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Capacity Building Contributions of Short-Term International Volunteers

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Previous research suggests that international volunteer service may have both positive and negative effects on host organizations. Applying a capacity-building perspective, this study uses semistructured interviews to ask staff in hosting organizations to identify the main outcomes of short-term volunteer service. These views were compared with perspectives of staff from matched organizations that do not host international volunteers. Findings suggest that international volunteers may increase organizational capacity by supplying extra hands, providing technical and professional skills, contributing tangible resources, and enhancing intercultural understanding. Volunteers may also challenge organizations as they absorb staff time and resources. Staff members from both types of organizations identify individual and institutional variables that may affect the quality of these outcomes, including volunteers' language capacity and the intensity of the service placement.

Increasingly, individuals take short breaks from their studies or careers to volunteer in other countries (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008). Nationally representative surveys estimate that over one million individuals from the United States volunteer abroad every year, and 70 to 80% of these volunteers serve for 8 weeks or less (Lough, 2010). The majority of these volunteers are motivated by a desire for a meaningful experience and an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of host community members. Others hope to increase intercultural understanding or to reduce social or economic inequality (Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2009). Although short-term international volunteers (IVs) are well-intentioned, we know relatively little about their actual effects on host communities and organizations—particularly from the perspectives of host-organization staff.

International volunteer service (IVS) is defined as an organized period of engagement and contribution to society, organized by public or private organizations, by volunteers who work across an international border, and who receive little or no monetary compensation (Sherraden, 2001). Although the definition of *short-term* IVS varies, there is growing consensus in the field that IVs who serve for 8 weeks or less are considered short-term (Beckers & Sieveking, 2001; Engle & Engle, 2003). As short-term volunteering grows in popularity and prevalence, scholars and practitioners are raising questions about its effectiveness (Lyons, 2003; Randel, German, Cordiero, & Baker, 2005). Although the evidence suggests positive impacts on IVs, there are larger questions about the outcomes for host communities and organizations (Laleman et al., 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2006). This study assesses organizational outcomes from the perspective of staff from organizations that host IVs.

THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF IVS IN BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizational capacity is defined as "management practices and organizational processes" that help volunteer hosting organizations accomplish their missions (Letts, Ryan, & Grossman, 1999, p. 35). IVs potentially contribute to these practices and processes in a number of ways. First, volunteers could help with service delivery, management, planning, accountability, and marketing (Brown & Moore, 2001). Second, volunteers may attract tangible and intangible resources, including funding, networks of support, and opportunities for collaboration (Lough et al., 2009). Third, volunteers may bring in diverse perspectives, contributing to increased tolerance and broadened perspectives on how to solve problems (Comhlámh's Volunteering Options

[CVO], 2007). Finally, volunteers may develop human resources by contributing skills, information, and knowledge (Eisinger, 2002). Organizational capacity building adds to the ability of social service organizations to achieve their mission and goals, and to meet the needs of clients.

Although IVs have the potential to increase host organization capacity, they may also deplete scarce organizational resources and time. Hosting volunteers requires training, support, and resources. When volunteers serve for shorter periods, demands on host organizations may be more intense as they are required to orient each new volunteer that is placed with the organization. Placements are frequently driven by the supply of volunteers, rather than a community demand for volunteers (Leigh, 2005). Instead of sending volunteers whose skills and orientation reflect the felt needs of the community, volunteer placements may be driven by the limited understanding and capacities of volunteers. Volunteer-driven projects may be culturally inappropriate, or may supplant jobs in host organizations (European Voluntary Service, 1996; Smith & Elkin, 1981). All told, short-term international volunteer placements may benefit volunteers more than host communities (Simpson, 2004).

