



Sierra Nevada Unit

Planned Informality

Written in 2007

Occasionally the issue of growth and the SNU has come up. First, It isn't the size of the organization that matters but what it does and how it does it. There are several aspects of the SNU that seem to particularly appeal to it's members. Key among these is the informality and need for minimal visible organization and structure.

The structure of the SNU and its informality is not haphazard and not something that just happened accidentally. It was designed and carefully built. It was intended as an example and an illustration and an experiment. It has good theoretical underpinnings and solid historical precedent for a foundation. Members need to know this so they can have confidence that it is a maintainable and manageable construct. That confidence will help members continue to implement and develop the ideas so we can all enjoy the benefits of new friends and new experiences the way we have come to expect with the SNU, no matter how many members we share it with.

The SNU tackled these concepts when we reformed the bylaws in 2002 and even earlier when we structured a focus on the primary purpose of the organization over a lot of the fluff that some Airstreamers complain about. That purpose is to go camping in your Airstream.

An example of the reformed bylaws is related to the elected officers. The WBCCI Unit norm is a whole set of officers and committees with defined duties. We trimmed that to the core in 2002 and, it appears, we are going to more formally demote the unneeded offices and committees when the current bylaws recommendation is adopted. Instead, we work as a committee of the whole to determine priorities and see if we can find some individual willing to champion a priority via voluntary action. It is a subtle difference but an important one. It is the difference between obligating someone to undertake some activity of some sort and having someone who is not otherwise obligated at all to step forward and volunteer because he sees something important that needs doing. Push vs pull.

The assumption is often that everyone will expect to be 'assigned' a volunteer task in events. There is nothing wrong with that and it is a time tested and proven model. The SNU, in contrast, makes no such assumption. It turns out, though, that this particular assumption is difficult to keep tamped down as people always expect things of others. That difficulty is a testament to the quality of the people involved (they do things on their own and we come to expect it) but also highlights the need for paying attention and maintaining the discipline for informality. We have to pay attention to keeping our presumptions and expectations in check.

Unlike many other Units and groups in general, the SNU has been able to avoid getting stuck on individual reservations, formally planned participation in activities, and other such things. In part this is due to the area we live in. It is also a result of conscious decisions made in 2002 one of which is our preference for unstructured, dry camping sites. This enabled us to keep rally costs to a bare minimum and made it possible to accommodate any Airstreamer who showed up at a rally whether they had RSVP'd or not.

The SNU has also taken the lead in using modern communication methods to augment and support a variety of communications efforts. Much of the planning and coordination needed for Unit activities and Unit management can now be done with much less formality or bureaucracy through effective use of the tools available.

By knowing how the SNU operates and explaining how we do things and why we do them a certain way it will help ensure that a discipline for informality can be maintained. That is the reason SNU behavior is codified on the Unit website and why concerns such as those about growth are so important to discuss.

The SNU operates on the principle of invitation and opportunity versus one of obligations and burdens. It will take the SNU as a whole to keep the focus on the core values, keep expectations in check, and most of all, as an active and contributing member of the committee of the whole, help the SNU maintain the qualities that we have all come to appreciate and enjoy.

[Check the Op Notes to learn more about the SNU and how it functions.](#)