

# The IRC Project



Picture from Yarrow EcoVillage (B.C.) website <http://www.yarrowecovillage.ca/index2.html>

A Proposal and Invitation to help create an

## **Intentional Rural Community (IRC)**

Based on Wholistic Principles and Practices

Project Co-ordinator: Michael Greenstein, founder  
the Wholistic Community Network (WCN)  
[www.wholcom.net](http://www.wholcom.net)

Please direct your expressions of interest, questions, and comments to  
Michael Greenstein: [michael@wholcom.net](mailto:michael@wholcom.net), 2<sup>nd</sup> Revision June 4 2007

## Personal Introduction:

---

Hello, my name is Michael Greenstein. Teaching is my passion, my right work, and how I try to make a difference in the lives of others. The subject I teach is wholism which I'll tell you more about on the next page. Among the few things I've achieved in my 60 years are helping to raise five decent human beings and founding the Wholistic Community Network (WCN), an online community dedicated to the promotion of wholistic principles and practices. The site address is [www.wholcom.net](http://www.wholcom.net)

I'm about to make some major life changes involving **where** I'm living and **how** I'm living. To prepare for these changes, I asked myself what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. That one was easy; I want to write books and articles, give talks, organize workshops and conferences, and anything else that will promote the use of wholistic principles and practices.

Then I asked myself how I wanted to live while doing this work. That "how" answer is my personal agenda for initiating the IRC project. It's quite a simple agenda. To be healthy and productive, I need:

- **to live in a healthier, more natural environment;** where I can breathe clean air, drink clean water, eat healthy food, and reduce the amount of noise, traffic, and neurotic behaviour that I now encounter in my daily city life here in Montreal. I need to experience some point in the day when all I can hear is silence.
- **to form close relationships with a small group of compatible people;** who share my values and want to participate with me in the activities of a vibrant intentional rural community. I want to return to this community after traveling and know that I'm truly home.
- **to work where I live;** writing my books in a peaceful home setting, helping with the physical and administrative chores of the IRC, and doing at least part of my teaching in a facility located within our community. I need to do all this without living in poverty.
- **to help create a living model and example for others;** that demonstrates how the use of wholistic principles and practices can help create the ideal conditions for people to live balanced and harmonious lives. In these unstable times of crisis and major changes, the world desperately needs wholism. What better way to show its benefits than by creating a thriving community based on its use in daily life.

This 9-page document is a starting point; a personal invitation to join with me in creating our IRC. Here's what you'll find:

page 1. **Introduction (this page)**

page 3. **What is an IRC?**

page 5. **My Commitments**

page 7. **Six Ingredients for Success**

page 2. **What is Wholism?**

page 4. **My Vision of Our IRC**

page 6. **My Needs**

page 8. **Getting Started**

If this project resonates with what you need and want in your life, please contact me asap. Even if you can't participate in this project, I'm most interested in hearing from you if you are now living in an IRC or have had past experiences creating or living in one.

To all who receive this, I send you my warmest regards.

**May what you want and what you need ...both be the same**

*Michael Greenstein*

## What is Wholism?

---

Before I can ask you to join with me in creating an IRC based on wholistic principles and practices, it's only fair that I clearly describe to you what I mean by the term wholism. Along with the brief explanation that follows I invite you to learn more by visiting the Wholistic Community Network (WCN) website [www.wholcom.net](http://www.wholcom.net)

---

Wholism is a way of living in harmony with the laws that govern our universe.

These Universal laws have existed from the beginning of time and are the foundation on which science, religion, philosophy, spirituality, etc. are built. Each of these “bodies of knowledge” describe some part of the universal whole, often getting their “details” right but not seeing how these details relate to the whole.

Although many have tried, no one group can claim these laws as their own or distort their meaning for social, political, or religious purposes. Because the source of these laws is not human, they are unaffected by human fads, trends, and flavors-of-the-month. It is my belief that these laws are the only real and meaningful standards on which we can base our actions.

At this time of high stress and rapid, widespread change, many of us are seeking something solid that creates meaning, order, and direction in our lives. What could be more solid than aligning our thoughts, feelings, and actions with how the universe is designed to work.

