



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Community Connections Belarus Final Report 2011 - 2012

Prepared by World Learning





International Development and Exchange Programs

Strengthening communities to drive positive social change

World Learning International Development and Exchange Programs bridge the gap between the desire for human development and the ability to achieve that goal.

Using approaches that are innovative, people-focused, and community-based, World Learning programs enhance the capacity of individuals, groups, and institutions to take ownership of their own development, secure just and effective policies and structures, and create sustainable positive change.

The aim of each project is to build the knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness, and practical applications necessary to address critical global issues such as poverty and exclusion, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the marginalization of women and children, the global education crisis, and the urgent need for government accountability.

World Learning projects focus on five priority areas:

- Education
- International Exchange
- Capacity Development and Training
- Civil Society and Governance
- HIV/AIDS





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A PROGRAM STORY and SUCCESS

The Host Organizations that hosted these CC Belarus groups unanimously stated that their groups of participants were one of the best groups they had ever had. IRIS, Inc. was one such Host Organization.

Strengthening Community Journalism in Covering Local Development Activities

Host Organization: IRIS, Inc.

All the participants in this group noted how impressed they were with the official welcome from the Honorable Terry Branstad, Governor of the State of Iowa and members of the Governor’s staff in Des Moines, Iowa. On another occasion the participants were welcomed by Ann Campbell, Mayor of the City of Ames, Iowa. During their 5-day stay in Cedar Rapids, Iowa they were also welcomed by Monica Vernon, Mayor Pro-tem of the City of Cedar Rapids.

FUNDAMENTAL IMPACT

“I really enjoyed volunteering for the American Dance Festival. I do not think we are even capable of understanding the concept of volunteering. We are so far from it. There are all these people who voluntarily commit their time. For instance, we met with a costume designer volunteer who works at the local theater. We asked the theater staff we met with what if this volunteer and other volunteers do not come to work one day. The person we met with told us that ‘it does not happen because people feel responsible’. Volunteering is such a high level of responsibility and commitment with no financial benefit that is not familiar to us.”

Rozum, Raisa



Final Report

World Learning is pleased to present this final report to provide an overview of Community Connections Belarus (CC), including program implementation; monitoring and evaluation; and program impacts.

Overview

The CC program, funded by USAID/Belarus, was managed by USAID/Belarus and administered by World Learning. The program successfully integrated US foreign policy goals of development, capacity building, and public diplomacy, contributing to democratic and economic reform in Belarus. CC exposed participants to a democratic and free market system, built private-public partnerships, created lasting professional and personal linkages, and inspired participants to implement change in Belarus.

From October 2011 through September 2012, this CC Belarus program hosted 80 professionals in specialized, three-week training programs in the US. The tailored programs empowered eight groups of 10 participants each with new professional knowledge, skills, and contacts, allowing them to develop valuable relationships with Americans and an understanding of American society and culture.

These CC participants were selected through an open recruitment process. They represented all sectors: public, private, civil society, and academic. Programs were thematic and tailored to meet the unique social, economic, and civic needs of participants and their home communities. USAID/ Belarus and World Learning selected eight themes based on country-specific priorities:

Promoting Innovative Managerial Practices among Young Business Professionals

Host Organization: Tulsa Global Alliance, Tulsa, OK

Green Tourism Development

Host Organization: World Affairs Council of Oregon, Portland, OR

Introducing International Standards and Innovative Approaches into Business Education

Host Organization: Columbus International Programs, Columbus, OH

Workforce Development

Host Organization: Heartland International, Chicago, IL

Early Childhood Services to Disadvantaged Groups

Host Organization: Lift the Children, Sacramento, CA

The Role of Arts in Political and Social Life

Host Organization: International Affairs Council, Raleigh, NC

Strengthening Community Journalism in Covering Local Development Activities

Host Organization: IRIS, Ames, IA

Sustainable Regional Economic Development

Host Organization: International Center of Worcester, Worcester, MA



Program Hallmarks

Professional Training

Each three-week professional training was tailored to the thematic and technical objectives of each respective program and the participants, allowing participants to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to initiate positive change. Participants examined concepts and practices in the context of democratic values and market economies, including good governance, freedom of speech, and free competition.

Action Planning

Participant action plans ensured that best practices learned throughout each program were effectively implemented by participants upon returning home. Experts led facilitated planning sessions to ensure that each participant developed specific, measurable, and results-oriented goals. Due to the links made in the program some participants have built on action plans to remain in contact and to further maximize results.

Homestays

Living with an American family for the three-week program period offered close interaction with Americans, allowing participants to gain a personal understanding of Americans, their culture and society. Homestays often result in long-lasting personal and professional relationships that developed into valuable community-to-community linkages.

