The Diasporas for Development Initiative (DfD) was a 2.5 year initiative (October 2012 – March 2015) which piloted a model for engagement of diaspora communities in the United States to reduce poverty and inequality by addressing skills gaps in five countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Peru and the Philippines.

DfD was implemented by Cuso International, through a public-private partnership with Accenture and USAID. There were two primary components: technical assistance from diaspora volunteers, as international and e-volunteers, for development initiatives in their countries of heritage; and partnerships with US based diaspora organizations, to increase their capacity to engage and serve their communities.

**Definition of Diaspora – as utilized in DfD – an inclusive definition:**

“Individuals, communities and groups living in one country while maintaining a sense of identity and engagement with their country or region of origin or heritage.”

**Piloting a Model for Diaspora Engagement in Development:** The Diasporas for Development initiative succeeded in piloting a model to engage diaspora professionals living in the US to apply their skills and expertise toward achieving development objectives in their countries of heritage. This model included developing relationships with a variety of diaspora organizations, recruiting diaspora volunteers with and through diaspora organizations and a variety of media outlets, establishing sustainable partnerships with select diaspora organizations, and working with program partners internationally to develop opportunities for diaspora volunteers to effectively contribute to development goals. Driving this model was a public-private partnership which leveraged the resources and expertise of the private sector, non-profit and government partners.

**The Impact of DfD:** Through the work of 86 diaspora professionals volunteering through DfD:

- 2,133 direct beneficiaries were equipped with entrepreneurship, technical and employability skills.
- 302 direct beneficiaries obtained employment or an apprenticeship/internship.
- 1,303 direct beneficiaries started new businesses and employed 574 individuals.

Five diaspora organizations, identified as Diaspora Partner Organizations (DPOs) in DfD, became stronger and more strategic as a result of technical assistance provided by Accenture and Cuso International that led to developing 3-5 year strategic plans building capacity in volunteer recruitment and management. For these community based, volunteer-led organizations the strategic planning process resulted in an 80% increase in their perceived capacity to meet their mission. Boards of Directors and senior leadership teams became more engaged. Each organization developed more awareness of and participated in opportunities for volunteering in international development, through in-country and e-volunteering.

**Lessons Learned:** Details on these achievements are fully outlined in a separate DfD report. This document focuses on the best practices learned from the DfD pilot initiative, and outlines recommendations for engaging diaspora communities in development. **Best practices** were implemented in DfD. **Recommendations** are solutions to challenges which arose in DfD, but may not have been fully implemented due to the limited period of the pilot project. The document is divided into sections: **The Diaspora Volunteer Experience, The Diaspora E-Volunteer Experience, Capacity Building for Diaspora Partner Organizations, and the Global Development Alliance (GDA).**
The Diaspora Volunteer Experience

Outcomes

During DfD, Cuso International deployed 40 volunteers to the five target countries: Ethiopia, Jamaica, Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines, and these volunteers successfully completed 39 unique placements. Through the process of engaging diasporas through identifying diaspora organization collaborators, conducting stakeholder mapping and research, identifying diaspora leaders and champions of diasporas for development, recruiting diaspora volunteers, conducting webinars and hosting engagement events, the project has demonstrated that many diasporans and diaspora-serving organizations or associations are seeking structured opportunities for engagement in the social and economic development of their country of heritage. This interest among diasporas is diverse and the project didn’t seek to draw conclusions on the different motivations for engagement. For the most part, the project sought to engage those who were motivated to participate directly as skilled volunteers and the organizations that sought to support volunteerism as a valuable means of contributing to development. Through the project, it was observed that in general, there was strong recognition of both the skills and workforce gaps that many countries have to overcome as well as the opportunities for strong market-driven approaches to development. Volunteering also contributed to diaspora volunteers and the DPOs becoming interested in, or introduced to, new types of engagement; such as other forms of philanthropic projects, business and investment opportunities.

Additionally, volunteers and partners acknowledge that diaspora volunteers bring specific skills to the table that non-diaspora international volunteers are unlikely to possess, such as cultural understanding, local knowledge, local networks of support, and language skills. During meetings with returned DfD volunteers, they have reported the following points as the value of being a diaspora volunteer:

- Understanding the language and culture facilitates integration and communication. Prior experience of the climate, culture, geography often facilitates a smooth transition into their assignments (although settling into rural and remote locations may still be a challenge for any international volunteer)
- Diaspora volunteers have commitment and passion to the particular country or region. They are close to the issues, realities and have a sense of ‘stake’ in the development of their country of heritage. The placement for them is not a one-time event – it builds on previous commitments and experiences.
- The quality of professional relationships developed during the volunteer assignment is often higher, as a diaspora volunteer already has a high level of confidence in the culture and is able to build strong bonds. Many of the volunteers reported feeling that they were able to successfully build strong and lasting bonds with local counterparts as a result of their relative advantages in building peer relationships when compared to other non-diaspora international volunteers.
- As a peer, diaspora volunteers reported that they felt that they were seen as role models for youth, particularly young women, that they worked with because they were more relatable to local counterparts and beneficiaries than non-diaspora volunteers.
- A diaspora volunteer can serve as an Ambassador within their home country and country of ancestry. They can provide valuable insider and outsider perspectives
- Many diaspora volunteers reported gaining a greater sense of identity. They reported feeling closer to their country of heritage, while also gaining understanding about family background and past and present challenges.
- Some volunteers reported being able to access personal and professional support from family and friends in country during their assignment. Some already had a network in country that they could draw upon for assistance in their assignment.

