
VIDEO ACCESS CENTRES (VAC'S)
A FEED-BACK EVALUATION

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THE PILOT VIDEO ACCESS CENTRES (VAC'S)

PADDINGTON	City Video Centre 445a Oxford Street, NSW 2021
CARLTON	Access Video Resource Centre 93 Drummond Street, VIC 3053
FOOTSCRAY	Footscray Video Centre 95 Paisley Street, VIC 3011
BLACKTOWN	Blacktown Video Resource Centre Post Office Box 222, NSW 2148
FAIRFIELD	Fairfield Community Video Centre 26 Harris Street, NSW 2165
WHYALLA	Whyalla Community Video Access Centre 72 Essington-Lewis Avenue, SA 5600
BRISBANE	Brisbane Community Access Video Centre "Coronation House" 109 Edward Street, QLD 4000
ALTONA	Turtle Video 18 Pier Street, VIC 3018
PARRAMATTA	Parramatta Community Video Centre 92 George Street, NSW 2150
GREEN VALLEY	Valley Video, C/o Green Valley Community Centre, Shropshire Street, MILLER, NSW 2168
ADELAIDE	Adelaide Community Video Centre 5a Normal Street, WOODVILLE, SA 5011
FREMANTLE	Frevideo, 40 Cliff Street, WA 6160

Started as a pilot project in May 1974 by the Film and Television Board of the Australian Council for the Arts. Administered through the Australian Film Institute. The major source of funds for the pilot project was from the Film and Television Board; funds for the equivalent of 3 VAC's in western regions of Sydney and Melbourne were provided by the Department of Urban and Regional Development.

EXTRACT FROM TURTLE VIDEO REPORT, SEPTEMBER, 1974

"COMMUNITY VIDEO THE MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR COMMUNITY VIDEO IS NEITHER STAFF, MONEY, EQUIPMENT NOR PLACE. IT EXISTS IN FRONT OF OUR EYES. OFTEN HIDDEN.

The communities themselves.

Each community works in its own time, has its own stories, its own storytellers.

At first, and from the outside, the ways are often strange, the stories unintelligible, and the storyteller unrecognizable. Sometimes the language is hard to understand. Other times, we would rather not know what the stories are telling us. Some of the tellers are official spokesmen who hold committee positions in established organisations.

Most are not.

On occasions, an outsider who has shared in the life of a community and become a respected friend can tell some of their story. But nearly always a story is most telling when it comes from the heart of the group whose experience it expresses.

When such stories begin to be told, a community can gain (or regain) confidence in its own possibilities. When they are heard a community gains experience of its own power.

Community Video does not then, set out to be a solution to a floundering community's problems... IT IS LETTING STORIES BE TOLD... AND HEARD ... AUTHENTICALLY.

Even more importantly, it not only accepts that many people and publics disenfranchised by the established media have stories to tell - but, that they can tell them tellingly.

The "so-called" deprived western suburbs of Melbourne might be considered a desert so far as the presence of people with experience and capacity in video is concerned. They aren't."

UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL QUOTATIONS ARE TAKEN FROM OUR OWN INTERVIEWS, VIDEO CENTRE DIRECTORS' REPORTS TO THE A.F.I., CIRCULARS TO CENTRES OR TRANSCRIPTS OF A SERIES OF INTRA-STAFF INTERVIEWS, FEBRUARY, 1975.

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This evaluation was undertaken by us only after reaching agreement with officers of the Film and Television Board of the Australian Council for the Arts that:

- a. directors and staff could well feel that they were being unfairly evaluated because they had not had a fair chance to demonstrate what could be done;
- b. the directors could well ask 'evaluated against what?' the very vague mission they had been given or the more specific missions they were still trying to find for themselves in their communities?

These agreements shaped our attempts at evaluation. Firstly, we had to recognize that if mistakes and false moves dominated the early period there may well have been no other way of learning. Second, we had to accept that the emergence of new policy alternatives might well be the only really significant pay-offs from such a brief period of learning. Third, we had to accept that the very process of evaluation by outsiders at this stage could be hurtful and damaging. Literally, it could do more harm than good.

To anticipate the fuller discussion of our findings we can state now that no evidence has emerged of mistakes or false moves that have put the fate of any of the centres in jeopardy, singly or collectively. Further, the pay-offs already include much more than identification of policy alternatives. This particular group of people seem to have shared with cats a remarkable ability to land on their feet no matter the height or direction from which they were thrown. Lastly, it does seem that we were able to go some way to involve directors and staff in a self-evaluation to help their own learning.

This report is not just an evaluation. The study was carried out and reported so that it was a feedback evaluation. An evaluation that not only enables outsiders to judge what has been achieved but would help the insiders to stand back a little from their day-to-day concerns and learn from what they have done.

THE MATURE OF PORTA-PAK VIDEO AND COMMUNITY PURPOSES FOR THE VIDEO ACCESS CENTRES (VAC'S) 2.1

The VAC's were established on the very general grounds that video was a technical breakthrough that made it possible for people to record experience in a visual non-conceptual way. It thus made it possible for people to share experiences that they had not all had shared but of which they now may have different memories. Technically, video also made it possible for ordinary people to go from recording what they wanted to record to replaying it for themselves or others. There was no dependence in the communication chain on any specialists who were not necessarily 'one of us'. Establishment of the centres made this technology available in towns well before they could be as economically available to everyone as transistor radio's have become.

As a medium, video must not be associated with T.V., radio or film each of which is characterised by a refining process by "experts" (such as journalists, technicians, filmmakers), leading to a professional product tied up with professional pride in the product. As a medium video is a truer medium than any of the mass media in that it imposes less structuring on the messages*. There may be a lot of noise in terms of low quality but any deliberate distortions are those that users themselves produce by pointing the porta-pak here rather than there. Video as a medium is more like the telephone. The immediate recording, play-back, erasing nature of video without the intervention of specialists is as much a communication utility as is a telephone network or passing notes in a meeting. The relevant life of the video message is only the life of the face-to-face processes of which it is a part.

There were the further assumptions that Australian communities needed the capabilities offered by video and that they would provide ways of putting these facilities to effective use if they were provided on the scale and with the professional and technical back-up designed into these first centres.

In the last analysis the question would have to be asked as to whether the results obtained outweigh the cost to the society of using consolidated revenue now as against waiting some years till enough members of the society were enticed by much lower prices to buy video for themselves. Even this is not a precise enough statement of relative costs and benefits. The benefits of individual purchase and ownership of video (even when economically feasible) may not be the same as those generated by community access video centres.

*Heider, F. Thing and Medium, 1927, Berlin

To have some idea of what a community might gain from access to the possibilities created by access to video we have to ask what purposes a community might wish to pursue. If we can formulate a general statement of these purposes we may be able to evaluate what has been achieved to date. Including an evaluation of the new specific purposes that have emerged from people at the centres.

To benefit a community VAC's must increase the choices available to its members,

According to the analytical model of choice* VAC's must do one or other of the following four things if it is to so benefit a community:

- a) Effect Prob. of Choice.
That is, increase the likelihood that members choose as a matter of custom or personal preferences the same courses of community action. An observable consequence would be more co-operativeness and what is usually referred to as community spirit.
- b) Effect Prob. of Production.
That is, increase the effectiveness of the community's instruments, facilities and services and reduce the proportion of members with inadequate access to these facilities.
- c) Effect Prob. of Outcome.
Increase the outcomes that are possible and probable for members of the community; in particular by increasing the range of probable outcomes for those unduly constricted.
- d) Effect Relative Values of Different Courses of Action. Increasing the range of relative values would by itself create a 'tower of Babel': dissociation into multiplicity of private worlds. Community benefit would follow only if there were increasing unity in the increasing range of specific valuations: if the specific motivation were embedded in the put suit of wider objectives and ideals that were commonly and explicitly shared. Such a development would reflect itself in a community which was both more tolerant and supporting of ideal seeking members.

The Australian government has been quite explicit in its concern that many Australian communities, particularly in industrial towns and the newer working class suburbs are:

- a) markedly lacking in community spirit and organised efforts at community self-help.

*Ackoff, R. L. and F. E. Emory On Purposeful Systems 1972, London Tavistock, Chapters 3 and 13.

- b) served by poor community facilities;
- c) served by an inadequate range of facilities;
- d) characterised by high rates of vandalism, delinquency, suicide, mental ill-health, broken families and other such signs of dissociation of the motives of community members.

