Victorian Safe Communities Network Inc.

First Annual Conference – report on participant feedback

Introduction

This is a report, prepared by Mark Hennessy, setting out the results of a questionnaire survey handed out to participants in the First Annual Victorian Conference on Community Safety, held at the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Complex on Friday 31 October 2003.

Thirty seven people handed in completed questionnaires, out of 108 people attending the conference. A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this report. In addition, Norm Free handed in some written comments, which have been integrated into this report.

Participants were asked to rate various aspects of the conference on a 5 point scale – the results are set out in the graph below.

Participants were also offered the opportunity to provide open responses about aspects of the conference, which are grouped under common themes in subsequent pages.

Participant feedback - VSCN Conference 31/10/03
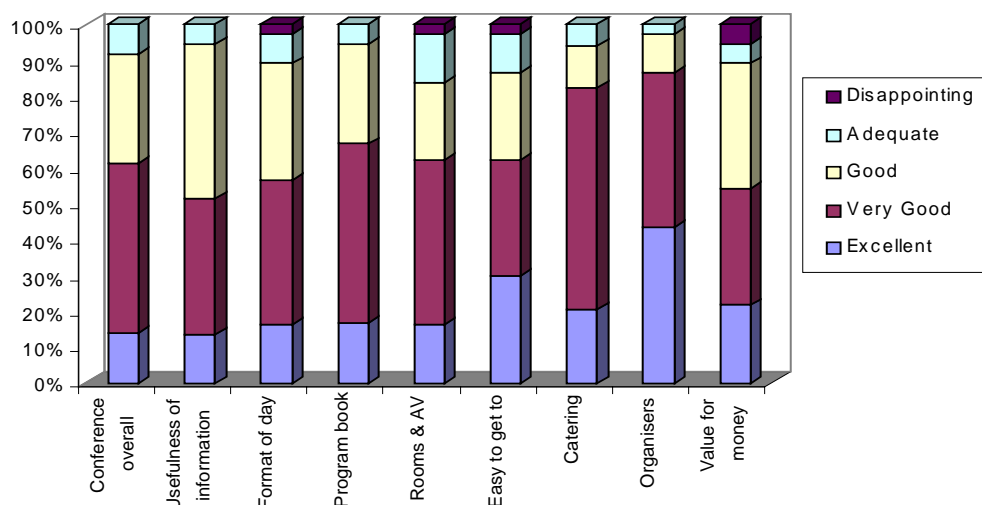
What did you like best about today?

Particular speakers and sessions
- Interesting variety of presentations. I liked Phil Shanahan, Lynne Galanti & Wendy Bell especially.
- Keynote address by Bill McKendry
- Presentation on Safety Design by Wendy Bell, and generosity of all participants.
- Marketing session
- Workshop sessions
- Hypothetical

Whole of community safety approach
- The idea of bringing together the various strategies and programs that are focusing and including safety/prevention. Especially from those that are doing the work. NOT management.
- Range of presenters and topics
- Presenting
- Varied approaches, choice of sessions to attend
- Introduction to new aspects and ideas
- Choice of topics/streams to attend
- Diverse presentations
- Lots of different areas covered.
- Cross fertilization of disciplines, issues and approaches
- The variety of speakers
- The fact that the broad and holistic nature of community safety was recognised
- Range of speakers, interests, passions about safety

Networking
- Chatting with everyone
- Good information displays. Networking opportunities.
- Learning about other networks and whole safety approach
- Meeting old friends and new ones
- Networking (6)
- Networking - variety people
- Networking & exciting program, information put forward
- Fairly casual atmosphere
- "The buzz" between people working in this area – enthusiasm / camaraderie.
- The information
- New idea opportunities
- Opportunities for discussion / interactive sessions

Information
- The workshops were very informative.
- Short presentations - 30 minute max is ideal.
- Hypothetical great way to inject some fun into the day.
- Practitioner focus.

Other
Vegetarian catering

What did you like least about today?

Chairing, timekeeping of sessions
- Poor time management (facilitation) of opening session. Too little time for discussion, and over-run.
- Late start / long double intro before keynote speakers.
- Speakers overrunning their time
- Sessions going overtime
- Late start and difficulties maintaining time frames.

