

To: PVS Board
From: Louise M. Tritton, Facilitator
Subject: PVS Board Workshop Report and Notes
Date: March 21, 2019

On March 15, 2019, seven PVS Board members engaged in a brain-storming exercise indicating which PVS activities they would continue, stop and start in an effort towards achieving structural and financial sustainability. Staff were interviewed separately and their answers were incorporated into the lists that appear at the end of this report. Themes and observations from these lists and the ensuing discussion were compiled by the facilitator, Louise Tritton.

Summary

All Board members were passionate about the mission and work of PVS. No one suggested closing down the organization at this time. Although many of the details have yet to be worked out, the consensus of the Board is that PVS can be restructured to continue its valuable functions while cutting overhead costs in the short-term and generating more revenue in the long-term. Key discussion points, including some of the challenges and opportunities, follow the summary table.

	March-June	July-October+	Comments
Reduce costs	Reorganize staff roles and/or decrease hours to reduce office overhead. Expand roles and responsibilities of regional coordinators. Distribute assignments to more people across the visitors network.	Develop visitors council. Minimize travel and expense for training conference.	Develop and publicize a compelling vision for the restructured organization. Compare financial projections for new and existing structures to make sure costs are reduced while key functions are maintained. Align accounting with recent audit. Develop realistic financial projections.

	March-June	July-October+	Comments
Increase Revenue	Send direct appeal letter. Make direct donor calls/phone-a-thon. All Board members contribute or find equivalent funding. Seek bridge funding/loan.	Apply for grants. Seek sponsor and/or partner organization. Identify and cultivate major donors.	Build momentum for development of the new structure at Mississippi training – an opportunity for a broader base of support, commitment and involvement in PVS.

Reducing Costs

The current financial crisis is the result of a combination of high personnel costs and declining revenue. Currently, PVS is structured around a central office with a paid, full-time professional Executive Director, Assistant to the Director, and part-time National Recruiter. Visitor report responses, problem-solving, fundraising and appeals to donors, and related activities are managed through this central office. Accurate bookkeeping and compliance with auditable accounting rules are maintained in the office.

Since personnel costs are the largest expenditures for PVS, reorganization and/or reduction of staff roles and reallocation of time could be an important first step towards financial stability in the short-term. For example, in the current structure, the visitor reports are sent to the central office where they are read in full detail. One estimate is that this takes 40% of the time of the Executive Director. Distributing these tasks more widely through the regional coordinators, would save time and cost in the central office. This time could be shifted to a focus on making donor calls, writing grant applications, and enhancing communication throughout the network.

Suggestions for reducing rent (currently about \$1000/month) include moving to a co-op space, moving from Philadelphia to a less expensive location (there are mixed sentiments about the importance of keeping a central office and of keeping that office at Friends Center where PVS has been located historically), and making more use of a virtual (e.g. Skype) office. The work week could be shortened to four 8- or 10-hour days. The feasibility of any of these changes would have to be weighed against the ability to carry out assigned duties.

Other suggestions for reducing expenses focused on cutting costs for travel and printing. The major travel expense is the combination of a volunteer trip for planning the Training Conference followed by attendance. These expenses could be reduced by using less expensive

hotels rather than a retreat center, and by partnering with a sponsor to share the space and costs. Printing costs could be reduced by changing over to electronic files.

Increasing Revenue

Immediate revenue to cover the short-term gap could result from sending out the spring appeal letter followed by donor calls. Donations are an essential revenue stream for PVS and can function as a way of keeping prison visitors engaged above and beyond prison visits. Further appeals through a phone-a-thon were proposed. There was a caution that past donors were being solicited too often (“once a year is enough?”). There were mixed sentiments about the possibility of communicating the current financial crisis to the visitors as a way of asking for their assistance: would this information encourage or discourage donations? Another suggestion for short-term aid involved reestablishing connections with sponsors, leveling with them about the current financial situation and asking for increased support. In addition, they might be asked to provide contacts among their constituents for further outreach to new potential sponsors. Foundations or banks might provide a bridge loan.

Longer-term sources of revenue involve cultivating and engaging donors, especially those able to make major/premier gifts. Outreach to prospective donors is planned but not yet implemented. A PVS campaign aimed at planned giving, bequests and funding an endowment needs to be developed. A system for reporting could enable better organizing, scheduling and tracking the success of these efforts. Hiring or contracting to a dedicated fundraiser/development person could result in increased revenue in the long-term.

