

Survey Report

Effective Practices Work Group

Building Bridges Coalition

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Executive Summary

The Effective Practices Work Group of the Building Bridges Coalition (BBC) was formed to explore and identify effective practices in volunteer abroad program management. The work group is open to all members of the BBC who practice in the field of volunteer abroad or those who are interested in supporting the work of this field.

For its first major task, the Effective Practices Work Group chose to design a survey to be completed by practitioners in the field that would provide insight into current program management techniques. The main focus of the survey was three-fold:

- To gather information from practitioners in the international volunteer field about how they manage their programs
- To find if there are common program management/administration practices among international volunteer organizations
- To find key points and areas to explore related to program management

The survey contained seventy five (75) questions. Fifty two (52) organizations completed the survey. The survey was distributed as widely as possible via work group members. While these results may or may not represent the volunteer abroad field in general in the U.S., they do offer some insights and areas for exploration.

This report highlights results from key questions as they relate to effective practices in volunteer abroad program management. Results have been grouped into the following categories: organizational background and program structure & delivery, mission and mission directive, organizational practices, business practices and structures, field methodology, volunteer selection and management, key questions and areas for further exploration. In some cases, the statistics obtained from responses are provided and speak for themselves. In other instances, commentary has been provided about what the results could signify.

This is an overview of the survey responses received and does not provide results on all questions, nor does it analyze the results in depth. This is an initial release of information. Additional results and comparisons can be made available at the request of BBC members.

Organizational Background and Program Structure & Delivery

There was a wide variety in type and size of the organizations who responded to the survey. This represents the diversity of organizations and program models that practice in the volunteer abroad field. Highlighted below are responses that provide an overview of who these organizations are and where commonalities and differences can be found in the answers provided.

Age of Organizations (Question #2)

Age of Organization	% responding orgs
Less than 10 years	37.2%
10-19 years	16.3%
20 years or older	46.6%

This demonstrates that there could be a wealth of experience and knowledge in the field with many organizations operating for decades.

Background of Program Participants (Questions #8, 9)

A majority of the responding organizations indicated that their participants were between the ages of 16-30, with many organizations stating they are students in high school or college or recent graduates. A few organizations mentioned that they work with participants of all ages or focus on working professional or retirees. Some organizations also mentioned that a majority of their participants are female.

Over 90.3% of the responding organizations stated that the majority of their participants come from the United States. A small percentage indicated Canada and Germany as well.

Numbers of Participants per Year (Question #11)

When asked how many volunteers the organizations place or accept per year, the results were:

43.6% place/accept less than 100 participants per year

35.8% place/accept between 100 and 499 participants per year

20.5% place/accept over 500 participants per year (with 2 organizations placing/accepting 3,000-3,999 participants per year)

Length and Location of Programs (Questions #12 and 13)

Length of Program	% responding orgs
4 weeks or less	37.5%
1-3 months	22.5%
4-9 months	15%
10-12 months	20%
Over 1 year	5%

Many countries were listed by respondents, from all continents, for where they place their volunteers or from where they accept volunteers.

An interesting point can be found with question #15 when organizations were asked what is the longest period of time they have send/received participants to/from one country? Half of the respondents (50%) said over 10 years. Another 26.4% said 4-10 years. This shows a commitment on behalf of the responding organizations to work within the same country. Why this is the case – logistics, interest, business value, meaningful ties - can not be assessed through this survey but could be an interested area to explore.

Annual Budget and Expenditures (Questions #21, 22, 23)

The largest number of respondents (18.2%) indicated that their annual operational budget was over \$10,000,000 USD. All but one of the remaining responding organizations are spread out between \$50,000 and \$10,000,000 USD.

When asked what percentage of the operational budget the organizations spend on administrative overhead, outreach and recruitment, and other internal organization costs, the results were as follows:

% spent on admin, etc.	% responding orgs
Less than 10%	10%
10-19%	33.3%
20-39 %	33.3%
40-69%	20%
More than 90%	3.3%

This question is often of interest in this field, especially as many volunteer abroad organizations are non-profit organizations, which are often expected to keep low overhead/administration costs. More can be explored about how organizations define administration/overhead costs and why the percentages may differ so much among organizations.