Although the activities of IVs vary widely, volunteers most frequently classify their activities as *social work* or *community work* (Jones, 2004). Given this connection, it is important that research in the field understands and assesses these activities, particularly as a principal social work ethic is to "do no harm" (Antle & Regehr, 2003, p. 136). Research on IVS can help determine whether the value added by IVs is worth the possible harm that well-intentioned outsiders or amateurs may impose on host communities. Outcomes ultimately depend on three key elements: the capacity of individual volunteers, the institutional capacity of sending and hosting organizations, and the service activity (Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). This study explores these variables, focusing on the relationship between short-term IVS and host-organization capacity building. Host organization staff members identify the primary contributions of IVS, and pinpoint key variables that may affect the quality of these outcomes.

METHODS

This study takes place in a low-income settlement, Villa El Salvador, located in an arid plain in the outskirts of Lima, Peru. Villa El Salvador was settled originally by 3,000 squatter families evicted from state-owned land in the early 1970s. Over the following years, these families formed a new settlement (Burt & Espejo, 1995). With large rural migration to the city, Villa El Salvador has swelled since its founding, and currently boasts a population of approximately 400,000 (VESM, 2009). This study analyzes a large United States-based volunteer sending organization that has placed nonexpert short-term volunteers in host organizations in Villa for more than 10

years. Volunteer placements average 4 weeks duration and range from 1 to 12 weeks. Volunteers live together in a housing complex in the center of Lima city, located about 15 kilometers from Villa. New volunteers receive a 1-day in-country orientation, and are supervised by full-time field staff employed by the volunteer sending organization. Volunteers pay a fee to cover housing, food, transportation, cultural activities, and supervision. The sending organization provides no formal financial compensation to hosting organizations. Between 1999 and 2010, over 1,500 volunteers served in Villa through this organization.

Volunteers serve in several community-based social service agencies, for an average of 20 hrs per week, providing care, health, education, and other related activities. Prior to being placed in a host organization, volunteers complete applications on which they select a number of activities and interests, which have been predetermined by the host organizations. The sending organization reviews the applications and tries to match the skills and interest of the volunteers with the needs of the host organization. The program sets no specific eligibility requirements for education, language abilities, or occupational experience. The majority of volunteers come from the United States, and the majority are 25 years or younger (70%), female (79%), and students (40%).

Design

This study uses a comparative design to understand the *counterfactual* (i.e., volunteer-hosting organizations [VHOs] are compared with non-VHOs to see how outcomes would have differed, had no volunteers been introduced into the organization) (Morgan & Winship, 2007). Five VHOs are compared to five comparison organizations (COs) that do not host domestic or IVs. Although some COs host local community members or student workers occasionally, none of the selected COs regularly or formally host domestic volunteers. The stated reason that COs do not host volunteers is not due to lack of interest, but due to low volunteer supply. Using COs allows us to understand how VHOs benefit from IVs in ways that COs may not. Using a comparative design allows us to assess the specific contributions and challenges of IVs to the organizational capacity of VHOs. Researchers worked with local program staff to identify appropriate interview sites. The VHOs are all medium-sized social service organizations located in Villa. The COs are matched to the VHOs as comparison sites based on organizational goals, activities, resources, and services provided to clients. Although size differed slightly, the characteristics of all COs were similar to VHOs except that the COs did not regularly utilize IVs.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semistructured interviews were conducted with 30 staff members in the 10 organizations (three per organization). Two researchers visited each

program site prior to conducting the interviews to brief directors on the goals of the research and solicit their participation. In each of the 10 organizations, interviewers met separately with the executive director, the volunteer liaison, and one additional staff member who engaged frequently with volunteers. Respondents received a study information sheet, which included background information on the study, confidentiality rights, and contact information. Each interview lasted approximately 45 min to 1 hr. The study was approved by the Institutional Human Subjects Review Board at Washington University in St. Louis. Interview guides and questions were based on a comprehensive assessment of existing research on IVS. To increase the practical relevance and validity of these research tools, we reviewed more than 35 studies on IVS effects on organizations and communities. Researchers piloted the interview guides in Spanish and incrementally refined these tools.

The primary researcher is from the United States and has previous work experience in Latin America. Although the interviewer has working knowledge of Spanish, he also used a native Peruvian interpreter/research assistant in all interviews to ensure comprehension and fluency. Both the interviewers are men. Interviewers minimized bias by meeting in private locations, stressing informed consent and confidentiality, and encouraging respondents to discuss both benefits and challenges of hosting IVs. The researcher and interpreter debriefed after each interview to discuss responses and to refine questions.

Interviews were digitally recorded with the verbal consent of respondents, except in five cases where staff members did not consent. Responses to these interviews were recorded in written form. Immediately following each interview, interpreters transcribed the interviews to maximize their ability to record content accurately. The interpreter, also trained as a translator, translated all transcriptions from Spanish to English. To ensure accuracy, a Spanish-speaking researcher compared each transcription to the original Spanish. Respondents also completed a voluntary, anonymous demographic questionnaire at the close of each visit. Of the 30 staff respondents, 28 completed a questionnaire. Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 72 (average age of 46). Across VHOs and COs, most respondents were female (89%), had never volunteered internationally (90%), and had no previous experience working with IVs prior to their most recent engagement (79%; see Table 1). On average, respondents had worked in the organization for about 10 years and they had lived in Lima or Villa El Salvador for 25 years.

Data were analyzed using NVivo software. During the pilot, two researchers coded the same three documents using an initial draft code list. The coders then compared concepts and discussed differences to resolve conceptual discrepancies. Following pilot coding, researchers revised the coding plan and coded all documents. Researchers once again compared codes and resolved any differences to ensure consistency among analysts. After resolving differences, they coded all documents. The analysis was

TABLE 1 Demographic Characteristics of Staff by Type of Organization

Demographic category	Volunteer host organization ($N = 14$)		Comparison organization ($N = 14$)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Previous experience with IVs				
Yes	3	21%	3	21%
No	11	79%	11	79%
Ever worked as an IV				
Yes	2	14%	1	7%
No	12	86%	13	93%
Marital status				
Married or domestic partnership	5	36%	4	29%
Single never married	4	29%	5	36%
Divorced, separated, or consecrated	5	36%	5	36%
Ethnicity				
Spanish or mixed	5	36%	4	29%
Indigenous only	1	7%	5	36%
Other	5	36%	3	36%
No answer	3	21%	2	14%
Gender				
Male	1	7%	2	14%
Female	13	93%	12	86%
Total years working in organization	10.6		11.7	
Total years living in community	26.5		25.4	
Mean age	47.7		44.9	

Note. Valid percentage may not equal 100% due to rounding. IV = International volunteer.

a mixture of coding down, based on information contained in research, and coding up based on new ideas obtained from the staff members' perspectives (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). Although each interview presented some new information, no additional codes were added during the final coding of the interviews, indicating that emerging themes were relatively saturated.

FINDINGS

Overall, VHO staff had positive perceptions of IVs. In fact, the most frequently mentioned outcome was "general satisfaction" with volunteers (38 references). Respondents described their views in these ways: "we just like them;" they have "a big heart, a lot to give, a lot of spirit;" they come with "a lot of will, with a lot of affection, with a lot of love for the work, and dedication;" and "we are very, very happy to have them." Recognizing the potential social desirability of these responses, we pressed for specific examples and possible challenges of hosting IVs. Most prominent among the challenges included the drain on staff time (22 references), distraction to other

staff members and clients (13 references), and concerns of organizational dependency on IVs (13 references). These findings are fairly consistent with other research on short-term IVS (CVO, 2007).

IVs Direct Contributions to Organizational Capacity

Turning to IVs contributions to organizational capacity, staff identified four main ways that IVs enhance organizational practices and processes. IVs (a) act as an extra pair of hands to help address immediate labor shortage needs; (b) provide tangible resources, philanthropy, and social capital that help sustain the organization; (c) introduce new ideas and increase intercultural competence of staff and clients; and (d) apply or transfer technical or professional skills to the VHO and staff.

