

Peace Corps Armenia

CBD Project Progress Report #2

Reporting Period: February 1, 2007 - May 31, 2007
Due Date to PC: May 31, 2007

Name of PCV: Kyle Gifford

1. Basic Information

Town /Village	Name of the Organizations you are working with:
Noyemberyan	Yerevak NGO, Support for Noyemberyan NGO, Noyemberyan School #2, Koghb Art School, Bridge of Hope NGO, Yerevan International Women's Council, YCAP, Center for Development of Civil Society, CAPS, OSCE, Peace Corps' SPA/PCPP program

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: Technology Accessibility for Noyemberyan Region

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

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M:	W:	M: 4	W: 1	1 – Association/NGO	9

Activities Description: My work with Yerevak NGO on their WiFi Internet system has occupied the largest portion of my time for this reporting period. We have done much work in restructuring our current system, including selecting a new, more reliable

service provider, re-installing and re-configuring our network, installing new ISP software, and developing an expansion plan which will reach 9 more villages in the Noyemberyan region. The technology specialist at the NGO attended the Peace Corps' Project Design and Management seminar in February, and we submitted a SPA grant application in mid-March, which was accepted. Computer upgrades have been purchased for the NGO's training center, new Internet equipment was purchased, and training plans have begun for a business-technology training seminar in June or August. The NGO has also agreed to establish new training seminars for the training center, and will host a Computer Camp for area youth sponsored by CAPS in August.

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

As a result of our changes and upgrades to the WiFi Internet network, Yerevak has expanded its services to more clients and has seen a steady increase in Internet traffic from Noyemberyan and area villages. A SPA grant was also received, which helped build the NGO's capacity by purchasing new computers and equipment, which have taught employees newer technology and will enable the NGO's trainees to have access to more advanced technology in the training center. The NGO has a much stronger sense for how an Internet Service Provider should operate, and is currently re-evaluating its services, pricing and marketing to better reach its clients. The technology specialist and several employees have acquired many new skills related to computer networking and computer installation, maintenance and repair. The NGO's employees have also developed a much better attitude in looking at new ideas and ways to expand their services, including expressing a desire to include youth and local business as part of their future training offerings.

Project Title: Computer Skills Classes at Koghb Art School

CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 3; Goal 3, 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: I conducted weekly hour-long lessons on various computer applications to upper-level art students. Topics of instruction have included Corel Draw, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia Flash, Macromedia Dreamweaver, Microsoft FrontPage, and Adobe Premier. The students are becoming more involved with a local business support NGO and have expressed the desire to study web-site design and implementation. In addition to case-studies and hands-on lessons, we have begun consulting with various local businesses to understand the project cycle for web-site

design. Students have also been using the International Computer Drivers License CD being tested by Peace Corps.

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

Two of the students are now working with a local NGO, Support For Noyemberyan, to make small web-sites for four small businesses in and around Noyemberyan. They are very proactive in trying the new technologies they are using, and are always asking questions and wanting to learn new things. Their attitude towards technology has changed very much over the past 6 months, and it is possible they will pursue technology in the form of video production, graphics or Internet technology as a career. Their excitement has instilled interest amongst their peers and it is our goal in my next year to help them establish an Internet connection and a small computer lab, as well as additional self-taught classes at the Art School.

Project Title: Handicap Accessibility at Noyemberyan School #2

CBD Project Goals and Objectives Met: Goal 1, Objective 2; Goal 2, Objective 1; 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 2 – Association/NGO	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 a grant to the Yerevan International Women's Council for ramp renovations, which we received in May. Groundbreaking is set to begin in June.

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

Several community and school members are excited about the results of the YIWC grant, 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. Now they will use these

skills to manage the project implementation phases with minimal oversight from Peace Corps volunteers. The school and implementing NGO Bridge of Hope both applied for a CHE volunteer, which will further help them implement this project in Noyemberyan.

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:	4 – Schools	2

Activities Description: Conducting weekly clubs in two communities (Noyemberyan and Koghb) with open memberships, where students and community members can come to practice spoken English. We developed 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 club 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.

