

AID Conference 2004

Minutes for Session Named AID Strategy Session

Date: 05/29/04

Time From: 12:15PM

To: 1:15PM

Minutes Taken By: Rajesh Rao

Number of attendees: ~80

Audio/Visual Component? Yes, slides.

Speaker/Panelist Names:

1. Kiran Kumar Vissa
2. Govind

What they are speaking about: AID Strategy

Main Presentation: Look at the strengths and weaknesses of AID to determine direction for future. AID Austin's organization of conference was acknowledged. Need for strategy is for long term survivability.

Good news: Unique and wonderful association, joy in working together, diverse bag of volunteers. ~100 active volunteers who have been with AID for more than 2 years and the numbers are growing. Can-do attitude is helping in doing new events. Collaboration with NGOs, people's movements in India was emphasized. Broad holistic approach along with areas of focus to attract volunteer base with diverse interests has been very successful. Goodwill in the community has grown. AID has been successful in attracting new volunteers and opening new chapters.

Flip Side: Unreliable administrative and operational aspects. Consistency in admin performance is lacking. Donor relations need to be improved. Fund raising growth not up to our potential (could be due to economic downturn). Institution building, leadership building is currently poor. Retaining individual knowledge instead of organizational knowledge leads to lack of continuity. Attacks from outside especially in areas like globalization, dams etc. What are we doing to address this (for instance do we have effective answers for questions like AID is anti development, anti-hindu etc.)? How are we engaging the public in this? Presenting our work to the world is a major issue. We need to take up proactive role in media.

Doomsday forecast – are we at breaking point. Not yet but

Time to transition:

Many a times we have unreliable service with multiple points of failure. There is a need of a transition to assured service that is consistent and responsive (especially in administration and operational aspects). Think of donors and NGO partners as our customers. As we expect service from telephone or cable provider, we should be able to show them results.

High re-learning factor: We are prone to go back to square one, for example, during Leo Saldhana's second visit to AID-MD they started discussions at the same level as they had in his first visit. There is need of transition to organizational learning and training.

Amateur development organization leads can make transition to a valuable resource group and source of expertise. Need to develop our own understanding of issues and present them to NGOs.

Operations under stress: treasury, legal aspects etc.

How to Fix: Volunteer accountability (regular monitoring, fixing failures), clear line of responsibility. First step is to know on an organizational level that failure is occurring. Other important thing is to have right people in right role. Each coordinator needs to reevaluate their system and see if systemic change is needed. Do we need paid help for some experts in few critical tasks? Contract out some specific well identified tasks like legal and/or treasury work. Full timer working in the US with wider range of tasks based on amount of work can also develop organizational structure. Or Part time paid help – students, graduate students etc.

Part II: how best to make use of volunteer base:

Results of survey posted on AID groups. Gist of survey is that systematic training and capacity building is needed. This task is more urgent with a lot of new volunteers joining in. We have recruited more than 500 volunteers. Year-by-year progress path for volunteers needs to be defined. Challenge to long term volunteers to increase expectations of ourselves and involve in capacity building. Examples: treasury or project workshops. Learning from visits by Jeevan Saathis/senior volunteers should be encouraged.

Question/Answer Session:

- 1) What is the follow up for the survey: People who have expressed interest in capacity building will be contacted and probably small focus groups will be formed.
- 2) Dissemination of knowledge base being created by issue cells/region cells. Publication and awareness team will help with this.
- 3) Vinod from Aid Dallas: optimizing our resources needed.
- 4) Mora from Boston: fine balance between new people coming in, creativity and keeping discussions in meetings/aid conference at a high level. Lot of speaker assume that their position is already well known to the audience. Creativity of new volunteers needs to be recognized and encouraged

- 5) Balaji from AID Chennai: Printing for publication team can be done in India/Chennai. Booklets/pamphlets or cartoons need to be prepared by senior volunteer to document their knowledge
- 6) Paid help for admin work vs all money going to India. AID already has admin costs ~ 4% of our budget. Raise funds specifically for administrative purpose.
- 7) Om Damani: What is the additional cost of not having paid help for administration? Organization will become much more effective if we get paid help for admin tasks.
- 8) Priya from San Diego: need to simplify terminology so that new volunteers can grasp it quickly.

Additional Notes/ Observations: