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Strengthening the M&E system of Peace Corps Colombia

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STRENGTHENING THE MONITORING & EVALUATION SYSTEM OF PEACE CORPS COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT

In 1961, when the Peace Corps was established, Colombia was the first country chosen to receive volunteers. The program ran for 20 years, with volunteers working all over the country in various sectors. Then in 1981, due to the increasing violence from the guerilla civil war, the US government decided to withdraw the volunteers and suspend the Colombia program. After a 29-year hiatus, at the request of the Colombian government, the Peace Corps was invited back to Colombia in 2010.

The Peace Corps Colombia post currently has two programs, Practical English for Success (PES), established first; and, Community Economic Development (CED), started as a pilot project in 2016. Both of these programs are subject to monitoring and evaluations (M&E) scrutiny, which has increased substantially since the earlier Peace Corps programs in the country. For M&E purposes, project framework and indicators for the PES program are already established. Indicators for the CED program are still under review. Both programs are impacted by the need for increasingly precise data on volunteer programs and expectations of more intensive M&E reporting. This has proved to be difficult for the post due to, among other things, limited staffing.

Interest in this situation spawned my research question for this paper: how might the M&E system of Peace Corps Colombia be strengthened? I have used reviews of M&E best practices and potential pitfalls for similar organizations, comparison of these standards to the process at Peace Corps Colombia, and candid staff interviews to assess challenges to the current M&E activities and suggest strategies for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, I worked with Peace Corps Colombia through the US Diplomatic Mission in Barranquilla, Colombia. I spent my time assisting in the Department of Programming and Training and observing the organization and function of the Colombia post. This provided the opportunity to see and experience the daily operations of the post, recently reopened after a 29-year hiatus. During my time there, Peace Corps Colombia has put forth two programs: the pilot program of Community Economic Development, and the expansion of the Practical English for Success program. This Capstone Project reflects my interest in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system used at the Colombia post.

My interest in M&E stems from my five years work in public service/community development programs in Latin America. Recently concluded with my SIT practicum as a staff member for Peace Corps Colombia, these experiences provided me valuable practical insights to the M&E process. In each of these experiences, M&E was used, or not, with various outcomes, and in a wide-ranging context.

As a Peace Corps Nicaragua volunteer in 2010-2012, the importance of M&E was not emphasized nearly as much as is now the case in Colombia. Although the Nicaragua volunteers used a data collection tool similar to that which volunteers still use today, it was applied much less rigorously. The volunteers viewed it more like a survey of work done in the past quarter. We did not use systematic metrics to measure the Nicaraguan English teachers progress. Many of the teachers themselves, did not speak or understand English; for them, their "teaching" activities were a means to secure a paycheck. It was a significant challenge to bring about change in teaching practices when the teaching staff had little or no motivation to improve. The role M&E filled was to characterize the segments of teachers and students that had a desire to learn. In this context, my impact was easier to measure and was cause for me (as a volunteer) to more likely choose to work with these people.

My second round of endeavors in Latin America, following Peace Corps Nicaragua, was in the Dominican Republic (2013-2015). This was with an NGO which promoted small business development projects organized on a “micro-entrepreneur” model. During my tenure, first as a member of the field staff and later as country-wide Logistics Manager, my interest in M&E really grew. This was not because of how well the NGO's system for M&E worked, but because there was no system. My experiences frequently illustrated the pitfalls involved when there is no M&E system in place. The results of programs and staff efforts were, at best, hit and miss. The choice of products to deliver supposed benefits to community members were, as often as not, an example of trial and error with little forethought to immediate or longer-term implications. Lots of money and time was wasted by not having a clear and well founded M&E system. My experiences working for this organization strongly influenced my decision to pursue studies with a sustainable development focus.

Returning to the Peace Corps, this time as a staff member (during the term of my practicum) was an opportunity to see the Peace Corps programs through another lens. Peace Corps Colombia had recently restarted, and faced many of the situations characteristized by a "new" program. The Practical English for Success (PES) program was chosen as the post's first activity. More recently, the organization has started a pilot program for community economic development. What I learned in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic provided a clear understanding of the importance of having a strong M&E system in place. My sentiments gained sharper focus from conversations with colleagues and supervisors. I was surprised to learn that Peace Corps Colombia did not have a strong M&E system in place. I worried that the Colombia post would have challenges similar to my Nicaragua posting: measuring its overall impact of "what are we accomplishing here and how is it changing the community."

In meetings and conversations with my colleagues, I learned that Peace Corps headquarters is requiring more M&E reporting and increasingly precise data on volunteer programs. Complicating this request is the circumstance that Peace Corps Colombia is one of the few Peace Corps posts worldwide that does not have an M&E specialist. This experience led me to my research question: How can the M&E system of Peace Corps Colombia be strengthened?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review is divided into two main sections: best practices of M&E, and the challenges and pitfalls of not having a strong M&E system. The main themes follow the importance of having defined staff roles, dedicating sufficient time and resources to M&E in project design, and in providing adequate M&E staff capacity. The challenges section reviews problems that can occur when the best practices are not followed.

The literature follows the M&E industry standard of the OCED/DAC evaluation criteria as well as drawing upon peer-review articles and agency-practitioner promulgated strategies, tactics and standards. Existing literature on M&E in the Peace Corps, USAID and other similarly oriented NGOs use the experience of practitioners with design considerations, staffing objectives and performance measures. Information is also taken from assigned articles and textbooks used in the SIT courses of Monitoring and Evaluation and of Leading and Managing in Social Sector Organizations. Particular attention is given to Markiewicz and Patrick (2016), *Developing Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks.*

The literature from academics and practitioners provides two different perspectives to setting up M&E systems, both making a useful and potentially valuable contribution. From the academic perspective "this is what you need to do," and from the practitioners' perspective "...and here are some ways to go about it."

DEFINITION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As this paper considers the intricacies and best practices of M&E, it is important to first have a general definition of the two distinct activities of monitoring and evaluation and the difference between the two. As defined by Markiewicz and Patrick "monitoring focuses on the tracking program implementation and progress, including program activities, processes, outputs produced and initial outcomes achieved" (2016, pg. 12). Evaluation differs from monitoring in that its predominant focus is on "the systematic determination of the quality and value of a program with summative judgment as to the achievement of a program's goals and objectives" (2016, pg. 12).

A somewhat differently stated definition is provided from a "practitioners" vantage point. The officially recognized definition of evaluation from the OECD/DAC is "an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation, and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors (OECD, 2017)."

In either case, those in the field can remind themselves that M&E is there to help them understand, "...what are we doing, why, and how well are we doing it."

Purposes and Advantages

The need and importance of M&E have grown significantly over the years. Evolving from simply tracking activities and outputs, it now focuses more on outcomes and the achievement of results. As program funding has become more restrictive, donors and agencies face higher expectations that funding on projects is delivering results and impact (Markiewicz and Patrick, 2016). M&E frameworks should be versatile and adaptable to several different program needs. Depending on the circumstances, they can address a range of different purposes such as project management, accountability, program improvement, and program and organizational learning (Markiewicz and Patrick, 2016).

