

APC proposal

This document is intended as a running proposal both for the structure that the APC should take and for the route needed to get it there. I welcome comments and changes but it would be good if we had a vision of where we were going even if this changes.

• **Basic concepts**

The main assumption I am making in this document is that the existing and future networks (IGC, GN, PNS etc) need some kind of structure that supports their work and acts as a resource pool to make them all effective.

• **Lessons to be learnt from Sweden**

For a long while I thought that what we needed in the APC was just a co-ordinating body. This was based on my experience with IGC and GN, both these networks are fairly self-sufficient and could pretty much function without each other. However my visit to Sweden changed my thinking. PeaceNet Sweden (PNS) has plenty of potential to be a viable network in its own right and has good political connections. However it has minimal technical or communications experience. This made me realise that the APC needed to fulfill two purposes at least.

- 1) To technically assist new networks to get started and
- 2) to do joint development work. I fear that if we do not have good pooled technical capability then starting new networks would drain their neighbours technical resources to help them and more importantly that under-funded networks would be unlikely to hire programmers to do their share of the development. Note both IGC and GN started with programming people onboard so this choice never arose.

On looking into the question of what resources and costs should be pooled the following ideas emerged.

• **Potential Roles for the APC**

The APC needs to fulfil a number of main roles:

• **Coordination**

Most crucially the APC needs to fulfill a coordination role. Although it is not intended that the APC have any real power over the networks if we are to have a truly international tool then we need good coordination and effective resource sharing.

• **Technical Development**

I propose that we move all common development work under the umbrella of APC which may either hire its own programmers or contract with those working for networks or independant programmers. This would have a number of advantages:

• **Prioritisation**

Priorities at the moment are essentially decided from a single network's point of view. This is understandable given that it is the network (IGC or GN) that is paying the bill. With a technical resource paid for by APC then the priorities could be set on an international basis.

• **Financial support**

A new network does not necessarily need a full-time operations person, however it does need skilled staff available. Having a budget available for development would allow the APC to pay part of the costs of having a technical staff person by using him or her for development work in the rest of their time.

• **Mobile team**

Having a technical team paid for centrally allows them to be more mobile and able to travel to support an emergent network with less regard to the source of their income. This will be essential where networks start up with minimal technical skills. For example I would expect that an APC techie would spend a couple of months with PNS during its start-up phase, possibly while also doing (and being paid for) APC development work.

• **Accountability**

As the networks grow and proliferate there is a need for the technical development to be accountable, at GreenNet, I feel we have no real input into the selection of priorities for development, on a number of occasions we have duplicated a day or more's work already done at IGC because of being unable to convince the technical people at IGC that it is cost effective to help setup the tool at GN. At other times working together works really well. However the work needs to be setup in a situation where a network, even if it has no technical developers of its own can feel that it has an input to the process and a mechanism to ask for what it feels are a priority.

- **Fund Raising**

Emergent networks are going to find it harder to raise funds than existing networks. The APC can provide a name that can help national networks find funds, it could also provide help with fund-raising skills and eventually hopefully be a source of funds itself. The APC can also valuably provide a charitable vehicle through which charities can funnel grants to potentially non-charitable (although non-profit) networks.

- **International Comms experience**

The skills of working with international communications technology are fairly rare, for this reason I think APC needs to address itself to building up a good body of expertise, again this can be by contract or staff or a mixture. It can also act as a channel enabling people with this expertise within other organisations to make it available.

- **Organisational size and profile**

The APC can potentially have a size and visibility which its members, especially new ones, lack.

- **Negotiating with PTTs**

It has been suggested by Charles Convis that a key role to be played by the APC is of a significant organisation able to negotiate with PTTs and multi-national organisations. Little attention is likely to be paid to an emergent network by a PTT, especially in a developing country. However if the negotiating is a joint effort of the new network and an international organisation then we will be in a much stronger position. (I am saying this from experience of dealing with IBM etc)

- **International Organisations**

A similar situation exists when negotiating with an international NGO such as the UN or Greenpeace. A new network is unlikely to be listened to unless the founders have very good contacts, but the APC can make approaches from within countries where they have users. This also enables us to strike one-stop deals with people like Greenpeace or IFSDH where they deal with one body who handles all the billing and support etc and farms it out to national networks.

- **UN consultative status**

An eventual goal of the APC should be to get recognised status with bodies such as the UN, ITU etc etc. While I don't put much significance in these kinds of things they are important to some of the organisations we will be dealing with.

- **Umbrella**

There are numerous people with good-will whose skills and resources cannot be fully utilised because of the nature of the network they relate to. For example at GN we have only recently been able to get something out of IBM despite the fact that one of their senior people is an old friend of mine who has wanted to help us for a long time. With a bigger more international organisation we are more likely to be able to take advantage of offers like this and also more able to have under our umbrella projects of an international nature (like Amandla net)

- **Priorities**

What priorities should APC have? I would suggest the following:

- **Support for new networks**

APC needs to be able to help any of the emergent networks it chooses to. We must not be in a situation where new networks do it themselves (with Fido or Picospan for example) or go to a large commercial network such as Dialcom, Maxcom or GeoNet.