Ok, so what are these Universal Laws. There may be many, but here are five:

1. **The Universe is an Interconnected System of Living Beings.** Every living being influences and is affected by the actions of every other living being.
2. **Life is Energy.** Everything that vibrates is “alive”. Energy moves purposely through the Universe to where it is needed in order to create and maintain energetic balance and harmony. Seeing life in terms of moving energy instead of good-bad, them-us, etc. changes everything.
3. **Energetic Balance and Harmony is the Ultimate Goal of All Activities in the Universe.** The universe is designed for our wellbeing. It wants us to be in balance and harmony. Every action can be evaluated by its contribution to the balance and harmony of all who are affected by that action.
4. **Relationships are Energy Exchanges that Enable Energy to Move to Where it is Needed.** It is these exchanges of energy with material objects, plants, animals, and fellow humans that sustains our life. The nature and quality of our relationships determines the nature and quality of our lives.
5. **All Living Beings have a Specific Design and Purpose.** Each living being contributes to the wellbeing of the whole by acting according to its own unique nature. Therefore every living being is “valuable” and is worthy of our love and respect, no matter how different it appears from us.

Wholism is a way of living whose goal is to create balance and harmony in all our relationships through the conscious use of our energy. So how does wholistic living help us create an intentional rural community?

Wholism helps us understand that building an IRC in a forest or on farmland effects the lives of billions of living beings and must be planned with an awareness of their energetic needs as well as our own. Every material object, plant, animal, and human contributes to the IRC's wellbeing and healthy relationships must be formed among all of them. The total amount of energy our IRC takes from the land and its natural resources must be returned in some form to ensure energetic balance. I could go on but I think you get it.

Imagine living in a community where these five laws are put into daily practice. That's exactly what I'm proposing. A community based on mutual respect, harmonious relationships, and balanced living.

# What is an Intentional Community?

---

From an online article I edited heavily and added to. See the full article @ <http://www.planetfriendly.net/community.html#examples>

---

**Intentional Community** is an inclusive term for ecovillages, cohousing, land trusts, communes, co-ops, housing cooperatives, and other projects where people live and work together with a common vision. Thousands exist today worldwide, communal or individualistic, spiritual or secular, big or small. They can be based on economic cooperation, equality, environmental sustainability, health, personal growth, social activism, spirituality, etc. Intentional communities can be organized as:

## Ecovillages

An ecovillage is a sustainable community, committed to living in an ecologically, economically, culturally and spiritually sound way; a full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world. Physical and living arrangements vary widely.

## Cohousing

read this excellent description at <http://www.chaswoodcohousing.ca/whatis.html>

In a cohousing neighbourhood, each family or individual has their own private home, but certain facilities and resources are shared. This varies, but could include any of the following; gathering place, meeting rooms, dining area, playground, playroom, exercise area, daycare, vegetable garden, office, workshop, etc.

## Co-operative Housing

Co-operative houses are co-operatively owned and managed. Residents share the responsibilities and control of their homes. They are often government-sponsored. Some have a high sense of community and sharing, others much less so. Also known as "co-op housing", or "housing co-ops".

## Co-op Houses

A "co-op house" is often a shared, rented house. In some cases, it is co-operatively owned by the occupants. In either case, the intent is to find like-minded persons with whom to live. This generally leads to a much more stable, pleasant living conditions in which occupants share meals and house maintenance.

## Communes

There is no authoritative definition of the word "commune". But in general, a commune is a small, often rural community. Its members are likely to share interests, work, income, and/or property.

## Cooperatives

There are many kinds of co-ops; housing: food co-ops, credit unions, worker's co-ops, agricultural co-ops, etc. Technically, a "cooperative" is a specific legal arrangement that serves as an alternative to a for-profit incorporation. An ecovillage or cohousing neighbourhood can be set up as a cooperative.

## Land Trusts

A Land Trust is a non-profit, charitable organization committed to the long-term protection of natural and/or cultural heritage. A land trust may own land itself, or it may enter into conservation covenants with property owners to protect or restore natural or heritage features on the owner's land.

## Collectives

Refers to a project, enterprise or living situation in which people work together towards some goal or vision, with at least some degree of sharing (of skills, resources, decision making and/or profits).

