

'The Relationships That Define Us', AAFBG Conference, August 2024.

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As 'Friends of' Groups, our Relationships determine how we think, act and feel.

In our Three Worlds, everything is connected - Natural:Social:Personal - *but Relationships are more. Connections are like phone lines; relationships are the messages that we built around and between them.*

There are 5 types of Relationships FRIENDS must build and maintain ...

- 1. with **Plants** / 'Botanic Garden'
- 2. with **Public Custodians**
- 3. with **Communities & Networks**
- 4. with **Members** as our Group
- 5. with **Members** as Individuals

1. Botanic Gardens / Plants

KEY MESSAGES:

- **BG's connect Plants:People:Place** - they are Living Museums.
- **Start with the Plants** - Collections are Created as well as Curated.
- **Science+Art facilitates Change** - BG's are Movements, NOT monuments, and Creativity is a catalyst.

'Bad museums are those that people visit and think Isn't (someone else) clever?' [Garth Boomer]

FRIENDS ROLES: **Observer and Questioner**

DEFINING FEATURES / CHALLENGES:

- Knowing WHY we exist.
- Having a collective, informed VISION based on a 'think global – act local' rationale.
- Acting with CREATIVITY, as well as courage.

When we look at our Friends Group, ... Do we observe and question?

Are our Connections with the natural world clear and present in our shared Vision?

Do the Collections we support or manage allow for Creativity and Change in the face of challenges?

2. Public Custodians

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Public Gardens** are 'owned' by the PEOPLE.
- **Plant people are different!** Communication with managers and politicians is affected.
- **'Botanic Gardening'** = Purpose+Plan+Team.
- Teams can be any combination of BG Professionals, Friends + Others, but they must act as such.

Regional BG's in particular need guidance and support to develop a common and agreed approach to 'BG professionalism': Too many have to struggle from the bottom up, leading to difficult relationships.

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing ever has.' [Margaret Mead]

FRIENDS ROLES: **Critical Friend and Partner**

DEFINING FEATURES / CHALLENGES:

- Knowing WHAT your Group can do, and HOW.
- Reciprocal RESPECT and BELIEF.
- CHANGE YOURSELF when you cannot change the situation.

When we look at our Friends Group, ... Does the Relationship manage the MoU? ... or vice versa?

3. Communities & Networks

KEY MESSAGES:

- **This task is bigger than all of us** - Friends need all the friends they can get.
- **Connections build Communities** - Your Group is as big as other Groups around you help make it.

When you've made your peace with Mother Nature and your managers & politicians, who else belongs in this picture?

'It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit' [Harry Truman]

FRIENDS ROLES: **Advocate and Facilitator**

DEFINING FEATURES/CHALLENGES:

A shared SENSE OF PLACE integrating social as well as ecological 'communities.

Knowing your place, and WHERE you fit in; Connections with 'like' organisations.

Respecting and Valuing other Custodians, including Indigenous and Philanthropic/Economic.

When we look at our Friends Group, ...

Can we say, 'this is what we do in our Community: how we fit in, how we collaborate (not compete)'?

4. Members as the Group

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Growing as part of a Movement** requires strong connections with other Groups - AAFBG / BGANZ / BGCI /
- **A defined Niche** develops connections - competition diminishes collaboration.
- **Group Identity is magnified by Diversity** - Membership transcends difference.

It helps the strength of our Network/s to create a local identity, but we can do better than copying what we see elsewhere, i.e. *'Nobody else has that'* could be a good starting point!

'In diversity there is beauty and there is strength' [Maya Angelou]

FRIENDS ROLES: **Creator and Chronicler**

DEFINING FEATURES/CHALLENGES:

- A Group that has a shared, sustained and evolving Vision.
- An inclusive Group, based on 'collections of PEOPLE' - valued and acknowledged TEAMS.
- Fun and Learning are built-in and visible.

When we look at our Friends Group, ...

Do we compare ourselves with other BG Friends - critically and constructively?

Do we share and borrow ideas creatively, or try to 're-invent our own wheels'?

5. Members as Individuals

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Embrace Change** - acknowledge creativity & knowledge of others.
- **Know your limits** - put your sanity before your legacy!
- **Respect the Group vision & identity** - be part of creating it.

Are you OKAY? As a Member, ask this of others ... and yourself.

As a member of a Friends Group, what is the smallest thing you ever did with the greatest love?

Was it about PLANTS,or PEOPLE or PLACE. ... or a mixture?

'None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.' [Mother Teresa]

FRIENDS ROLES: **Carer and Sharer**

DEFINING FEATURES/CHALLENGES:

- Reconciling UNITY of purpose with INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM of action.
- Valuing and acknowledging INDIVIDUALS.
- Fostering SELF-CARE: Life-long learning, beating burn-out, & opportunities for succession.

What does *your* Group's next Relationship-building journey start with?

Plants & BG's, Public Custodians, Communities & Networks, Membership or Members?

In this video on AALBG - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKMER52WfPY> - consider how each of these 5 Relationships is represented in the history of effective Volunteering efforts in this case.