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Volunteer Reflection

Foreword

Volunteer Reflection: is a practical guidance on how to encourage reflective thought both at the individual and collective level on what it means to be a volunteer. The tool is part of a Volunteer Toolkit, which contains eight (8) volunteer management tools: The Volunteer Toolkit has been developed to support the implementation of UNV Programme Strategy 2011- 2013, more specifically to enhance the effectiveness of volunteer management and the skills of UN Volunteers to become good advocates of Volunteerism for Peace and Development.

The Volunteer Toolkit is to be disseminated and/or made available to UN Volunteers over the course of their volunteer assignment. The objective is to ensure that UN Volunteers (POs, other international UN Volunteers, and national UN Volunteers) can benefit from each tool at the relevant stage of their assignment: Pre-assignment; Support during assignment and End of Assignment.

Front Cover: National UN Volunteer Larry Zalave, UNV Water and Sanitation Officer with UNICEF, provides technical advice to displaced families living in evacuation camps in the Philippines (UNV, 2009).



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Background for the volunteer reflection toolkit

With the adoption of its corporate and strategic plans, UNV¹ is strengthening the promotion of volunteerism for peace and development and is focusing on embedding UNV mandate and strategy at all stages of the volunteer management cycle. This is achieved through the development of specific volunteer management tools and instruments.

Changing culture or ‘the way we do things around here’ needs to be driven towards the outcome, i.e. the promotion of volunteerism for peace and development. To this end, UNV has been monitoring its support culture and fine-tuning

adjustments to tools, policies and support structures. Attitude and policy change can reinforce each other and lead to behavioral change, and at the same time this can also feedback to reinforce pro-volunteering attitudes and policies.

UNV has been making efforts to help all UN Volunteers gain a deeper understanding of the impact of volunteerism on peace and development, to enhance the volunteer spirit and feeling of belonging to the UNV programme, and to have richer volunteer experiences. In order to achieve this objective, different tools have been developed to support UN Volunteers during their assignments. One such tool is the Volunteer Reflection Toolkit.

The purpose of reflection is to guide UN Volunteers to see things from different perspectives, to promote ways in which

1. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. Volunteerism can transform the pace and nature of development and it benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers.



they can learn from their volunteer experiences, to recognize their contributions to development and peace, and to help them grow as a person.

Volunteers all over the world explore and analyze their thoughts and actions, and try to find the meaning behind their volunteer efforts. In the words of one UN Volunteer:

“[Reflection] is a very good process and I totally support it. During the last 15 months ... I have been following a similar process. However, I didn't have the time and effort to document [the process] in writing or in a certain format. I wish I had a template so that I could document it.”

UNV Field Units are encouraged to collect and collate results from volunteer reflection activities and share with UNV HQ on a regular basis.

The Volunteer Reflection Toolkit should enhance the volunteer experience by encouraging the use of reflective thought in order to maximize learning, and to provide a framework for those volunteers who feel they need more structure or ideas in order to do this. This self-directed Toolkit has been designed with all UN Volunteers in mind. It is modular, so each stage of the toolkit can be used independently. The modules focus on the beginning, middle and end of the volunteer assignment. It has been designed to complement other tools, such as the End-of-Assignment Manual. Many practical activities are suggested in the Toolkit that can help UN Volunteers think deeply about the meaning of their assignments and actions.

Examples of the activities include starting a journal, meditating and writing an action plan. These activities can be carried out individually or in groups (during briefing sessions, retreats or annual meetings).

Building volunteer identity through reflection: Why reflection?

“Learning without thought is labor lost.”

Confucius, Chinese Philosopher (551-479 BC)

What is reflection? Reflection is a way to think deeply about our actions so that we can be even more effective in the future. Most of the time, we are very busy carrying out our tasks for our host organizations. Reflection is an opportunity to stop for a moment, and take the time to think about our volunteer contribution. Reflection uses creative and critical thinking skills to help you prepare for, succeed in, and learn from your volunteer experience. It will give you a chance to put your volunteer assignment into the context of the larger picture and understand the impact of your volunteering.

Why reflect? Volunteers everywhere are asking themselves questions such as ‘How does my commitment fit into the larger picture?’, ‘What has changed because of my actions?’, ‘Has this been worthwhile?’, etc. Reflection is exactly this: the process of thinking critically about our experiences and actions in order to

lead to new understanding. This is important for volunteers. It helps you generate new ideas, gives new perspectives on things, helps you to grow as a person and ultimately can improve your outputs. At different stages of an assignment, reflection can help you to focus on questions that are specific to a certain point in time. Some examples are questions about cultural integration or preparation for future opportunities.

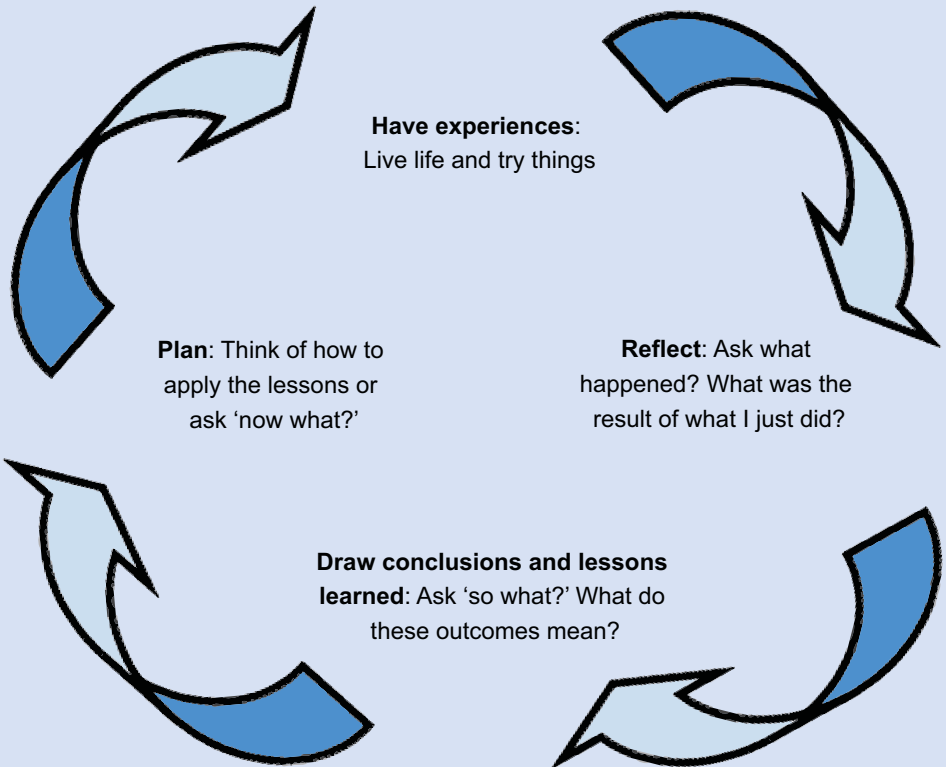
How do I reflect? Reflection can happen through writing, speaking, listening, reading, drawing, acting, etc. Many more ideas and examples are given in Appendix 1 and 2. This Toolkit is designed for self-directed learning, but **self-directed** does not mean **solitary**. Self-direction implies that you take charge of your own learning. You will need to find the resource people and tools necessary to meet your needs.

Phases of Reflection: Reflection is an ongoing process, and is part of learning. The learning that you do, the questions you ask, and the steps that you take will prompt you to ask more questions.



Kolb's learning styles

This Toolkit focuses on some critical points in your volunteer assignment, namely the beginning, middle, end and post assignment stages. However, reflection can happen at any time and you should not feel constrained by the exercises suggested here.



Phases of reflection

Phase 1: Start of the Assignment

Reflection at the start of your UN Volunteer assignment can help you to consider your expectations for the assignment, to think about what challenges and learning opportunities you may have, and to develop a plan of action that is realistic and well informed. It is an opportunity to think about why volunteerism is important and how it is an important part of your assignment.

Some activities are given here. There are more examples in Appendix 1, if you want more ideas:

1. Discussion: Try to talk with other volunteers, colleagues, family members or with other people you trust about what you expect will happen during your volunteer assignment. Try to discuss things that appear to be obvious, because many assumptions or stereotypes are mistaken. Consider writing down your discussions for the future so you can use your notes for planning, or to look back at later.

2. Write a Letter to Yourself: In this exercise, you will write a letter to yourself. The letter can talk about how you feel right now, how you would like to feel later,

what you would like to achieve and why, an issue that is important to you, or something that you want to change in the world. You can write about anything really! The purpose of the activity is to show how thinking about the future can help guide your current actions. This letter is just for you to see, so try to be as honest as possible. When you have written the letter, date it and put it in a sealed envelope in a safe place.

3. Sit and Be Thoughtful: Reflecting this way can be done as a part of a group or individually. Well known examples are to meditate or to participate in religious or traditional ceremonies. The activity involves sitting quietly and giving oneself time to think, breathe, and be. Try training yourself to make one activity per day a 'thoughtful one'. For example, take a morning cup of tea in a quiet spot and concentrate on how it feels to drink the tea. Or spend 10 minutes before bed each day clearing your mind of the day's events. The purpose of the activity is to focus your thoughts and energy in one area such as what you achieved yesterday, what you would like to do differently in the future, and what you want to do today.



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4. Start a journal: Journal writing can focus on one particular topic, or can include all ideas you have- it is up to you. You can make entries and updates as often as you like. Adding drawings and photographs is optional. Although journaling can feel awkward at first, you will probably start to look forward to the opportunity to collect your thoughts each day. As an additional benefit, a journal can serve as a very special memento of the time spent at your volunteer assignment. (Click here for an example)

5. Practice activities that increase focus and energy: Examples are walking, running, going to the gym, doing yoga or tai chi, or any other physical activity that encourages you to free your mind of thoughts and worries. Take this time to focus on one topic or idea that you want to think more deeply about, and use it as a personal time to explore. For all activities, keep in mind the security situation at your assignment location.

