

VINE

VIRGIN ISLANDS NETWORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS

Virgin Islands Sustainable Farm Institute (VISFI)
St. Croix, USVI
September 20-21

Workshop Summary

The first ever capacity building workshop for VINE members kicked off on Thursday, September 20th, 2007. The workshop was sponsored by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through a Coral Reef Management Grant administered to the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Coastal Zone Management. Funds were allotted to enhance the Local Action Strategy (LAS) of raising public awareness through education and outreach.

Participants consisted of VINE members from St. Thomas (7), St. John (2), St. Croix (12) as well as four environmental educator professionals from the BVI who are aspiring to create a BVI VINE chapter in the near future. The Department of Education Science Coordinator, Ms. Rosa White, also attended on both days along with two of her colleagues based on St. Croix, Ms. Gloria Gwyrech (sp?) and Ms. Juanita Boneque (sp?). Two local environmental educators who have been working with VINE, Mr. Jesus Espinosa and Ms. Wanda Vialet, participated in the workshop as well. A NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program specialist, Ms. Marci Wulff, came on her own accord in order to observe local efforts and mechanisms by which coral jurisdictions are utilizing education and outreach as a tool for marine conservation and management.

The VINE workshop was opened by Karlyn Langjahr, NOAA's Coral Reef Management Fellow housed in DPNR- Division of Coastal Zone Management on St. Croix, who gave an overall welcome and introduction to the background and development of VINE as well. She highlighted the already strong and growing efforts of VINE members and thanked everyone for their passion and motivation to have brought VINE to this level. She also appraised the attending BVI participants who are working to create a VINE chapter in their territory and offered them any future assistance and resources. She noted the critical attendance of several Department of Education ... and how VINE has reached a landmark in which we can now work toward partnering with the DoE and other education institutions to be more effective in the USVI.

Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Sustainable Farm Institute, Benjamin Jones, gave his appreciation for VINE's support and shared his enthusiasm in hosting the first workshop at VISFI. Marci Wulff briefly explained how VINE and USVI territorial efforts in outreach and education are linked to the overall goals that NOAA has for coral reef conservation. Olasee Davis lead everyone in prayer before the opening of the workshop.

Thursday Sept. 20th

Session 1: The Role of Strategic Communication in Environmental Issues

Dr. Arzum Ciloglu, Senior Program Officer of the Center for Communications Programs at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, lead off with the first session. The overall objectives of this session were: 1) to understand the concept of strategic communication and 2) to develop a shared vision for environmental educators. Arzum emphasized the process-nature of strategic communication and talked about its 12 elements. One of her take-home messages was “local solutions solve location problems best” and that communicators must first believe in themselves! She also pointed to the need for a clear shared vision, an understanding of the current situation with respect to the shared vision, and most importantly why there is a difference between the two.

Through concrete examples, Arzum showed us how to make visions and communication more effective by driving to root causes of problems or issues rather than stating general descriptions which fail to provide a path of action. She urged us to “confront the real dragons” and think beyond our imagination in creating shared visions. Finally, we learned that we can only achieve our vision if we change ourselves first. If our approach is unsuccessful after multiple attempts, we clearly need to change our approach.

Following Arzum’s session, she assigned participants into working groups for a break-out session. Each group devised visions they had for the environment of the Virgin Islands and presented to everyone else under her facilitation.

Group VISIONS:

- Through environmental consciousness, the Virgin Islands will be empowered to live a life in tune with the earth that is evident in everyday livelihood, legislation, and government.
- A system is in place that allows for communication between science and the public through public and private education so that individuals who are environmentally aware. This leads to sustainable/responsible use of resources in the Virgin Islands.
- Everyone feels a willing obligation to be stewards of their environment for overall community health & wellness. 2. Elders are the link between the past and the future in that we learn from past lessons to improve upon the future. 3. All members of the community and community groups work in partnership to engage in direct environmental experiences.
- By 2010 there will be community-wide awareness and involvement on environmental issues (children are taught EE in all schools, recycling is widespread, fishers adhere to regulations ensuring sustainability, strict/consistent environmental enforcement, all responsible development, organic crop production, air/water standards are high, etc.)
- To reconnect by 2020 the Virgin Islands to the environment by developing sound community values, promoting eco- and heritage-tourism, building human capacity through education, gaining policy-maker buy-in, aspiring toward respect for the islands and resources.

Session 2: Building Lasting Partnerships with Education Institutions

Dr. Alida Ortiz-Sotomayor, the Founder of Puerto Rico Sea Grant in the mid-1970s and President of Consultores Educativos Ambientales (Environmental Education Consultants) imparted her experience and knowledge in the following session. Alida began by outlining environmental education goals and frameworks for educators in order to identify means of building partnerships. She gave examples of how environmental education could be partnered with three distinct entities: Universities, Research Institutions, and Government. Often, she elucidated, there are disconnects among disciplines, the environment from the educational setting, and in communication between researchers and the general public. Alida described the major conflict between environmental protection and action.

Some notable examples of how VINE can partner included:

- 1) Establishing partnerships with universities to provide access for educators for special fellowship or internship programs.
- 2) Partnership with research institutions in actual grant proposals to provide educators as field assistants or trained conductors of research which allows for activity and curriculum development within classrooms.
- 3) Sponsoring of research seminars/workshops hosting researchers as presenters in order to clarify difficult topics.
- 4) Promoting integration activities between educators, officers, education policy makers to discuss EE issues; insertion of activities is more efficient than changing curriculum.