Community Service

To promote volunteerism in participants' home countries, each participant volunteered for a community activity designed to complement their program's theme. Activities included planting trees, volunteering at a camp, serving food to the homeless, cleaning a park, or working with youth. Participants learned the civic value and tradition of volunteering, something that is embedded in American society.

Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

World Learning's CC Monitoring and Evaluation Plan gathered and analyzed data in four main areas: 1) program design; 2) program implementation; 3) participant satisfaction; and, 4) program impact.

Program Delivery

Regular monitoring allowed World Learning to be proactive in addressing any concerns or problems and in determining whether any adjustments to a program were required. During the three-week program, World Learning conducted weekly telephone or Skype video conference calls with participants to ensure that their program was proceeding according to plan, they were receiving the required technical information, they were enjoying their home stays, and participants were happy and in good health. By making a more personal connection with participants, World Learning found that monitoring calls were productive, participants were more willing to talk openly, and issues were resolved more efficiently.

At the end of each program, participants completed a [Community Connections Final Program Evaluation](#). This electronic evaluation tool enabled World Learning not only to evaluate individual programs, but to evaluate programs by host organization and themes and allowed for rapid evaluation as it was all electronic.

World Learning kept meticulous records of a host organization's performance for every program. At the conclusion of each program, World Learning rated the host organization based upon direct contact with them and feedback from the participants through monitoring calls and the Final Program Evaluation. The information captured was then used to provide constructive feedback to the host organization, requiring them to address any programmatic, management, or logistical deficiencies.

Participant feedback in the US was captured in three primary ways: 1) the mid-program monitoring calls, conversations that only included participants; 2) emails and conversations with the hosting organizations throughout the three weeks; and 3) the end of program evaluation call and participant evaluation survey. Additionally, we were provided feedback and questions by USAID/Belarus based on their dialogue with the participants upon their return. This was a 360 approach to monitoring and evaluating of each program that gave World Learning the information it needed to maintain the highest quality of programming and to improve in any areas deemed necessary. In addition, all the information was not only entered into the World Learning database for future feedback, but it was used to provide feedback to USAID, host organizations, interpreters, host families, and professional presenters.

Action Items Identified

Two items arose during the year of implementation that World Learning has since addressed: lost baggage and health cost reimbursements. With regard to lost baggage World Learning worked with USAID/Belarus to develop a policy to provide a minimal allowance to any participant whose bags were lost. And, World Learning is to develop a lost bag airline policy database to ensure we can rapidly respond to and can communicate clear airline policies to USAID. Secondly, if a participant is due a refund for prescription medications or a service, World Learning has now modified its contract with the health insurance provider, HTH, to allow for refunds to be sent directly to World Learning who can in-turn work with USAID to provide a cash or travelers check refund. This is critical in places where participants are unable to process foreign checks. These policies will be applied to all other EV programs in the future and the solutions were identified during the implementation to this program.

Program Evaluation: Measuring for Results

Community Connections Final Program Evaluation Results

As mentioned, every participant completed an online [Final Program Evaluation](#) at the end of each program. Evaluations were administered as close as possible to the participants' departure from the US.

World Learning correlated and analyzed the data collected through the Final Program Evaluations from the eight programs and has included evaluation questions to key program components from all 80 participants in the summaries to follow.

Gender Balance and Education:

Gender		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	36.3%	29
Female	63.8%	51
answered question		80

Education Level					
	High School	Undergraduate	Graduate	Ph.D	Response Count
Select the highest education level you achieved:	2	58	10	10	80

Professional Training: Relevance

Professional training was a the main objective of the CC program. During the course of a three-week program, participants met with top professionals to learn the best and most up-to-date practices in their fields. Each CC program was unique and catered specifically to the experience and skill level of participants. This ensured that material and information provided during the professional training component were relevant to the participants, their work, and organizations. EVs were asked a questions to measure the effectiveness of World Learning's tailored approach. An overwhelming majority strongly felt that the program effectively met their professional needs.

In your opinion the overall level of the program content:		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Matched your professional background and experience	80.0%	64
Was too advanced	1.3%	1
Was too broad and general	18.8%	15
answered question		80

Please assess the accuracy of the following statements by selecting the most appropriate rating.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Rating Average
The topics covered in the programs were relevant to my job	0	1	14	23	42	4.33
I gained new knowledge and skills that I can apply	0	1	6	17	56	4.60
I expect that my organization, colleagues, and/or community will support me in implementing my concepts and ideas.	0	0	7	23	50	4.54
answered question						80

