

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Rec Vic exists to bring about reconciliation in Victoria. Ultimately, this means improving the life opportunities of Aboriginal Victorians; that is, 'closing the gap' across all indicators that currently divide Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. To achieve this, the attitudes of non-Aboriginal Victorians (99% of the population) need to change. RecVic contributes to this by community education, products and services, and supporting communities and organisations to develop reconciliation initiatives that lead to understanding and change

Rec Vic has been funded by the Vic State Govt, through the Depts. of Premier and Cabinet and Planning and Community Development (DPCD), for 5-6 years, including one 3 year grant between mid 2005 and mid 2008 inclusive, followed by a belated extension for one year, 2008/9. This grant of around \$200,000 per year pays for the operation of the org. We have also been able to attract additional grants of around \$40-60,000 pa from various other sources, including the City of Melbourne and other areas of Govt. These grants hit their peak in 2007/8 – the year of the 40th Anniversary of the referendum and the Federal Govt's apology. Since then grants have been harder to come by. Trusts have also contributed small amounts, but without DGR (Deductible Gift Recipient status, meaning that donations above \$2 are tax deductible; also see 3 below). These amounts remain small, are strictly non-recurrent and in anycase are NOT for core operations.

As in 07/08, this year the Govt has stated that they will not fund Rec Vic after June 2009. Their reasons seem to be not well-argued.

Essentially, Rec Vic needs to continue to build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal people, orgs and communities, so that the Victorian community can best understand Aboriginal aspiration. We achieve this by being involved, working with and supporting Aboriginal led activity. **There is a great deal of research that shows that changing the attitudes and practices of non-Aboriginal people is central to altering the 'social indicators' that determine Aboriginal health.** This is the essential task of RecVic.

We need to then focus on the non-Aboriginal community to inform, educate, engage and activate them to also work towards Reconciliation. RecVic believes that reconciliation is the task primarily of non-Indigenous people and as such must be funded as a direct grant by the State Government to honor its pledge to 'close the gap'. We have and want to continue to target local Govt, young people at schools and universities, service provider NGOs, faith and 'ethnic' organisations, Service and sporting clubs and then more widely, community organisations – Scouts, Neighbourhood Houses and so on. Where ever possible we will also work with corporate and small businesses. No other organisation in Victoria has this brief.

RecVic insists that funding for reconciliation must be made without competing for funds allocated to the development or provision of Aboriginal controlled or managed services. To suggest this 'them' or 'us' competition for funds, is mischievous, disingenuous, divisive and destructive. We want the Government to make a long term commitment to this work and to properly fund Reconciliation Victoria to do it. At minimum we need 3-year funding blocks, to ensure sustainability and continuity for our relationship-building with Aboriginal organisations and communities and the ongoing development of our knowledge, skills and projects. We also need a significant increase to the current grant, which only allows a very small impact on the large challenge of reconciliation (think anti-racism as anti-smoking/drinking or re the road toll).

For information about what we have done, want to continue to do and our submission "Ten years of Reconciliation", please contact us.

FAQs to assist you to argue our case

1. Govt has funded RV for 5/6 years – why should Government keep funding you?

- It has taken 220 years and millions of dollars (if not billions) to create this mess for Aboriginal people; it will take more than 6 years, a few hundred thousand dollars and 2.5 staff to fix it
- Racism exists – in schools, in work places and practices, in systemic governmental and other institutional policies, processes and procedures (eg form filling), as unintended and as covert or as overt, deliberate prejudice and exclusion; this too still needs to change across the community and will take generational change. This takes time.
- Cultural and attitudinal change in the community is Government responsibility. It needs to lead.
- **RecVic is the ONLY State Govt response to these issues in the Vic community.** Govt has some significant and very worthy programs targeting Aboriginal people - in Justice in particular (Koori Courts, etc) and potentially in education (via Wannik) and with the issue of representation (via LINS), but nowhere any attempt to deal with broader community attitudes.

2. RecVic should get its money from 'corporate' and/or philanthropic sources

- **It is governments** over 220 years that have largely created or inspired and funded others to create this mess for Aboriginal people and the attitudes and beliefs that go with them –govt must accept responsibility for rectifying the consequences.
- RecVic currently sources small, one-off amounts in addition to its core Government grant, but this is nowhere near sustainable funding. Corporate and philanthropic sources **DO NOT** fund recurrent core/operational costs. While many corporates are sympathetic to the issues of Reconciliation, they are not well-placed to deal with the complex and controversial issues associated with the root causes and possible cures.
- Corporate and philanthropic sources sometimes fund relevant projects, but a core government grant is needed for staff to research and write and negotiate the projects and the funding, which is seldom for more than one year and more often for much shorter periods. These grants are meant to complement existing work, not replace it.
- Further, sole reliance on project funding would lead to disjointed activity rather than structured, coherent work based on well formulated plans and organisationally defined strategies. A core Government grant is needed to provide continuity.
- Many philanthropic and corporate funding sources target Aboriginal people/projects directly (as do govt) which is to be commended. However, there is little appetite to support projects that target attitudinal change in the 99.3% of the Victorian population who are non-Aboriginal and are the major obstacle to creating a safe and respectful place for Aboriginal people.

