DURD DISCUSSION PAPER -
VIDEO ACCESS CENTRES

CONTENTS:

DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
   INFORMATION SERVICE
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to serve as the basis for beginning discussions with those people interested in the future of video access centres (VAC). The paper does not, represent formal departmental policy but is intended as the first step in formulating such a policy. After further discussions have taken place maybe this Department can work with those other groups, notably the centre directors and the Film, Radio and Television Board in producing a policy document. The centre directors and two consultants have already reported on the VAC program and prior knowledge of these reports and the basic principles of the program are assumed,

Because of the shortage of time these discussions will need to take place early in the year with a view to meeting the March deadline for forward estimates. In Adelaide such discussions could take place within the framework of a task force which is developing a public information policy statement. Similar task forces have been proposed in Sydney and Melbourne but they would require a sponsoring body such as the South Australian Council of Social Services.

The Film, Radio and Television Board has agreed to take part in any task forces and have nominated Bill Childs. The Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) will be represented by the author of this paper Bill Brydon. It is hoped that other interested Departments would nominate officers as well.

Review

(1)   DURD involvement with the VAC program
(2)   Evaluation of VAC program by the directors -
         Henaut, Abrahams.

(1) The Department of Urban and Regional Development's involvement with
     the VAC program dates back to 1973/74 when a contribution was made
     under the Area Improvement Program to the establishment costs of
     five Video Access Centres in Blacktoun (whole cost), Fairfield,
     Parramatta, Altona, Footscray (part cost).

     The Department of Urban and Regional Development did not contribute
     to the VAC program in the 1974/75 financial year. The extent to
     which funding can be extended in 1975/76 has yet to be worked out
     but it is possible that the centres could be funded through the ROC
     (or banker council) for specific projects to be carried out in the
     region. This arrangement highlights the problems of funding the
     VAC program from the Area Improvement Program which is
     administered by the Department of Urban and Regional Development.

     In the past, funds were administered by the Australian Film
     Institute. This arrangement appears to have some administrative
     limitations which a few of the VAC directors have expressed. The
     Department of Urban and Regional Development similarly feels that
     the administration of the VAC program could be improved. The
     Department would require certain "structural linkages" to exist
     between the ROC and the VAC's in order to foster broader regional
     goals in line with the aims of the Area Improvement Program.

     Other Federal and certainly State departments may not require
     these linkages but as will be argued in the body of this paper the
     Department of Urban and Regional Development feels that the
     continued success of the VAC program depends not only on the
     administrative benefits flowing from such linkages but the
     community development or 'process' benefits as well.

     In the past the VAC directors have not been given any direct advice
     of the nature of these "structural linkages" or the reasoning
     behind them. This has been because of the nature of

the experiment by the Film, Radio and Television Board which has set down in guidelines that the VAC's remain as autonomous as possible. A copy of these guidelines is attached in Appendix 1.

The literature of the Department: <u>Regions</u> and the <u>Annual Report;</u> set down some of the principles behind the functions of ROC's. The Westudy report also discusses some of these principles. At the moment the Department is trying to develop a Regional Information Systems policy which will include the operation of such programs as the VAC program, so it can be seen that no firm guidelines have been adopted as yet. The Department of Urban and Regional Development will attempt to make known in ensuing discussions more of the principles behind "regionalising community participation" and "regional information systems".

It must be emphasised here that this Department does not see; itself as the sole purveyor of information services and indeed would look to the greater involvement of other Departments and organisations in the VAC program in future and in the development of the broad range of information services.

(2)   Evaluation   -   The VAC directors have attempted to produce answers to questions which have never been explicitly asked of them. The Department of Urban and Regional Development has been asking for an evaluation of the VAC program for some time and the final products still do not answer some of those as yet unasked questions which should have been asked before an evaluation was attempted. The Directors report gives details of accomplishments with individuals or groups and the specific issues those accomplishments relate to. These accomplishments are the building blocks of community development. They are necessary to the overall success of a community development program, but what are we building? <u>What are the explicit objectives of the VAC program in a community?</u>   <u>How do these objectives relate to defined issues in the community?</u> The VAC