“The session with Nationwide Insurance was one of the most interesting sessions. There is so much to learn we could have spent a month in their office. We received lots of materials so I am bringing home something to work on and we exchanged our e-mail addresses so I have already had a chance to receive additional materials from the Nationwide by e-mail. My Action Plan is based on the training program design presented at the session with Nationwide Insurance Company, and is focused on creating a training program for mid-level managers at my company. The presenters from Nationwide even came to our final Action Planning session so could ask more questions about specifics of their training programs.” *Gortchakov, Andrei, Introducing International Standards and Innovative Approaches into Business Education*

Please assess the accuracy of the following statements by selecting the most appropriate rating.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Rating Average
Overall, we had sufficient time for questions and answers during the meetings.	1	5	5	18	51	4.41
The presenters were prepared for the sessions (they were on time and had presentations or discussion points ready for the meeting).	0	2	6	14	58	4.60
The presenters seemed to be knowledgeable of and experienced in their field of expertise.	0	0	1	19	60	4.74
The Program Coordinator was flexible and responsive to my needs and requests.	0	0	3	1	76	4.91
The Host Organization was prepared for the program and was familiar with my country, background, and professional field.	0	1	3	12	64	4.74
answered question						80

“In our Childcare Center for Children with Special Needs we do have programs addressing parent-child interaction but not at the level at which they exist here. A parent-child interaction is the foundation for all early childhood programs in the US. It made us realize how important it is and I know exactly what I can implement in my Childcare Center to improve our work in that direction.”
Buzhynskaya, Natallia, Early Childhood Services to Disadvantaged Groups

Answer the following question by selecting the most appropriate rating.						
	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Rating Average
How would you rate your overall professional program experience?	0	1	11	23	45	4.40
answered question						80

“As Deputy Director of the Education Center for High Tech Park, my challenge is to create a match between my students’ skills and the requirements of technology firms that are hiring. My goal now is to increase the Education Center’s current placement rate of 35% to 50% within the next six months. Strategies include creating better diagnostic instruments to assess students’ skill needs and implementing an alumni support system. Best practices of several Chicago organizations in particular influenced my Action Plan strategies. I liked the “one-stop” concept we observed at the US Department of Labor; I was impressed by the way Loyola University’s Career Development Center evaluates students; and I found a useful contact at Manufacturing Works.”
Lokteva, Elena, Workforce Development

Professional Training: Action Planning

Training applicability and impact could also be measured through the action plans that were developed by each participant at the end of the program. Most participants clearly incorporated new skills and knowledge into their action plans. Not only was the training being applied, but participants found value in the action planning component and felt that it would ultimately achieve their goals and objectives once they returned home.

Please assess the accuracy of the following statements by selecting the most appropriate rating.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Rating Average
The action plan facilitator was effective in helping you develop and write your Action Plan.	0	2	4	14	60	4.65
My action plan will be a useful tool in helping me achieve my goals and objectives.	0	0	3	17	60	4.71
answered question						80

“The Action Planning sessions are clear and the facilitator, Dr. Bob Zahrowski, is paying individual attention to our goals and projects. He really gets into details of our action plans and he has an amazing memory – he remembers even smallest details of what we tell him about our goals and objectives. He is a true professional and we enjoy working with him.” *Ivachou, Aliaksandr, Green Tourism Development*

“In my Action Plan I tried to address two challenges: the youth lack job experience and are sometimes unmotivated to work and prospective employers seek highly motivated candidates with experience. My goal is to increase the competitiveness of these youth in the job market. I will design a formal curriculum and organize a summer camp. Both of these activities will draw on the motivational strategies and hands-on methodologies I learned from the Cara Program, I.C. Stars, and the Paul Simon Job Corps Center.” *Kosautsava, Sviatlana, Workforce Development*

Homestays

During their three weeks in the US, each participant lived with one or, in a few cases, two host families. At first, participants often were reluctant to live with a family that they did not know. Despite their initial hesitancy, participants consistently identified homestays with families as a highlight of the CC program. Some participants and host families remain in contact after the participants returned to their home country. In order to measure satisfaction with homestays, World Learning asked:

Answer the following question by selecting the most appropriate rating.						
	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Rating Average
How would you rate your overall home stay family experience?	0	5	3	10	62	4.61
answered question						80

“During the time we spent with Roland we were given lots of attention and taken a good care of. He was so attentive to our interests and needs. We also really appreciate that he tried to make sure we are safe. He helped us with logistics and transportation when necessary. His approach is “less words – more action” and he really tried to offer activities that did not require much time and were affordable which was very important for us.

Roland is very intelligent and a real gentlemen. He answered our questions and it is from him we learned about Chicago’s history, traditions, and lifestyle of Americans. We spent many wonderful evenings talking on his cozy terrace.

He is an amazing volunteer. We wish him to stay healthy and in good mood, happiness and many more visitors in future programs.

