



## North American Community Service: Pilot Project Research Report

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Global Service Institute  
Center for Social Development  
Washington University in St. Louis

# North American Community Service Pilot Project: Research Report

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## Research Abstract

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In 2002, the North American Institute, in collaboration with the Universidad Veracruzana, the Student Conservation Association, and Canada World Youth, along with regional and local organizations in Mexico, Canada, and the United States, initiated a pilot demonstration of a North American Community Service (NACS) program. The purpose of NACS is to build capacity among youth from all walks of life for leadership in creating a North American community.

### **Program Goals**

- (a) To prepare young people to meet the challenges of young adulthood in a global world.
- (b) To increase knowledge and skills among youth to understand and respond to North Americas' shared cultural, environmental, social, and economic challenges.
- (c) To make tangible contributions to host communities through cross-border exchange and voluntary community service.
- (d) To contribute to a growing network of people and communities committed to sustainable community development in North America.

### **NACS Program Description**

The NACS pilot program consisted of nine youth ages 19 to 25 and a group leader. There were three participants from each country and efforts were made to assure social and economic diversity. The NACS team worked for two months in each country. The team's activities in each site included physical activity, such as construction and restoration, data collection and analysis, such as mapmaking, documentation, and monitoring, and various educational activities. In Canada, the team was stationed in Nelson, British Columbia, working with three organizations (Earth Matters, The Cottonwood Creek Wetlands Restoration Project and Harrop-Proctor Community Watershed Protection Society and Community Cooperative). The underlying theme of this phase was environmental preservation. In the United States, the team was deployed to Socorro, Texas, to work with Cornerstones Community Partnerships. The theme in this leg of the program was historic preservation and restoration. Finally, in Mexico, the team settled in the village of Coyopolan, Veracruz, working under the guidance of the Universidad Veracruzana. The themes of this phase were community and sustainable development and environmental preservation.

### **NACS Impacts on the Participants**

- a) Participants learned how to work effectively in a culturally diverse group.
- b) Participants learned to communicate in another language.
- c) Participants acquire new skills and developed new interests.
- d) Participants gained insight into their future education and career plans.
- e) Participants gained cross-cultural understanding.
- f) Participants increased their understanding of North American issues.
- g) Participants began to develop a North American identity.

### **NACS Impacts on Communities**

- a) Service work addressed legitimate needs in each community,
- b) Participants believed they made the greatest contribution in communities where their service work centered on one site with multiple work options.

- c) Service work of volunteers engaged local residents, especially in the smallest communities.
- d) Participants had greatest influence on youth and children, especially in Socorro and Coyopolan.
- e) Exchange of ideas between NACS participants and community actors provided ample opportunity for cross-cultural and cross-national learning.

### **NACS Impacts on Organizations and Policy**

- a) Organizations increased their international profile and understanding of international issues.
- b) NACS helped organizations improve their relationship with the community.
- c) NACS posed a financial and logistic challenge for some of the organizations.
- d) Due to its small size and limited exposure, NACS received little attention from policy makers.
- e) Program development and funding pose the greatest challenges for taking NACS to scale.

### **NACS Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations**

The process of designing and implementing NACS was a true multi-lateral effort. The advisory board and steering committee supported and firmly believed in the concept of NACS. However, at times there was confusion about specific roles of NACS partners. Clarification of vision, mission, and goals can highlight potential contributions to building a North American community. Limited financial resources, however, placed strain on the program in all three sites. With increased funding, NACS should be able to grow and develop into an important North American institution. Communication was a major challenge at all stages of the program that suggests the importance of establishing an advisory board committee on communication.

Regarding program design, the pilot establishes a "starting point" for future programs. Earlier recruitment and training and orientation modifications would better prepare volunteers for NACS. Furthermore, clearer roles would clarify expectations among volunteers, group leader, and service site supervisors. With greater ongoing support, the group leader could be more effective. Key skills for the group leader include English and Spanish proficiency, leadership ability, and group work skills.

Participants praised the education programming, particularly in Mexico. Efforts to link education activities to the goals of the program could reduce program costs and make the program more coherent and feasible. Participants were excited about their language acquisition, but believed that additional language training would be desirable. Overall, participants believed that host family living and congregate living offered different types of advantages, although host family living was more closely associated with cross-national program goals. Almost unanimously, the participants believed that two months in each community was too little time to make a service contribution and engage in educational activities. Volunteers believed that stipends should be uniform for all volunteers.

Capacity to supervise and host the volunteers varied by community. Although communities need not be wealthy, it is important to be able to provide basic accommodations and an appropriate service site and supervision. To increase service impact and facilitate implementation, a single service site may be desirable. As NACS grows, service project "tracks" might be considered that could accommodate different interests and skill levels among participants. To facilitate growth, it may be useful to design future NACS projects with the goal of going to scale. Moreover, it would be helpful to research well-established cross-national programs in other parts of the world. Finally, because research on national and international service and volunteer programs is scarce and policy makers inform their decision with available information, research on impacts and implementation of NACS should continue.

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## Research Summary

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In 2002, the North American Institute, in collaboration with the Universidad Veracruzana, the Student Conservation Association, and Canada World Youth, along with other organizations in Mexico, Canada, and the United States, initiated a pilot demonstration of a North American Community Service (NACS) program for youth. The pilot consisted of nine volunteers (three from each country) doing community service in British Columbia, Texas, and Veracruz for a total of six months. This following summarizes the full report that follows, providing a brief examination of the NACS pilot project, and emphasizing cross-national impacts.

An Advisory Board of North Americanists, experts in youth service, and academics, oversaw the NACS pilot. The North American Institute (NAMI) convened the group and facilitated the formation of a Steering Committee of the three partner organizations. The Steering Committee included a representatives from the Universidad Veracruzana (UV is the public university in Veracruz and a leader in student community service in Mexico), the Student Conservation Association (SCA is a youth conservation and leadership program in the U.S.), and Canada World Youth (CWY is an international youth service exchange program in Canada). CWY oversaw implementation of the pilot NACS program.

The stated goals of the NACS pilot program were to "raise awareness on the part of North Americans of shared cultural, environmental, social and economic challenges and to increase their capacity to confront these challenges in collaboration with one another." Objectives were:

- (a) To transform youth with respect to knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them for leadership roles in building a sustainable North American community,
- (b) To make tangible contributions to host communities through provision of community and conservation service, and
- (c) To establish a growing network of youth participants and host communities committed to sustainable community development in North America that will continue to share resources following their participation in NACS.

### **NACS Program Description**

One team of youth, composed of three participants from each country and one project supervisor, rotated through three sites, beginning in Canada, moving to the United States, and then to Mexico. The team stayed in each country for two months. Aged 19 to 25, the volunteers were engaged in community work projects (e.g, construction, restoration, data collection and analysis) and educational activities (e.g., experiential learning, lectures, field trips, discussion). The Canadian volunteers were the youngest and Mexican volunteers were the oldest. Although the U.S. volunteers had spent the most time abroad, overall the group had little international experience.



### **Three phases, three countries, three communities (June to December 2002)**

**Phase 1 - Environmental preservation and sustainable development in Nelson, British Columbia.** NACS worked with the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) in three projects with three volunteers (one from each country in each group).

- (1) The first group did cleanup, maintenance, creation and management of community green space and community education at *Earth Matters*, a grassroots, youth-driven environmental and conservation organization that aims to build sustainable communities and teach about the natural environment.
- (2) The second group attended a one-week Wetlands Institute and conducted initial research for a social and biological history of the Cottonwood Creek drainage area for *Cottonwood Creek Wetlands Restoration Project*, focusing on wetlands' conservation.
- (3) The third group participated in intensive training and worked on an organic herb farm and in the sustainable forest operated by *Harrop-Proctor Community Watershed Protection Society and Community Cooperative*, a community-managed sustainable forestry and watershed management project.

**Phase 2 - Historic preservation in Socorro, Texas.** The volunteers worked with *Cornerstones Community Partnerships* at the *Socorro Mission Preservation Project* on the Texas-Chihuahua border on restoration of the historic Socorro Mission, *Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción*, a historically and culturally significant building founded in 1680. Working alongside staff, welfare-to-work participants, and youth from an alternative school, NACS volunteers:

- (1) Built with traditional methods of adobe construction and architecture,
- (2) Conducted oral history interviews with local community residents, and
- (3) Spoke to children in the local public schools on the Mexico-U.S. border.

**Phase 3 - Community development and sustainable development in Coyopolan, Veracruz.** The volunteers worked with the *Universidad Veracruzana* in a small rural village in the mountains of Veracruz. The volunteers worked on projects selected by the university and village leaders. They lived together in the *Casa de la Universidad*, built by UV for outreach and service. Working alongside community residents and UV students, NACS volunteers:

- (1) Built a sustainable house and a garden for two community residents,
- (2) Restored and expand community greenhouses, and
- (3) Developed trout breeding tanks in the mountain stream.

## NACS Impact on the Volunteers

"When we see our common problems then we can relate to one another . . . When someone tells you about his or her life . . . well, a connection is made. That's precisely what happened to us when we saw the same problem in Canada and the United States. We were able to relate and to connect. That makes it possible to [be] a North American citizen."  
 – Mexican volunteer

**Perspectives on NACS goals.** The volunteers said they believed that the main goals of NACS were:

- (a) To learn about different ways of life and different issues confronting the three nations.
- (b) To develop youth as leaders and facilitators of change.
- (c) To learn how to help communities in tangible ways.
- (d) To build common understanding and connections across North America.

What did they gain from the experience?

*✍* **Volunteers learned how to form a cohesive working group.** The NACS group was diverse in nationality, age, race and ethnicity, and social class. Despite these differences and the challenges of living in close proximity for six months, the group became generous, hardworking, and cohesive by the end, according to all reports. As one volunteer stated, "I never thought [these relationships] would solidify, but [they] have become unbreakable."

*✍* **Volunteer gained group interaction and "people" skills.** As one volunteer said, "I have learned that when working in a team I need to be clear in communicating my needs and delegating out responsibilities when I'm in a situation that requires it. I have a clearer understanding of how I work in groups." Another volunteer learned to have patience: "The experience of living in a tight group of people and working within that group to solve differences, problems and break stereotypes are lessons and skills that will help me enormously in the future. Patience, patience, patience." The volunteers learned how to work with others, including "being able to relate to and understand at-risk youth."

*✍* **Volunteers learned to communicate in another language.** None of the volunteers began the program bilingual in English and Spanish. In their own assessment, six volunteers progressed from almost no language ability to basic ability; one progressed from basic to intermediate, one progressed from intermediate to advanced, and one progressed from advanced to proficient. The Mexicans had the greatest challenge because they were the first group to be placed in a language immersion situation (in Canada). By the time the group arrived in Mexico, the native English speakers had learned some Spanish from their peers and from residents in Socorro.

*✍* **Volunteers learned to value another language.** Judging by what might be the ultimate test of success—how much the volunteers enjoy speaking another language—the language portion of the program could be judged highly successful. The program, according to one volunteer, "made me realize that I like languages and I like being able to communicate with people." Several said they planned to continue their study of language.

- Volunteers developed new substantive interests and had an opportunity to practice new skills.** In Nelson, British Columbia, volunteers learned about environmental protection and sustainable development, including forestry, gardening, planning, and community involvement. In Socorro, Texas, volunteers learned about historic preservation, including adobe construction, rehabilitation of centuries-old beams, use of compatible building materials, and ethnographic research. They gained understanding of history: "people would come up and talk about their great-grandparents . . . we're continuing on with the history, you know, we're helping with history." In Coyopolan, Veracruz, volunteers learned about construction with local materials and development of local talent and resources for entrepreneurship and sustainability. As one volunteer pointed out: "I definitely developed my logic skills and spatial skills working on constructing a greenhouse and being around expert craftspeople . . . I had not used power tools very much before and became proficient, as well as learning how to lay adobes and preserve a historical building." Another said that in Veracruz "where material and resources are not always perfect . . . I developed my ability to work under pressure."
- Volunteers believed that the NACS experience would impact their career directions.** Volunteers said that NACS would likely contribute to their career choice and/or focus. One volunteer from Mexico, for example, decided to change career plans as a result of NACS: "It was through this amazing experience that I have learned the importance of fostering a sustainable society in the world. Now I wish to complete my master's degree and redirect my future. Perhaps pursue a doctorate, but in an environmental field with the purpose of applying my knowledge in the community and thus contribute to its development." Another volunteer planned to pursue graduate work in Latin America.
- Volunteers gained cross-cultural understanding.** The experience provided ample opportunities for gaining insight into culture and everyday lives of people in three communities in North America. They gained understanding of people in different environments but also how institutions impact their lives. For example, a volunteer said that living "on the [Mexico-U.S.] border really made clear to me how flexible cultures can be and also how constraining society and policies can be on cultures."
- NACS affected the volunteers' conception of leadership.** One volunteer described a new determination to become more involved in his community: "NACS for me was like a surge, as if someone hit me and made me react and awaken from the lethargy we find ourselves when we don't know the work of many people who fight to reach a goal." Several factors contributed to this growing sense of responsibility, including: (a) heightened consciousness about the reality of other people's lives, (b) greater understanding of community leadership, and (c) a greater sense of empowerment. As one volunteer said, his belief in his own potential grew because the group members were "being spoken of as future leaders of North America . . . our accomplishments [were] acknowledged by people that I highly respect."
- Volunteers increased their understanding of common issues in North America.** As one volunteer said: "a knowledge of three very distinct communities that on the cover seem so different, in reality have so many things in common." Another said that her perceptions about "developed" countries changed as a result of seeing challenges faced in each community:

"NACS has influenced and broken the stereotypes I had of the other countries, I was able to see directly that other countries also have problems such as environmental, social, cultural problems."

- ✍ **Volunteers acquired knowledge about environmental, social, economic, and political issues confronting North America.** Comparing issues across countries helped the volunteers to understand similarities and differences. The volunteers' understanding of "North American issues" was framed by the specific experiences and location in each country, and also by the work and education activities in each program site.
- ✍ **Volunteers began to act on their increased knowledge of the "North American" context.** NACS' experiential approach made the realities of each country more compelling. They learned that the problems in each nation often were similar, but issues played themselves out differently in the three contexts. They developed deeper and more complex understanding of social and economic inequities across the region. They learned about the impact of North American integration on small communities and thought about how negative impacts could be avoided. The group also began to learn how to convey what they were learning about North America to others.
- ✍ **Volunteers began to develop a "North American identity."** As one volunteer stated, "I no longer feel that I am from the United States or [am] what everyone calls an 'American.' I am a North American!" Another concurred: "Without a doubt I now feel part of North America with the civic duty to serve and foster this citizenship." The volunteers said developing a North American identity did not mean giving up their national identity and their roots, as one volunteer pointed out: "I have learned to value more my personal roots."

## NACS Impact on Communities

"We have come to realize they are hardworking people and it is a shame they are going back to their countries so soon."  
-- Coyopolitan resident

- ✍ **The service projects had significant and tangible impact on communities, especially in communities where volunteers worked at one site.** Type, level, and visibility differed by site, but the work made a tangible difference in each of the communities. As one volunteer said about one project: ". . . we've created something and it's going to be finished by the time we're done. You know, we'll be able to see the finished product." The volunteers believed that they had more impact in sites where the work was concentrated in one site.
- ✍ **The volunteers' work invigorated and impacted community residents.** The idea that an international group would be interested in their community, motivated some residents to think about getting more involved themselves. A volunteer reported, for example, that in British Columbia, "people came up . . . would visit and get involved." In Texas, a volunteer pointed out that the mission workers "were looking at the work only as masonry—or disagreeable—work, but now they are impressed because we are working as volunteers. [As a result] many of them have changed their attitudes and now they value their work, [they] see

their work like an art." In Veracruz, the NACS volunteers' enthusiasm and engagement with local residents influenced other volunteers from the university.

*✍* **NACS volunteers may have had most influence on children and youth.** As one volunteer pointed out: "It is wonderful, I think, to imagine they will not be prejudiced against foreign people, they won't have that xenophobia that people have because they think."

*✍* **Cross-national and cross-cultural learning occurred in all three communities, but was most visible in the smallest one.** By the end of their stay in each community, the volunteers had forged close friendships. In the smallest community, Coyopolan, despite initial apprehension, "community involvement [in] this phase was amazing and the most warm and enthusiastic of any of the phases," according to one volunteer. In the words of another observer, the NACS program was "something amazing to see—how people come together."

*✍* **NACS (by itself) raised the issue of North America.** Some thought that the simple act of bringing young people from three different countries together raised North American issues. One observer said: "people will be wondering why are there three people from each country coming together? . . . if we can answer that question . . . it will kind of show them that there is a connection between the three countries and this is why we're here. I think that's a major, major, thing."

*✍* **Forging of international links by communities was limited, but some transfer of ideas occurred.** Although NACS volunteers developed cross-national ties, there was little evidence that community residents forged similar ties. However, some lessons learned in one community were transferred to others, suggesting that, over time, cross-national linkages might be possible. For example, a community leader in Coyopolan recounted: ". . . they showed us a video from Canada, they have over there . . . a botanical garden, and, I mean, if they have one of those over there, why can't we have one here? . . . All the years I have lived here I have learned about plants that cured me without spending one single peso, not one centavo!"

## NACS Impact on the Organizations

"There were definitely a lot of questions from . . . some members of our board . . . about the relevance of this kind of programming over more locally focused programs and other priorities."  
-- Organizational participant

*✍* **Organizations expanded their international profiles and gained greater understanding of international issues.** Each organization involved could claim greater international involvement and expand their "profile within North America." Some developed more understanding of international issues among staff and board, as the participant quoted above went on to observe: "I think that [board members] got a lot out of meeting the participants and hearing what they were learning about. I think that gave them more of an understanding of why this kind of thing is important."

- ✍ **Organizations integrating NACS into their organizational mission sometimes find it challenging.** This was particularly true for organizations whose missions are not international, but was also true for international organizations. For example, NAMI, whose central mission is North American community building, "NACS has had a positive impact." Nonetheless, "there has been some discussion on the Board of Directors about how the program fits within the larger NAMI role of serving as a convener and less as a program coordinator, NACS clearly added dimension and value to NAMI, as well as to North America."
- ✍ **NACS invigorated organizations.** One organization, for example, reported improved relations with the community, greater interaction with young people in the area, and increased visibility: "It was possible to expand the interest and knowledge of all participants about the problems of the relationship between Mexico, the United States and Canada." Young people were very receptive to the idea of participating in NACS. For example, SCA had 500 inquiries from their alumni pool of former leaders for just three spots and UV and CWY reported a high degree of interest among potential applicants.
- ✍ **NACS increased financial pressures for some organizations.** The most negative effect mentioned was financial. Each of the organizations involved provided funding (directly or indirectly) from existing budgets. For some, these expenditures caused relatively little strain, but for others the strain was considerable.

## NACS Impact on Policy

"Eventually with the right kind of interventions, I believe that we are offering a new format for the cooperation and solidarity among our three nations."

– Advisory Board member

- ✍ **NACS received relatively little public exposure.** The media coverage NACS received had positive results: "Lots of people here say, 'Oh, yeah, I read about you guys in the paper, I heard you on the radio,' or, 'Oh, yeah, that's a really cool project that you are working on.'" NACS was considered a success by governmental and civilian entities in Veracruz. This success enhances the profile of the University and created opportunities for potential resource development. Nonetheless, media coverage and public exposure was limited.
- ✍ **NACS received some policy and academic attention.** NACS volunteers and Advisory Board members attended two conferences in Mexico City. One academic paper has been published about NACS.
- ✍ **The U.S. has been the most reluctant partner.** Some people commented that it is imperative for the U.S. to join as a "full partner." As one observer pointed out: "no truly committed U.S. partner has yet emerged ready and situated to lead the initiative forward in the U.S. in a dynamic way. [I'm] disappointed in the difficulty in the U.S. grasping the value of the project. I would have thought it would be a slam-dunk . . ."

*✍* **NACS faces challenges in "going to scale."** Clearer focus and more financing are required to develop NACS beyond a small-scale program. As an observer pointed out: "In the longer term, scaling up and sustainability will require an investment of public funds. But the pilot needs to be successful in order to convince public agencies to invest." Current political and economic circumstances give pause, but also offer a rationale for the importance of North American community building.

## NACS Program Design and Implementation

### Advisory Board and Steering Committee Operations

*✍* **NACS is a model for international cooperation based on partnerships.** The process of designing and implementing NACS was truly cooperative ("participants from all three nations functioned equally and well in designing the pilot project"). The model, with CWY in charge of implementation, guided by a Steering Committee and an Advisory Board, worked well most of the time.

*✍* **The Advisory Board and Steering Committee were highly committed to the purpose of NACS.** Throughout the pilot, all of the participating organizations expressed support for and a commitment to the central purpose of NACS. In the words of one supporter, "NACS constitutes an ideal instrument to gain experience, knowledge, to develop a social conscience and action mechanisms to transform the youth of the three participating countries into factors for change."

*✍* **A lack of clarity about goals emerged in implementation.** Differences in perceived goals reflected diverse organizational missions and goals and diverse socioeconomic realities of each nation. Differences in substantive focus (e.g., sustainable development, conservation, community development, or historic and cultural preservation) influenced organizational views of NACS. Inequality across North America also influenced planners' goals for NACS. NACS, therefore, represents a convergence, but in a context of inequality and difference. NACS will fulfill its mission as it strives to build common ground.

*✍* **Lower than expected funds resulted in scaled-down pilot project.** The pilot started late and there was less time for preparation as a result of tight funds. As one observer pointed out: "The biggest disappointment thus far has been the lack of funds available for the program, and subsequent scaling-down of the pilot. It has been challenging to generate interest on the part of the private foundations and individual donors, mainly due to program being new and seen as a 'novelty.'"

*✍* **Organizational contributions were generous but not sustainable.** Organizational contributions included planning time of implementing agencies, Advisory Board and Steering Committee activities, and research and evaluation. In communities, host families and communities at all three sites covered various on-site costs. Many of these costs will have to be covered in future budgets, although economies of scale will help.