GOVERNMENTAL PURPOSES FOR VAC'S 2.2

The government has directed large sums of money toward alleviating these community conditions. To ensure that these funds are increasingly used by communities in the ways that they themselves desire it has explicitly stated that the administration of the funds should be governed by the principles of open government, public participation, and community involvement.

We suggest that the VAC's- themselves funded by the Australian government for community purposes, could serve these administrative principles by:

- i. Informing the public about government decisions and programmes; in short, a PR function. This is the traditional task of mass media relations (press secretaries, T,V. interviews, press releases), information sections of departments (brochures, T.V. ads) and more recently, Public Information Centres.

In this role, VAC's would be spending much of their time showing PR tapes about government programmes, building libraries to this effect and working with government teams in producing PR tapes. If this were the case, the VAC's would be competing with information sections of departments and Public Information Centres and would not justify a separate existence.

The VAC's have not assumed this role.

- ii. Facilitating individual and community participation in government planning and government programmes (such as a public display of a new town plan, an invitation to respond to funding programmes).

This is an important role, since traditionally, the more articulate, more powerful and more-educated groups predominate. Host government programmes themselves try to provide their own assistance to disadvantaged groups with planning / project / liaison officers. If the VAC's were helping more disadvantaged groups participate more fully in government planning and programmes, then this would be regarded as a positive criterion of success.

It would not be a major reason for their existence because the alternate strategy to meet this criterion is obviously to upgrade government department community liaison resources.

There is evidence that all VAC's have achieved success in this role. In effect, the VAC's are teaching government departments the power and validity of video as a communications tool and helping make this equipment itself more available to the community.

Roles iii and iv are considered more important to the continuing future of VAC's.

- iii. People informing public agencies of what their programmes are doing to themselves and other people: such as freeways, mining leases, housing, transport, police, schooling etc.; potentially leading to social organisation and action.

This would be regarded as a positive criterion for the success of the VAC's, as no other public media agencies exist to facilitate this role.

There is evidence that the VAC's have achieved success in this role.

- iv. People informing other people and public agencies of social needs that are currently being unattended to; potentially leading to social organisation and action.

Again, there are no other public media agencies existing to facilitate this role.

There is evidence that the VAC's are achieving success in this role.

- v. As a negative criterion, there is a risk that the VAC's could be channelled into the home movies function or serving local commercial interests.

Roles iii and iv are considered most important. If there is evidence that the VAC's have managed even within the nine months of their existences then they could be considered successful.

We believe there is evidence to this effect.

The question of cost/effectiveness is taken up in Section 6.

It is to be expected that the VAC's, as with all social processes, grow in phases*. Four such growth phases can be clearly identified from their histories:

- I. Waiting - opening the doors, getting to know and be known in the community, idle curiosity of the community.
- II. Teaching use of the equipment and developing confidence - at this stage the home movies function, e.g. taping weddings, school events, sporting matches or just people, will probably predominate.
- III. Project use - emergence of one-off projects using video for purposes ii, iii, iv, above.
- IV. Project use on a programmed basis. At this stage centre staff are not just lending equipment and technical assistance. They are moving more into a community development role and are helping the community to organise around their own needs. The centres feel a need to be multi-media centres, not just video.

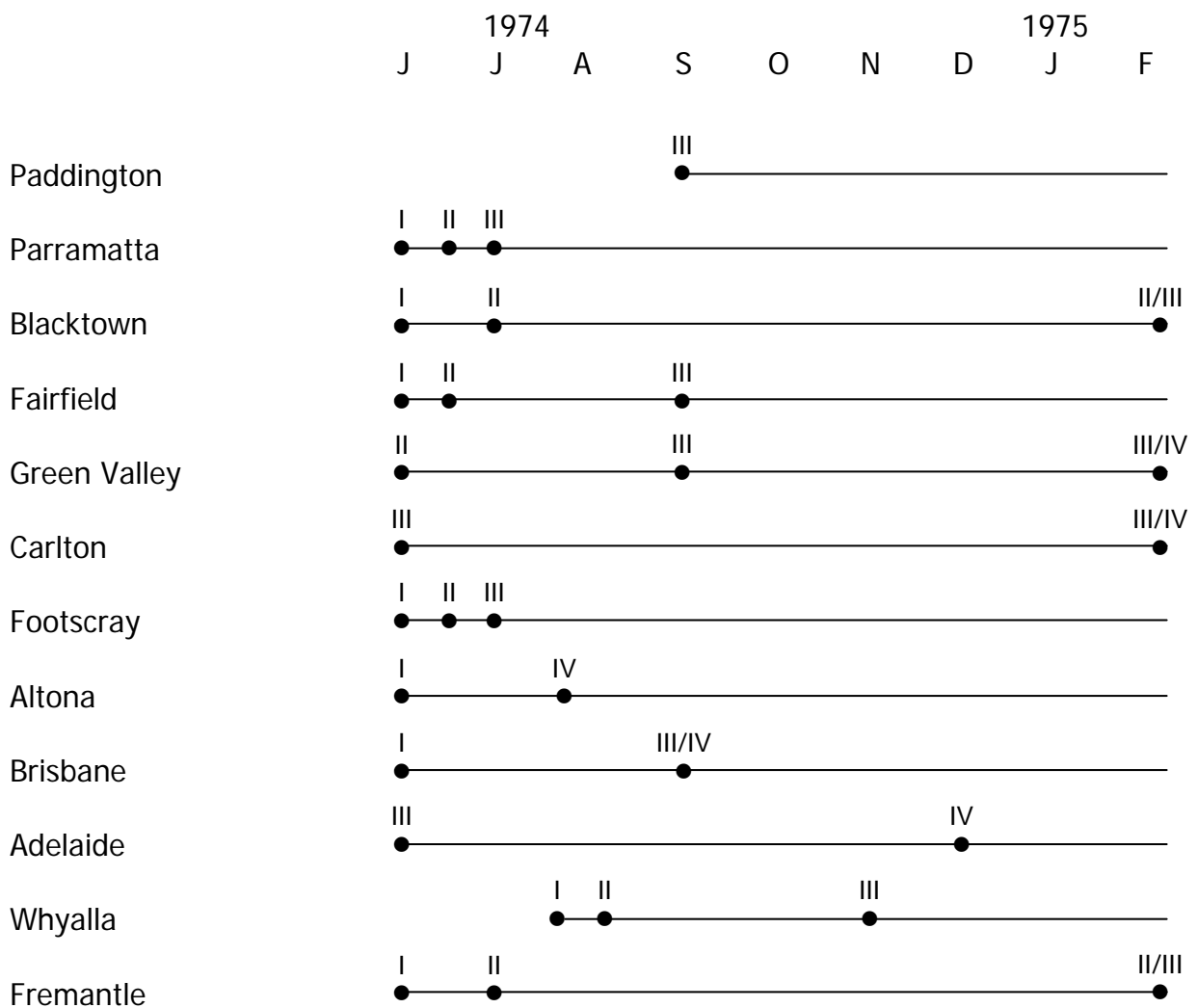
In remarkably quick time, all the VAC'S appear to have progressed to the third phase. There is no evidence that role v (home movies) has subsumed roles ii, iii and iv.

We have assumed the desirability of the VAC's progressing to Phase IV as early as possible with projects in roles iii and iv. Phase III represents an unplanned approach to projects and is personally demanding of centre staff. This is born out in our interviews. Future training of centre staff should help them recognise and progress to Phase IV in a short time.

Considering the novel nature of the VAC's the current rate of progress is not just reasonable, it is remarkable.

Refer to Section 5 for further expansion of this point.

PROGRESS OF THE VAC'S THROUGH PHASES OF GROWTH 3.1



As a Centre passes on to another phase it does not move entirely out of the preceding phases. New people keep dropping in as they hear about the Centre, new people request training, demands for one-off projects continue to emerge.

We have not been able to quantify the evaluation down to the next level, how much of a Centre's time is on average spent on level i, ii, iii, iv? At this early stage such figures would in any case be unreliable.

It is stressed that the emergence of phases for each VAC is dependent on a number of factors peculiar to each centre:

- The amount of preparatory work by the Film and T.V. Board.
- The priorities of the directors resulting from interpretation of "community" and "access" (refer Section 5.2).
- The nature of the community in terms of already emerged social organisations (e.g. inner-city areas of Sydney and Melbourne are more developed in this respect than other areas).
- The skills and experience of staff selected.
- The local knowledge of directors and staff.
- The date of arrival of full complement of equipment and arrangements for maintenance.
- The location of centre, size and alterations required.

The following extracts from Directors' reports to the API indicate the emergence of phases:

Phase I to II

"I've reconsidered and rejected my initial approach to the job - i.e. allowing the Centre's facilities to be used for virtually any purpose at all, no matter how apparently trivial, and taking no directional role myself."

Phase II to III

"Time for follow-through, while trying to keep the centre open as long as possible is a major problem. How to follow through is the theoretical one. I find myself more and more faced with the choice of shutting the Centre up more in order to take initiatives."

Phase III emerging IV

"While the centre will now withdraw from the hub of activities (around the Women's Refuge we helped start), our next step will be to encourage more and more women to use video in the many facets of this scheme. Recording the ups and downs of the 2nd women's refuge in Sydney could end up making an extraordinary tape but probably only if the women do it themselves."

Phase IV

"The fact that the more reticent - and consequently powerless - groups are using this Centre is due to our careful planning."

Phase III can greatly disorder and extend Centre staff.

"I am writing this report at 2 am on Monday - having worked all Sunday, a day we are normally closed; my assistant is ill from over-work, and a voluntary worker is typing up a submission to Canberra."

COMMENT ON PHASE GROWTH AT EACH VAC 3.2

Paddington The opening of the video access premises was delayed due to staffing and location difficulties. One of the current co-directors started in September, the other in December.

The inner-city area of Sydney has a wide range of active social organisations concerned with public issues and representation of minority views and culture. From the beginning, the Centre appears to have been involved in many projects. A programmed approach to the development of the Centre is currently emerging (Phase IV) ... "I would like to see Paddington doing several long term projects... We should be working as community development officers... we are considering setting up a programming committee collective."

Parramatta The Director is a Canadian previously experienced in community development, but no prior knowledge of area before commencing. The Centre is located first floor off the main street in a commercial area. Assistant staff joined Centre in October. Centre involved in a wide range of projects in roles ii, iii and iv.

Blacktown	Cramped quarters at edge of shopping centre, due to difficulty in obtaining a more suitable site in a high cost area. Assistant has long term familiarity with area. Emphasis on training and distribution systems. Projects in youth groups emerging.
Fairfield	Shop front premises in commercial area; first three months deliberate policy by Director of open access. After three months, policy change to project work. Initially one full-time assistant, neither familiar with area.
Green Valley	Centre resulted from local pressure following a Film Australia project involving centre director. Centre embedded in a church-oriented premises. Assistants local involved residents. Woman's health centre project evolving to Phase IV.
Carlton	Premises in same location as AUS in socially active areas. Immediate involvement by Centre in projects. Basis for emerging Phase IV with formation of a programming collective of users and staff.
Footscray	House premises let from adjacent Trade Union Community Health Centre from which many local contacts made. Director lived in premises during first few months.
Altona.	Co-directors well established interest in video and community development prior to appointment. Strategies immediately directed to long term programmes.
Brisbane	Early problems with equipment, staff and location. Director previously involved in local social issues. Encouraged early emergence of long-term project work.
Adelaide	Director extended previous community development involvement in area, upon opening of the Centre. Deliberate policy change to long-term programme in December.
Whyalla	Prior publicity of Centre caused an early development of Phase II activities. Director no prior knowledge of area and had difficulty obtaining satisfactory living accommodation. Assistant local resident. Phase III projects arose from direct contribution by director to local culture.

Fremantle Director from Sydney. Initial premises found unsatisfactory; move to new premises in January accompanied by extensive alterations. Major attention to outdoor and mobile training during period of uncertainty with premises.

EXAMPLES OF PHASE III AND IV PROJECTS AT EACH VAC 3.3

Paddington protests - Balmain container terminal
inner city freeway
women vision
emerging black urban culture

Parramatta local prison group activities
health education - continuing programme
with Health Commission
trade union education project
resource for emerging youth groups

Blacktown youth needs projects emerging

Fairfield conservation of local historical building
women's health education project
emerging migrant projects

Green Valley Liverpool women's health centre project
Valley Video juniors

Carlton Housing Commission tenants series
women's health discussion tape
school teacher training project

Footscray Yarraville resident's action project
Croatia community participation in local festival
outdoor distribution in shopping mall and
investigation of "local cable broadcast

Altona establishment of local video access
points throughout area
programme of active use of video by school
development of council library use of video

Brisbane	anti-freeway project local Aboriginal community organisation programmes women vision programmes
Adelaide	Aboriginal community programmes development of Focus 1, the local drop-in centre
Whyalla	'Whyalla 8' public participation in planning project education department rural extension project support to emerging residents' groups
Fremantle	Ataraxia alternative living community project

Following are examples of how the VAC's are working in different areas of public issues within roles ii, iii and iv described in Section 2.2.

EDUCATION 4.1

"A lot of people who came into the Centre want to learn more than how to use video - they're interesting in fitness, painting, reading, craft groups. I'm encouraging the staff (who are interested in meeting these needs) to evolve their own teaching methods and to train any volunteer help."

"Unemployed and alienated youth are a very dispossessed group. We have been planning some thorough street work for the New Year with the porta-pak with a view to offering a means of expression to these kids."

"There's a number of groups concerned with educational issues, ranging from playgroups, through pro-school and after-school, to experimental schools."

"There's very heavy use by young kids - all wanting to tape school plays and debates (and the occasional pollution story)."

One local school...

"has built a studio in a classroom. They have dozens of kids who are trained in video who are going things with us."

"As well as making video equipment available Turtle Video has been able to:

- * encourage schools to share the existing but growing amount of video equipment in local schools.
- * pass on the experience of video in schools both in and beyond the local area.
- * advise on equipment when a school is considering purchasing its own."

"Community Outreach - North Williamstown Primary School

One of the most interesting community developments in the western suburbs is the growing range of activities and projects being fostered through the Community Outreach Group of the North Williamstown Primary School.

Plans to enable Community Outreach and Turtle Video to become a joint venture in community media are under way."

One of the major activities of the Centres is working with students, teachers and other Education Department people in the use of video. The Centres are helping 'liberate' equipment, put it in the hands of students and community directed projects. This is a long term task in some cases, aimed towards the schools becoming part of the local network of access points spreading from each centre. Students often come to the Centres - there's a regular group in Green Valley - and take part in the training programmes (sometimes of teachers) and running of the Centres.

Two major government programmes the Centres are working with are the Education Centres and Innovations Programme of the Schools Commission. This is a three-way dialogue between the programmes, the community and the Centres, each helping the other. For example, the Centre in Fremantle is helping the Education Centre in its resource planning and training.

At the tertiary level, Universities and CAE's are working with the Centres. Some Departments of Social Work and Community Development are placing their students part-time at a Centre as part of their field training. There is also a good deal of equipment sharing. Several directors have been invited to conduct seminars.

The Carlton Centre is housed in the same block as the Australian Union of Students. Both organisations share resources and provide mutual support. AUS has provided most of the quality print resources for Carlton and other Centres.

The Health Education Officers of the N.S.W. Health Commission in the western region of Sydney are major users of the four Centres. They have been influenced greatly by the Centres in their approach to using video and now have obtained their own equipment, yet still use the Centres as meeting places (because they don't look like government departments or hospitals).

As an example, a HEO working with a deserted wife with five children, used video to record conversations and played it back several times. Seeing herself for the first time, the woman grew rapidly in self-awareness and articulateness. After several weeks, she showed the tape to some of her friends in similar situations. Now the group is growing and developing a positive approach to their environment and working with other women in the area towards a women's health centre.

This tape would only have a very, small audience yet having a profound effect - an example of the process being important rather than a slick, professional product.

Health educators we've spoken to say that video is a very powerful tool in mental health group work, marriage counselling and related social work.

The Centres are also helping groups organise and then present submissions for community health centres (as in Footscray) and women's health centres and refuges (as in most states).

The Footscray Centre is located across the road from the Trade Union Health Centre and is discussing the possibility of providing a video outlet for the health centre by cable.

Another use:

"A tape was used to show doctors in Adelaide what facilities the hospital here could offer them and to induce doctors to practice in Whyalla where there is an urgent need for more doctors."

The Centres are participating in the development of local AAP committees or regional councils in many different ways. Some have been co-opted as resources to both established committees and community groups making submissions.

There is already some resource sharing at local levels. The AAP Council in Adelaide allocated a grant for a part-time worker from the Access Centre working with neighbourhood groups. A cable between the Centre and AAP office is being discussed as a possibility.