Traditionally, PVS has avoided seeking grants from the Bureau of Prisons or the Department of Defense. Revisiting this policy might open up appropriate new sources of revenue, and guide PVS’s use of them.

Another long-term possibility would be to explore affiliating or partnering with another, more financially stable organization with mission congruence.

A Vision for an Alternative Structure

One comprehensive vision for an alternative structure aimed at both reducing costs and increasing revenue was suggested. Paid staff hours would be decreased and roles reallocated. The position of executive director would be eliminated and a temporary director appointed. Current staff responsibilities would be more dispersed throughout the volunteer visitor network, appointing, utilizing and supporting six regional coordinators to manage reports and follow-up. This would be an opportunity to involve visitors more fully in the visitor report

reviews, problem-solving, networking and fundraising. Visitors could be informed of the financial situation and asked for suggestions and help. A visitors' council could be created to share and oversee all of these efforts, potentially including fundraising. A skeleton central office could manage communications and publicity as well as bookkeeping. Care would be given to accountability, coordination of internal policies and external image. Board committees and others would guide this process and work out the specific details.

During this transition, a compelling vision of the new structure could be developed and publicized, building momentum for the October training conference in Mississippi, and announced as part of the program. The conference could be an opportunity to expand visitor support, commitment and involvement in PVS.

In order to achieve financial stability/sustainability, attention must be given to the financial implications of a new structure, comparing projected costs and revenue with the actual budget for the current structure.

The Board emphasizes upholding the ethical and fiduciary integrity of the organization. PVS fills the unique and much-needed function of visiting prisoners in federal and military prisons. Throughout its existence, PVS has maintained and continues to maintain important relationships with the Federal Bureau of Prisons and Department of Defense. These must be carefully nurtured during and after any structural changes.

Other Discussion Points

Visitors

Visitors to federal and military prisons are the heart and life blood of PVS and the means for carrying out its mission. They should be kept up-to-date on the health of the organization and invited into problem-solving. Continuing efforts must be made to communicate with, engage, recruit, train and support them in the work of the organization. A visitors webpage might enhance communication within the visitors network.

A comprehensive system that tracks visitor hours could improve the efficiency of visits and help to identify gaps. Contacts with all visitors could confirm their status, identify skills and leadership potential and interest. In the long-term, an accurate data base of active visitors should be maintained. This listing should include a history of giving and the potential for conversion of visitors to donors.

In the long-term, on-line training for visitors could be further developed based on an understanding of the amount of time and steps required for training.

Board

With only seven members, the PVS Board is a dedicated but small volunteer group, currently stretched thin to accomplish the challenges faced by the organization. Developing strategies to expand and diversify the Board would increase its capabilities. In particular, the Board fundraising committee could be more active. Recognizing that development of new Board members takes time, there should be a short-term requirement that all Board members contribute financially either from their own resources or by obtaining the equivalent gifts from friends or other sources.

Suggestions for improving communication between Board and staff included setting up clear channels and directives without perceived micromanagement. Updates and concerns could be shared regularly throughout the organization, inviting all to participate in creating a viable future for PVS. More frequent efforts would be made to convey that every staff member and volunteer is respected and valued.

Staff

Staff need to be respected and supported. Expectations for staff performance need to be clear and realistic. In any structure, succession planning for personnel needs to be considered to ensure the continuity of the functions and maintenance of the institutional memory. A part of this long-term planning could include orientation about the structure and function of PVS for new staff.

Social Media

Several comments were made about social media (esp. Facebook and Twitter). Used judiciously, social media can provide visibility, publicity about PVS and specific activities, and be used for fundraising donations. These sites tend to attract the younger audiences that PVS wants to engage. Questions arose about how much staff time is worth spending on social media (not more than 15 mins. per day) and how it can be tracked/measured. Care must be taken about the message, values and image conveyed in this way.

The following lists are the notes from the workshop

Key question: The current PVS model does not appear to be sustainable past June 30, 2019. What are the strategies* – short term (two months) and long-term (6 months to the future) – that need to be put in place to achieve a sustainable structure that best fulfils the mission of PVS? [*"Strategies" refers here to activities, actions and plans directed towards financial and organizational sustainability.]