An extra pair of hands. All VHO respondents said the provision of extra hands to serve beneficiaries through routine, nonexpert activities is an important benefit of short-term IVs. They most frequently mentioned help with childcare and care and companionship for the elderly or disabled (22 references). Volunteers' extra hands may help alleviate the resource squeeze on host organizations. According to VHO respondents, lack of adequate financial resources limits the numbers of professional staff they can hire and retain, and creates demand for IVs. Volunteers can provide significant support to free up staff time and "allow the teachers to be more dedicated to the students." In a VHO undergoing a funding crisis, a staff member explained, "We are like a boat filled with holes, sinking into the water and every volunteer is a hand or foot covering a hole and keeping us afloat."

When asked about the potential contributions of IVs, three-quarters of the CO staff members also imagined IVs as helping hands. For example, the director of a government-funded CO reported that retaining teachers and assistants is extremely difficult. If they had IVs, she believed they could provide assistance when permanent staff members were in short supply. A teacher from another organization observed that IVs "could help as teachers' aides, take the kids on breaks, help with the snacks, plant trees, etc." A worker at a home for older adults said IVs might be able to help her with home visits with the elderly, thus helping with a task she considered particularly demanding:

> [IVs] could help me when I go to visit the houses. I bathe the grannies, I comb them, sometimes their beds have been untended for weeks. . . . I would feel a little more relieved regarding work, the overload, with all the little jobs that one must do.

Tangible resources and philanthropy. Of the 15 VHO staff members interviewed, 13 said volunteers bring resources to the organization, either

directly or indirectly, by leveraging resources from other domestic or international organizations. IVs directly provided physical resources to the organization, such as money or supplies (33 references). Usually these were small in-kind contributions, such as paint, crayons, paper, books, games, used clothes, shoes, and vitamins. Although nearly all contributions were small or symbolic, staff members from two organizations remarked that some volunteers donated substantial amounts of money or facilitated funding from domestic or international organizations. One organization's primary source of funding was from former volunteers: "They send us money to cover the salary of the doctor, the nurse, the social worker, the driver of the taxi-moto . . . and also a little bit more for medicines. So that's our steady income." Another staff member from the same organization stated, "The program is maintained with contributions from friends [of former IVs]. . . . When they go back to their towns, they share with their families, with their friends," who also donate to the organization. In another organization, prior volunteers had contributed $500 dollars in one case, and €500 in another case. Another prior volunteer alerted the VHO to funding opportunities in the European Union and the International Red Cross.

CO staff remarked that they rarely receive local donations. Although they often asked the parents of students or the children of older adult clients to provide resources, these parents and children could seldom afford to donate. Consequently, COs were primarily dependent upon public funding or support from international philanthropic organizations. With 18 references to resources, more than a third of CO staff remarked they would welcome resources and donations from IVs. However, few expected that IVs would provide this type of support. One CO staff member said she would not expect support beyond "cooperation, openness, comradeship, and the availability and will to work."

Intercultural understanding. All VHO staff emphasized that volunteers bring intercultural understanding to the organization and its clients (16 references). By sharing distinct methods and introducing new ideas into the organizations, IVs can contribute to organizational capacity, as well as enhance cultural competence of staff members. Staff members from VHOs said IVs promoted positive cultural understanding through simple exchanges about cooking, eating, music, and dancing, to complex exchanges about ideas and cultural practices. In most cases, however, cultural exchanges were limited by volunteers' lack of Spanish. As one teacher articulated, "there must always be a person who translates: That is the downside." When volunteers can communicate in Spanish, "they listen to each other and share what they have there [in their home country] that we do not have here." Many staff members stated that their perception of Americans had changed as they became better acquainted with volunteers. In particular, a few staff, who said they used to believe that Americans were "cold" and distant, reported that their perceptions changed as they interacted with IVs. As one staff member

recalled, "I had this idea that they were very cold, right? But no—upon see-ing, sharing with them in the little time that I have been with them—well no, they have shown the opposite."