Other centres are co-operating with Community Development Officers and local groups in preparing submissions. The Paddington Centre has assisted a group in south-west Sydney prepare plans for a resource centre. The Adelaide Centre is helping a neighbourhood drop-in centre, called Focus 1, develop and then hive-off with the support of the Regional Council:

"Focus one may be another basis for residents in the Parks area demonstrating to police, probation officers, social workers, teachers, departmental project workers etc., some other aspect of the potential of the residents within the framework of their own expectations."

The Department of Social Security see the Centres as partners in their job of implementing the AAP. An officer of the Department addressed a meeting of centre directors to this effect on March 8.

As part of the Darwin reconstruction plan, the Department of Social Security opened an Access Centre in Darwin. Most Centres have been brought into this programme on a consultative-basis.

URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT 4.4

The Centres set up in the DURD Western Region of Sydney are, according to DURD officers, vital parts of their Western Region programmes. The Centres are being used by the Department as meeting places - again to avoid any government office atmosphere. The Centres are also helping the Department plan and tape a series of seminars on employment, child care and transport.

Most issues that local residents see as important relate in some way to urban and regional development. Roads, public transport, industrial pollution, town planning etc.

"A number of tapes have been prepared this month revolving around the issue of tenants and tenancy. These tapes which are of a high production standard have helped to bring people together concerned about a common issue and will also be used to stimulate discussion in planned future meetings/workshops of the use of video in the inner urban environment."

"A tape was made indicating local opinions as to how the community centre should be designed - this was shown to the architects concerned,"

"There are several suburbs with notorious problems ... and the plight of the residents of these areas should be brought to the public attention. Alternative plans for these areas can be developed. There are also several people interested in producing video tapes for schools and public meetings to put the arguments in favour of public transport."

National Public Transport Action
Week Circular, Brisbane, April 1974

In Whyalla, a tape of a public meeting at which the State Planning Department discussed its proposed plan of the city was played back many times in Adelaide in the Department. Local objections raised at the meeting were quickly resolved with the tape being acknowledged as a major influence. The Whyalla town planner has since become enthusiastic about the possible use of video in community planning.

As far as rural regions are concerned, the VAC's have so far made only tentative steps. The Fremantle Centre conducted a three-week tour of mining towns with the financial backing of the State Government and mining companies. The Whyalla Centre also visited country regions of South Australia and is currently planning a continuing rural strategy.

This area is only just starting to become involved with the VAC's. It has exciting potential. It is perhaps the area most open to political manipulation; however all Centre Directors appear to have solved this potential problem with a "no party politics, no campaigning" policy.

In Parramatta, the local organiser of the Amalgamated Metalworkers Union (and a local resident) is using the Centre. He is working both with local branches and the Union Education Officer in using video as a tool in trade union education.

Many people having access to video equipment in industry are being encouraged by the Centres to make their resources more accessible to the community (e.g. in Parramatta and Altona). Of course, the community includes workers in these industries, so that bridges are being built between workers, unions and management with the help of the Centres.

An interesting example of how people in various community development programmes interact and interchange resources is the work started by Roy Rienter at the Leyland factory with migrant workers. The Leyland plant had a very high proportion of migrant unskilled workers in many ethnic groups. Industrial and social problems were totally intermixed. Roy was employed by Leyland at the time as a sociologist to come up with plans to solve basically industrial problems (absenteeism) low productivity, high staff turnover etc.). Roy worked with the migrant workers and their ethnic communities, built a network of interpreters and facilitated ethnic and work groups to organise to get resources to solve both industrial and social problems (now recognised to be inseparable). Both management and unions were closely involved.

Roy ultimately left Leyland and is now a Health Education Officer with the Health Commission working still with migrant groups in industry and using the Parramatta Centre.

The Department of Labour and Immigration have just completed a video tape of the Leyland Programme. The tape will be copied and made available through the VAC's where there is already considerable demand for feedback of Roy's experience.

Most Centres are working with ethnic groups in different ways. Both - Altona and Footscray are deeply involved with migrant groups in their communities. The other Centres are only beginning to tap the potential for significant developments in this field.

In Carlton, many ethnic groups are involved in Housing Commission planning. The Centre is working with both tenants and Housing Commission in future planning of facilities, both for existing flats and for designs of future blocks.

The western region of Sydney and Melbourne and Adelaide have a relative concentration of ethnic groups.

Through such strategies as taping and playing back local sports and family celebrations, gradually migrant persons are being brought into the life of the Centres and are becoming involved in other projects.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS 4.7

In Brisbane, a staff member who is Aboriginal (funded from the Aboriginal Arts Board) is working with the Brisbane Aboriginal community very sensitively. She provided a major catalyst by taping the final of a Rugby League competition in which an all-black team were the victors. The tape has been shown many times to assist with community organising.

In Paddington, black groups are using the equipment of the Centre themselves. One project linking the Paddington and Brisbane Centres is a proposal by some South Sea Island woman to prepare a video submission to the Human Relations Commission. The project would involve an extensive tour of North Queensland tracing the living conditions and history of South Sea Island descendents in Australia and how many are disadvantaged by current legislation.

In Adelaide the activities of the Centre were started in conjunction with a local Aboriginal Community Programme. Since then video has been a significant resource.

Practically all Centres are establishing links with local councils. At Blacktown a permanent monitor is set up in council chambers; it is used to provide a communication channel from residents about issues raised at council meetings. Council responses to tapes are also taped to be played back later to residents. There have been several cases in Blacktown of immediate favourable decisions by Council after viewing a taped submission.

Some local libraries use the VAC's; many are already planning their own equipment, tape libraries and library promotion tapes,

"On a number of occasions locally made video tapes have been able to be played in the Altona Library - the tapes being specially transferred onto video cassettes for this purpose. The Library is also using video to record some of what is happening in its expanding programmes"

The Centre in Fremantle, with the support of the local council- has made a submission to the R.E.D. Scheme for assistance to alleviate local unemployment while benefiting the Centre in its administration and renovations.

Footscray Council has helped the Centre set up playback facilities in the shopping mall and have supported its efforts to conduct a pilot cable project with the approval of the P.M.G.

"Newport Power Station - the controversy still goes on with the government threatening power blackouts unless the unions agree to build the power station. The local conservation group are going to reshoot some material including more local interviews and a meeting of all unionists, scientists and others opposed to the power station."

"Various groups are making a series of tapes on parks, perk-lands which they intend showing to the public to drum up interest in their cause."

Conservation groups particularly require access to a range of media to record their findings. These include print, film and colour video; they are very media conscious and would be among the first groups to use extended facilities if they were available through the Centres.

In Fairfield, the honorary archivist of the Council used video to record the history of Cambridge House, an historic building under threat of redevelopment. Only recently, the wreckers moved in after two mysterious fires had gutted the building. The Centre took a video record of the wrecking.

Brisbane conservation groups are major users of the Centre. They are working with groups opposed to construction of inner-city freeways.

In Footscray, the Yarraville citizens' action group used video to record visual pollution in their area - the tape then assisted them in building their organisation to attack the causes of the problem.

HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION 4.10

Public participation in town planning is becoming more evident with the rise of tenants' unions and resident action groups. Video has already been shown to be a highly effective resource, promoting dialogue between planners and local residents.

Groups in inner Sydney and Melbourne are particularly media conscious.

In Adelaide, the VAC satellite drop-in centre, Focus 1, has been established in the centre of a Housing Trust estate. Video is being used by mainly young people to highlight the poor facilities in the area. They are working with a newly formed residents' committee which is liaising with the Housing Trust, the Department of Community Welfare and Education Department in the planning of a multi-purpose community centre.

New firms of community housing such as construction or redevelopment co-operatives require extensive community development for full participation.

It was frequently pointed out that there is enormous scope for the use of video in this area as well as refugee participation in the planning of Darwin, the planning of new towns such as Monarto.

Sporting groups have used all the Centres to record matches for later play-back. Whereas this sort of activity is not thought of in terms of "social action" or "community development", it has been nevertheless, a valuable element in gaining local acceptance of the Centres.

Most Centres seem to lend the equipment to sporting groups if it is available.

There is a deal of spinoff: people in sporting teams have become involved in the life of the Centre and are assisting other groups or initiating projects in their own areas of interest.

In Fairfield, a person who is a property developer, whose initial introduction to the Centre was via the taping of a football match, is now working with the Centre in planning community media facings for a new shopping complex he is building. Cable T.V. and community radio are part of the plan.

In Whyalla, the local town planner has proposed that a tourist tape be produced and placed with automatic play-back facilities in the Tourist Information Centre. The Centre would arrange production of the tape.