Establishing a strong M&E system is essential to ensure that informed decisions are made to guide the project's investment, development, and implementation. The advantages of such efforts are that programs have a higher success rate of producing the desired outcomes for which the project was developed (Markiewicz and Patrick, 2016).

M&E Best Practices

From a programming standpoint, one of the key objectives of both Peace Corps Colombia's programs is ensuring that the volunteers are working towards achieving the desired programmatic goals by the end of their service. This is done by developing and improving its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. Researching this issue produced a list of top strategies and methods that other agencies' M&E staff have implemented and found useful in supporting their M&E activities.* These proposed best practices are:

- Define staff roles in M&E framework
- Dedicate adequate time and resources for M&E in project design

- Develop capacity of M&E field staff and local partners
- Leverage technology
- Promote organizational learning

*** "***Agencies" and "NGOs" here and in what follows refer, generically, to governmental and non-governmental organizations which carry-on international programs of a similar nature to those provided by the US Peace Corps.*

Defining staff roles in M&E framework

For Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) the M&E framework will present a broad plan that details the monitoring and evaluation functions and processes throughout the life of a program. These frameworks are, ideally, designed at the same time as the program plan and become part of it. However, often the importance of M&E is undervalued; its design and inclusion are relegated (or appended) to the end of a program. Therefore, it is critically important that the M&E staffing responsibilities be defined from the beginning of the program design. This avoids confusion and increases the effectiveness and efficiency of M&E implementation. In a statement from USAID, M&E staff said that "defining the respective M&E roles of staff members facilitates cooperation and increases the consistency and quality of M&E activities…[and] makes everyone in the chain from the headquarters to program field staff aware of the importance of M&E" (White, 2013, pg. 15).

Other NGOs use methods which include an agency-wide document that clearly outlines M&E staff responsibilities. This approach improves consistency and communication between headquarters and project level managers (White, 2013). At USAID, project managers are required to ensure M&E plans include performance indicators when developing a Performance Monitoring Plan. Depending on project size, plan responsibility is shared by at least one locally hired M&E Specialist or advisor (USAID, 2016). Similarly, for other agencies (some of which work with USAID), the M&E specialist helps to guide the M&E process across multiple programs to streamline the process.

In another approach, rather than embedding M&E staff in specific projects, a group of M&E specialists with a variety of countries in their portfolio is used to "...create manageable size of relationships." These groups know each other well and work together extensively. The donor agency strives to ensure that they receive sufficient support from headquarters and program levels (Kasturiarachchi, Eriksson, Rodriques, & Kubota, 2009). The benefit of this method is that it emphasizes the importance of M&E. Rather than designating a single staff member responsible for M&E, it promotes the idea that M&E is everyone's responsibility. The M&E process becomes more about improving project performance instead of compliance or auditing (Kasturiarachchi et al., 2009).

There are many different strategies available to improve M&E quality and consistency. Choices depend on the program type, needs, and budgetary constraints. Regardless of the donor agency, one key objective of defining responsibilities in the framework is to improve existing M&E practices (often inconsistent and not followed by staff) and to promote a culture of learning within the organization.

Dedicate adequate time and resources during project design

As noted above, when designing the project framework, it is crucially important to make sure to dedicate sufficient time and resources for M&E in project design. Inadequate resources lead to poor quality M&E effort and results. Ensuring sufficient financial and human resources are both integrated into program design from the start, rather than as a compliance requirement afterthought, results in higher quality and more effective M&E outcomes. This allows for the development of a more detailed M&E plan; one that identifies effective indicators and data collection methods (White, 2013). On some occasions, a program design tallies M&E financial and human resources as an additional cost, rather than an inclusive part of overall program costs. This practice, according to a 2009 United Nations Development Projects (UNDP) report, is a hindrance on program effectiveness (Kasturiarachchi et al., 2009).

When developing the project design, it is essential to have an explicit theory of change that informs the M&E work. A theory of change according to The Center for Theory of Change "first identifies the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions that must be in place… for the goals to occur" (The Center for Theory of Change, 2017). History has shown that despite significant funding from NGOs and governments, previous attempts to evaluate the impact of social programs without a clear theory of change have resulted in "disappointingly inclusive findings" (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007).

Blamey and Mackenzie (2007) highlight three criteria when designing a theory of change. It must be "plausible, doable and testable". Plausible, to ensure that the logic of theory is acceptable to all the stakeholders involved. Doable, to ensure that the implementation of the theory is feasible with the timescales and financial and human resources available to the program. Finally, the theory of change must be expressed in a way that can be tested and evaluated. A clearly expressed theory of change improves the understanding of stakes and stakeholders, which promotes a more in-depth analysis in thinking through the use of the M&E data and lessons and increases the consequence awareness (Mayne, 2008).

UNDP project planning strategy stresses the importance of realistically estimating the time and costs needed for M&E. They are not automatically assigned as a percentage of the budget. UNDP recommends having separate budget line items for each M&E element. This practice helps planners be more realistic in assigning a cost for each portion of the of M&E plan. Additionally, it helps to reduce overspending in the monitoring portion and not having sufficient resources for the evaluation portion at the end (Kasturiarachchi et al., 2009).

Equally important as budgeting sufficient money for M&E is providing adequate human resources. In order to produce high-quality results, the program should have skilled personnel with expertise in M&E. The staff should have sufficient time dedicated solely to the functions of M&E (Kasturiarachchi et al., 2009). In the M&E professional community, there is disagreement whether the best evaluation data is collected with an in-staff M&E specialist, contracted out to an external M&E contractor, or a combination of both (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Regardless of what type of evaluator is chosen, the same financial and human resource recommendations apply.

Develop field staff and local partner capacity

The third recommended practice to follow in the development of an effective M&E system is developing the capacity of the field staff and local partners. There may likely be differing levels of education and capabilities before starting a project. USAID recommends providing training to field staff to ensure the skills necessary to identify qualified local partners and to monitor their activities (USAID, 2016). At the agency level, better trained field staff results in improved local partner recruitment. Local staff better understand local cultural context; when they are given the training to manage evaluations, the relationship and communication with the local partnerships improves.

During the planning stage, to promote scalability, the program staff should strive to keep the M&E tools simple. USAID works with its local partners to make sure that the data collected and evaluations are shared publicly in an easy to access website (USAID Forward, 2013).

Figure 1: International Red Cross Logframe Structure

As the International Red Cross Red Crescent (2011) explains in their diagram (above), when developing an M&E logframe in the project framework, it is important the categories and evaluation questions are clear, concise, and measurable. When planned together with program staff and local partners, this practice can increase ownership and reduce confusion of staff responsibilities, in addition to improving the overall quality of the project design (USAID, 2016).