directors were given some tools and told to go out (in pre-selected communities) and do a job. What is the job? They have done remarkably well in trying to define that job and many have come to the conclusion that the community will not of themselves define that job for them. VAC directors have moved away from an open access approach to specific projects. Abrahams identifies 3 approaches in his report - Broadcast, Systems, and Grass Roots. He rejects the last two for being too bureaucratic and for being partial to video freaks respectively. The Broadcast approach receives his endorsement without an illustration of its success. If the Broadcast approach is successful in promoting community participation how is it any more than hand holding on the Titanic? The systems approach may be the closest to the DURD solution which has been proposed at the end of this paper but hopefully allows some of the autonomy that all three reports claim is necessary to the success of the VAC program.

The reports are very much arguments for the status quo and given the run-a-round some VAC directors have received this may be a justifiable response. One problem that remains below the surface of such arguments is that a professional group, be it librarians, social workers, video directors or bureaucrats could sometimes be wedded to a tool or medium for exchanging information and one type of information alone. When they take this approach they can become essentially information imperialists. They control the flow of information through the control of the medium. All media except speech are elitist, how does the VAC program ensure that the use of one medium, video, is beneficial to the widest community? Many of the centres have broadened their scope to include other tools such as print and radio but this will require additional money. Does the past experience of the program .justify increased expenditure?

The VAC program has suffered from an inability to reach a wide audience with the final product. It is not sufficient to use video equipment and the production of tapes as therapy.

The equipment then becomes a very expensive talisman to be dangled in front of the underprivileged with no guarantees that their time and efforts will result in any changes in their situation. How does the VAC program reach a wider audience including decision makers as well as the communities in which it is working?

A hierarchy of administrative arrangements emerges from the reports. They range from the present (or more) autonomous position of VAC's to a National Access Media Association.

Continued access to public funds is assumed at each extreme without any suggestion of accountability in return. If the VAC program is a public service how does it illustrate the effectiveness of that service to the funding bodies? How does it provide greater benefits than other similar programs - access radio, information centres, acquisition of books for school libraries?

A report has been produced by the Departments of Media and Education on the availability of television equipment in Australian schools. There is a fair amount of video equipment in the schools. Is it being used fully and effectively? How does the VAC program relate to the use of this equipment?

The above statements do not comprise an exhaustive review of the three reports nor do they present a complete list of those 'unasked questions'. The three reports are inadequate measures of the effectiveness of the VAC program. They are also inadequate in proposing the directions that the VAC program should take in future. Again, given the time available, evaluation and proposals for action can only be arrived at after cooperative discussions between the interested groups over the next few months. This paper should not be taken as an indictment of the VAC program rather, an attempt to set out the questions which are being asked without trying to come to any conclusions about success or failure. That decision must be reached co-operatively as should any decisions on how to proceed from here.

Another list of reasons for possible VAC failure, which comes
from the Inter Action Advisory Service in Britain, could be
included for discussion.

1. indiscriminate use - freaks, private, sports or wrong media
2. raising expectations unrealistically
3. ill defined objectives (means become ends)
4. lack of planning for showing back
5. lack of playback facilities
6; inadequate back-up resources - institutions
7. lack of other resources - advertising
8. expenses - may be cheaper means required
9. ill defined message
10. inadequate grass roots research
I1. poor quality
12. co-operation.
 (these are attached in Appendix 2)

In this paper equipment and facilities have not been extensively
treated. These problems are well documented elsewhere and can
largely be solved with more money or more staff or better or more
equipment. Before more money is considered the problems outlined
below have to be dealt with.

    The proposal of this paper is to:
(1)   set out these problems as the Department of Urban and Regional
      Development sees them

(2)   set out the constraints to finding a solution to problems

(3)   proceed to adopting a solution to the problems.

Problems
(i)   VAC's require on-going funding - post August 1976.
(ii)   VAC's require some structured accountability to the
          communities and institutions in the areas where they are
          located, in order to make and justify proposals for funding
          from central authorities. That is to say, the communities
          and institutions have to be seen to be receiving a public
          service from the VAC's and the effectiveness of the service

has to be measurable in some way.

