

Peace Corps Armenia

CBD Project Progress Report #1

Reporting Period: September 1, 2006 - January 31, 2007
Due Date to PC: January 31, 2007

Name of PCV: Kyle Gifford

1. Basic Information

Town /Village	Name of the Organizations you are working with:
Noyemberyan	Yerevak NGO, Noyemberyan School #2, Koghb Art School, Noyemberyan State College, Bridge of Hope NGO

2. Project Purpose

The purpose of the Community and Business Development project is to support local organizations and businesses throughout Armenia through capacity building to enhance standard of living of their community members.

3. Project Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1: Local business, government and community organizations and motivated individuals particularly youth and women will increase their opportunities and effectiveness by learning and using new business practices for effective use of local resources.

Objective 1: Business skills development

By 2012 CBD PCVs and their community partners will assist 80 local businesses and organizations to increase their professional effectiveness through training and follow-up support in improving customer service, financial management, time management, marketing and business planning.

As a result 50% of the supported businesses will be able to improve their customer service, financial management, time management, marketing and business planning practices.

Objective 2: Project planning and management

By 2012 CBD PCVs and their community partners will assist 80 local businesses and organizations in learning, practicing and using participatory tools and techniques to research, plan and implement business and community projects.

This will result in 10 businesses and 10 organizations improving their abilities to learn, practice and use participatory tools and techniques to research, plan and implement business and community projects.

Objective 3: Personal and professional development

By 2012, CBD PCVs and their community partners will work with at least 2000 individuals (particularly women and youth) to expand their understanding of their work and career options and skills development (through formal and informal meetings, consultations and trainings). Thus 50% of direct beneficiaries will expand their job finding skills and understanding of work and career options.

GOAL 2: Businesses, informal community groups and community based organizations (including municipalities and NGOs) will serve their communities through effective use of organizational management, teamwork and leadership skills.

Objective 1: Organizational development

By 2012 CBD PCVs and their community partners will have assisted 80 businesses and community based organizations (including local governmental organizations and NGOs) to improve their organizational structures and their management skills. Thus 50% of beneficiaries will gain required skills to improve their organizational structures and their management skills

Objective 2: Teamwork and leadership

By 2012, PCVs with their community partners will assist 40 organizations (formal and informal) to learn and practice techniques to strengthen teamwork and enhance leadership.

Thus 50% of beneficiaries will learn and practice techniques to strengthen teamwork and enhance leadership.

GOAL 3: Municipalities, NGOs, community-based organizations, and informal community groups will effectively serve their communities by developing communication skills and networks of cooperation within their communities as well as externally.

Objective 1: Communication skills building

By 2012 CBD PCVs and their counterparts will work with 40 businesses and formal and informal community based organizations to improve their internal and external communication through developing writing, communication, publicity and ICT skills.

As a result 50% of beneficiaries will improve their internal and external communication through developed, writing, communication, publicity and ICT skills.

Objective 2: Business Networking

By 2012, CBD PCVs and their community partners will help 15 Business Support organizations and 100 local businesses develop and use networks of contacts with lenders, commercial enterprises and international organizations.

These new linkages will give 5 Business support organizations and 25 local businesses access to training, consulting services, financial resources and potential business contacts to reinforce and expand their commercial activities.

Objective 3: Community Networking

By 2012, CBD PCVs and their community partners will assist at least 80 community based organizations to develop and improve their network of contacts and their outreach, marketing and service delivery techniques.

Thus 50% of beneficiaries will improve their ability to develop and improve their network of contacts and their outreach, marketing and service delivery techniques.

4. Your Projects

Please tell us about the projects you have been working on. Write about any projects you were involved, this does not have to be only primary assignment projects. Please write in a narrative form about the work you have accomplished or are still in the process. It is very important while describing each activity to mention numbers, for example number of people trained, number of individuals assisted, number of formal and informal organizations that you helped, and number of business entities or entrepreneurs you consulted. These numbers can be approximate and also please mention gender distribution. Describe changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behavior as a result of the activities you mentioned. Please use bullets to separate activities. The electronic format will be more effective and appreciated.

Project Title: WiFi Internet Consultation/Internet Café Upgrades

CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objectives 1 and 3; Goal 3, Objective 2.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M: 2	W: 2	M: 5	W: 2	1 – Association/NGO	3

Activities Description:

I have been working on refining and redeploying the Internet services offered by Yerevak in a variety of capacities. In October, I helped to arrange and host a consultant

from the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO) who helped us design a new WiFi Internet network which is currently in the process of deployment to Noyemberyan and two additional communities, Koghb and Berdavan. I have consulted on various software and network applications, network design, and ISP operations and procedures, including offering technical support, safety and security, pricing structures, etc. I have also helped procure equipment from Yerevan and the United States to be used for the new network. I am currently helping to write a grant to complete the network upgrades (see future plans section) and to further expand the services offered by the NGO. I have also provided software consultation and advised on virus and ad-ware software and have installed and maintained it at Yerevak's Internet café (an extension of their LLC).

