Economic Efficiency of HIV/AIDS Education Programs for Gay Men

A Discussion Paper

Prepared by Paul Martin
for the AFAO Education Working Group
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Background

The health sector is currently experiencing significant changes in the way that health programs are funded and evaluated :-

- there is a move towards funding agencies on the basis of agreed outcomes, rather than inputs;
- 'evidence based' public health is now the new focus in health funding, with increased pressure to demonstrate that programs effect change; and,
- the community sector is being asked to demonstrate why it is better placed to provide services to their constituencies.

Community based HIV/AIDS education programs need to be able to demonstrate their effectiveness and efficiency in delivering education and prevention programs to homosexually active men.

Traditionally AIDS Councils have been well placed to marshall extensive volunteer labour in both education and client care services. The savings that this volunteer labour delivers to the health care sector is currently being calculated by AIDS Councils, through the AFAO Care & Support Working Party. There is a need to calculate these savings for education and prevention programs as well.

Volunteer Participation

As organisations founded by gay communities, AIDS Councils have always relied on the participation of volunteers in both management and service provision. Participation of gay men (among others) in AIDS Councils is integral to the community development and ownership principles of Australia's community based response. However, in addition to these fundamental organisational principles, volunteers also bring significant savings in the delivery of education & prevention programs.

AIDS Councils need to be collecting and using this information when arguing the efficiency of community based education programs.

Volunteers are involved in all levels of education and prevention programs, including:-

- program advisory committees;
- project steering committees;
- peer group facilitators;
- outreach works; and,
- telephone information & referral service volunteers.

The number of volunteer hours donated by volunteers needs to be routinely collected and reported. For example the cost of running a workshop for gay men may be:

Development/Preparation	4 hours	
Paid staff @ $24/hour	$96	
Volunteers x 2		$192
Facilitation 3hrs/week over 4 weeks		
Volunteers x 2		$576
Debrief/Support 1hr/week over 4 weeks		
Paid staff	$96	
Volunteers x 2		$192
Incidental Expenses	$100	
TOTAL	**$292**	**$960**

In this example volunteers contributed the equivalent of $960 to the program, with an outlay by the organisation of only $292. This means that for every dollar that the organisation put in, volunteers contributed $3.28.

If this type of calculation was conducted across the education & prevention programs in Councils, there would be a clear demonstration of the capacity of Councils to generate significant amounts of volunteers labour. Without this labour the programs would not have the reach nor the effectiveness they currently have.

In-kind support

Not only are community based organisations able to enlist the support of volunteers, they are also able to generate a vast amount of in-kind support. For example the development of a poster campaign may cost :-

	cost	**in-kind**
graphic design		
artists fee (40% less than commercial rates)	$600	$400
printing		
posters (less 10% discount)	$720	$80

placement of advertisements		
4 ½ page ads in the gay press @ 300/ad		
minus 10% discount	$1080	$120
negotiate a free front page of paper		$800
placement in gay venues		
6 posters in 5 venues for 12 weeks		
@ a fee of $2.99 per placement/week		
(based on '*Convenience Advertising*' quote)		$1076.40
launch		
venue		$250
TOTAL	**$2400**	**$2726.40**

In this example in-kind support was equivalent to $2726.40, with an outlay by the organisation of $2400. This means that for every dollar spent by the organisation they were able to generate $1.14 of in-kind support.

If you then add to this the volunteer labour used in developing, and running the campaign (ie. steering committee, focus testing, distribution of resources etc) it would amount to a very significant saving compared to the same campaign, with the same reach run by a government or mainstream service.

Collecting Data

The collection of this much detailed data may seem like a daunting task. However if it becomes part of the regular financial budgeting and evaluation process for each individual project, then it should be an easy task to add the volunteer and in-kind savings from each project together to form a picture of savings across the education and prevention program.

This kind of analysis should also appear in the financial pages of the annual report of AIDS Councils. This would allow Councils to represent all inputs of the organisation, not just cash grants and donations. It would also provide a true representation of the ability of Councils to provide cost efficient services, that government of mainstream services could not.

Questions for Discussion

Are there other economic benefits of community based education & prevention programs?

Are there areas where we have made efficiency savings by changing the way we do things? (eg. changing from the traditional beat outreach model or workers sitting in cars, to volunteer staffed phone lines like RRAP)

What potential links does this process have to 'benchmarking'?

Should we attempt to develop estimated savings for the 1995/96 year for use in current lobbying (both by AFAO and individual Councils)?

Would it be useful to develop a national picture and/or consistency in the way we collect and report this information?

Is there a danger in showing that we do our job too well, leading to core grants being reduced on the basis that we can generate so much ourselves?

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF AIDS ORGANISATIONS INC.

PO BOX 51
NEWTOWN
NSW 2042 AUSTRALIA

PH +61 2 9557 9399
FAX +61 2 9557 9867

HIV Health Information Line
1800 803 806

Email: afao@afao.org.au

Internet:
http://www.afao.org.au