanges.

However FFI would prefer not to have the clubs dealing with one another prior to completion of the matching process.

13. Theme Exchanges:

George explained: clubs need to tailor exchanges to the new generation. So now you can have a gardening theme, an exchange that is focused on learning a language, a hobby theme like stamp collecting or model railroading. These exchanges could involve participants other than Friendship Force members. The FF Club can go into the community and work with other groups to run the exchange. Choirs, orchestras, jazz bands, cycling and wine tasting are themes that can be used to create the exchange

14. Oversubscribed Outbound Exchanges:

This is an issue with 5 of the 17 clubs in attendance.

Jaap Schouten, President of FF Ottawa and Bill Harkness, President of FF Niagara provided details of how their clubs deal with oversubscribed exchanges.

You can obtain a copy of FF Ottawa's procedure from Jaap at schouten@rogers.com

You can find the procedure that FF Niagara uses by accessing their website at ffniagara.org and click on the "Member Resources" link.

15. Travel Visas:

Roger Lafleur explained that Canada's Immigration has difficulty providing visas to individuals from countries where others have come before and claimed refugee status. It is costly and time consuming to process these individuals and return them to their country of origin. Ambassadors from these countries therefore, have difficulty getting Canadian visas.

Some suggestions are:

- Provide a letter of introduction with the names and addresses of the ambassadors that the outbound club can take to the Canadian Embassy in their country.
- Suggest to the Ambassadors that they keep their passports even expired ones to show that they have gone to other countries and returned.
- When Canadian Clubs travel to these countries, take a little time to visit the Canadian Embassy and explain why you are there and that some members of the local club may want to come to Canada at some point. There are no guarantees but it may help to satisfy the Immigration officials that these persons will be returning to their homeland.
- Ask the Inbound club to start the process of obtaining visas immediately
- Keep a close watch on the schedule and if you think that the number of Ambassadors will be significantly reduced, contact FFI and see if another group can come.
- George pointed out that some clubs are being assigned exchanges. Burundi, Kenya, Georgia, Mongolia and Ghana are not assigned exchanges because of the visa issue. FFI will offer members from these countries to join other exchanges on an individual basis.

16. Directors Liability Insurance: George read from their insurance policy that stipulates FF Clubs in Canada and the USA are covered. Merv Sullivan from FF Ottawa stated that upon review by their legal counsel, lawsuits against Canadian Club Directors that are filed in Canada might not be covered. George Brown said that he would have FFI's legal counsel take a look at this and get back to us.

When trying to arrange a venue, like a Church Hall for an FF event, the landlord often ask for a certificate from the insurance company to verify that your club is covered. If you need a certificate, contact Mary Mwambay

Notes prepared by Jim and Mary Fox FF Haliburton Highlands October 27, 2009