Project Title: Women’s Day Essay Contest

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

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M: 15	W: 135	M:	W: 10	25 – Schools 1 – Association/NGO	22

Activities Description: I was the Peace Corps liaison for the 4th annual Women’s Day Essay Contest, which was principally coordinated by the Center for the Development of Civil Society NGO in Yerevan. I was responsible for advertising the essay contest to all Peace Corps volunteers through a variety of means, collecting the essays and helping with the awards ceremony. I was also involved in the fundraising efforts and helped to secure funding for the project from OSCE in Yerevan. I worked with other volunteers

to write the essay questions for the contest, and also helped with grant writing, project planning, and budgeting.

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

The project was once again successful this year. Because of the continuing interest of the NGO to implement this project without the aid of outside organizations, they handled most of the budgeting, facilities rental, and program coordination with minimal assistance from Peace Corps. The NGO is becoming increasingly independent and produced a strong, fully-funded contest this year. There were 25 schools involved from 9 regions in Armenia, and over 150 essays were received. The results of the contest and the awards ceremony, including recognition of Peace Corps involvement, were featured on several local television stations and newspapers. Peace Corps' Program and Training Manager Jason Compy also spoke at the ceremony, providing further publicity for the program and Peace Corps. An article on local students and Peace Corps involvement was published in a Noyemberyan newspaper.

Project Title: International English Writing Olympics - Noyemberyan

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

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M: 6	W: 24	M:	W:	4 – School	2

Activities Description: Together with other PCVs from my site, we held a local English Writing Olympics for 6th-10th form students in Noyemberyan and Koghb. The program was part of a larger project sponsored by Peace Corps Volunteers in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. 30 students gathered on a Sunday morning in April to write a creative essay in English about one of many pre-selected topics. Three winners from each form were selected to go to the national contest. An awards ceremony was held in late April for all students who participated, along with their teachers and local school directors.

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

Several students were very excited about the contest and the opportunity to write in English for a national contest. Many students and teachers have expressed interest in participating next year, and one teacher has expressed interest in coordinating the event to make it a sustainable activity. An article on the essay and students/volunteers involved was also published in a local Noyemberyan newspaper.

Project Title: International Outreach Camp

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

Individuals Assisted		Services Providers Assisted		Organizations Strengthened and Type of Organization	Communities Assisted
M: 30	W: 70	M: 2	W: 2	1 – Association/NGO	1

Activities Description: I will be a teacher at the International Outreach Camp, which will be held this summer near Vanadzor. The mission of the program is to instill belief and skills in young people that they can create the civil society they want to live in, both locally and globally. As part of my role, I am working with an Armenian co-teacher to develop curriculum to teach in-depth country studies courses as a part of a larger civic-leadership program. The camp will invite 70 Armenian students and 30 international students and will offer courses in civic leadership, country studies and cultural understanding. I have worked with a large group of Armenians and Americans in coordinating this camp to ensure it is successful, through curriculum development and general discussion with the sponsoring NGO. I also helped write and sponsored a Peace Corps Partnership Project to promote the IOC camp and raise money for student scholarships and cultural excursions.

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

The camp program is coming along very well with the support of numerous PCVs and Armenian staff. Many Armenians involved with the projects have learned a myriad of new skills, including project design and development, curriculum development, and a general understanding of how the civic and economic systems around them work. In addition, our Partnership Project was recently fulfilled and will allow 10 additional Armenian students to attend the camp this summer, for a total of 70.

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 main challenge is continually defining and establishing the role of IT volunteers within the CBD group. The expectations of my roles within Armenia are still ambiguous in my mind, although this affords certain flexibility in my work. I would recommend continuing to try and better integrate the IT program into PST training and continue to establish networks between PCVs and IT companies/programs within Armenia. This may also include notification of IT-related events that are taking place in Yerevan or other marzes, which may not otherwise be relayed to volunteers.

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

June will be spent in Noyemberyan implementing my two outstanding projects. Working with Yerevak NGO, we will continue to implement and improve the WiFi Internet to Noyemberyan and surrounding towns, including a planned roll-out to several additional villages by the end of the summer. Further service offerings, including a new pricing structure and additional features and training (email for instance) are currently in the planning stages. The second project is the construction phase for the handicapped accessibility project at School #2. Groundbreaking should begin by mid-June and the project will be finished before IOC camp in July.

