

Diversify the Source, Enhance the Force
Project Evaluation



Gillian MacKay, M.H.Sc.
Evaluation Consultant



Project Evaluation Highlights

1. Goals of the Evaluation.
2. Methodology.
3. What went well in the project? What were the emerging issues?
4. What were the benefits?
5. How could the project be improved?
6. Was the project a success?



1. Goals of the Evaluation

- Compare how the project was originally conceived to how it was implemented (I.e. what adaptations were made).
- Articulate the strengths of the project (i.e. what went well).
- Identify emergent issues (i.e. opportunities for improvement).
- Provide a snapshot of overall benefits, and make recommendations for improvement (should the program run again).



2. Evaluation Methods

- Data collection tools included:
 - End-of-project Interviews (telephone, in-person)
 - End-of-project Focus Groups
 - End-of-project Surveys (written, on-line)
 - Mid-project “Process Logs” (on-line)

Evaluation Methodology

Key Informants	Data Collection Tools	Sample Size and Location
Volunteers	Focus Group	5 participants (Toronto)
	End-of-project surveys	43 written surveys (across 4 cities)
	Telephone interviews	4 total (Hamilton, London, Sudbury)
Peer Facilitators	Focus Group	6 participants (Toronto)
	End-of-project surveys	12 respondents (across 4 cities)
	Telephone interviews	3 total (Hamilton, London, Sudbury)
Volunteer Coordinators	Mid-project process logs	18 entries total (across 4 cities)
	Focus Group	6 participants (Toronto)
	Telephone interviews	6 total (Hamilton and London)
Brokering Agencies (SHRC's)	Telephone interviews	5 total (Hamilton, London, Sudbury, and Toronto)
DSEF staff	Interviews	2 total (Toronto)



3. Strengths and Emerging Issues

- 5 major themes emerged:
 - Volunteer placements
 - Support groups
 - Training
 - Information for peer facilitators (i.e. manual)
 - Material supports



Strengths – Volunteer Placements

- **Many good matches between volunteers and placement agencies.**
 - 88% of volunteers said that they were matched to appropriate placements.
- **volunteers received appropriate support during their placements.**
 - 97% of volunteers said that they received appropriate support during their placements.
- **Placements provided chance to learn about work environments.**
 - Several volunteers reported that they have found work specifically because of their experience with DSEF.
- **Placements increased volunteer commitment to agencies.**
 - ↑ knowledge about placement agency = ↑ commitment to placement.
- **Project holds potential for “unskilled workers”.**
 - Opportunity to improve English, and/or learn transferable skills



Emerging Issues – Volunteer Placements

- There must be a match between volunteers' skills and interests and the needs and interests of pilot sites.
 - Some volunteers found it challenging to find placements to match their expertise and experience.
 - 12% said that they did not have an appropriate placement.
 - Volunteers need to feel that they have a meaningful role within the organization.
 - Placements need to be established at outset of groups.
 - Allows time to resolve questions and complete proper paperwork.
 - Need to have strong links with pilot sites.
 - Helps to identify agencies that are particularly suited to this project, and ensure that they are ready to participate.
 - Expectations about roles, expectations, and potential outcomes of volunteering need to be made clear.
 - Participants may be interested in particular volunteer roles if there is a perceived opportunity for continued involvement or employment down the line.



Emerging Issues – Volunteer Placements

- Organizational readiness is important.
 - Working within a unionized environment.
 - It is important that volunteers' roles complement, but not duplicate, the role of unionized staff.
 - Need to get buy-in from staff working with volunteers.
 - Agency staff need to understand the intent and value of taking on DSEF volunteers, particularly if those volunteers will be working directly with them, or in their department.
 - Significant workload for volunteer coordinators.
 - Project involves many responsibilities, including meeting with volunteers and staff partners, determining interests, finding appropriate placements.
 - Work with agencies that have diversity policies in place.
 - Newcomers are in a vulnerable position, seeking experience in a foreign environment, and wanting to understand what volunteering in a Canadian context.