Best Practices Utilized During the DfD Initiative

Engaging Volunteers in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): The M&E strategy had a two pronged approach:
With a focus on building entrepreneurship and employability skills in five target countries, the M&E strategy engaged both the local partner and the volunteer in activity and impact reporting. This required an initial capacity assessment of the local partner, a capacity development work plan with goals, and monthly reporting on progress and technical assistance activities, and a final reflection on the partner capacity assessment. Full activity and Impact reporting was required by USAID and Accenture on a quarterly basis, while progress was shared with the project Advisory Committee (made up of representatives from Cuso International, USAID and Accenture) on a monthly basis.

During the project, Cuso received a significant amount of feedback on the M&E strategy from volunteers which focused primarily on the workload and the metrics of evaluation. Many of the volunteers reported that they felt that the reporting requirements were high and that it was hard to balance the expectations that they and the partner had for outcomes and impact of the assignment with the relatively short duration available to complete the assignment (3 to 4 months). In order to fulfil the objectives of the grant from Accenture, it was required that each volunteer and partner report on these indicators:

- The number of males and females building employability and entrepreneurship skills (disaggregated by type into categories under the ‘Skills to Succeed’ program, Accenture’s corporate citizenship program);
- The number of males and females that started or expanded their businesses;
- The number of males and females that started jobs, internships or apprenticeships;
- The number of males and females that improved their livelihood as a result of improved work.

The majority of volunteers reported that they felt that it was not a reasonable expectation to measure the outcomes for beneficiaries of employability and entrepreneurship projects within the timeframe of their assignments, especially when considering that the assignment was focused on building the local partners’ capacity to deliver those projects or services. Therefore, they reported challenges responding to indicators beyond reporting on activities and changes in the local partners’ capacity. During the project, it became apparent that the different indicators and reporting requirements of each party, Cuso International, USAID, and Accenture, contributed to creating a somewhat cumbersome and challenging reporting process for volunteers, partners and Cuso International. The challenges in aligning Alliance partners’ core metrics and project indicators is discussed in more detail in the Global Development Alliance Section below.

Despite the challenges of the M&E strategy, there were some key insights into best practices..

- By engaging the volunteer in the M&E process, the process encouraged the volunteer and the program partner to engage in a discussion about expectations for the assignment and developing a work plan collaboratively – which are a best practices in themselves.
- Indicated by the high level of feedback, it was apparent that the volunteer and the partner were actively considering the intended outcomes and impact of the volunteer’s intervention throughout the assignment.
- Further discussion and planning among the Alliance partners in the project design phase, could have allowed better streamlining and simplification of the M&E Strategy to prevent it from taking volunteers and partners away from the core objectives of their assignment. Volunteers require a strong orientation on the M&E strategy, why it is important and how to use the reporting tools as well as continuing support to complete M&E requirements.

Pre-deployment training, Skills for Working in Development (SKWID): The purpose of the SKWID training is to prepare volunteers who have been identified as having the requisite technical and interpersonal skills required to undertake an assignment with additional training to support them to be successful adapting to a new work environment, new organizational and country work culture, and effective tools and approaches to complete their capacity building and technical assistance work.

During SKWID, volunteers were introduced to Cuso International’s approach to diaspora volunteering, special content designed to introduce diaspora volunteers to opportunities, issues and challenges they may face in volunteering as diaspora volunteers, the M&E strategy and tools, and they learned about the e-volunteering component of DfD to ensure that they understood these aspects of the program prior to departure.
From the general SKWID curriculum, the DfD volunteers reported that SKWID provided them with tools which were used during their placement; they appreciated conversations on power relations, gender and social inclusion; and SKWID helped set expectations for a potential changes that might lead to divergence between placement descriptions and actual work on the ground.

During SKWID, Diaspora volunteers expressed a desire for there to be more emphasis on understanding more about the specific assignment and the partner organization. However, it is hard to accommodate with volunteers assigned to 5 countries and multiple partners in each country. Some other suggestions from volunteers were also noted:

- Connect volunteers to the local partner organization in country ahead of departure (and perhaps during or immediately following the SKWID training).
- Diaspora-specific issues should be elaborated during training particularly regarding potential perceptions / assumptions / expectations / differential treatment they may receive by the community they’re working with because of how they are perceived as a diaspora.
- Provide access to diaspora volunteers who have returned to the US, to learn about their experiences.
- Use more diaspora as SKWID facilitators.

**Reintegration:** Research and over 50 years of experience in international development has solidified Cuso International’s belief that the challenges upon return are as great as those that occur during an overseas placement. It is essential that returning volunteers have an opportunity to reflect on the value of their experience on personal and professional levels as well as the social and economic development impact they had in their assignment. Volunteers report the importance of having an opportunity to share experiences and learning with their peers to facilitate a smooth re-entry. The Reintegration weekend is based on the principles of adult learning and experiential learning activities are used to enable participants to “unpack” their overseas experience in a safe and supportive environment. Returned volunteers share their feedback on their own experience openly, guided by trained facilitators and supported by a psychologist. Once the feedback has been given and received returned volunteers are able to focus on the value, richness and personal growth that arose from their placements. The majority of DfD participants in reintegration had a more positive attitude towards their experience and were able to communicate the value of their work following the weekend. Additionally, Cuso International benefitted from the opportunity to learn from the returned diaspora volunteers about the specific benefits and challenges they experienced.