Staff members also remarked that IVs learned a great deal about Peruvian culture. Although, in most cases, these exchanges were positive, the learning process was difficult for some volunteers, especially for those who encountered extreme poverty for the first time. The director of one organization found this lack of exposure "worrisome," but when volunteers seemed overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of poverty, she and other staff members took time to "talk with [the volunteers] and explain the reality of the [situation]." Staff members also cited a few examples of cultural mis-understandings that may have had negative impacts on the organization and its clients. One director recalled a situation that happened 2 years earlier: "It was a parade for *el Dia de la Patria*. We all participated in the parade, includ-ing our international volunteers. The volunteers got much more applause than any of the students and all the other children. . . . it was very sad." She believed this reaction might have negatively affected local students' sense of cultural pride and dignity, so she used it to teach a lesson:

> The next day I brought them together and we talked about it, and I said we have to be proud of who we are. Every race is just as valuable as every other race. So this became a good educational opportunity, an opportunity to reinforce the idea that there is no race that is any more important than the others.

In this case, the teacher recognized differences in privilege and respect, and used it as a teaching opportunity. Although this respondent and a few others mentioned challenges from intercultural exchange, most VHO staff only highlighted positive intercultural exchanges.

Far fewer CO staff members (less than half) brought up potential cul-tural exchanges with IVs, and those that did were mostly optimistic. They believed intercultural exchanges would be, "interesting . . . to learn, to have some cultural exchange." Some said IVs could bring a different perspective and "transmit a different culture." As one staff member stated, "The experi-ence that the foreigner provides would be better, because it would be new. While among Peruvians we already know what we aim for, we do not know how foreigners do things." Consistent with the VHO staff member's concern that foreign people and ideas may be "better," this staff member seemed to indicate that new experiences from IVs would be particularly advantageous for the organization.

According to some CO staff members, the benefits of intercultural exchange could also increase the level of creativity and openness of organi-zational culture and professional practices. For example, one staff member observed, "Organizations that have [international] volunteers are a little

more open to many things. . . . Volunteers spread ideas about their ways of doing things . . . like what we call carrier pigeons." None of the 15 CO staff members referenced possible problems associated with cultural influence of IVs. Although they recognized that volunteers' influence might create change, CO staff consistently interpreted these potential changes as beneficial.

Technical and professional skills. Almost all VHO staff members (14 of 15) said IVs provide special technical or professional skills in education, health, social services, and business (16 references). For example, one volunteer with a background in social services taught "exercises and meditation" to older adults in her volunteer placement. Another was a physical therapist, "which helped [local staff members] see more children." Those with nursing backgrounds "tested blood sugar . . . and gave different [medical] tests." In addition to direct benefits to clients, some volunteers trained VHO staff on new techniques in their professional fields. In this way, volunteers made direct contributions to the level of human capital in the organizations. For example, one school director recalled, "We have been lucky enough to have professionals from special education, and it was wonderful. . . . A volunteer gave a class for all the personnel on autism—about techniques for working with autistic people." VHO staff members clarified that IVs with professional experience in education, psychology, small business, medical, and dental fields were particularly helpful in transferring skills. Staff members recalled, "We've had nurses come who teach first aid, and we had an international volunteer with a Master's degree who taught a reproductive health course for the female staff." Another director stated that they observed a willingness to share expertise particularly among "teachers and psychologists." Nonetheless, some staff members said that skills transfer did not occur frequently enough:

> It would be good if they can share with us through the exchange workshops. It's good for them to share with the children, but it's also very good when they share with the aides and with the professional staff. There aren't enough of these workshops.

A few VHO staff alluded to the added value of IVs' unique skills and contributions. Remembering one IV in particular, one director observed that, "She was a professional offering different knowledge and experiences that were much more enriching for our professionals." Another director stated, "When we have international volunteers who are teachers, we hope they can help our professors, show them new methodologies. A great strength of the international volunteers is the new skills they can teach us, especially when they're already professionals."

