

To the Boards of Directors of Cloud Forest Institute
And the Mendocino Environmental Center

August 27, 2008; Re-issued August 29, 2008

Re. Follow up on Organizational Concerns and
Introduction to Proposal for Mediation Workshop

To: Denny O'Brien, Dave Smith, Teri Nieves, Sid Cooperrider, Steve Scalmanini, Jessica Clark, Jenny Shakman, Chris Bennett, Jenny Burnstad, Govinda Dalton, Cliff Paulin, Tola Levinson, James Mathews

This letter is the follow-up on concerns raised at the April 30, 2008 meeting of the MEC board. Verge Belanger challenged the 2008 election in which the existing board was re-elected. The board agreed that the election was irregular but dismissed the challenge.

It is to Belanger's credit that he focuses our attention on the organization and how it actually operates.

Denny O'Brien, president of the Board, states in his August 4 letter to Belanger

The board meeting prior to the election (late March) was moved up from 7pm to 6pm because of a late request by a board member. The change was made only the day before the meeting. Although *there is no requirement that members be notified of the date and time of each board meeting*, in retrospect I could have sent an alert to all members, at least as a courtesy. (Emphasis added.)

Is it really true that there is no rule against changing meeting times without notifying the membership? Is it just a "courtesy" of the president?


Verge may be obsessed with the election process (elections mean little when the membership itself is small and unrepresentative) but he has raised significant, and from an egalitarian point of view, *crucial* failings of the board, including lack of public minutes, and prohibiting recording of board meetings, lack of member access to organization records and lack of due process for member grievances. The board has also looked aside as some parts of the MEC space have been allocated for private use ("the vinyl room"). The control over almost everything remains with a small group that—whether by design or incompetence—has failed to increase membership and revenues to a sustainable level.

So many things about the current board "rules" conflict with the "transparency and inclusiveness" which were once the watchwords of Dennis O'Brien.

Therefore we put this Proposal For A Mediation Workshop before the board of the MEC and Cloud Forest Institute,

Respectfully submitted by MEC members,


King Collins


Gabrielle Welford

Attached: Proposal To MEC and CFI For Mediation Workshop

**PROPOSAL TO CONVENE A MEDIATION WORKSHOP:
DEMOCRACY IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

The question to the MEC and CFI is: Do you support the project as outlined here? We would appreciate communication from all concerned, especially board member of both organizations. The primary authors of this document are King Collins (king@greenmac.com) and Gabrielle Welford (welford@hawaii.edu).

Those of us who have been following the MEC are aware of its precarious financial and organizational situation.

We believe that the board/management does not have an effective plan to resolve the financial crisis and increase the small (c. 200) membership of the MEC, and furthermore that the board is encouraging a management style that is isolating the MEC from the wider community and discouraging those whose help is needed to restore the MEC's viability.

The proposed Mediation Workshop is designed:

- 1) To bring together (old and new) members of the MEC in a trusting social climate to discuss and find solutions to the ongoing crisis.
- 2) To look objectively at the strengths and weaknesses of our organization.
- 3) To take a serious look at how democratic community organizations are set up and run, including information about different models of democratic management.
- 4) To work toward an organizational form that promotes internal democracy and reflects the kind of society we hope to see in the future.

We hope a more comprehensive majority will emerge from this process and come to agreement on effective ways to increase membership, reach financial viability and achieve the MEC's social and environmental goals.

Those of us proposing the workshop ask that we view our work together as an experiment and a work in progress in which we all have something to learn. Rather than a victory for one faction over another, what we need is a way for us to work *together*.

Therefore, this proposal for A Mediation Workshop is presented for your review and comment.

Submitted to the board of the Mendocino Environmental Center on August 27, 2008.

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