International Staffing (Questions #54, 55)

When asked, “How many paid staff members do you have at locations other than volunteer sites? For example, staff members at organizational headquarters in another location or country than where volunteers are engaged,” the responses were as follows:

# paid staff on site	% responding orgs
0-5	50%
6-10	10%
11-30	16.6%
Over 40	23.3%

This is often an area of discussion in the volunteer abroad field – is there a “best” way to run programs and arrange staffing? Popular options are using local partners, partner organizations in the host communities, providing paid or unpaid staff from the sending organization, and others. This could be an area to explore further. Also, exactly how organizations define terms such as “staff” or “partners” is not always clear.

When asked how many of these paid staff members on site work full-time, the responses were as follows:

% full time	% responding orgs
0-10%	22.6%
26-75%	16.2%
75-100%	61.3%

Mission and Mission Directive (Questions #1, 3, 4, 73)

Key words that are found repeatedly in responding organizations' mission statements are "empower young leaders", "develop young leaders", "provide challenging intercultural experiences for young people", "foster respect", "foster compassion", "contribute to global peace and justice", "promote volunteering around the world."

Many of the organizations identify young people or youth as the focus of their programs. Others do not designate a targeted population in their mission statement. No responding organizations reported a political affiliation, and nearly 84% reported no religious affiliation.

Nearly 67 % of respondents report partnering or networking with other volunteer-sending organizations (VSOs). This may demonstrate a collaborative element to the field, whether by choice or necessity.

Motivation/Goal of International Volunteer Programs (Question #5)

At the heart of this field is the question of why organizations provide these types of programs. The open-ended responses are listed here:

Learn to draw connections around a set of global issues (such as lack of access to education and poverty), work on a volunteer project related to that issue (such as building a school); and go through our leadership training process.

To continually strengthen our network of chapters (volunteers) and institutions in the Western Hemisphere to effectively and efficiently receive and send volunteers. This will be done to continue strengthening mutual understanding and cooperation.

To develop young leaders committed to Africa's advancement.

To educate students, serve communities abroad and domestically, advocate for the pedagogy of service-learning, and create in people a life-long commitment to being responsive to the needs of others.

To give our volunteers the opportunity to unite with a group of motivated young adults to live and work together towards a common goal; to combine their unique passions and expertise towards holistic community development, working with all ages and in various developmental regards to provide the resources necessary for overall communal enrichment.

Education of students

Provide opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and to aid worthy grassroots projects.

We believe that young Canadians and Americans have a meaningful contribution to make to international development and global youth development. Over the years we have seen our youth volunteers become the leaders of non-profits and key contributors to society. We have also seen local youth in developing countries become inspiring leaders and citizens in their own countries. And we have seen the local NGOs we partner with become effective and sustainable organizations. This is the heart of what we do.

We have a wide variety of volunteer opportunities and projects - our goal is to provide the participant with a cultural immersion experience and create a global family.

Educational volunteer experience/service learning, sustainable development, cultural exposure and exploration

To increase cross-cultural understanding on the part of the volunteers and the host community members as well as provide support for projects and challenges that the local community deems important.

Justice for all persons who suffer from social, political, economic and personal injustice; Break through the barriers between cultures and peoples; The principle of equality among cultures, nations and sexes; Providing experiences that will encourage international and intercultural understanding; Helping participants to become aware of the issues and problems in the local and national community in order to better understand world-wide socio-economic-political issues and problems; Encouraging commitment to act on these understandings, both during the exchange experience and beyond."

We strive to develop creative and effective local solutions to global problems by providing opportunities for individuals to interact with people of diverse cultures who share common global values.

To empower young people across the globe to take action in support of people, animals and the environment. To connect young people across the globe who are involved in service.

Generally part of an academic program; civic learning

Broaden students' perspectives; teach social responsibility, prepare them for global citizenship

To provide short term technical assistance in support of the economic development work we do in developing countries worldwide.