6. Write an Action Plan: After looking over your Description of Assignment (DoA), and having your initial briefing with the UNV Field Unit and your supervisor, try to write specific, realistic actions that you plan to take during your assignment. Include ways that you can promote volunteerism for development in your

assignment. Try to think of concrete ways of how mobilizing, promoting, and advocating for volunteerism can help you to get the job done and make it a more satisfying experience in the process.

The format of this action plan is flexible. (You may be asked to write a plan for your supervisor, but do not duplicate your efforts if you do not need to). A plan can cover planned actions, ways to monitor progress, target dates, who is responsible, time commitments, etc. It is suggested that you provide a copy to your supervisor as well as to the UNV Field Unit so that they can comment and provide support in specific areas. (Click here for an example)

7. Write a Personal Learning Plan: A volunteer assignment has opportunities to learn formally and informally. To make the most of these learning opportunities, it is suggested to create a plan of your learning objectives. Items that you may want to plan for are language learning, cultural integration, personal development courses, etc. It may be useful to think about this in terms of the skills, talent, knowledge and strengths you already possess, those that you would like to acquire, and what you could do to help you achieve these. For personal development, you may want to speak with

your supervisor in order to find out what areas s/he feels are most important and where you might get the budget to undertake the learning.

8. Prepare for Integration to the Organization and Culture: Changing locations, responsibilities, and organizations can be very exciting, but it can also be stressful and cause anxiety. You may have these feelings regardless of whether you have moved a lot in the past. It is important to take the time to reflect on what the changes mean to you and to think about some of the ways you can prepare for them. A new culture or organization has ideas, systems, and technologies of their own. You will need to discover these and become accustomed to them. The process of adjusting to a new culture is known as ‘culture shock’. The people around you will have to adapt to you as well. Openness, respect for local knowledge, and curiosity are important in this stage.

Some suggested exercises are:

- If security permits, do a neighborhood walk-through, and ask: What is that? Why is it used? Who uses it and when? Etc.
- Organize an excursion of national and international UN Volunteers in the home

village of national volunteers where he/she can show local culture and custom to build strong relationship with each other.

- Organize the gatherings with national and international volunteers in informal meetings/lunches/coffees/cinema to enhance cohesion.
- Take on a ‘buddy’, or a person who you feel comfortable asking cultural questions, from within your organization or neighborhood. Ask them cultural questions or inquire about local behaviors. How you choose your buddy should also be culturally appropriate.
- Make use of opportunities to meet community members and talk to them. Discuss their ideas, inspirations and aspirations. What would they like to change in their community and is it possible that you do something together to bring positive change to the community?
- Reflection on culture. Some questions could be:
 - How does my home culture or previous organizations in which I have worked or volunteered influence how I react to my host organization or culture?



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- What personal strengths and weaknesses do I have in terms of getting settled into my new location? What do I expect to find easy? Difficult? And, why?
- What do I expect to find challenging? Has there been something already that confuses me? Did I do something that produced a reaction I didn't understand?
- How will I continue to perform well at my volunteer assignment while I go through this emotional time?
- How will I introduce my home culture to my hosts?
- There are many ways to integrate into the host organization or culture- use your imagination. Generally, it is recommended to do activities that you enjoy. Maintain a sense of humor and an interest in learning, without worrying about making mistakes. (Click here for an example)

Tips and guidance on how to adapt to a new culture and how to recognize and manage stress are included as appendices. (Click here)

Phase 2: Half-way Through the Assignment

The half-way point of your assignment is an excellent time to think about what you have done, consider what you have learned, and think about how you have changed. You can use this time to come up with new ideas, to look at your learning plans, or to change the way you have been doing things. You may choose to change your actions in areas that were not been as successful as you had hoped would be. Some possible activities for reflection at the mid-way point are:

1. Review your Action Plan: An action plan is only effective if it is used to help guide your activities. It is useful to review the plan and see where you have been doing the most work. Use the notes made in your journal or elsewhere to monitor your progress against the plan. This is a good time to speak with your supervisor and to ensure that you are meeting his or her expectations of the assignment.

If you find that you are not doing any activities directly in the area of social development or peace-building, or do not feel like a volunteer, you may want to ask yourself what you can change about your assignment. Other reflection questions are:

- What have I learned from being a volunteer?

- How has volunteerism been expressed in my assignment?
- I am a volunteer. In what ways is me being a volunteer important to the objectives of the assignment?
- What challenges have there been to volunteerism in my assignment?
- Why is volunteering important to development and peace?
- In what ways has my volunteer assignment contributed to development/peace? Be specific and give concrete examples.
- How has my volunteer experience changed me and those around me?

By going through some of these questions, you may be able to come up with some clearer ways to integrate volunteerism into your personal plans. For more reflection questions, see Appendix 4.

2. Review your Personal Learning Plan:

A review of your personal learning plan will highlight which learning objectives you have achieved and which have been neglected. You may notice that there are learning objectives that you originally forgot in your plan, but now realize are important. Revise the plan and budget.

3. An After Action Review is a discussion or review of a project or an activity that can enable you and other individuals involved to learn for themselves what happened, why it happened, what went well, what needs improvement, and what lessons can be learned from the experience. Lessons learned are not only tacitly shared on the spot by the individuals involved, but can be explicitly documented and shared with a wider audience. After Action Reviews are an excellent basis for, and often feed into, the development of Lessons Learned papers (see below).

What are the benefits of After Action Reviews?

After Action Reviews are an excellent way of reviewing an activity or a project in a systematic way and allowing you to capture the main strengths, weaknesses and lessons. Learning can be captured before a team disbands, or before people forget what happened and move on to something new. Despite the name ('after action'), they do not have to be performed at the end of a project or activity. Rather, they can be performed after an identifiable event within a project or major activity, thus becoming a live learning process in which lessons learned can be immediately applied. Conducting regular After Action Reviews throughout your volunteer



assignment can help you to track progress, correct unintended impacts and ensure planned results.

4. Lessons Learned Papers synthesize evaluations and reports, good practice and comparative experiences into concrete studies of your work. They allow you, and UNV, to reflect on past practice and provide concrete recommendations for improving UNV's performance in the future. Lessons Learned papers from UN Volunteers and UNV Field Units are generally short one or two pagers on individual projects or specific activities within a project. Lessons Learned papers can result from conducting After Action Reviews. In general, Lessons Learned papers work best when they are case-specific and limited in scope.

5. Continue the Activities From the Beginning of Your Assignment or Start New Ones: Look back to some of your earlier writings, drawings or activities and think about how these activities have helped you in your daily life. Do you now look forward to your reflection activities? Do they meet your needs? Now is the perfect time to change activities if you want to. If you want new ideas or inspiration, look at Appendix 1.

6. Open the Letter to Yourself: If you did this exercise, now is the time to find the letter you wrote to yourself and open it. Use the opportunity to see how you have changed, how your ideas have changed, whether you are on target with your goals, etc.

Phase 3: End-of-Assignment

The end of the assignment can be filled with emotions- both ups and downs- and filled with ideas of what will happen next in life. Reflection is useful in order to prepare you for the upcoming changes. More information on the process of ending your assignment is given in the End-of-Assignment Handbook. The Volunteer Reflection Toolkit complements this information.

Possible activities for reflection are:

1. Personal Reflection: There will be many questions that will fill your thoughts at this stage of your assignment. These can be addressed through your journal, through reflective thought during meditation or exercise, through discussions with friends or family, etc. If you would like some ideas on how to express yourself, see Appendix 1. Some reflection questions are listed below. You will probably go over more or less questions depending on your personal needs. As well, your answers will

probably not be ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but often reflect a complex mix of feelings that are somewhere in between. Examples are:

- As a result of my volunteering experience, do I have a better understanding of my role as citizen and as a volunteer in my home community? How do I intend to use this experience to be active in my home community after the assignment has finished?
- How have I benefited from my volunteer experience personally/academically/professionally? In what ways? List some concrete achievements.
- Did I make an impact on those around me? How so and on whom?
- Did I mobilize other people to volunteer or teach anyone about the benefits of volunteerism? Are there any concrete results from this?
- What social need, challenge, or public issue have I given the most thought and energy to this year? Why was this issue important to me? Will I continue to advocate on this issue when I finish my assignment?

More examples of reflection questions are located in Appendix 4.

2. Final Review of your Personal Action Plan

Plan: The end of assignment is an excellent time to sit down with your action plan, take stock of your concrete contributions to peace and development, and to put explanations against any objectives that you simply could not meet. If this final review is done with your supervisor, it can serve as the basis for a final performance review and competency based letter of reference. Use the notes made in your journal or elsewhere to prepare for this meeting, and make sure that you give your supervisor advance notice that you would like his or her comments on your performance as a volunteer.

3. Planning for What is Next: The end of your assignment is an important time and there will be many decisions for what is coming up next. The first choice is likely to be where you want to be. Will you go home, stay in the location of assignment or move to a totally different location? Then you will need to choose whether you work, study, volunteer again, take a sabbatical or go on vacation.

To help you visualize your options, you may want to do brainstorming or a ‘mind map’ (see Appendix 2 for an example). You will need to think about your strengths, weaknesses, priorities and past



experiences. Before making a final decision on what is next, you may want to consider what your motivations and interests are, and how these have changed over the course of your volunteer assignment. It is interesting to consider what you **do** want in the next phase of your life, but also what you **don't** want to do.

Once you have decided what comes next, things will move more smoothly if you have a plan. Break tasks into small, workable pieces, and create a timeline with a corresponding budget if necessary. This can serve as your roadmap towards achieving your next goals in life.

4. Preparing for the End-of-Assignment:

If you return home at the end of your assignment, there will be a re-adjustment to the life, culture, family and friends that remained behind. The stages of reverse culture shock are covered in the End-of-Assignment Handbook. Most people think that going home will be an easy or happy event. Although going home can be happy, this transition implies many changes and challenges. Many factors will influence how this transition affects you, but reflecting and planning ahead will likely smooth the transition or at least prepare you for what to expect.

The following reflection questions may help prepare you for this process.