In COs, two-third of the staff remarked that IVs might bring professional expertise. Specifically, they identified need for educators, psychologists,

occupational and physical therapists, and volunteers with medical and business backgrounds. In a few cases, the expectations of CO staff seemed to exceed what VHOs actually receive from IVs. In one CO that serves children, the director noted the children and families she works with would benefit from having IVs with a wider variety of professional backgrounds including "everything related to drug abuse prevention, child prostitution, or child labor." CO staff also expressed a desire for IVs to help build additional kinds of organizational capacity, such as technical and information services. Other CO respondents admitted that they did not know exactly what they might expect from IVs, their professional abilities, or their skills. Although their guesses ranged from "doctors, psychologists, anthropologists" and "mass communication media" to "designers, artists, [and] poets," CO respondents were more imaginative as they considered utilizing IVs from a wide variety of fields. Overall, CO staff had a slightly more optimistic perspective than VHO staff on the capacity of volunteers to contribute to the organizations' technical and professional skills. Although VHO respondents had significant practical experience with short-term IVs, CO staff often did not have a good grasp of what to expect from IVs. As is discussed later, CO staff placed more emphasis on the need for language abilities and other communication skills, which volunteers serving with the VHO often did not possess.

Variables Mediating the Effectiveness of IVs

Consistent with prior research on the outcomes of international volunteer service (Sherraden et al., 2008), respondents listed a number of factors that may mediate the contributions of IVs to organizational capacity. The most prominent include volunteers' ability to communicate in the host-language (73 references), and the duration of the service placement (50 references). In addition to these variables, staff members also mentioned the importance of taking time to effectively facilitate and integrate the volunteer in the organization (43 references), volunteer occupational experience (30 references), volunteer commitment to the placement (23 references), and continuity of volunteer service between placements (15 references).

Host-country language ability. Volunteers' ability to speak in the host-country language was the most frequently mentioned factor affecting volunteer effectiveness. The director of one VHO recalled how valuable it was to have a doctor who spoke Spanish. "We have had two, three volunteers who were doctors. One of them spoke Spanish very well and . . . got very involved with the older adults. He attended to their health problems, gave some lectures, and did some health campaigns." In the next breath, the director recalled "another doctor, whose Spanish language was poor." Facing a shortage of medical professionals, the director assigned patients to him, but emphasized that the Spanish-speaking doctor was far more helpful. All VHO

staff discussed volunteers' language abilities. However, less than half claimed that language ability was very important. Language skills were considered particularly helpful for complex interactions and tasks. For example, VHO respondents stated that lack of language ability was a barrier to intercultural understanding because cultural differences could not be discussed or negotiated. However, language ability had a less substantial effect on simple activities, such as when IVs performed roles as helping hands. Nonetheless, VHO staff did not consider language to be an insurmountable obstacle. They described multiple means of working with non-Spanish-speaking volunteers. For example, they used nonverbal communication and limited English skills, or relied on other volunteers who spoke some Spanish.

In contrast to VHO staff members who developed strategies for working with IVs with limited language ability, most CO staff members (11 of 15) believed that Spanish was an important or essential skill for volunteers. In fact, staff from two COs expressed serious doubts about accepting volunteers who did not speak basic Spanish. One staff member stated, "I think we would have to put as a requisite that they speak Spanish. You know if they don't speak Spanish they could help out serving the tea . . . but that's about as much as they could do." This staff person and other CO staff believed that volunteers who do not speak Spanish would not be useful beyond menial tasks, regardless of their educational background and professional skills.

Service duration. Many respondents also referenced the importance of a prolonged service commitment. Most VHO respondents (12 of 15) preferred that volunteers serve for longer periods of time. One VHO staff member explained why:

> When volunteers come for a slightly longer period, it's a much richer activity. There is the chance for mutual support and learning. . . . If the volunteers could stay at least a month or 6 weeks this is a much better length of time to develop more sustainable projects for the volunteers.