Another use of the equipment:

"Librarians from a nearby Library contacted me early in the month to discuss using video tape with a group of teens. They had been having a great deal of trouble with unemployed teens around the library disrupting the library at night. Instead of sending them away they began meeting with them and discussing the problems of being a teenager here. They thought the video tape might be useful in role playing and in opening up some new interests for the teens. They also had a group of adults in contact with them interested in media and alternative learning."

Anti-freeway groups in Sydney and Brisbane have used the Centres and are learning from each other through exchange of tapes.

Groups promoting bicycles as a cheap non-polluting, safe form of transport in Melbourne are using the Carlton Centre facilities.

In Sydney, a major project of the Paddington Centre has been to provide resources for a Balmain residents' group trying to stop container trucks using the narrow streets of the suburb. They have proposed barges as an alternate form of transport for the containers. A tape was produced by the group and is being shown throughout the inner-city area to other groups to rally support; it was also shown to the Australian Minister for Transport.

Women's movement groups such as Women's Electoral Lobby and Women's Liberation are very media conscious and are very much aware of the Centres in all the capital cities. The Centres have provided them with resources that otherwise would be very difficult to obtain. Most major events in the women's movement are now recorded on video, edited and distributed widely: such conferences as Women in the Media, the WEL annual conference, the International Women's Day-march.

In Green Valley and Fairfield, the inner-city women's groups gave support to local women who had first organised themselves (the Green Valley Centre was a focal point) and then prepared a submission for a refuge and health centre (both were a success). The video tape was instrumental in convincing the inner-city women of the need for support.

Some woman's groups preparing submissions for IWY, the Human Relations Commission and the Children's Commission are using video as a resource to make cases:

"One tape discusses the need for real child care facilities and creative environment which can fulfill both mother and children. Looks at facilities in the area, how they can be improved and for the pooling of resources in establishing a centre run by mothers."

A staff member of the Parramatta Centre is regularly visiting a men's prison and working with the inmates during their creative activities and general discussions.

"That's really important because a lot of them are getting out soon. It gives them a direct link with communications outside, somewhere they can pick-up on. Apart from all the obvious benefits from contact with what's going on outside Parramatta gaol, this is helping to break down the isolation and help them to articulate their feelings about what it feels like to be in gaol."

This is a real breakthrough at the gaol which is a medium-security prison which does not admit many outsiders to talk with prisoners.

In another area, in Footscray, a consumer protection group is using video:

"... we've done quite a lot of work with the Sunshine Community Centre on consumer protection - a couple of people have been working on that pretty intensively with demonstrations and activities they've organised to publicise consumer protection - and also a programme about its effect on migrants and how they get ripped off."

There is great potential use of video and other media in working with groups of police and citizens to see each other's point of view:

"There's a tape on police harassment of young people, A Greek gentleman has collected a lot of evidence on audio-tapes of young people's unpleasant experiences with local law enforcers - wants to make a tape to send to the Attorney-General's Department in Canberra."

It was creative ideas in the first sense that started the pilot VAC's; it has been creative people in the VAC's that have carried the ideas into practice.

Two centres, Paddington and Carlton, were originally proposed as "Resource" Centres as well as having an "Access" role. The distinction was that these centres would have more equipment and be available for artistic use of video as well as "access". In practice, both centres have been a vital part of the VAC network and the "resource" function a vital part of this. All centres are attracting artistic people and in many cases these people are the most sensitive when working with community groups - probably because of their sensitivity and ability to identify themselves with people and issues.

The Centres are very much part of the community arts scene. Footscray:

"... I don't see video as sort of standing back and just recording functions - it's a multiple purpose medium, and if you can be in a situation where there are people working in other creative fields, there's some good sparking going on between the two. ... we're at the stage of trying to work with the Community Arts Centre."

In the western region of Sydney, all the Centres are involved in local moves to create community arts councils. It is apparent that there is a valuable on-going exchange of information and resources between the Community Arts organisations and the Centres.

MEDIA 4.16

At some stage, to present their message, groups require access to distribution facilities that the Centres cannot provide. All Centres are accumulating resources in this area - how to write press releases, how to get journalists interested in issues, how to gain access to T.V. news etc. Centre staff are helping groups plan their distribution.

As groups realise that the present media organisations have different objectives or are slow to respond, alternate plans are evolving. The Centres are a resource in this planning.

Even though the Centres are concerned with processes rather than product, production skills are a necessary resource to each Centre. Community-minded journalists, radio, T.V; and film producers - are already part of the life of some of the centres and are helping groups produce tapes.

In the planning stage of the VAC's, there was debate in the video community and among Board members as to which organisational strategy was appropriate (cf "Greeks Bearing Gifts" by John Hughes, Learning Exchange Newspaper, December 1974). The debate focusing on two approaches:

- * the grass roots approach in which autonomous groups would be invited to make application to a fund. This was feared to encourage mainly video 'freaks' and middle-class groups that knew how to organise to apply for government funds.
- * the systems approach in which a central, strong management body would systematically plan and open centres with a strong dependency on the central management unit for resources and with planned dependencies on other Centres. This was feared to be impossibly bureaucratic considering the diverse and individual nature of each Director and local community.

In fact, neither of these approaches was followed. A broadcast or broad front approach was implemented. VAC's were set up in areas with a Director, some equipment and a small budget. The success of any one Centre was not dependent on the others - the success being related to the ability of the Director to match the needs of the local grass roots. Centres link-up voluntarily in a network, feeding and developing from each other both resources and ideas.

The Film and T.V. Board Policy Statement of May, 1974, stated,

"Each Centre will be conducted autonomously through the Australian Film Institute.... this autonomous and independent status is vital to the success of the Centres. They should not be part of a rigid, formal structure, the Centre Director will be totally responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Centre."

This approach, in fact, has been shown to be more appropriate than either of the two debated. It has been shown to work in areas relatively denuded of organised grass roots and avoids the disadvantages inherent in the grass roots and systems approaches.

One other helpful element - the VAC's were set up with the back-up of a first class administrative support structure through the Australian Film Institute accounting section. Whilst some Centre Directors begrudged the time they had to give to keeping their accounts they did admit that the system could hardly be simpler or more responsive to their needs.

The Directors

A group of people with a diversity of ages, experience and individual skills were selected as Directors.

THE AUSTRALIAN FILM INSTITUTE
is establishing a number of

**COMMUNITY ACCESS
VIDEO CENTRES**

in collaboration with the Film & Television Board
of the Australian Council for the Arts

and requires

CENTRE DIRECTORS

Applications are invited from those sensitive to the need for community development through improved methods of communication in local communities and understand the potential for using video as a sociological instrument.

Applications will be considered from experienced social workers who are familiar with the use of video as a recording and communicative medium, and who have the ability to stimulate individuals and groups in the community in using the techniques of video production for sociological purposes.

Administrative experience and a knowledge of television or video equipment and production techniques is desirable.

Initially, centres are being established in:
FREMANTLE, WHYALLA, BRISBANE, MELBOURNE
(Altona—Footscray—Carlton) and SYDNEY (City and Western Suburbs).

Salary is negotiable to a maximum of \$8,000 according to experience and qualifications. The Directors will be offered one year contracts subject to renewal.

Written applications, including the names and addresses of three referees, should be addressed to:

**The Director
Australian Film Institute
PO Box 165
CARLTON SOUTH VIC 3053**

CLOSING DATE—16 March

The interview sought community development skills:

"the emphasis should be on a strong desire to promote social change rather than use video. But he/she must be fully aware of and keen to use the untapped power of video to achieve these changes ... be wary of people who would become T.V. Directors/Producers -they must encourage and teach others to express themselves fully. Their direct involvement should be minimal reducing to zero."

(From notes for Selection Panel by a Film and T.V. Board Member.)

Following is a synopsis of each VAC Director appointed.

MALE, 28	managerial experience in family firm 2 years; technical training; European travel, community cable television work, Canada, 1 year; travel through South America, 1 year.
FEMALE, 31	M.A. (English); lived in Holland 2 years; film researcher 2 years. Prior to this a teacher.
FEMALE, 22	degree in Sociology and Social Work; active interest in local politics and film making.
FEMALE, 21	left school aged 14 years; experience in journalism; also worked in community video projects; 4 months Film and T.V. school.
FEMALE, 28	Arts and Dip. Ed. high school teaching and working with youth via YWCA, Canada.
MALE, 25	part Arts degree Sociology. Extensive involvement in student action movement; video and film experience.
FEMALE, 29	Arts (Politics), Dip. Ed., 2 years high school teaching; living as migrant in Italy, 1 year; work/travel U.S., 2 years educationist Aboriginal community development programme; tutoring at CAE, Sociology.
MALE, 47	ex-minister; worked in crisis intervention agencies as a leader of sensitivity training and encounter groups.
MALE, 23	video and technical work for Department of Social Security and AAP.
MALE, 22	unfinished law degree; extensive video experience in community groups.