- Have I changed over the assignment? How do I expect that my loved ones will have changed? Have there been major family events that I have missed or decisions I will need to take when I return (for example family illnesses, a close friend moving away, etc.)?
- Have things that are important to me changed?
- How will I describe my volunteer experience to my family or friends?
- Will I need my friends and family support me (financially, with room and board, emotionally)? If so, for how long? Is this realistic?
- Going home will not be perfect. Can I anticipate five things that will bother me about being home? Five things I expect to enjoy? What will I miss about being on volunteer assignment?
- There may be a time of feeling disconnected, lack of motivation or depression after I return to my home culture. Have I ever had feelings like this before? What will I do if these feelings come up? Does reflection help?

- Do I have a plan ready for what I want to do next? In what ways can I include my volunteer experiences into my life plan?
- How will I stay in contact with my host culture or community? Do I have ways that I can teach my home culture about my host, or otherwise bridge the gap between the two?
- Think and write 5 little stories (funny and interesting) from your volunteer experience to tell your family and friends.
- Collect 5 interesting photos or mementos from your volunteer experience to share with your family and friends.

5. Share Your Lessons or Your Story: One

of the amazing things about the UNV family is that there is a huge group of people volunteering towards the same goals. The stories, lessons, and documents that come from your experiences can help other volunteers. If you find that there are lessons or stories that come out of your reflection, please consider the following:

- Share photos, stories, project documents with your UNV PM or PO. The PM/PO will link with the UNV Communications Unit at headquarters, the UNDP Public Information Unit, with local press and with volunteer networks in other countries. If you need help getting started with your article writing, try looking back at your journal and some of the photographs you have taken. For step by step guidance, you can search online for 'how to write an article' and many sites will come up.

- Prepare a list of your friends in the country/place of assignment and write them an email summarizing the best moments you had during your assignment.
- Upload your documents onto the World Volunteer Web at www.worldvolunteerweb.org/tools/contribute.html. The World Volunteer Web is a website for information and resources linked to volunteerism. These can be used for campaigning, advocacy and networking.

See suggestions on how to write a story in Appendix 2.

Phase 4: After Returning Home

"Less 'former' and more 'forever' volunteers"

Former UN Volunteer, 2007.

Reflection does not need to stop at the end of your volunteer assignment. Ongoing reflection can help you to clear your thoughts and feelings over the long-term.



You may find yourself exploring how you will talk about the competencies you gained whilst volunteering, and your personal definitions of volunteerism, social engagement, development and peace.

Some exercises for reflection are:

1. Personal Reflection: In order to think of ways that you can continue to have a positive effect on peace and development, or to think of ways that you can make positive changes through volunteerism, consider the following questions:

- What did I enjoy about volunteering?
- What did I not enjoy, or will I avoid in another volunteer experience?
- How can I transfer what I have learned during my assignment to my home community?
- How can I encourage people to volunteer, advocate for volunteerism or integrate volunteerism into my day-to-day life at home? Can I still give my time, will I encourage other people to volunteer, or maybe will I donate money or expertise to an organization that supports volunteers?
- Do I have little time to volunteer? If so, is there a place where I can go with my whole family to volunteer, can I volunteer online, or do a volunteering 'holiday', where I plan my annual leave around a specific project?

- What areas of the world or topics are important to me? (This can help to you refine what type of opportunities might suit you).
- Are there simple things in I can do in my own community? Can I recycle, help clean up a park, be on the parent/teacher committee, etc? All of these are important to the local community.

2. Discussion: You may find it useful to discuss your move, your experiences abroad and the stresses of moving home with family and friends. This may help them to understand what you have lived through and put them in a position to best support your needs. Or, you may prefer suggesting that they read about reverse culture shock on the internet or from other sources (for example, the End-of-Assignment Manual that has been developed by UNV). If they cannot understand what you have lived through, try connecting with other people who have lived in a second culture or who are active in areas that are related to peace and development.

3. Continue to write: After starting to write, it is likely that you will continue to be comfortable writing. A personal journal, an article for UNV, a blog are some options. See examples given in Appendix 2.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Designing a Group Reflection Activity

There may be opportunities to do portions of the reflection activities as a group - perhaps through a retreat organized by your UNV Field Unit, a UNV workshop, annual meeting or in another venue. Some tips for designing a reflection activity highlighted below:

- Have an outcome in mind (i.e. leadership, team building, improved critical thinking, or acknowledgement).
- Check this outcome against the learning expectations of the participants (particularly important with adult learners).
- Decide on the method and tools to be used. Take into account people's comfort levels with the topic and their preferred ways to communicate (i.e. is a group setting appropriate?). Plan ways to ensure that the group activity occurs in a safe and democratic way.
- Be appropriate for the team (language, culture, organizational setting, etc.).
- Be targeted for the appropriate stage in the experience (beginning, middle, end). Note that different types of reflection activities may be appropriate at different stages of the volunteer experience. For example, case-studies and readings can help volunteers in the preparation stage.
- Be directly linked to the project or experience or some other commonality (i.e. volunteerism, organization, profession).
- Dispel stereotypes, address negative experiences, increase appreciation for social needs, improve understanding of the role volunteerism plays in peace and development, and increase commitment to service.
- Be well facilitated and organized for maximum participation, creativity, and learning
- If possible, actively involve the service recipients in order to make the session well informed and inclusive.
- Reflection activities can involve reading, writing, doing and telling.
- Reflection activities most often involve presenting 'open' questions, or those questions that cannot be simply answered with 'yes' or 'no'.



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Examples of activities that can be used for a group reflection activity:

Grow Model (pg.29), *After Action Review* (pg.35), *Country Office Blog* (pg.39), *Case Studies* (pg.41), *Sculptures and Murals* (pg.43), *Project Programme Timeline* (pg.44), *Visionary exercises* (pg.46), *De Bono's Six Hats Exercise* (pg.48), and *Kolb's Learning Styles* (pg.50).

The following are some session approaches that may be used during reflection sessions:

- **The What?/So What?/Now What?** approach. This structure for reflection questions is perhaps the most widely known and used. It is a basic way to promote discussion that begins with reviewing the details of the experience and moves toward critical thinking, problem solving, and creating an action plan. It involves the following process:
 - *What?*: Describe what you do as a UN Volunteer (descriptive, based on facts)
 - *So what?*: What is working? What is not? Why? What is missing? How does it feel? Who is being effected? How am I being affected? (shift from descriptive to interpretive)
 - *Now what?*: How may I continue to challenge myself? What can be improved? How does being a UN Volunteer contribute to the MDGs? How can UN Volunteers promote volunteerism? (seeing the big picture; applying lessons learned/insights gained to new situations setting future goals; creating an action plan)
- **Reflection circle.** Rules of the circle generally are that each participant has a right and an opportunity to speak, every idea has value and can contribute to learning, individual contributions are recognized and participants are responsible for their own learning. In this methodology participants are seated in a circle, with the facilitator(s) seated along with them. Facilitators should not be separated out by standing up or speaking at a podium. A reflection question is posed by the facilitator and participants are encouraged to respond. Good facilitation is crucial to effective full group participation.
- **Focus group discussions.** This tool is suitable for a session discussing issue/s relevant to the group. This may involve about ten (10) to fifteen (15) participants. This will require one facilitator and documenter. The role of the facilitator is to guide the discussion

to the specific issue/s identified. A question checklist may facilitate the conversation within the group.

- **Story telling.** This tool involves the process of free flowing sharing of experiences and perceptions of individuals about a topic or issue. The role of the facilitator is to focus the discussion to the issue and process and synthesis the ideas generated.
- **Case Study.** This will involve sharing a number of cases as a focus for discussion. As a reflection tool, it will be possible if a number of volunteers can share their experiences on a topic and serve as a case study for the session.
- **Brainstorming.** This involves sharing ideas and eventually coming up with one concrete through for discussion. This tool is usually followed by another method.
- **Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat (SWOT) Analysis.** This tool assesses both the internal and external factors affecting an issue. It diagnoses the strength and weaknesses of an activity or issue and the opportunities and threats.
- **Dreams Release or Visioning.** This tool asks more on “what the participants wanted things to be in the future”. This is a good tool in objective setting and developing way forwards.
- **Drama, Role Play or Simulation Exercise.** This tool will help participants express their thoughts and perception about an issue in their own creative way.
- **Timeline or Historical Trends.** This tool facilitates documentation experiences and events that happened in the past as basis for discussion and reflection.
- **Most Significant Change.** This tools aims to discuss and share the most important changes- both positive and negative. This aims to generate lessons learned and good practices from experience and as input to setting way forwards.
- **Impact Flow Diagramming.** This is commonly known as a cause and effect exercise. This focuses on discussing what were the factors that caused and contributed to the current situation. The diagram could alternatively be used to understand or map out the relevant people that were involved during the volunteering experience.
- **Use of quotes or other motivational statements** to generate thought and discussion.



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Appendix 2: Questions to Stimulate Volunteer Reflection

These questions are designed to stimulate volunteer reflection both for a group and as an individual activity.

Examples of activities that can be used for individual reflection include: *journal entries* (pg.19), *beginning of assignment matrixes* (pg.20), *articles* (pg.31), *Poems* (pg.33), *middle of assignment matrixes* (pg.34), *Personal After Action Review* (pg.36), *writing lessons learned paper* (pg.35), *photos* (pg.40), *Personal Timeline* (pg.44), and *Mind map* (pg.45).

If you want to continue your reflection or are trying to plan a group meeting for reflection, following are additional reflection questions:

- What motivated me to become a UN Volunteer? Write down why you first became interested in volunteering, how you chose this organization to volunteer with and what your expectations of volunteering were.
- How does my UNV assignment build upon previous volunteer experiences?
- How am I perceived by family/colleagues/local community/host agency as a UN Volunteer? In what ways have these perceptions changed during your assignment?
- Have I been able to identify volunteerism aspects of my assignment? What did I do about these aspects or because of them?
- If I could change something about my project or volunteer assignment, what would it be? How would I do it? Can I do this?
- Is there anything I wish I had known before I started my volunteer assignment? How would this knowledge have been useful? Is there any way I can give this information to incoming volunteers?
- What social need is my UNV assignment helping meet? How am I working towards this? Does this relate to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?
- Do I think my volunteer activities benefited me, my family, my organization, local society, etc.?
- Has my understanding of volunteerism for development changed? Why? How?
- Should everyone volunteer? If yes, how can I encourage other people to do so?
- Make a list of the competencies used and learned during the volunteer assignment. How will I apply these to a different volunteer assignment or to a job?