To turn challenges into opportunities and give low-income youth the same opportunities abroad that many middle class youth experience. We aim to show low-income youth that they can be leaders in the global community.

To help our students link the theory they learn in class with the applied they will learn in the field

Students volunteer on-site with partner organizations only in the context of a long-term, multi-year partnership. Each chapter (located at universities across the country) partners with a grassroots health organization in the developing world and works throughout the academic year to raise funds for a public health project at their partner. Then, usually during the summer, a small team of students travel to the partner and work on a project determined by the partner organization. One of the main goals is to complete a project that will be carried on by the organizational staff, but equally important is strengthening the partnership (on both ends) between the community and the chapter.

To provide opportunities for individuals to make a meaningful contribution to international education by living and working as volunteer teachers in developing countries. In addition, to facilitate a transformative experience that will cultivate compassionate and knowledgeable global citizens.

Give the opportunity to young people to have an intercultural experience through volunteerism where they can learn another language, have a better understanding about the world and different backgrounds.

Youth leadership and community service, in partnership with host communities in Latin America

To motivate people to interact and help build sustainable mutual development.

We believe that world peace will come through world trust—and when people from one country travel to work in another country, that builds those bonds of trust across borders.

This program was initiated to instill in students a lifelong commitment to the Jesuit Mission of service and promotion of social justice.

This program facilitates short-term (one week to one year) outreach opportunities for professionals (medics, technicians, teachers, and businesspeople), college students, families, and individuals. Designed to accommodate a rapidly growing interest in service projects among youth and adults, we connect volunteers with ministry projects specially suited to their skills. Service opportunities exist on a continual basis in various countries in Africa, Central America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean. In the United States, we mobilize volunteers in the aftermath of a disaster.

To engage students and community members in global experiences that improve our local and global communities. Students, faculty, staff and community members alike are beginning to have an increased desire and sense of responsibility for global issues and communities- our focus on local is looking global.

Promote an international understanding between the host situation and the volunteer to join hands in building a better world together.

We work with students interested in volunteering or interning internationally, helping them find the right program and fit.

To promote cultural understanding and awareness and work side-by-side with local partner programs to help them achieve their goals.

To strengthen the institutions, governments, and industries that drive economic growth in emerging markets.

The goal is to eradicate poverty. By doing so we all need to understand our civic responsibility.

Promote sustainable development through asset based community development and social entrepreneurship.

(1) to engender student civic responsibility through service-learning with impoverished individuals and communities in full-time work during the summer; (2) to provide substantive support to agencies so that interns provide a level of support that would not have been met otherwise; (3) to promote respect for differences in diverse communities through student work with persons different from themselves, thus promoting mutual learning; (4) to make an indelible mark on students by helping them conceive their vocations in ways that will better integrate all persons and communities into our society.

To increase intercultural understanding.

To financially support education programs in rural Cambodia and to change the way travelers live, travel, and give after their trip.

To make a meaningful contribution to international education by sending volunteer teachers to live and work in developing countries.

To provide funding for our University's undergraduates who wish to pursue an immersive (minimum of eight weeks) service experience by meeting a community need locally, domestically or internationally. Thanks to funding this program funded and supported 350 students in both group programs and independent projects during the summer of 2009. Since the program began in 2007, more than 800 students have participated.

We cultivate opportunity across borders. We do this by mobilizing volunteers and resources, creating alliances, implementing development projects, and building the capacity of grassroots organizations.

It is interesting to see that the focus of the motivation behind these programs might be to transform or impact those participating in the programs by traveling abroad to volunteers, whereas in other cases, the focus is on addressing issues/needs in the host communities.

Organizational Practices

A majority of respondents reported self-government through an internal and/or public code of ethics, however, an appreciable percentage (24.3%) reported neither. (Question #20)

Program Management and Measurement of Success (Questions # 14, 16, 19, 72)

The process for selecting international volunteer sites varies widely among respondents. Of primary consideration are availability of responsible local partners and services to the support international volunteers. Other significant considerations are safety and stability of location, knowledge of the area or country, and the expressed need for assistance from international volunteers.