FEMALE, 25	arts degree; production work A.B.C.; study grant to look at video access/cable T.V. U.S.A.
FEMALE, 27	Multi-media journalism experience in Australia and U.S. Active in women's movement.
MALE, 23	B.A. Dip. Ed., (Government), Communications post-graduate training.
MALE, 38	Minister - on - Leave; prior work with ethnic communities; extensive community organising experience with multi-media.
FEMALE, 31	Multi-lingual, ex-teacher; extensive community organising experience with multi-media.

It appears that there are three possible directions that the experience of Centre directing could lead. These are highly related to the amount of time the Centre dwells in each phase and the types of projects chosen:

- i. TECHNICAL - a Centre predominantly in Phase 11 with Role Type v would emphasise the importance of this skill.
- ii. PRODUCTION - a Centre in Phase III or IV and assuming projects Role Types i and ii would move towards an emphasis on this skill.
- iii. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/G.P. - a Centre in Phase IV with Role types iii and iv would stress the importance of developing this skill. The Centre Directors role is highly analagous to that of a G.P. As a G,P. relates to his neighbourhood community so a Centre Director relates to his more complex community (neighbourhood, work, industrial , government). The voluntary, helping relationship is key.

Most Centre Directors have sensed the conflict between these three roles. Certainly, each Centre needs to have as staff, or have access to people with a range of these skills

"To what extent is the Director's role one of administrator, producer, technician, community worker?"

It is suggested that a Director is often called to-fake on these roles simultaneously although each role has follow-through, follow-up responsibilities."

(Quote from a Workshop Agenda Item)

However, it appears that concentration on building technical and production skills can subvert the Community Development/G.P. role of the Director and Centre. This is evident in those Centres that have spent much of their time in Phases II and III.

There would be positive advantage in openly de-emphasising the technical and production role of the Directors and their VACs.

"Nevertheless, even though sometimes no equipment has been operating, the numbers of projects have been increasing and involvement in these projects more complex and sophisticated."

Those Directors who brought community development experience to the job are also those who most quickly led their Centres to Phase IV.

The Centre

Many Centres deliberately set up as drop-in centres with attendant publicity and street front accessibility. There is conflict in this role as Centres emerge to Phase IV.

"I've found the administrative side most onerous. As a shop front you do have problems which do not arise if you can choose the hours at which people come. While you are trying to keep your systems going you're also at the beck and call of people who just walk in after they think its an electrical shop or they think you are selling T.V.s. Very time consuming. So, I find it most difficult to get time for initiating particular use of the centre by community groups."

The image of the "friendly neighbourhood video access director" with the notion of unlimited and unquestioned access to television equipment diverts the energy and time of the Director and staff, is personally exhausting and subverts the Phase IV function of the Centre.

Drop-in centres should not be an aim of the VAC's. They can arise, however, from a planned project as in Adelaide with Focus I,

"Although they discuss the running of Focus I with me I know that their decisions are appropriate to the area and so I find that my role is mainly that of reinforcing their growing confidence."

Focus I is already being budded-off to lead its own independent existence.

The overall success of the VAC's in achieving purposes has arisen from initial strategies that have given independence to the Centres, This has been emphasised, as the Centres move to Phase IV and the Director assumes a community development/G.P. role rather than technical or production.

"Community Video can't be a centrally controlled bureaucratic project, it is properly a co-operative federation of groups and activities."

(Co-directors of Altona, already in Phase IV)

Any further development should be carefully devised so as not to jeopardise what has already been successful. The self-management style of the VAC's should be protected against pressures to set up "expert" central management services and management committees such as could be required for predominantly technical or production centres.

"The danger now manifestly apparent is that with their enthusiasm for intentions suitably tempered with critical regard for what is actually happening, the Directors will now, rather than organizing with their communities, turn instead to organizing themselves... if this were to come about, then in essence what has been rhetorically referred to as 'Guerrilla Video' will have taken to the trenches - and there, along with all the hopes and aspirations that the concept embraces - it will most assuredly rot and die... I suggest that it is first imperative... that the Access Programme will be served - and can only be served - by the Centres themselves serving their community."

(Brian Walsh, Alternative Radio Association, September 1974 now staff member, Carlton VAC)

The implications of this are to build up local responsibility, local resources and control of planning and budgets with the VAC Director, and an absolute minimum of function at a national level. This must be accompanied by budgets that enable flexibility and diversity of operation.

As well, local sources of funds should be tapped to provide additional resources.

National Level Functions

The accounting function is a central function that is working well and should be retained. It is a service and not a control and should remain such.

On the other hand, the centralising of technical expertise in Paddington has bureaucratised this essential function and is not, working. There is no way that a central technical skill can provide information, maintenance support and counselling equitably and with maximum response to Centres so widely spread.

"We've had a lot of problems with the equipment. But it's not possible to solve them at a national level. We'd prefer to have a budget to deal with it ourselves - a lot of local people can help. What is really bad is that ordering of equipment was done without our knowledge. This should definitely be a function of our Centre."

(From a monthly report)

Centre Directors should be given sufficient budget to enable them to make their own equipment maintenance arrangements. As well, the building of local technical skill networks is a vital creative function of each VAC, which is far more effective than the advice and counselling one central person can give.

Technical skills and other requirements not contained fully at one Centre can still be shared between VAC's - but on a voluntary exchange or contractual basis; this would be an expected outcome of the network development of the VAC's. An example of this would be the starting of a technical newsletter by one Centre, with others paying some of the cost, only if they saw value in it, or one Centre paying the fare of a staff member of another Centre possessing a particular skill to visit and conduct a workshop. Each Centre budget should allow for such decisions.

It has been suggested that some functions of each of the Centres can be co-ordinated or assisted by a "national video resource person". As with the current national technical resource, there is no way the VAC's can achieve satisfactory service without sacrificing significant responsibility to the central level; this would be a dilution of the self-management administration of each VAC.

We repeat, the success of the VAC's is related to their self-management style of organisation which must be protected.

Directors have already demonstrated initiative and creativity in approaching the problem of meeting their needs either locally or by developing their own system of sharing/exchange between centres:

"Last month we tried to start the tape exchange/programs list etc., circulating and will give it another try next month.

Footscray called in and used the facilities at our Centre several times and I personally spent time in discussion in the Footscray Cable project.

Whyalla has had some programs dubbed and borrowed a porta-pak. Adelaide called for copies of same programs and Bush Video in Sydney has agreed to incorporate our list of programs in their catalogue and we will reciprocate."

"We were very pleased to have the company of Chris, the assistant at the Woodville Centre. He stayed at our Centre and helped shoot a tape and hold a workshop in the Footscray Bowl on the 28th. We had long discussions on ways of increasing co-operation between our centres as he perceived a number of similarities in our operations, through exchange of dubs and offering us the facility of using local interpreters in Woodville for dubbing tapes in different languages."

"At the time of typing this we are putting the finishing touches to a folder of publicity material (pamphlettes on the centre, photographs etc.). When this is completed I will send you all a copy. If any of you are doing likewise could you return the favour? People are keen to see what is happening in other areas."

"One of the problems I raised in the last monthly report was the problem of staffing the centre and being also able to go around the community. This problem will be largely solved for myself as I have a full time assistant starting next week. I was able to do this by saving the bulk of my part time budget until now for use."

"We have asked the five people mentioned in our September report to be consultants to Turtle Video for a trial period."

BOARDS, BUDGETS, SELECTION OF STAFF 5.4

Board of Trustees

(N.B. This section does not refer to any existing Board, or Management Committee within the current organisation of the VAC's.)

The Centres, as a matter of purpose and organisational strategy, are self-managing units linked in a network on a voluntary exchange or contractual basis. What are the lessons for overall control of the VAC's?

This model has no central management function. It may have, initially, a central accounting service because the simplicity of such a procedure, coupled with the availability of a telephone is extremely simple to administer. It has no 'expert' management services. There is no need for a management committee, simply because the Centres are self-managing.

However, there would need to be something like a Board - as trustees for the fund-givers, set up to assume public accountability and responsibility for the VAC programme.

This Board is analogous to a company board; it does require secretarial advice, so it would employ a 'company secretary' who serves the Board only. This person would have no direct managerial function with respect to the VAC's.

