Peace Corps Training for Sustainable Library Development Projects

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TRAINING MODELS
In 1991, Laura Wendell arrived in the African village of Yikpa, Togo, to work on fisheries projects as a Peace Corps volunteer. She was equipped with a degree in biopsychology and had received Peace Corps training in language, intercultural skills, and fisheries. As time passed, she realized that what the villagers truly wanted was a library. Laura sought book donations, raised funds, and worked with dedicated community members until the idea became a reality. She later founded a nonprofit organization, World Library Partnership, and documented best practices in the publication *Libraries for All!* The library that Laura Wendell helped launch is a model of success in the history of Peace Corps volunteer library projects (Lawrence, 2000; Nixon, 2009).

Established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy, the Peace Corps is a U.S. government agency that trains and sends volunteers to work and live in communities around the world. The mission of the Peace Corps is to promote world peace and friendship (Peace Corps, May 11). Since 1961, over 210,000 volunteers have served in 139 countries, and today, there are over 8,000 volunteers and trainees working in seventy-six countries (Peace Corps, 2012, *Peace Corps Performance*). Peace Corps volunteers are engaged in grassroots development through a variety of specific work assignments and activities. Currently, volunteers are assigned to one of six sectors or work categories: agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health, and youth in
development. Volunteer work projects vary widely. In addition to their primary work assignments, most volunteers are engaged in other work activities in their communities, such as English tutoring, youth sports, and library projects.

In fact, Peace Corps volunteers have been involved in library projects and library development throughout the history of the agency. In the early years, professional librarians were recruited and assigned to work in public and academic libraries in such places as Botswana, Colombia, Fiji, and Morocco (Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support [OPATS], 2013). Although librarians have not been recruited for over twenty years, volunteers have continued to engage in library projects of many types, more often as secondary activities.

Against this background, Marcy Carrel and Gail Wadsworth, the two librarians at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., were presented with an opportunity to develop and improve training provided to volunteers engaged in library projects. “Focus In/Train Up,” an agency-wide initiative, was introduced in 2011 to focus on key development sectors and train volunteers to excel in their work (Peace Corps, 2012). The OPATS led the initiative to redesign training. It has developed standardized training packages for specific project areas to guide field staff and facilitate training at Peace Corps posts worldwide. As of February 2013, about 180 training sessions and over 20 training packages had been developed and released to the field (OPATS, 2013). The Sustainable Library Development Training Package, written by the two Peace Corps librarians with input from the field and other experts, gives Peace Corps volunteers standardized training and guidance for library activities, as well as recommendations for appropriate resources to support library development in their communities.

Cross-cultural and intercultural skills are essential for successful Peace Corps service in any work sector. Regional recruiters and placement officers evaluate potential candidates on skills and suitability for service, gauging their ability to live and work in another country for twenty-seven months. Candidates who pass the final suitability review, as well as legal and medical clearances, receive invitations for a work assignment in a specific country (Peace Corps, 2012, Live).

After accepting an invitation to the Peace Corps, an individual travels to the country of service with a group of fellow trainees to begin a three-month training program. The intensive preservice training period includes technical, language, and cross-cultural training. Training is conducted by the local Peace Corps office, which includes both U.S. hires and local host-country staff. The Peace Corps headquarters in
Washington, D.C., through OPATS, provides programming and training guidance and resources.

While immersed in another culture, Peace Corps volunteers develop their intercultural skills in both informal and formal settings. During preservice training, most trainees live with host families to become more fully immersed in the local culture. When the training is completed,
trainees are sworn in as volunteers and sent to their individual communities, where they work and live for the next two years. Volunteers are also given additional training opportunities at in-service training events throughout their service.

During preservice training, all trainees are introduced to the Peace Corps publication *Culture Matters*, and they are encouraged to use the exercises in the book throughout their service. During interactive training sessions, volunteer trainees distinguish between personal, cultural, and universal behaviors. They explore values such as formality, time, privacy, and communication along a cross-cultural values continuum and match behaviors to cultural values. They also identify possible adjustments to manage cross-cultural differences they may encounter during their service.