From July 4-20th, I will be working at the IOC camp in Vanadzor as a co-teacher and team leader. This is a very exciting opportunity and will reach a very large audience of Armenians and international students with very important information about civic leadership and establishing international relationships.

The remainder of the reporting period will be spent on several projects. In August, Yerevak NGO will be hosting two major trainings I will be involved with. The first is the Smart Technology for Smarter Businesses training, which will help 10 businesses and NGOs better implement technology into their office environments. Yerevak will also host a week-long computer camp for area youth in cooperation with the CAPS program and an NGO in Charentsevan.

English and computer trainings will also continue throughout the summer when I am available. I also plan to use this as a time to work with area youth on a more personal level, whether through 1-on-1 English speaking or through recreational activities. This will also be a good time to begin plans for next school year with local school directors and others involved with youth-oriented projects.

Additional pursuits will also be made in further expanding the handicapped accessibility project at school #2, and also orienting a new CHE Peace Corps volunteer to the city, local businesses, NGOs and schools if we receive one.

7. Your Personal SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

- Strong connection with many community groups and businesses
- Good balance of all three Peace Corps goals
- Fluidity between projects
- Flexibility in work environments
- Language acquisition (also began studying Russian and Arabian)
- Health – eating better and getting exercise

Weaknesses:

- Often take on too much work – hard to say “no”
- Busy with work – less time for goals 2 and 3 than desired
- Spend too much social time with site mates, less with HCN/family

Opportunities:

- Working in a camp environment
- Meeting new organizations and youth this summer
- Building on existing successes (and failures)
- New volunteers working at my site

Threats:

- Taking on too much responsibility
- Expenses incurred from out of site work
- Relying on projects/grants for work
- Becoming over-involved (stress/anxiety)
- Not letting HCNs perform the majority of work

8. Recommendations/lessons learned regarding any activities organized by you.

I am learning something new every day from my Peace Corps service and my activities; I have learned a lot about grants and how they work, and the difficulties associated with them. For SPA, there was a substantial amount of writing work required for the project, all of which was required to be submitted in English. My organization in general speaks very little English and it is difficult to impossible for them to write the required amount of information. This certainly concerns me, as SPA projects are supposed to be community-driven, not volunteer driven. This is definitely one of the things I learned first hand to watch out for. Also, the way (and speed) in which grants and grant money are delivered in this country is not consistent, reliable or timely (SPA included unfortunately) and this can make for problems in project

timelines. I have learned that it is necessary to provide a substantial buffer for budget problems, money delays, and the power going off within every aspect of the project.

9. Recommendations regarding any of the activities organized by PC Armenia.

I thought the Project Design and Management program was very well put on, and it was extremely helpful to my counterpart and his NGO. The interactive learning methods used were very excellent and helped my counterpart and me to engage one another instead of just listening to a lecturer. While he entered with the expectation that we would be writing a grant application instead of learning a process, ultimately it was good the way it was. My only recommendations would be to mention a little about the SPA process and the differences between what was taught at PDM and what is required for SPA. One thing that was not touched on that turned out to be very difficult was the bidding process and why this is a required facet. Overall it was a very good program, however, and I would recommend it highly.

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

It would be extremely beneficial if Peace Corps would publish a list of international organizations that are working in Armenia, what program areas they are focused on, and a real life contact for us to work with. I realize this is a difficult thing and it would be very hard to maintain, but it is certainly better than recreating the wheel for every group of volunteers. Any connections to local/national/international IT organizations, as well as links to computer training manuals published in Armenian would be helpful.

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

There are many things I would consider a success, from the earnest friendships I have made, to the situations I've survived, to the successful projects I've implemented. However, my biggest success thus far likely stems from four students of mine at the Koghb Art School. While initially I met them and agreed only to teach a weekly computer class, our relationship has quickly grown into one where we celebrate one another's holidays, attend bar-b-ques together, and learn about each others language, culture and beliefs. Our professional relationship is also great – we now have many classes, formal and informal exchanges, and they express a genuine interest in learning from me (and I from them). They have actually applied the knowledge they have used and are beginning to make logos for businesses, sell products they've designed (they even made a company name based on my advice!) and are producing their first web-sites for businesses in the area. Our mutual friendship bridges all three Peace Corps goals and is one success story in my life I will certainly never forget.