# My Vision of Our IRC

---

## 1. The People

Guiding Principles: variety, complementary skills, shared values

I see a **mix** of singles, couples, and children from different backgrounds with a complementary mix of hands-on and intellectual skills, all pooling our resources of money, time, energy, etc. to create healthy and productive lives. I see some of us working in one of several community enterprises and others working in their own home-based or Internet-based enterprises. I see us devoting time to socializing, working on ourselves, and being active in the world. I see us assuming different roles; organizing our internal activities, liaising with other groups, etc., each according to his or her talents and personality. I see people who simply want to retire in a beautiful rural setting and others who are actively trying to change our world.

## 2. The Land

Guiding Principles: a place that satisfies a wide range of needs

I see a beautiful location in Ontario, B.C., Western Alberta, or the Maritimes; within a 2-5 hour drive of a major city and 30 minutes to a large, flourishing town. I see us living on at least 50-100 acres of land well above sea or high-peak river level, with pond / stream, some sturdy existing buildings, access to electricity, excellent drinking water, enough arable land for gardens and pastures; relatively mild winters, good roads, and an airport within 2-5 hours. Most importantly, I see a location that has no zoning or other restrictions that would prevent us from doing a variety of income-earning enterprises that would enable us to overcome one of rural living's greatest challenges; economic poverty.

## 3. Food & Energy Production

Guiding Principles: self-reliance, sustainability, reliability

I see a community that produces much of its own food and energy. I see greenhouses, fish ponds, organic gardens, field crops, and healthy enclosures for animals. I see solar panels, wind and water turbines, radiant heated floors supplied by geothermal systems, etc. I see partnerships with universities and other institutions that are doing research in new methods of food and energy production. I see field testing of new machines, building systems, etc. on IRC property.

## 4. Housing and Living Spaces

Guiding Principles: energy-efficient, comfortable, affordable

I see a variety of choices; separate and communal homes, personal and community ownership, long or short-term leases, etc. I see domes, yurts, e-riggers, underground houses, straw bale construction, and conventional houses; all well-insulated and making efficient use of solar, geothermal, wind, and hydro-electric energy. Again I see organizational and institutional partnerships and field testing of new designs.

## 5. Community-Owned Facilities

Guiding Principles: multipurpose, flexible

Along with the food and energy production facilities described above I see a multi-purpose building with open space for recreational activities, talks / workshops and private rooms for various therapies and enterprise offices. I also see a large workspace in a separate building for research, invention, and small-scale manufacturing. I see visitor's accommodations (guest houses) where students, clients, and guests can stay for extended periods.

## 6. A Wholistic Model for Others

Guiding Principles: be normal, walk our Talk

I see our IRC becoming a living example of how to use wholistic principles and practices to manage our internal affairs, build structures, grow food, organize community living, handle energy needs, relate with neighbours, partner with a variety of organizations and institutions, etc.

## 7. Our Common Bond

Guiding Principles: cooperation, balance, respect

I see shared needs and beliefs as the glue that binds our intentional rural community together. I see us at different stages in our lives and often doing different things; yet we are in harmony. That harmony is created through open communication and shared beliefs ...see What is Wholism p.3

# My Commitments to Our IRC

---

All projects require resources to be successful i.e. money, time, skills, access to information, land, buildings, equipment, etc. In the case of our IRC, the key resources are the right mix of **people**, with the right mix of **skills**, who have generated the right amount of **money**, and have found the right **property**. I believe it's important that each of us communicates clearly what resources we can commit to the IRC to determine what, in total, we have to work with. Here's what I'm willing and able to commit at this time (June 2007).

## Stage 1. While Creating our IRC

**Time:** days of **visiting existing IRCs**, doing **land searches**, **reporting my findings**  
days of **speaking with** and **meeting in person** with potential IRC members  
days of helping to **write-rewrite** our IRC proposal, operational plan, etc.

**Financial:**

Do all of the above **at my own expense**.  
\$ 1,000 in IRC "shares", "loans", or membership fees

## Stage 2. While Living in Our IRC

**Time:** I will contribute **3 - 5 hours / 5 days a week**  
during the start-up or initial building stage of our IRC.

I will contribute **1 - 3 hours / 3 days a week**  
once our IRC is well established.