Successful Peace Corps service is predicated on successful integration into the community. Intercultural skills are essential to this integration process. As members of the communities where they work, volunteers are sometimes uniquely poised to understand the needs of the communities and facilitate a successful development project.

The co-authors of the *Sustainable Library Development Training Package* are both professional librarians and returned Peace Corps volunteers, with combined volunteer and relevant work experiences in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Central, North, and South America. These experiences provided an understanding of some of the realities faced by volunteers in the field and possible strategies for successful, sustainable library projects.

Developing training and resources to support volunteer library projects requires an understanding of both the volunteers and the types of library projects they become engaged in. The majority of volunteers are generalists, with little or no specialized work experience. The average age of volunteers in 2012 was twenty-eight, and 7 percent were over age fifty (Peace Corps, n.d., *Fast*). Over 90 percent of volunteers have at least a bachelor's degree.

There are no comprehensive statistics on the number, type, and description of volunteer library projects. Self-reported data in the 2012 Annual Volunteer Survey indicates that eight percent of volunteers are involved in library projects as part of their primary work assignment and 16 percent are involved in library projects as secondary activities (Peace Corps, 2012, *Annual*). Exemplary library activities are also sometimes highlighted in annual status report data that each country post submits to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. The Peace Corps Partnership Program, a funding mechanism that some volunteers may utilize,
provides a source of information for selected volunteer library projects (Peace Corps, 2013). Further, local U.S. media outlets may report on library projects undertaken by volunteers from their regions.

Such projects vary widely, but include book drives, creating infrastructure, developing classroom libraries and English-language collections, and putting together health clinic libraries. Volunteers working in all sectors may become involved in a library project, although it is more common among education volunteers. Recently, library work became a designated program activity for that sector. Here are a few examples of recent Peace Corps volunteer library projects around the world (OPATS, 2013).

Albania: A volunteer in a small city (population 32,000) worked with the local librarian to develop an English language children's collection in the public library, housed on the second floor of a cultural center. The volunteer also helped the librarian set up a children's weekly reading group and sent out an “Adopt our Library” call to friends and family to collect English language children's books for the library.

Namibia: An education volunteer teaching basic information science at a secondary school started a library renovation project with his thirteen basic information-science classes. This involved cleaning up and organizing an inherited school library of about 1,000 books that had fallen into disuse. Books were arranged by section, nonfiction books were cataloged using Dewey, and a circulation system was devised. Another volunteer helped install educational software in the computer lab of a public library.

Paraguay: Volunteers worked with municipal librarians to provide story hours to neighborhood children at public libraries to expand the role of the librarian and attract more children to the libraries.

Peru: An environment volunteer worked with his community to create about 6,500 ecological bricks (half-liter plastic bottles filled with inorganic trash), which are being used in construction of a multipurpose ecological building to serve as a library, eco-museum, and theater.

Swaziland: Health volunteers assisted “KaGogo” social-center managers with setting up a library and information center. They formed a library committee and assisted in training community members in cataloging, inventory techniques, and operations. KaGogo social centers were established in rural areas to address the growing number of children orphaned by HIV-AIDS.

While many Peace Corps volunteers engage in library projects around the world, most are not trained in library and information science. Volunteers are well versed in sustainable development, yet translating sus-
tainability to the library context requires more specific consideration and training. The Sustainable Library Development Training Package was developed to address these needs. The purpose of the training package is to support and provide guidance to volunteers engaged in library projects and strengthen the work of volunteers in partnership with their communities.

The training package includes a series of detailed session plans developed by the Peace Corps librarians with input from field staff and training experts, ensuring that the training sessions meet the Peace Corps's interactive and learner-focused training style. The session plans follow the standardized Focus In/Train Up design, using a modified version of “4MAT” lesson planning with sections on motivation, information, practice, application, and assessment.* Training sessions are intended for a wide variety of circumstances and can be adapted, where noted, to fit specific cultural or local contexts. Sessions may also include handouts, trainer materials such as PowerPoint slides and flip-chart instructions, as well as supplementary publications.