What should PVS staff, volunteers, and Board stop doing? Start doing? Continue doing? How should PVS be structured organizationally?

Continue:

Visit federal and military prisons

Maintain integrity with Board of Prisons and Department of Defense

Train visitors

Energize visitors with regard to PVS mission

Support visitors

Recruit visitors

Support staff

Be financially sustainable

Comply with auditable accounting rules

Engage leaders to give time and money

Develop, cultivate and engage donors, especially major donors

Be ethical

Keep an office/infrastructure in Friends Center

Keep the Board

Donor calls (LYBNTY)

Board oversight of strategic and fiduciary responsibility for PVS

Cultivate and improve efforts to value every staff member and volunteer

Improve communication (clear channels and directives) between Board and staff

Stop:

High personnel costs

Board micromanagement of staff

All problem-solving funneled to/through ED

Operations at a loss

Intense focus on publicity

- Use time to start conversations and apply for grants

Training conference expenses

- Find a sponsor

- Use less expensive hotels rather than a retreat center

Concealing the financial crisis (at least open up more to some key funders)

Taking on issues beyond the immediate PVS mission

Time wasted on social media

Travel expenses

Over-emphasis on media at the expense of fund-raising

Full-time director position

Constant donor appeals

High rent (~\$1000/month)

- Move to co-op space

- Move from Phila. to less expensive location

- Create virtual/Skype office

Shorten work week to four 8- or 10-hour days

Start:

Provide regular reports on donor/sponsor calls and outcomes

Shift visitor reports to coordinators

Focus on direct mail appeal

Hire or contract to dedicated fund-raiser

Consider applying for government grants (DOD, BOP)

PVS endowment campaign based on planned gifts and bequests

Build visitor networks

Construct organizational models based on different revenue projections

Level with sponsors and asking for help

- Publicity to their constituents

- Increased support

Recruit capable new Board members, at least 5 by the end of 2019

Keep a comprehensive visitor schedule; track visitor hours

A realistic expectation of visitor financial support

Build regional teams

Determine how often visitors should be solicited for donations

Ask visitors what they need

Reorganize PVS to be run and funded by visitors

Track conversion of visitors to donors

Reorganize staff roles and allocation of time

Straighten out accounting per audit

Increase diversity of visitors

Ear-mark directives

Maintain an accurate listing/data base of active visitors that would include all the individual information (e.g. Mary Clare's data base)

Contact all visitors

- Confirm status
- Identify lead coordinators
- Identify skills

Developing leadership in visitors

Develop a "Volunteers of PVS" web page reflecting activities and values.

Planned orientation for new staff

Develop premier donor category program

Hold a phone-a-thon to past donors

Level with visitors that PVS is in crisis

Develop a visitors advisory council with regional participation

Regionalize functions - refer visitor problems to appointed regional reps for visitation problem-solving

Explore affiliation/partnership with another organization

Reach out to younger donors via Facebook

Make central office a place to handle mailings, finances and inquiries only

Enforce minimum donations by Board members

- Individual contributions
- Equivalent contributions from other donors or grants

Develop time-line for training visitors

Determine Board members

Number

Qualifications

Strategies for recruitment

Develop on-line training for visitors

Succession planning for personnel

Look beyond direct mail for fund-raising

Build Board committees

Give regional coordinators more responsibility, visibility, input, and respect

Major gift program

Apply to Fels Foundation or other for bridge grant

Planned, regular communication with visitors to keep them informed

Realistic appraisal of revenue potential

Notes from flipcharts: Now to June 30:

PVS needs to restructure to be more effective.

Is professional management needed?

Cooperative model/grass-roots emphasis

Is a part-time ED needed for leadership, supervision, development and fundraising?

Give visitors increasing opportunities for leadership and input.

Communicate a compelling vision that honor visitors as the heart of PVS.

Develop visitor advisory council to work with Board to develop and clarify the new vision.

Alert visitors that their help is needed in fundraising.

Send out spring fund appeal.

Send out a donor prospect appeal.

Board to make contact/call sponsors to increase contributions and reach out to their networks.

Consider reaching out to PA Prison Society to help managing PVS for six months.

Have a temporary moratorium on recruiting.

Increase regional coordinators and roles (consider paying honorarium) more than paid,
professional staff.

Clarify who from inside PVS would lead and oversee transition.

Need central, organized approach and supervision for problem-solving.