(iii)   VAC's require some <u>framework</u> over an extended period of time within which they can operate effectively. This not only means continuity of funding in order to carry out stated objectives but the statement of those objectives so that accomplishments can be measured against them at intervals. Some mechanism of evaluation for comparing the effectiveness of the VAC program with costs incurred by central funding authorities is required. Even if the VAC's are fortunate enough to become totally dependent on local sources of funds this framework and mechanism will undoubtedly be required.

Constraints

Constraints on finding a solution to these problems.

(i)   VAC's have been set up as autonomous bodies. It has been argued that this arrangement is central to their effectiveness. If the level of autonomy changes how will this affect the VAC program?

(ii)   <u>Time</u> is scarce but:
a) It has been argued (Henaut) that a program must evolve slowly and that rushing the process will endanger the effectiveness.

b) Institutions in the communities concerned may be asked to sponsor VAC's proposals to central funding bodies for on-going funding without having been involved in the direction of the program in the past.
These institutions may be suspicious of recent hurried approaches for sponsorship. How can they be assured of on-going involvement after their sponsorship is no longer required?

(iii)   <u>Personnel</u> who have worked in the VAC program have been asked to do an impossible task - "Set up community participation using video in the following places. You won't be told how to do it and what it is you are supposed to produce but

we will cut off funding if you don't". They have learned
from their experience over the last year and a program has
evolved part way. If the program looks to be in jeopardy
or they get tired of the hassles they will leave, taking
that invaluable experience with them.

(iv)   Central funding authorities at State and Federal levels
          may, in some situations, be mutually exclusive sources
          of funds and VAC's will be in the position of not
          knowing who to approach and how, unless both levels make
          explicit their criteria for judging performance and what
          they expect VAC's to perform.

(v)   There may be problems with the ownership of equipment.
          If autonomous bodies are to be set up how is the equipment to
          be transferred from its present ownership to those bodies?

Possible Solutions

There is a hierarchy of solutions to the problems of
developing administrative structures.

(i)   National Access Media Association
(ii)   local autonomous VAC's accountable to themselves and
          what they define as the "community".

The proposed solution from DURD's viewpoint may lie somewhere
between the above two extremes. The model has already been set up in
the Western Region of Adelaide and is proposed in the Western Region
of Melbourne. The Western Melbourne proposal does not make explicit
the linkages which are proposed between Western Community Media
and a Regional body. A management committee can be set up but unless
it has those structural links with a regional body then it will remain
just another institution peddling its own information and the tools
required to interpret it. In Westudy the Western Region Library and
Information Authority was proposed. It has not been set up yet and in
DURD's submission to the National Library Inquiry

it has been recommended that no new regional bodies should be set up elsewhere. There is enough duplication between ROC's and Regional Councils for Social Development and in some regions they are talking about setting up joint secretariats. This central secretariat could handle some of the problems of administration and funding of the VAC program. The VAC could carry out specific project work for regional bodies in return for payment but they would also be free to carry out other work for approved (by management committee) bodies. The VAC could also be incorporated and still have the same relationship with the regional bodies.

Clearly the Western Adelaide model will not fit all regions without some changes but it seems to be one of the best solutions encountered by this Department. Other solutions need to be developed for other regions such as Western Melbourne where a specific authority has been proposed or Northern Spencer Gulf where the ROC and RCSD may have enough administrative problems without taking on VAC's as well.

The problems and constraints to solutions outlined above are intended to be the first response from this Department. Further work in developing the VAC program must be carried out by state task forces working with all levels of government and the communities served.

<u>10 MAY 1974</u>

<u>COMMUNITY ACCESS VIDEO CENTRES</u>

INTERIM POLICY AM) OPERATIONAL STATEMENT
(To "be reviewed in 3 "to 4 months)

1.   OBJECTIVE

To support or encourage social interaction and community development, using "Community Access Video" as a catalyst and as a creative sociological resource.

2.   GENERAL

It is the hope of the Film and Television Board and the Australian Film Institute that the Video Access Centres will stimulate and improve communications and in so doing, that community awareness and involvement will increase.

3.   THE CENTRES

Each centre will be conducted as autonomously as possible through the Australian Film Institute according to principles established by the Film and Television Board of the Australian Council for the Arts.