**Recommendations for Diaspora focused international volunteering programs**

**Cost-effectively attract and deploy highly skilled diaspora volunteers by leveraging networks of diaspora leaders and organizations:** In order to deliver the required technical assistance and capacity building support to overseas partners, Cuso International and our partners co-develop detailed assignment descriptions outlining the needs of the local partner and the qualifications of the volunteer. This is summarized into an assignment description summary that is used for recruitment purposes. It is very similar to a job description, with a description of Cuso International and the local partner, the location of the assignment, a summary of the scope of work to be undertaken, the required and preferred qualifications of the volunteer, and a link to the terms and conditions. Recruiting against an assignment description is an important best practice to ensure that skills-based international volunteers can be assessed and selected against the technical, professional and personal qualifications required by the assignment. The recruitment strategy for the DfD project included:

- Posting assignment descriptions, similar to job descriptions, on Cuso International’s job board as well as other external job boards, some specifically designed for charity jobs and volunteer opportunities, like Devex, Idealist, charity village, VolunteerMatch, LinkedIn, and others.
- Identifying appropriate cultural and social media outlets, such as community print and online newspapers, LinkedIn groups, embassy and community notice boards, Twitter hashtags, etc.
- Engaging alumni and other non-diaspora partners, including corporate partners, to circulate project and assignment information, share volunteer stories, and promote Cuso International’s work (particularly in diasporas for development) through their networks and make referrals.
• Identifying diaspora associations, organizations, and leaders with reach into the target communities for the project and developing dissemination channels and some formal recruitment partnerships.

• Identifying professional associations interested in disseminating volunteer opportunities within their membership.

• Handing out flyers on the Diasporas for Development Initiative and diaspora volunteer opportunities at job fairs, diaspora events, development conferences, and meetings with diaspora organizations.

• Advertising and hosting recruitment information sessions and webinars targeted to specific cultural communities and professional associations.

It is important to highlight the importance of working with recruitment networks to support a cost-effective recruitment strategy. Starting relationships with diaspora recruitment partners involves significant investment of time in stakeholder mapping, outreach within the target diaspora communities, spending time with diaspora community leaders, eminent diasporans and senior leadership of diaspora organizations, and building awareness about the project, the model being applied for diaspora engagement, and the role of skills-based volunteers in development. A recruitment strategy should target both community organizations and specialized professional associations, for example a Nigerian lawyer association, Ethiopian health association, or the Peruvian Chamber of Commerce. This may also include professional associations that are not diaspora specific, but to whom a large number of diasporans may belong. Building the networks should begin before the recruitment process to allow time for key messages to be conveyed and support gained before assignments need to be filled. In Cuso International’s experience, referrals are an important means of recruiting international volunteers, thus robust relationships with diaspora organizations and their communities can lead to robust recruitment for international volunteering.

• The Challenge Experienced in DfD: During the DfD project, managing partner expectations and competing timelines created major challenges in recruitment. It took significantly more time than anticipated to map, identify, and engage recruitment partners. Several factors came into play to affect recruitment:
  o Coming to agreement within the Advisory Committee on partner selection criteria and completing due diligence;
  o Designing volunteer assignment descriptions in 5 countries that fit the needs of the partners and the design elements and intended impact of the project (aligned with the metrics of the Alliance partners);
  o Urgency from local partners to receive volunteers combined with the interest of the Advisory Committee to see immediate progress against multiple objectives of the project early on in a new Alliance;
  o Sourcing applications from a targeted sub-set of predominantly experienced diaspora professionals from the private sector with specific skill sets to support technical assistance projects that achieved employability and entrepreneurship outcomes;
  o Sourcing applications from within target diaspora communities who had limited familiarity with Cuso International, the Diasporas for Development Initiative, and international skills-based volunteering;
  o Experimenting with new channels for recruitment to reach target volunteers.

Carefully design placement length in a way that balances ideal length to complete the assignment with the length of availability of potential volunteers: When designing international volunteer programs for professionals, including diaspora, length is an important consideration, as well as working the program partners in the host country to establish work plans which closely align with the length. The DfD placement length of 3-4 months was intentionally designed in order to attract a large cadre of diaspora professionals. Additionally, each international volunteer was supposed to spend an additional 3-4 months as an e-volunteer, albeit not full time. Initial research indicated that 6 or 12 month assignments were too long for many individuals in the target group because of professional or family obligations. Cuso International specializes in deploying volunteers for between 6 and 24 months, and thus shorter assignments were different for many of the program partners who had worked with Cuso International in the host countries. It is important that volunteer sending organizations need to ensure that
assignments are co-designed closely with program partners in a way that takes timeframe into consideration when designing the scope of deliverables so that both volunteer and partner can believe the expectations are achievable in the timeframe. In longer term assignments, objectives can be more broadly defined and allow for flexibility, whereas in shorter assignments, it is important that the scope of work is more narrowly defined and specific to ensure it can realistically be completed within the timeframe of the assignment.