Format
- Speakers - too many, not enough time for discussion with them about their work programs. Too long a day.
- Some of the sessions were a bit too long.
- Not being able to make the first half
- Some sessions too long
- Not enough interaction in workshops
- Breakdown of stream topics
- Having to choose between streams / too many streams (3)
- Streams should have been halved - 2 speakers per stream x 4 sessions to allow greater choice & for speakers to attend other streams.
- Would have liked the opportunity to hear more of the presenters. but was limited to the 2.
- Workshop environment was not personal or intimate

Other
- Should have organisation on badges so you can identify industries of interest
- Not getting the program.
- Venue was cold.
- Venue, acoustics
- Drop off of delegates.
- Nothing
- Rain
- I was freezing all day
- It was all good

Hypothetical
- Not that I didn't like it, but the least value for me was the hypothetical
- Hypothetical good at exposing problems but not at getting to solutions.
- Hypothetical
- Hypothetical was good, but could have pursued some of the issues more vigorously and realistically.

Topics and speakers
- Very little on the principles, practice and training for CS
- Too few in work safety stream (3)
- Keynote speakers did not address practical approaches
- People did not seem to rate A & D issues as relevant to community safety or they might view it as a specialist field.
- One keynote address was mentioned.

How did you find out about the conference?

- Advertisement
- Braybrooke and Maidstone Association
- Casual phone call from Barbara Minuzzo
- Community safety month information
- Crime Prevention Victoria
- Email (9)
- Jan Shield
- LGA knowledge of VSCN inc.
- Local government
- Mail (3)
- Newsletter
- RCH
- Through my Council
- Through VSCN membership/meeting (10)
- Through corporate membership of VSCN (RoadSafe)
- Website
- Work
- Work - PLP
- Work colleague

Suggestions for next year

More, bigger, better

Dinner next year
Looking forward to next year
Well done! I look forward to next year's conference.
Well done to the organisers.

Topics and speakers

A more culturally diverse set of speakers.
Focus / theme – models for integrated community safety planning.
Perhaps a plenary speaker might present A & D issues and mental health issues in the perspective of community safety.
Find a way to keep everyone here until the end!
Ask members beforehand for their priority focus topics
Stronger thematic focus on specific issues.
More practical examples / discussions.

Format and timing

We need to stick to time schedule so speakers get a fair run.
The ability to swap streams for different topics.
Bit more time for interactive sharing / workshops.
Repeat sessions as hard to go to all concurrent sessions of interest
Shorter streams.
Perhaps only 3 speakers per session – 4 was a bit much to maintain concentration.

Facilities

Need voice amplification in all rooms.
Raised platform for speakers in main room. More interactive workshop sessions, eg compulsory split up.

It would be helpful for speaker to have a computer screen to look at rather than turning round and talking to screen.

Encourage speakers to use microphones, when available, and to speak up when no microphones available.

Audiovisual equipment focussed higher on wall – too hard to read and see when sitting middle and back of room.

Information provision

There was not notification to participants after payment eg conference acceptance, agenda.

Booklet – more info about presenters and projects.

Promotion to wider safety networks.

Bios of all presenters.

When to hold it

Timing – Friday before cup weekend may have been a disadvantage in attracting more delegates; presenters unable to prepare because of community safety month.

Slightly shorter – 9 to 4

Late traffic on a Friday is not a pleasant thought.

General

Keep it going – well done! Maybe a high level kit note presenter, ie someone out of the network – new ideas.

Retain the strengths: low budget, accessible, short time lines from closure of submissions to conference, parallel sessions. Don't go upmarket with it – keep it lean and accessible. Retain practitioner focus.

More local government. More regional health care services.

Longer?

Have it in Western suburbs

Conclusions and comments

The conference was very well received by participants, with 90% rating it as good (or better). The organisers were praised, with 87% rating the job they did as very good or excellent.

The basic format was rated as good, although several participants would have liked more time for interaction and discussion. The range of topics and disciplines was valued, as was the practitioner focus.

There are a number of practical suggestions for improvement. Consideration should be given to scheduling it away from Community Safety Month, to give workers more time to prepare, and not on a Friday.

There is a need to bolster the afternoon program to increase retention of participants. Perhaps, in hindsight, this could have been done by selecting a couple of drawcard speakers for the final plenary – perhaps Wendy Bell, and Mark Boyd (to lead into the launch of his report).