Leveraging technology

In today's world, we are surrounded by technology, from the nearly ubiquitous and omnipresent mobile phone to more complex "big data". Leveraging new technologies allows agencies to collect different types of data that gives them insight and to spot patterns not evident from traditional survey and interview techniques (Gripper, Kazimirski, Kenley, Mcleod, & Weston, 2017). Real-time feedback to M&E staff members allows them to make better informed decisions on an ongoing basis; to know not only if a project is working but also how, why, and for whom (Gripper, et al., 2017). This, in turn, can provide much better insight into the effectiveness of a project.

Within this assortment of rapidly changing technologies, a few notable trends are exciting research experts and are likely to have relevant and long-lasting contributions. Here, remote sensing, impact management, and data linkage are three of these trends given particular attention.

Remote sensing is a technology that collects information from cell phones or sensors in other devices placed in the field, that could not be collected conventionally (Gripper, et al., 2017). Remote sensing is very popular in international development, experts say, because it enables data collection from isolated locations that are difficult and not cost-efficient to visit. It also reduces the possibility of human error and bias influencing the results (Gripper, et al., 2017). An example of where remote sensors have shown success is the water and sanitation sector with NGOs such as Charity: Water. According to Charity: Water, these sensors are a big breakthrough, capable of transmitting data from remote, low connectivity areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa. The sensors are placed on water pumps that have been built for rural communities and can immediately report breakage or service interruption "...to make sure that people who receive clean water keep having access to clean water" (Charity: Water, 2015).

Impact management's main strength is providing a clear, real-time link between evaluation and improvement (Gripper, et al., 2017). This technology involves integrating impact assessment into strategy and performance management, by regularly analyzing and responding to the data. By setting up the evaluation analysis to feed into project delivery, M&E staff can make changes during the implementation stage instead of at the end (Gripper, et al., 2017). Impact management has been very popular with humanitarian relief agencies, to monitor and improve their response to disasters, such as the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone (Gripper, et al., 2017).

Data linkage, as the name implies, is the combining of different sets of relevant data about a particular group of participants from more than just a single organization. This new trend is important because opportunities to share information between organizations reduces repetition of work done and increases the feasibility of tracking long-term impact (Gripper, et al., 2017). Additionally, with a more complete dataset, M&E staff are better able to see trends and understand the cumulative impact of multiple or different interventions (Gripper, et al., 2017). For example, an education program could share data with a local youth club, allowing it to see whether students who attended both a youth club and the education program had improved outcomes compared to those who had only attended one or the other (Gripper, et al., 2017).

Promoting Learning at Organizational Level

As a former SIT professor once said, "...all the reports in the world are useless if they just end up on a shelf and nothing is learned from them." Following this logic, it is essential to discuss and learn from the results of the project to see what can be improved upon in the future. The following excerpt from the UNDP *Handbook on Planning Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Approach* emphasizes this.

> "Learning not only helps improve results from existing programs and projects, but also enhances the capacity of the organization and individuals to make better decisions in the future and improves the formulation of future programs and projects. Since there are no perfect plans, it is essential that managers, staff, and

stakeholders learn from the successes and failures of each program or project" (2009, p. 11).

There are many ways that NGOs can promote organizational learning. One agency reported a reflective learning loop drawn from the original framework of practice that integrates their lessons learned throughout organizational levels. In another, staff members researched having periodic conferences where staff can "take stock" of the recent project and discuss with colleagues and partners areas that work well and others in need of improvement (White, 2013).

A practice that the UN implements in their organizations' program is the institutionalization of impact evaluation (Vaessen, Gracia & Uitto, 2014). This is the process of reflecting on the "when and how of IE [impact evaluation] within a particular organizational system" (Vaessen et al., 2014). Having an action plan of impact evaluations embedded in an organization's M&E system is important for several reasons. The planning of impact evaluations tends to improve the interaction with local stakeholders. This interaction can provide the organization information regarding the effectiveness of their project and project objectives, which can lead to improved organizational learning and strategic decision making (Vaessen et. al, 2014).

USAID, after implementing its update evaluation policy in 2016, is developing post-evaluation plans after an evaluation has been completed. This allows for program management to integrate the evaluation findings into the strategic decision-making progress regarding program priorities and project design (USAID, 2016). In addition to the post-evaluation plan, USAID recommends preparing a yearly inventory of all the evaluations completed that year, as well as those to be completed during the following fiscal year. The rationale behind this is so that the organization does not lose track of valuable information gained from previous evaluations (USAID, 2016).

CHALLENGES TO M&E

According to the World Bank data, there are currently more than 80,000 development projects underway worldwide (Wenar, 2006). The Peace Corps alone has approximately 7,300 volunteers working in 65 countries around the world (Peace Corps, 2016). When developing projects, it is crucial that project managers are attentive to the local skills and participation to ensure a high level of engagement and resulting success. However, often that success is dependent on effecting a significant behavioral change of those who are meant to participate (Wenar, 2006). The Peace Corps, as well as similar NGO agencies, encounters many of the same challenges when implementing and coordinating M&E activities from their projects. Research from the literature of NGOs and the Peace Corps, suggests that there are four common challenges that affect many organizations. These are:

- Insufficient M&E capacity
- Unclear staff roles and responsibilities
- Conflicting accountabilities
- Low ownership of M&E by staff

Insufficient M&E Capacity

In the development of projects, it is too often common to suffer from insufficient M&E staff capacity and lack crucial resources to effectively carry out M&E activities (White, 2013). M&E activities such as funding and training for staff, allowing time to establish sufficient M&E systems, collecting data and the monitoring and evaluation of these data are often constrained by budgets. Project management which prioritizes the programming sector can limit the availability of adequate M&E training and resources (IFAD, 2002).

M&E staff burnout is frequent at agencies hampered with insufficient resources and capacity. Research elsewhere has shown that when management overextends a limited M&E capacity, it leads to rapid burnout of M&E staff efforts. One potential outgrowth of high rates of staff burnout and turnover are limits within the organization's ability to provide support and expertise for M&E. This situation can also present an added challenge in the recruitment of skilled M&E professionals (White,2013).

Unclear staff roles and responsibilities

One consequence of limited M&E capacity can be a lack of clarity of responsibilities for M&E. Whether or not there is sufficient M&E capacity, many NGO headquarters expect field staff to "make the most" of limited available resources and fulfill M&E requirements required by headquarters and/or donors. The Peace Corps is unique, as its annual budget is determined by Congress; it does not rely on donor support like many other NGOs (Peace Corps Leadership, 2017). Nonetheless, Peace Corps headquarters, like donors, expects M&E activities to be done. The result is often that M&E responsibilities are divided on an ad hoc basis among the field staff personnel. Uncertainty of responsibilities tends to cause confusion among field staff members with respect to who is covering what assignments and whom to go to when seeking guidance. Inconsistent M&E and Program staff structures contribute to less effective coordination in the field. Without review from headquarters, field offices may use varying M&E practices, which leads to inconsistent data quality and the inability or know-how to use the data effectively (ADA, 2009).