Similarly, all CO staff members believed that IVs should serve for substantial periods of time. The executive director of a CO said she would prefer volunteers for "at least 6 months." Another staff member from a CO expressed doubt that a volunteer serving for 1 week would be particularly helpful. "In a week, what could we really achieve? Maybe just to relate to each other, to assemble a small cultural exchange program so that each one can talk about their country . . . but beyond that, we could not achieve much more." Staff members mentioned other factors that may mediate service effectiveness, including how volunteers are integrated into the organization, continuity of service between placements, volunteer occupational experience and expertise, and volunteer commitment to the placement. Future research should focus on the relevance of these variables to service outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Staff members in both types of organizations (VHOs and COs) view IVS as a mechanism for building organizational capacity through: filling gaps in staffing, obtaining financial and in-kind resources, generating intercultural understanding, and developing technical and professional skills. Staff members in both organizations also believe that certain mediating factors make a difference in IV effectiveness, especially language ability and duration of the placement. Despite these similarities, distinct differences also emerge from comparing VHO and CO perspectives on IVs.

Staff members at COs were more likely than staff members at VHOs to expect that IVs would arrive with language abilities and useful professional skills. Nonetheless, staff members across both types of organizations believed that even unskilled and "amateur" IVs could help provide basic social services and fill shortages in organizational staffing. Although COs were willing to accept volunteers, their higher expectations suggest that international volunteer placements may be driven more by supply of volunteers than by community demand. The *supply-based model*, which has been criticized by some scholars and practitioners, prioritizes the needs and abilities of volunteers over the needs and demands of host organizations and communities (Leigh, 2005). To enhance principles of reciprocity, a demand-based model would assess and prioritize the needs of host organizations, and assign volunteers who meet those specific needs. CO staff interviews offer a vision of what a demand-based model might look like in this community. Arguably, CO staff members have a closer approximation of what the ideal volunteer may look like. The views of CO staff are less constrained by the realities and challenges of hosting IVs. In comparison with VHO staff, CO staff voiced higher expectations that IVs would have Spanish language ability, stay for longer durations, and bring professional or technical skills.

Although VHOs reported they could use volunteers without local language skills, COs were less sure. Limitations resulting from IVs' language skills have also been echoed by staff members hosting short-term volunteers from other programs (CVO, 2007; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003). Skills transfers and intercultural understanding may be enhanced when volunteers can communicate directly with staff members or through a translator. Although VHO staff members were happy to receive volunteers for any length of time, they preferred volunteers for longer durations (1 month or more). CO staff members echoed this point, but many expressed a preference that volunteers stay even longer (3 to 6 months). Volunteers serving for longer durations would be able to integrate more fully in the organization, would consume less staff time for orientation and training relative to their total time volunteering, and could be trained to perform more complex tasks and "sustainable projects" (Devereux, 2008, p. 363). Because staff members

are often required to assess, plan, and utilize the technical and professional skills of volunteers, the drain on staff time can be considerably higher when volunteers serve for very short terms. The implication for the field is to ensure an effective match between the volunteer's capacity and the task at hand.

Despite the fact that IVs transfer skills, some VHOs said that this did not occur frequently enough. In line with this, COs typically expected that IVs would be able to provide workshops and share skills. The gap between staff members' expectations and IVs' actual contributions is likely due to a lack of language abilities and professional skills among short-term volunteers. Although professional techniques and strategies from Western perspectives may be beneficial, the unexamined replication of practice methods may also be inappropriately applied to local problems, and may possibly inhibit the invention of indigenous methods of intervention. The challenge of applying Western methods to indigenous practice is frequently discussed and debated (Gray & Fook, 2004; Hochfeld, 2002). Given this challenge, it is important that future research assess whether the skills and strategies that volunteers teach are truly relevant to local problems. Moreover, volunteer programs that recruit these types of volunteers should be careful not to overstate their potential contribution to development. For volunteers' expectations to be consistent with placement outcomes, stated objectives and marketing materials should also reflect these contributions and limitations.