3. Why doesn't Rec Vic get DGR status and then apply for grants/donations from corporate and philanthropic sources?

- RecVic has sought specialist advice through pro bono work from three different legal firms, four times over the last 18 months to get set up for an application to the relevant body seeking DGR. Legal advice is that RecVic WILL NOT obtain DGR status under the present rules.
- We have also attempted to get the support of the Vic Govt to make representations to the Federal Govt to be 'gifted' such status (as Rec Aust was) and via Rec Aust, but to no avail.
- Corporate and philanthropic sources are limited by the rules of DGR status that disallow any work that might be considered 'advocacy' or attitudinal change. Getting major grants is very difficult without DGR, although small 'project' grants (between \$5,000 around \$30,000) are sometimes offered.
- Even if we were to be granted DGR and received monies through those provisions, it would force us to change what we do from 'building relationships' and 'community education' to 'providing services to people in "necessitous circumstances"'. We would be driven by the direction of the granting source, not our own constitution, albeit these directions need not always be different.
- Carefully managed, work around research and policy development may be possible, but the notion of advocacy simply could not figure at all, unless we were big enough to draw from the income earned from the investing the DGR based grant/donations.

- For example, in ball-park terms a \$1mil secure investment could bring in a spendable \$50,000 in a good year, assuming we did not touch the capital. We would need \$4mil to meet our current inadequate income base and twice that to be barely sustainable.

4. Why won't Rec Aust fund RecVic and why have two orgs anyway?

- Australia operates on three levels of Government: federal, state and local. Each level has a particular focus and responsibility. The three levels of reconciliation organisation - Rec Aust, Rec Vic and Local Reconciliation Groups (LRGs) – reflect this and each have their focus and role. Rec Aust does not have the money to fund all States and Territories anyway.
- RecVic has built a solid relationship with Rec Aust and works in cooperation with Rec Aust and other State Councils.
- Community engagement work is more effective the closer the organisation is to the community. It would not be desirable or sensible for a national body (over which a state govt has no control) to deal with matters of State responsibility. Also, State govts are constitutionally responsible for certain matters and states and local areas, differ greatly in their circumstances.
- Any move to transfer State responsibility and costs to a National org/govt merely attempts to shift State government responsibility – it does not deal with the issues created by this State government over the last 180 years or so.
- Rec Aust **WILL NOT** fund State Councils - they have made this absolutely clear. States are seen as the responsibility of State Govts. We cannot change this policy (we have worked with other State Councils over the last several years to do so).

5. Why doesn't RecVic charge our members joining fees to raise funds?

- As with seeking corporate/philanthropic funds, at best this would raise only minimum funds and would diminish RecVic's relationship with its members. We are trying to engage people with an issue about which they may have only a vague sense and has little traction in the community.
- We have some 3000 people receiving Newsletters of which 600 are formal members (no fee). A membership fee would discourage many of these, yielding something less than \$20,000 (400x\$50). RecVic wants to reach as many people as possible, so the Newsletter needs to be free – if so, what else can we offer the paid membership?
- We already seek donations and pro bono contributions where ever possible, including on our brochures, 'membership' forms, website, newsletters, emails and e-list sign-on.
- Reconciliation is NOT a big issue in the community, other than as an idea - as something that **should** happen, as something **someone else should** do It is Rec Vic's challenge to change this attitude and the beliefs that underpin them.
- A membership fee is NOT a solution to gaining the core funding Rec Vic needs to be effective. It is also another attempt to shift govt responsibility away, this time to the individual citizen. **Reconciliation IS a Govt responsibility** – to show leadership, to encourage and support action, to fund policy advocacy bodies and to create the climate and opportunities for a radical change in thinking about history and Aboriginal people past and present.

6. Why can't RecVic develop 'products' that it can sell to Local Govt, corporates and others, or offer consultancy work?

- We do, but reconciliation is not a high-profile issue in the community; there is not strong demand for products and services, if it has to be paid for, partly because it already available free or cheap. This may be a future direction but will require core funding to support the initiative. Products will never be self-sustaining when the full cost of development, marketing and distribution are factored in. It is govts responsibility to support the provision of products and services.
- Even if products are pursued as a major initiative, core funding is required to support RecVic's other day to day work – building and maintaining relationships with Aboriginal people, orgs and community, supporting Reconciliation focused policy and actions in local government, corporate and community groups, running events and maintaining a website and newsletter information flow to the wider community and dealing with the dozens of requests we receive for information, speakers and workshops.

CONCLUSION – ACTIONS REQUIRED

The arguments outlined above put our position that State Government has a responsibility for ongoing support to THE reconciliation organisation in Victoria, RecVic, in order to achieve the commitment to 'Close the Gap' recently signed by the Premier. Research demonstrates that ameliorating the 'social determinants of Indigenous health' is dependant on the effectiveness of the sort of work that RecVic does. Ongoing commitment to RecVic as a sustainable organisation is fundamental to achieving reconciliation in Victoria.

You can assist – please contact your local member or our office now – 9662 1645.

For help re contacts, letters, etc, see - <http://www.antarvictoria.org.au/saverecvic.html>