The hypothetical was enjoyed, but some participants would have liked to see it tackle solutions to a greater extent.

There were calls to allow people to attend more of the streams, possibly by scheduling more, shorter parallel sessions.

We need lecterns and microphones in every room next time, and the provision for speakers to read from a screen in front of them, rather than having to look around all the time. More IT support may assist with loading of presentations.

There were a number of complaints about sessions running overtime.

Participants would like more information, such as acknowledgement of registration, a program to be emailed beforehand, and names of organisations to be included on name tags. There was also a suggestion that the printed program contain biographical details of speakers. One other consideration is to provide a list of participants in the show bag, so that people can more actively network on the day.

Organisational considerations

These comments are made by Mark Hennessy, who was a member of the organising committee, but not a member of the VSCN Executive, throughout the planning period.

The organising committee worked well as a team, despite not being able to get full attendances at several of the meetings, due to the difficulty of finding a mutually convenient time or place to meet. This carried the potential risk of lack of coordination of decision making, but this did not happen. A number of decisions had to be made outside of the committee, which also carried the risk of lack of coordination. However, the good will on the organising team carried the project through to a successful conclusion, with good support from the VSCN Executive.

Barbara did a fantastic job on the nitty gritties of the organisation. Ian Danahay was the lynch pin who steered the planning process and held the team together throughout the six month planning period. Rebecca took prime responsibility for the program, and also arranged the hypothetical. All of the committee contributed in some way.

Next time, there needs to be a clearer allocation of responsibilities within the committee, especially between the issues of program and the rest of the planning. The main portfolios are chairperson, secretariat, program, logistics, communications and finance.

There also needs to be a clearer separation of powers between the organising committee and the VSCN Executive – the executive needs to be clear on the level of autonomy delegated to the organising committee, to avoid duplication and to speed up decision making processes. The Executive has many matters to consider on behalf of the network other than the details of the conference, and should delegate as much of the decision making and work to the conference organising committee as it can. The organising committee needs to operate not as a sub-committee making recommendations to the Executive, but rather as a management committee in its own right, acting on behalf of the Executive, with powers delegated to it by the Executive. A new executive will always be elected at some point during the planning cycle for the conference, whereas the organising committee needs to be in place and making decisions well before the annual election of VSCN officebearers.

The conference was planned and organised within the space of about six months. A little more time would allow more considered planning. Based on this first experience, it should be possible to draw up a Gantt chart of critical decisions and actions that need to be taken at certain times.

The aim should continue to be to keep the time between close of submissions and the conference as short as feasible, in order to ensure the immediacy and freshness of the presentations. People sometimes do not know if they are available to attend until a couple of months before the event, and therefore may not be able to commit to a presentation if the closing date is earlier. The early bird deadline was 4 weeks before the conference, and seemed to work as a good prompt for people to register.

We are also now in a better position to prepare a more detailed itemised budget.

Electronic communications should continue to be the main means of promoting the conference. The concept of mailing out a printed program book is costly in both time

and money, both to develop and to distribute. It may be worth doing a hard copy mail out at some stage. However, including the final program in the mail out is not compatible with the conflicting requirements of (a) getting the printed document out early enough to promote the conference, at the same time as (b) fine tuning the program as the day approaches.

Victorian Safe Communities Network Inc.

First Annual Conference – participant feedback

On behalf of the members of VSCN, the Executive would be grateful if you could provide us with written feedback on the value of today's conference – so that we can make next year's conference even better for participants.

		Disappointing	Adequate	Good	Very Good	Excellent
1	How would you rate the **conference overall**?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	How **useful** was the information presented?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	How would you rate the **format** of the day?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	How would you rate **the printed program** book?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Please rate the **rooms** and **audiovisual** facilities?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	How **easy** was the venue for you to **get to**?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Please rate the **catering**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Please rate the job done by the **organisers**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Was the conference good **value for money**?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11   What did you like **best** about today?

12   What did you like **least** about today?

13   How did you **find out** about the conference?

14   Would you like to offer any suggestions about how to improve the conference **next year**?

Please hand this form in to reception, or fax to Barbara Minuzzo on 03 9345 5086