- What values, opinions, and decisions have I changed through my actions?
- Since becoming a UN Volunteer, do I feel that it is more important to be involved in peace or development in my home community? Will I continue to be a volunteer for peace or development after my UNV assignment?
- How is UNV different from other UN agencies?
- What is the difference between work or a job and volunteering or service?
- How do I answer those who say that volunteers are cheap labor or that I am not really a volunteer because I am receiving an allowance?
- How does being a UN Volunteer differ from being salaried staff in my host organization? What are the positive and negative differences? How can I strengthen the positives?
- As a UN Volunteer, what can I do to promote volunteering?

Appendix 3: More ways to reflect

There are infinite ways to reflect- and each person within every culture will have their own particular style. Here are some suggested ideas. These are simply the start to your possibilities:

Write:

- personal journals
- group journals
- fictional stories
- articles (newspaper, journals)
- poems
- essays
- letters (to the editor, to family, to friends, to oneself)
- music lyrics
- blogs
- case studies
- SWOT analyses

Make:

- collages
- posters
- photo compositions
- videos
- displays



- sculptures
- scrapbooks
- murals
- timelines
- impact diagrams/mind maps

Do:

- painting
- sewing or weaving (blankets, clothing for those in need, remembrance quilts)
- cooking (to remember the ‘flavor’ of where you are, to be able to share with those in need or those around you)
- gardening

Be:

- visioning exercises
- meditation
- take “5” (minutes to just reflect)
- yoga
- walking
- tai chi
- prayer
- soul searching
- running
- going to the gym

Read:

- articles about volunteer service or your duty station, etc.
- books related to development, peace, security, the location of assignment, etc.
- fiction
- poetry
- travel guides
- reports about the project

Tell:

- discussions or presentations
- debates
- songs
- presentations
- skits
- dances
- question-and-answer sessions
- interviews
- musical performances
- radio spots
- talk with family, friends or colleagues
- tell stories

Appendix 4: Examples of Reflection Tools

Journal Entries

A journal is a visual record of your experiences. By definition it includes some writing, but how much is dependent on you. It usually takes at least 3 weeks to develop a habit of writing a journal, so it is suggested that you journal regularly for a period of three weeks to start. After this, take some time to reflect how it is working for you. How to write a journal is described here:

1. Find something to write on (a notebook, scrap paper, a journal, your computer). Whatever you have on hand is fine, but try to pick something that suits you (for example, if you dislike disorganization, avoid loose sheets of paper, or if you already spend many hours at the computer, try a different format).
2. Choose a time of day to write when you won't be interrupted by others. This can prove a difficult task. Make a point of being alone to write in your journal. Make sure you have a comfortable place to write. You may enjoy the privacy of your own room for writing, or a busy cafe. Sitting in the same place to write can help you get into the right frame of mind for journal writing.
3. Date your entry. When you look back at your entries later, you'll be amazed just how useful having an entry date can be.
4. Start writing. Just write whatever comes to mind. You may need a journal prompt. Try using some of the reflection questions outlined here.
5. Be creative. Try different techniques, such as lists, collage, drawing, other visual styles, or whatever takes your fancy. Your journal is a place to express your thoughts and emotions. Forget the rules and what others expect. Play with ideas and use your journal for your own benefit.
6. Stop writing, expressing, or creating at some point. Decide on a time or page limit, when your materials run out or just when you feel you've written all that is on your mind.
7. Reread what you've written, if you can. Either read it directly after making the entry or set aside a time to read your past entries. There is much to gain from rereading your journal entries.
8. Make a commitment, to yourself, to write regularly. While daily entries are ideal, there's no limit to how often you should write in your journal. Just make it regular. You gain some benefit in writing a single entry, but the greater benefits remains in making a habit of writing in your journal.

(Adapted from www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Journal-Entry)



An example of a journal entry is given here:

Oct .19 Entry #5 New Insights, New People

My perception of life has changed since I started this volunteer program. The Food Run has shown me reality and the other sides of life. Through the Food Recycling Program, I get to experience teamwork, charity, and suffering. Working together and talking to other volunteers and cafeteria workers allows me to form a team with others and at the same time, allows me to develop friendships. Charity is seen through the donation of time of the volunteers and the food given to the soup kitchen. I am so glad that there are so many people willing to donate their time to help others.



Every Wednesday as we arrive at the soup kitchen, I always see this one man on the sidewalk with his same pair of worn-out shoes and same raggedy, plaid shirt. He is sitting there like there is no hope in life. As we are unloading the food, I always look over at him, smile, and say, "Hi sir. How are you doing today?" He always smiles and replies, "Thanks for asking ma'am. I'm trying to get along, but doing just fine." For some, it is easy to ignore the homeless, but when you see the same man or woman sitting on the side of the street week after week, you take the initiative to see how they are doing because ignoring them is impossible. The Food Recycling Program has helped me realize what life is all about and has helped me appreciate life more. Through working with the Food Run, I have developed new qualities as well as new friendships. I really enjoy the time I spend each week volunteering and helping others.

Sample Journal Entry from www.psych.uncc.edu/cdfernal/3480jrnl.html

Finally, you can be even more artistic, including photographs and drawings



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Beginning of assignment matrices

Action Plan, Learning Plan, Cultural Integration and Stress Management

These matrices link to the beginning of assignment section, and may be useful to lead you through making an action plan, setting your personal learning goals, or preparing for cultural integration. They can be used during the initial briefing sessions or handed out by the UNV Field Units for individual reflection. If the matrixes are handed out for individual reflection, it is advised to come back to them when drafting the Volunteer's work plan.

Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: Action Plan (On Arrival)

Objective: Use this form to answer questions such as:

- What are my personal expectations for the assignment?
- How can I prepare for the common challenges in volunteering?
- How can being a volunteer and volunteerism help me to meet the objectives of my assignment?

Date Prepared:	
What are my personal objectives for the assignment?	
Where can I link volunteerism to these objectives?	
How will I achieve them? How will I incorporate volunteerism?	
What is the timeframe?	
What resources are needed?	

Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: Personal Learning Plan (On Arrival)

Objective: Based on your personal goals, what learning objectives would you like meet over the course of your volunteer assignment?

Date Prepared:

What personal learning objectives do you have?

What is the planned course of action?

What is the timeframe?

What resources are needed and where could they come from?



Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: Supporting Cultural Integration (After Arrival)

Objective: Reflect upon critical incidents that happened in the first weeks of the assignment so as to identify effective coping strategies/social support networks and understand perspectives on international development and shifting views of the self.

Date Prepared:

**How did you deal with the situation?
What action did anyone take this week that you found to be affirming or helpful?**

How do you view yourself this week in relation to international development and your contribution to promoting volunteerism for peace and development?

What are the most important insights that you realized about yourself this week?

Cultural Integration: Adjusting to a New Environment

When you move to a new location, there may be a radical change from the perspective and way of life you are used to. This can lead to feelings of disorientation. This feeling is commonly referred to as ‘culture shock’. ‘Culture’ is the new way of life to which you are being exposed and ‘shock’ is your physical and emotional response to the differences.

Everybody experiences some form of culture shock. The difference is in the degree of shock which individuals experience. For some it is a matter of a few weeks before the feeling of disorientation disappears, while others may never get over what can be a painful and difficult experience. At this stage, two things are important to keep in mind:

- You are a UN Volunteer and have a mission to be completed, a pledge to the society you are working in, and a concrete task to accomplish, which is the main reason for you to be here.
- The price you and your family members will pay for adapting to different smells, climate, language, traffic conditions, levels of wealth or poverty and other possible signs of cultural differences, is incomparably lower than the personal gains this process will give you.

Demonstrating cultural humility is vital to intercultural interaction. It is one way that we may become more conscious of our behavior, as opposed to operating on “auto-pilot” when interacting with people. It necessitates new ways of thinking: openness to new information, a rejection of existing stereotypes, and an awareness of perspectives other than our own. Empathy helps you to be more aware of how others would like to be treated, from their own perspectives, and act accordingly.

It is possible to achieve intercultural effectiveness. Practicing patience, self-awareness, humility, humor, demonstrating a readiness to learn to unlearn, questioning your existing behavior patterns, coping with uncertainties and searching for commonalities between different perceptions are all a part of this process.

Tips on Ways to Adjust

It is important to remember that culture shock is a normal, healthy psychological reaction. It signals that you are learning something new about the local culture. Culture shock can be a period of self-assessment and cultural learning. Moving beyond culture shock puts you on the path to becoming “inter-culturally fluent”, or at ease in the new culture. Because culture shock is a sign that you are beginning to let



go of your home environment and engage with a new culture, the appropriate response is to know how to manage the stress and the consequences it causes.

Engage In Physical and Mental Activities Rather Than 'Running Away

'It depends on the individual but regular activities like physical exercise, meditation or relaxation techniques, or keeping a journal can help. Once you have settled into your accommodation, you may want to engage in new activities or start a new hobby (in accordance with security and local context). Renew subscriptions to professional journals and other periodicals that interest you or read books. This will keep your mind and body occupied and will help overcome boredom.

Seek Support Rather Than Closing Yourself Off From Others

Find out about various groups, which share your interests, your ideals or your religious faith. Get involved in their activities. This will act as an entry point to knowing people who share your values and will provide much-needed support.

Create Stability Zones to Bridge Home and Local Culture

If you spend most of your time totally immersed in your new culture you may briefly want to retreat into what can be

called a 'stability zone', or an environment that closely resembles home.¹ These physical or mental zones might include meeting compatriots, listening to music or watching a movie in your native language or eating familiar food.

Establish New Support Systems Rather Than Pining for Old Friends

Feelings of isolation can be intense when you are far from friends and family. Having someone to talk to, someone you feel you can call in an emergency situation or a baby-sitter with whom you can leave your children may ease your feeling of isolation. Do not be afraid of getting to know someone who belongs to your culture, who is of similar age, or who has similar interests and try to establish a good relationship with him/her.