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities):
 Yerevak is more aware of network design, implementation and maintenance procedures as a result of my work. They have installed and used virus scanning software on their computers and at the local Internet café and they are distributing it to clients and community members throughout town. They are currently in the process of writing a grant to acquire the remaining equipment needed for expansion of their Internet network. The Yerevak IT specialist will be attending the Peace Corps Project Design and Management seminar in February 2007 and generally has more interest in acquiring IT management and technical skills.

Project Title: Computer Art Classes at Koghb Art School
CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 3.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M:	W: 4	M:	W:	1 – School	1

Activities Description:
 Performed weekly hour-long lessons on various computer graphics applications to upper-level art students. Topics of instruction have included Corel Draw, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia Flash, and Adobe Premier. Students were interested in learning to make labels in assorted graphics programs for products in the region. Thus far, 15 lessons have been conducted, and are still continuing. All lessons are accompanied by handouts and instructions as reference for further learning.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities):

One student has begun to design labels for businesses as a fee-based service. The students have expressed interest in a variety of other programs and are now more interested in computer graphics as a means of employment. The students are also planning on starting their own business in Koghb and have utilized several elements from lessons, including designing a business logo and offering design services.

Project Title: Computer Skills and PowerPoint Course at Noyemberyan School #2
CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 3.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M: 2	W: 10	M:	W:	1 – School	1

Activities Description:

Taught a 10 week, 15 hour course on various computer skills, including basic computer setup, using scanners and digital cameras, basic digital imaging, basic computer graphics, and Microsoft Office, with a focus on Microsoft PowerPoint. The course was offered for 9th and 10th form students and will continue again this semester after school with a focus on Internet skills and typing in both Armenian and English.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities):

Students have become more interested in computers and regularly ask for further lessons or explanations of topics discussed during the course. Students have demonstrated vast improvements in computer skills, and can now effectively assemble, use, and troubleshoot a computer. Many have told their friends or family about the courses and they would like more courses to be offered. Due to this need, I have worked with the School Director and the Project Harmony technician to begin offering more computer classes starting in February 2007.

Project Title: Handicap Accessibility Consultation at Noyemberyan School #2
CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 2; Goal 3, Objective 3.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M:	W:	M: 2	W: 3	1 – School	1

Activities Description:

Beginning in September 2007, Noyemberyan School #2 will be accepting 20 students with mental and physical disabilities as part of Bridge of Hope NGO's program, "Step by Step." The school is vastly unequipped, capitally, to support the students who require handicap accessible facilities. To prepare for the new students, we are working with the Bridge of Hope NGO, the Noyemberyan municipality, and the School #2 staff to raise money for accessible bathrooms and ramps to the school. We wrote one grant to the Save the Children "Community Self-Help Fund" (which we are waiting on) and are working on identifying other funding organizations. I worked closely with the school director, staff, community members, and the municipal government to draft a project proposal, design, monitoring and evaluation plan, and helped transfer skills in Excel-based budgeting, project design and management, and working with people with disabilities, including ramp design and construction assistance.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities): Several community and school members are anxiously awaiting results of the grant proposal, and several parents of, and students with disabilities, are now planning to enroll at Noyemberyan School #2 after learning of the proposed improvements. The school staff gained knowledge of project design, including segmentation and budgeting, and community members and the municipal government gained awareness and practical construction skills for designing handicap-accessible facilities.

Project Title: Consultation at Noyemberyan State College
CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 2, Objective 1;

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M:	W:	M: 1	W: 1	1 – School	1

Activities Description:

After the director of the Noyemberyan State College contacted me regarding various problems at the school (water, books, and facilities), myself and CBD volunteer Eileen Marin contacted and consulted with college staff over the course of two months. We developed a step-by-step plan for helping them overcome their problems and proposed "next steps" for how the college could do several things without money.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities): A strategic plan was developed for the college, including outlining goals, objectives, and a SWOT analysis for the college. As of yet, projects have not been implemented

and it is unclear whether the college will actively take the first steps needed to continue our consultative work with them.