Irina Zhurko, Pinsk, Belarus

Sviatlana Kosautsava, Minsk, Belarus

“Our host, Julia, calls us her Belarusian sons.”

Budkin, Siarhei

“I stayed with one host family throughout the program (with Oleg Bogdanov). They made quite an impression on me – very nice people with a good sense of humor. My host family is the first thing I will be telling people about when I am back in Belarus.”

Parkhimenka, Uladzimir

Community Service

While in the US, most CC groups took part in a community service activity. Whenever possible, the volunteer activity was tied to the professional training theme. Volunteering was a new concept for many participants, as community service is not often practiced in their home country. The community service component was designed to give participants a chance to give back to their host communities, as well as to instill in them the value of volunteering. The intended outcome was that participants would return to their home country and find new ways to engage with their communities, further amplifying the impact of US training.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY			
Answer Options	Yes	No	Rating Average
Did you participate in the group volunteer activity?	80	0	2.00
<i>answered question</i>			80

“We all walked in the Komen Race for the Cure. It was such an impressive event and we are glad we had the opportunity to volunteer.” *Kniazeva, Aksana*

“I would suggest increasing the duration of CC programs to one month because there is so much to learn and I would also have liked to participate in more volunteering opportunities as it is something that does not exist in Belarus. We took part in two volunteering activities and they are definitely the highlights of the program.” *Lukin, Siarhei*

Answer the following question by selecting the most appropriate rating:						
	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Unsure	Likely	Very Likely	Rating Average
Because of this program and this experience you will now encourage others to volunteer in your community.	1	0	4	34	41	4.43
<i>answered question</i>						80

“Our group volunteered at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church and met with the pastor, Cindy Long. It is very unusual for a female to be a pastor in Belarus.” *Lehankova, Volha*

“Volunteering for the American Dance Festival on July 8 was the highlight of the program for all the participants. It was a great opportunity for us to give back to the Raleigh community for hosting our program. Another highlight was our group’s volunteer presentation to the children of the Durham Arts Council’s “Afternoon Adventures Summer Camp” (ages 5 – 12). We did a short presentation about Belarus and Belarusian culture. We were impressed with the children and their interest in our presentation. They listened to us well and then, during the quiz, answered almost all our questions.” *Zaitsau, Aliksandr*

Overall Program

When asked to consider all aspects of the program, it was clear that participants were very happy with their overall program experience.

Please assess the accuracy of the following statements by selecting the most appropriate rating.						
	Highly Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Highly Satisfied	Rating Average
Overall, the program activities started on time and as scheduled.	1	2	2	9	66	4.71
The program was well planned and implemented.	0	3	4	9	64	4.68
answered question						80

Answer the following question based on the scale of 1-10 (1=You did not like this program at all, 10=This was an excellent program).											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Rating Average
How would you rate the overall program?	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	12	13	51	9.33
answered question											80

Managerial Practices among Young Business Professionals Tulsa Global Alliance

PROGRAM IMPACT

Anastasia Khamiankova, a participant from the *Promoting Innovative Managerial Practices among Young Business Professionals* program, wrote an article about her host family, led by a Dr. Dayal Meshri, a successful businessmen. Anastasia was fascinated with Dr. Meshri and wanted to post an article. This article (translated from Russian) was posted on the website of the Center for Communications BELBIZ where Anastasia works as the Head of Online Portal Development Department.

In his interview Dr. Dayal Meshri says that it is never late to start your own business. He started his company when he was 50 and after his children graduated from college. Thanks to his wife's support and belief in himself Dr. Meshri became who he is now. He is the Founder and Director General of the Advance Research Chemicals, Inc. (ARC) which is on the world biggest chemical companies providing Inorganic Fluorides. Dr. Meshri has his own formula for a successful business - SQSP – Service, Quality, Security, Price – and this is the foundation for his own company built on highest professional and ethical standards. Dr. Dayal Meshri is not only a successful businessman. He donates money to organizations like Boy Scouts of America, Catholic charities, Indo-American Center, and others. His wife passed away 7 years ago. She was the Doctor of Geology and worked for Amoco Production. He has a son and a daughter. Not that long time ago Dr. Dayal Meshri donated \$111,111 to the University of Idaho's Geology Scholarship Fund in the name of his wife.

The link to the full interview in Russian:

http://bel.biz/usa/articles/mnogo_mechtaj_zhivi_prosto_rabotaj_userdno/

Thank You!

World Learning would like to thank everyone who dedicated this last year to making Community Connections Belarus such a successful program: USAID/Belarus; US host organizations; host families; all the committed professional presenters and facilitators, and, of course, each outstanding and dedicated Community Connections participant!



World Learning
Bridging cultures. Transforming lives.

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