Conflicting accountabilities

Conflicting accountabilities arise when the M&E infrastructure is not clearly defined. Due to the often inherently political nature of the impact associated with development assistance, stakeholders demand a high level of accountability from aid implementers (Crawford & Bryce, 2003). As a result, agencies must maintain a balance across the diverse accountability objectives of partners, beneficiaries, host governments, and donors (Edwards & Fowler, 2003). Edwards and Fowler note that a common occurrence in NGOs when there are multiple accountabilities is that “over-accounting” and "under-accounting” tend to increase to meet the demands of the various stakeholders.

Reports from the World Bank evaluation department have concluded that there is a strong tendency for evaluators to provide a better evaluation of a project’s success than is warranted (Wenar, 2006). This "positive bias" tendency in evaluation, Wenar states, is viewed as in the interest of the NGOs. A positive evaluation confirms their image of effectiveness with donors and helps with fundraising. This tendency toward positive bias has created a risk averse culture that recycles proven projects promoted by donors and beneficiaries instead of promoting risk-managed innovation in new projects and ideas. One serious consequence of the extensive positive bias mentioned in the World Bank report is an increased difficulty of obtaining reliable data on what settings different types of projects are most successful. This, in turn, limits the World Bank actions to effectively measure its impact on poverty reduction efforts and objectives (Wenar, 2006).

Aid organizations' annual reports that focus heavily on data collection but neglect the data analysis provide limited measures of the effective impact of programs. Where there is a weakness in staff capacity, even good data can fail to result in findings which support an informed and well-founded process of decision making (White, 2013).

Low Ownership of M&E by Staff

USAID reports that low M&E ownership of processes can greatly hinder local involvement in M&E activities, whether due to inadequate staff capacity or a general lack of understanding (White, 2013). "Ownership" of an agency's M&E process, supported by adequate resources and training for both field staff and local partners, will encourage participants to provide their valuable input on decisions and determine indicators to measure a project's success. As one commentator noted, local stakeholders that feel left out or frustrated by the M&E development process will be less likely to commit to M&E activities (IFAD, 2002).

When there is low ownership of M&E, staff members often view M&E as a "tedious donor-imposed obligation unrelated to project implementation" (IFAD, 2002). Low ownership can cause the field staff and local partners to incorrectly calculate the time commitments needed for M&E planning and implementation. This, in turn, affects the quality of the data collected later in the project's life cycle (IFAD, 2002).

This Literature Review includes information, descriptions and commentary, and the citations they are drawn from, which sets forth a clear description of the structure of a well-formed M&E framework. Likewise, it provides a good deal of insight into the potential challenges and pitfalls an organization can encounter in assembling a sound M&E system. Now, the attention turns to how Peace Corps Colombia measures up against these standards.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this course-linked capstone paper focuses on a qualitative research approach. The data from the research was organized into different themes that appeared in the research of text materials and during the interviews. I analyzed those themes using an inductive approach that the current M&E system needed to be strengthened.

Data sources also include a desk review of the current M&E practices of Peace Corps Colombia and open-ended interviews with selected staff and volunteers at Peace Corps Colombia involved in the different aspects of M&E. This included interviews of a subjective nature with a field practitioner to incorporate an "on the ground" perspective to the research. A total of nine interview requests were sent to Peace Corps Colombia staff and six to currently serving volunteers. In total nine interviews were conducted with program directors, managers, specialists, and volunteers from both the teaching English and community economic development programs. This sample was selected for convenience and purposeful sampling according to job role and involvement in the current M&E system.

For the interviews, I developed a set of questions of an informative style to better understand the current situation and implications of the M&E system. I asked the interviewees questions about the M&E best practices and challenges at the Colombia post, their responsibility in the current M&E system and the feedback they received. Some questions were more useful than others but overall the questions provided a good background of the staff and volunteers' perspectives. To maintain the confidentiality of my interviewees, their comments are cited by assigned number (1), (2), (3), etc.

The limitation of this methodology is that it is purely qualitative given the unique nature of the Peace Corps and, as a result, cannot be extrapolated to all development agencies. Additionally, it is important to note that while key practitioners involved in M&E were interviewed, the interviews are a non-representative sample of the Peace Corps globally. This limitation is due in part to wanting to focus on the idiosyncrasies of Peace Corps Colombia, and also the unavoidable time constraints and difficulties in contacting M&E staff members at other Peace Corps posts during pre-service training periods.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

BACKGROUND - THE PEACE CORPS GLOBALLY AND PEACE CORPS COLOMBIA.

Globally, the Peace Corps volunteers serve in approximately 65 countries. The majority are working in Africa, but volunteers are working on every continent including the Pacific Islands (Peace Corps, 2016). These 7,300 volunteers are working in six areas: education, agriculture, environment, community economic development, health and youth development. Education is the largest sector by far where the volunteers not only teach English, but depending on the country, also math, science, and computer technology. Following the education sector, the health and community economic development sectors, respectively, are the next largest sectors.

One of the factors that makes M&E a challenge in the Peace Corps is measuring impact between tangible projects and intangible projects. Health volunteers, for example, work in areas such as water and sanitation in schools with projects involving school water filters. As was the case in the communities in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic where I worked, there was a lack of clean drinking water. Student and families unable to afford bottled water drank the dirty water or went thirsty. This leads to health problems and missed school days. With water filter projects providing access to clean and free drinking water at the schools, the impact was tangible and immediate. Students no longer suffered from dehydration and other related health problems and as a result missed less school.

Other health initiatives, like nutrition and HIV/AIDs prevention that involve more of a behavior change aspect, are much more difficult to measure impact. This is the case with teaching English or mentoring a local business; the conditions to see a behavior change and measure a tangible impact are extended over a longer period of time. This, in some cases, is longer than the volunteers' two-year service.

Peace Corps Colombia is in a unique position in comparison to other Peace Corps posts around the world. In 1961, when President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver established the Peace Corps, Colombia was the first country chosen by the respective governments to receive volunteers. The program ran for 20 years with volunteers working all over the country in various sectors. Then in 1981, due to the increasing violence from the civil war with the FARC guerrillas, the US government decided to withdraw the volunteers from the country and suspend the program (Peace Corps, 2017).

In September 2010, the Peace Corps was invited by Colombian President Alvaro Uribe to return to the country. With its long history of service worldwide, the Peace Corps has evolved greatly since 1981. In this interval Colombia became, in many ways, like a new post in a country never served by the organization. Moreover, in Colombia, the Peace Corps must rebuild the network that it once had. As of today, Peace Corps Colombia has supported approximately 90 communities along the Caribbean coast (Peace Corps, 2017).