Strengths – Peer Facilitators’ Training

- Excellent good overview of project – theory and practice.
 - People had a chance to understand the why’s and how’s of the project.
- Had lasting impact for peer facilitators.
 - Peer facilitators reported that the training carried them through the project.
- Lightened load for volunteer coordinators.
 - Volunteer coordinators reported that as compared with non-DSEF volunteers, program participants came to them understanding more about their placements.



Emerging Issues – Peer Facilitators Training

- More practice time was required for peer facilitators.
 - Chance to put theory into practice.
- More training required for those supporting peer facilitators.
 - Request from volunteer coordinators for more training about the project.
- More resources available for expanded training session.
 - Amount of training available was a function of project resources.
- Continue training into beginning stages of support groups.
 - Some peer facilitators expressed that they would have liked to have DSEF staff support during the first meeting(s) as they had not facilitated groups before.



Strengths – Anti-racism Training

- Important reminder about diversity and racism issues.
 - Helped to identify barriers that newcomers face when working in the dominant culture.
- Helped to facilitate discussions in the workplace.
 - Helped agencies to reflect on how they serve diverse populations, and to question whether they have proper policies in place.
- Helped to identify training needs within agencies.
 - Helped agencies to identify whether staff have the appropriate understanding and/or training to sensitively respond.



Emerging Issues – Anti-racism training.

- Should be a standard component of DSEF, delivered at the beginning of the project.
 - Offered to all project stakeholders (e.g. participants, peer facilitators, volunteer coordinators, brokering agencies)
- Extend to staff, board members, and volunteers of participating agencies.
 - It was identified that staff members and volunteers (who work with DSEF volunteers), as well as board members (who set organizational policies), be offered anti-racism training as a means of nurturing a welcoming environment to newcomers.
- Needs to tackle practical issues.
 - Some volunteer coordinators expressed that training requires a skills-building element, to help identify and respond to issues as they emerge.



Strengths – Support Groups

- Provided nurturing environment.
 - All of the key informants felt that the “groups went well”, and provided an important outlet for participants to express themselves.
- Recent immigrants as peer facilitators.
 - Provided an example for volunteers; they could see someone who was ahead of them in the settlement process.
- Opportunity to practice English.
 - One of the most commonly cited reasons why people participated in this project.
- Duration of meetings and project appropriate.
 - Most participants felt that the length of the meetings and the project was appropriate.
- Time and size of groups appropriate.
 - Important to negotiate the time of day, and day of the week for group sessions.



Emerging Issues – Support Groups

- Timing of project implementation.
 - Needs to be a good time organizationally, as well as seasonally.
- Situational barriers to participating.
 - Barriers to continued participation included financial or work reasons, family or child care, and communication breakdown (i.e. contact was lost with participant).
- Cultural and linguistic barriers.
 - Tips for peer facilitators to understand how culture and language impact on how people participate in the group and project.
- Tools to help peer facilitators to delegate responsibilities.
 - Peer facilitators have busy lives, and tools to help determine who will do what would help groups run more efficiently.
- Venue for peer facilitators to debrief and share information.
 - Space required for sharing experiences of running groups, asking questions, sharing challenges, as well as to debrief. Being a peer facilitator rehashed some people's experiences.



4. Benefits of the Project

- Individual Level.
- Organizational Level.
- Community Level.



Individual Level Benefits

- Good way to get Canadian experience.
 - 90% of volunteers said that they participated in order to get Canadian experience... “now I could decide my career and it was helpful”
- Made volunteering easier.
 - For finding volunteer placements, understanding volunteering in the Canadian context., and sharing coping strategies.
 - Improvement on previous experiences.
- Opportunity to practice English.
 - 89% of participants said this was why they joined the program; 100% said that their English had improved as a result of the project.
- Good way to learn about the dominant culture.
 - In the words of one participant, “I was not acquainted with the culture... but in my (volunteer) placement, I could see how people are living, eating... all of them were useful experiences for me”.