Beyond the influence of volunteer abilities and skills and service duration, intercultural exchanges and resource transfers are two salient outcomes related to capacity. Although VHOs valued the intercultural contributions of IVs, they also referenced a handful of challenges from intercultural exchange. Consistent with other studies, some VHO staff members emphasized that volunteers may challenge host organizations and their clients as they engage in intercultural exchange (Lough et al., 2009; Porter, 2003). Disparities in power and privilege between IVs and local residents may result in greater respect for the volunteer's culture, thereby devaluing indigenous cultural identity and furthering a Westernized cultural hegemony. When these cultural differences are not discussed and navigated, these perceptions may have negative effects on the host organizations and clients. Although interviewees in this study reported only minor cultural misunderstandings, the onus is often placed on staff members to help their clients sort through these differences. For instance, in the *Dia de la Patria* example, if the teacher had not discussed differences in privilege with the children, many of them might have continued to feel disempowered. VHOs also acknowledged the challenge of working with IVs who encounter extreme poverty for the first time and experience "disorienting dilemmas" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) and acute "culture shock" (Ward, Bocher, & Furnham, 2001, p. 5). As expressed by VHO staff members, time and resources are often required to help IVs

adapt to differences in culture, and to help them comprehend the reality of grave global disparities. CO staff members did not anticipate many of these challenges. These are important topics for sending organizations to discuss with new VHOs as they initiate emerging partnerships.

Although the temptation may be there, VHOs should not expect IVs to provide resources. Contributions from IVs may add sources of aid to existing networks of support. However, this enhanced capacity may or may not be sustainable over the long term. The diversification of resources through IVs support may allow greater flexibility in the provision of services (Froelich, 1999); in this sense, VHOs may have an advantage over COs that do not host IVs. On the other hand, when former volunteers become a primary source of funding, VHOs may also become dependent, thus increasing organizational reliance on continued philanthropy. In such cases, it is important that IVs providing support maintain a diversified and sustained flow of resources. Sending organizations have a role to play in communicating the implications of such support to the volunteers.

The findings of this study are not without limitations, which informs a number of research implications. To the degree that staff members perceived that the researchers were linked to the volunteer sending-program, and were the same nationality as volunteers, positive expressions across both types of organizations may have been overstated. In addition, it is difficult to generalize these findings to all short-term volunteers because the context of this study is limited to a specific volunteer sending program in a specific geographic location. The program selected for this study has been recognized as a respected leader in short-term international service, and is known for applying available evidence to guide programming. In fact, this program is frequently used by schools of social work as a *third-party organization* to facilitate international social work field placements (see, for instance, University of Michigan, 2010). Given the traditional connection between volunteer service and social work (Richmond, 1895), as well as the fact that most volunteers serving with this program describe their activities as *social work*, the finding that volunteers contribute positively to organizational capacity is heartening. However, it should be noted that if research was completed with a less socially-conscious partner program, additional challenges and problems may have been more evident. Future research should validate findings from this study with additional programs in other contexts. Understanding how differences in duration, service activities, eligibility requirements, compensation, institutional support, and facilitation contribute to service outcomes can help inform evidence-based practice and drive effective policies on IVS. In addition, findings from a comparative study may have significant implications for international social work field placements. Combining data from larger, more representative samples may also offer a clearer view of patterns across countries, contexts, and time.

CONCLUSION

Although a handful of previous evaluation studies have interviewed host organizations, this is the first known study to examine the effects of short-term volunteers on organizations using a comparative design that includes organizations that host IVs, as well as those that do not host IVs. From the perspectives of local staff members, short-term IVs do affect their organizations' practices and processes, and can contribute to organizational capacity building. Some of these contributions may not be unique to international volunteerism, but could theoretically result from domestic volunteers as well. For instance, local volunteers can also supply extra hands and provide technical and professional skills. On the other hand, outcomes such as enhanced intercultural understanding may be a unique contribution of IVs. These findings also suggest that IVs may provide *bridging social capital* to organizations in low-income regions of the world that may not be easily supplied by domestic volunteers. These linkages can help bridge the resource gap; connecting those in low-income countries with more powerful individuals and institutions in resource-rich countries.

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