Many tools, methods and approaches were cited in maximizing the volunteers' effectiveness. Most responses fall into one of these categories:

- Volunteer training, preparation, orientation
- Building strong relationships in the host community
- Finding and building strong partnerships
- Matching volunteer interest with host community needs
- Assuring continuity/sustainability of projects

The success of the international volunteer abroad programs is interpreted in many ways by responding organizations, however, the most often cited indicators/measurements are reports from both volunteers and community contacts and the number of volunteers participating in the organization's programs.

Local involvement and influence appears to be key in ensuring sustainability/ continuity of volunteer projects. Strategies indicated by respondents include:

Strategy	% responding orgs
Local ideas & leadership	74.2%
Train & transfer projects to local leaders as soon as possible	16.1%
Look for local orgs to inherit projects	9.7%

In addition, 12.9% of responding organizations indicated that as long as the project is successful for its duration, they do not hold their sustainability to be crucial.

Volunteer Recruitment (Questions #25, 26, 27)

The most popular tools for volunteer recruitment include:

Tool	% responding orgs
Website	94.6%
Word of Mouth	91.9%
Social Networking Sites	78.4%
Events/Fairs	70.3%
Presentations (schools, Community groups, etc)	64.9%

Responding organizations found the following to be most effective in connecting with new volunteers:

Tool	% responding orgs
Word of Mouth	71.1%
Website	44.7%
Events/Fairs	28.9%
Presentations	26.9%

In addition, 78.9% of responding organizations said that they do provide new volunteers ways to connect with former volunteers.

Business Practices and Structure

The following questions were asked to assess what business practices and structures are employed by responding organizations to optimize program efficiency.

The types of international volunteer programs offered by responding organizations include (Question #7):

Program Type	% responding orgs
Medium Term (1-6 months)	73.2%
Short-term (less than 1 month)	58.5%
Long-term (over 6 months)	53.7%
Internship/apprenticeship	53.7%
Study abroad (service as part of education abroad program)	36.6%
Language learning (service as part of language program)	24.4%
Voluntourism	22%
Other	17.1%
Online volunteer projects & roles	9.8%

Responding organizations indicated that they used the following methods for achieving transparency in their programs (Question #17):

Method	% responding orgs
Shared Feedback	86.8%
Testimonials	86.8%
Annual Reports	68.4%
Open Financial Models	47.4%

For responding organizations that require a fee from volunteers to cover their program costs, the following services, opportunities, or necessities are included (Question #36):

Service/Opportunity/Necessity	% responding orgs
Housing Abroad & Meals Abroad	95.8%
Pre-departure Support	91.7%
Language Support	83.3%
In-country Transportation	79.2%
Cultural Events	70.8%
Re-entry/Return Home Support	62.5%
Classes or learning opportunities	58.3%
Travel Excursions	45.8%
Transportation to country of service	37.5%
Assistance with job search or other next steps post-service	20.8%

Responding organizations provide the following types of insurance for their international volunteers (Question #39):

Insurance Type	% responding orgs
Medical Insurance	69.7%
Travel Insurance	57.6%
Liability Insurance	33.3%
Don't provide it, but require proof of medical insurance	18.2%
Don't provide it but require proof of travel insurance	15.2%
Other	9.1%
Don't provide assistance with insurance	6.1%

Working with Partner Organizations (Questions # 63, 64, 65)

Responding organizations indicated the following relationships with partner organizations:

Partnerships	% responding orgs
Yes, we work closely with local organizations for project development and/or volunteer placements	88.2%
Yes, we have some contact and collaboration with local partner organizations for our volunteer projects/placements	14.7%
No, we partner with international organizations whose headquarters are outside the country	11.8%

Responding organizations indicated a wide range of types of partner organizations including human services NGOs, environmental and conservation NGOs, Faith communities, hospitals, schools and universities, study abroad programs and others.