- ✍ **There was some confusion about roles.** Specific roles of implementing organization, convening organization, Steering Committee, advisory committee, and local host and funding organizations were sometimes unclear.
- ✍ **Organizational capacity and staffing by host organizations varied.** Ad hoc arrangements for NACS were feasible in the short term, but not sustainable over the longer term without additional resources.
- ✍ **Communication and changing personnel were challenges.** Rapid implementation, lack of time, and lack of experience caused coordination and communication problems. This resulted, at times, in unintentional "lack of inclusiveness and shared decision-making." Advisory Board members were unaware of some major developments. Steering Committee participation was also uneven, resulting in changing composition on the Steering Committee. Communication problems were exacerbated by language differences, which impeded participation and decision-making.
- ✍ **The NACS Internet site was not used much by planners.** Telephone and e-mail appeared to be more useful modes of communication, especially among Steering Committee and Advisory Board members. In the communities, Internet access was spotty and lacked technology to scan photos or graphics, making communication and report writing difficult.

### Program Design Details

- ✍ **Each phase of the program was too short.** "Two months are not enough time to achieve the goal of building the citizenship in North America." Group members felt pressured by the activities they had to accomplish in the short time available. Time pressures were most acute in the first phase because of orientation and time needed for adjustment.
- ✍ **Volunteer recruitment procedures resulted in a large seven-year age difference among volunteers.** Recruitment was decentralized, with each nation's organization designing their own protocol and procedures for soliciting and choosing volunteers. Guidelines were followed, but resulted in significant age spread, resulting in different levels of educational and work experience.
- ✍ **Volunteers wanted information in advance of program.** Lack of pre-program information resulted in lack of understanding of the program, their roles, and time for preparation. Some said that with more time they might have engaged in language study prior to program.
- ✍ **The group leader had wide (and challenging) range of responsibilities.** Duties included project budget, work project selection, education activities, training host families and other community partners, coordination with implementing organization and local host organization, ensuring health and safety of participants, group guidance, translation and problem-solving. Despite her many talents, the amount of work and challenges of time management were at times challenging, especially without consistent and accessible support and supervision.



- ✍ **The group leaders' responsibilities varied depending local host.** The group leader's responsibilities were greatest in Canada and least in Mexico. People viewed the leader's role differently, depending on their interpretation of program goals and their own responsibilities in their organization and in NACS, resulting in some uncertainty by the group leader about her role.
- ✍ **The model of one community in each country and one work site in each community works well.** A single service work site provided ample opportunity for learning about each country and making a contribution in each community and was easier to organize.
- ✍ **Choice of specific work activities offered variety and an opportunity to use each volunteers' strengths.** Even within one community service work site, a variety of projects (e.g., building a house, conducting oral interviews) gave the group focus, but allowed the group to maximize their impact by building on individual strengths and goals.
- ✍ **An experiential approach was valued by volunteers.** The "hands-on" and "experiential learning" approach gave volunteers tangible skills and allowed them to see the results of their learning.
- ✍ **The role of volunteers and local hosts varied across sites.** Differences in approach and supervision across service sites challenged the group. Volunteers learned about how organizational and cultural differences affect life and work. At times, however, the group found the differences difficult to adjust to. This raises the question: Which aspects of program design and operation should be similar and which should vary?
- ✍ **The most organized educational curriculum was the most successful.** The educational curriculum in Veracruz was the most carefully planned, organized, and successful. Overall, volunteers said they would like to help plan educational activities. They also wanted "more discussion of North American issues in a little bit more formal way."
- ✍ **Lack of time and fatigue made individual education projects difficult.** Volunteers were often worn out by the time they turned to their individual education projects. In the end, the idea of individual projects may have been too ambitious given the amount of time available and ability to link across sites.
- ✍ **Community education days were successful.** The volunteers successfully organized "community education days" in each site, which were well received by community residents and memorable events for the volunteers.
- ✍ **Volunteers learned to speak another language, but said that more language training would have been helpful.** As one volunteer observed, "From the very beginning, language was an obstacle and I was told it would not be." In the end, however, all the participants made impressive gains in language ability. The language challenge was greatest in formal program activities.

- ✍ **Different levels of language fluency did not create problems for group interaction.** The decision not to require ability in both languages was deliberate and avoided selection of only those who had already traveled or studied abroad. The volunteers learned as they helped each other to learn the language.
- ✍ **Local accommodation and preparation varied by program site.** Some communities were more prepared to assist with accommodations and educational activities. Living arrangements and educational activities were very well planned in Veracruz, however, in El Paso lots of improvisation was required.
- ✍ **Congregate living and host family living have distinct advantages and disadvantages.** Congregate living facilitated group formation and group activities. Host family living facilitated language acquisition and cross-cultural learning. To some extent, congregate living in a small village may facilitate both.
- ✍ **Policies among partner organizations differed regarding volunteer stipends.** Some volunteers were given much larger stipends than others, a practice which led to differential access to resources and some hard feelings. Steering Committee members did not become aware of this until the U.S. phase of the program.
- ✍ **Research is important to understand implementation and outcomes of NACS.** Qualitative and quantitative data are needed to understand the effort, impact, and meaning of NACS. Some aspects of data collection should be standardized as the program expands. This phase of the research is exploratory, but once response categories are determined, close-ended questions can be developed to facilitate data collection and analysis. Qualitative interviews and observation will help interpret and generate deeper understanding.

## **Lessons from the NACS Pilot Project**

### **Vision, Mission, and Goals**

- ✍ Clarify the vision, mission, and goals of NACS.

### **Partners' roles and responsibilities**

- ✍ Partner roles and responsibilities will evolve in concert with vision, mission, and goals of NACS. Over the longer term, NACS Advisory Board and Steering Committee may also discuss the possibility of other organizational structures.

### **Equal commitment across nations .**

- ✍ Equal commitment by each partner organization will make NACS truly tri-national. Funding levels will likely vary by access to resources.

### **Funding and resource development**

- ✍ Increase funding base.
- ✍ Link funding proposals to NACS mission and goals. Effective proposals will address the value-added by a tri-national program instead of separate national programs.

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- ☞ Link program activities to NACS mission and goals. Engaging only in activities that support NACS mission and goals may help to minimize costs.

### **Advisory Board**

- ☞ Board members should offer expertise, access to resources, and an ability to communicate effectively the vision, mission, and goals of NACS.
- ☞ Regular meetings can inform the Advisory Board about NACS activities and involve members in policy and resource development decisions. Meetings held at least two times a year during the pilot phase, with Board committees meeting throughout the year through teleconferencing and email, will assist in effectiveness.
- ☞ Advisory Board meetings can be coordinated by either the implementing agency (CWY) or the tri-national convening organization (NAMI).

### **Steering Committee**

- ☞ Stability and regular meetings of the Steering Committee are important. It will ensure that each country has voice in program decision-making. An alternate on the Steering Committee could help to ensure continuity and communication.

### **Local host organizations and local funders**

- ☞ Clear roles would help local host organizations be more effective and helpful.

### **Project duration**

- ☞ Longer duration in each country would facilitate service and educational activities. Most appeared to agree that three months in each country would be ideal and four months would probably be too long and expensive.

### **Volunteer selection**

- ☞ Maintain nationality, social class, ethnic, and gender mix.
- ☞ Perhaps consider French-speaking Canadian volunteers at some point.
- ☞ Consider narrower age range (e.g., 19-23 years) to reduce differences in education and experience.
- ☞ Consider volunteer motivation, group interaction skills, and leadership potential in selection.

### **Orientation**

- ☞ Increase information sent prior to program start. Send materials earlier to allow volunteers to engage in language training and other preparatory activities.
- ☞ An increased focus on language training during orientation, including how to use adult language learning curricula and peer-training throughout the NACS program, would facilitate language acquisition.

### **Formal language instruction**

- ☞ Increase access to language training and materials throughout the program.
- ☞ Host family living and language immersion in a small community facilitates language learning.

### **Group leadership**

- ✍ Provide additional support for group leader. It may be helpful to have one person familiar with local sites and circumstances who is available to provide guidance and support.
- ✍ Provide leader with training on group process and how to handle conflict.
- ✍ Group leader bilingual and bicultural skills are essential.

### **Community selection**

- ✍ Community capacity to provide certain resources is important. In addition to interest in sponsoring NACS, communities need to be able to provide accommodations, transportation, and appropriate service work, education, and cultural opportunities.

### **Community host**

- ✍ Identify a local host organization to work with the group leader in planning work project and education opportunities. A local host individual could further facilitate program implementation.
- ✍ An additional advantage of a single service work site is a potential increased sense of responsibility to help with local arrangements.
- ✍ Ongoing communication between the local host organization and local host with the implementing agency and the Steering Committee is important.

### **Accommodations**

- ✍ A mix of host family living and congregate living may be ideal. The group might live together intermittently, but most of the time live with host families (unless there is a congregate living option that allows close interaction with the community, and avoids placing a heavy burden on local families with few resources to provide housing and food – such as in Coyopolan).

### **Service work project**

- ✍ One service work project per phase that can accommodate a variety of activities and volunteer skills and goals is more visible and easier to coordinate. The group is more likely able to make a real and lasting contribution to the community if the effort is focused. Challenges of transportation are minimized. It is simpler to integrate educational activities. A large project utilized by several groups could introduce economies of scale. Continued effort in one community in each country may lead to eventual cross-national linkages as the volunteers move across the sites.
- ✍ Possible development of project "tracks." With growth of NACS, service project "tracks" might be developed that volunteers sign up for depending on their skills, and personal and career interests (e.g., sustainable development and conservation, cultural/historic preservation, community development).
- ✍ Local service project supervisors, who understand NACS goals, are important. Because of the relatively short duration in each community, supervisors facilitate swift start up, solve problems, and help with volunteer integration into the community.

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### **Education curriculum**

- ☞ It is important to link educational activities to NACS goals.
- ☞ Education can contribute to real and lasting contributions made by the group in the community by integrating education with service work projects.
- ☞ Attention to efficiency and simplicity in educational activities, such as peer education and community education days, may lower costs.

### **Stipends**

- ☞ Stipends and requirements for volunteer fundraising should be equalized across all three national groups. Consideration might be given to a stipend offered at the end for transition purposes.

### **Building NACS Constituency**

- ☞ An Advisory Board committee on communication might provide ideas for increased media exposure.
- ☞ A well-designed media campaign could disseminate pilot results to major print and news outlets, foundations and other funders, government officials and organizations, and universities.
- ☞ A website for potential volunteers could increase applications.
- ☞ An alumni group with access to a web site could continue to participate in NACS.
- ☞ Participation in national and international meetings and publishing and distributing research findings can help inform policy makers about NACS.

### **Going to Scale**

- ☞ Design pilots explicitly with the goal of going to scale. Although not likely to happen soon, this may facilitate a transition to a larger program.
- ☞ NACS Advisory Board and other constituents can monitor potential public (or quasi-public) and private funding streams in all three countries.
- ☞ Examine models of cross-national youth service elsewhere in the world (e.g., the European Union) for design, funding, and policy ideas.

### **Research**

- ☞ Continue to conduct research on the pilot projects and develop research instruments that are efficient, valid, and reliable. Sound research will be a key to development of NACS.

# 1. Introduction

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In 2002, the North American Institute, in collaboration with the Universidad Veracruzana, the Student Conservation Association, and Canada World Youth, along with other organizations in Mexico, Canada, and the United States, initiated a pilot demonstration of a North American Community Service (NACS) program for youth. The pilot project consisted of nine volunteers (three from each country) doing community service in British Columbia, Texas, and Veracruz for a total of six months between June and December of 2002. This report examines the NACS pilot project, with an emphasis on assessing the cross-national impacts.

Three questions guided data collection and analysis. First, how successful were program implementation and administration, with particular focus on implementation of a tri-national service project? Second, what were the initial outcomes for participants and communities, especially with respect to tri-national impacts and lessons? Third, what does this demonstration suggest about tri-national program and policy development?

Data for this report are from interviews, surveys, and content analysis of program and other written materials. Participant observation and informal interviewing of key players provided additional background and contextual information. Because of the small scale and exploratory nature of this project, a qualitative approach was chosen as the principal method of inquiry. We conducted interviews in person with the nine volunteers twice, at the end of four months (in Texas) and near the end of the program (in Veracruz). Interviews in person or by telephone were held with several community members in British Columbia, Texas, and Veracruz. We also utilized written survey results administered in Canada and Veracruz by Canada World Youth with participants, host families, and service site supervisors. We conducted an email survey with Steering Committee and Advisory Board members at the end of the pilot project. (See Appendix A for complete description of research methods.)

We underscore the exploratory nature of this research. The results cannot be generalized to other cross-national service programs, nor do they predict in any way results of future NACS programs. They are meant to increase understanding of cross-national service, and to suggest program improvements and policy ideas for NACS and to help design future research on cross-national service. Further research, using a variety of methods, will be needed to define and measure concepts accurately and to test propositions regarding cross-national service.

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### A Preliminary Note

The NACS pilot project took place in an environment that created greater challenges than originally anticipated. The events of September 11, 2001 made the idea of a tri-national project more challenging, exacerbated differences among the three countries, and made it more difficult to raise money for the project. For example, the US policy response resulted in less interest and support for international programs. As one US Advisory Board member suggested, "the border community was a casualty" of September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> Although NACS might have been an effective response to this "step backward," policy makers and funders were focused elsewhere for the most part.

At an institutional level, NACS also suffered the tragic loss of the founding President of NAMI and Professor of History at Stanford University, Dr. John Wirth, who died as the NACS pilot project was getting underway. The absence of Dr. Wirth's leadership was deeply felt, but his loss further inspired NACS organizers to make his vision of North American community service a reality.

In combination, the impact of these events meant fewer funding sources, greater challenges to tri-lateral efforts, and diminished institutional support and direction from NAMI. Nonetheless, the organizing group and NAMI leaders believed that the underlying rationale for the creation of NACS had not changed (indeed, it had become even more compelling), and the model continued to hold considerable promise. The decision, therefore, was made to move forward with the pilot project.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout, quotation marks represent direct quotes.

## 2. Background and the Creation of NACS

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In 1999, the North American Institute (NAMI), under the direction of Dr. John Wirth, convened a group of North Americanists, experts in youth service, and academics to discuss the idea of a North American youth service corps. At the meeting hosted by the University of Texas at El Paso, Wirth asked the group to consider the potential to contribute to the overall mission of NAMI of advancing the North American community. At that meeting, it was determined that there was potential and interest to plan for a tri-national youth service program that could build on a successful tradition for youth service in each of the three countries.

Background studies in Mexico, the United States, and Canada were completed, assessing interest and resources for a North American youth service corps (Sherraden, 2000). Many of the same people who met in 1999 convened again in 2001 as an Advisory Board for the proposed North American Community Service program (NACS) (Appendix B). NAMI, the tri-national sponsor, hired a staff person to facilitate start up. The target date for the NACS pilot project was summer 2002. The Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Missouri-St. Louis proposed a plan for research on the NACS pilot project.

NAMI facilitated the formation of a steering committee of the three partner organizations in Mexico, the US and Canada. The steering committee consisted of representatives from the Universidad Veracruzana (UV), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), and Canada World Youth (CWY). While these organizations vary in their missions, goals, and activities, their shared focus on youth and a commitment to developing youth leadership in the North American community brought them together to work on NACS. CWY in Montreal was selected as the main implementing agency.

The mission of the *Universidad Veracruzana*, the main public university in the state of Veracruz, is to create, preserve, and transmit culture for the benefit of society and with the highest academic quality (<http://www.uv.mx/>). Like most universities, it is charged with teaching, research and service. UV has been a leader in Mexico for promoting community service through the creation of *brigadas universitarias*, multi-disciplinary teams of students performing a year of mandatory *servicio social* or capstone internships in their professional discipline. The teams and their supervisors work in up to 50 impoverished communities on a variety of social, health, and economic development projects. The head of university outreach, responsible for coordinating the *brigadas universitarias*, was responsible for planning and coordinating NACS, along with a team of 11 UV faculty and staff.

The *Student Conservation Association*, founded in 1957, is the leading US provider of conservation volunteers, mostly in public parklands. Over the years, more than 35,000 SCA volunteers helped to promote the mission of SCA: "to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of our environment and communities." The lead contacts for the NACS pilot project were the Vice President for the Southwest Region and the Director of International Programs.



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*Canada World Youth*, the third partnering organization, is a non-governmental organization (NGO) "whose mission is to increase people's ability to participate actively in the development of just, harmonious, and sustainable societies." Staff in the Montreal office was responsible for NACS implementation, but regional staff in the British Columbia and Yukon offices implemented the Canadian portion of the NACS pilot project and provided supervision for the NACS group leader. CWY partnered with Columbia Basin Trust (CBT), a non-governmental organization charged with promoting a sustainable environment in the Canadian Columbia River Basin, based in Castlegar, BC.

A memorandum of agreement (MOA, no date, p. 1) signed by the country partner organizations (UV, SCA, and CWY) spelled out the commitments of each organization. There would be equally shared responsibility for planning NACS, but CWY would assume overall coordination. Each country partner organization would take responsibility for the project while NACS was in their country and could take independent action in the case of emergencies. (They could choose to subcontract specific activities, as occurred in British Columbia and Texas, where local organizations hosted the NACS group and assisted the group leader with local arrangements, community service activities, educational programming and so forth.)

Under the auspices of the Steering Committee, CWY was charged with coordinating the overall work plan, including: (a) information flow among the three lead agencies, (b) all NACS common services (e.g., international transportation, participant documentation, training, and internal evaluation), (c) monitoring and reporting on progress of revenue generation and project site expenses with NAMI and other lead agencies, (d) accounting related to common services, (e) creating the educational plan, (f) and planning research framework in collaboration with the Steering Committee and a consultant.

#### **NACS Goals**

The stated goals of the NACS pilot project, adopted by the Steering Committee, were to "raise awareness on the part of North Americans of shared cultural, environmental, social and economic challenges and to increase their capacity to confront these challenges in collaboration with one another" (NACS, December 12, 2001). Objectives included:

- (1) To transform youth volunteers with respect to knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them to play leadership roles in building a sustainable North American community. Specific skills that the NACS project hoped to develop among youth included: cross-cultural sensitivity; increased sense of responsibility for social and environmental sustainability; increased knowledge of cultural, environmental, social, and economic issues in North America, and; increased capacity to serve the community and prepare youth for future employment.
- (2) To make concrete contributions to host communities' projects through provision of community and conservation service and access to the experiences of both youth teams and other participating communities.

- (3) To establish a growing network of youth participants and host communities committed to sustainable community development in North America that will continue to share resources following their participation in NACS.

### The NACS Program

The pilot project included three teams that rotated among three sites in North America over a period of six months.<sup>2</sup> One team of nine youth, composed of three participants from each country and one project group leader, began in Canada, moved to the United States, and then to Mexico. The team, ages 19 to 25, stayed in one community in each country for a duration of two months each.

By most standards, the volunteers were very diverse, including gender, socioeconomic level, race and ethnicity, age, linguistic background, rural/urban, and geographic origin. The US group was recruited nationally, while the Canadian and Mexican groups were recruited within one state (Veracruz) or province (British Columbia).

The NACS program consisted of community service, education, and outreach. Generally, volunteers spent four weekdays per week working on a service project and one weekday in formal or informal educational activities. Other educational and recreational activities occurred during evenings and weekends. In each country, the group took a one-week tour of the region. The host community and local host organization planned the community service projects. These were negotiated and approved by the Steering Committee based on the project's relevance to NACS and the local organizational capacity to provide opportunity for service and learning. According to the NACS Educational Framework, service projects were to include (a) physical activity (e.g., construction, restoration), (b) collection and analysis of data (e.g., mapmaking, inventories, documentation, monitoring), (c) facilitation of community decision-making or participating in existing processes, or (d) strengthening community institutions through implementing appropriate procedures or infrastructure (NACS Educational Framework, no date).

The education program was designed to: (1) build knowledge, skills and attitudes of youth participants necessary to prepare them to play leadership roles in building a sustainable North American community; and (2) build among NACS host communities, a greater understanding of, and commitment to, sustainable community development in North America (NACS Educational Framework, July 20, 2001; MOA, no date, 12). The specific educational program proposed for NACS included: (a) *participant orientation* at the outset and at the beginning of each phase of the project; (b) A six-month *personal education project* to integrate learning and experiences about the North American community; (c) *educational activity days* (EADs) on themes that intersected with the personal education project and host community priorities; (d) *community education days* that would involve communities, including discussions about North American issues; (e) formal and informal *language training*; and (f) *inter-community learning* to share information, experiences, and learning among host communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Initially, the plan was to spend three months in each community for a total of nine months, but the program was downsized because of inadequate funding.

### Three Phases, Three Countries, Three Communities

The programmatic focus changed according to the phase of the project: environmental preservation and sustainable development in British Columbia; historic preservation in Socorro, Texas; and community development and sustainable development in Coyopolan, Veracruz.

**Phase 1: Nelson, British Columbia (June-July, 2002).** NACS volunteers began in Eastern British Columbia working in three Columbia Basin Trust (CBT)-funded projects. NACS volunteers lived in the City of Nelson, a center of tourism and logging located in the scenic Kootenay mountain range. NACS volunteers were housed with host families in Nelson. For their community service, NACS volunteers divided into groups of three (one from each country in each group) and worked with the following organizations:<sup>3</sup>

*Earth Matters*, founded by a staff member of CBT eight years ago, is a grassroots, youth-driven environmental and conservation organization sponsored by the Nelson District Community Resources Society (NDCRS). *Earth Matters* seeks to provide youth with skills and knowledge necessary to promote sustainable environmental choices. They operate the Forest Garden, a steep hillside garden at the end of Nelson's busy main street. The garden permaculture, eventually intended to be self-sustaining, mimics a diverse forest with layers of trees and understory vegetation with a footpath winding alongside medicinal plants and herbs, trees, shrubs, pond, and a composting area. *Earth Matters* is also the steward of Cottonwood Park in the lower reaches of Cottonwood Creek just below Nelson's downtown. It has a straw bale house, composting site, and displays of edible and medicinal plants. Both sites are used to promote sustainable communities and teach about the natural environment. NACS volunteers were charged with cleanup and maintenance of the Forest Garden (including finishing a fish pond in the upper reaches of the garden) and Cottonwood Creek and to learn about creation and management of community green space and community education. Their community education project included a "community education day" in Forest Garden and Cottonwood Creek.

*Cottonwood Creek Wetlands Restoration Project.* Working with an organization called Kootenay Lake Freshwater Resources Society, this project aims to conserve wetlands by changing human activities that are having a negative impact on the aquatic habitats in the Cottonwood Creek drainage area. NACS volunteers attended a one-week Wetlands Institute where they learned about Wetlands conservation and received feedback on participants' project ideas. With a focus on the urban sections of Cottonwood Creek that flow through Nelson to Kootenay Lake, NACS volunteers were responsible for initial research and development, including a social and biological history of the Cottonwood Creek drainage area, a "barefoot" mapping of the area, and a community education day. Experts from the community helped with each part of the project. When NACS volunteers finished, they handed the plan over to the community group.