There is no place on the Board for VAC representation; such a role is untenable for any Centre Director whose responsibility is co-ordinating the self-management of his or her Centre. Also, the campaigns for 'worker' positions on the Board would divert energy to pulling the VAC network apart rather than strengthening the bonds. It is doubtful that any director would accept in practice that he and his centre could be represented by any other director. These objections to 'worker representation' are highly predictable and well documented.*

Some of the functions the Board will from time to time consider:

Replacement of staff, selection of new staff, yearly approval of national level funding, conditions of employment, can all be dealt with in a manner meeting the satisfaction of individual Centre staff and community.

For example, if a Centre Director is planning to retire, a note could be circulated around other VAC's indicating the Board's intention to advertise the vacancy. The Board asks one or two other Directors and a local consultant to visit the Centre, discuss with the retiring Director, staff and users, the job requirements. An advertisement is designed and placed locally, and maybe nationally. A selection committee appointed by the Board and made up of representatives of the above interview and make a recommendation to the Board.

Annual budgets of each Centre can only be planned at each Centre in a self-managing model. Expenditure has to be related to income which comes both from a national level and at a local level. The Board can send an accounting person around each VAC to help if needed, final budgets approved at the Board level relate only to national funds and not local funding. Auditing is arranged at the local level. It would be expected that as a VAC grows, local level income assumes an increasing proportion. The sources of local funds are many and varied and reflect the diversity, local grass roots needs and support and current programmes of each VAC.

Salaries and other industrial questions can be solved in the usual model of collegiate organisation of VAC staff through a staff association. The Board is the employer in these negotiations.

*Emery, F. E. & E. Thorsrud, Form and Content in Industrial Democracy 1968, London, Tavistock.

Collegiate or Collective Functions

VAC Directors and staff do have shared problems and interests and a lot of on-going learning that they can profitably share.

A College of Practitioners can be set up voluntarily to meet from time to time in workshops to discuss shared futures and ways and means of mutual support. As and when appropriate, they might make recommendations to the Board of Trustees as to the appropriate size of seeding grants for new VAC's and an appropriate policy for national level grants for existing VAC's.

The Film and T.V. Board

The creativity and foresight of the Film and Television Board was the stimulus to set up the original VAC pilot project. This was an appropriate mission of the Council for the Arts.

But, there is no place in their charter to continue their control.

"Council and the Boards should not set themselves up as production organisations. An arts activity may at its inception need some kind of stimulus which Council or a Board may be best suited to provide, but this role as a direct participant should not be a continuing one."

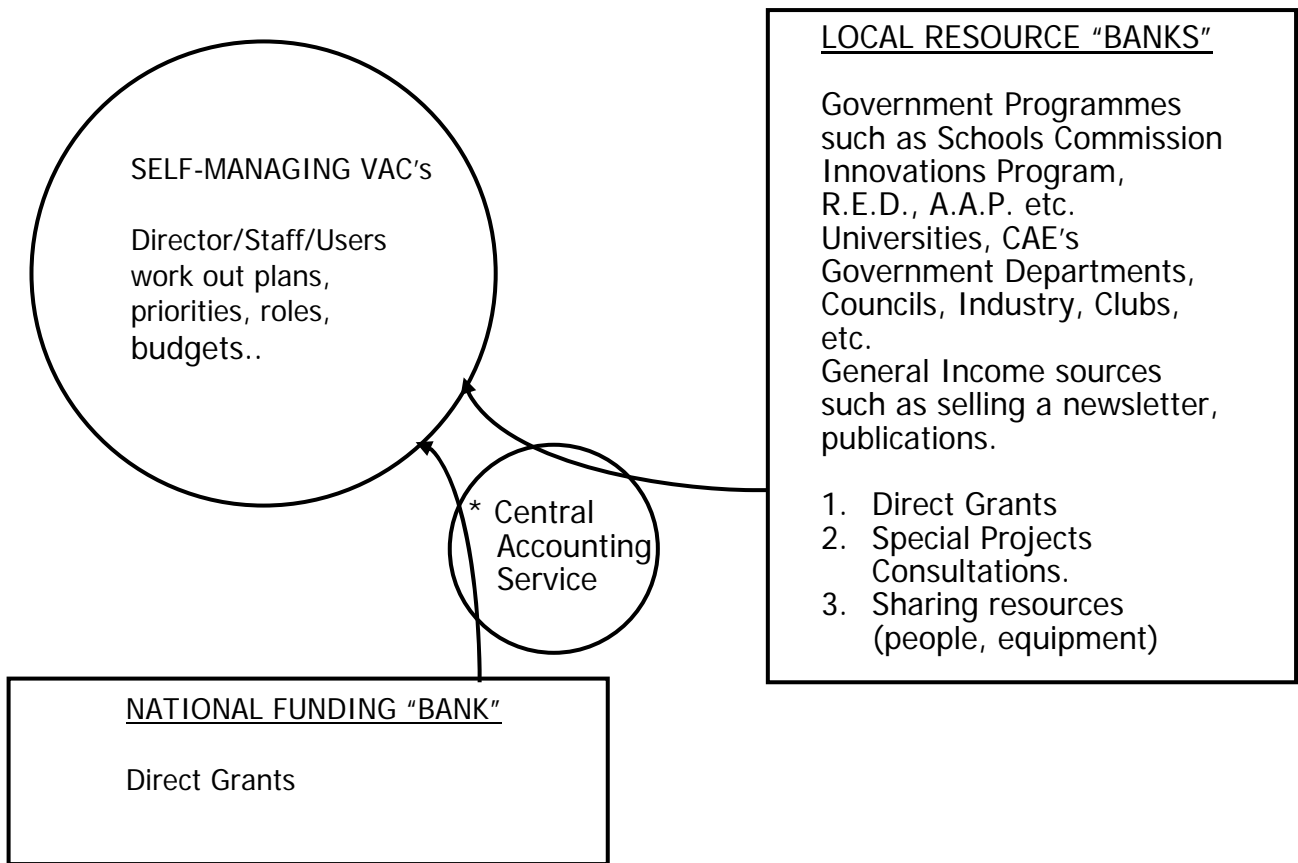
(Recent Policy Statement of Council for the Arts)

Nor does it seem appropriate to fund a programme that sets national goals and purposes as its rationale, from a single industry source. The VAC programme is multi-dimensional. This implies, a diversity of funding, first at the local level under guidance of each VAC and at the national level.

The VAC programme is not industry oriented (film, T.V. or media). In developing to meet community requirements the VAC's have consistently and significantly moved away from the product orientation of the mass media. The sooner it moves out of this industry the healthier for its growth.

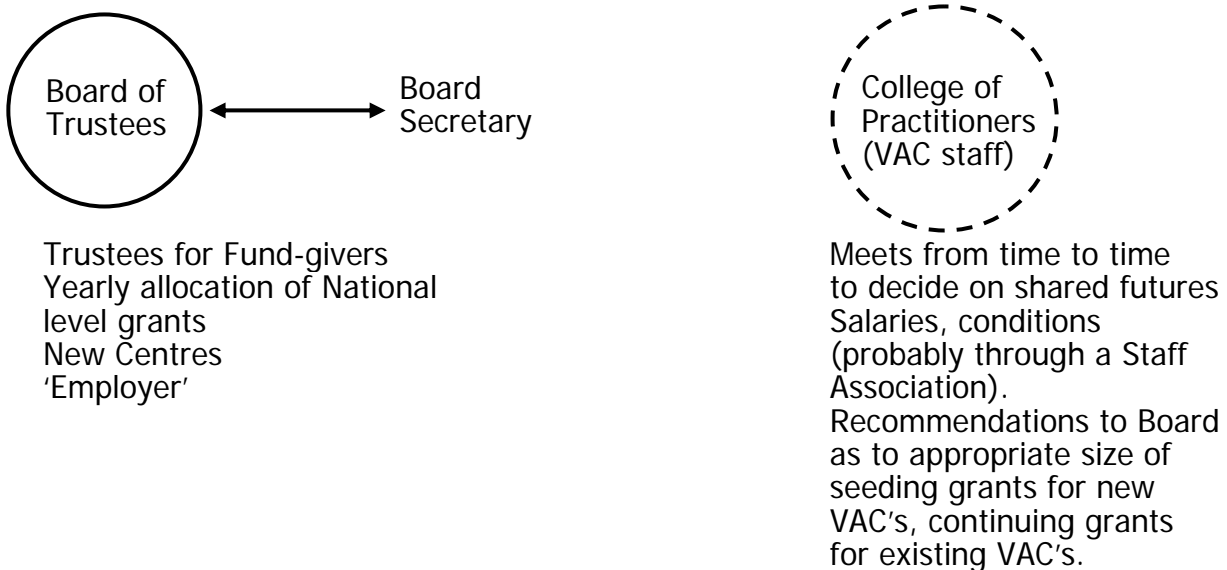
Likewise, it would not be healthy for the VAC's singularly or collectively to rely on one government department for funding. The pressures from the information section to take over would be extremely strong. The VAC would likely spend its time in Roles (i) and (ii) (tools of government).