In an effort to measure the long-term impact of volunteers in a community, Peace Corps Colombia has implemented the practice of grouping volunteers from both sectors together in the same community. Additionally, the Peace Corps program managers have committed, with the local community leader, to place volunteers in the same community for six years - three cycles of volunteers. While it is still too early to see if this practice will produce a tangible impact, the idea is that PES and CED volunteers can support each other in their community projects and the Peace Corps can establish a stronger presence in the communities. Another desired benefit of pairing up the volunteers is to act as a peer to peer support system, intended to reduce the challenges of cultural issues and isolation.

The Cacao for Peace project is a promising initiative that started in 2016 with the Peace Corps Colombia CED program, USAID and USDA. The project's objective is to improve the value chain of Colombian cacao by expanding key agricultural institutions in the public and private sectors with technical assistance and farmer extension education. The Cacao for Peace Initiative will supply Colombian agricultural organizations, as well as farmers, the necessary resources so Colombia can take advantage of the increasing global demand for chocolate, enabling it to become a global supplier of cacao (Conlon & Gallego, 2016).

This project has great promise for Colombia, now that the government has signed the peace agreement with the FARC guerrillas that ends 50 years of civil war. The cacao industry is severely under-developed due to the danger from the FARC and their cultivation of coca to produce cocaine. As USDA Agricultural Specialist Juan Gallego (2016) noted, "A strong cacao industry would provide economic opportunity for hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers and their families, many of whom live in conflict areas. Cacao will also provide a strong alternative to coca production."

The CED Peace Corps volunteers that are working in collaboration with the development and agricultural organizations provide a unique and vital role in the M&E of this project. They are the on-the-ground connection that is living and working with the farmers to provide support, and problem solve together as they develop this economic opportunity (Richards, 2017). If successful, this project will transform the Caribbean region of Colombia into an incubator for innovation in cacao cultivation. The successes here can then be shared as a strategic plan with the other cacao producing regions in Colombia (Conlon & Gallego, 2016).

CURRENT M&E SYSTEM AT PEACE CORPS COLOMBIA

The Peace Corps has a long institutional history and a large support network of programs in countries around the world. Organizational learning is a practice that is very important. Since the Colombia programs are still relatively new, the post continues to work on improving its programs and training for volunteers. Despite not currently having an M&E specialist, the programming staff does its best to work together and share responsibility. During the three-month pre-service training period for each volunteer group, three roundtable meetings are held to evaluate a broad range of aspects of the group's current training. After the training period has ended, the program staff distributes a survey requesting volunteers input on training components: what worked well, and what can be improved for future programs. Additionally, the program manager and program specialist both submit a reflective evaluation report of the training period that is discussed with the programming staff.

At an organization-wide level, the Peace Corps is good at sharing knowledge of best practices that are working well in other countries. This is done both through online webinars via Skype, as well as visits between experienced staff members with a new staff member in a nearby country. Large and annual regional or worldwide training sessions are also very common. Here, best practices are shared among the many countries where the Peace Corps is working.

At the forefront of Peace Corps Colombia's mission is developing and improving its M&E system. As mentioned earlier, the first program reestablished in Colombia was the Practical English for Success program (PES). In 2016, Peace Corps Colombia expanded to include the Community Economic Development program (CED). The project framework and indicators for the PES program have already been developed. The CED project was developed as a pilot project, unlike the PES project which is now up for its 5-year project review and revision towards a logical project framework. The CED project was designed from the beginning using a logical project framework in collaboration with M&E and project specialists.

Benefiting from being a large transnational organization, the Peace Corps has a long history and support network of programs in countries around the world. The basic components of the M&E system have become standardized worldwide. This system is broken down into four basic components: the volunteer's community assessment; the online indicator reporting tool called the Volunteer Reporting Form (VRF); mid-service training; and, four site visits from program staff. To ensure community involvement, the components of the system are always shared among the community partners, the volunteer(s), and the Peace Corps program staff.

The M&E planning and implementation process begins during the design of a program, with solid program theory and local stakeholder input. Program directors work with local officials to plan the program design. They assess the process for each program framework to focus on goals, objectives, and key activities. Key organizational and post-defined indicators are clearly specified; they must be appropriate for measuring progress toward program goals and objectives through anticipated activities (Peace Corps, 2004).

The CED project main goal is, “...Micro-entrepreneurs, leaders from partner organizations, community members and youth work effectively to create new economic opportunities within their networks, increase their business productivity, and adopt a culture of savings and money management” (Peace Corps Colombia, 2017). The logical project framework consists of four objectives with each objective broken down into activities and sub-activities with the methodology and role the volunteer will carry out.

In the PES program, there are two goals that are very concise. First, Colombian English teachers will improve their teaching practice and competence. Second, Colombian students will improve their English language learning proficiency through increased exposure in curricular and extracurricular training (Gonzalez, 2015). These goals are supported by precise objectives and indicators to measure success. The first objective of the PES project framework is: “By December 2017, 960 Colombian male and female English teachers will implement more communicative English teaching techniques, effective classroom management strategies, classroom-based assessment and improved instructional material design” (Gonzalez, 2015).

To measure the level of success in achieving this desired outcome, the PES program staff developed four outcome-based indicators. For example, the following indicator, ED-001-A, measures the Colombian English teacher’s methodology: the proportion of teachers the volunteer works with "...which improved their English instruction in one or more of the following ways...use new techniques for teaching language skills or more effectively applied established communicative language learning principles” (Gonzalez, 2015).

Appendices A and B are examples of the program objective/data collection tools used in the PES project. The volunteers complete these on a quarterly basis to measure the improvement of the students and teachers they work with. This reporting process is very time intensive for both projects, PES and CED. In the PES project, there are two objectives with a total of 14 indicators. One report must be completed for each teacher and class the volunteer works with. The same must be done by the volunteers in the CED project which has four objectives and 12 main indicators, one completed for each "client".

In both examples from the PES project framework, the objective, and the outcome indicators are clearly targeted and easily measurable. In conjunction with their work for the World Bank, Kusek and Rist recommend that when translating the desired outcome described by good quality performance indicators, it is important to have indicators that are clear, direct and unambiguous as possible. They use the acronym CREAM - Clear, Relevant, Economic, Adequate and Monitorable. They also advocate simple and quantitative measures systems instead of qualitative indicators when first establishing a results-based M&E system like that used by the Peace Corps (Kusek & Rist, 2004).

Both CED and PES programs have a preference more towards logical project framework and theories of change as previously mentioned in the literature review. The important thing is that both are focused on the desired long-term goals of their respective programs and the indicators of success to reach those goals.

Volunteer assessment

Before ever leaving for their site, all volunteers spend their first three months in-country in pre-service training. They receive in-depth training in conducting a needs assessment, data collection, and the use of the Volunteer Reporting Form (VRF), an organization-wide online data recording tool. Follow-up training is provided, along with in-service training involving volunteers and host-country partners. During the training sessions, host country partners are trained on M&E processes and feedback points, managing volunteer program, and monitoring activities. This is to ensure data quality throughout the information collection and recording processes.