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<sup>3</sup> Because the participants were split into three service projects, the leader also organized several all-day service projects to enable the entire group to work together.

*Harrop-Proctor Community Watershed Protection Society and Community Cooperative*

Harrop-Proctor is a historically important village about 45 minutes outside of Nelson. The small population is made up of families who have lived there for generations, as well as new residents of the area. About 80 percent of the community voted to form a watershed alliance, petitioning the BC government for a community-managed watershed. They have designed comprehensive plans for sustainable forestry and ecologically sensitive watershed management. Their highest priority is maintaining the ecological integrity of the watershed and creating a new model of sustainable community-based resource management. Harrop-Proctor operates a community forest, wood products and a botanical products business. The community forest is 11,000 hectares of land, only a small portion (13%) of which is intended for logging. In their second logging season, a small milling operation was also beginning to produce value-added wood products. Sunshine Bay Botanicals cultivates and harvests herbs and tinctures for sale from the forest and organic garden. Since Harrop-Proctor began this experiment to create an economically and ecologically sustainable community, other communities in BC have begun planning similar strategies. NACS volunteers worked mostly on the organic herb farm with a master herbalist, learning about organic farming techniques, medicinal plants, and the process of organic certification. Two of the volunteers also learned about sustainable forestry techniques, helping mark out cutblocks and building culverts to prevent ground erosion. NACS volunteers also participated in a week's intensive training at Harrop-Proctor that brought together plant experts, representatives of the Sinixt Nation, and others to learn about native plants and marketable uses.

**Phase 2: Socorro, Texas (August-September, 2002).** The *Socorro Mission Preservation Project*, located in Socorro on the Texas-Chihuahua border, focuses on historic preservation under the aegis of a non-profit organization, Cornerstones Community Partnerships. NACS participants worked on restoring the historic Socorro Mission, founded in 1680 and located near El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico. The project was undertaken in conjunction with the Archdiocese of El Paso, which works with the local Socorro community in projects related to community development. The Socorro Mission building, officially named *Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción*, was built in 1843 with beams from the original 1692 building. It is one of the most historically and culturally significant buildings in the US Southwest. Established as a Mission for Christianized *Piro* Indians who fled Socorro after the *Popé* Rebellion of 1680, it is now an important source of pride for the largely Hispanic and low-income communities that surround it. NACS volunteers learned traditional methods of adobe construction and architecture, learned about the social and anthropological history and current situation of the mission. Working alongside staff, welfare-to-work participants, and volunteers, including KEYS ("Keep Every Youth in School") Academy, NACS volunteers built adobe bricks, restored original 1692 beams, and worked on other restoration work of the Mission. They also conducted oral history interviews with local community residents and visited local public schools on the Mexico-US border. NACS volunteers were housed in a communal facility on the grounds of the Mission until the final week when most moved in with host families.

**Phase 3: Coyopolan, Ixhuacán de los Reyes, Veracruz (October-November, 2002).** The third phase, organized and guided by the UV, focused on community development and environmental preservation in the mountain village of Coyopolan. The 68 families and 330 inhabitants of Coyopolan are primarily agricultural (87 percent) and produce coffee, cane and other subsistence

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crops. Poverty is high and services are inadequate. Children and adolescents make up one-third of the population. Illiteracy rates reach 36 percent, 22 percent of homes lack electricity, and 71 percent of the population lacks health services beyond the preventive care provided by university students.

Projects undertaken by the NACS volunteers were discussed at a community meeting in which it was decided to build a sustainable house, greenhouses, and develop the community's trout stream. Three volunteers built a two-room "sustainable" house for two villagers, elderly woman and her grown daughter who lived in extreme poverty. Selected by village leaders, the new house was constructed alongside the family's original one-room wooden shack. With a dry composting toilet and a high efficiency wood stove, timber from the family's ancestral home was used as lintels above the windows and doors, and ceiling beams came from the family's land (and were replaced by 30 pine trees). Two volunteers designed and built the surrounding garden and yard. They planted local herbs and flowers and kitchen garden vegetables. The house and garden are considered a model for the area.

Four volunteers worked with a university biologist to restore a greenhouse and build another one. They also worked on development of breeding tanks in a nearby mountain trout stream. In response to severe declines in coffee prices and increased competition from imported foods,<sup>4</sup> village leaders and university outreach workers plan to turn these projects into alternative income sources, including the possibility of eco-tourism sites. These projects were also viewed as a way to engage village youth in constructive activities and expose them to university programs.

NACS volunteers lived in an aggregate setting, in the *Casa de la Universidad*, built by UV for outreach and service. UV had been in the area for over six years, including two years in Coyopolan. The *Casa de la Universidad* is usually home to the *Brigadista Universitaria* groups from UV, the interdisciplinary group of students conducting their *Servicio Social* prior to graduation. The most recent group of *Brigadistas* included a physician, nurse, dentist, chemist-pharmacist, social worker, and biologist. While the NACS group lived in the residence, the *Brigadistas* moved a half-hour distance from the village and commuted daily to Coyopolan.

Educational activities began during orientation in Mexico City, with visits to the anthropology and Frida Kahlo museums. This was followed by two days of orientation about the geographic, cultural, political, social and economic profile of Coyopolan. Thereafter, lectures every Friday included topics such as the Mexican as an individual, the Mexican family, community in Mexico, people and their environment, Mexican communities in historical and contemporary context, sociology of contemporary Mexico, and pluralism and development of North America and its citizens. Featured local and international lecturers from various disciplines also prepared papers distributed to the volunteers for further study. Tours over the weekend were designed to further illustrate issues raised in the lectures and provide historical and contemporary perspectives of the region. Visits outside Coyopolan included tours of the region, museums (including the highly acclaimed UV anthropology museum in Xalapa), UV community centers, parks and nature preserves, and archeological sites.

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<sup>4</sup> Farmers earn one peso (approximately US\$10 cents) for one kilo of coffee "cherries" (the natural form of the coffee bean). According to local residents, it costs US\$15 cents to get one kilo to market.

### 3. NACS Impact on Volunteers

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This program, the experience, and the connections that I have made will change my life forever.  
– Canadian volunteer

Having the opportunity to share, learn, help, and establish connections with eight other powerful youth from across North America is something that will continue to enrich my life forever.  
– US volunteer

When we see our common problems then we can relate to one another . . . When someone tells you about his or her life . . . well, a connection is made. That's precisely what happened to us when we saw the same problem in Canada and the United States. We were able to relate and to connect. That makes it possible to [be] a North American citizen. – Mexican volunteer

Few of the volunteers had significant international or cross-cultural experience. Previously, only four had lived or worked closely with people from other countries at some point in their lives. Only one volunteer had lived for an extended period outside of her country of origin. Their diverse ages, educational attainment, and work experience reflected the different orientations of the organizations that selected them. As a result, members of each national group were similar in some important ways, but different from the other national groups. The Canadian volunteers were the youngest, had the least Spanish language instruction (although they had studied French), relatively little international travel experience and least sure about their academic and career goals. The US volunteers were older, had recently completed—or were in their final year of—university. One had traveled extensively, especially in Latin America and spoke considerable Portuguese and Spanish. The other two had lived in various parts of the United States and had some Spanish language skills. The Mexican volunteers were the oldest. Two had already begun their professions as nurse and architect, and another had begun graduate studies in biochemistry. None had traveled to an English-speaking country before NACS.

Overall the volunteers believe that the impact of NACS was profound, although they said they would have to wait until later (in the words of one volunteer, until going "back to my regular life") to know what would be the lasting effects of the program on their lives. In the sections below, we explore their thoughts in greater detail.

#### **Group Interaction and Cohesiveness**

As a group, the volunteers successfully negotiated the stages of group formation, or as one Advisory Board member put it: "forming, storming, norming, and performing." During the first phase of the project, the group leader and volunteers reported that the group formed a tight bond. When minor conflicts emerged, volunteers resolved them quickly, often with humor rather than with anger and resentment. In orientation, when living in close quarters, members respected each other's space and divided up chores equally. Group members demonstrated a high degree of acceptance and tolerance for one another. The group leader reported that the more mundane decisions were sometimes the most challenging. Some individuals developed closer bonds, but they did not exclude others. The group leader encouraged self-evaluation and group decision-

making. These efforts generated cohesion and consensual decision-making in the first phase, according to group members.

In Phase II tensions surfaced as the euphoria of the "honeymoon" period ebbed and individuals began to reassert their own agendas over those of the group. During this phase, the group lived in a congregate setting, which provided little time to be away from each other. As a Canadian volunteer explained: "That's ten different personalities, it's ten different idiosyncrasies and ideologies trying to work together as a unit, which is, I mean, challenging at the best of times, [but] it's been great [and] we have really grown as a group." The group did not let the inevitable tensions affect their work, according to this Canadian volunteer:

I think that we've done quite a good job of, um, leaving our conflicts behind when we come to work. Um, and when it's work time, it's work time. Um, yeah, so I think that for the most part, it hasn't really affected the quality of work. It has, however, affected the quality of time that we spend outside of our group or out of work. Um, so like, our living together and stuff, it's, you know, at times we will avoid each other when really, um, it would be really cool if we could all feel comfortable hanging out with each other all the time.

During this phase there were fewer planned group activities (formal and informal) other than the service project. Congregate living and fewer planned group and educational activities may have also hastened the emergence of tensions in the group compared to Phase I. While differences in personality, language, culture, age, and level of education had been, in a sense, capped during Phase I, they seemed to be released in Phase II. The Mexican participants also felt somewhat excluded from group decisions. As a result, they reported that they did not press their issues as much or with as much force as the other participants. This appears to have been largely a function of language, with the majority English speakers asserting themselves more easily in the Canadian and US environments.<sup>5</sup>

By Phase III, however, the group had successfully rallied. In addition to the tendency for groups to become more united over time, two factors may have facilitated the process. First, in Texas, several of the volunteers were in a car accident that resulted in an injury to one volunteer. The accident helped them appreciate how much they meant to each other and, as a result, they "rallied . . . to support each other in a new way." Or as a service supervisor observed: "the accident . . . provided a lightening rod for them to circle the wagon and for them to come together as a community in ways that they had not before." Second, in Veracruz, the group engaged in a process of group problem solving as it negotiated with local supervisors about the structure of the program.

In the course of six months, the volunteers lived together in greater proximity than most families, often sharing small living quarters and making decisions together on a daily basis. In the end, the personal strengths and motivation of each of the young people in this group outweighed the many challenges they encountered. They became a generous, hard-working, and cohesive group by the end. One American volunteer noted, "I never thought [these relationships] would solidify,

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the US-Mexico border is bi-lingual to a very great extent, but Spanish-speakers remained the smallest linguistic group with the volunteer cadre.

but [they] have become unbreakable." She believed that she developed communication skills living and working in this diverse group: "between each and every very different one of us!"

In the process, group members gained valuable group interaction skills. As a volunteer from Canada said "I have learned that when working in a team I need to be clear in communicating my needs and delegating out responsibilities when I'm in a situation that requires it. I have a clearer understanding of how I work in groups." Another volunteer learned about the importance of patience:

The experience of living in a tight group of people and working within that group to solve differences, problems and break stereotypes are lessons and skills that will help me enormously in the future. Patience, patience, patience.

## Language

Learning another language was among the greatest challenges – and greatest accomplishments – for the NACS volunteers. Although fluency varied, none of the volunteers began the program bilingual in English and Spanish. The Canadian and US volunteers were native English speakers, although one US volunteer spoke quite a bit of Spanish. The three Canadians spoke some French (which helped them learn Spanish "because the two, French and Spanish, work on similar principles"). The Mexicans were native Spanish speakers and had taken English courses; but had little conversational English. There was frustration in the beginning: "It was hard not knowing each other and having different language proficiency levels. It makes it difficult to communicate, which is what this program is about -- communication" said one participant. Another concurred, "The language issue, of course, is difficult. Sometimes it slows everything down. Sometimes it slows us down too much. Everything takes twice as long because it needs to be translated into English or Spanish, depending on where we go."

Despite help in translation from the group leader, who was bilingual, communication during Phase I was the most difficult. A US volunteer said: "I think definitely Canada was like 'in the barracks' . . . you know, like the hardest part. And the fact that we're all new to each other, too." A Mexican volunteer said: "In Canada, I think that I could have participated more if I knew English a little bit more. It was a frustrating experience." Another Mexican volunteer thought language was a significant barrier, especially at the project site:

From the moment we arrived in Canada, language was the first obstacle, an enormous barrier, one thing I believed about the NACS program is that language was not a requirement and that one simply needed the will to work hard . . . [but] upon arrival it was a enormous barrier, seeing everyone talking and not understanding a thing.

Even a little bit of prior language training seemed to help, as a Mexican volunteer pointed out: "I studied [English] with a video, one of those videos they sell on TV, borrowed from an uncle. I studied two hours a day and that's what I brought with me. If I spoke say, ten percent, that ten percent was very useful, and it kept going up and up."

Nonetheless, the immersion experience in Canada resulted in the Spanish speakers making the greatest advances in language in the first phase. As one volunteer said: "I could not



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communicate the way I wanted, but as time passed, I found a way of conversing and in the end we worked very well."

Phase II took place in a bilingual environment on the Mexico-US border. As a Mexican volunteer said: "It is a good situation because I can interact in both languages, in English, but more so in Spanish." As a result, she evaluated her experience in British Columbia and Texas differently: "Well, in terms of learning, Canada, but social interaction and actually seeing the fruits of one's labor, here [Texas]." Another volunteer, too, agreed that he could make more of a contribution to the community because he could speak the language. Therefore, volunteers believed they had greater impact where they could speak the language.

In Phase III, the English-speaking volunteers had an opportunity to live in a Spanish-speaking environment in Coyopolan. This immersion experience was profound for the English speakers, but they had more support from the group and had already learned quite a lot of Spanish from their peers. One volunteer said, "My main challenge was getting over my fear of talking Spanish to members of the community since my speaking level was intermediate. But as time passed, I became more comfortable speaking and I think it was equal on the community's part as well!" The Mexicans continued to practice their English with other group members during this phase.

Despite the early difficulties, the group overcame the language barrier. As a volunteer said, "Immersion is the only way to do it. Lessons just don't work. And this is what it is – it's an immersion program. Basically, you get thrown in feet first." All participants expressed satisfaction with their language ability by the end of the program. In their own assessment, six volunteers progressed from almost no language ability to basic ability; one progressed from basic to intermediate, one progressed from intermediate to advanced, and one progressed from advanced to proficient. One volunteer who started with no Spanish at all evaluated his progress this way:

I can listen to a lecture, I can understand what he's saying. I can't ask questions because I don't have the vocabulary. I can walk down the street and buy anything or walk in a hotel and ask basic questions. But I struggle with conversations, obviously, because I started with nothing.

Another volunteer described her language ability:

At the beginning of this program I could not speak a word of Spanish. And now I can carry out a conversation with the guys at work or the kids that I play cards with . . . I'm starting to be able to use different tenses. Like I'm starting to get the concept of past tense. But the thing is, I've never had a class, so there's a lot of grammar problems . . . Like I'm kind of at this spot where I can communicate just because I'm courageous and I go up there and I put a word out there that I think is right.

Regarding level of fluency by the end of the program, an American volunteer pointed out: "We have inside jokes. So if we have inside jokes, you know that things are getting okay communication-wise!" A Canadian volunteer learned enough to realize how much "language reflects culture."

Judging by what might be the ultimate test of success—how much the volunteers enjoy speaking another language—the language portion of the program could be judged highly successful. All of the volunteers were concerned at the end of the program about having opportunities to practice their new language skills. As one of them noted, it "makes me want to go back to school and pick it up more and speak it better, for sure." Another said, "It's made me realize that I like languages and I like being able to communicate with people."

### Service Project Knowledge and Skills

In each phase, the volunteers gained substantive and process skills. In British Columbia, they gained knowledge and skills in applied environmental service, environmental research, community assessment, and sustainability. This knowledge base formed the foundation for continued learning in Texas and Veracruz.

According to the volunteers, an advantage of experiential learning is discovering how things really work. For example, through their efforts in each community, they learned how community change takes place. One American volunteer observed that "in Nelson it was kind of more grassroots. You know? . . . Here in El Paso, it's like you have to know people who know people, in order to get things done. Kind of a little political chess that's going on here." A volunteer from Canada pointed out that community activism differs across communities. It would be far easier to get people out to a protest rally or a film festival in Nelson than in El Paso:

So it is very, very different . . . I'm not going to say there is not a sense of community [in El Paso] because . . . there is more of a sense of family and that people are maybe more concerned about their livelihood, putting food on the table, how they are going to afford to pay the rent and keep the hydro on, than they are about a preservation project or about cleaning up the Rio Grande, or about helping out with a wildlife refuge in the desert, or you know, issues like that.

In Socorro, Texas, the volunteers' service focused on historic preservation. Working on an historic mission, they learned *adobe* construction (traditional masonry technique), rehabilitation of centuries-old *vigas* (beams), use of compatible building materials, as well as how to reverse damage done to historic structures by poorly designed additions to buildings. As one volunteer pointed out, "I learned a lot about historical and cultural preservation, that extreme measures are taken to preserve and document as much of the old material as possible." One volunteer said:

I learned how to make *adobes*, work with *adobes*, lay *adobes*, cut *adobes*. I learned the history well enough to give tours and share the techniques that were being used to restore the [building]. I learned about lime plaster and why it is better than cement, and how to work with the lime plaster. I learned a bunch more Spanish and that playing with mud all day long is tons of fun.

Through ethnographic research collecting oral histories in the surrounding community and informal interactions with community residents, the volunteers learned about the unique features of the Mexico-US border:

I learned about how historic preservation can be valued by not just those who it directly relates to, the problems surrounding water rights and irresponsible use in an already dry area, as well as the flow of people—not just goods—across the Mexico-USA border. (Volunteer from Canada).

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In Veracruz, the volunteers learned about construction with local materials and development of local talent and resources for entrepreneurship and sustainability. In interactions with *brigadistas* in *Servicio Social*, NACS volunteers learned more about the community and about professional education in Mexico. In Veracruz, the volunteers gained knowledge about "different ecologically-sound technology, about Magnolia tree preservation efforts, more sustainable farming techniques suited to the Mexican environment, history, and cultural preservation in Coyopolan, traditions, and ways of life." Another volunteer from the United States said:

I definitely developed my logic skills and spatial skills working on constructing a greenhouse and being around expert craftspeople . . . I had not used power tools very much before and became proficient, as well as learning how to lay adobes and preserve a historical building.

The volunteers also gained "people" skills including "being able to relate to and understand at-risk youth." In Socorro, the volunteers worked alongside participants in a welfare-to-work program. Many of the individuals had "drug problems, alcohol, spousal problems—almost everyone, actually everyone there, had a larger family . . . for them, the United States isn't better . . . it's not an easier way of life at all," said a US volunteer. She also said that she gained insight into US welfare-to-work policy:

It's really interesting to hear their stories—how many jobs they've been through, what kind of training, all that stuff. It's been really interesting. It's really scary because right now there's no jobs. And with our economy the way, it's very, very hard.

A Steering Committee member thought this aspect of the program was particularly valuable: "I loved the fact that the *Nacsters* were working with high-school dropouts and welfare-to-work trainees—and were therefore receiving a more balanced picture of Americans."

The volunteers developed problem-solving skills. A Steering Committee member observed that the group dealt with program start up constructively: "I was very impressed with the pilot group's ability to overcome environmental challenges, living arrangements, and disorganization." One Mexican volunteer said that the program encouraged her to look at her limitations and overcome them. Another volunteer explained how she had learned to deal better with disappointment. With a broken collarbone after the car accident in Texas, she had to fight back "feelings of being helpless and useless. After the accident, I couldn't participate on the restoration, which was a big part of the experience in Texas. But I was able to use what I could do—oral history—and I think that helped out as well." Similarly, a volunteer from Canada said that she developed "problem-solving" skills in Veracruz "where material and resources are not always perfect. I developed my ability to work under pressure, as well as multi-tasking."

### Career Development

By the end of the six months, the volunteers believed they had a better grasp of who they were and what their goals were, as this volunteer from Mexico points out:

[Before NACS] I was following a straight line, I wasn't going up and I wasn't going down, having participated in NACS, I feel I am going up. It's as if I'm thinking a little more about what I want,

about what I believe in, and what I respect, and the things I can do to show respect for others so they can respect me.

During the program, they had opportunities to build on past experiences and future career interests. For example, one volunteer with an architectural degree helped to design the public garden in Nelson; a volunteer who was a nurse worked in the medicinal garden; and another with social science training organized and conducted oral histories.

At the same time, each of the volunteers had ample opportunities to try out and learn new things. They all believed that the NACS experience would have significant impact on their careers. In most cases, they believed that their increased understanding of North America would contribute to their career choice and/or focus. For example, a volunteer from Mexico, who had already begun to pursue graduate training, was considering different career plans as a result of NACS. He explained:

It was through this amazing experience that I have learned the importance of fostering a sustainable society in the world. Now I wish to complete my master's degree and redirect my future. Perhaps pursue a doctorate, but in an environmental field with the purpose of applying my knowledge in the community and thus contribute to its development.

Others planned to build aspects of their experience in NACS into their education and careers. One US volunteer planned to pursue graduate studies in Latin America. Many planned to continue their study of language. NACS helped the younger volunteers understand better what they enjoyed doing and would like to continue doing as a career. As a Canadian volunteer said,

NACS has made me want to learn more about border culture, Mexican history, NAFTA effects and many other things. I am now interested in continuing learning the Spanish language, whereas before I didn't have any interest at all . . . . It has made me think more about the rural-urban divide, what this means to me in my community and made me want to study this situation further . . . . [I've] learned that I enjoy collecting information and research, as well as writing.

After the experience in Veracruz, she learned that she "liked working with children and designing interactive educational activities." Similarly, another young volunteer said that she learned something important about herself: "that I need to follow a career path that involves children."

### **Cross Cultural Knowledge and Understanding**

The volunteers developed much greater cross-cultural understanding. Living in the group, living with host families, and working alongside community residents provided multiple opportunities for gaining insight into culture and everyday lives of people in three communities in North America. Educational activities also contributed to deeper understanding of culture in each community.