Individual Level Benefits

- Facilitated the settlement process.
 - In Toronto and Hamilton, emphasis on settlement issues in the groups such as finding affordable housing, supermarkets, and restaurants was very helpful.
- Good way to make friends, develop a network, and break social isolation.
 - This feedback was provided consistently across volunteers and peer facilitators
 - “this program helps you get out of the house, meet people, and feel more confident”
- Increased confidence; sense of control over destiny.
 - 82% of participants said that this was one of their goals for participating. After the program, 97% of those same participants said that they had achieved this goal.
 - One SHRC staff person said “people are solving their problems and have found a way out of a dead end”.
- Opportunity to give back.
 - Volunteer coordinators and brokering agency staff said that this project gave peer facilitators an opportunity to give of themselves, and indicated that peer facilitators liked the opportunity to help newcomers to Canada.



Organizational level benefits

- Opportunity to work with volunteers in a new way.
 - Self-help model provided opportunity to work with volunteers in a group format, and address issues that may emerge.
- Expanded capacity of Volunteer Departments and organizations.
 - Through successful and unsuccessful placements, volunteer coordinators learned about what departments and staff partners need to provide appropriate placements for newcomer volunteers.
 - Links to new and more diverse volunteer pool.
 - Links to new and more diverse client base.
 - Win – win opportunity - Have seen the benefits of having short term volunteers.
- Opportunity for organizational learning about diversity.
 - Educational for staff and volunteers about ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, and about barriers faced by newcomers.
- Reflection on organizational practices, frameworks, and policies.
 - Volunteer coordinators and brokering agencies reported “meaningful awakenings”...



Community level benefits

- Community members learned about people from different cultures.
 - Exposure to new people from a variety of places, has provided the opportunity to breakdown stereotypes and create opportunities for understanding and relationship building.
- Opportunity to learn about the work of and build linkages with community partners.
 - Through the identification of pilot sites and volunteer placements, agencies have learned more about their community partners.
- Model is being replicated in other community networks.
 - Given the success of this project, this model is being replicated by other networks in community development initiatives.



5. Recommendations for Improvement.

- Diversity and anti-racism training for project stakeholders, and staff and volunteers of participating pilot sites.
- Explore ways to assist smaller agencies (that wish to participate) with the workload that is created by this project.
- Resolve questions related to brokering and recruiting (i.e. what agency should take responsibility for what) to create a smooth and efficient process for establishing, implementing and evaluating the project.
- Continue to identify volunteer placements that offer opportunities for skill development and/or are a match for professional designations.



6. Was the project a success?

Success of this project was analyzed based on questions including:

- Did the project appear to meet its goals and objectives?
 - The aim of the DSEF project is to provide support and preparation for newcomers seeking volunteer experience and to voluntary agencies in Ontario that need them.
- What was the balance between strengths/benefits and the weaknesses/emergent issues?
 - Aforementioned recommendations are the outstanding issues that emerged when the strengths and benefits of the project were compared with the weaknesses and emergent issues.
 - Strengths and benefits clearly outweighed weaknesses and emergent issues.
- Would stakeholders recommend this project to others? Would they do it again? Why or why not?
 - 100% of volunteers and peer facilitators said that they would recommend this project to a friend.
 - All but one of the volunteer coordinators said that they would do it again. The latter volunteer coordinator said they would consider doing it again as long as there was appropriate projects for volunteers to work on.



Summary

DSEF offers:

- a respectful and supportive way to begin introducing newcomer volunteers into agencies that currently employ a majority of staff and volunteers from the dominant culture.
- the potential to humanize human resource policy change by providing means for involving people from diverse backgrounds.
- opportunities for organizations to grow through the development and thoughtful implementation of diversity policies.
- an important piece of settlement in Ontario.
- a way to welcome and incorporate newcomers while building individual, organizational, and community level capacities.