**Skills:** Meeting Facilitation; "big picture" and action-oriented meetings  
Small Business Management; marketing, management, etc.  
Event Organization; talks, workshops, summer camps, etc  
Computer Skills; create web sites, spreadsheets, databases, etc.  
Wholistic Health Approaches and Practices  
Child and Adult Education (I'm a licensed teacher in Quebec)  
Carpentry, General Renovation, :  
Organic Gardening (primarily vegetables)

**Financial:** \$ 400 - \$ 600 /month as rent for a personal living space  
"Sweat equity" in the form of hundreds of hours of administrative, planning,  
and supervision work at low or no pay

### Some Comments:

My greatest resource contribution to our IRC will be my **eclectic mix** of knowledge, skills, and experiences in the areas of Education, Business, Personal Growth, and Media Design. I am or have been a licensed teacher (p.e. and health), house renovator, childcare worker, small-business owner, enterprise coach, website and print media designer, sports coach, wholistic therapist, active father of five children, and a 35 yr student of wholistic principles and practices. I have several skill sets but financially I'm not in a position to be able to provide a sizeable amount of money. It is my hope that my weaker financial situation can be balanced by other members who have larger amounts to invest but don't have the skills, good health, or the personal interest to be as actively involved in our IRC as I intend to be. Please remember "it takes all kinds"

# What I Need from our IRC

---

I believe it's important that I have a clear understanding of what I need and expect from the IRC. Knowing my personal agenda and list of needs and communicating that information to other potential members is a vital first step in creating a successful IRC. Here's what I need from our IRC:

## **1. I Need A Harmonious Place to Live**

Above all else, I need harmony among all our IRC members. I need open and honest communication so that any frictions that do arise can be settled peacefully. I need to know we are able to develop some communication approaches and strategies that will help create and maintain this harmony.

## **2. I Need Certain Personal Freedoms**

I need to know that in our community I am given the personal freedom to have my own beliefs, pursue my own interests, and act according to my own conscience. In return I offer those exact same freedoms to every other member. The operative phrases are "live your values", "respect others", "do no harm"

## **3. I Need A Healthy Personal Space to Live In**

I need an approx. 20' x 35' (700 sq ft) personal living space that has lots of light, is well insulated and properly sealed against the weather, and is quiet. It could be in the form of a small cottage (1st choice) or a shared space in a larger house or a space in a community-owned low-rise apartment building. I'm prepared to live in "rougher" conditions during the IRC startup phase for a period of up to 18 months, but not longer.

## **4. I Need the Right Conditions to Do My Work**

I need a work schedule that enables me to balance my IRC commitments with my need to have undisturbed periods of time at certain times of the day and / or days of the week. Simply put, I need sufficient time to write and teach as well as help build the community.

## **5. I Need Access to People and News from Outside our IRC**

I need to know that our community works in the world, not hides from it. I need to know that as a community we encourage the invitation of guests to give talks and make presentations on a wide variety of topics. I need to be able to invite family and friends to stay with me at any time (provided there is enough room). I need access to radio, television, and newspapers in my own personal space, if I so choose.

## **6. I Need Access to Certain Services, Tools, and Commodities**

I will probably need access to electricity; a way of connecting to the Internet, indoor plumbing, fresh vegetables, grains, meat, and fruit, community-owned construction and agricultural tools and equipment; a good road leading to a relatively prosperous town 30 minute drive from the IRC where I can obtain food, tools, clothes, spare parts, etc.

**Optional but Nice:** A river, lake, or pond for boating, swimming and fishing; a way of communicating with other IRC members on the property (walkie-talkie, phone); access to an airport within a 2 -3 hour drive.

## **7. I Need Access to Art and Cultural Activities**

I need to occasionally hear some live music, see an adult or children's play, enjoy a movie, etc. I would like some of these activities to be offered within the community by community members or invited guests, or be available in a nearby town or city.

# Six Ingredients for Forming Communities That Help Reduce Conflict Down the Road

by Diana Leafe Christian

---

This is an edited version of a must-read online article found at: <http://www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/2000/20diana.php> Please read the entire article. I found the author's insights extremely helpful! MG

---

Only 1 out of 10 new communities actually gets built. The other 90% go nowhere, occasionally because of lack of money or right land, but mostly because of conflict. Many of these community break-ups resulted from "structural conflict" - problems that arose when founders didn't explicitly take care of certain important issues at the outset, creating one or more flaws in their organizational structure. Here are the six ingredients for successful communities:

## 1. Fair, Participatory Decision Making

It's obvious that a great deal of conflict arises when people feel that they don't have enough say in community decisions, unless the community has explicitly created a structure in which a leader or small group of members make decisions, as is sometimes the case in spiritual communities. The first thing a forming community should do is to choose a fair, participatory form of decision making.