Three library publications accompany the training package:

- **Libraries for All!: How to Start and Run a Basic Library**

- **Setting Up and Running a School Library**

- **Sources of Donated Books for Schools and Libraries**

These publications have been available for use by Peace Corps Volunteers for many years, but had not previously been part of any training, formal or informal.

Currently, there are eight sessions in the training package, in addition to an introductory document with background information and general guidance for Peace Corps staff trainers. It takes one-and-a-half to two days to deliver all the sessions, depending on the time devoted to optional field trips. Because posts have very tight training schedules,

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*The 4MAT model is a learning framework that promotes student engagement. Access current materials at https://aboutlearning.com/4mat-training/4mat-on-the-go-training/*
most participants would only be able to commit to a few hours during preservice training. The full package would probably be delivered at a dedicated in-service training later in the training cycle. Therefore, some sessions are stand-alone and most sessions are designed with few prerequisites. Trainers are also encouraged to give volunteers a copy of the training package itself, so that they can adapt the resources to provide training for community members. The key messages the authors sought to communicate through the training package are the importance of sustainability in a library context, and the availability of additional appropriate resources for a library project. Further sessions are prioritized accordingly and include the following:

PEACE CORPS RESOURCES FOR LIBRARY PROJECTS
(PRESERVICE TRAINING)

This session prepares participants for library development projects by introducing them to Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange publications that will be useful guides throughout the process.

Introduction to Sustainable Library Development
This session introduces the concepts of sustainability and “first, do no harm” in the context of library development.

Information Resources for Library Projects (optional)
This session is an overview of information resources available from the Peace Corps and outside organizations. These resources provide guidance for volunteers in developing and managing library projects.

Steps for Setting Up a Library
This session provides participants with a set of seven steps for setting up a library and provides practice for step 1, forming a library committee. A set of specific steps provides participants with a framework to consider, explore, plan, develop, initiate, and manage a potential sustainable library development project.

Organization and Classification
This session introduces the concept of organization through classification in the library context. Participants are given the opportunity to practice several classification systems that could be used in a local library. Organization and classification enable library resources to be easily located and used by library visitors.
Borrowing and Lending
This session introduces systems of borrowing and lending that participants could adapt to a local library project.

Supplementary Services
This session provides a brief overview of library supplementary services that may enhance and enrich the role of the library in a community.

Library Field Trip (optional)
This session gives participants an opportunity to visit at least one local library or resource center to observe and gain insights that would be valuable for library projects in their communities. The session is particularly helpful to introduce participants to local information resources and to encourage participants to establish contacts, begin networking, and gather ideas that might be appropriate for implementation in community libraries. The session is optional if it is not logistically possible to include a field trip during in-service training due, for example, to time or fiscal constraints.

SUSTAINABLE LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE EDUCATION SECTOR

This session prepares participants for library development projects by introducing them to the Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange publications that will be useful guides throughout the process. This session also introduces the concepts of sustainability and “first, do no harm” in the context of library development. As part of the Global Education Training Package, this session is intended as a requirement for all education-sector trainees or volunteers, and combines parts of three existing sessions. This session is the recommended single session for trainees or volunteers in any sector who are or will be involved in library projects, but do not have the opportunity to participate in the full training package.

The Sustainable Library Development Training Package was released in October 2012 and released again in February 2013 to include the new global education sector session. Field feedback is a critical part of the training rollout. All Focus In/Train Up training packages are written with input from the field and are released as “draft for pilot.” After the training resources have been used at posts, feedback from training staff will inform further refinements of the training package, including development of additional materials to accompany the package.
The Sustainable Library Development Training Package was authorized for public release and is being promoted to the larger library community. All of the resources can be downloaded from the Peace Corps public website by scrolling alphabetically on this page of the “publications” section (http://www.peacecorps.gov/library/pubindex/). The hope is that the training can be adapted and used in many other library contexts. User feedback is encouraged.