Beginning with the group itself, the volunteers learned to live and cooperate on a daily basis. As a project supervisor observed: "They were dealing with a lot of the same issues (personally and in the neighborhood) . . . that [people in] the United States, Mexico, and Canada are dealing

with." He continued: "I don't want to get too touchy-feely here, but the bottom line is, the ability to see somebody else's culture, realize that differences sometimes come from culture, realize that despite those differences things can work together." Later, he pointed out that conflicts within the group helped the volunteers gain cultural understanding:

in the midst of controversy . . . your hands are dirty, you're in the middle of it, and you go through this tunnel of chaos and get out on the other side. And that's where the respect comes. That's where understanding comes.

NACS exposed group members to a variety of issues confronting many different communities. In British Columbia, for example, the volunteers learned about the *Sinixt* peoples, the large international "hippie" population, the timber community, and local elites. In Texas, the volunteers learned about the unique Mexico-US border culture. As a volunteer from the United States said "seeing life on the border really made clear to me how flexible cultures can be and also how constraining society and policies can be on cultures." In Veracruz, the volunteers gained a more intimate perspective of a small rural village and its relationship to the larger society. According to the group leader, it was in Veracruz where the differences in communities became clearer and the group really began "to understand what community was."

Volunteers also gained a greater understanding about the role and importance of history in communities. One volunteer commented on Mexico's unique history and culture. In Texas, she learned to appreciate the role of history for the people on the Mexico-US border: "people would come up and talk about their great-grandparents, their great-grandmother, their great-grandpa . . ." She was proud that NACS was contributing to their sense of history: "we're continuing on with the history, you know, we're helping with history."

As a result of this experience, the volunteers learned not only how different communities can be, but also how similar. As a volunteer said, she gained "a knowledge of three very distinct communities that on the cover seem so different, in reality have so many things in common." The experience of living in a group in three different communities in three different countries led to a reassessment of such cultural stereotypes. As one Canadian said:

I think this is something . . . eliminating cultural stereotypes . . . it's something for me growing up in rural, Northern Ontario, where it was as "waspy" as you can get. I have really nothing to—not judge—but . . . I didn't have an understanding of what it meant to be Mexican or what a Mexican was or what a Mexican believed or what that culture was about. So for me it was just the stereotypes you have through American media . . . now I feel like . . . I mean, as far as a 22 year-old guy from Canada, who hasn't studied Latin American studies or culture or hasn't ever lived here before . . . I don't think I could have any clearer of an understanding. And so, I mean, there's no stereotype left for me.

One volunteer from Mexico explained that her perceptions about "developed" countries changed as a result of seeing in person challenges faced in each community:

In my life NACS has influenced and broken the stereotypes I had of the other countries, I was able to see directly that other countries also have problems such as environmental, social, cultural problems, etc. I saw in a direct manner how a developed society can damage the family units, and break the link between family and society.

## Social Responsibility, Citizenship, and Leadership

One of the local organizers at UV suggested that one of the benefits of NACS is that it "sensitizes the *Nacsters* about the responsibility we have as citizens of North America to improve the quality of life of those who are the least privileged." In fact, all of the volunteers reported that they felt differently about their role in community as a result of their participation. One of the younger volunteers said: "NACS has changed my views of citizenship in real terms." An older volunteer described a new determination to become more involved in his community: "NACS for me was like a surge, as if someone hit me and made me react and awaken from the lethargy . . . when we don't know the work of many people who fight to reach a goal." After this experience, he explained, "Now I have a stronger desire to grow and expand what I know so one day I can repay the society that educated me." Similarly, one of the Mexicans put her volunteer experience into perspective, saying, "my work in community . . . was to see in what way I could use those experiences to create or promote changes that strengthens the roots of our society."

Several factors contributed to this growing sense of responsibility. First, the volunteers developed a heightened consciousness about different people's lives. For example, in Texas, working side by side with the local youth and Mexican-American men in the welfare-to-work training program, one of the Canadians wrote that it was new to her, "the fact that a lot of the guys were learning the skills of the trade." An American observed:

You know, I'm working with little "gang bangers" here. Some of these guys are tougher than nails . . . just sweethearts, but tougher than nails. Gunshot wounds, knife wounds . . . you name it . . . but sweethearts. You know? Offer you food. I mean, you will never go hungry here at this work site.

After observing community leadership in the three countries, a Canadian reflected: "I know I have a better understanding of what it means to be a community 'player.' I have fostered my values and beliefs and gained new perspectives and ideas as to what it means to be a responsible citizen." His comments reflect a theme heard throughout the interviews that the volunteers were pleased to be considered important enough to be included in conversations about the welfare of the community. Later, he said: "the more programs that are like this . . . the better place we are gonna be living in, because, it's not the government who is going to be solving these problems. I think we are starting to acknowledge that."

All of the volunteers believed that they had developed leadership skills and had become, in the words of one volunteer, "empowered." As one of the Americans said, "It has been really inspiring for me to see what we as youth are capable of." In addition to tangible contributions made in each phase, the volunteers appreciated the many opportunities to play leadership roles in formation and implementation of projects and educational activities. They were conscious of and responsive to the leadership expectations of NACS organizers, site supervisors, and community members. As a volunteer said, his belief in himself grew because they were "being spoken of as future leaders of North America . . . our accomplishments [were] acknowledged by people that I highly respect." Their involvement in decision-making was particularly intense in Texas, where the two site supervisors included them in almost every facet of the project. The volunteers understood that this could not be done in every situation, but believed that their learning and productivity were positively and directly influenced by the level of involvement. In

the end, these leadership opportunities influenced their self-concept. As an American volunteer said: "I have a new self-concept that will help shape the person I am trying to and learning to be—and how these new experiences have opened my eyes even wider."

### **Understanding of North America Issues**

Volunteers acquired knowledge about a variety of environmental, social, economic, and political issues confronting all three North American countries. The volunteers discussed environmental issues, especially water and waste management, deforestation, pollution, and natural ecosystem protection. Most volunteers understood and provided examples of how environmental issues in one country affect other countries. For example, one volunteer said that for the first time, she gained insight into the Canadian timber industry and its relationship to the United States:

This has definitely opened my eyes . . . Because honestly, before, I didn't know what went down in Canada (laugh) . . . I didn't know the whole lumber issue, and that their industry is suffering because it costs more money to ship it to the United States now and things like that. I mean, I'm definitely more attentive to these issues now than I was before because I hadn't been involved in it.

Others discussed a variety of social, economic and political issues, such as employment and unemployment, immigration, political participation and apathy, poverty and wealth, health care, trade issues, international treaties, government functioning and corruption, civil liberties, human rights, and cultural identity. For example, the significance of imported produce took on new meaning for this volunteer:

I mean, my gosh, you know, when you get that orange you're like, "Oh, I have an orange," but you don't think about the migrant worker who has gone under these harsh conditions to get that orange for you and then what it has gone through just to go across the border, by like whatever regulations and things like and finally to the grocer . . . And so it's like you're global.

Another Canadian volunteer said,

In Nelson you are dealing with . . . problems of unemployment because of the forestry industry. You are dealing with economic changes . . . . We have to shift to different things. Down here [in Socorro] it's, um, obviously unemployment is a huge problem here. This is one of the most depressed cities in the United States. It has one of the poorest neighborhoods . . . one of the highest dropout rates for high school education in the nation. You got issues of migrant workers who are being poorly treated and underpaid to do jobs that Americans won't do . . .

The volunteers' understanding of "North American issues" was framed by the specific experiences and location in each country, and also by the service and education activities in each program site. Living in a timber and tourism region of rural British Columbia, in a low-income border community in Texas, and among the rural poor in a mountainous village in Veracruz, framed their growing knowledge about North American issues. How did they make sense of diverse conditions and contexts in which they lived and worked and how did they place these within a "North American perspective?"

First, the experiential approach meant that the realities of each community and each country came into focus. As a US volunteer said, it compelled them to learn about everyday life in the three countries by "throwing" them into the situation:

And that's what NACS helps you do. You go out and it throws you—it doesn't place you—it throws you into places . . . Once you know, you can't get it out of your mind. Once you've seen it, you can't ignore it to the amount that you could before. It's easier to ignore something that you've never seen.

Second, the volunteers soon learned that despite profound differences, communities in the three countries shared many similar concerns. For example, they learned about poverty in all three countries. This was a surprise to some, particularly to the Mexicans, who had little idea what US poverty might *look like*. As a UV staff person observed: "The Mexican youth became aware of the poverty and marginalization that exists in the North American region." The volunteers also learned about indigenous peoples across North America and their complex historical relationship to international boundaries. A Canadian volunteer observed that the indigenous people's historic lands have been divided by national boundaries:

Native Americans and Native Canadians are having a huge problem in the [Columbia River] basin because they've got reservations or Indian Reserves . . . and some of them are in the States and some of them are in Canada. Really they were in both [countries] at one point and time and now their culture is being forced to stay in this one spot.

Migration was another phenomenon affecting all three countries and all three communities where the volunteers lived as a part of NACS. As a Canadian volunteer in Texas said:

A lot of the Mexican work force is leaving to work in El Paso in poor conditions because they get paid more here than they do in Mexico, but still it's not very much in terms of an American wage. And that's a major problem because they are forced to leave their families and leave their homes and they often end up with serious illnesses. And that happens in Canada as well. We lose a lot of talented work force to the US across the border.

Common problems of water management and water quality surfaced repeatedly. As a volunteer pointed out, "Everything that happens with that water directly affects the United States and whatever they do to that, you know, the damming issues we are dealing with, hugely affected Canada and that's why the Columbia Basin Trust exists." In Veracruz, the problems of water pollution and poverty are intertwined, as one of the Americans observed, "in Coyopolan there's no sewer system, but everyone has bathrooms. Our own house has flushing toilets, but there's no sewer system, so it just goes straight in the river." A Mexican volunteer said they had a joke about British Columbia and its approach to timber harvesting: "Gosh! One day they will be [arid] like Mexico because they're just cutting the trees like that." Another volunteer observed that environmental problems – and people's complacency and buck-passing – are common problems in all three countries:

In Nelson, people told me . . . "Water waste goes into the lake, but what can we do?" And the same thing occurs here, many people whom I have asked what happens with waste and drainage tell me that they do not have any idea or just that they know it goes to the groundwater. And their conclusion is the same: What can we do if the government does not do anything?



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Others talked about common social policy problems, such as hospital closures and budgetary cutbacks in British Columbia. They compared these to budget constraints in social services and health care in Texas and Veracruz. They pointed out that large proportions of the population in Veracruz and in Texas have no access to regular medical care, and that British Columbia has had to cut back its health services because of the flagging economy. In relation to services to rural areas, one of the Canadian volunteers thought that things were "getting better in Mexico and getting worse in Canada, and the States is getting worse as well."

Third, despite similarities, the volunteers learned that issues often played themselves out differently in the three countries. In other words, globalization affected all three countries, but in different ways. For example, despite the existence of poverty in all three countries, the problem was more acute in Mexico. One of the Mexicans pointed out that "the problem in Mexico is that we are an underdeveloped country and that our poverty -- despite being a very rich country -- our poverty becomes more evident everyday due to a lack of understanding of the people, of the poor people."

Fourth, the volunteers developed a deeper and more complex understanding of social and economic inequities across the region. They noted the irony of US demands for free trade while it protected its own food from Mexican imports and its own timber from Canadian imports. One Canadian said she discovered that this resulted in "tense border relations in the United States and Mexico, water flowing over borders and our problems with sharing it sustainably and about NAFTA's potential future effects on all three countries." For the US volunteers, these discussions were sometimes disconcerting but understandable. One US volunteer said that he learned that Canadians and Mexicans were often hostile towards the United States. Although the group members respected one another, he said that he realized that "there's a lot of hate toward our country . . . And a lot of it is found in stuff which is totally understandable and we've got to change that."

Fifth, the volunteers debated how North American integration could occur without negatively affecting small communities, like the ones where they lived in NACS. They identified strengths and resources in each community and thought that building on those was one important approach. They believed that it was important to begin with family and community when thinking about how to manage the impacts of globalization. For example, a US volunteer believed that it might help if Coyopolan could build on its strengths:

I mean, if they could get away from using fertilizer, pesticide, herbicide, they would be virtually a self-sustaining village. They [already] grow most of their own corn and beans that they eat. They have a trout farm . . . where they produce food. They have greenhouses. They have a little bakery. I mean, they're a very self-sufficient town.

As another US volunteer pointed out, "I'm very impressed with [Coyopolan]. It's like a small community and I think that's another strength . . . it makes it more sustainable . . . their neighbors aren't strangers." But as she drew a comparison with El Paso, she made an astute observation about a deeper social reality:

And in a big city like El Paso, gosh, it's like this big, sprawling, kind of thing. But Socorro *was in* El Paso. During the oral history project, I was like – everyone knew everybody because everyone went to that church . . . You know?

In a relatively short period, this volunteer developed a capacity to associate what she was learning about one community to another quite different one. Similarly, one of the youngest volunteers said that she began to see how this experience related to our collective ability to solve global problems: "I think it's not just a North American community, but a global community as well . . . and economic and environmental issues are very obvious aspects of our connectedness.

Community development made more sense, and was in some ways more manageable, they said when they worked in communities they began to see how their efforts fit into the larger North American context. As one volunteer conveyed it:

And keeping in mind always the larger context. But you have to start within your own reality . . . I think it was . . . that interest and that need to really appraise what is happening in the community, what, how does that community service, what does sustainability mean to that community? And see how people are responding to that.

As the group leader observed:

I think that what happened through the course of the program, and how I saw people were transformed—even myself—and how each place affected us—as a real sense of how something that seems so insurmountable can actually start to become something that you can solve only when you look at it from a very community base level.

Finally, the group also began to learn how to articulate and convey what they were learning about North America to others. They gave presentations to school and other community groups that illustrated the goals of NACS. Their service with the children provides a useful example. One volunteer reported on a presentation about NACS to a classroom of small children in Coyopolan. To teach the children about common North American issues, they presented a play about George, a migrating duck, and a little kid, Anna:

Anna threw a rock at the duck, and [he] . . . came over and was like, "Hey! Why are you doing this?" And then he took [Anna] on this little flight through the three countries and showed the child all the problems . . . and how they're very similar, and how all the solutions are quite similar as well, and how we need to work together to come up with solutions. And in each country they went and talked to animals . . . like in Mexico we talked to a Magnolia tree and a jaguar. And in the United States, we talked to a . . . mouse and a cactus in the desert talking about dumping of nuclear waste . . . and we had a buffalo as well . . . And then in Canada we had a moose and stuff like that.

### **Development of a "North American Identity"**

At closing ceremonies for the NACS pilot project in Veracruz, an Advisory Board member observed that "service fundamentally changes you." Beyond that, he said, NACS offers an additional benefit, "for the rest of your lives you will be citizens of a community, of a nation, of North America, and of the globe." The volunteers agreed with this assessment. An American

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volunteer said "I no longer feel that I am from the United States or [am] what everyone calls an 'American.' I am a North American!" One of the Mexicans concurred: "Without a doubt I now feel part of North America with the civic duty to serve and foster this citizenship."

The volunteers said they gained insight into their own culture and their own community. In fact, developing a North American identity did not mean giving up their national identity and their roots. One volunteer observed: "[In] this border culture . . . from my perspective, many people risk losing their identity. I see that on the people's faces, with the children at school. Hispanic people with '*gringo*' thoughts. I think it is necessary to work hard to search for one's identity." Another Mexican volunteer agreed, "they don't know whether to be Mexicans or Americans." Another Mexican volunteer said he believed it is important to feel proud of one's roots, instead of feeling "ashamed – [in Mexico] we see people using the word *indio* like a derogatory term, but when you know what it is to be an *indigena* . . . one begins to be proud. When people are ignorant, they cannot see this." As a result of living in El Paso and participating in NACS, he continued, "I have learned to value more my personal roots."

## 4. NACS Impact on Communities

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At the concluding ceremonies in Mexico, the group leader used a metaphor to describe the NACS experience. She said the volunteers' worked like bees cross-pollinating flowers from which they drew nectar. As the volunteers worked and invigorated people through their youthful energy, talents, and ideas, she said, they gained valuable experience and insights from community residents and local organizations.

While the volunteers were impressed with the friendliness and openness with which they were received in each community, initial receptivity varied. In British Columbia, families opened their homes and three local organizations welcomed their participation, but because of its size and diversity, they did not become integrated into community life. In Texas, the service site became the center of their lives. Although their work supervisors provided entrée into the surrounding community, they did not get to know it very well.

Ironically, the NACS volunteers became most accepted and integrated into the smallest and initially, most resistant community. Even though UV outreach workers met with community leaders to discuss hosting the "foreigners," community leaders were concerned about whether the NACS volunteers would "get used to our traditions, food and ways of living." They asked: "Aren't they coming with the idea to change us, take what is ours, and not respect us?" They were concerned that villagers would be under surveillance by the "strangers." Recalling their initial worries, a community leader in Coyopolan commented: "I had my doubts with these people from other countries, because we don't know where they live, or where they work, or what they do for a living or whether they have helped their people in their countries . . ." Their concern suggested a high level of social integration, which could have made it difficult for the NACS group to successfully navigate. But the volunteers demonstrated their enthusiasm to settle into community life and to reach out to residents. Moreover, the university's prior relationship with the community facilitated entry, according to a UV representative: "The degree of acceptance of the program by the community, the way the people from the community related to the group, is an objective indication of the approval of the university's work by the community."

The volunteers were surprised and pleased by the extent to which they became comfortable and attached to the people in each of the communities. By the end of their stay in each community, the volunteers had forged many friendships. As a service supervisor in Texas said, "I felt that the NACS students overall . . . did a very good job in assimilating into a community, into working through a lot of problems." Judging by the embraces and tears among NACS volunteers and the 30 Coyopolan community residents who attended closing ceremonies at the UV, volunteers and residents formed close bonds during the two months they lived and worked together.

### Service Project

NACS outreach and service efforts had significant and tangible impact on all three communities, although the type, level, and visibility differed by site. As a US volunteer suggested, "we definitely had an impact on every community in a different way, for sure, because they were such different projects that we were doing." In British Columbia, for example, another American

pointed out that neither she nor the community grasped the full implications of their watershed mapping project at first: "Cottonwood Creek . . . is a creek everyone's heard about but they don't know . . . it's there and it's dying." But after "we did this big mapping project and . . . they were like, 'we didn't know that about the creek' . . . and it was like, 'wow, now that we know this, the creek is going to take a whole different perspective in our minds!'" Through their mapping project and the community education day, the group began to heighten community consciousness about the forgotten stream in their midst. The volunteers left each community with the impression that residents appreciated their service. One volunteer reported that in British Columbia, "people came up . . . would visit and get involved," and in Texas, people told her "You work so hard. Thank you so much."

In Texas, where the group joined an ongoing effort to restore a historic Mission, the service project was more focused and more visible to the community. As one Canadian volunteer said: "because we are all working as a group of nine on the same project as opposed to working [in] three groups of three, we are having a different impact." Another volunteer agreed, saying: "I feel like my impact here is more significant [than in Canada]. I think that comes mainly because we're all centered on one project. We have almost 10 bodies working on this project at all times, whereas in Canada, it was three, three and three. So that's been really powerful." In Texas they also received more media coverage, which they thought gave them more local visibility. A volunteer from Canada said they received lots of "positive feedback" from the community: "Lots of people here say, 'Oh, yeah, I read about you guys in the paper, I heard you on the radio,' or, 'Oh, yeah, that's a really cool project that you are working on.'"

Service supervisors believed that NACS volunteers invigorated the mission project and made it more visible to the community. A service supervisor observed that after the mission fiesta (which the NACS volunteers helped to organize), people understood the restoration project better: "People left the fiesta saying, 'I finally get it. I see what you're doing,' and now they're ready to come back and start getting involved." A Canadian volunteer said:

. . . people have been telling us, you know, since we have arrived we have added a new spark to this job and we've got the crew more involved, we've got the community more involved, we've got youth involved, we've got even the teachers and the people who are running this crew. They've got a new spark for it . . . it's kind of been a revival process with us being here.

The mission work supervisors in Socorro helped the volunteers make a meaningful contribution to the community in part through their openness in discussing conflict. Some stakeholders, including community members and restoration funders, misunderstood and disagreed with the careful (and expensive) restoration procedures. Including the volunteers in the debate turned the disagreement into a learning experience, but significantly, also permitted the volunteers to contribute to greater community awareness and understanding of the project.

In Veracruz, in addition to the sustainable house and garden and the renovated trout ponds and greenhouses, the volunteers also influenced the community in other ways. A village leader among the women in Coyopolan reflected: "We have come to realize they are hard working people and it is a shame they are going back to their countries so soon." As a university official pointed out:

The community of Coyopolan had the opportunity to increase their knowledge, change their outlook on life and their perception of the social, economic and cultural reality in their region. The volunteers' stay in that community helped to consolidate the self-esteem and appreciation of the values and traditions of the residents. The community takes pride in having hosted the youth from Canada and the United States.

In Coyopolan, a UV site supervisor believed that the impact was greatest on the children and adolescents. By involving the children and youth in various environmental education activities, the group leader believed that the NACS volunteers "left a seed" that would stimulate continued interest. The volunteers agreed that they forged bonds with the young people:

All of the children organized thank you's, goodbye's, songs and everything. The children all participated and worked very hard to show us what an amazing impact we had on them and how they have changed each one of us! We will never forget the Village of Coyopolan or the children.

Overall, the volunteers believed their impact was greatest in Texas and Veracruz because their efforts were focused on one site and the service was more visible. In Veracruz, for example, the impact of the group's service was "deeper" and more visible because of the size of the community and the scope and type of projects chosen (e.g., restoring a mission, building a house). As one volunteer from the US pointed out: "This is the only part of the project where we've created something and it's going to be finished by the time we're done. You know, we'll be able to see the finished product."

The volunteers may have also invigorated other workers at the service sites. In Texas, for example, a volunteer pointed out that, "Many of the workers were looking at the work only as masonry—or disagreeable—work, but now they are impressed because we are working as volunteers. [As a result] many of them have changed their attitudes and now they value their work, [they] see their work like an art." Another volunteer agreed, saying that "Yes, the attitude of the guys in charge of that organization was changed in as much as they became more motivated because they saw that the little things we did produced results." A service supervisor in Coyopolan observed that the volunteers also helped the UV *brigadistas* to better understand their professional roles. The NACS volunteers' enthusiasm and their interaction with community residents provided a different model for community outreach. A Canadian volunteer pointed out: "I think the greater impact is with the interaction in the community and . . . just the inquisitive nature of our group and wanting to know what's happening and why its happening."