This autonomous and independent status is vital to the success of the centres. They should not be part of a rigid, formal structure; rather they should blend into and be of service to the community in which they operate.

Ideally, the community will soon recognise and accept the Video Access Centres as a community resource.

4.   DIRECTOR

The "Centre Director" will be totally responsible for the day to day operation of the centre.

An important function of the Director will be to animate and activate the community towards the use of video as an agent of social change.

5.   ACCESS

The facilities of the centres will be made available without bias or prejudice to any group or individual in the specified community.

6.   PRIORITIES

The priority of access to facilities will be decided by the Director.

In deciding priorities related to the booking of equipment the Director should look to the general rule of "First come First served". As demand increases and conflict in bookings occurs the Director will:

(a)   Discuss the position with the applicants concerned and strive to
re—schedule one or the other to achieve satisfaction.

(b)   If re—scheduling cannot be achieved the Director will be called upon to make a qualitative judgement based on the merit and community benefits of the project.

(c)   Attempt to establish an emergency or back—up pool of equipment by gaining the co-operation of local educational institutions etc.

7.   RESTRICTIONS (Users)

Equipment and facilities will by priority be available to people within
the specified community and area surrounding the Centre. This area
will be clearly defined and displayed prominently in each Centre* This
does not exclude people living outside the area working on productions
being made by residents within the area.

8.   RESTRICTIONS (Use)

The purposes for which facilities can be used and subject material of
programmes are virtually unrestricted according to the following
guidelines:

(a)   No person will be allowed to use equipment inside or outside the
Centre until they have satisfied the Director of their knowledge of and
care and handling of any piece of equipment they wish to use.

(b)   The care and responsibility for loss or damage will be vested
in the person who signs for the equipment at the commencement of
each project before a project is approved by the Director.

(c)   The objective and proposed use of Video Centre facilities will be
clearly stated in writing by the person who will sign for the
equipment.

(d)   A change of objective or use may be viewed as a separate
application and will normally join the "First in First Served" queue
and be re-assessed by the Director.

9.   BOOKINGS

After a project is submitted and approved, bookings may be made — in
the name of the project by approved users. The duration of booking
periods will be restricted as demand dictates, at the Director's
discretion.

Equipment will be booked on an hourly basis.

Advance bookings may only be a maximum of four weeks.

At the end of the booking the equipment must "be returned on the due
day and time. If an extension of the booking is required, the
responsible person should call the Director, If no other bookings
exist, extensions on an hourly basis can be made.

The control of booking rests entirely with the Director. Should a person
or group continually abuse the system, the Director is empowered to
restrict or bar them from the facilities.

10. APPEALS

Should Centre users disagree with the Director's decisions in any area
of priorities or bookings, the Director's decision is final and no
correspondence will be entered into.

11. <u>COMPLAINTS</u>

Where members of the public make a complaint regarding the Centre or any
operations or 'users' activities — the complaint will be immediately
documented and investigated, and a report should be submitted to the
Director of The Australian Film Institute. Then if a Community Access
Video Centre and an experienced Director can't solve the problem by
bringing all parties together (using video if necessary) who will be able
to solve it?

13. <u>"SELF-EDIT" RULE</u>

At all times where persons are recorded by users of "Access Centre"
equipment — they must be given the opportunity to see and hear themselves
and if the person so chooses, they may demand all or part of the material
to be edited.

This policy must "be communicated to all "users" and failure to comply will
mean withdrawal of access privileges.

The printed release forms will cover this point and 'users' should ensure
"subject people" sign them at all times.

13. <u>VIDEOTAPE</u>

Videotape always remains the property of the Centre and all tapes must
be returned at the earliest possible time.

14. <u>RETENTION AND ERASURE</u>

(TO BE DISCUSSED DURING NEXT MEETING OF DIRECTORS)

15. <u>HOURS OF OPERATION</u>

The Centres should be open for as long as possible, seven days a week.