When asked how they screen and select partner organizations, respondents indicated the following:

Screening/Selecting Methods	% responding orgs
Word of mouth and peer recommendation	79.4%
Conducting and in-person interview	55.9%
Other methods	26.5%
Conducting a phone or web-based interview	20.6%
Using on-line or paper application process	2.9%

An interesting dichotomy between organizations is in the role local partner organizations play in supervising or managing volunteers (Question #66) and in funding provided by the respondent to partner organizations (Question #67). 47.1% of respondents said they work in collaboration with the partner organization to ensure safety, security and satisfaction of volunteers, whereas 41.2% of respondents said that they maintain ultimate responsibility for their volunteers and provide on-site support.

When asked about providing funding or financial support to partner organizations, respondents indicated:

Providing funding/financial support	% responding orgs
No, they provide their own funding	29.4%
Yes, we contribute to their funding	26.5%
Yes, we contribute in-kind support and resources	20.6%

Also, 91.2% of respondents report that local partner organizations participate in determining the focus of the volunteer work projects (Question #68).

Field Methodology

Quality control and program efficacy is achieved through a broad variety of methods. Respondents provided the following information about how they administer, control and assess their programs.

How does your organization carry out monitoring and evaluation of international volunteer projects and programs? (Select all that apply.) (Question #18)

Method	% responding orgs
Surveys of International volunteers	74.4%
Surveys of in-country partner organizations and programs	64.1%
Site visits by off-site staff	61.5%
Annual project or program evaluations	56.4%
Site visits by local staff	59%
Unsolicited Feedback	56.4%
Surveys of local members of host communities	35.9%
Ongoing research and/or statistics	41%

Do you involved local volunteers? Do they volunteer alongside international volunteers? (Question #30)

Response	% responding orgs
Yes	61.1%
No	30.6%
We'd like to but have not yet been successful	8.3%

How do you determine which projects to undertake or populations to work with? (May choose as many as apply) (Question #31):

Determined by...	% responding orgs
Needs/requests of local community members	65.8%
Needs/requests of local organizations	60.5%
Accessibility (eg: projects where you already have partners)	50%
Mission of organization	42.1%
Needs/requests of government agencies	28.9%

Staffing at Volunteer Project Sites

Approximately how many paid staff members do you have at volunteer sites? (Question #46):

# of paid staff at site	% responding orgs
1-4	48.6%
None	40%
11-20	8.6%
5-10	2.9%

What percentage of your paid staff at volunteer sites is from the local community or country? (Question #47)

% of paid staff on site who are from local community	% responding orgs
76-100%	45.8%
0-10%	29.2%
26-50%	12.5%
51-75%	8.3%
11-25%	4.2%

What percentage of your paid staff members onsite are full-time? (Question #48)

% of paid staff on site who are full-time	% responding orgs
76-100%	37.5%
51-75%	29.2%
0-10%	25%
11-25%	8.3%

How are paid staff at volunteer sites trained? (Select all that apply.) (Question # 51):

Training Method for paid staff	% responding orgs
Trained on-site	72.7%
Trained in another location out of country	59.1%
Trained in another location in-country	18.2%

What support do you provide in-country staff? (Select all that apply.) Question #53):

Type of support	% responding orgs
Trainings at local site	75%
Trainings at site outside local area or country	65%
Access to organization-wide prof. development resources	40%
Trainings by internet	35%
Access to other prof. development opportunities	30%

Approximately how many non-paid or volunteer staff members do you have at each volunteer site? (Question #56):

# of volunteer (unpaid) staff at site	% responding orgs
None	46.7%
1-4	36.7%
More than 20	13.3%

What percentage of your volunteer staff at the volunteer site is from the local community or country? (Question #57):

% of volunteer staff on site who are from local community	% responding orgs
76-100%	42.1%
0-10%	36.8%
51-75%	15.8%

How are the volunteer staff at the volunteer site trained? (Select all that apply.) (Question #60):

Training Method for volunteer staff	% responding orgs
Trained on-site	78.6%
Trained in another location in-country	28.6%
Trained in another location out of country	21.4%

Volunteer Selection and Management

This section looks at how respondents select their volunteers and how they manage them in the field.