Ironically, in the villages around Coyopolan, NACS may have contributed to an element of envy. On one hand, this likely reflected the visibility of the NACS group in Coyopolan, but on the other hand, it also likely reflected circumstances of extreme poverty:

One has to consider the expectations that were created among the residents of Coyopolan about the improvement of the house. It is possible to foresee that some families may become jealous since they were not chosen for the model home. One can also point out that for many of the nearby communities, the selection of Coyopolan as the host community for the NACS group was arbitrary. To some degree there is a certain sense of frustration in many of these communities and their municipal authorities.

## Cross Cultural and Cross-National Learning

In all three phases there was evidence of cross-national and cross-cultural learning, not only among the NACS volunteers, but also among community residents. In British Columbia, host families and service site supervisors (especially at one site) thought that discussions, exchange of ideas, and living together led to learning. For example, one of the most unexpected outcomes of the project for one host mother was "the wonderful connection my daughter had with the [NACS volunteers] that lived with us. We . . . have developed a wonderful bond." Another host mother reported that she learned "how strange and unusual our cultures are and how similar we can be as people with connection to community." Another said that she learned "that borders mean little. We all have issues that concern all and we all can work together without a lot of politics and red tape to heal, grow, change, and create a better world." In Texas, a community activist said: ". . . I never thought that anybody from another country would be working here at the *Misión*."

Cross-national and cross-cultural learning were most evident in Coyopolan, where the small size and homogeneity of the community made cross-national and cross-cultural learning most visible. In the words of a UV official, the NACS program was "something amazing to see—how people come together." Another said that, "the children and the adolescents learned a lot from this interaction . . . The rural community lived the experience of having a group of foreigners amongst them sharing their knowledge." A participant said: "Being in a community where you were obviously the outsider and then to really work in the community and be accepted was eye opening for me." Another spoke with pride about the children: "They are like seeds. In the future, they will be more open. It is wonderful, I think, to imagine they will not be prejudiced against foreign people. They won't have that xenophobia that people have."

In Veracruz, where organizers said that the Canadian and US volunteers provided a "face, not just a television image," said there is "less prejudice" against Canadians and Americans<sup>6</sup> as a result of the interaction with the group of young people. This was underscored by a village leader who said, "Oh sure, that I learned for sure, I'd say not everything that we say or that one hears about the United States is bad, there are very good people . . . in Canada and the United States, there are very good people also." This was not lost on the volunteers. A volunteer from the US told a story about this same community leader who attended educational days with the volunteers. She said, near the end of the program

we were having one of our Friday lectures and he . . . said, "You know what? When I first heard about how people were coming in from Canada and the United States . . . coming in our community to work, I was apprehensive because my relationship with things like that has been that they always take, take, take. And then that's it. So I was really apprehensive. But now after working with you guys and seeing what you guys do, talking with you – I'm not apprehensive at all. We were, like, "wow!"

Perhaps this acceptance by the community, this embracing of the NACS group, was best articulated in the words of one volunteer:

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<sup>6</sup> Limitations of the English language require that we use "Americans" to describe those from the United States. In Spanish, we would use *estadunidenses*.

In other words, for them I am not a Mexican or they [the other volunteers] are not Americans or Canadians. We are NACS, a group of young people who came here to help. They don't see nationality anymore; they don't see a language... for them you are simply part of the group who came here to help.

### **North American Issues and Community-Building**

The service supervisors understood the goals of NACS and by the end of their stay in their communities, the volunteers could apply these goals to their unique situations. For example, when asked if he thought that NACS goals were met, one service supervisor responded:

You know, with you asking that question, it kind of triggered some thoughts in my head that possibly what the NACS program is trying to accomplish regionally, we are able to do in a micro-environment here. And that was community interaction, get people to think, uh, more outside the box, more of a bigger picture.

He went on to say that: "...this whole concept of, of bringing these young people together from these three countries now so they can have a positive impact in their later years, is uh, is really what's needed to infuse this regionalism idea." Another supervisor pointed out that even with agreements like NAFTA, he did not believe that governments could build a North American community without it starting with the people: "You can't legislate, you know, 'Now we're a North American community.'" Instead, he believed that communities and people would continue to build links, and that programs like NACS are a better way to create a North American community.

A Canadian volunteer thought that the simple idea of bringing together people from all three countries made an important point to the people they met:

And also the communities that we travel to where people will be wondering why are there three people from each country coming together? I think . . . if we can answer that question for them, it will kind of show them that there is a connection between the three countries and this is why we're here. I think that's a major, major, thing.

After the experience in Coyopolan, the volunteers believed that over the long run, it might be the service with children that would really make a difference. Thinking "globally" probably should start with youth in programs like NACS, as one volunteer said:

what we want to do with the community, is like go to the youth and to try and educate them on not thinking just about our own selves, but thinking, you know, the larger picture. And that's really hard. I'm not even sure if I did that in high school . . . but, you know, definitely in college is where I really started thinking globally.

A UV official echoed this sentiment, when asked if the goal of building a North American community had been achieved, he said:

I believe that working with young people is to certain degree missionary work. I believe there is a mission in all this, which is that these young people get to know each other and themselves and that they feel they are part of a territory, of a physical, geographical space that has a lot of things



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in common. Therefore, I believe that at least these nine youth learned that there is a Canada in the north and a Canada in the south . . . in Chiapas . . . I believe there are no borders in this sense, for the young people there are no borders.

Although participants in NACS believed that community residents were more open to North American dialog, there was little evidence that communities began to forge international ties with other communities, despite the program's intentions. Given that NACS did not bring community representatives together and that the service projects were different in each community, this finding is not surprising. Nevertheless, some lessons learned in one community were transferred to others, suggesting that, over time, cross-national linkages might be possible. For example, a community leader in Coyopolan recounted:

They showed us a video from Canada. They have over there, what do you called them? A botanical garden. I mean, if they have one of those over there, why can't we have one here? And here we have abundant vegetation. There are a lot of medicinal plants, a lot. All the years I have lived here I have learned about plants that cured me without spending one single peso, not one centavo!

## 5. NACS Impact on Organizations

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Organizational representatives reported mostly positive impact on their organizations. Participation in NACS created or expanded their "profile within North America." Each organization involved could claim greater international involvement. Even CWY, whose mission is international, had not worked directly with the US prior to NACS. In contrast, SCA's mission was domestic and NACS represented a significant internationalization move for the organization. At the same time, NACS required some organizations to figure out how it fit into their organizations' mission, goals, and objectives. For NAMI, whose central mission is North American community building, "NACS has had a positive impact." Nonetheless, "there has been some discussion on the Board of Directors about how the program fits within the larger NAMI role of serving as a convener and less as a program coordinator, NACS clearly added dimension and value to NAMI, as well as to North America."

From UV's perspective, there were several important impacts. First, NACS provided an opportunity to expand its commitment to experiential education:

The Social Outreach and Extension program at the UV has achieved a high degree of maturity and consolidation that allows its diffusion and replication in other institutions. Furthermore, the level of development of the program imposes the need to look for new opportunities for operation and expansion of coverage that may enable to transcend the results thus far obtained and expand the initial proposed objectives. (UV supervisor)

Second, UV's team worked together on the project and, as a result, "has reinforced group integration." Third, community residents also embraced the NACS program and the volunteers: "The work of the other professionals in the community was reinforced." This reflected well on the university and its outreach and extension program, according to a UV supervisor: "The community took ownership of the objectives and work of NACS. At all times they shared their solidarity with the volunteers and felt part of the university's project, helping in the activities undertaken by the tri-national group."

Fourth, UV officials said that as young people in the area interacted with the group and learned about NACS, "everyone wanted to join." And finally, NACS "opened a forum about the importance of having international ties," according to a UV official, helping to highlight UV's emphasis on internationalization:

NACS with its first cohort, constituted an exceptional strategy to put into practice the internationalization concepts proposed by the new paradigm of higher education proposed by the President of the *Universidad Veracruzana* . . . . It was possible to expand the interest and knowledge of all participants about the problems of the relationship between Mexico, the United States and Canada. This will help to develop new approaches to the social outreach work, especially as it relates to the issue of immigration and the need to assist as university students in the design of social and productive alternatives for the poor and marginalized people of Veracruz. (UV supervisor)

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A project coordinator from UV related how NACS had an impact that extended beyond its intended purpose and how, by chance, a group of biologists and agronomists met the group and, as a result of that meeting, a small forum took place at the School of Biology:

They [The NACS volunteers] presented their work, then the professors began to question why the university did not do certain things and why it took people from other countries to come and speak about these things and do them. What's going on, they wondered. I mean, it was very interesting, it moved the professors, it shook them . . . . Then the Dean of the Agronomy department approached me and said, "Hey, listen we want to work in Coyopolan. We're looking into it." For me this is one of the outcomes, one of the impacts within the university.

Similarly, the University coordinator for the sustainable housing project commented that she learned a lot, especially from the US and Canadian volunteers: "They have added a lot. They have suggested how to do this or that or how to do it more efficiently, they have also looked into details and identified mistakes."

Local host organizations mentioned other organizational benefits. CBT, whose work focuses on the Columbia River basin that spans the Canada-US border, had not worked extensively with US organizations. As a result of interaction between the NACS group and the CBT board, the latter developed a better understanding of NACS and the importance of cross-cultural exchange and trans-boundary issues, according to a CBT staff person:

There were definitely a lot of questions from . . . some members of our board . . . about the relevance of this kind of programming over more locally focused programs and other priorities. And I think that they got a lot out of meeting the participants and hearing what they were learning about. I think that gave them more of an understanding of why this kind of thing is important.

An Advisory Board member from the University of Texas at El Paso also noted that NACS expanded "the range of our thinking about our Community Partners in Education program and the types of projects it might engage in." NACS influenced the university's "activities designed to foster exchange and collaboration between students of the local universities [including] . . . a bi-national student group, called *Encuentro*, which meets regularly to plan programs."

The impact of NACS on local organizations is likely to be most positive when the goals of NACS complement local ones and if communication between the organizations is consistent and positive. It is unlikely, however, that local host organization goals will perfectly match those of NACS. For example, NACS' broader focus was not a perfect fit with CBT's regional focus on youth leadership in environmental well-being in the Columbia River Basin. This underscores the importance of establishing and communicating clearly the goals of the program and to discuss where overlap and/or differences exist. (Some local organizations may decide the overlap is insufficient to justify lending support and resources to NACS.) The importance of communication can be seen in the following example. As NACS funding limitations became apparent, NACS had to scale back its plans. Disappointment was exacerbated when CBT staff did not receive regular communications. Compounding the problem, CBT was not adequately recognized in media and other events for their support.

The principal negative effect mentioned by organizational representatives was financial. Each of the organizations involved had to provide funding (directly or indirectly) from existing budgets. For some, these expenditures caused relatively little strain, but for others the strain was considerable. UV, in particular, felt the budget pinch, in large part because of limited budgetary flexibility and also because it took on many more of NACS local costs than other local host organizations. Moreover, UV developed an extensive, coordinated and relatively expensive educational program. These costs to the organizations are not sustainable over the long term.

## 6. NACS Impact on Policy

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NACS had relatively little observable policy impact. Time and resources were focused on pilot project implementation. The NAMI board was aware of the NACS project, but there was little to no direct contact between NAMI board members and NACS staff, participating organizations, and volunteers. For the most part, North Americanists outside of NAMI were unaware and remain unaware of the NACS pilot project. However, there were some exceptions.

There was more discussion about NACS in Veracruz than in British Columbia and Texas. Presentations were made on two occasions at conferences on community service in Mexico. Three advisory group members addressed an international conference on *Servicio Social* in September (Sherraden, 2002). In November, the NACS team and UV hosts discussed NACS in a workshop session at a national conference (*Encuentro Nacional de Prestadores de Servicio Social*) conference in Mexico City (Fernández de la Garza, 2002). As a result, there was greater knowledge and interest in the project in Mexico than in the other two countries. As one UV staff person pointed out: "The program's profile was expanded at a regional and national level. This caused other universities in the country to develop an interest to carry out this program."

The wife of the Governor of Veracruz attended the NACS closing ceremonies, suggesting that NACS had some impact in the State of Veracruz:

From the point of view of policy in the State of Veracruz, NACS has been considered a success by governmental and civilian entities. This success enhances the profile of the University and creates opportunities for the procurement of resources. It also consolidates the participation of the Office of Outreach and Extension in the forums and activities of community development sponsored by the federal, state, and municipal governments in Veracruz. (UV representative)

Most of the media coverage about NACS was institutional and/or local, with occasional regional coverage (see Appendix C). Most of the organizations that worked with the NACS group issued newsletters and other informational material describing the service projects and activities of the NACS volunteers. Finally, there was some academic attention to NACS (Sherraden, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Sherraden & Benítez, 2002).

Everyone involved in NACS, from the volunteers to the Advisory Board, believed the NACS model warranted continuation. Most hoped that the program would eventually go to scale. However, they also said that a more coherent organization and more financing would be required to develop NACS. In order to take NACS to scale, one Advisory Board member pointed out:

The size of the program was determined in part on available funds and in part on the capacity of the host organizations to manage a larger group. These two issues need to be addressed before the program can grow. If it remains at its present size, it will be another one of a million pilot programs funded by foundations and governments that never develop beyond the initial stage. In the longer term, scaling up and sustainability will require an investment of public funds. But the pilot needs to be successful in order to convince public agencies to invest.

Some were not optimistic about the possibilities at this time because of current political and economic circumstances. For example, an Advisory Board member observed:

. . . the world has been in a phase of rapid change with respect to international activities of all types in the last year and a half. While some voices in the U.S. point to the increased need for international knowledge and interaction, other trends are carrying the U.S. to increased isolation and domination. I would like to think that the NACS program could contribute to the first of those, but I am afraid that the second trend is the stronger one right now, and economic declines will also prevent NACS from more expansion.

Others commented that it is imperative for the US to join as a "full partner." A Canadian Advisory Board member pointed out that he was most disappointed "that no truly committed US partner has yet emerged ready and situated to lead the initiative forward in the US in a dynamic way. I was disappointed in the difficulty in the US grasping the value of the project. I would have thought it would be a slam-dunk . . ." A US Advisory Board member suggested that "unless a dynamic, idealistic US focus emerges soon, I'm fearful that the exemplary success for the first phase of NACS will not survive." Thus, money is an obstacle, but, in the words of another Advisory Board member, "it's not the real obstacle." He continued:

The largest obstacle is that there is little or no impetus right now for the idea of a North American community, probably from any of the three possible partners in it. That is complicated by the desire of the U.S. to subordinate nearly every aspect of international interaction to one view of its security concerns. A second, but still significant obstacle is the divergence in philosophy between the U.S. on one hand, and Canada/Mexico on the other, with respect to the appropriate role of government in public programming.

According to observers, significant public relations efforts will be needed to impact policy and to take NACS to scale: "We must enhance the exposure to the larger community, and expand the press coverage." Another Advisory Board member suggested that "possibly NACS could be sold to policymakers as complement to NAFTA's exclusive focus on economic and trade issues."

Although it is too soon—and NACS is too small—to wield influence on tri-national policies, organizers believed, in the words of an Advisory Board member, that "eventually with the right kind of interventions, I believe that we are offering a new format for the cooperation and solidarity among our three nations."

Eventually NACS Advisory Board members hope that the NACS model would have impact on policy in all three countries. At this point, however, the pilot project has had no demonstrable impact on policy discussions.

## 7. NACS Program Design and Implementation

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### Vision and Goals

**NACS.** NACS organizers were highly committed to the idea that NACS is a model for international cooperation based on partnerships. They believed that NACS has the potential to build common ground and address tri-national issues:

NACS constitutes an ideal instrument to gain experience, knowledge, to develop a social conscience and action mechanisms to transform the youth of the three participating countries into factors for change. (Steering Committee member)

Nonetheless, differences in emphasis and substance emerged in the course of implementation. Some of these differences reflected diverse organizational missions and goals. Each approached the project from their particular organizational perspective and mission (e.g., educational, conservation, historic preservation, youth development, and so forth). For example, CWY viewed NACS as central to its mission of increasing international understanding and building global citizenship, thus the idea behind NACS "is at the core of what [CWY] values; youth programming that is team-based and reciprocal . . . it focuses on education in a service learning format that involves peoples of a range of nations." Although SCA's focus traditionally had been on US public lands, it has become increasingly interested in community-based projects and international programs that dovetail with NACS mission. UV officials believed that NACS "represented an excellent opportunity to reflect about the paths to build the North American citizenship, based on awareness of and the sum of the different cultural identities in the region." NACS, therefore, complemented UV's outreach efforts.

The emphasis in Veracruz was also slightly different, in part because of the organizational setting, but also because of a different national perspective. For UV, volunteers would return to their home communities with an increased understanding of, and commitment to solve problems associated with globalization. For example, NAFTA, US farm subsidy policies, and uneven development pose formidable challenges to rural development in Mexico. NACS could provide young people with first-hand knowledge of the causes and consequences of globalization: "Through programs such as NACS we can raise awareness about these realities to the people's of the participant countries." Moreover, NACS could help prepare young people for the challenges that lay ahead: "The program contributes in the preparation of leaders that through the direct knowledge of the reality of rural Mexico, could be factors for better decision making in the near future." There was profound interest on the part of UV, for example, to internationalize the university in order to prepare youth for the challenges of working in poor communities in an increasingly global world:

The new reality of rural Mexico, its problems, its challenges and its opportunities are closely tied to the economies and the development of the Canadian and U.S. societies. The opening of markets, the asymmetry of agricultural development in the three nations, migration and trans-culturalization are realities that require finding new forms of internationalization [university curriculum] that prepares professionals with a strong sense of social commitment. (Steering Committee member)

Thus, NACS provided, from UV's perspective, an opportunity to "not only understand the local issues, but also to promote the understanding of the regional issues of the countries that comprise North America and thus be able to support the development of a plural and tolerant society in this important geographical area." As a Steering Committee member from Veracruz pointed out:

It is necessary to enhance our understanding of the reality, objectives and development strategies of the nations with which we have international agreements and treaties. The fight against poverty in Veracruz requires recognizing the social, economic and cultural interrelations of Mexico, Canada and the United States.

Therefore, despite considerable agreement on goals, differences also existed from the outset. For some, NACS would identify common issues and solutions for managing the North American community. For others, there was greater emphasis on asymmetrical relationships that underlie social, political and economic conditions in the three countries.

These different interpretations and interests make it difficult to answer a question posed by a Steering Committee member: "Is NACS a community development program, a youth exchange program, or a cross-border educational program?" Posed out of context, one might assume that the Advisory Board could agree to agree on one approach. The question, however, exposes an underlying reality of NACS. Operating in a context of profoundly uneven political power and economic conditions, NACS member organizations interpret the "North American community" from different vantage points. This context is the very ground on which NACS toils. It represents convergence and difference. If NACS is fulfilling its mission, it will continue to struggle to identify differences and build mutual understanding and common ground.

**Local host organizations.** Local host organizations also interpreted NACS goals in different ways. For example, a project supervisor in El Paso said that he thought the program was attempting to build future leaders with broad vision: "[NACS is] trying to accomplish a level of awareness with the participants as far as future stewardship regionally and individually—and I think that's probably the most important aspect of it as far as the long-term goal." For CBT, a local host organization with an explicitly regional and environmental focus, NACS was viewed as a way to develop youth conservation leaders with global understanding. A local host in British Columbia said that she agreed that "trans-boundary" issues are really important when "you're looking at it from an ecosystem-based perspective. These natural resources, and particularly bodies of water, do cross political boundaries and what does that mean in terms of shared responsibility?"

Local hosts interpreted NACS goals from their organizational frame of reference. This is not surprising given the broad scope of NACS, its infancy, and its uncertainty about goals. For example, one local host from British Columbia was not clear about how exactly her organization's goals corresponded to those of NACS. For example, in the beginning she was not aware that community development would be so much a part of NACS. Her initial impressions changed:

When I was actually contacted about it, the emphasis was on environmental and heritage conservation projects. That's what I understood the focus to be. And I think ultimately the



objectives of the program are much, much, broader than that. So in terms of our getting involved, I was surprised that the scope of the project ended up being as large as it was. And that's something I would say, from my perspective, it would be worth examining, whether it wants to be left that broad or more narrow . . .

In the end, she believed that the goals were worthy, but thought that a narrower focus would make the program more coherent.

This "shifting ground," as one Advisory Board member described it, presented implementation challenges for the volunteer group, the group leader, communities, and organizations. As a result, many Advisory Board members, Steering Committee members, and volunteers agreed that it was essential to clarify goals. As a Steering Committee member pointed out, "even the participants themselves do not understand what role they are supposed to play in the respective communities." With greater clarity, it would be easier to answer questions such as: How much should NACS focus on participant or community impacts? Should NACS focus on experiential learning or community service? How much focus should there be on service contributions versus volunteer education and learning?

Lack of clarity about mission and goals also contributed to a central challenge for NACS -- fundraising. As a Steering Committee member observed:

Part of the problem also lies in the inability to more clearly define the intended results of the program. Creating future leaders for North America is not specific enough for foundations at a time when they are moving in the direction of metrics and quantifiable projects.

Having sufficient resources would make it easier for the organizations to meet the challenges of a trinational project. An Advisory Board member working near the Mexico-US border observed that money is not the only challenge to cultivating cross-national programs:

The logic of the national system (amplified by a factor of two in the border zone) simply has other priorities and interests. There are cultural differences . . . reflected in different organizational structures, different calendars, etc. -- that make programming difficult. I don't think there are any secret formulas, but commitment, backed by money [is needed] to create the material infrastructure so that the continual need to solve the other problems doesn't just wear people down to exhaustion.

**Community members.** Community members in host communities had somewhat disparate perspectives about NACS goals and objectives. One community leader in Coyopolan recounted how she reacted with apprehension when she was first informed about NACS: "...Six months ago, I think, they told us that this group was coming to build a house for the neediest person in the community... I thought, 'is it possible that's why they are coming?'" Another leader in Coyopolan believed that the goal of NACS was to, "facilitate and increase communication among the countries, at least the three countries participating now." He also believed the program sought to find ways to do away with, "injustice and the inequality that exists among all the countries in the world." However he felt the main focus of the program was the environment: "... and something I consider to be fundamental, the environment, because for what I have seen they have focused more on the environment."

