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The Future Generations Fund

by Tim Mack

The World Future Society has embarked on an exciting new set of related programs, for 2005 and beyond, designated the Future Generations Fund (FGF), which will provide support and resources to young people everywhere as they prepare to participate in a rapidly changing world – one in which foresight will be an increasingly vital skill.

The FGF programs address the critical question: How can we help to ensure that the youth of today will understand their choices, have the capacity to make the best decisions, and create the best possible outcomes in their future roles as voters, workers, and leaders?

The Future Generations Fund is a programmatic endeavor that stemmed from the commitment and mission of the World Future Society. It is based on the conviction that futures education can bring great benefit to students and youth in the following areas:

- Thinking of the future can affect behavior in the present and clear personal goals can stimulate motivation and achievement.
- Anticipatory skills can allow students to deal with uncertainty and to manage change more effectively.
- Reflective and critical thinking is needed to identify trends and weigh alternatives.
- Identification of value judgements underpinning alternatives assists students in understanding society and human nature.
- The skills of thoughtful decision making and creative imagination are developed by the demands of forward thinking.
- The ultimate outcome of consideration of more just and sustainable futures is responsible citizenship.

The Fund serves as an umbrella, enclosing a range of programs that focus on guiding and helping youth. Following is an outline of a few of the programs under development:

Educational Web Design for High School and College Students

This program will be developed in partnership with the Global SchoolNet Foundation (www.globalschoolnet.org), which manages a network of 70,000 teachers. Students will be encouraged to 'Prepare for the Future!' by thinking about their own future plans, the conditions that will affect the future of their community, and issues of global importance. Students, working in small teams, will

conduct original research to produce high-quality, educational web projects, which will be available as learning tools to millions of people around the globe.

Competition judging initially takes place online, as the students themselves evaluate the projects of other schools, by using an online assessment tool designed by Global SchoolNet. The top-ranking entries are reviewed by a panel of Society judges to determine the 'best of the best'. The winning projects will be archived in a searchable online library, and serve as a model and inspiration for future projects. The WFS awards presentation for 2005 will take place at the World Future Society conference in Chicago at the end of July.

Teacher's Guides to the Future

A centerpiece of this effort is an update of a prior WFS effort to capture the leading futures curriculum materials for teaching foresight available around the world. The initial project, entitled "Prep 21" for 'Preparing for the 21st Century' proved very useful to educational practitioners but has not been revisited for a number of years. It will involve educators across the globe and include curriculum, teaching materials and a summary of best practices. Ultimately, recommended guidelines for teaching students how to think about and optimistically prepare for the future will be part of the package.

Scholarships at the WFS Conferences

The Society offers special opportunities for students who wish to attend its conferences. The selection process is managed locally and the funding shared between the local WFS chapter and the international office. Additional funding has been provided by donations by individual members of the World Future Society. Finally, WFS offers even further discounts for larger groups of students. One of our largest student contingents is at Tamkang University in Taipei, Taiwan, where a foresight course is required as part of an undergraduate degree.

Youth Program at WFS Conferences

This program enables young people to share their experiences and insights with their peers and provide new insights to their older colleagues. As well, certificates of achievement can be provided for youngsters completing programs of learning about the future. These certificates can motivate young people to think more intently and constructively about their own futures as well as the more general future of human civilization. With adequate funding, cash awards can also be offered for young people producing the most outstanding work.

Web Resources: "Youth Net" Youth-To-Youth Program

This gives initiative for new programs to the students themselves. New ideas can be shared, discussed, and even uploaded onto the site for other groups to review. An on-line chat room for young futurists is part of the package, as is a youth presentations track for imaginative and innovative events at each annual meeting. Especially promising is the world-wide aspect of this effort, bringing young people together from across the globe.

Adopt a Class Program

This package is designed to be used in a class of about 25-30 students at the secondary level. It will include a teacher's guide, copies of *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future* and access to a resource web site.

Chat Room for Educators

This is also part of our strategic alliance with Global School Net, an international non-profit which provides training and tools for teachers and students. They are working with WFS to provide future-related materials to the teachers in their network.

In addition, WFS is working with several potential partners to explore programs such as a “Discovery Team” approach allowing high school students to develop solutions to compelling technology challenges now facing modern society, such as breakthrough energy storage technologies. The goal is to energize youth by opening up and ‘democratizing’ the process of scientific innovation.

These are some of the highlights of our education-related programs for the year. We invite your participation, feedback and even financial support and look forward to working with a range of interested partners in this important and fascinating area. If you would like to discuss these programs in more detail, contact me at tmack@wfs.org or 301-656-8274.