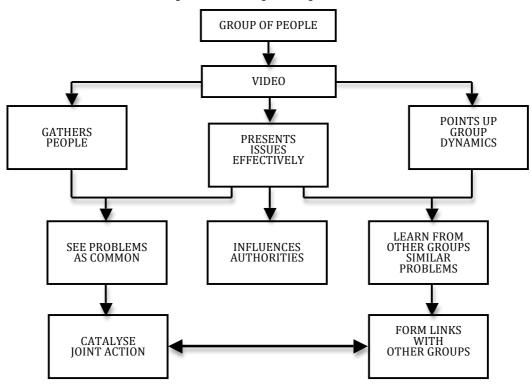Demand and "user" patterns will vary from Centre to Centre, but
where possible and with careful planning and use of part—time
helpers (both paid and voluntary) daily hours of 10.00 a.m. to
10.00 p.m. should be possible,

16. <u>MISCELLANEOUS</u>

Pressure: Should a Director be faced with excessive pressure, harassment
or threats from any source, the Director of the Australian Film Institute
should be informed immediately.

A Diagram showing the general uses of Video

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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │ GROUP OF PEOPLE │
                        └─────────────────┘
                                 │
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │      VIDEO      │
                        └─────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
   │   GATHERS    │   │   PRESENTS   │   │  POINTS UP   │
   │    PEOPLE    │   │    ISSUES    │   │    GROUP     │
   │              │   │  EFFECTIVELY │   │   DYNAMICS   │
   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘

   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
   │ SEE PROBLEMS │   │  INFLUENCES  │   │ LEARN FROM   │
   │  AS COMMON   │   │ AUTHORITIES  │   │ OTHER GROUPS │
   │              │   │              │   │   SIMILAR    │
   │              │   │              │   │   PROBLEMS   │
   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘

   ┌──────────────┐                      ┌──────────────┐
   │   CATALYSE   │◄────────────────────►│  FORM LINKS  │
   │ JOINT ACTION │                      │     WITH     │
   │              │                      │ OTHER GROUPS │
   └──────────────┘                      └──────────────┘
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Where Does Video Fail?

1. Indiscriminate use

Not every community problem calls for the use of video to tackle it. A major failure will come when it is used just because the equipment is available and when it is not really needed. Other media will often get a message across more satisfactorily. To give an extreme example, to use video to publicise a fund-raising disco is a waste of a potentially useful tool on something that -posters have publicised quite adequately for ages. In many cases video will be the best medium; in other cases tape/slide, a community newspaper, an exhibition or an event will work better.

2. Ill-defined objectives

A video project is almost always more than just the making and showing back of a tape. It is a means to an end, whether that end be the formation of a tenants group, recording an event, achieving some measure of social change or gaining some consensus over a local issue. Before embarking on a project, you need to have decided what your social objectives for the project are and how much you can realistically achieve, what resources are necessary to back up the videotape, what people you need to influence; and you will need to have developed an overall plan of action. Too many projects fail because the wider context of the work has not been thought out or because the pre-planning has been inadequate. It is vital to arrange a preliminary meeting with local people and community workers to talk about the general problems of the neighbourhood right from the start, even before mentioning video.

3. Unrealistic raising of expectations

Video can be dangerous in that it can raise peoples hopes unrealistically that something will be done about a particular problem. Video in itself can solve nothing; it is a means of communication and self-expression. It can be a focal point for group gathering. But to get results, research should always be done beforehand on whether there is a realistic solution to the problem; for instance, does the council in fact have the resources and is there actually space for an adventure playground?

4. Lack of planning for showing back

Video can fail if there has been no thought given as to how it is going to be shown to people. What is the point of making a tape if there is no local gathering place where people can see it? Or if no one puts out any publicity on where and when it can be seen? Or no equipment is available to play back the tape when this is needed? Also, if it is shown at a public meeting, it is very important to have someone chairing the meeting who will bring up the issues raised by the tape, not defend the council or deviate into personal complaints about related issues.

5. Lack of playback facilities

Tapes can fail because there are insufficient facilities for showing them back. Does the group making the tape have its own playback monitor and VTR? If not, do you have the time to show the tape back for them repeatedly? Is there another group in the area with the requisite equipment such as a college or polytechnic or adult education institute? If a playback to a large group is necessary, more monitors will be needed, as well as a sound amplification system — are they available? If the answer to these questions is *no,* then another medium more feasible than video should be used.