**Volunteers.** During orientation, the volunteers said they hoped the NACS experience would encourage them to take responsibility for improving conditions in their communities and in North America. They hoped to grow personally and professionally, make friends and personal contacts, learn new skills, gain a deeper understanding of North America and its communities, including their own. Specifically, they hoped to increase their language skills, cultural understanding, technical skills in media and research, leadership skills, knowledge of community development. Some hoped that the experience would help them make education and career decisions.

By the end of the program, the volunteers said the main goals of NACS were learning, leading, helping, and building a common agenda in North America. First, they agreed that a principal goal was to learn about different ways of life and different issues confronting nations and communities, including eliminating stereotypes. For example, one Mexican volunteer thought that the strength of NACS was the opportunity to "learn about other societies' ways of life, different life styles, habits, costumes, and to learn different approaches to problem solving with existing resources." This understanding began with the program itself, according to the volunteers: "The diversity of participants greatly enhanced the spirit of the program."

Second, they thought the program aimed to develop youth as facilitators of change. The program was supposed to foster a sense of responsibility for community and sustainable development, including bringing back knowledge to their own communities. The importance of NACS as a youth program (fostering "youth empowerment," in the words of a Canadian youth) had perhaps not been explored as fully by the framers of NACS. The volunteers believed that the focus on youth was vital. Another Canadian said "It is a great opportunity for youth to work together on common goals and to learn how to become stronger leaders." She continued:

The fact that it connects youth from the three countries in the North American continent and gives youth the opportunity to see how we all have similar problems and learn from our differences. It is a great opportunity for youth to work together on common goals and to learn how to become stronger leaders.

Third, they believed that helping communities in concrete ways during NACS was also a goal. As one volunteer from Canada pondered:

I guess, what I think we are suppose to be accomplishing or what we are supposed to, as well as, I mean, contributing to the communities and doing actual work that we are doing and being a positive force in a community.

One American volunteer believed service projects were a means to reach the community and to raise awareness about important issues. For example, one volunteer talked about the importance of using *adobe* in rehabilitation of the mission, "... everyone wants concrete, you know, because concrete is what everybody knows. And so [it is important] for us to say, 'Look at what's working here. This mission has been here for 300 years.'" A volunteer from Mexico underscored this sentiment and said that

People should know that this, more than anything else, is community service. We are nine volunteers that want to help in any projects the community is interested in. That, I feel, is one of the important goals.

Finally, they believed that NACS was trying to build common understanding and connections across North America. As a volunteer said, one of the main strengths of NACS was the emphasis on "creating a sense of responsibility for and connection with the North American continent as a whole." The idea that youth would develop "friendships in other countries," as another volunteer suggested, was also important to the volunteers.

### **NACS Organizational Structure and Partnerships**

As an international collaborative, NACS is a model for international cooperation based on partnerships. With relatively few models for how a truly tri-national program might work, NACS brought together an unusual group of organizations. An Advisory Board member pointed out that the process of designing and implementing NACS was truly cooperative, "participants from all three nations functioned equally and well in designing the pilot project." It was, in his words, "not just tri-lateral in a national sense, but also, in important ways, multi-lateral in terms of types of organizations represented: academic, NGO, volunteer, local, national, etc."

The partnership model worked well much of the time. NAMI was in charge of fund raising and maintaining the collaborative and the program was launched in June 2001. As the director wrote, NAMI "played a central role in the overall design and implementation of the program . . . NAMI's role was (and is) to serve as the umbrella organization for the three country partner organizations (UV, CWY and SCA) and provide tri-national linkages to the program." CWY was in charge of overall planning, operations, and direction. In each country, partner organizations provided expertise and resources for implementation of each phase. Local organizations, such as UTEP, Cornerstones, and CBT provided important local support. Finally, the Global Service Institute at Washington University in St. Louis was brought in as the research partner.

At times, however, NACS was "a ship adrift in the sea," in the words of one Advisory Board member. There was some confusion between the roles of Advisory Board members, Steering Committee members, and NAMI staff. Even after the pilot project, there was little agreement about roles. For example, key roles for the Advisory Board, according to one person, should have been to: (a) provide contacts, (b) serve as a sounding board, (c) help to assess results, and (d) set expectations about accountability. Another believed the Advisory Board should focus exclusively on fundraising and overall strategic direction.

At various points the roles of the tri-national sponsor (NAMI) and the country partner organizations in each country (CWY, SCA, and UV) were unclear. As one Advisory Board member recalled:

The Steering Committee did not have the full authority intended as NAMI occasionally became directly involved in operational issues that tended sometimes to muddy the waters rather than help clarify things. The outcome? A successful pilot year with a range of lessons learned about cooperation and especially definition of roles—and sticking to them.

Another advisory member agreed:

The partnership that developed between the key organizations in each country and NAMI was often awkward and unclear in terms of division of responsibility, and in terms of adequate and frequent sharing of information. Many of the administrative difficulties were caused by lack of experienced staff at NAMI and shortage of funds—not by intent. But the result was often a sense of lack of inclusiveness and shared decision-making.

Confusion also existed between Steering Committee and local host organizations roles (e.g., CBT in British Columbia and Cornerstones in the US). Many decision-makers were involved, sometimes offering contradictory instructions, exacerbated by a short planning period that did not offer the luxury of working out roles and responsibilities. Local host organizations were not represented on the Steering Committee in Canada and the United States, leaving them "out of the loop," as one observer suggested. The Canadian host organization, CBT, for example, provided financial support, but other than participant selection, did not have a formal role in project decision-making. A Steering Committee member from Canada believed that "some sort of protocol agreement" might help "to find a way to involve the host community organizations in decision-making without making it too unwieldy and confusing (as in our earlier conference calls, where the participants changed at each call)."

Finally, the relationship between the local host organizations and the NACS group were unclear at times. For example, CBT and Cornerstones were involved in some aspects of the local stay, but not all. Many tasks related to accommodations, education, and other day-to-day activities were left to the group leader and volunteers. This was challenging because group members did not know the communities.

One Steering Committee member raised the possibility that NACS current partner structure may not be optimal because the country partner organizations may not be able to "cope with larger groups of volunteers."

### **Host Organizations**

As suggested above, organizational capacity and staffing by host organizations differed markedly across the sites. In Canada, CWY had broad organizational capacity with respect to funding and staffing. Locally, CBT provided funding, but had limited staff resources that could assist with implementation. In the United States, SCA assisted NACS, especially with recruitment and volunteer support, but had not yet found a niche for NACS in its organizational mandate. Locally, Cornerstones could not provide funding, but staff provided extensive project supervision, and assistance with housing, transportation, and other support. In Veracruz, UV took responsibility for the planning and implementation of NACS, shifting several staff to the project, providing extensive service project supervision, housing, meals, transportation, and educational programming.

To differing degrees, therefore, country partners and local host organizations re-arranged their priorities to accommodate NACS. While this was feasible in the short run, it is not sustainable over the longer term without additional resources. Despite a willingness to provide support to NACS, it placed strain on the organizations, especially at UV.

Varying levels of support and involvement created implementation challenges for the pilot project. While the differences in goals and methodology permitted each country partner and host organization to participate in the way that best suited their goals and resources, it fell to the group leader (and to a lesser extent, volunteers) to fill in the gaps and to adjust roles accordingly.

### **Coordination, Management, and Communication**

The NACS operational structure was serviceable, if not sustainable. As a Steering Committee member suggested, this was a *pilot* project: "I must take into account that this was a first experience and thus one cannot expect that its planning would be perfect." Lack of communication and changing personnel contributed to the challenges.

Within NACS, coordination and communication problems were the result of rapid implementation, lack of time, and lack of experience. This resulted, at times, in an unintentional "lack of inclusiveness and shared decision-making," in the words of one participant. Advisory Board members were often unaware of major developments, and as a result, many questions arose during implementation that might have been discussed and resolved by the Advisory Board (e.g., responsibilities of the Steering Committee organization versus local host organizations, responsibilities of the group leader). For example, one potentially significant fund raising and public relations opportunity was lost because the staff person in charge at the time did not understand its significance and did not respond.

Steering Committee participation was also uneven. While high-level managers brought decision-making power to the Steering Committee, they were also very busy individuals and often could not attend telephone meetings. This resulted in "rotation" in Steering Committee composition, which according to one member,

We don't get to know each other and it makes it somewhat confusing to know whom we are dealing with. Conference calls are positive but may also lead to confusion, especially in our case, due to our poor command of the English language. Therefore, I would recommend we meet [in person] at least twice a year, at the beginning of the annual planning of the exchange, to review the evaluation from the previous year, and later just before the start of the program to fine-tune the logistics and details of the volunteers' stay in each country.

An Internet site, with discussion board capabilities, was established but was used infrequently. Telephone and e-mail appeared to be more useful modes of communication, especially among Steering Committee and Advisory Board members.

Communication was also a challenge at the community sites. None of the three sites had adequate internet and telephone access. Days were full, leaving little time to go to the library or office where there might be access to the Internet. This made communication and report writing difficult for volunteers and group leader. Finally, there was no way to scan images, which was unfortunate because the volunteers could not send their photographs to NACS planners and media outlets.

There is little evidence of any communication across program sites. Although building a network among these sites was a goal of NACS, there was little time and lack of rationale for building these networks.

### **Funding and Resources**

Enthusiasm for the idea and a commitment to developing the NACS model attracted resources from many different organizations and groups. The pilot project budget was \$135,000. Of this, \$40,000 was raised in Canada, \$75,000 was raised in the United States, and \$20,000 was raised in Mexico (\$10,000 of the Mexican portion was in-kind for food, lodging, in-country transport, medical and insurance, graduation ceremonies and reception). Sources ranged from funds contributed by (a) lead agencies (CWY and UV) (\$40,000), (b) host organizations (CBT) (\$10,000), (c) the convening organization (NAMI) (\$45,000), and (d) a foundation grant (\$30,000). The Center for Social Development's Global Service Institute, the research partner, made an in-kind contribution of \$40,000 for this research.

In fact, the NACS pilot project would not have been possible without the generosity of local organizations and residents, although these levels are likely not sustainable over time. Organizational contributions included planning time of Advisory Board members since 1999 (annual meetings), coordinating activities of CWY and NAMI, and Steering Committee activities during 2001 and 2002. In the communities, host families and communities at all three sites covered various on-site costs, such as room and board.

Despite these generous financial and in-kind contributions, it was clear from the start that there were insufficient funds for the pilot. As one US volunteer said, at the end of the first phase of the program: "We need more time, more money, and more organization." Service site supervisors reported that more funding was needed, especially to "cover expenses of host work projects."

Local host organization costs were highest, and had the greatest implications, in Veracruz:

Considering the financial aspects of the NACS program, I can comment that the original budget was surpassed in the initial weeks. This, in addition the slow process of obtaining funds from our institution, led us to subtract funds from other programs to cover NACS expenses. This created difficulties and setbacks in the development of those other programs.

The organizers in Veracruz pointed out that time and resources were available on a limited basis, but over the long run NACS is not sustainable without additional external resources.

Lack of funding contributed to significant changes in program design and a later start. The original program design included three groups of nine participants each that were to spend three months in each country and cycle through the three host sites. Lack of funding meant a reduction to one group of nine participants who spent only two months in each site. Excluding time spent in orientation, tours of the region, and other group events, communities received modest volunteer time.

The lack of sufficient funds for the pilot project—not to mention a larger program—was a great disappointment to many of the organizers, as an Advisory Board member stated:

The biggest disappointment thus far has been the lack of funds available for the program, and subsequent scaling-down of the pilot. It has been challenging to generate interest on the part of the private foundations and individual donors, mainly due to the program being new and seen as a "novelty."

Limited resources had other effects. Inadequate funding prohibited NACS from hiring a group leader in advance of program commencement, which led to inadequate time for planning, pre-program communication with volunteers, orientation, finding host families, and for organizing service sites and educational projects. Other less pressing activities, such as creating documentation and evaluation and research procedures and greater inclusion of implementing agencies in initial decision-making, were also given too little attention. Lack of funding also meant that all volunteers did not receive adequate spending money during the program. Host families received inadequate funds for hosting the volunteers. A US volunteer said that the difficulties recruiting host families in El Paso might have been partially explained by the low reimbursement for food: "They're not cooking for \$40 a week. They're cooking for \$75 to \$100 a week . . . That's probably one of the reasons why we had trouble finding housing down here."

Fundraising was complicated by the distinct ways that each country partner organization acquires its program resources. Each organization has a different funding structure that affects how they raise money for their programs, including NACS. For example, CWY funds come mostly from Canada's international development agency, along with private sources. SCA typically raises its funds through a fee-for-service arrangement with the US National Park Service, along with other organizational fund-raising. UV receives its funding from the state and federal government, tuition and fees, and grant writing.

According to most observers, raising funds is *the* principal challenge for expanding NACS. As an Advisory Board member observed: "The most difficult obstacle to consolidate the program is financing. It is necessary to establish an organized fund raising effort."

Many believe the US, as the wealthiest country of the three, has a special role and responsibility to help generate resources. As a US member of the Advisory Board said: "We must speak to the imperative of raising US funds, lest the program grievously disappoint the hopes, confidences, and investments of money and effort of our Canadian and Mexican partners." It is impossible for some of the NACS partners to generate sufficient resources for this kind of project, despite their great interest in being a part of the program, and in order to continue to participate, it is important "to have sufficient financial resources."

### **Program Duration**

The main drawback to the pilot project design, according to volunteers and staff, was the short duration of each phase of the program. As a service supervisor in Veracruz pointed out: "It is not possible that two months are enough time to achieve the goal of building the citizenship in North America." Group members felt pressured by the activities they had to accomplish and the short time available. The group leader felt particularly responsible to figure out how to fit many

activities into a relatively short period of time. Time pressures were most acute in the beginning, as the group leader noted at the end of their stay in British Columbia:

We all felt quite pressured for time, especially towards the end. There was never a lack of things to do, and we could have met and visited with many more organizations had we the time. With so many administrative things to take care of, I wasn't able to really extensively contextualize the North American perspective. Everyone was aware of the resource library, but people were so busy with their work, fieldwork on the [educational] projects, and lives with host families that they didn't have the time or energy to spend time reading the materials. I did incorporate workshops on globalization and North American issues, and some language instruction, however, we could have done a lot more.

The volunteers agreed. As one volunteer woman from the United States pointed out: "I felt that two months was not sufficient enough time to become part of the community and truly get to know the area we were living in!" They were committed to all program activities (service projects, educational projects, group time, and community/host family time) and found that it was difficult to do justice to each one. Most cited lack of time for service projects ("three days was too short") and educational projects.

### **Volunteer Recruitment**

The recruiting organizations (CBT in British Columbia, SCA in Texas, and UV in Veracruz) designed their own protocol and procedures for soliciting and choosing volunteers. They followed the guidelines adopted by the Steering Committee that volunteers should be between 19 and 25 years of age, and include men and women of diverse social class, race, and ethnic backgrounds. All participants had to be in good health, have valid passports, be committed to the program, and agree to assist fellow volunteers. The program also informed potential participants about non-discrimination and sexual harassment policies and required their agreement to respect these policies for the duration of the program.

Two programs used individual performance in prior programs as a measure for their selection (SCA and UV). CBT volunteers were chosen with an eye to their commitment to returning to the Columbia River Basin area to make contributions to conservation, sustainable development and environmental leadership. SCA selected the three volunteers from a pool of 500 generated by a call to former volunteers and interns who inquired about NACS and 75 who followed up with completed applications. UV selected their volunteers from among 700 former *Servicio Social* participants. They were chosen as emissaries with a responsibility to network, learn English, and increase the visibility of UV in North America. Among the three, UV's selection criteria were the most international in focus.

One Steering Committee member thought that there could have been greater clarity about selection criteria.

Although we recognize the many qualities of the nine participants, we observed significant differences in their educational background, work experience, level of commitment and reasons for participating. In some cases there appeared to be a lack of future perspective over how to best utilize the knowledge acquired during the experience.



Although the variety may have contributed to enriching the group experience, this individual believed it is "necessary to establish a level of personal characteristics, abilities, expectations, and attitudes that permit better group integration" in future NACS projects.

### **Volunteer Orientation**

Volunteers received orientation materials in advance of the program that were designed to help prepare them for the experience, and to understand their roles, learning opportunities, and responsibilities during the program (MOA, no date, 12). The short amount of time prior to the program launch, however, did not allow for (1) adequate baseline data collection, or (2) pre-program orientation of volunteers (e.g., readings, volunteer communication, language training). As a result, the coordinators drew heavily on documents from CWY for orientation which were not adapted adequately for NACS (including Spanish versions for the Mexicans).

Upon arrival in the first NACS site in Nelson BC, the group received orientation led by the group leader and the local host organization (CBT). With unexpected delays at the Canada-US border,<sup>7</sup> there were only four days left for orientation. The focus of orientation was on the program objectives and components, habits and customs of the host country and community, training in cross-cultural communication, and skills in working together. The group decided on two central themes for the six-month experience: (1) community management of social, cultural, environmental, and economic resources, and (2) how communities fit into North America. Generally, participants agreed that orientation was helpful, but was too short.

### **Supervision**

Originally, the plans called for hiring a group leader to ensure that the organizational, administrative and educational aspects of the exchange were carried out successfully (MOA, no date, 16). The job description called for a group leader with leadership and interpersonal skills; ability to motivate young people; experience in facilitating groups and intercultural communication; administrative, organizational, supervisory, and problem solving skills; and working knowledge of English and Spanish. Desirable qualities included an ability (or willingness to learn) to teach in a non-formal context and knowledge of community and international development. Specific duties included:

- (a) To ensure organization, administration, and educational quality;
- (b) To plan the project budget;
- (c) To plan the educational approach;
- (d) To undertake work project development in the host community;
- (e) To select and train host families, work project staff, and educational resource people in the community;
- (f) To work in collaboration with exchange country counterparts in the other two countries;
- (g) To coordinate with host families and work project staff throughout the program;

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<sup>7</sup> Increased vigilance at the US-Canadian border due to the G-8 summit held in Calgary around the same time caused the group to arrive a day late.

- (h) To ensure the health and safety of participants in the host community and work project site (MOA, no date, 16).

Interestingly, this list does not emphasize group guidance or translating, although these activities consumed much of the group leader's time. The volunteers had never lived in this kind of group environment, nor had most lived in other countries. Therefore, there was significant demand on the group leader to manage group process and help volunteers cope with new experiences.

The group leader reported that time management was the most difficult part of the job, especially in British Columbia. (The level of responsibility and level of local support varied considerably across the NACS sites. She had greatest responsibilities in British Columbia, less in Texas, and the least in Veracruz.) Others echoed this challenge and pointed out that the range of responsibilities was too extensive, especially without prior knowledge and contacts in the host communities. In British Columbia, a service supervisor and a host family reported in the questionnaire that more communication was needed.

Furthermore, different people's (e.g., volunteers, group leader, local hosts, Steering Committee members) interpretations of program goals and their organizational responsibilities led to a lack of consensus about the group leader's role and responsibilities. Expectations changed as the group moved from place to place. The group leader was not always certain exactly what was expected. For example, a local host and service supervisor in Veracruz suggested that:

The [group leader] must facilitate and promote the processes that help achieve the program objectives. She must be attentive, observing each activity that the youth participate in, guiding and proposing solutions to problems. She should not be part of the group. Communication must be horizontal among the participants [but the group leader] must be impartial. She should not take sides with either participants or local host organizations. The [group leader] must be responsible and autonomous, to make the decisions that are best suited for the development of the program in each country. In Mexico there were problems due to lack of experience in working with young professionals.

In contrast, the group leader proposed a different style of leadership:

It's about how to foster [leadership] within the group, how to initiate things. I found that was a challenge because my initial idea was to try to facilitate that . . . and allow the group to make their decisions as much as possible. But I found that often it wasn't – it just didn't work or people weren't willing to take that role sometimes . . . I think it's one of those [questions] for reflection and evaluation . . . What's the best way to encourage that same kind of initiative and leadership, but also to try [to not let] everything fall apart either?

Tying this question of group leadership into building leadership for North America, she said, "Leadership doesn't mean that one person . . . necessarily takes control of everything. Each person has [her/his] own strengths to contribute. And if they do that proactively, that lends itself to, you know, really finding solutions and working together."

Approaches to project site supervision also varied. This affected the level and type of integration into the community. In British Columbia, supervision was lacking in two of the projects, and as a result, the group leader played a large role in project supervision. As a result of this (along

with a shorter stay and less structured activities), the volunteers believed they made less contact with and impact on the community. In Texas, the site supervisors assisted the group with their work and adjustment, but also brought the volunteers into the decision making process by telling the volunteers:

These are the problems we're facing. We're not going to hide anything from you. You came in at this time and this is what we're dealing with." And I think the group really loved that. "You trust us. You trust us to help come up with some solutions." And that was a really effective way of making the group feel like this was theirs.

Thus, in Texas, the volunteers were highly integrated into the service site. In Veracruz, supervision was the most structured and was based in large measure on the university's multi-disciplinary *Brigadista* model. Although it took some time for the group to adapt to the increased level of structure and supervision and to figure out how to communicate effectively with local hosts, they also felt that they became more integrated into and had greater impact in the community.

### **Group Size**

There was little consensus about the ideal size of a group. However, there was some consensus that it is best to have one leader per nine to ten volunteers. CWY's binational projects have two leaders (one from each country) for 18 volunteers. SCA groups are nine and have one leader. The volunteers and group leader in the NACS pilot project liked having a total of ten and believed it would be difficult to find service projects for more participants.

### **Selection of Community Sites**

Selection of community sites is another critical component of the NACS program. Volunteers and organizational sponsors agreed that the three communities chosen provided ample opportunities for interesting service, educational experiences, and receptivity on the part of community residents. As one American volunteer said, "The communities that were chosen were ideal!" Another said, "Working within communities with local organizations and individuals was definitely the biggest strength [of NACS]." A Canadian volunteer also thought that an important aspect of NACS was the emphasis on "community awareness, activity and a sense of wanting to create a better, stronger community."

In the end, the choice of community provided the NACS group with a particular perspective on the region and country. The ideal choice might reflect a balance of the community's ability to contribute to the goals of NACS and the capacity of local residents and local host organizations to sponsor and accommodate the volunteers.