Appreciate Cultural Differences Rather Than Stopping Exploring

You are in a new environment and in a different culture so don't shut it out. This is a golden opportunity for you to experience another culture. Not many people get this rare opportunity. So make the most of this opportunity to enrich your life. The key here is to appreciate the differences and learn to empathize.

1. Adler, N. International Dimensions of Organisational Behaviour, 2002

Learn the Local Language

If you are in a location where you do not know the local language, it is a sign of respect and cultural awareness to learn at least a basic level of the local language. These sentences can be the introductory and final salutations, a sentence that apologizes for your inability to speak the language and the correct way to say “thank you”. Do not be afraid of trying to communicate. Even if you make mistakes, the local population will appreciate the effort and this will help you in establishing trust and in establishing an entry point into the new culture and context.²

Stress: Recognizing the Signs and How to Manage It

In the field, it is likely that you will experience a degree of stress. There are different levels and types of stress, all of which should be taken seriously and addressed to prevent ‘burn out’.

- Basic stress: adjusting to climate, country, language, food, new colleagues and boss
- Cumulative stress: Cumulative stress results from an accumulation of various stress factors.

- Traumatic stress: a critical incident, e.g. war, disease, witness of death

Recognizing stress

It is important that you are able to recognize stress in yourself, and in others. The most common signs of stress include:

Physical symptoms: overtiredness, diarrhea, constipation, headaches, abdominal and back pains, sleeping disorders, appetite changes.

Emotional signs: anxiety, frustration, guilt, mood swings, undue pessimism or optimism, irritability, crying spells, nightmares, apathy, depression.

Mental signs: forgetfulness, poor concentration, poor job performance, negative attitude, loss of creativity and motivation, boredom, negative self-talk, paranoid thoughts.

Relational signs: feeling isolated, resentful or intolerant of others, loneliness, marriage problems, nagging, social withdrawal, antisocial behavior.

Behavioral changes: increased alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use, change in eating habits or sexual behavior, increase in risky behavior, hyperactivity, avoidance of situations, cynical attitudes.

2. Adapted extract from the ‘Culture and Culture Shock’ section of How Do I Fit In? (UNV, 2009). To learn more about culture shock, please refer to this publication.



Collapse of belief systems: feeling of emptiness, doubt in religious beliefs, looking for magical solutions, loss of purpose of life, needing to prove self-worth, cynicism about life.³

Tips on stress management

1. Identify the sources of stress

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses. Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining it, your stress level will remain outside your control.

Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life.

Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem, such as smoking, drinking too much, over or under eating, withdrawing from friends, family and activities or lashing out at them.

2. Learn healthier ways to manage stress

If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the four as: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.

3. Managing Stress in the Field, IFRC, 2001

Change the Situation:

Avoid the stressor, e.g. *if a particular person causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.*

Alter the stressor, e.g. *express your feelings instead of bottling them up.*

Change Your Reaction:

Adapt to the stressor, e.g. *take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run, one month, one year from now?*

Accept the stressor, e.g. *don't try to control the uncontrollable, rather than stressing out over them focus on the things that you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.*

It is very important to **make time for fun and relaxation**

Set aside relaxation time. Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule.

Connect with others. Spend time with positive people who enhance your life

Do something you enjoy every day. Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy.

Keep your sense of humor. This includes the ability to laugh at yourself.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week.

Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress.

Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary “highs” caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy.

Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or

mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.

Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally. ⁴

Basic principles of stress control in the field to remember:

- Emotional reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations
- Every individual has a unique way to experience stress disorder and to recover from it
- Emotions control is everybody's own personal commitment
- Stress control is the head of the mission's responsibility

4. Adapted material from the online stress management guide: http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm



Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: How do I integrate volunteerism for peace and development into the assignment? (GROW Model) ¹

This exercise would be best carried out during a general meeting or retreat as it enhances the sharing experiences and maximizes peer learning.

Date Prepared:

Objective: The GROW model is a simple yet powerful framework that helps you both to reflect on your goals and to put them in action.

After your initial briefings, this tool could assist you to reflect on how to integrate the promotion for volunteerism for peace and development into your assignment ². The goal, as referred before, is to promote volunteerism for peace and development during your assignment.

G-Goal: Your Goals should be as specific and measurable as possible:
 How will you know that you have achieved that goal?
 What are the expectations of others?
 Who else needs to know about the plan?
 How will you inform them?

R-Reality: In order to analyze the current situation you could ask yourself:
 What has been stopping you reaching your goal?
 Do you know anyone who has achieved that goal?
 What can you learn from them?

¹ Adapted from: Deans, Fran and Oakley, Louise, *Praxis Paper No. 14: Coaching and Mentoring for Leadership Development in Civil Society*, January 2006, p9 (www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper14.html) by courtesy of Fran Deans, former UNV PO in Albania.

O-Options: Once you know where you are and where you want to go, the next step is to explore the options you have for getting there:
 What could you do as a first step?
 What else could you do?
 What would happen if you did nothing?

W-Will: To change and improve performance, motivation is necessary. The desired outcome from this stage is a commitment to action. The following questions can guide you:
 Where does this goal fit in with your personal priorities at the moment?
 What obstacles do you expect to meet? How will you overcome them?
 How committed are you to this goal?
 What steps do you need to take to achieve this?

² Promoting Volunteerism for peace and development includes the exploration of potential of community-related work for UN Volunteers to maximize UNV’s contributions such as:

- Community out-reach
- Social inclusion activities
- Build capacities of communities, NGOs, civil society
- Build volunteering-based partnerships
- Promote national volunteering by communities
- Engage in volunteering activities
- Share personal volunteering experience



Writing an Article

Your perspectives are valuable. They may be recorded as personal stories told in your own words. Articles explain programs and projects more formally. Here follow some tips on the profile of a good article:

1. Is personal and human – it tells a story about what you really do. For example:

- An overview of your typical daily work;
- Stories about special moments;
- Challenges faced and overcome;
- Quotations are very useful too – if someone says something particularly apt or striking, try to write it down.

2. Has an ‘angle’ – it mentions an event, a milestone reached, an achievement, an anniversary or something. For example, for UNV purposes you would want to:

- Look out for distinctive contributions to development (e.g. towards the MDGs) or ways that volunteerism or volunteers have supported peace and development

3. Remembers the people who are going to read it. These people may not know all the technical details, so we have to explain them simply and clearly.

4. Gets the details right. Don’t forget to check:

- The spelling of names (people and places)
- Exact job titles
- Names of host agency, stakeholders and partners
- Recipients of the programme, etc.
- Get contact details so you can follow up later

Some open-ended questions to answer are Who, Where, When, Why, What, How?

- Describe the work / project you are doing...
 - who does it benefit and involve?
 - where does it operate?
 - when did it start?
 - why is it important?
 - what does it involve?
 - how do you do it?
- What are the main highlights, outcomes, achievements and challenges?
- How does your work contribute to peace and human development?

- How does the project impact women, or how are women involved?
- How do you:
 - improve access to opportunities and services?
 - improve the delivery of services?
 - increase inclusion and participation in development?
- mobilize citizens?
- Finally, is there anything else you'd like to add that you think is important or gives a particularly good example of the things discussed above?

An example of a story is given below:
www.unv.org/en/perspectives/doc/addressing-biodiversity-through-technology.html



ADDRESSING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY
by Naji Sakhita, 22 May 2008

Damascus, Syria: The climate is in constant change and whoever watched the movie 'An Inconvenient Truth' by Al Gore knows what we are going through and what the world is facing in the next few years. This was the main reason behind my application to become a UNV volunteer.

My specialization may seem to be more theoretical and my duties might be far away from the typical image of volunteering – but I am still a volunteer. I am an Information Technology Volunteer, and I work to engage people in environmental issues through the means of these technologies.

Technology is often seen as a main factor in environmental degradation, but through our project we try to publicize environmental challenges and raise awareness among youth and the public about climate change through our national climate change website: www.inc-sy.org.



The environment is something related to each one of us, it is the thing that gathers us together as brothers and sister of humanity. It is the environment that carries us and gives us the reasons to survive. When I was a child, my father taught me a proverb: "Treat people the way you like to be treated". But I see that our environment gives us the best while we burden it with the worst.

Volunteering is not a career, but it is a curriculum and a culture we must continue to spread. The people of Syria are known as extremely hospitable; volunteering is in our traditions and is one of the deep rooted principles of our culture that we must revive and teach to our neighbours, friends, and family.

I believe that together we can make a difference. Just like trees standing next to each other make a forest, we accomplish more when we stand together for a cause, like we did on the tree planting day.

When I first applied to UNV, I never expected to have this family atmosphere. The work with the UNV Programme team has taught me lessons of fraternity and enriched my volunteer spirit, which is also what I felt during the planting activity on the UN forest day. We have been working, planting and sweating together and I am so glad that with each tree that we put in this dear soil, our smiles were reflected from the earth to our lips.

Proverb: "*Treat people the way you like to be treated*". But I see that our environment gives us the best while we burden it with the worst.

Poem

PROUD TO BE A VOLUNTEER

A Poem by Cristian Mazzei, UNV Civil Affairs Officer in Fort Liberté, Haiti

9 December 2006: English Translation, from
www.unv.org/en/perspectives/doc/proud-to-be-a.html

In my mind the face of a child
its eyes lost to the horizon
a life without future.

A woman with no way of feeding
her child that she holds close to her
but without hope.

The hands of a man asking for bread
and the pain of a hunger that gives no rest.

I feel the misery, the suffering
and the cry for help
which perturbs my nights and gives me no peace

Peace, the world still needs Peace.

I feel the indifference of people,
who have abandoned these people.

The desolation of this land that my steps now walk on.
How can one still remain passive before this outcry?
How can one close his eyes before so much pain?