If 3-4 month placements are designed, a couple methods for maximizing the engagement of the volunteer to meet the requirements of the program partner is to:

- Have the international volunteer engage in e-volunteer work prior to deployment internationally, and have that be focused on both the capacity assessment of the organization, as well as writing the work plan. When this upfront, introductory work is completed before the volunteer arrives, the volunteer can “hit the ground running.”
- Recruit volunteers so they are deployed back to back and overlap, so there are four volunteers working on a project in year with a partner, and each volunteer builds easily on the work of the previous.

• **The Challenge experienced in DFD:** The majority of both volunteers and partners in DFD reported the placement length was too short in their evaluations. This is in contrast to statements from many DFD volunteers when recruited that they were attracted to the opportunity because of the 3-4 month timeframe instead of a year’s commitment. As Cuso International’s program partners were used to volunteers being in country for one year, they wrote their placement description with less focus and specificity than was required to ensure volunteers had clear guidance and could stick to specific technical deliverables.

*Manage Expectations and Acclimation - Connect diaspora volunteers to the host program partner prior to deployment, and provide ongoing support to the diaspora volunteer:*

Program partner hosts often have a set of expectation about what a diaspora volunteer will bring in terms of cultural familiarity, language, and socio-economic status. Concurrently, a diaspora volunteer often has expectations about how s/he will be welcomed and perceived in their country of heritage as a professional and a member of the diaspora. Managing these expectations is vital for the success of a placement. When a volunteer sending organization is able to connect the diaspora volunteer with the host organization in advance, enabling both parties to understand each other and begin dialogue, it can facilitate relationship building and mutual understanding. It can help the host organization understand the level of support they may need to provide to the diaspora volunteer, and help the diaspora volunteer to manage their assumptions and expectations with reality of the local partner. Organizations may need to support diaspora volunteers who experience challenges reconciling contradictory expectations upon arrival in their country of heritage. Having trained staff in the local program office to provide support is ideal.

• **Examples of the Challenges experienced in DFD by some diaspora volunteers:**
  o Differing Expectations of socio-economic status: In many countries, there exists a perception that diaspora (particularly those based in developed countries) are people of affluence and advanced socio-economic status. Diasporans are routinely relied upon by family and friends for financial and material support, as evidenced by large international remittance flows. Similar to non-diaspora international volunteers, the perception of socio-economic divide means that diaspora volunteers are not perceived completely ‘local’ and may still experience being treated as outsiders during their assignment. In addition, for those diasporans who are accustomed to higher standards of living than are made available to them while on assignment, either in the US or even in the country of heritage, volunteers may experience discomfort while adjusting to local workplace, transportation and accommodation standards.
  o Differing understanding of the diaspora experience: Diaspora volunteers are diverse in terms of their degree of connection and familiarity to their country of heritage. Some have been away for years, some decades, and others born in the United States and have not visited their country of heritage often, or sometimes at all. Their language skills, cultural awareness and geographic
familiarity vary. Host organizations may assume that a diaspora volunteer will need less logistical and administrative support than other international volunteers.

- Cultural Expectations and Identity: The volunteer experience often challenges self-perception and identity, particularly for diaspora volunteers, who may identify more or less with their home country or country of heritage as a result of their experience as a volunteer. One DfD volunteer commented that she realized “I am not that Filipino anymore.” Another commented “It made me question myself as an Ethiopian.”
E-Volunteering

Outcomes:
DfD’s target was to create 100 e-volunteering placements. Each of the 40 international volunteers would work with his/her host organization to create two placements (for a total of 80); one for the international volunteer to complete upon return to the US and one for which Cuso International would recruit. DfD partners created an additional 20 placements for to support capacity building and technical assistance for DPOs and additional Cuso International partners not receiving DfD volunteers.

During DfD, Cuso International and partners created 111 e-volunteer placements; of these 70 were initiated or completed. However, only 16 of the DfD international volunteers completed an e-volunteer placement, and not all of the organizations which hosted an international volunteer created e-volunteer placements.

This is an indication of the challenge that DfD partners experienced with e-volunteering. On the surface in the modern digital age, the ability for someone in the US to provide support to a developing country appears simple and efficient. In reality, designing and managing remote work to address development challenges is complex and the issues, as elaborated below, range from lack of technology to differing expectations between organization and volunteer. E-volunteering programs require a significant amount of administrative support from implementing organizations to ensure success and impact. The following provides best practices that Cuso International identified from this pilot as well as recommendations for future implementation of an e-volunteering program.

Best Practices Utilized During the DfD Initiative

Providing support and resources to local partners: For many local organizations in low and middle income countries, e-volunteering and remote work is a new concept and method of working. Local partners need strong orientation to incorporate e-volunteering in their work plans, as well as support as they launch the program. For example, Cuso International noticed significant improvement in the engagement of the Ethiopian partners in the last quarter of the DfD initiative, following the delivery of a more in depth orientation. In addition, a small grant to allow them to access superior internet helped support their engagement with an e-volunteer. The orientation program helped the partners understand that e-volunteering could be a solution to human resource gaps, a way to bring more diverse skills to their programs, and a method of completing technical tasks that may otherwise go incomplete.