### **Community Service Projects**

The volunteers appreciated the experiences in each site. In particular, they appreciated the emphasis on "hands-on" and "experiential learning." Another said: "when given the chance to try, I learn the most in hands-on type experiences." Several volunteers pointed out how important it was "actually doing work to be able to help someone and seeing that help!" This

excerpt from an interview with a volunteer from Mexico shows insight into the purpose of NACS service projects:

In reality these are the means that allow us to permeate into the community. [The work] is not the purpose of NACS, right? If that were the case I could take a gardening class and learn more about greenhouses. I think the point is to become integrated in the community as much as possible and have a real knowledge of what community means in Mexico, how it works and how it functions.

Adapting to differences in culture, organization, and context across the three countries challenged the volunteers. In British Columbia, the volunteers and group leader were left on their own to make many, if not most, of the project decisions. They could have used more direction and guidance. The Texas project struck a delicate balance between providing structure, but also involving the volunteers in day to day decision making. As one volunteer said, there was a "positive work environment by our bosses, there was absolute equality and no prejudices existed". Another said "the partner organization was extremely supportive with time and energy and also very flexible . . . the work project's flexibility created a really great work environment. It encouraged people to take initiative and use their skills to the fullest potential." Another liked the fact that the supervisors were "laid back," and "it was really great how they told us what they were having problems with and if we had any solutions or ideas and that we could work on whatever we wanted."

In Veracruz, after four months working with small non-profits with a great deal of independence and flexibility, the NACS group worked with a large public university, where the work was fairly structured (it was designed along the university's renowned *Brigadista* model). This required that the NACS group adapt to a different organizational style. As one volunteer wrote: "One of the main challenges was trying to remain motivated and independent when many plans were already set in place for our group . . ."

Learning to adapt to differences across countries, communities, and organizations is a central goal of NACS. At the same time, some features of the program should be standardized and predictable across sites, especially in a program of relatively short duration. Standardization makes it easier for participants to move from site to site and also makes it easier to predict program outcomes. The question is which aspects should be standardized and which should vary? These questions are central to implementation of a cross-national project.

### **Educational Activities**

The educational curriculum was based loosely on CWY, but differed in each phase of the project depending on the local host organization. In British Columbia, each of the three teams completed a project and organized a community presentation for each of the local host organizations. In Texas, small groups undertook various educational projects, culminating in a community presentation at the Socorro Mission festival day. In Veracruz, UV coordinated and implemented the most tightly organized and coherent educational program of the three sites. As a volunteer pointed out: "the fact that they had a professor come in every week was really good . . . It really conceptualized where they were and other things . . . it was great because some of the

people that came to speak would bring it back to North America, which I thought was really wonderful."

A day a week was set aside for Educational Activity Days (EAD),<sup>8</sup> providing time and structure for the teams to learn and work on the community presentation made at the end of each phase. One volunteer summed up the general feeling: "I found the EADs useful as a way of educating ourselves and others on areas of interest that couldn't be addressed fully in the regular work settings."

UV coordinators suggested that NACS should seek "to integrate with more clarity the educational component, in other words, emphasize a learning program about historical, cultural, social and economic and environmental issues of the host communities." A volunteer agreed, saying that she would have liked to have even "more discussion of North American issues in a little bit more formal way. The whole border issues, immigration, etc. It's just really interesting. And we did actually learn more about that, but I want more." In each phase, the educational program was supplemented by trips to local sights and other outings, although the program was most elaborate in Veracruz.

Original plans for individual education projects that would be followed throughout the program were not carried out. In the end, the projects were not linked across sites, but each provided a means for learning and a way to "give back" to the community. The volunteers, the group leader, and the community members interviewed thought that the projects were well worthwhile.

Writing about the second phase of the program, the group leader debated the relative emphasis on education projects versus community service projects:

I did incorporate workshops on globalization and North American issues, and some language instruction, however, we could have done a lot more. At this point, I am trying to figure out how to apply this to the Texas site. Since they are working full days, four days a week, that leaves only one day for EAD. Research and investigation can only be done after work hours. It seems like way too much to fit into a short time. If the work week was shorter, possibly three days a week, it would be more realistic for the group to work on their own projects and get out into the community more. The idea of working on a project throughout the three countries is a good one, however, it seems like it is not totally realistic if they are so busy on their regular work projects. I'll need some input on how to incorporate the EAD objectives here in Texas, where they are working eight hours a day, four days a week, doing heavy labour mostly, and then working on the community outreach plans for the organization. They are going to need some downtime, and with that, and the excursions that are being planned, there is precious little time for doing a whole lot extra.

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<sup>8</sup> Weekly EADs were organized mostly by the volunteers and group leader in Canada and the United States, while in Veracruz, the EADs were formal presentations made by experts. The former allowed volunteers to work on their community projects, but were somewhat less informative generally than the Veracruz approach, while the Veracruz approach provided interesting perspectives on Mexico, but allowed less time for the group to fashion their own educational days.

## Language

The original NACS announcement said that fluency in English and Spanish was not a requirement for participation. Although this decision was deliberate (in order to increase inclusiveness), communication difficulties frustrated the volunteers and group leader. As a volunteer observed, "From the very beginning, language was an obstacle and I was told it would not be."

The service project teams consisted of one volunteer from each country, leaving the Mexican volunteer in each group the only Spanish-speaking participant. While this composition encouraged cross-cultural communication, it left the Mexicans somewhat isolated sometimes. As the group leader wrote after the first phase:

Since the English speakers are the majority, they made less of an effort to communicate in Spanish. I could see this being a source of real frustration – it remains to be seen if this will improve in the other two phases.

The Mexicans' age and relatively high level of education and experience (compared to the Canadian and US volunteers) may have exacerbated their sense of frustration.

In informal interactions and activities, language posed few problems. The group leader gradually eased off translation so that the team could practice their language skills and translate for each other. Group members interacted and communicated with each other and made genuine efforts to listen and understand each other. The group leader reported that she consciously reduced the amount that she translated so that the more bilingual volunteers in the group could begin to take over translation. As a result, she noticed both English and Spanish speakers began to pick up and use each other's language much more, often speaking and understanding unconsciously, and surprised when she or others pointed out that they were speaking or understanding another language.

Language presented a greater challenge in formal program activities than in informal ones, according to volunteers. Meetings and educational events progressed at a slow pace, especially during Phase I, because of the time the group leader had to spend translating. In the initial phases, the English speakers were not patient with this process and the Mexicans were frustrated by their inability to understand all that was happening around them. But by the time they arrived in Veracruz, they were communicating effectively and were excited about their progress.

## Accommodations

Local accommodations were a significant programmatic issue. As one Steering Committee member suggested, "It is not simply about having room and board but also to find a way to enhance and enrich the experience of the [volunteers] through exposure to a host family and local community." The volunteers, the group leader, and local hosts suggested that congregate living and host family living have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Congregate living had certain advantages for NACS, such as facilitating group formation and group activities. As one of the American volunteers said: "Living with a group is nice because it's easier to organize stuff." A volunteer from Mexico said: "it is a big advantage to live with a family, but I want to

emphasize that it is part of one's learning to know how to live together." Host family living, however, facilitated language acquisition and cross-cultural learning. According to one volunteer, living with a host family in British Columbia, "I learned more about the way of life of the Canadian people." Another said: "In terms of the goals [of the program], I think that . . . host families are better because you learn more about the culture, you're involved in the community, you see what life is actually like." Living with a host family, a Mexican volunteer observed,

I saw the reality of the culture, the one that is intrinsic, the habits, what time they wake up, what they do on weekends, what they eat, their behavior, how they manage their emotions . . . That is why being with a local family is so enriching.

Living with host families also provided "breathing room" for the group, and a little independence. As a volunteer explained, "seeing each other daily, always trying to figure out what's wrong and trying to solve it, well, it gets a little draining emotionally."

In the end, the volunteers liked both kinds of living arrangements.

I think a main goal of the NACS initiative is just establishing interconnectedness. And it's like, either way, you can't lose because if you live with a host family you're connecting with a different part of the community and if you're living together, you're in this group all the time so you're still connecting.

Comparing all three phases, the volunteers seemed most satisfied with the situation in Veracruz where volunteers lived together, but were located in the heart of a mountain village where intercultural exchange was a daily occurrence. As one volunteer explained:

One day [a Mexican volunteer] and I went for a walk . . . we were going to see if we could borrow a guitar from somebody. And we got invited in and there was sort of a little community band and they were practicing and [the other volunteer] and I danced on their living room floor and had tea and talked to some of the women in the house . . . And mostly they were all family members . . . a lot of this community is related. So you'll see people in other people's houses all the time.

## **Volunteer Stipends**

The sponsoring organizations had different policies regarding volunteer stipends. NACS provided volunteers \$15 per week for incidental expenses. SCA volunteers were paid an additional \$100 a week in a lump sum at the end of service, an organizational policy for all interns. They were unaware at the outset that others were not receiving a similar stipend. As an SCA representative pointed out: "SCA made a big mistake in not speaking with one voice to the American interns about the amount of their living stipends, with the result that we had to give them much more money than the other participants were receiving. This badly undercut the purpose of the program." Nor were Steering Committee members aware of the disparity until well into program implementation. The volunteers viewed this practice as unfair. One host family in British Columbia commented that \$15 a week "seems extremely low to me." Moreover, at least one CWY participant was required to raise funds for the project before its initiation to pay for rent and utilities for the first two months. Although differential treatment resulted from misunderstanding, it led to some hard feelings.

## Research

Exploratory research was integral to the NACS pilot project. As one observer pointed out: "It is necessary to establish a methodological approach, define measures to assess the outcomes." Another said: "I believe it would be very interesting, within the research protocol, to establish a baseline and set indicators that allow us to assess either potential or actual impacts resulting from the implementation of the program." Research results were viewed as essential to guiding NACS program development, helping with communications and funding, and, eventually, providing directions for moving the program to scale. The research was exploratory, therefore, results are suggestive rather than definitive.



## 8. Lessons from the NACS Pilot Project

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Based on this exploratory study of the pilot demonstration of NACS, we offer some lessons. It should be understood that these "lessons" are the result of initial inquiry. Nonetheless, while the results of this study are largely suggestive, they should be helpful for understanding cross-national service in the North American context and for future program and research development.

The study suggests four fundamental issues facing NACS as it plans for the future: clarifying the vision and mission, developing partnerships, acquiring funding, and building effective means of communication. In addition, several other program design issues emerged in this study that provide guidance for cross-national community service. These issues and some possible solutions are discussed below.

### **Vision, Mission, and Goals**

It is important to clarify the vision, mission, and goals of NACS and to highlight its unique aspects and value. Agreement among all of the partner organizations (e.g., implementing agencies, community partners, group leaders, and volunteers) would help to assure that everyone is working towards the same ends. Once this is accomplished, the Advisory Board could be expanded to reflect and support the mission. Even with a program design that correctly reflects NACS mission and goals there will likely be different interpretations (by country, community, and groups), but the program would be coherent.

Many of the problems encountered during the NACS pilot project reflected different underlying goals for NACS that are rooted in the very issue that is the core of NACS: building a North American community. It manifested itself in many ways through misunderstandings among participants, group leader, host organizations, Steering Committee, and Advisory Board. Recognition, open discussion, and focus on the underlying challenge will go a long way toward developing models for cross-national policies and programs. It is recommended that volunteers engage in discussions from the outset about how their experiences (in host families, in service sites, in classes, among themselves) help to identify and overcome differences. Volunteers, for example, who have questions or concerns about program decisions could be engaged in discussions aimed at understanding the goals of NACS from the perspective of the host organization and how certain programmatic decisions have been made. What do their experiences tell them about an organization or a country? What does it tell them about the social, economic, and political realities of that organization or country? How do these inform their understanding of how to build a "North American community?" Common ground is not easily reached. It is the result of hard work. Different perspectives certainly have cultural dimensions, but they reflect different social, political and economic realities in each of the countries.

## Program Structure and Partnerships

**Membership on Advisory Board.** Advisory Board members are the architects and guardians of an organization's vision, mission, and goals. It is important that board members be in a position to offer expertise, access to resources, and to communicate effectively the underlying goals of NACS. In this way, NACS can focus more clearly, generate sufficient resources, and build a strong constituency.

**Partners' roles and responsibilities.** The organizational partners in NACS come from different institutional perspectives, including public and private, large and small, academic and non-profit, international and domestic. While this structure offers NACS expertise and other resources, it also creates challenges. The NACS program must navigate differences in organizational structure and purpose, in addition to the challenges of working across international borders. The structure of NACS, therefore, underscores the importance of (1) clarifying its vision and mission, and (2) the roles and responsibilities of partnering organizations. To some extent, this will result from trial and error, but it must be an explicit aim of the Advisory Board and Steering Committee. Over the longer term, NACS Advisory Board and Steering Committee might also discuss the possibility of other organizational structures.

**US partner commitment.** CWY and UV are unequivocally supportive of NACS. CWY is "solidly behind" NACS and is "very supportive of all that underpins the NACS initiative." While CWY's commitment "portrays exuberance, but not unlimited funds," it is in a position to provide significant and ongoing financial support for Canadians and Mexicans in all phases of the project. Moreover, it is committed to staffing the project implementation. UV officials are also supportive of NACS, even though funds are limited, in part because of the potential value for linking the university to other institutions across North America. Although SCA has supported NACS in the US, the program represents a significant departure from SCAs established programs. As an organizational representative observed: "We're in the middle of an internal debate about whether to increase our presence outside the US and, until that debate is resolved, I think our participation will be hesitant, as it has been." It will likely take some time for SCA to determine if and how to integrate NACS in its mission and goals.

**Steering Committee.** The pilot project suggested the importance of stability in Steering Committee membership. The Steering Committee includes a representative from each of the key partner organizations in each country who is in a position to make decisions. Because these individuals are fairly high level administrators, there are times when they are not available for meetings. Therefore, it may be a good idea to assign one alternate representative who knows the program well and can take over when the Steering Committee member is unavailable. This is important because if personnel are not stable, a country's "voice" may be lost in program decision-making.

**Local hosts and local funders.** It is also important to develop clear roles for local host organizations. What is the role of local host organizations in decision-making? What role should local funders (who may have somewhat different goals and interests) have in program decision making? Specifically, it was suggested that NACS move towards a model that formalizes

. . . NACS into a single entity with its own non-profit and 501(c)(3) status, housed in one central location somewhere in North America. The organization could enter into agreements with multiple organizations throughout Canada, US, and Mexico to 'place' volunteers into project sites (similar to the US Peace Corps model), thus accommodating larger numbers. NACS would still be a collaboration of various entities throughout North America, and would have its own staff. This model is obviously a long-term approach, and we are clearly not ready for it just yet, but it is something that we should address in the future.

A UV service supervisor agreed with the idea of forming a new tri-national organization:

A solution could be the creation of a tri-national organization. This organization should include the local host organizations in each country. Furthermore there must be a role for the evaluator for the length of the process. He/she must live the process in each country to enrich the experience from within.

Instead of being housed in a non-profit, another supervisor argued that the logical "home" for NACS lies in public universities in each country:

From the experience in Mexico, I consider that the center of the organization for the development of the program in each country should fall to local public universities. The universities should issue a call for participants ensuring that the youth experience includes multiple learning opportunities. The stay should be of an academic, cultural, and social nature in a community in which the university plays a role through its extension office, teaching, and research programs. Academics must have a direct relationship with the tri-national exchange experience of the youth. Finally there must be a formal method to disseminate the outcomes and evaluate the impacts.

### **Funding and Resource Development**

**Funding.** In order to continue NACS, more funds will be necessary to support the program adequately. A second pilot year will likely include key changes based on the lessons of the first year (such as a more sustained period of planning and a longer stay in each community). But these changes will require a larger budget. As a UV official pointed out:

In terms of the program's financial planning, the 2002 experience gives us the opportunity to prepare a more realistic budget for 2003. The budget for the 2002 program (in Mexico) was underestimated and it considered, generally, expenses that were always below the original estimations.

Increased funding may be particularly challenging in the current political and economic context. As one Steering Committee member pointed out, it will be a "philanthropically lean year ahead," which will challenge NACS in its efforts to raise adequate resources. Lack of funding may require that the program be boiled down to its essence, with no frills. With greater clarity, funds may be able to be targeted for activities that support the central mission and goals, without any "extras." There may be other ways to further streamline and introduce efficiencies. For example, a Steering Committee member suggested that chartered bus travel might be less expensive than air travel between countries.

**Link between funding proposals and NACS mission and goals.** Several stakeholders emphasized the importance of linking proposals for funding to NACS mission and goals. Proposals must answer the question: What is the value-added by a tri-national program instead of separate national programs? In order to "bring in the large-scale donors," wrote a Steering Committee member, "NACS will have to demonstrate that it is a program that has wide-scale implications for the citizens of North America, and not just a small experimental program within the 'Northamericanist' circles." Moreover, it will be important to create a budget that focuses on NACS mission, not more. This is important to keep in mind as the program is designed. A Steering Committee member said: "Clarify what is and what is not in the NACS budget and who pays for things that fall outside it."

**Link between program activities and NACS mission and goals.** Engaging only in activities that support NACS mission and goals may help to minimize costs. Focusing on the service project and supportive educational projects may help save expenditures on activities that are enjoyable and enlightening, but unnecessary to achieving program goals. For example, the Columbia River Basin tour was a great experience for the group, but is such a tour essential for NACS at this time? This and other similar questions can only be answered in the context of NACS goals.

### **Communication and Coordination**

**Advisory Board meetings.** In order to be more effective, the Advisory Board needs to be aware of NACS activities and be involved in key policy decisions and resource development. More frequent meetings would likely facilitate communication, especially during the pilot phase. Communication might be enhanced through regular email updates. Board committees that meet throughout the year (perhaps mostly through teleconferencing and email), could be of greater support to NACS. With adequate staffing, these groups could provide key support for NACS.

**Steering Committee.** Communication across national boundaries and across different kinds of institutions is challenging, and can be expensive. A stable Steering Committee (discussed above) can facilitate better communication and inclusive decision-making. Although many decisions have been made during the first pilot project that will facilitate management, communication and coordination in the second, it is imperative for future NACS programs that the Steering Committee be available to the program coordinator for quick decision-making and implementation. An alternate on the Steering Committee may help to ensure that communication is clear. Regardless of decisions about structure, it is important for the Steering Committee (including alternates) to meet regularly, including some face-to-face meetings at program sites, as this Steering Committee member suggests:

As much as conference calls are a good instrument to plan the program, I consider it would be appropriate for the Steering Committee to meet at least twice before the beginning of the program for each new cohort. Funds should be procured to conduct these meetings in a place that is easily accessible to the responsible parties from each country.

**Volunteers.** Because of the low costs and relatively easy access, additional use of the web might be explored for posting recruitment and orientation materials, as well as alumni activities. A short video (perhaps using the one currently being produced by the pilot NACS group leader) also might be placed on the web (other uses of the web are discussed below).

## Program Design

**Project duration.** A longer period is needed for program planning and orientation. Although materials and documents created during the pilot project will help, a longer time is needed to re-design and develop additional documents and orientation materials (including educational, group dynamics, and evaluation and research materials). Moreover, more time for orientation is needed (discussed below).

The volunteers, as well as service project supervisors, believed that the program would be more effective and less rushed if it were longer. Most appeared to agree that three months in each country would be ideal and four months would probably be too long. As one US volunteer said: "I think three months in each place would be perfect, but at the same time that's gonna be really hard, you know . . . nine months or more with an introduction and maybe like a final thing." A project coordinator from UV said: "two months for me is not enough time and, well, the NACS directors will have to look into that. The time, I felt, went too fast, it was too short." A resident of Coyopolan regretted that the NACS volunteers could not stay longer. They were beginning to plan new projects for the volunteers.

**Volunteer demographics.** The diversity of the group, including nationality (three each from each country), gender (five women and four men), Spanish and English speakers, race and ethnicity (African American, Anglo, *mestizo*), and rural and urban, worked well. In order to reduce the dominance of English speakers, it might be advantageous to include French Canadians into the group, although they would be likely to speak English as well, thus the numbers of English speakers would remain a majority. The pilot project was fortunate to have a group leader who was bilingual and bicultural.

Most respondents believed that it was important to maintain a mix of social class backgrounds and to avoid selection criteria that would restrict participation to young people from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds.

**Volunteer age range and skill level.** It may be entirely appropriate to target younger volunteers who have little education and have not yet chosen a professional career, but this decision depends on what the program is trying to accomplish. What type of impact does NACS want to make on individual volunteers? What are the needs of communities and what kinds of volunteer qualifications and characteristics would accomplish these objectives?

Most observers agreed that a closer age range would simplify group process. One observer pointed out: "I also think that the contrast of the youth and inexperience of the Canadians (and, to a lesser extent, the Americans) and the seriousness and maturity of the Mexicans was an issue which might have been foreseen." In the pilot project a wide range of ages happened to work well (in large measure due to the extraordinary personal qualities of the participants and perhaps also because of the excitement surrounding the pilot project). Nonetheless, it is possible that such a mix in that future groups might not be as successful. Although there was no consensus about the best choice, the age range that was mentioned most often was 19 to 23 years of age. In other words, young people with some academic background and some vocational direction, but young enough that career paths not yet taken shape.

**Volunteer motivation and group interaction skills.** Based on the experiences of the first group, it may be helpful to assess prospective volunteers' goals and their compatibility with NACS goals.

Hence, the necessity of recruiting participants who are conscientious and have an open mind and an open heart towards overcoming the negative realities of those less privileged in our three countries. They should have motivation and social sensibility. They should understand the role of the youth in the design, promotion and implementation of the process of sustainable community development.

The group leader thought that it would be helpful to ask prospective volunteers about their views on community, leadership, and group living. For example, in the application process it might be helpful to pose various group situations and ask what they would see as the volunteers' role and the group leader's role in solving problems or generating solutions.

**Pre-program information.** Several volunteers mentioned it would have been helpful to have more information prior to the program. They were not clear about goals or program activities. Information disseminated prior to orientation might address the mission and goals of NACS, expectations, typical service and education activities, description of partner organizations in each site, and other details. Further, this might be an opportunity to introduce the volunteers to each other.

**Length and content of orientation.** In retrospect, many participants and observers believed that orientation could include intensive language preparation (see below), discussion of NACS goals and objectives, and planned group service projects. In the words of a Canadian volunteer:

In terms of the whole program . . . the first phase of the program needs to be a week or two longer than the other two phases because of orientation and getting to know each other and working out kinks and so on and so forth—all those little things that pop up that you wouldn't have thought about, but end up taking time . . . so you can allot time for them.