The authors faced many challenges in developing the Sustainable Library Development Training Package. Succinct interactive training materials had to be written for U.S. adults with little or no background in libraries, and for those establishing libraries or facilitating library projects using one of many possible languages in any of over seventy-five developing countries. An initial challenge was lack of comprehensive information about current volunteer library projects. Thus, the authors began by compiling anecdotal information accumulated informally and seeking further sources of information to document the realities in which volunteers work.

The Focus In/Train Up structure and the time constraints of the Peace Corps training schedule presented further challenges. Although the session-plan format provides an effective standardized structure, it was at times difficult to follow exactly and to create “motivation,” “practice,” and “application” activities for each session. There was only time and space for information determined to be critical to any type of library project or situation. Sessions need to be adaptable to almost any context and include considerations of gender and potential differences in language and culture.

The training package includes and refers to several Peace Corps publications, including two older library-related titles, Libraries for All! and Setting Up and Running a School Library. Although the information in these publications is still valid and useful, their content does not seamlessly match the content of the training package. Some of the practices are unnecessary; some newer topics, particularly those involving technology, are not included. It is hoped that a new library publication will accompany the training package in the future.

A final challenge worth noting is that the training package has not been tested in the field. As with all Focus In/Train Up training packages, the Sustainable Library Development Training Package was released as “draft for pilot.” The expectation is that posts will use resources to train volunteers, and some volunteers will adapt and use the resources to train community members. Feedback has not yet been received since the package was just recently delivered to Peace Corps posts.
One early success of the training package was the decision by OPATS to add a single two-hour session as required training for all Peace Corps volunteer trainees in the education sector. Library development is now a recognized activity for volunteers. The hope is that attention to library activities will continue to grow.

Another success was the authorization to release the Sustainable Library Development Training Package to the public and post the resources on the Peace Corps website. This is the first training package to be released publicly, and others are forthcoming. The authors hope resources can be used in the larger international library community and serve to encourage further discussion and collaborative efforts.

The development of the Sustainable Library Development Training Package and its use in the field offers potential personal and professional enrichment to different stakeholder groups: the authors of the training package, Peace Corps trainers, volunteers, and community members who participate in training. The authors are promoting the training package widely within the library community. They delivered a presentation in March 2013, shortly after the package was released publicly, to the Society for International Development, Washington, D.C. chapter, Development Information Work Group. A poster session and workshop presentation were conducted at the 2013 American Library Association Annual Conference in June. Additional presentations and articles may follow, furthering professional development opportunities for the authors.

The training package builds the capacity of Peace Corps trainers to provide library training. It also helps Peace Corps volunteers successfully engage in sustainable library projects and activities. Volunteers who then use the training package to facilitate training in their communities have the potential to improve and build their capacity as trainers for library projects. Finally, community members who are trained gain new skills, build capacity for sustainable library activities, and may continue by, in turn, training new community members to become involved in library activities.

The Sustainable Library Development Training Package has the potential to provide enrichment to the larger international library community. Sustainable libraries create advocates for libraries and enhance the professional status of librarians.

The authors of the Sustainable Library Development Training Package are fully aware of areas not adequately covered. They began planning for the next version before the digital ink was dry on the first. Innovation, library technology, budgeting, mobile libraries, and research services are just a few of the many topics that may be covered in a future version.
One possibility is to develop a continually growing collection of new sessions as a supplement to the core group, allowing trainers to choose those most relevant to their context. As mentioned, a manual to accompany the training package may also be developed, perhaps taking the form of a growing, dynamic set of resources available in digital format only.

In the near future, a new collaborative website, PCLive, will offer Peace Corps staff and volunteers worldwide the opportunity to share ideas and resources on training and development topics, including library projects. This forum will provide documentation of the work being accomplished and facilitate a community of practice around Peace Corps volunteer library projects. Collaboration will further enhance the quality and sustainability of library projects and activities.

REFERENCES


RECOMMENDED READING