A volunteer journey and resources specifically relevant to e-volunteering: Cuso created and utilized an application process, work flow, and monitoring and evaluation system that was specifically designed to support e-volunteering. This facilitated expedited selection of qualified volunteers, and provided a manageable reporting system on placement results for both the e-volunteer and the host organization.

Introducing e-volunteering during pre-departure training: As all international volunteers were expected to return to the US and engage in an e-volunteering placement with their host organization, as indicated in the assignment descriptions and the volunteer terms and conditions. The project team was surprised to find that not all volunteers felt comfortable or were familiar with remote work, and therefore experienced challenges designing e-volunteer scopes of work with their partners. Some volunteers were less familiar with technology options to help them undertake e-volunteering work. During the project it became clear that the more emphasis on e-volunteering early in the volunteer’s journey, the easier and more likely it was that the volunteer would work with their host organization to create effective e-volunteer opportunities. Volunteers were more motivated to design e-volunteer assignments when they were able to benefit directly from the support of e-volunteers during their placement and could design that support and when the e-volunteer assignment helped them to wrap up some element of their assignment that they felt was not fully complete or required further support.
**Having an in-country volunteer supervise an e-volunteer:** A significant challenge to e-volunteering is virtual supervision. One solution used in the project was having an volunteer in-country identify a project to be undertaken by an e-volunteer while that volunteer was able to supervise the completion of that project. When this occurred, the project actually augmented the work of the in-country volunteer. This method can be highly successful because the in-country volunteer can help to delegate work and stay concentrated on the priorities of their assignment or oversee work that they don’t have the technical skills to complete themselves. The in-country volunteer can also help to orient the e-volunteer with the local partner organization, address any communications challenges the e-volunteer may experience while working with the local partner.

**Create a database of potential e-volunteers:** Early in the project, Cuso had a large pool of potential e-volunteers who had applied to a general appeal to e-volunteer before many scopes of work had been developed. This was considered evidence of the interest in e-volunteering as a form of engagement, however, as more specific and targeted e-volunteering assignments started to populate the job board and after significant outreach to recruitment partners, there was a shortage of applications to a number of e-volunteer assignments requiring specific technical or technological skills. Because potential e-volunteers already have a certain motivation to help virtually, but their availability to support can change, Cuso determined that is useful to maintain a database of potential e-volunteers to call upon as opportunities as arise. This facilitates quick matching, and reduces the strain on recruitment marketing. We also leveraged contacts made through the US office, our Dfd alumni and other recruitment avenues such as VolunteerMatch and LinkedIn in the second year of the project.

**Recommendations for E-Volunteering programs**

**Develop e-volunteering criteria in partner capacity assessments and volunteer assignment descriptions:**

The success of e-volunteer placements is largely dependent on the capacity and enthusiasm of both the host program partner and the e-volunteer. Thus it is important to develop e-volunteer specific criteria within partner capacity assessments to evaluate whether or not a program partner has the technical capacity to support successful e-volunteering. Evaluations of program partners should include identifying whether the organization recognizes the potential value of virtual volunteering, has staff available to support virtual volunteering, and has access to technology to support an e-volunteer. Equally, during the recruitment process, potential e-volunteers should be assessed for their ability to work independently, their ability to use appropriate technology, their adaptability and commitment to successfully completing the e-volunteer assignment.

- **The Challenge Experienced in Dfd:** The partner capacity assessment undertaken by Cuso International assessed a wide variety of characteristics of capacity but did not include a comprehensive assessment of program partners’ capacity to undertake e-volunteering. Additionally, while international volunteers were aware of the e-volunteering requirement when applying to Cuso International, the assessment focused on how they will work in-country. A few program partners were not willing to engage in e-volunteering because they felt that face-to-face engagement was critical to successful volunteering. Additionally, some placements were still not successful because of:
  - staffing limitations that challenged program partners could to identify staff to supervise and guide the e-volunteer’s work and provide direction and feedback on a regular basis;
  - program partners lacked consistent access or adequate quality of internet or telephone connection with which to engage with an e-volunteer;
  - international volunteers felt that upon their return they did not have the time to support their host organization when they returned to the United States.

**Develop strong orientation programs for both program partners and e-volunteers:**

Even when a program partner or volunteer has been assessed and approved for an e-volunteering program, an implementing organization cannot assume that either has the capacity to be successful in the e-volunteering
program. It is important to establish a strong orientation program for local program partners, which reiterates the value of e-volunteering for their organization, provides guidance on supporting an e-volunteer, and also provides information on what can be expected from an e-volunteer. The orientation program for the e-volunteer, particularly those not traveling to the country, should include information on how to manage their expectations when working with an NGO in a developing country, how to effectively communicate and what feedback can be expected.

- **The Challenge Experienced in DfD**: Cuso International found that for some of the e-volunteering placements which were not completed the lack of connection between the e-volunteer and the program partner was a factor. In particular, e-volunteers who did not work in-country felt disconnected from the host organization as the host organization was not prepared to provide virtual orientation. E-volunteers are often enthusiastic to start their placement but perceive a gap between their interest and engagement and that of the partners. External e-volunteers, those not also traveling to the host country, are highly technical, proactive, efficient and extremely comfortable with working online and developing successful online relationship. To quote one e-volunteer “I work online all the time anyway, so e-volunteering is a better way to spend my time online.” An orientation program which addresses how to connect and understand the perspective of each side can assist in ensuring enthusiastic e-volunteers are able to effectively engage with a program partner.