Once volunteers reach the community where they are working, they conduct a participatory community needs assessment. This helps determine the primary activities which combine community needs and project framework goals and objectives. Together with community members, they will design a plan for implementation and evaluation that is culturally appropriate.

For many volunteers, they are the first ever to be placed in their community of service. In many cases without previous Peace Corps presence, baseline data does not exist. They may need a baseline study to monitor or gauge the specific performance indicators developed in the project framework. It is the volunteer's responsibility to develop the baseline study. In situations like this, Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) recommend techniques such as undertaking retrospective studies of the population, conducting interviews or surveys, and reviewing past project reports from other agencies if available.

Peace Corps Online Volunteer Recording System

The VRF is the data recording tool used by the Peace Corps worldwide. The VRF is the primary way that volunteers report on their work in their community. This is one of the many things that has changed prior to the Peace Corps' return to Colombia. The VRF evolved due to technological advancements, volunteer expectations, and host country and site limitations (Peace Corps, 2015).

The data the volunteer reports quarterly in the VRF is reviewed by the program staff. This provides feedback to better support the volunteer and makes any strategic changes to program training deemed necessary, both at the post as well as a macro-level at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington DC (Peace Corps, 2015).

Mid-Service Training

Volunteers receive mid-service training (MST) to provide them with more information about correctly filling out the VRF. However, training covers a large gamut of topics besides issues related to M&E. Despite efforts to provide more M&E training in the most recent MST, this session was scheduled at the end the second day of the training and was cut short because of other sessions running over their time allotment (2).

Volunteer Site Visit

The final component used in Colombia and globally are the four "official" visits volunteers receive from the Peace Corps program staff during their service. They are referred to as "official" because the sole purpose of these visits is for the program staff to meet with the volunteer and their community partners; they are there to hear how the volunteer’s primary and secondary projects are going. At these visits the program staff can receive and provide more personalized feedback from the community partner and volunteer about data reported in the VRF with respect to the level of community integration.

Typically, during these visits, the staff member will observe a class of activity that the volunteer and community partner normally work on together. By combining the visits with the online reporting, the program and training department can get a complete view of the level of achievement to the performance indicators. These are a purely quantitative reporting received from the VRF. Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) note that this practice strengthens assessment in M&E plans, using the example of community education classes, a common practice among volunteers in all programs sectors. “The level of participation may be inaccurate in some contexts if it solely relies on the use of an indicator relating to numbers attending” (pg. 134). The staff visits are beneficial in this sense because they allow the opportunity for immediate debriefing and suggestions for improvement. Also, these visits enable the staff to make adjustments as needed to strengthen the training of incoming volunteers if needed.

CHALLENGES TO M&E IN PEACE CORPS COLOMBIA

A unique challenge to the Peace Corps in the evaluation of a volunteer’s impact occurs when the volunteer’s two-year service is not always carried out with the same community and community partners. These changes in site and changes of local counterpart makes measuring the impact of one volunteer's service difficult, let alone in cases of multiple volunteers. The current VRF system shows the outputs of the volunteer’s work in the community with respect to the project framework objective indicators. It does not show the impact of the desired objectives as well, that is, what changed in the community. During my interviews, senior staff expressed a goal for Peace Corps Colombia in the coming year: "...how to get Peace Corps in more of a mindset of how to evaluate the outcomes of the communities themselves based upon the presence a volunteer has over two years, and then a group of volunteers has over six years or eight years” (1).

Table 1, below, is a summary of the M&E best practices and challenges from the literature review integrated with the findings of reoccurring issues in Peace Corps Colombia. A cursory analysis of the table shows that Peace Corps Colombia M&E activities fall short of the industry recommended best practices due to a lack of M&E capacity.

Table 1: Peace Corps Colombia Challenges Assessment Summary

Dedicated staff roles	➢ **Insufficient M&E Capacity** ➢ **Unclear Roles and Responsibilities**	• **No M&E specialist causes ad hoc division of M&E activities that M&E POC does not have time to do** • **High staff burnout** • **Less effective coordination with volunteers M&E activities** • **Lack of incentives for staff to do more than minimal M&E activity oversight** • **Programming staff unable to effectively fulfill main work duties such as training and site development to fulfill M&E duties**
Dedicate adequate time and resources for M&E project design	➢ **Insufficient M&E Capacity** ➢ **Low Ownership of M&E by staff**	• **Project Framework is designed with PC HQ help - very standardized due to lack of staff time to allow for much customization** • **Lack of staff time and availability prevents staff from following up with PCV M&E progress** • **Lots of data collected but little used** • **Volunteer report review is seen as a time-consuming burden by staff** • **Most volunteers see VRF reports as box checking to meet obligations**
Develop Capacity of Field Staff and Local Partners	➢ **Insufficient M&E Capacity** ➢ **Conflicting Accountabilities**	• **Lack of training for volunteers in Pre-Service and Mid- Service Trainings** • **Challenging to strengthen local partners, i.e., teachers and entrepreneurs** • **Volunteers unclear who to go to for answers** • **M&E divided between Training and Program Managers left until last minute at trainings** • **Volunteers over-accounting or have positive bias in results to please Program Managers**
Leverage Technology	➢ **Insufficient M&E Capacity**	• **Lack of M&E specialist to improve current VRF and data collection tools** • **Lack of incentive for staff to dedicate time and effort with busy schedule**
Promote Organizational Learning	➢ **Insufficient M&E Capacity** ➢ **Low ownership of M&E by Staff**	• **Feedback loop of training group evaluation and lessons learned not carried forward and implemented with next group of volunteers** • **Lots of data collected but little used** • **Attitude of staff is one of just get through PST; lessons learned from previous groups seldom implemented**

Volunteer continuity is an issue M&E experts in Washington are also considering, "...What can we track and say about a site because a volunteer has been there?" (1). In situations where a volunteer is pulled from a site because of safety and security reasons, the community may not receive another volunteer. The volunteer then must start over in a new site with new teachers and students, or a new clientele. This prevents Peace Corps Colombia from accumulating consolidated information over a long, multi-volunteer period of time. One manager explained that the communities that Peace Corps Colombia has been consistently working with for over four years are a small proportion of the total volunteer commitment: around four or five out of approximately 30 communities in total. With the rest of the sites, the Peace Corps has been there for two years or less, making it difficult to measure any substantial impact from the volunteer or organization in general (2).

The absence of a dedicated M&E specialist, a point encountered repeatedly during my interviews, raises multiple issues that are a consequence of insufficient staffing and resources. The M&E point of contact (POC) at the post is also currently the Volunteer Support Manager (VSM). Both positions are purportedly full-time assignments. Although roles of M&E staff can vary by organization, the M&E POC is tasked with adapting and developing logframes and indicators, to fit the Colombian context. The POC is also tasked with managing and using evaluations for annual reports presentations to headquarters. This work is done on top of VSM's other professional duties. However, the M&E POC duties are only fulfilled at 20 percent allocation of capacity; the VSM must fulfill his primary job duties as a priority (1). The remaining 80 percent of the M&E duties are divided up among the rest of staff, primarily between the program manager and the programming and training specialists. At times, this causes conflicting accountabilities of "who is responsible for what."

