Commentary on Process for a New Future

Rationale for Using Synanim in Framing the Big Picture

It seems ideal to have a "big picture" view of where we want to be headed that is meaningful to the largest number of people in the NVC community. This can serve as a point of reference as more specialized decisions are made about how we would like to move forward.

We want to begin our process in a way that is as inclusive and open as possible. At the same time, we have a sense that it is vital to get to a stage of implementing concrete actions relatively quickly. We are eager to inspire trust in those who have become deeply discouraged about the possibility of meaningful changes involving CNVC. We are equally eager to see NVC's impact in the world grow significantly. So, it was appealing to discover an established, tested process that comes with automation to support it and which is designed to allow a group to efficiently develop collective answers to open-ended questions.

Using Synanim, we expect that (1) we can involve as many people as would like to participate, (2) everyone's participation can be fed into a summary statement within about a month, and (3) this can be done with minimal logistical support (i.e., without large numbers of organizers, facilitators and meetings). We are not aware of another approach that offers these advantages.

Synanim has been used to produce statements collaboratively authored by up to 13,000 people. Anecdotally, those who have used the system have been very happy with the results, and have found the process to be enlivening. Some people have reported a deep sense of ownership, saying that the statement produced by the process really represented them well—even though they personally only participated in early stages of the process.

In exploring the use of Synanim, we have consulted extensively with Brian Sarrazin, the creator of Synanim. Brian is familiar with NVC and was excited to be able to support CNVC. We have talked over several months about Synanim, how it works and people's experience with it—and Brian has offered coaching on how CNVC can make effective use of the software.

According to Brian, "Synanim was developed from research into how we think and how we learn. Its learning aspect elicits the deepest wisdom of the group by encouraging best ideas in a social setting which supports open-mindedness." Synanim offers a process that has been tested, and which seems to produce results that people like (based on our conversations with Brian and the user feedback at http://www.synanim.com/ and http://www.faithvoices.org/programs/comments.html).

We don't expect the Synanim-based process to be perfect. We acknowledge, for example, that it will not include people who aren't able or willing to participate in an on-line process, or who are not available to participate at one of the times offered. And, it may be that we will fully appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of this approach only after we've tried the process together as a community. For this reason, it makes sense that it will likely be the statement produced via the Synanim process plus the collated feedback of the network concerning this statement that collectively inform what happens next.

On balance, given the desirability of framing the big picture efficiently, and trying to hear from the network as a whole, and given the apparent advantages of using Synanim, this seems like a worthwhile approach that we are excited to try out.

Topic Areas

The topic areas for Working Groups will be decided after the results from the *Framing the Big Picture* phase are available. However, based on prior input from the network over the years, we imagine a set of Working Group topic areas might look like this:

- *Organizational Structure and Governance* - What organizations do we want to exist, or what sub-organizations do we want to exist within an umbrella organization, and what do we want their relationships be? How do we want leaders be selected and how do we want decisions be made?
- *Certification and Membership* - If we want to recognize changes in understanding and ability in the areas NVC develops then how we will do that? What types of affiliation and recognition might we employ for that? How do we want individuals and groups to interact?
- *Learning* - What sort of learning environments and structures (e.g., IITs, on-line trainings, focused projects, etc.) do we want to have offered via a central organization, and how do we want them to work? How do we want requests for learning and further development to be handled?
- *Support for Trainers / Members* - How do we want central organizations to support those sharing the work and the larger NVC community?
- *Community Alignment with NVC* - How do we want to support the ideals of NVC being realized in the NVC community? How do we want our own conflicts to be addressed?
- *Outreach* - How do we want to address access for those groups underserved by our work? How do we support increased effectiveness in reaching people? How do we relate to other groups?
- *Supporting Big Projects and Innovation* - How do we want to support big things happening? How can we support ongoing innovation to increase effectiveness with respect to our goals?
- *Addressing Cultural/Language Challenges* - What do we want to do to support diverse cultures, languages and practices and to support cross-fertilization?

Rationale for Working Group Member Selection Process

The strategy of having the Board select Working Group members has been reached after quite some soul searching. A number of considerations have contributed to our choice of this strategy:

- Some in our network have deeper experience of thinking through and applying NVC to systems than others. These are often those who have extensive experience as trainers, but whose work is based on application in specific social areas beyond workshop settings. We want to maximize the chances that the Working Groups will make decisions that reflect the radical possibilities implicit in NVC and apply them to our organizational challenges. We want them to make sense both to the current NVC community, and far beyond it, supporting interaction with individuals and groups doing the most effective, empowering work in peacemaking worldwide. We seek small, agile Working Groups that represent our best wisdom about how to lay sound foundations for what will follow.

- It is our experience that commitment to NVC does not necessarily translate into the ability to participate in groups that make effective decisions, let alone powerful, transformation-producing decisions. We want to do our best to craft the population of the Working Groups to optimize the chances of such powerful decisions being made.

- Given the lack of consensus within the network on satisfying mechanisms for community decision making, and the particular sense of how we want Working Groups to be populated which we describe above, it makes sense to us that we hand pick Working Group members who we assess as likely to be able to support the quality of insight, vision, and powerful decision making we are longing for.

We are aware some might find this strategy disappointing, and hope for a process that they consider more horizontal. We hope you will understand why we are choosing to use it in this specific context. And that this energy for increasing openness can be channeled into the process itself, so that it produces decision making procedures for us that increasingly share power on a community level.

Throughout the process of defining topic areas and inviting Working Group members the Board will share their thoughts through the communication channels chosen, and listen to feedback, seeking to achieve the most consensus on this crucial phase of the process.

Rationale for limiting Working Group decisions

The Working Groups are intended to be deliberative bodies that make decisions, not merely recommendations. Thus, their work product needs to include specific actionable decisions.

We would like to restrain the number of such decisions to about 5, so as to:

- support focusing on what matters most
- help make it feasible to reach decisions in a limited time period
- encourage the decisions to be sufficiently high level that there will be some flexibility during implementation when people learn more about what will work in practice.

Support for Multiple Languages

We see increasing the flow of information and dialogue between those who speak different languages as important to our concept of a healthy international NVC community. Our intention in designing this process and the communications around it is to make progress toward multi-lingual inclusion. Notably, we have customized the Synanim software to enable it to support multiple languages to a significant extent. We regret that some additional improvements to how speakers of different languages could be supported may need to emerge as outputs of the process rather than being fully available now, as the process begins.