Lastly, Alida reiterated that partnership depends upon consistent process that might seem to move slowly, but is necessary for the overall movement.

Groups were formed after Alida's presentation and tasked with strategic development of forming a partnership with the Department of Education.

Group Strategic Plans:

- “Branding” of VINE to become recognizable: create a standard pitch before presentations, develop a VINE logo, regular use of the VINE Yahoo group, ownership of a VINE website. 2. Create a data base of teachers we currently work with, what we do with them and which VINE members have worked with them; Calendar of activities development. 3. Revisit the vision and mission of VINE and develop a 3 year strategic plan. 4. Expand our groups to include PTA meetings, civic groups, churches, UVI, clubs and co-ops and more. 5. Annual VINE territorial meeting (continue writing grants) and territorial projects such as Clean School Bus. 6. Ensure visibility at government levels.
- 1. Deliver presentations at teacher professional development days at schools. 2. Partner with VIMAS in environmental briefing booklet for senators. 3. Coordinate with school community service director to involve students in research/ demonstration projects. 4. Foster environmental appreciation at top government levels by taking senators/administration on field trips. 5. Have VINE troupe in Carnival Parades and festival committee. 6. Provide accurate info/review of science-based articles. 7. Build relationships with media and community groups (also Restaurant & Hotel Associations) to expose VINE. 8. Expand/promote use of St. Croix Environmental Information

Repository/ website to network/ disseminate info to and among VINE members, teachers, students, etc. 9. Weider utilization of mobile classrooms (hybrid cars, eco-mobiles, visits to eco-lodges, etc.)

- Education: To develop VINE representation in curriculum development and revision committees and Task Forces and to have teacher/guidance counselor representative in VINE (aiming for a teacher + counselor from each school). University /Research: To engage VI-EPSCoR as a partner and funding source for a new certificate program at UVI for environmental education including pairing of teachers with researchers during summer programs at research institutions
- Create a curriculum Task Force to make recommendations. 2. Continue and enhance QuEST participation: “Needs” survey for teachers, curriculum-based programs, approach higher levels such as Dr. Larsen, develop personal relationships with teachers
- 1. Encourage VINE members. 2. Collaborate with schools and attend staff meetings. 3. Work from multiple angles. 4. Entertainment-education. 5. International collaboration and funding (USVI + BVI). 6. Collaborate on field trips with multiple presenters.

During the evening dinner, a slideshow created by Emily Tyner of photos from VINE members in action was shown.

Friday Sept. 21st

During breakfast, Ben Jones lead a farm tour for any interested VINE participants to showcase his environmentally-friendly practices and sustainable aspects of the VISFI.

Session 3: Diversifying Stakeholder Participation in Environmental Issues

Manoj Shivlani, Senior Research Associate of Marine Biology and Fisheries at University of Miami’s Rosenstiel School for Marine and Atmospheric Science, provided a research perspective using case studies to demonstrate various conflicting use patterns of natural resources.

Examples of his research and incorporation of different user groups were taken from projects in the Florida Keys, Vieques (PR) and Darien (Panama). His experience working with diverse constituent groups were similar to environmental issues in the Virgin Islands, particularly for those of us working in the area of marine and coastal conservation/management. Manoj highlighted that no matter what the environmental resource involved, there will always be conflicts of interest among all users.

One of the approaches that could be applied to VINE members in our own work is to identify perceptions (via social science methods) that different user groups have toward their resource and toward other resource user/ user groups. This approach also indirectly allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of our outreach and education.

After Manoj’s session, participants opted to work in their own groups based upon challenges that they are facing. Groups were encouraged to brainstorm various ways to improve stakeholder relationships and how to engage a greater range of stakeholders.

Session 4: Translating Science & Policy Into Effective O&E Programs

Dr. Arzum Ciloglu delivered the final session of the workshop, utilizing the research perspective that Manoj provided, to guide us on translation of science/policy into outreach programs. Arzum's last session had two major objectives: 1) to become familiar with the "P Process" for communicating program planning and 2) to understand how to analyze audience and appreciate the importance of audience segmentation. Other objectives included: 3) to describe the relationship between audiences, messages and communication channels, 4) to be able to select, define and describe a segment, and 5) to understand how to translate data (science/policy) into effective messages.

The "P Process" consists of analysis, strategic design, developing + testing, implementation + monitoring, and evaluation + re-planning (which feeds back into the analysis cycle). A key message in Arzum's overall session 4 is that we need to put ourselves into our audience's shoes and really understand both their individual and social contexts. Another theme from this session was that 1) Health is for all but there are many paths to better health, 2) People may have different information needs and 3) Similarity of behavior does not imply similarity of motivation.

Our break out session with Arzum was to select an audience segment that we would like to reach/ influence within the context of our work. In small groups, we described components of the audience:

1. General characteristics
2. Three priorities they have in their lives
3. What would you like them to do
4. Identify the benefit (for your audience) related to your goal that would likely convince them

After two long and hard-working days, we closed and thanked everyone for partaking in the first VINE workshop. All participants received a certificate of participation. Evaluation forms were distributed via email on the following Monday. Karlyn is looking forward to receiving feedback and suggestions for the planning of the next VINE workshop!