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I have chosen
 I have chosen not to ignore
 I have chosen to be a Volunteer
 To put my life to the service of others.
 To leave my own land, to leave everything,
 To go where there is more need for me
 Living to help others, to give joy or
 even only a smile

To help others, It is the most beautiful
 thing in the world,
 there is no doubt

It does not cost anything, you cannot sell it, you cannot buy it
 It is free, you can give it without expecting to be rewarded
 This is the essence of a Volunteer
 But what pushes me to do all this?
 The smile of a child who plays thoughtlessly
 The joy of a mother who can nurse her little one
 The happiness of a father who can work and still believe in a future.
 Happiness, thanks to my action
 This is the reward that one can have
 I am happy and proud
 I have chosen to face reality,
 although uncomfortable, and to react

I am proud to be a Volunteer.

Middle of Assignment Matrices

Action Plan, Learning Plan Review, After Action Review and Lessons Learned Paper

These matrices can guide you on the review of your work plan or your learning plan. These matrices can be used either in mid-term review sessions or handed out for individual reflection.

Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: Action Plan (Mid-Assignment Assessment)

Objective: Looking at your Action Plan at the midpoint of your assignment allows you to ask yourself:

- What have I done so far towards my personal objectives?
- What challenges have I encountered?
- What is the way forward to achieve my personal objectives?
- Has volunteerism been promoted in my actions?

Date Prepared:	
What were your planned personal objectives?	
What about this went well? Why?	
What did not go well? And, why?	
How can I move forward?	



Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: Personal Learning Plan (Mid-Assignment Assessment)

Objective: To look at what personal development has occurred so far? Is your learning in line with your original personal objectives?

Date Prepared:

What were your planned personal development objectives?

What actions did you take towards your objectives?

What else do you think you need to meet your objectives?

What resources are needed and where could they come from?

How to conduct an After Action Review (AAR)⁵

AARs can be grouped into three types: formal, informal and personal. Although the fundamental approach is essentially the same for each, there is some variation in how they are conducted. Formal AARs tend to be conducted at the end of a major project or event (learning after doing). They require some preparation and planning, but are not difficult as they take the form of a simple meeting.

Steps and tips for successful formal AARs include:

STEP 1: Call the meeting as soon as possible

AARs should be conducted as soon as possible after the event, whilst memories are fresh, participants are available, and where appropriate, learning can be applied immediately.

STEP 2: Create the right climate

The ideal climate for an AAR is one of trust, openness and commitment to learning. AARs are learning events, not critiques, and so should not be treated as a performance evaluation. There are no hierarchies in AARs – everyone is

regarded as an equal participant and junior members of the team should feel free to comment on the actions of senior members. Establish this atmosphere of trust by setting group rules, ensuring a relaxed atmosphere and removing the team from the work environment.

STEP 3: Appoint a facilitator

Ideally a formal AAR should be facilitated. The main job of the facilitator is to help the team to learn by drawing out answers, insights and previously unspoken issues; to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute; and to help create the right climate and ensure that blame is not brought in. The facilitator should be someone who was not closely involved in the project or activity, so that they can remain objective, but with a good knowledge and understanding of UNV-related issues and programs.

STEP 4: Revisit the objectives and deliverables of the project

Ask ‘what did we set out to do?’ and ‘what did we actually achieve?’

STEP 5: Ask ‘what went well?’, find out why, and share recommendations for the future.

It is always a good idea to start with the positive points. Look to build on best practice as well as learn from mistakes.

5. Adapted from UNDP, *Knowledge management Toolkit for the Crisis prevention and Recovery Practice Area*, UNDP, March 2007



For each point that is made about what went well, keep asking a ‘why?’ question. This will allow you to get to the root of the reason. Then press participants for specific advice that others could apply in similar situations.

STEP 6: Ask ‘what could have gone better?’, find out what the problems were, and share recommendations for the future

Do not simply ask ‘what went wrong?’ but rather ‘what could have gone better?’ Hence the focus is not on failure, but on improvement.

STEP 7: Record the AAR

It is important to have a clear and well-documented account of the AAR and its learning points, both as a reminder to those involved and so that you can effectively share learning with others in the CPR Practice Area. You should aim to include: lessons and guidelines for the future; the names of the people involved for future reference; and any key documents such as project plans or reports.

STEP 8: Share the learning

As well as distributing your account of the AAR to the project team, consider who else could benefit from reading it. For example, you may be aware of another team that is about to embark on a similar

project or activity. Your document therefore needs to be stored in a place where it can be easily found and accessed.

Informal AARs tend to be conducted after a much smaller event such as a meeting or a presentation (learning after doing), or following a specific event during a wider project or activity (learning while doing). They require much less preparation and planning and can often be done on the spur of the moment. The format is simple and quick – a pencil and paper or flipchart exercise. In an open and honest meeting, usually no longer than half an hour, each participant in the event answers four simple questions:

- What was supposed to happen?
- What actually happened?
- Why were there differences?
- What did we learn?

Personal AARs are a simple matter of personal reflection. For example, take a few minutes to reflect on something you did yesterday, such as participating in a workshop, or drafting an UNV project document. Ask yourself the four AAR questions above. What does that tell you about what you could do differently tomorrow?

Some examples of **when to use** an After Action Reviews are:

- Following the setting up, running, or closure of a particularly innovative UNV project, activity or process;
- After participation in an event that presented particular challenges or opportunities for volunteerism for peace and development; or
- Following the introduction of a new set of procedures or ways of working.

How to Write and Disseminate a Lessons Learned Paper⁶

STEP 1: Research

Compiling the relevant documents on a project is the first step for drafting a Lessons Learned Paper. There are occasions when the research for a Lessons Learned paper can be done by individuals alone. Often, however, it is worth involving others in the process in order to bring in new ideas, critical ideas, and fresh perspectives. This may mean, for example, meeting with colleagues to draw out lessons learned through a facilitated discussion or conducting an After Action Review (see previous exercise), then writing up the main conclusions in the form of a Lessons Learned paper.

STEP 2: Drafting

Consider who is best placed to draft a Lessons Learned paper – often it is the person who was most involved in the project or activity. Thus, Lessons Learned papers can be drafted by UN Volunteers in collaboration with the country office and HQ staff, depending on the activities that they are describing. In some cases however, an outside eye has its advantages. For example, it may be difficult for managers of a project to be critical when writing about their own projects; someone less directly involved may be better placed to highlight and discuss both the negative and the positive impacts of the work and help to draft the paper.

When drafting the paper the specific contextual variables need to be described. But in order to make this paper usable for UN Volunteers, UNV Field Units and UNV HQ, the lessons need to be generalized. This generalization is the most difficult part since too general information such as “involve partners as early as possible” does not provide valuable advice for colleagues. Reaching a balance between very specific recommendations and very general ones is the art of drafting a Lessons Learned Paper.

6. Adapted from UNDP, Knowledge management Toolkit for the Crisis prevention and Recovery Practice Area, UNDP, March 2007



STEP 3: Reviewing

Ask a few selected colleagues to review the Lessons Learned paper in its initial draft, and to focus their comments on its scope, readability and usefulness.

STEP 4: Dissemination

Lessons learned papers should be shared as widely as possible within and beyond the organization to encourage others to learn from your successes or avoid repeating the same mistakes. You can use UNV's Knowledge Platform via the UNV Field Unit, workshops and virtual networks in the future for this; and/or feed components of the Lessons Learned paper into wider studies and reports on issues, countries/regions and projects/activities.

STEP 5: Follow-up

Lessons learned papers, and particularly the section on follow-up recommendations, should be reviewed and updated as circumstances change.

There is often some unease over the term 'lessons learned'. The fact that a Lessons Learned document has been produced does not necessarily mean that the lesson has actually been learnt, or that the learning has been institutionalized. Some have adopted the phrase 'lessons **to be** learned', rather than 'lessons learned' – to emphasize that reflecting on and evaluating an experience is

the beginning, not the end, of a process. Despite this unease, this manual will use the term 'lessons learned', referring to both lessons that have been shared and positively acted upon, and those that have been identified and recorded but not yet incorporated into practice and programming.

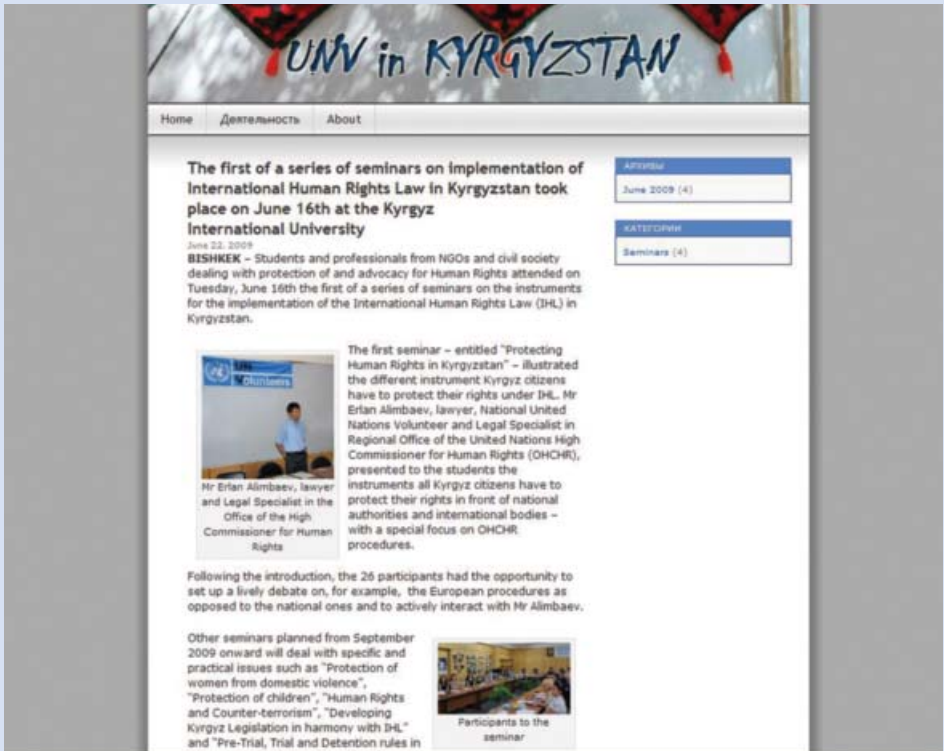
Blogs

In format, a blog is similar to writing a journal, but some people like the feeling of writing online or the feeling that it is being shared with the world. Two examples from are given here:

1. <http://unvkyr.wordpress.com/>

A Country Office blog offers a great opportunity for UN Volunteers to contribute and can serve as a platform of mutual sharing and exchanging, thus building up and enhancing a UNV identity.