Project Title: Consultation with Koghb Clothing and Craft Design start-up
CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 3.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M:	W: 4	M:	W:	1 – Business	1

Activities Description:

Consulted with four young women who are starting their own clothing design and craft company in Koghb. We analyzed their current business operations and developed their strategic plan. We also explained best-business practices and offered suggestions for starting their business in terms of marketing, sales and distribution, inventory and accounting, and website development.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities):

They have adapted several of our suggestions into their business practices. The best thing to come from our meeting was the opportunity for them to ask us questions and to figure out the best way for them to start their business given the business environment in Noyemberyan. Time will tell whether it will be successful or not.

Project Title: Computer Lab Upgrades and Maintenance at Noyemberyan School #2
CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 3; Goal 3, Objective 1.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M:	W:	M:	W: 2	1 – School	1

Activities Description:

The school purchased new computers for their lab three years ago but has no one on staff knowledgeable to perform maintenance and ensure system integrity and security. I consulted with the Informatics teacher and the school’s Project Harmony technician to determine the software, hardware and security needs for the computer lab. I helped teach them the appropriate procedures and made sure the lab fit their needs.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities):
 Both teachers are now knowledgeable and capable of performing upgrades and maintaining the computers in the lab without my assistance. They also understand the resources available in the lab better and will incorporate them into more classes at the school.

Project Title: English Speaking Clubs

CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 3.

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M: 8	W: 28	M:	W:		3

Activities Description:

Conducting weekly clubs in three communities (Noyemberyan, Koghb, and Djudjevan) with open memberships, where students and community members can come to practice spoken English. We develop a variety of activities but encourage members to develop their own discussion topics and to practice speaking as much as possible. Emphasis is on building confidence through jokes, stories, and discussion.

Outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, or behaviors as a result of these activities):

Many members have tremendously improved their confidence in their English speaking abilities and members were responsible for the creation of the second and third clubs outside of Noyemberyan. Armenian members actively recruit and develop activities for the club and express a very positive attitude and initiative towards the English language and American culture. Due to member interest, a weekly film club and discussion has been added and will further enhance their English abilities.

5. CBD Project Analysis. In this section please write your recommendations on improvements of the CBD project, please mention strengths and challenges. Your constructive feedback is highly appreciated.

Strengths:

The CBD program is very strong, and I enjoy the flexibility it gives me to work in the community and identify my work goals and objectives without much outside interference. Our program manager is a very strong asset to our program and is incredibly supportive in whatever direction we choose to take our service. The scope of

our goals and objectives are broad enough to allow us to work fluidly within the community, and afford us the opportunity to explore all avenues of business development, from youth education to business technology to NGO development.

Challenges:

The Armenia CBD program still lacks an identity for IT Development volunteers and the training is heavily skewed, both in terms of resources, presentations and networking opportunities, towards business and NGO volunteers. Very few meetings were arranged during training to meet IT organizations in Armenia. I think the training needs to be redefined for IT volunteers and offer more background of the IT environment in Armenia and what resources are available to us as volunteers. Also, I do not think our training adequately demonstrated to us what to expect when we got to site in terms of the business environment, so getting settled with work took longer than expected.

6. Work plans for next reporting period <February 1, 2007 – May 31, 2007 >:

I am currently working on two grant applications for community development projects. The first is for the Yerevak NGO through Peace Corps' SPA program and will focus on developing Yerevak's Internet services, training center, and business-technology training curriculums. I am also working with the Mission East organization, and possibly Peace Corps' SPA, to acquire final funding for our handicap accessibility project for Noyemberyan School #2.

I am also continuing classes in various capacities around Noyemberyan. I will be continuing lessons at Noyemberyan School #2 and at Koghb Art School on a weekly basis. All three English speaking clubs are continuing weekly, and a new English film watching and discussion club will begin soon.

I will be attending several trainings and seminars during this reporting period. The biggest is Peace Corps' Project Design and Management (PDM) course. My counterpart from Yerevak NGO will be attending. I hope the skills and the personal bonds we acquire from the training will be helpful in continuing our work. At Yerevak, I plan to continue consulting on their Internet systems, and also plan to focus on deploying Yerevak's, and their partner NGO Noyemberyan Communities Union's, websites. We are also planning several computer and technology trainings for Yerevak, including business and technology, website development, and computer graphics.

Another big project I am working on is coordinating the International Women's Day Essay Contest, in cooperation with the Center for Development of Civil Society NGO of Yerevan. My site mates and I helped to develop the questions and I am helping to ensure the project's funding, and in distributing and collecting essays from regional

schools via other Peace Corps volunteers. This will likely occupy a good portion of time but will be a very worthwhile experience.