Additionally, as noted earlier in the general M&E challenges, using current staff to fill in gaps that management is unable to fill as a dedicated position increases the rates of staff burnout and turnover overall. This is especially apparent in Peace Corps Colombia: the post is understaffed for the work required to cover the gaps of unfilled positions. Program and Training staff time and attention are taken away from training development to fulfill M&E duties. On multiple occasions, different staff members have mentioned in passing that they felt overworked and burned out.

When the post reopened in 2010, the program staff worked on creating the necessary M&E resources and materials, but quickly discovered that more time and effort was needed than the staff could devote to the process (2). Lacking sufficient staff, the post relies heavily on Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington for M&E materials and support. Some editing is done on the indicators to match the Colombian context, but the overall M&E system used is one mandated from headquarters (2). The M&E framework and indicators sent from headquarters are, for the most part, standardized to fit the Peace Corps programs worldwide. Compelled to use standardized indicators, one staff member familiar with the English program explained, "...we are not fully able to capture the achievement of the teachers' improvement in English because the indicator...from Washington only measures the amount of English used in the classroom. It does not account for English spoken with the volunteer in situations outside the classroom" (2). The indicators also do not account for different varieties of English classes taught beside the standard high school English class. Another staff member noted the need to differentiate between primary class, camp classes and community English classes (3). More work needs to be done to contextualize the framework's indicators.

A programming staff member that works closely with the volunteers evaluating their responses and the data collected noted that volunteers have difficulties reporting on the data collected. Under-accounting and over-accounting or duplicated data is a common issue staff encounter with volunteer evaluation reports (4). This problem with consistency arises from the lack of clarity volunteers have on who should and should not be tallied in their quarterly reports. The combination of the lack of training and positive bias on the part of the volunteer causes more emphasis upon data collection rather than data analysis. Similarly, staff lacks available time to review the data to derive the kinds of useful information that can help to inform programming decisions (4).

Lack of training is another important consequence arising from no dedicated M&E specialist on staff. In all of the interviews researching this report, participants were asked, "...What are some of the challenges of carrying out effective M&E in your post? What would you change given the opportunity?" All the interviewees mentioned the need for improved training. Unlike other agencies and NGOs where the evaluators are skilled professionals in the field of M&E, for many Peace Corps volunteers, this is their first time working with M&E. The challenge is to present a thorough training on unfamiliar and often complex material that the volunteer understands, as well as remembers and properly uses when time comes to write their first evaluation report 6 months hence (2). It is fundamental that volunteers understand that this is an essential part of their work - one of the main ways that their services is evaluated. However, as it is now, the volunteers are not getting the training needed to understand how to use the data collection tools and VRF (3). VRF training sessions are usually left as a two-hour intensive session they see once or twice during the pre-service training. Limited exposure to the M&E data collection tools is likewise a deficiency connected to limited staff capacity and training time available for M&E processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research, it is apparent that many of the challenges and problems with M&E at Peace Corps Colombia stem from or are compounded by not having an M&E specialist on staff. Filling this position would improve the training of volunteers, the understanding of the impact of projects, relieve the workload of other staff members, and help to promote organizational learning. In addition to staffing with an M&E specialist, recommendations included here offer a variety of options which can be used to improve M&E functions and overall program performance at present staffing levels.

Collaborating with senior staff, a number of ideas for the M&E specialist were suggested, based on the position in other posts. At the staff exchange level, the M&E specialist would work with each program sector to ensure that the M&E framework is developed and well implemented. Additionally, the project managers and project training specialist should have the necessary training and tools at their disposal. The M&E specialist would be charged with managing the 5-year project evaluations, providing an in-depth analysis of the outcomes and lessons learned. This will promote organizational learning so information collected and analyzed is used to make better informed decisions in the future (1).

The M&E specialist can also work closely with the Training Manager to both lead and evaluate the training activities and sessions. By working in close collaboration with the Training Manager and program managers, the M&E specialist can develop a continuum of M&E skills, expertise and understanding, avoiding the need to cover it all at pre-service training (1). This can be done, for example, using mock lesson plans and real data from past volunteer reports. Volunteers can provide feedback on their reports, confirming their clear understanding of the M&E skills and the VRF reporting requirements. This "continuum" approach ensures that training has “an impact on knowledge, but also to make sure that there was an application in everything [the volunteers] learned” (1).

There remain, however, a number of strategic and operational changes that can be made at Peace Corps Colombia from this point onward. These other recommendations have the potential to be accomplished within the existing staffing complement and could result in meaningful improvements. They include:

- Develop a user-friendly VRF
- Promote VRF work groups
- Develop an organization M&E assessment grid
- Conduct impact evaluations annually
- Develop and implement a "Team Approach" M&E structure

A key recommendation based on feedback from staff and volunteers is to update the VRF reporting tool. The current VRF system, while innovative when it was developed over a decade ago, is now outdated, cumbersome and complex. Following the best practices of leveraging technology, the Peace Corps (either the Colombia post, alone, or in collaboration with Peace Corps HQ and other posts) should invest in the development of a mobile-based data collection application that can be accessed from a smartphone or tablet. Many volunteers have complained about the complexity and that the current VRF software must be downloaded and uploaded from a computer, which can be difficult and time-consuming depending on the reliability of rural electricity and internet connectivity (5). There are many benefits of mobile data collection; my research suggests several which can be achieved here: 1) making entry and aggregation of data simpler; 2) providing instant visualization of the data, depending on the filters and algorithm used by an M&E specialist or programming staff; 3) casting the data to highlight various characteristics which allow staff to see volunteers' information much clearer; and, 4) collecting "cleaner" data and, by using filters, culling data to limit conclusions that don't make sense (Better Evaluation, 2017).

Volunteer Work Groups is a practice that already appears to be successful in reducing VRF reporting errors (2). By working together, volunteers can ask and answer their fellow volunteers' questions, which helps to reaffirm what they know. The programming staff should continue to encourage this practice when explaining the VRF during pre-service training. Another recommendation drawn from the staff interviews is expanding the current Project Advisory Committee (PAC) to include volunteers' input to support the project managers and M&E specialist in improving the VRF and the data collection methods. Both PES and CED projects have annual PAC meetings. Two or three volunteers have attended to offer input to ensure that VRF updates are practical and well understood. The participation of other volunteers would be very helpful in increasing their ownership in overall M&E activities.