**Have a grant system in place to support communications**: Program partners which are willing to participate in e-volunteering and recognize the value it could have on achieving mission, may not be have an operational budget for the required access to the internet or telephone. If an e-volunteering project has the funding available, a grant program can alleviate this gap in capacity.

- **The Challenge Experienced in DfD**: in some cases local partners lacked internet and telephone connectivity to support e-volunteering; if internet could be accessed, it would cost additional money to connect; In particular, grants for the local organization to pay for access to the internet.

**Task based e-volunteering has a greater success rate**: E-volunteering placements which are based on completing a specific, finite task for a program partner, have a greater likelihood of being completed and are easier to measure and evaluate. Examples include: website design, translation, market research study, or business plan design.

- **The Challenge Experienced in DfD**: DfD intended to test three models of e-volunteering: peer-to-peer, e-mentoring and task-based technical assistance. Some DfD e-volunteers engaged in e-mentoring primarily those who formed relationships while completing their international placements. However, during the pilot, the majority of successful placements were task-based technical assistance. They had clear and measurable objectives, deliverables and time-lines, and proved to be a better fit for program partners who had unreliable internet connectivity and low capacity to host e-volunteers. For e-mentoring roles, program partners and volunteers found it difficult to establish objectives, deliverables and timelines. Cuso International needed to play a stronger role in structuring the assignment as well as fostering the relationship.
Diaspora Partner Organizations: Capacity Building through Strategic Planning

Outcomes:
Through this aspect of DfD, each DPO developed a strategic plan with a clear vision and mission. This enabled each organization to better structure its Board of Directors and engage participation of the membership. The strategic planning process provided the DPOs with clarity on programming and a path to future growth. As a result each organization could more effectively serve its US based diaspora community and engage in development activities with its country of heritage. DPO’s had stronger ties to each other through a new network, and new ties to international development organizations, enabling better involvement in discussions of economic development impacting their country of heritage.

Best Practices Utilized During the DfD Initiative

Strong selection criteria and due diligence process: Accenture and Cuso International used a 17 point selection criteria, a weighted list, to finalize the DPOs asked to participate in the project. This list was critical in ensuring that the DPOs could function well within the parameters of the initiative and partnership. The list was also developed prior to DPO selection, so it informed the search and was an important element in ensuring GDA partners came to consensus fairly easily on whether or not to select a diaspora organization as a partner. Additionally, prior to being confirmed as a DPO, each diaspora organization was asked to submit its articles of incorporation, financial reports and additional assessment documents, which partners used to conduct due diligence. This ensured Accenture and Cuso had a firm understanding of the work and financial standing of the diaspora organization, prior to its becoming a DPO.

Using a Partnership Approach Methodology: Accenture and Cuso International approached potential diaspora organization utilizing a partnership development methodology. They presented the project to the organizations, provided information about Accenture, Cuso International, USAID and the global development alliance, and then asked if the diaspora organization would be interested in developing a relationship which could be sustainable beyond the length of the initiative. The process provided time to both the GDA partners and diaspora organization, to assess each other and confirm commitment to the relationship. While there were some immediate outcomes with the DfD initiative, all participants approached the project with the idea of sustained relationships and not from a donor / receiver perspective.

Visioning Sessions and face-to-face interaction: In this age of digital communications, it is easy to have a sense that communication through teleconferences and email is efficient and productive. But Accenture found that with the DPOs the most productive sessions were those conducted in person and that these sessions were critical to the project’s success. Particularly important were the Visioning Sessions, one day facilitated strategic planning workshops for each DPO, during which their senior leadership and other stakeholders came together to discuss the organization’s mission, vision and direction. The Visioning Sessions were critical to ensure buy in from the whole organization to the capacity building process. At a minimum, Accenture recommends that a project kick-off meeting as well as a visioning session should be conducted in person, to maximize opportunity to coordinate the ideas of the leadership of the organization. All face-to-face interaction helped the Accenture consultants gain a deeper understanding of the organizations they were working with, streamlined conversations, and helped build alignment and momentum within the DPOs themselves.

Visual timeline for DPOs and Work Plans: Each DPO participating in DfD was volunteer led. Thus those participating in the strategic planning meetings, often held at night or on weekends, were also juggling their work and family commitments. Thus Accenture found that giving the DPOs a timeline and work plan, so that those involved knew what was coming and how to plan their time, was beneficial for productivity. During any strategic planning
process, some conversations can be laborious, so having milestones in place for the DPOs helped to ensure moving the process forward. This is particularly important when time is of such high value for volunteer led organizations.

Convening Leaders across DPOs for Cross Organizational Learning: Although each DPO served different communities and missions, they shared many of the same challenges and many of their effective practices translated easily to other DPOs. During a one-day workshop in January 2014, convened as a DPO Summit, many DPO participants commented both on the benefit of peer-to-peer learning between diaspora organizations, and that they wished they had opportunities for additional gatherings in the beginning and middle, rather than only the end of the strategic planning process. The DPO’s also convened in October 2014 and March 2015, and both times participants shared learning and strategies on implementing strategic plans, and they also developed relationships for sharing outside of formal DfD gatherings.