According to the volunteers and group leader, living in a congregate setting during orientation facilitated group formation, cross-cultural communication, language learning, and program socialization. Greater clarity about goals and expectations could facilitate entry and adjustment. A Canadian volunteer raised an interesting point about the need to standardize the program expectations:

There needs to be a NACS contract and all of the participants get all of the same paperwork and all of the same rules and regulations instead of having the Canadians having the Canada World Youth rules and regulations, and the Americans have the SCA rules and regulations, and the Mexicans have the University of Veracruz rules and regulations, because it makes it really confusing and difficult and frustrating at times. So, all the participants need to have the same contracts that they've signed. It's not a problem really for me, but I can see that it might be a problem in the end.

**Formal language instruction.** Despite the fact that all of the volunteers made significant strides in Spanish/English language acquisition, there was consensus that more formal language instruction would have been helpful. They suggested intensive language preparation during

orientation (and/or prior to orientation), as well as ongoing opportunities for formal language instruction, particularly during Phase I. For example, a US volunteer said: "I think language training should be a serious part of future NACS programs. Communication is a big part of our cultural exchange so having too many language barriers could impede that process." She described an approach that others echoed, to have structured language instruction as a part of the weekly program:

I think if the program really wanted [the group] to gel right away, if we had set language lessons from the get-go, until the end, then that would have made things go so much more smoothly, I think. I mean, people would have just gotten over that fear of first of all, meeting new people, but also, just communicating.

If ongoing formal language instruction is too expensive in the short term, NACS could provide adult language teaching materials to assist the group with its peer-instruction in language.

There was also consensus that maintaining a mix of nationalities and language abilities in each program component (e.g., service, education, living quarters) facilitated language learning. Moreover, they reported that host family living (and congregate living in small towns where contact with the community is constant) facilitates language learning. Providing longer home stays and immersion activities for non-native speakers to learn the language are also helpful. These activities provide informal places where communication is relaxed.

The solution may be a two-step process. First, include more language training during orientation and throughout the program. Second, make it clearer to potential volunteers that they will be in a group with others who may not speak very much of their language. The combination of understanding what they were getting into, and having resources to improve their language ability more quickly, may alleviate some of the early frustrations and challenges of working together.

**Group leader selection.** The pilot project was fortunate to have a group leader who was bilingual and bicultural, and had a clear understanding of the goals of the NACS program. Bilingual ability and significant experience living in other countries, especially in physically demanding situations, is essential for effective NACS leadership. Group leadership skills and experience and a thorough understanding of NACS goals are also important.

**Group leadership and support.** The group dynamics problems that emerged in Phase II may be an inevitable part of group formation. To a great extent, these conflicts can be managed effectively by a group leader, with assistance by local hosts. However, in the pilot project, the group leader was under considerable strain and needed assistance in providing guidance for the group. Training on group process and group formation and how to handle conflict would also be helpful.

The group leader also thought it would be helpful to be supervised by one person who would be available by phone and email to consult about challenges of group leadership. It would be essential, in her opinion, that the supervisor be familiar with the circumstances and personnel at each site. Without this kind of knowledge, the supervisor would not be able to help sort out the issues and help to develop strategies for solving problems.

As a volunteer from Canada pointed out at the end of the first phase:

I think that the administrative side of the program needs some re-vamping. [The group leader] consistently had much more on her plate than time allowed. Definitely having somebody to help before the program commences and during with logistics and administrative work would be very valuable. This would free up the [group leader] to spend more time with the group as a whole and to be more involved with the work projects.

**Community selection.** The pilot demonstration suggests that communities who have the leadership and organizational infrastructure that can support NACS, along with the capacity to provide for a service project, accommodations, and cultural opportunities, facilitates program implementation. Sometimes, it is not easy for communities and organizations to provide a large enough service site, as this representative from SCA pointed out: "It's difficult to find sites willing to take nine interns for three months, let alone 27 [interns]." Nonetheless, a single service site appears to be the most successful model (see below).

**Local host.** A local host in each community could make local arrangements, including finding host families, arranging the service projects, and educational events (including arranging for guest speakers). The group leader would be able to concentrate on guiding the group, facilitating learning, helping group and community better understand the goals of NACS, and so forth. Adopting this model would cost more because a local host would be paid for their assistance, but, in the interim, it might be possible to find a volunteer in each community (or someone willing to take on this role for minimal pay) to perform some of these functions.

The local host could perform other functions as well. For example, a local host could arrange local transportation. A great deal of time was spent working out transportation, especially for the whole group. In Veracruz it was less of a problem because buses reached the community and the university provided transportation for tours of the area. However, this was expensive. Depending on the circumstances, the local host could be the same person as the local service supervisor.

Greater attention to communication with local community institutions and representatives would help local supporters understand NACS and how they can assist. As a Steering Committee member pointed out: "It is important to plan more carefully the interactions of the NACS volunteers with government and non-governmental agencies in the host community. They should have a more functional and specific purpose." More communication at the community level may help to increase local support for the program. Our interviews suggest that areas surrounding the NACS community may wish to be involved, and may be possible future locations for NACS group.

**Accommodations.** Host family living is especially helpful for learning language and learning about life and culture in another country. Congregate living is helpful for group process and for group educational purposes. Living arrangements, therefore, might be adapted to the specific aims of the program at different times. An idea posed by one volunteer would be to place volunteers in pairs in host families "with somebody else from another country." A project supervisor in Texas suggested that the program should begin and end with congregate living, with host family living in between:



I would start them together and I'd end them together. I wouldn't let them go off in separate directions or start out in separate ways. There was a challenge with them coming together when they got here because when they were up in British Columbia, they had three different things going. And a couple of them stayed in their own homes.

**Service project selection.** Based on the first pilot project, one community service project in each phase appears to work best for a number of reasons. Large projects can accommodate a variety of activities, volunteer skills, and goals. The project is more visible (to the volunteers and to the community) and the group is more likely able to make a real and lasting contribution to the community if the effort is focused. Challenges of transportation are minimized if everyone is working on the same project. It is likely simpler to integrate educational activities when there is a focus on one project. A large project utilized by several groups allows certain economies of scale. For example, if the community project is ongoing, it may be possible to use several NACS groups in succession, minimizing the need to re-create educational activities for each new group, and so forth. Furthermore, continued effort in one community in each country may lead to eventual cross-national linkages as the volunteers move from one to the other.

A central challenge may be to identify projects that can accommodate the whole group at once. The project could become more routinized and the community less impressed with groups over time. However, these disadvantages seem to be outweighed by the potential benefits.

**Develop service project "tracks."** If NACS becomes much larger, it may make sense to develop different "tracks" of service projects that volunteers could sign up for depending on their skills, and personal and career interests. For example, there might be a sustainable development track, a community development track, or a historic and cultural development track in which projects in each country are focused along one dimension. One observer suggested an environmental focus for the first track:

I think the ideal would be for the students to work on similar projects in all three countries, so that they'd have a basis of comparison from one country to the next. I'd like to see all projects at all sites relate to the issues of integrating communities into their environments – a broad enough area to encompass all kinds of potential projects.

The projects might have more impact in this way, as the same observer suggested: "I'm not suggesting that nine or 27 interns can have a great impact in any of the countries in which NACS operates, but I think the impact would be more significant with a tighter focus." Establishing "tracks" could also help with volunteer and community recruitment. Further, it would help the group leader and staff members develop educational materials.

**Local service project commitment to supervise the NACS group.** Site supervision is important because of the relatively short duration in each community. Supervisors can facilitate swift start up. They can also help solve problems so that time is not wasted trying to find resources and information. It is important that local service supervisors understand and facilitate NACS goals.

**Education curriculum.** Despite overall favorable comments about the educational curriculum, the structure and content might be re-visited from the perspective of NACS mission and goals. Linking education to goals will facilitate the cross-national (and other) goals of NACS. Second, because of the short duration of the program, education activities could be streamlined. The wide range of educational activities put in place created time pressure for the group. For example, in Phase I when time pressures were the greatest, volunteers (a) organized three "community education days" corresponding to each service site, (b) began developing personal education projects that they intended to be working on throughout NACS, (c) planned how to link education projects from one phase and one community to the next, and (d) engaged in educational activities, such as tours of the area and peer language instruction. Given only one day a week for education—which was sometimes usurped for whole group service projects—there was insufficient time to complete projects. There was little time or energy left for peer language instruction. Choosing educational activities carefully so that they accomplish more than one goal at a time could reduce demands on the participants, group leader, and community facilitators.

The educational program was more manageable in the second and third phases. The group worked together at one site but they also abandoned the idea of a personal education project. Instead, they decided to make presentations to groups in a variety of settings (using a variety of teaching methods, such as classroom presentations and plays), about building the North American community. They also continued to video record the NACS experience and the opinions and ideas of local people about North America (made possible by the group leader who is a documentary film maker).

Volunteers suggested that it would be a good idea to include groups in planning and implementing aspects of the educational experience. In Texas, there was relatively little in the way of educational activities, and the volunteers were disappointed to miss some good opportunities. As a volunteer observed: "I know that here in El Paso there are a huge number of amazing organizations that are working towards similar goals and it would have been really cool to have been able to go and see them. But, um, due to lack of organization, we didn't get to." Giving the volunteers responsibility for aspects of the educational program at each site could further involve the volunteers in their own education and help to reduce costs.

**Stipends.** Volunteers and other observers believed that stipends and requirements for volunteer fundraising should be equalized across all three national groups. Volunteers prefer a small weekly allowance (enough to call home and pay for incidentals and occasional recreational events) and a lump stipend at the end to help with transition from NACS to their next endeavor. For example, some volunteers intended to return to school and a small sum to help them rent an apartment or buy books would have been helpful. CWY's requirement that volunteers do some fundraising prior to the program might be examined for feasibility in the other two countries. This might be a way to engage the volunteers in NACS prior to their arrival at orientation and could help with funding stipends. However, it is important that this does not place too heavy a burden on volunteers who come from families and communities of modest means.

## Building NACS Constituency

**Media campaign.** The purpose of a pilot project is to demonstrate a model and work out the problems. But a pilot project will have no impact if dissemination of results is not effective. Advisory Board members, Steering Committee members, staff, and ex-volunteers could be enlisted in the effort to communicate results of the pilot project. Because of the critical importance of communicating the goals and outcomes of NACS, an Advisory Board committee and NACS staff should focus its efforts on communications.

A well-designed media campaign would be aimed at major print and news outlets, foundations and other funders, government officials and organizations, and universities. A small program can have a large impact through creative use of media. Advisory Board members have recommended developing a press packet that includes the NACS mission statement and goals, photographs and quotes from participants and community members from the NACS pilot project, a collage of local press headlines and excerpts, institutional profiles, and a video. Because of the low cost, additional use could be made of the web, including access to press packet materials.

Potential constituent groups could be identified and pursued, using methods that are designed to "speak to" particular constituencies (e.g., policymakers, general public, funders, researchers, potential volunteers, communities, alumni). This report, prior publications, and the video from the pilot project will provide more than enough data to reach a variety of people and groups. Given scarce resources, it may be important to develop priorities among these different groups. For example, if the NACS Advisory Board decides to move towards public funding, it will be important to reach public officials. A Steering Committee member said this would be a good place to start: "One last suggestion would be to try to get our three governments more involved, especially through the embassies and consulates."

**Alumni group.** One way to begin building a constituency is with those who have been involved in the NACS pilot project. One of the volunteers suggested that it would be good to have an alumni web page and bulletin board so that they could keep in touch with each other. However, they may also be willing to help with program expansion by providing some form of testimony. Ex-volunteers may be powerful way to get the NACS message across.

## Going to Scale

Several Advisory Board members suggested a hard look at the feasibility of expanding NACS. If it decides to proceed with NACS, it is important to set a goal and move towards it. One board member suggested that this might include looking at different approaches to continuation:

The first thing the Advisory Board must do is to determine the degree to which it is willing to continue to push the program in the face of adverse circumstances. There, I see two very general possibilities. One, having proven the feasibility of the concept, document it, declare a victory, and quit. Two, continue to advocate, publicize, and raise money. In the second case, a clear-eyed assessment of whether the ultimate objective is to find a way to have government (or quasi-government) accept the program, or whether it is to raise enough money to enable the program to continue on an independent basis, will be necessary. Other possibilities would be to serve as an umbrella agency for support of programs which are dedicated to pieces of the NACS concept.

Although going to scale is not likely soon, it would require public (or quasi-public) funding. All three of the central partner organizations currently receive public funds. The Canadian International Development Agency funds CWY, the US National Park Service funds SCA, and the State University in Mexico funds UV. These may be among the first organizations to support NACS directly, although other public funding sources also may be available.

If stakeholders intend to continue pursuing the idea of going to scale, it would be useful to examine models of cross-national youth service elsewhere in the world. For example, the European Union has cross-national community service projects that could be explored for ideas.

## **Research**

The initial NACS pilot project is completed, and this research report documents its activities, challenges, and achievements. As NACS continues into a second cohort of volunteers, the research program should expand accordingly. Larger samples and use of standardized instruments will be necessary. Survey instruments could offer ongoing insight into program accomplishments and issues. It is important to seek understanding of a variety of perspectives, including volunteers, group leader, service supervisors, and community and organizational partners. Qualitative components can help interpret quantitative findings, provide understanding and insight, and supply specific examples. A strong research agenda, however, requires significant resources and clear direction. Continued external research is especially advisable to help the program reach "scale."

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## Appendix A: Research Methods

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Researchers from the University of Missouri in St. Louis (Margaret Sherraden) and the Center for Social Development at Washington University (Carlos Benítez) conducted this research focusing on cross-national service and impact of NACS. The following sections describe the data sources used and the approach to analysis used in writing this report.

### Data Sources

Various data sources were used to write this report. Each data source contributed to understanding program implementation and administration and outcomes for participants and communities. With a small pilot group of nine volunteers and one supervisor, the research primarily relied on qualitative interviews and analysis, although a few instruments included scales. Some data collection was administered by CWY/NACS and some by CSD/UMSL (in parentheses). The results of this study may provide the basis for design of questionnaires and other instruments for the next phase of NACS.

#### Review of program documents and materials

The researchers scanned and extracted data from program documents covering the period from the first meeting when the idea of a North American community service program was discussed in 1999, through implementation of the NACS pilot of 2002. Documents included NAMI newsletters; organizational materials from partnering organizations, including work sites; some steering committee minutes; advisory board minutes; assorted emails from NACS volunteers, steering committee members, advisory board members; various materials created at each community site; budget materials; and other administrative documents.

#### Surveys with steering committee members and advisory board members (CSD/UMSL)

Open-ended surveys were distributed to steering committee members and advisory board members to assess pilot project implementation and organizational outcomes. The researchers received seven responses from people who participated on the steering committee at various times during implementation and four responses from advisory board members. Questions included why the respondent became involved in NACS, assessment of program design and implementation, effects on their organization, beneficial and challenging aspects of NACS, future for NACS, and organizational structure.

#### Reports by project group leader (CWY/NACS)

The group leader compiled three reports (at the end of each phase) that reported on volunteers and group dynamics, including volunteer interaction, language issues, and problem solving; relations with the community, including type of contact with community members; program implementation and administrative issues, including major challenges, issues that had emerged with the community and/or work site, level of support with main office, and contact across

communities; work activities; education activities; and cross-national significance of the program.

#### Volunteer surveys (CWY/NACS)

CWY collected evaluation forms from the volunteers on several occasions. These were used in this report, although the numbers were too small to report frequencies.

- (a) Short surveys during orientation (n=6), included open-ended assessment of motivation for joining NACS, past international experiences, and goals for participation.
- (b) End of Phase I evaluation (n=8), included open-ended assessment of host family situation, education program, work projects, group dynamics, tours, and community.
- (c) Work project report Phase II (n=5) and Phase III (n=8), included assessment of what they learned about the organization, community and country; North American issues, and themselves; skills they developed, principal challenges and their assessment of the particular phase.
- (d) End of NACS report (n=8) included future plans; other program impacts, assessment of the program, changes in opinion and attitude, knowledge and skills,
- (e) Workplace agreement (n=7) included personal learning objectives and how they would be accomplished.

#### In-depth interviews with volunteers (CSD/UMSL)

The content of the following in-depth interviews with volunteers, conducted by Carlos Benítez, were used extensively in this report.

- (a) Informal group interviews were conducted over a two-day period with volunteers near the end of Phase I. Topics included personal goals and NACS' goals, activities, and initial assessment of the program.
- (b) In-depth interviews were conducted near the end of the Texas phase (n=9). Topics included activities, personal motivation and initial contact, group dynamics, community interaction, assessment of the experience, relevance and issues related to the North American community, cross-national problem-solving skills, future plans, and program recommendations.
- (c) In-depth interviews were conducted near the end of the final Veracruz phase (n=7). Topics were same as those listed in (b)

#### In-depth interviews with group leader (CSD/UMSL)

Interviews with the group leader were conducted by Margaret Sherraden and were used extensively in the report.

- (a) An in-depth interview was conducted near the end of Phase I. Topics included how she became involved, her understanding of program goals (especially tri-national goals) and how well they were being met, how work projects and educational activities were being set up and managed, how program management functions, volunteer work and education activities,

cross-cultural dynamics and learning, community activities and relations, and advice about future programming.

- (b) An in-depth telephone interview was conducted after the program was completed. Topics were same as those listed in (a).

#### Survey of host organizations, host families, and community leaders (CWY/NACS)

The following documents and surveys were administered by CWY/NACS in British Columbia only. These were used in the report, but only qualitatively because of the small numbers responding.

- (a) Work site agreement (n=2), completed by the work site supervisor, including description of the host organization, tasks and responsibilities of the volunteers, expectations at the work site (e.g., time requirements, attitudes and skills needed), and assessment of knowledge and skills volunteers would learn.
- (b) Work site follow-up survey (n=2), asking what they learned, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and their thoughts about the future of the program.
- (c) Host family survey (n=5), requesting demographic information, family interests, and what the family hoped to gain and what they believed the volunteers would learn in their home.
- (d) Host family follow-up survey (n=2), asking what they learned, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and their thoughts about the future of the program.

#### In-depth interviews with community members (CSD/UMSL)

These interviews, conducted primarily by Carlos Benítez, were used extensively to understand NACS from the perspective of community leaders.

- (a) In-depth interviews were conducted with work site supervisors/organizational representatives in Canada (n=1), US (n=2), and Mexico (n=3). Topics included individual's role in organization and NACS, understanding of program goals, especially tri-national program goals, issues facing the organization and community, assessment of NACS role, positive and negative impacts of NACS, recommendations for future programs, and impact of NACS on them and their organization.
- (b) In-depth interviews conducted with community residents in Mexico (n=2), included their role, impression about NACS' goals, assessment of implementation, cross-cultural issues, community and personal impacts, future projects, and relation of program to North American community.

#### Press coverage and policy or program initiatives (NACS and CSD/UMSL)

- (a) Scans (using Nexus Lexus) for press coverage were attempted, but press coverage was local. Media coverage that was captured by the group supervisor and advisory board members is attached (Appendix C).



## **Analysis and Writing**

Beginning in Summer 2002, the research team began reading program documents, conducting interviews, and reviewing other documents, keeping in mind the key research questions. Concepts and themes were identified. In-depth interviews were conducted (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), transcribed, and entered into a qualitative software program (Atlas-Ti). We coded the transcriptions, based on key concepts and themes from prior analysis, further refining the ideas as the analysis progressed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data were extracted using Atlas-Ti's powerful search and extraction capabilities. We identified associations among concepts and further refined themes. In the fall of 2002, we began writing the first draft the report. We continued our review of documents and surveys, conducted additional in-depth interviews, re-drafted the report, adding additional examples. In January and February (2003), we received advisory board and steering committee surveys, and the final transcriptions of in-depth interviews from Mexico and completed the report (March 2003).

## **Appendix B: NACS Participating Organizations and Partners**

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### **Advisory Board**

Jon Amastae, Director, Center for Inter-American and Border Studies (US)  
Victor Arredondo, Rector, Universidad Veracruzana (MX)  
Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, Director, Liu Center for the Study of Global Issues (CA)  
Gov. Juan Carlos Romero Hicks, Constitucional del Estado de Guanajuato (MX)  
Jose Manuel Mascareñas Haas, Executive Director, Mascareñas Foundation (MX)  
Richard Mulcaster, President, Vancouver Foundation (CA)  
Diana Natalicio, President, University of Texas at El Paso (US)  
Ramon Olivas, Assistant Director, National Park Service, US-Mexico Affairs Office (US)  
Matthew Pearce, Executive Director, Canada World Youth (CA)  
Steven Rivkin, Esq., Bethesda, MD (US)  
Margaret Sherraden, Associate Professor, University of Missouri-St. Louis (US)  
Susan Stroud, Executive Director, International Center for Innovations in Civic Participation (US)

### **Tri-national Sponsor**

David Griscom, Executive Director, North American Institute

### **Steering Committee**

Janice Astbury, Canada World Youth  
Bob Coates, Vice President, Student Conservation Association  
Mario Fernandez de la Garza, Dean, University Extension, Universidad Veracruzana  
David Griscom, Executive Director, North American Institute  
Rick Zamore, International Programs, Student Conservation Association

### **Partner Organizations**

Canada World Youth, Vancouver office (CA)  
Columbia Basin Trust (CA)  
Cornerstones Community Partnerships (US)  
Universidad Veracruzana (MX)  
University of Texas at El Paso (US)

### **Work site organizations**

Earth Matters, Nelson, British Columbia (CA)  
Cottonwood Creek Wetlands Restoration Project, Nelson, British Columbia (CA)  
Harrop-Procter Community Watershed Protection Society and Community Cooperative, British Columbia (CA)  
Cornerstones Community Partnerships, Socorro, Texas (US)

## **70 North American Community Service Pilot Project**

Universidad Veracruzana, University outreach, Coyopolan, Veracruz (MX)

### **Host families in Nelson, British Columbia**

#### **Group leader**

Claudia Medina (CA & MX)

#### **Volunteers**

Jorge Alejandro Alegría Torres

Zach Allison

Lakita Edwards

Adriana Garcia

Jaime Alberto Llera Garcia

Mitchell Hauptman

Hillary Schell

Julia Treu-Fowler

Anna Wilkinson

## Appendix C: Media, Newsletter, and Conference Coverage

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