This is the blog of the UNV Programme in Kyrgyzstan:



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Case Studies

The essential parts of a case study are very similar to an article. A case study will often also include a lesson or a key message that the writer would like the reader to take from the study.

LAO PDR: Free Weekend School



Key idea
To provide primary education to disadvantaged children at a weekend school in Laos.

Background
For many Laotian children, gaining access to and the quality of education remain big challenges, particularly as most schools are overcrowded, and resources and teachers are scarce. In Laos, it is common for class sizes to range from 70-100 children. In rural areas, provision of basic services, including education, is problematic due to the rugged and remote terrain. Furthermore, financial and family constraints prevent many kids from attending school. Thus, many children lack fundamental education.

Objectives

- To provide value-based, basic education to Laotian children in a weekend school, and
- to build a community, emphasizing community values, participation, equality, and engagement.

Action Plan

- **Venue:** Schools, local temples, or private houses, which are provided by local school authorities, monks, or volunteers. The main school is located in the village of Pho Sai, other schools are run in the village of Non Kho Neua, where a partnership with a private school exists.
- **Mobilize local volunteers:** Recruited volunteer teachers by word of mouth. The project staff consisted of volunteers with various backgrounds (local NGOs, government officials, teachers, monks and former university students).
- **Community involvement:** Mobilized schools and temples to donate space for the classes. Motivated parents to contribute to their children's education by allowing them to attend the schools. Mobilized teachers from the community to donate their time and energy to classes and other extra-curricular activities, like sporting events.
- **Curriculum:** Mixed the normal education, which includes English and sciences, with teaching core values of constructive societies. For example, children were taught to show respect for the family and country, taught the value of education, and shown how volunteering creates a positive change in society. This was done by inserting ethical messages into math exercises, through songs, through meditation, through discussing folktales, etc. More practical lessons were given by experiencing or talking about real-life voluntary activities together, such as distributing food at the blind school, or talking about ways they have helped their families in the past week.
- **Partnerships:** Established partnerships with institutions such as schools and temples that could provide classrooms. In this project, there were partnerships with 'Pan Keo Primary School' in Non Kho Neua village, and the Pho Sai temple. Also, partnerships were established with the government; in this case, the Lao National Front for Construction is considering donating land.



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Volunteerism

Pho Sai school is run by volunteers only. Twenty volunteers, among them monks and primary teachers, dedicate their time to teach children every weekend. In addition to teaching, the volunteers collect resources such as books, pens, papers and food, and fund these from their own means. Thus, volunteerism is essential for this school. Students have learned to appreciate the time donated by the teachers, and have become even more committed, because they realise that this is a valuable opportunity. The volunteer spirit also touches others in the community. Several doctors and nurses from the local hospital are holding free health clinics for children and their families.

Innovation

Free and values-based education represents an innovative form of schooling. The project was initiated by Avi Sarkar, a former UNV, who volunteered in Indian slums before moving to Lao. There he experienced that education was valued by those who have limited access. After detecting similar needs in Laos, he started the weekend school.



Results

- **Students:** Since the schools opened in 2002, more than 1,000 children have attended and their interest in learning increased. Some drop-outs attend classes again and one student has even stopped drinking alcohol and gone to university.
- **Promoting volunteerism:** Volunteerism is increasingly being appreciated by the community. Many community members could be mobilized to support the project. By word of mouth, more and more volunteer teachers became involved. Temples and Non Kho Neua village 'Pan Keo Primary School' donated space for the classes. Additionally, the project has inspired medical staff from the local hospital to offer free health services for children and their families.
- **Role model:** The volunteer school is attracting those interested in replication, such as the Lao National Front for Construction. Also, another school has started in Vientiane based on the same model.
- **Outlook:** The programme is expanding as more and more parents are sending their children to school, and more volunteers are found to share the workload. Avi Sarkar now plays the role of the superintendent, and has continually stepped back in order to let the programme run itself. Many of the mechanisms are set up in order for it to run itself, for example the donated space and teachers are already in place and are committed to making the classes work.

Lesson learnt

The Lao Pho Sai school has the potential for replication in urban as well as rural locations. Resources and teaching skills are all based locally, and provided free of charge.



Case Study: Volunteer Teacher
 Ms. Vilayshouk Ounvongsay,
 Science Technology and
 Environment Agency (STEA)
 Vientiane

"When I first started teaching it was to get experience for my own studies. Now I realise that the children value my time and are so interested to learn. I feel I gain more than just work experience. I encourage everyone to get involved no matter how small. It's the collective effort by many actors that makes a huge difference."

Alliances

- Pan Keo Primary School
- Pho Sai Temple
- Lao National Front for Construction (government run organization)

Contact

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www.undp.lao.org/UNV.htm

Photos

How to take a memorable picture:

- A picture tells a thousand words, and can turn a good article into an excellent one or a journal into a real memento.
- The best way to take good pictures is to take lots. This way you can be sure at least one will turn out well
- Pictures are about people. Try to capture volunteers interacting with their target audiences and using their skills. Avoid taking posed photographs.
- People tend to relax once you've been around for a while, so don't rush into take pictures too early when you first meet people.
- The best times to take outdoor pictures are at dawn or dusk, the light conditions are ideal.

Here are some examples of pictures taken by UN Volunteers:



Sculptures and Murals

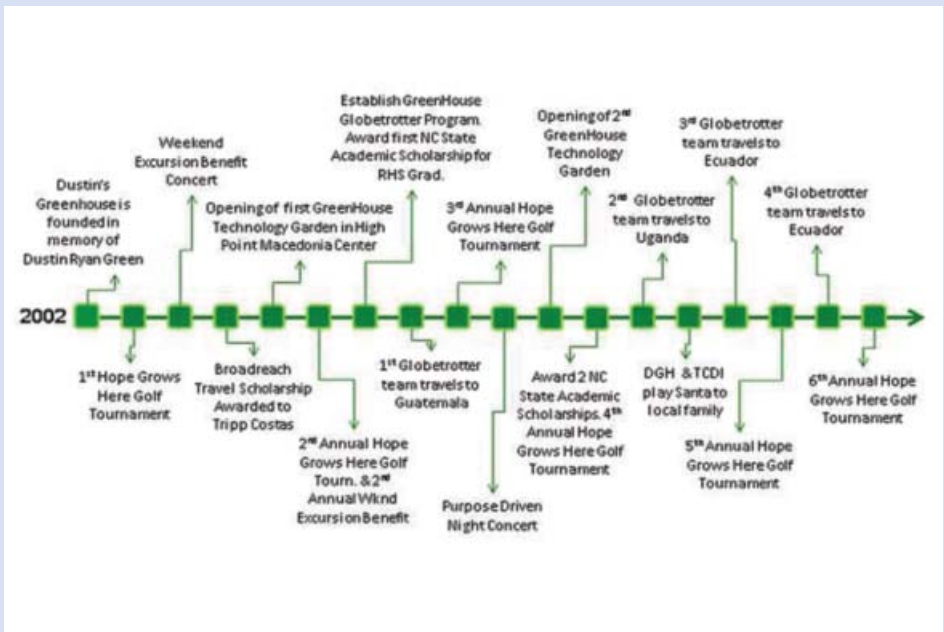
Sculpturing and making a mural take significant time investments, but as you can see from the examples here, the outputs are well worth it. Here are some masterpieces created through UNV initiatives:



Timeline

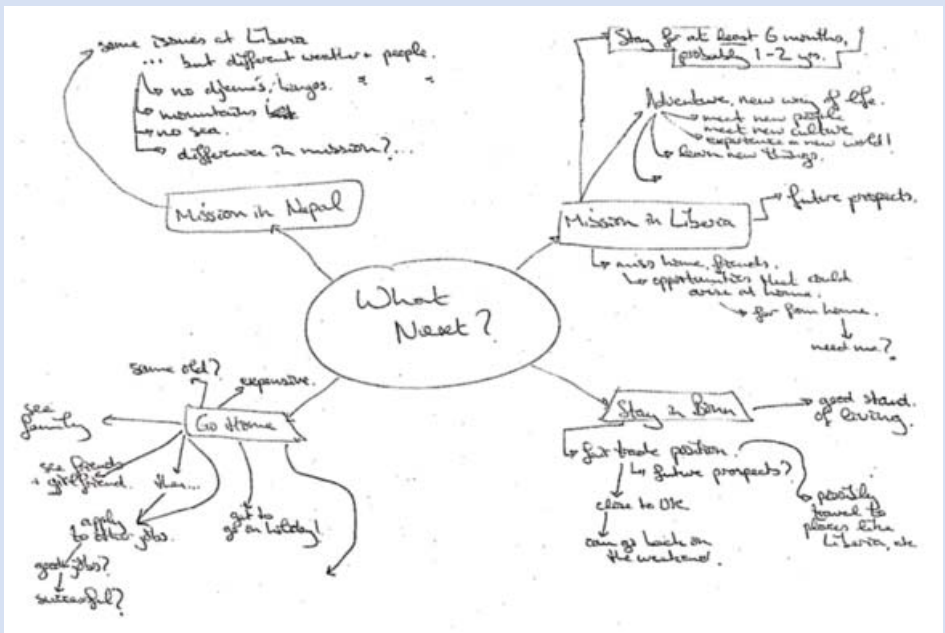
A timeline is a visual diagram of your key events or activities over a given period. It is done in chronological or historic order. An example is given here. A timeline can include photographs or drawings to pull our key things you remember at a point in time. A timeline can be designed as an individual activity to record personal key events or to capture the lifecycle of a project or programme.