I would like to further explore youth and community development this coming spring. It is my desire to fully transition Noyemberyan's computer club to the Informatics and Project Harmony teachers, to ensure sustainability after I leave. I would like to see Koghb's computer lesson evolve so that the current students begin to offer classes to the younger students, with only my background support. I also plan to help the Art School in other capacities, including website development and Internet marketing. There are also many opportunities for youth development work in Noyemberyan, from sports programs I plan to offer (Frisbee, running, baseball) to educational activities, such as basic business classes and gifted education. I am also working at the International Outreach Camp in Vanadzor this July, so I will be attending meetings and trainings for the camp, as well as developing curriculum about civic education and other topics.

Furthermore, there is a big need for a community center or theater in Noyemberyan, and I would like to investigate this as well. I would also like to find other avenues and outlets for sharing American culture, possibly through a television program on local Kamut TV station.

I am currently a member of the Youth Development and Gender and Development Peace Corps initiatives and plan to be active and attend meetings when possible. I would also like take on a role with the Information and Communication Technology Initiative if time allows. I am working on various ways to help strengthen the information technology infrastructure within Peace Corps-Armenia, including remote form submission and a reformed project history database. [Arshak – this is referring to PCArmenia.am website work, which Justin and I co-chair now. This should probably be removed or “politically edited” before submission to Washington].

7. Your Personal SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). Recommendations/lessons learned regarding any of the activity organized by you.

Strengths:

- Flexibility in projects
- Strong motivation and work ethic
- Language progress
- Practicing all three Peace Corps goals equally

Weaknesses:

- Often take on too much work – hard to say “no”

Busy with work – less time for goals 2 and 3
Spend too much social time with site mates, less with HCN/family
Little support from site mates with work

Opportunities:

Transition Noyemberyan and Koghb classes – more hands-off
Community and youth development projects
Fully acclimated at work and site
Plans for vacation outside of Armenia – R&R

Threats:

Taking on too much responsibility out of site
Expenses incurred from out of site work
Relying on projects/grants for work
Becoming over-involved (stress/anxiety)
Staying healthy (good food and exercise)

8. Recommendations regarding any of the activity organized by PC Armenia.

Overall, training for PC Armenia was a good experience, and was especially important for getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of our fellow volunteers and what contributions they will bring to their various sites. The language training was the most vital part of our training this summer and I cannot compliment my teachers enough for their hard work and excellent instruction, both in language and culture. The rest of the training, including the All-Volunteer Conference, was a nice way to get us out of our sites for awhile, which is always welcome, although much of the information could have been presented through a handout or electronically, and many of the questions should have been answered on an individual basis instead of in front of the group. The culture lessons and any training that is applicable to our living on a day to day basis was most important and I wish there would have been more about what we should expect from *Armenia* and not a general overview (diversity, for instance).

9. What kind of assistance would you like to receive from PC?

One of the most difficult parts of my site is adapting to the lack of resources available – there is rarely Internet access, an unreliable phone system, and a difficult business environment to work in general. There are a lot of outside expenses incurred to do business, including Internet access, using my personal cell phone for business

calls, and business trips to Yerevan or Vanadzor which are not reimbursed. This can make for a difficult situation when we must choose between making a phone call for work and buying food for dinner. While this is the same situation many Armenians face on a daily basis, there should be more attention to providing us with the necessary resources to be a better volunteer at site. I also disagree with Peace Corps' general disassociation with us as volunteers, as we are not allowed to use the Peace Corps name or receive a Peace Corps email address. I feel this takes away from our credibility as volunteers and does not allow us to work to our full potential.

10. Success Story based on any Peace Corps and/or CBD Project Goal.

Thus far my greatest success at site has been my integration and application of Peace Corps' goals 2 and 3. Especially through English speaking clubs and my lessons, I have been able to get to know several HCNs on a personal level and have been able to share about American culture while learning about Armenian culture. I have a very strong relationship with my World Wide Schools class, and my blog is shared with a wide audience in America about my experiences here. Most importantly, the relationships which I have developed at my site, between my family, students, teachers and friends, have been critical to my integration at site and being able to perform the work of CBD Project Goals and Peace Corps' goal 1. An example of this is my students at Koghb Art School; I am their teacher for computer graphics lessons and they are members of our Koghb English speaking club. They took an interest in our American Christmas, and decided to throw us a Christmas party on December 25th. While many PCVs were celebrating together, we were with a group of HCNs who wanted to learn about our Christmas traditions. They learned American Christmas songs, translated "Twas the Night Before Christmas," made Santa hats, and cooked a Christmas turkey. It was a great learning experience for everybody. As part of the exchange, they invited us to their New Years festivities, and asked me and my site mate to dress up as the traditional Armenian Christmas figures "Dzin Anushik" and "Zmer Papik." We have a very good relationship, both on a professional and personal level, with these students and feel they have been very important to our cultural exchange with the Armenian people.