## 2. Document our Vision; The Vision Statement: "what we are about"

Your vision is a compelling idea or image that inspires and motivates your members to keep on creating community, to persevere through the rough times, to remember why you're there, and to help guide your decisions. It gives voice to your group's deeply held values and intuitions. It is your picture or "feel" of the kind of life you'd like to lead together.

## 3. Know What You Need to Know

Forming a new community is like simultaneously starting up a new business and beginning a marriage. It is a complex, time-consuming process requiring both business skills and interpersonal communication skills. Founders of successful new communities seem to know this. And those that get mired in severe problems have usually leapt in without having this combination of skills or knowing how to access them.

## 4. Clear Agreements, in Writing

Many forming communities flounder because they haven't written down their agreements. When people try to remember what they thought they had agreed on months or years before, they often get it wrong. People can recall a conversation or an agreement in such divergent ways that each may wonder if others are trying to cheat or manipulate them. Putting things in writing prevents this!

## 5. Good Communication Skills

Every community experiences interpersonal conflict; it's a given. A community is healthy when it deals openly with conflict and doesn't pretend it isn't there. Healthy communities recognize that community offers living "mirrors" for each other, and an opportunity for faster-than-normal spiritual and emotional growth. Dealing with conflict is an opportunity, not a problem.

## 6. Select for Emotional Well-Being

People bring their "emotional stuff" when they enter a community. Some of these personal issues can be toxic to the healthy growth and development of an intentional community. One person can literally destroy an entire community. Find a way to screen and choose people who have already demonstrated they can get along well with others.

## Getting Started

---

### Step 1: Distribution of this Document

Timeline: **being done now**

I have begun a process of e-mail distribution of this document to approximately 150 people. I'm also placing some ads in online magazines, newsletters, and website dealing with intentional communities. It is my hope that those who receive this document will forward it to friends, family members, and other people they know who might be interested in pooling resources and starting an intentional rural community (IRC) in Canada.

### Step 2: Identifying Interested Potential Members

Timeline: **April – Oct 2007**

I will act as the interim contact person and clearing house for responses to this document. I will start a mailing list introducing potential members to each other and publishing their vision, commitment, and needs statements. The mailing list may turn into a newsletter. I am open to working with a small group of 5 – 10 people who are interested or an in pouring of interest and support from hundreds of people.

### Step 3: Forming Working Groups / Local Meetings

Timeline: **Nov 2007**

As people come forward and identify themselves as being interested in creating our IRC, we may ask individuals to lead working groups in the following areas; Organizational Structure, Legal Structure, Membership Criteria, Financing, Housing, Food Production, Energy Production, Community Enterprises, and any other areas you suggest. Our communication co-coordinator will keep all interested people informed of the work of these groups. Our mailing list or newsletters will encourage potential members living near each other to begin meeting informally and get to know one another.

### Step 4: Meeting Together As a Whole

Timeline: **Dec 2007 – Jan 2008**

With the creation of working group reports it may be time for all of us to meet together, preferably in person or at lease through e-conferencing. If we're ready, these meetings will be a time to make some commitments to the process and each other. We may need to decide and vote on legal structure, membership qualifications, which geographic area to focus on, etc.

### Step 5: Legal Structure

Timeline: **by Jan - Feb 2008**

After working groups reports and meetings, it may be time to create a legal structure so we can have a vehicle to collect and distribute funds for purchasing our land. We will need directors in place, written documents to distribute, and funds in our account.

### Step 6: Formal land Search Begins

Timeline: **from Feb 2008 onward**

While anyone of us can begin looking for land at anytime, it would be good to have an organizational and legal structure in place before we can really do anything with interesting properties that we've identified.

### Step 7: Purchase a Property

Timeline: **sometime in 2008**

After we've researched the property and surrounding area, thoroughly inspected the land and buildings, crunched our numbers, ensured that the land has the right zoning for community living, etc., we vote and then, if the vote is favorable, we purchase. Then life in our intentional community begins!

---

Please direct any questions, and comments to Michael Greenstein: [michael@wholcom.net](mailto:michael@wholcom.net) If you're interested in participating, it would be very helpful if you could create a vision, needs, and commitments statements (similar to the ones in this document) that we could circulate to other potential participants.