The following table characterizes an organizational M&E assessment grid that can prove very helpful in considering current position and future strategies to improve the M&E structure for Peace Corps Colombia. It is taken from work done by the UNFPA. They recommend using the following grading scale: a plus sign (+) to note a positive compliant area, a circle (O) to note that the status of an area is in place but needs improvement and a minus sign note missing area (UNFPA, 2013). Peace Corps Colombia could implement the use of a similar measure, which would be helpful in identifying existing strengths and weaknesses of the M&E process and lead to remedial actions.

Table 2: M&E Assessment Grid

Feature of the M&E System	What to check	Quality/Status	Answer
Type	Is the system activity or results based or both		
Nature	Is the system led by Peace Corps, managed with government counterparts, or led by them		
Management Information System (MIS)			
Design and Structure	Is there an MIS associated with the M&E system?		
	Is the MIS formalized in a written document?		
Data collection	Does the system define who should collect what information?		
	Is the frequency of data collection well defined and appropriate?		
Information flows	Is the level of information, depth/analysis appropriate for the post and headquarter needs?		
	Does the system define who should report to whom?		
	Are there appropriate templates to report the information		
	Does the system provide feedback to local counterparts?		
Resources			
Financial Resources	Is there a budget available at the post for M&E purposes?		
Human resources	Is there a person in charge of the entire system at the post?		
	Are M&E responsibilities clearly allocated to each staff?		
	Does the system capitalize on local capacity to collect relevant information?		
	Does the system build local capacity to collect and use relevant information		

Indicators			
Feasibility of the objectives	Are the outputs and the outcomes associated to the indicators attainable?		
Quality of the indicators	Are the indicators clearly formulated?		
	Are the indicators relevant?		
Role of evaluation in the system			
Integration in the system	Are evaluations well planned and selected to respond to the post and headquarters needs?		
	Are evaluations findings properly channeled into management and decision processes?		
Alignment	Are evaluations designed and its findings shared with relevant national stakeholders?		
Monitoring of risks and assumptions			
Assumptions	Has the post correctly identified the main assumptions affecting the country program?		
	Is the post able to accurately and timely use information on changes in those assumptions?		
Risks	Has the post correctly identified the main risk affecting the country program?		
	Is the post able to provide accurate and timely information on changes in those risks?		
Formalization	Is the monitoring of risks and assumptions formalized and recorded in written form?		

While current staff resources at Peace Corps Colombia are limited, it is crucial that Peace Corps program management implement annual impact evaluations. This will ensure that both sector projects are meeting the project objectives so that both local partner and communities can benefit from the volunteer service. An evaluation utilization study done by USAID in 2016 showed that 71 percent of evaluations had been used to design and or modify a USAID project (USAID, 2016). Changes that occurred due to the impact evaluation included revising or refocusing a project’s work or M&E plan. According to the study, over 27 percent of those surveyed reported an improvement in the effectiveness of projects after intervention based on a USAID evaluation (USAID, 2016).

The final recommendation acknowledges the realities of budget constraints and the likelihood of the addition of specialty staff. The prospect of borrowing from techniques used by others (USAID and UN) to create a "team approach" to M&E within current operations and staff resources appears to have some merit. Present assignments direct 20 percent of the M&E responsibilities to the POC with the remaining 80 percent distributed among the training and program staff. When not done in an ad hoc fashion as is presently the case, but a clearly designated and defined position assignment, this could work effectively if all the participants collectively devised an M&E infrastructure where responsibilities were allocated among the participants. Best practices are apparent, as are problems with current implementation, such as it is. Clear delineation of responsibilities and expectations resolves the confusion inherent in the present situation. Teaming also provides an occasion for cross-training among participants to take advantage of personal specialties and skills; it also rotates duties to keep the overall process from becoming onerous and promotes organizational learning. While an obvious "training commitment" is essential in starting this process, once in place, the process itself can serve as a solid platform for a continuum of training and improvement, specific to the needs of the Peace Corps Colombia operations. And, when at some point in the future, Peace Corps Colombia is able to staff with a dedicated M&E specialist, the organization will have already dealt with and accomplished many of the key elements of establishing a successful M&E program.

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Interviewees

Peace Corps Director 1

Peace Corp Manager, 2

Peace Corp Manager 3

Peace Corp Specialist 4

Peace Corps PES Volunteer 5

Peace Corps CED Volunteer 6

APPENDICES

Appendix A: PES Objective 1.1- Indicator for English Teaching Methodology

Peace Corps COLOMBIA

Objective 1.1 Improve English Teachers' Instructional Practice

Indicator ED-001-A Teachers: English Teaching Methodology

Number of teachers, out of the total number of teachers the Volunteer worked with, who improved their English instruction **in one or more** of the following ways: used new techniques for teaching language skills or more effectively applied established communicative language learning principles.

Measurement: Rating sheets (one per teacher). Two moments to collect data: at the beginning and at the end of the collaboration process.

Regardless of which instruction techniques a teacher already used, if they use or apply a new or improved technique after working with the Volunteer they have achieved the change identified in this indicator.

Scoring:
1 = Never or almost never (0-30%)
2 = Half of the time (30-60%)
3 = More than half the time (60-90%)
4= Always or almost always (90-100%)
N/A = Doesn't apply

Reporting period achievement determination: If the final score for any descriptor is higher than for the baseline score, then indicator was achieved for this teacher.

Teacher Name:	Baseline score	Final Score
Used new techniques for teaching language skills		
Uses authentic materials and/or simulates real life situations		
Develops student learning strategies along w/content		
Connects lessons to learner's needs & experiences		
Other: (Please describe)		
Applied established communicative language learning principles		
Conducts higher proportion of procedural language in class in English		
Emphasizes interacting in English		
Uses pair and group work for English language practice		
Other: (Please describe)		

PES Project Framework Indicator Data Collection Tool 2

Appendix B: PES Objective 2.1- Indicator for Students' Confidence and Motivation

Peace Corps
COLOMBIA

Objective 2.1 Improve Achievement and Participation in the English Class

Indicator ED-035-C Students: Confidence and Motivation

Number of students, out of the total number of students the Volunteer/partner worked with, who demonstrated increased confidence or motivation (through increased participation) in a class (club, or camp).

Scoring:
1 = Never or almost never (0-30%)
2 = Half of the time (30-60%)
3 = More than half the time (60-90%)
4= Always or almost always (90-100%)
N/A = Doesn't apply

Student Name:	**Baseline score**	**Final score**
Accepts constructive feedback		
Asks questions when he/she needs additional clarification		
Accepts praise		
Positively demonstrates learning new knowledge		
Respects differences in others		
Moves to next steps of assignments without needing motivation from others		
Speaks aloud with confidence		
Submits completed homework on time		
Volunteers to participate in class (e.g., raises hand to comment)		
Builds on the comments of others		
Has regular attendance		
Is rarely tardy		
Voluntarily helps other students or the teacher		
Engages positively in turn taking		
Often takes leadership of group work		

PES Project Framework Indicator Data Collection Tool 10