Responding organizations, on average, place or accept the following number of volunteers per year (Question #11):

# volunteers placed per year	% responding orgs
Less than 25	20.5%
26-99	23.1%
100-149	7.7%
150-199	7.7%
200-299	12.8%
300-399	5.1%
500-999	15.4%
3,000-3,999	5.1%

Qualifications required for volunteers (Question #28):

Qualifications	% responding orgs
Age	50%
No specific qualifications	31.6%
Education level	31.6%
Other	28.9%
Language fluency	18.4%
Skills & expertise	13.2%
International travel/work experience	13.2%

Application process for international volunteers. (Select all that apply.) (Question #29):

Application method	% responding orgs
Online application	62.2%
Written application submitted by post or fax	56.8%
In-person interview	37.8%
Interview by phone	32.4%
Other	21.6%
No selection process	5.4%

Most organizations provide information both during the pre-departure process and at an on-site arrival orientation. Topics include information about the organization, the volunteer project, the host country and community, health and safety, travel information, and more. (Questions # 33 and 34)

Volunteer Management On-site

Responding organizations supervise volunteers in the following ways (Question #41):

Supervision methods	% responding orgs
Local staff person on-site	68.6%
International staff person on-site	34.4%
Volunteer leader on-site	34.4%
Team leader or instructor who travels with the group	31.4%
Other	20%
Volunteers work independently and have no direct supervision	2.9%

Responding organizations have the following policies in place to regulate or deal with volunteer behavior (select all that apply) (Question #42):

Policies to regulate volunteer behavior	% responding orgs
Behavioral guidelines that volunteers agree to in advance	83.9%
Clearly stated behavior policies	71%
Group dynamics activities that help build strong groups	64.5%
Training for Supervisory staff and volunteers	54.8%

Program Evaluation and Post-Experience Support

Responding organizations offer the following post-volunteering support (select all that apply) (Question #43):

Policies to regulate volunteer behavior	% responding orgs
Blog or social networking site	87.9%
Debriefing with volunteers on-site	66.7%
E-newsletters	63.6%
Alumni e-newsletters or updates	63.6%
Post-trip evaluation survey	57.6%
Tools and resources for dealing with reverse culture shock	45.5%
Advice or guidance for seeking a job	33.3%
Advice or guidance for seeking higher education	30.3%
Post-trip phone interview	12.1%

Responding organizations measure the impact of a program on a volunteer in the following ways (select all that apply) (Question #44):

Measuring impact on volunteers	% responding orgs
Self reporting surveys by participants	91.4%
Exit interviews	42.9%
Regular evaluations of former volunteers	40%
Blogs or social networking activity	37.1%
Other	17.1%

Of the responding organizations that maintain a network of former volunteers, the following methods are used (select all that apply) (Question #45):

Methods of networking former volunteers	% responding orgs
Facebook group	73.5%
Newsletter or other regular communication with alumni	70.6%
Reunions, events and get-togethers for alumni	55.9%
Twitter feed	47.1%
Alumni section on organization website	35.3%
Alumni website	20.6%
Other	17.6%

Key Questions Raised/Areas for Further Exploration

- Results indicate that organizations commit to working in one country for extended periods of time. It could be interesting to explore why this is the case. What are the benefits of this and how might this affect effective practices and sustainability of programs?
- More can be explored about how organizations define administration/overhead costs and why the percentages may differ so much among organizations.
- There were differences noted in how organizations staff their programs on location – full-time paid staff, volunteers, local staff, international leaders, etc. How these programs are staffed affect the quality, liability and sustainability of international volunteer programs. More research can be done
- Many responding organizations indicated they use partner organizations to run or assist with running their programs abroad. A closer look at this practice would bring insight into various models being used and how these models may affect the successes and challenges of international volunteer programs.

Conclusion

This report is just the beginning of the Effective Practice's Work Group's review of how organizations manage, administer, create and recruit for international volunteer programs. While many trends and similarities can be noted from the responses received, there are also areas of differences that can be explored. At the very least, these results demonstrate the intricacy and complexity of these programs and all the aspects that need to be addressed in order to ensure safe and successful programs.

The Effective Practices Work Group welcomes comments and questions based on these results. The group will continue to process this information, gleaming insight and addressing new questions raised. All voices are welcome in this process!