THE VAC PROGRAM – PROPOSED ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL



* could be

- (i) A Government Department Accounts Section
- or (ii) The Australian Film Institute
- or (iii) Any commercial accounting firm



The setting up of the original pilot VAC's was a confusing experience for many Directors. It appears that at least three lessons are evident:

- i. The Centre should not be exclusively video. Altona (already in Phase IV) has made this point strongly. They are proposing to diversify their own resources to multi-media. Screen-printing, typing and duplicating are seen as equally desirable as video equipment - although access to such facilities is more important than ownership.

"The Access Project can never provide enough equipment to go around. It can unlock some of what is already around ... it is a process of building bridges - or, rather, many bridges, It is in part an attempt to bring together resources of equipment and human experience ... particularly those resources which have been till now, isolated and underused."

"Newport Power Station Protest Group - The tape makers changed their media priorities completely. They decided that it would be far more effective to produce a booklet financed by the Australian Conservation Foundation to be distributed through newsagents and booksellers. They printed 50,000 copies which are selling rapidly.

This is a classic example of people with an urgent case having restricted access to broadcast T.V. opting for the accessible cheap medium of print with wide distribution potential."

"People getting together is the really important thing, not the video itself. Community radio or print could be a hell of a lot more effective and that's a good thing ... if, as a result of using our Centre, people decide they would be better off spending the money printing pamphlets and doing a door-knock that's good. We have \$1,000 from the AFI to buy an off-set printer or hire a copying machine, and I think it will be used as heavily as the video equipment when people know it is there."

- ii. The technical and production skills of Directors should be subordinated to community development skills. The Centres should not be production or technically oriented, and should resist all temptation to become more 'expert'. This implies that the VAC's should not accumulate sophisticated editing and studio equipment though there's nothing wrong with having access somewhere.

"It was difficult for professional media people to run the workshop. We are more into community development work at the Centre - these guys didn't seem to understand that."

(Comment on recent Film and Television School Workshop by a Phase IV VAC.)

- iii. We consider that Directors in the pilot VAC programme were literally "thrown off the deep end". They were placed in a responsible, complex role with minimum preparation and training. There was no clear statement of purposes which would enable them to plan and organise their own time and realistically measure the resources of their Centre.

"There was no ground work laid for me to get my own accommodation..."

"It took about three months just to get the place set up."

"My second week served to get the Centre more operational; furniture was purchased, the phone installed and people started to use the gear."

It might be observed at this point that perhaps these things, particularly the last, are not very critical, after all the Centres succeeded despite them. We would have some reservations about this. Toward the end of our study we became aware of evidence that the directors may have suffered much more genuine upset to their health in this period than one would expect for their age group. Maybe people accept this when they see themselves as the pioneers. The next generation of directors will not have this to keep them going.

If existing VAC's are to be helped to move to Phase IV, then some strengthening of staff on location at the Centres is desirable. This would enable the Director to become more involved in community development and less in administrative hassles.

In short, VAC budgets should contain sufficient finance to cut down unproductive wear and tear of staff - a secretary/administrator/typist is necessary.

Adequate provision should also be made for telephone, local travel and interstate travel.

Workshop requirements are discussed in Section 5.7.

STARTING UP NEW CENTRES 5.6

New centres will not be in the same situation as the original pilot VAC's. The following are likely procedures in setting up new centres:

- * The planning of new locations. This can be started following grass root submissions to the Board of Trustees or the Board could request Centre Directors to submit suggestions. The Board could then appoint a planning group made up of say, three Centre Directors and/or appropriate consultants.

- * following a Board decision to start a new Centre, a Centre Director could be appointed using a similar procedure to that described in Section 5.4.
- * the newly appointed Centre Director could then work in another Centre for a few weeks and/or travel to a number of other Centres.
- * he/she would then spend time in the local community planning the location of the Centre and the moving-in.
- * sufficient budget would be available to appoint back-up staff immediately. A staff member from another Centre could be invited to work for several weeks.
- * the Centre would acquire basic video equipment plus other media - typewriter, duplicator, audio recorder as an example.
- * the Centre Director would be helped by a Board appointed consultant and/or some other Directors to understand the general purposes of the programme and the anticipated phases.

CONTINUING EDUCATION/WORKSHOP NEEDS 5.7

Five workshops have been held:

- i. May 1974 (2 weeks) Macquarie University. Orientation, discussions.

"The two major topics of discussion at the workshop were autonomy of Centre Directors and the policy as laid down by the Board."

(Senior Project Officer of Film and T.V. Board)

One Centre Director described this event as

"... no old reference points were allowed, no new ones created. There was no framework for constructive discussion and effective sharing of skills."

- ii. September, 1974 (4 days) Melbourne. Internal political discussion over the sacking of the Director of Paddington and Board/AFI problems dominated the proceedings. The inability of the workshop to attack individual problems of Directors and VAC's was commented on by one Director:

"The workshop is over. We all stayed in one room. We had one programme for everyone. We used one method of communication - group discussion. No diversity, no in-depth, personal exposure to an area in which we needed to extend our experience. No videotapes made or played. No vision... we recommend (a) individually tailored programs - decentralized, flexible, personal (b) all Directors together training sessions, only where it is reliably known that all are new to the specific matter, (c) only a very small component of required plenary discussion."

- iii. January/February, 1975 (5 days) Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide 3 regional workshops. Run by the Film and Television School in conjunction with the national design engineer. Topics were production and technical skills.
- iv. February 1975 (1 day) Sydney, "Challenge for Change" Seminar. Playback of tapes and discussion of projects. This was the first time Directors had discussed their projects with each other as a group.
- v. March 1975 (2 days) Sydney, A seminar as an element of the evaluation project.

It is apparent to us in our discussions with Directors that the workshops held so far have not met the needs of Centre Directors for the self-management organisation of the VAC's.

We suggest that a proper workshop would ask such questions as:

- * what are the purposes of the VAC's?
- * what criteria are they to be judged by?
- * how best can VAC's work with local resources? What resources? About what sorts of things?
- * how best can Centre Directors and staff organise themselves as a college of practitioners so as to collectively understand shared futures?

and

- * look back - look forward

A workshop/college on this basis could be held every 9 months if at least 8 VAC/s wanted it. A central allowance could be available.

The VAC's have achieved success with respect to purposes. We have gathered information and presented much of it in this report. This assessment is made with full awareness of the pilot nature of the programme associated with the fact that not all VAC's have yet achieved Phase IV of their growth.

There remains the question of cost/effectiveness. In other words are there more efficient, less costly strategies that would achieve the same ends? We believe not; that the diversity within the VAC programme is indicative of the many alternate arrangements at local level.

In summary, a VAC programme that is;

- a. self-managing for each VAC;
- b. non production, non technical oriented, with a range of resources accessible but a minimum equipment owned;
- c. with a modest, yet flexible budget;

is a valuable and cost effective community resource, initially needing seeding funds from government, eventually becoming more self-supporting.

Rationalisation

The talk of rationalisation of the current VAC's without their involvement in planning was an example of how the self-managing function of each centre is currently being diluted. In addition, it was also discussed on the specious ground of financial limitation of the Film and T.V. Board.

"To continue at the present level of ten centres would require in excess of \$500,000... rationalisation for budgetary consideration is imperative."
(Senior Project Officer Film and T.V. Board Report, November 1974)

We would like to make the following points:

1. We believe that the programme is achieving desirable purposes.
2. We believe the programme should continue as a self-managing administrative model with a diversity of funding both at the national and local levels.
3. There does appear to be a need for rationalization with respect to the equipment provided. Questions need to be asked about the cost effectiveness for the community of Special Effect Generators versus a mimeograph machine; a studio set-up versus an additional part-time staff member.

4. Consequently, we do not suggest any cutting back of existing centres that does not arise from local initiatives, i.e. we do not suggest rationalizing in that direction.
5. In the multiplication of Centres, their directors should as far as possible, be like the best of the current directors, people with proven practical ability to work in and with communities.