Recommendations for Capacity Building of Diaspora Organizations

Develop selection criteria which are reflective of the target diaspora community: As stringent selection criteria are an excellent idea for project clarity, selection criteria should be truly reflective of the characteristics of organizations existing within the diaspora populations. In conducting market research on the diaspora community, determining the general characteristics of the organizations within that community, such as the geographic reach of the majority of the organizations or the political activity of that diaspora population within North America, will give project partners an understanding of how to craft criteria which is reflective of what exists in the community.

- **The Challenge Experienced in DfD:** Accenture and Cuso International were challenged to find organizations that had both significant reach and capacity to engage because of their organizational structure. For the purpose of Accenture’s pro bono assistance, the selected partners also had to be registered non-profit organizations (501(c)3s), which further limited the pool of potential partners from among a pool of candidates that were predominantly volunteer-run, community based organizations. As a result, the volume of potential partners was smaller than anticipated and the GDA partners had to consider making compromises in terms of weighting the importance of each selection criteria.

Utilize an application process for the diaspora organizations: An application process in which the diaspora organizations apply to a capacity building program can streamline due diligence and partnership building. By using this method, the organization is providing much of the information up front (such as articles of incorporation, financial records, current mission and vision, etc...), and also expressing interest by taking the time to complete an application. This can help to limit the research required by the project implementers.

- **The Challenge Experienced in DfD:** Through the due diligence process, which followed some intense relationship building efforts with one potential partner organization, the team realized that the organization had let its non-profit status lapse, and it was therefore ineligible for the project. This required the team to have to initiate discussions with another organization for the same country.

Consultants and large non-profits should be prepared to implement new strategies and work styles when working with diaspora organizations: Diaspora organizations are often community based and function as works of the heart for many years, sometimes decades. They are fueled by passion of volunteers, rather than strong fundraising business models. Strategic consultants working with diaspora organizations, should first be alert to this nuance and then develop strategies for these organizations to grow without losing the energy which comes from the community based passion. Additionally, a consulting firm should be mindful that it may need to adjust its ways of working to meet the community organization’s needs. For example, when working with primarily volunteer-run organizations, meetings may take place during lunch or in the evenings. Because volunteer support can fluctuate
quickly in community organizations, consultants should request to have the same team members from the organization active through the different phases of the project, but also identify additional team members who can support during peak busy project periods. Thinking through these types of logistics in advance sets good expectations for both the consultant and diaspora organization.

- **The Challenges Experienced in DfD:**
  - Accenture found that the organizational capacity of the diaspora organizations researched, and the 5 selected, was at more nascent than anticipated, despite the age of some of the organizations. Additionally Accenture did not easily find role models for the DPOs in the US non-profit sector. This required additional ingenuity and creativity in how to determine what support could be provided with the resources available.
  - Volunteer-run organizations have significant time and human resource constraints. For a private corporation such as Accenture, working with volunteer-staffed and/or community-based organizations was challenging, and necessitated a great deal of flexibility in terms of the services and time directed to each DPO.

  **Include resources in project design to provide diaspora organizations support to implement their strategic plans:** In addition to a strategic planning process, volunteer led diaspora organizations can benefit from additional coaching / mentoring as they implement strategic plans for the first time, and in particular new financial and fundraising strategies. This kind of assistance will help develop new processes and routines to facilitate growth, as well as provide expert guidance on issues which existing organization leadership do not have knowledge and experience. Such coaching can better ensure the organization matures and that the strategic plan does not become a shelf item.

  **The Challenge Experienced in DfD:** At the completion of DfD, four of the five DPOs had had their strategic plans in place for a year. The last received theirs in April 2014. As noted above, the DPOs benefitted greatly from the process in terms of being able to define their mission for the community and develop communication messages. Additionally, the plans provided guidelines for decision making on programmatic activities. However, after a year, the organizations were falling behind in meeting their targets for plan implementation, particularly as it related to the board of directors and fundraising. Old organization habits in these volunteer led organizations were hard to shake without continued support and mentoring.

  **Include resources in project design to provide diaspora organizations guidance and support on diversifying their funding sources and fundraising strategies:** Volunteer led diaspora organizations can benefit from guidance and capacity support to develop additional fundraising resources. This would add capacity in the short run to help them identify new fundraising strategies, build donor databases and build grant writing capacity, for example. Sound financial resources are a clear path to sustainability and growth for diaspora organizations.

Diaspora organizations identified during DfD, the DPO’s included, have limited access to sustainable capital. Their financing structure is based on donations from within the diaspora community, often raised through a costly annual event (gala, awards ceremony, etc...). Individual donors and small businesses are often financing several organizations in the same diaspora community, and thus limit their donations. Additionally, donors prefer to finance programming rather than administrative and operational costs. Diaspora organizations lack the capacity to engage in grant writing, and thus find themselves in the vicious circle of wanting to diversity their financial resources but not having the capacity to identify and find those resources. Support to move out of this cycle will greatly improve their ability to serve their communities.
• **The Challenge Experienced in DfD:** As noted above, Accenture found that the organizational capacity of the DPOs, was more nascent than anticipated, despite their age. Because of this, Accenture spent more time than anticipated crafting and implementing the strategic planning process and did not have resources to also address in depth the fundraising requirements of each DPO. Accenture provided each organization with a financial toolkit. One of the organizations used this and raised $15k by implementing the procedures. The others however struggled with capacity to incorporate the toolkit and develop new fundraising methods.