(from www.dustinsgreenhouse.org/pages/wha_start.html)



Impact Diagram or Mind Map

With an impact diagram or mind map, you start with the central idea in the middle and allow all related ideas to stem off the centre. Try not to stop writing until the ideas dry up.



Visioning Exercises

Visioning exercises are a way for you to focus your thinking on one specific topic, and generate a positive and forward looking goal. One way to guide yourself or a group of people towards a vision is to think about a quote.

The first article of the UNV Conditions of Service state that UN Volunteers “uphold and promote the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct”. What does ethical conduct mean to me in the context of my assignment and how can I express it? Does my volunteer status enhance ethical behaviour, and how?

Picture taken at the National Museum of Ethiopia, 2005 (by Achim Merlo, UNV Programme Office in Kyrgyzstan)



Some service-oriented quotes are given below and opposite. Try reading one, and taking five minutes to think about what it means to you. Does it move you to change any of your actions? Can you work this into one of your plans?

Visioning exercises can be carried out individually, but they develop their full richness and maximize reflective potential when carried out as part of a group brainstorming activity.

“At the heart of volunteerism are the ideals of service and solidarity and the belief that together we can make the world better. In that sense, we can say that volunteerism is the ultimate expression of what the United Nations is all about.” —**Kofi Annan**, former UN Secretary-General



“The best test, and the most difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” —**Robert Greenleaf**, *Servant Leadership*

“It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness” —**Confucius**

“All... are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny . . . I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.” —**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

“If you want to build a ship, don't drum to the women and men to gather wood, and divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”—**Antoine De Saint-Exupery**, *The Wisdom of the Sands*

“Reading (or serving) without reflecting is like eating without digesting.” —**Edmund Burke**

“All formulas and all descriptions are concepts, ideas, words, theories. What makes them real is your involvement, your commitment, your life, your engagement. And that is a choice that you make with your whole being and not a system that an organisation puts in place to achieve results automatically.” —**Peter Koestenbaum**

“I was taught that the world had a lot of problems; that I could struggle and change them; that intellectual and material gifts brought the privilege and responsibility of sharing with others less fortunate; and that service is the rent each of us pay for a living... the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals.” —**Marian Wright Edelman**

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted, and behold, service was joy.”—**Rabindranath Tagore**

“You cannot sincerely help another without helping yourself.” —**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

“Whenever you are in doubt, apply the following test: recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to them.” —**Mahatma Gandhi**

Volunteer Reflection Toolkit: De Bono’s Six Hats Exercise⁷

Objective: To practice thinking in different ways. This exercise helps to enhance creative thinking and creates awareness that there are multiple perspectives on the issue at hand.

The central tool is a collection of six symbolic hats in different colors that represent different ‘thinking behaviors’. These hats are indicative of both frames of mind and emotional states.

<p>White Hat (informative)</p>	<p>With this thinking hat, you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them.</p>
<p>Red Hat (Intuitive)</p>	<p>Wearing the red hat, you look at the decision using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also try to think how other people will react emotionally, and try to understand the intuitive responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.</p>
<p>Black Hat (cautious)</p>	<p>When using black hat thinking, look at things pessimistically, cautiously and defensively. Try to see why ideas and approaches might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan or course of action. It allows you to eliminate them, alter your approach, or prepare contingency plans to counter problems that arise. Black Hat thinking helps to make your plans tougher and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black Hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance, leaving them under-prepared for difficulties.</p>

7. Adapted from: Deans, Fran and Oakley, Louise, *Praxis Paper No. 14: Coaching and Mentoring for Leadership Development in Civil Society*, January 2006, p37 (www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper14.html) by courtesy of Fran Deans, UNV PO in Albania.

Yellow Hat (constructive)	The yellow hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it, and spot the opportunities that arise from it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.
Green Hat (creative)	The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.
Blue Hat (reflective)	The Blue Hat stands for process control. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, and so on.

The hats can be used in a structured sequence for collective reflection, where a group wears one symbolic hat at a time. This is called parallel thinking, and provides focus and a clear direction of the thinking process. “Wearing” a clearly identified hat during the exercise separates personal identity from expression and performance. Therefore, it allows everyone to say things without risks which improves communication. For example:

- Step 1: The relevant facts about the issue are explored (White)
- Step 2: Ideas are generated about how the issue could be addressed (Green)
- Step 3: The benefits (Yellow) and drawbacks (Black) of the ideas are listed
- Step 4: Intuitions and feeling about the alternatives are shared (Red)
- Step 5: The outcome of the process is synthesized (Blue)

Appendix 5: David Kolb's learning styles model and experiential learning theory (ELT)

As UN Volunteers represent a great number of people and thus a great variety of learning styles, the suggested activities try to take into account all of Kolb's 4 learning styles. The short introduction to Kolb's work is taken from the following website, where Kolb's work is presented in detailed and useful ways:

www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm

« Kolb's learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles (or preferences), which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. (which might also be interpreted as a 'training cycle'). In this respect Kolb's model is particularly elegant, since it offers both a way to understand individual people's different learning styles, and also an explanation of a cycle of experiential learning that applies to us all.

Kolb includes this 'cycle of learning' as a central principle his experiential learning theory, typically expressed as four-stage cycle of learning, in which 'immediate or concrete experiences' provide a basis for 'observations and reflections'. These 'observations and reflections' are assimilated and distilled into 'abstract concepts' producing new implications for

action which can be 'actively tested' in turn creating new experiences.

Kolb says that ideally (and by inference not always) this process represents a learning cycle or spiral where the learner 'touches all the bases', ie., a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Immediate or concrete experiences lead to observations and reflections. These reflections are then assimilated (absorbed and translated) into abstract concepts with implications for action, which the person can actively test and experiment with, which in turn enable the creation of new experiences.

Kolb's model therefore works on two levels - a four-stage cycle:

1. Concrete Experience - (CE)
2. Reflective Observation - (RO)
3. Abstract Conceptualization - (AC)
4. Active Experimentation - (AE)

and a four-type definition of learning styles, (each representing the combination of two preferred styles, rather like a two-by-two matrix of the four-stage cycle styles, as illustrated below), for which Kolb used the terms:

1. Diverging (CE/RO)
2. Assimilating (AC/RO)
3. Converging (AC/AE)
4. Accommodating (CE/AE)

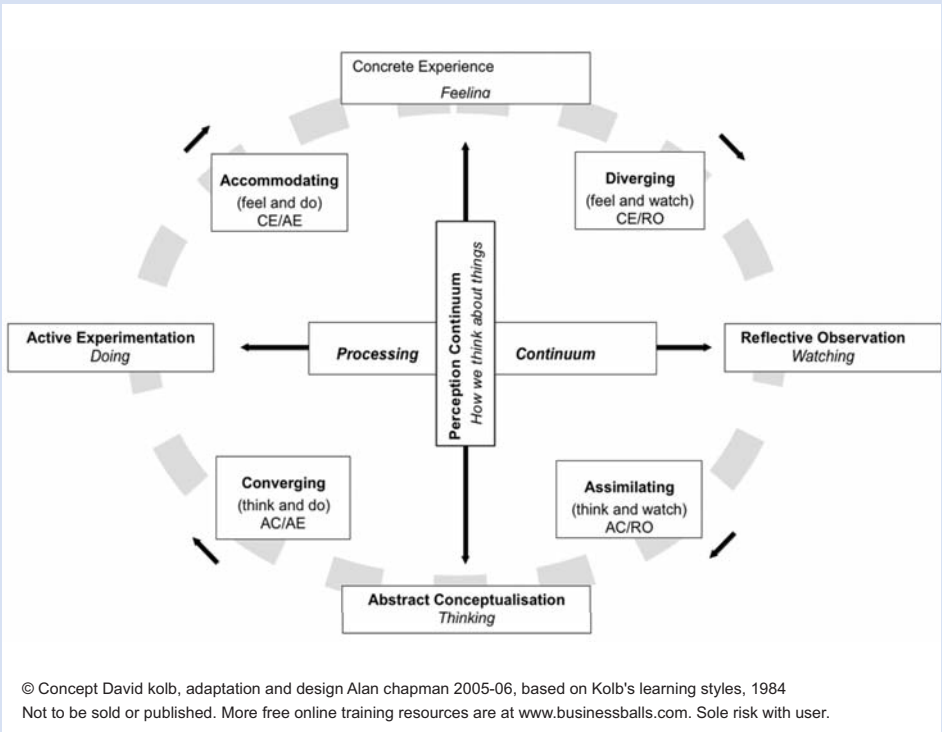


Whatever influences the choice of style, the learning style preference itself is actually the product of two pairs of variables, or two separate 'choices' that we make, which Kolb presented as lines of axis, each with 'conflicting' modes at either end:

Concrete Experience - CE (feeling) —V— Abstract Conceptualization - AC (thinking)

Active Experimentation - AE (doing) —V— Reflective Observation - RO (watching)

A typical presentation of Kolb's two continuums is that the east-west axis is called the Processing Continuum (how we approach a task), and the north-south axis is called the Perception Continuum (our emotional response, or how we think or feel about it).



These learning styles are the combination of two lines of axis (continuums) each formed between what Kolb calls 'dialectically related modes' of 'grasping experience' (doing or watching), and 'transforming experience' (feeling or thinking): kolb learning styles

In other words we choose our approach to the task or experience ('grasping the experience') by opting for 1(a) or 1(b):

* 1(a) - though watching others involved in the experience and reflecting on what happens ('reflective observation' - 'watching') or

* 1(b) - through 'jumping straight in' and just doing it ('active experimentation' - 'doing')

And at the same time we choose how to emotionally transform the experience into something meaningful and useful by opting for 2(a) or 2(b):

* 2(a) - through gaining new information by thinking, analyzing, or planning ('abstract conceptualization' - 'thinking') or

* 2(b) - through experiencing the 'concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world' ('concrete experience' - 'feeling') »

This is a living document that will change as your needs change. If you have comments and additions that you feel can make it more useful, please send your feedback to volunteer_tools@unv.org. It is hoped that the exercises and topics discussed will help to make your transition a successful one. We look forward to hearing from you in the future.





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