- **386**

To this end it is crucial from APC's perspective to get the 386s online, Sweden and Canada are both kitted up waiting for this and GN and IGC are bursting at the seams of their Plexi (sp?). This needs to be number one development priority.

- **Fund Raising**

APC's other priority needs to be fund-raising. We need to channel the expertise of the fund-raisers in our midst into bringing in at least a core-funding for APC and into helping emergent networks find funds..

- **Board & Control**

With any enterprise of this scale there comes the question of "Under whose control". I think the proposals in the APC constitution handle this and would be fairly unhappy with any significant change in them.

- **Partnership**

The key thing to be understood when we think of control and boards and so on is that the APC will NOT have control of its member networks. It will be these network's pooled facility. The networks will be instructing, both formally through the APC board and informally online, the APC as to what needs doing rather than visa-versa.

- **Operational authority**

I think it is essential for the role that the APC is envisioned having, that its director have operating authority. That needs to come under review by the board who will have the power to replace him or her but on a day to day negotiating basis the director needs to have the power to make deals, and more importantly needs to be seen to have this authority by the organisations he or she deals with.

- **Immediate Steps**

Where should we take this now?

- **Ratify the constitution**

We need to ratify the constitution in principle at least, we should be open to modifying it as we go to meet the needs of networks joining us but we need a defined working relationship that we can all rely on. Note that this is a time-critical thing, the longer we leave this then the more emergent networks we will be dealing with and the harder it will be to achieve a consensus on the precise structure of the APC. At the moment there is broad agreement between the five networks with capability to be online within the next three or four months (IGC, GN, WEB, ALTERNEX, PNS). If we ratify the constitution now then we can make modifications if and when new nodes suggest modifications, if we leave it then it may never get ratified,

- **Budget**

We need to allocate a budget to APC. I suggested 10% of Net turnover where this is defined as revenue (including grants) but deducting the cost of network connections (Phone and X.25). If this is too high or too low, or the wrong formula then fine lets hear some suggestions. At the same time we should be looking for seed money grants - Mark mentioned the potential of \$25K from Ford? Note these grants would be considered part of the contribution of the network that gets them (IGC in most cases).

- **Charities**

We need to establish a legal framework for the APC. We are in the process of forming a charity in the UK to be called "The Association for Progressive Communications". This will be used as a funnel for GN's grants since British charity law would significantly impede GN's work should it

become a charity. I would suggest that a similar vehicle be formed in the US, probably under Tides, quickly. This would protect the name in the US and UK.

In countries where we are starting to work then we should potentially form charities under the APC's control rather than under control of the emergent network. This precaution is in case, after a while of dealing with the people from the new network, they are found to be incompetent or too politically aligned. Once the network becomes formally part of APC then control of the charity should be passed to the network.

(??? Would it be better to retain control of all the charities with the APC board)

• **Consultancy**

After talking with Geoff, I agree that it is premature to appoint an APC director, however there is a large amount of work needing doing now and I suggest that I should move to working full-time as consultant to APC, working on bringing the emergent networks up to stream and making contacts with potential nodes in new countries. I would also work on coordinating the technical development between the different sites using the software and those developing it.

We should budget this work for a period of say 9 months at the end of which an APC director would be appointed by the then board (including all nodes, online by then).

• **Locations**

There is a question to be raised of location. Where should the APC be based. Wherever we are based will cause political controversy so I propose that we try and avoid the question by having addresses in each country where there is a network and deliberately avoiding being pigeon-holed. The technical staff will be based in a number of locations, in particular we are proposing that technical staff work with emerging networks for about three months. As the APC consultant I would spend most of my time working with different nodes and marketing all the APC nodes at international conferences. Not having a specific location would also make sure that the overheads of running APC would be minimised, essentially each network would commit to finding working space, and ideally accomodation for visiting APC staff in return for the benefit of having them available.

• **Personnel**

The APC staff need to have an unusual collection of skills. They need experience in computers, communications (low speed and X.25), politics and political organisations. Unlike most staff in most organisations they need to be able to deal with a wide variety of people from Peace activists through to corporate managers. Unusually our technical people need to be able to communicate well personally. For these reasons we need to base our strategy on the people we have and those we expect to be able to attract to the organisation. A separate document looks at the staff we have or might take on and looks at their personal wishes.

Why have a separate organisation

Advantages

There are a number of advantages of these roles being filled by a separate organisation rather than within the existing networks by bilateral agreement.

"American Expansionism"

I think it important that the APC not be seen as an American project given the amount of anti "US domination" feeling in progressive circles.

Technical accountability

The new nodes need to feel that the software development is accountable, the easiest way to do this is to have it being paid for by APC which they ALL the networks fund and control.

Disadvantages

There are few disadvantages of setting up an international organisation. It need not cost us any more than doing the same jobs with the same people within networks, overhead will be minimised by the APC not having separate offices and by APC staff/consultants using the facilities of the nodes where they are located.