*Expectations, roles and engagement of DPOs in DfD:* During the initiative, there was some misunderstanding and miscommunication between the DPOs and the GDA partners (Accenture, Cuso International and USAID) regarding the role of partners, outcomes, expectations, and project delivery. These misunderstandings were overcome with four of the DPOs, though they likely led to the fifth DPO’s decision to end its participation after receiving its strategic plan deliverables. Additionally, during a project meeting with DPOs in January 2014, all participants acknowledged there should be more opportunities for the DPOs to be more visible in all parts of the project and engage with the volunteers.

• **Recommendations:**
  o Ensure clear understanding of the expectations and responsibilities of all partners early on in project design and implementation.
  o When working with diaspora organizations which are engaged in their country of heritage, actively seek opportunities for diaspora volunteers to work on the international projects of the diaspora organization;
  o Seek opportunities to engage DPOs with the international volunteers and international program partners; in particular broker introductions between volunteers and DPOs so the volunteers may stay engaged with the DPO upon return home.
THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

DfD was a pilot initiative implemented through a Global Development Alliance (GDA), a public-private partnership of Cuso International, Accenture and USAID. Managing this relationship in order to ensure effective and timely project delivery was challenging, and required adaptation, commitment and flexibility of all involved.

Best Practices Utilized During the DfD Initiative

*Partnership developed with ‘shared value’ and shared values in mind.*

Alignment of mission, vision and values. Aspects of corporate culture that enabled strong collaboration and co-design, co-implementation.

*Collaborative Environment.* Cuso International and Accenture were both implementing different aspects of the initiative, and in doing so, developed a collaborative relationship. It was a two-way process, supportive, rather than a benefactor/beneficiary relationship. This led to strong outcomes as well as opportunities for continued partnership.

*Advisory Committee monthly meetings:* The GDA partners formed an advisory committee (AC) with Terms of References in December 2013. The AC met almost monthly throughout the project, approved major decisions and provided suggestions for implementation. This ensured the GDA partners were aware of project implementation status, could resolve challenges and adjust implementation schedules together, and provided opportunities for the project managers to seek advice.

*Partner Summit meetings:* In September 2014, Cuso International, Accenture, USAID and an additional strategic partner, Mentor Cloud, participated in a day-long retreat. Members of the Advisory committee and select stakeholders came together to celebrate successes and articulate learnings after the first year of the DfD project. In January 2014, the GDA partners joined with the DPOs for another group meeting, which provided another opportunity to discuss success and lessons learned. Both of these events furthered communication and team bonds. A final team activity took place in October 2014, when Cuso International organized a public forum highlight the work of DfD. Accenture, USAID and DPOs all had roles in the forum. The following day there was an internal meeting with DPOs focused on strategic plan implementation, as well as knowledge sharing opportunities. All three events described above not only strengthened relationships amongst the partners, but also solidified the network of organizations and individuals mobilizing diaspora engagement in development.

Recommendations for Successful Implementation of a GDA / PPP

*Co-designing, planning and coordinating are critical to successful partnership and project implementation and should start before project approval.* This process should include ensuring alignment of vision amongst the partners, and understanding the expectations, interests and modes of operation of each partner.

- **The Challenge Experienced in DfD:** Experience during the project start-up phase of the project exposed gaps in understanding roles, responsibilities, modes of operation, and expectations amongst the GDA partners that were resolved through a re-working of project design and delivery. For example, Accenture’s involvement in the initiative was being funded through the CSR initiative, Skills to Succeed. This required a certain level of M&E which had not been identified as the project proposal was being written. The partners added the level of M&E to meet this requirement, but working through this discussion during project start-up created a level of discomfort which could have been avoided if raised earlier in the development of the partnership.
Develop a strong and deliberate internal communication strategy: At the outset of an initiative with multiple partners and actors, and with a broad objective, partners should plan for internal communications that provides for knowledge sharing and participatory feedback processes. This should include both electronic and personal communications. A strong set of flyers and brochures should be available on a website accessible to all partners. This website could also be dynamic, with regular posts about progress in the different aspects of the project, and one which enables participants to network and share their experiences in the project. This communication can be augmented by periodic newsletters as well. All with the goal of ensuring that partners and volunteers understand they are part of an initiative whose success is dependent upon the positive actions of all involved.

- The Challenge Experienced in DfD: DfD was an initiative of many partners. Foremost was the Global Development Alliance (GDA), with the resource and implementing partnership of Cuso International, Accenture and USAID. Also included were the program offices and program partners in Ethiopia, Jamaica, Kenya, Peru, and The Philippines, the five DPOs and the volunteers. The initiative’s objective, to engage diaspora in the development of their countries of origin was unique. It was not as easily quantifiable as a single country, single sector development project, with which most development practitioners are familiar. The challenge of multiple partners and a unique objective made communication difficult, and could have benefited from a more structured approach at the outset of the project.