

Scale the Impact of your Market Systems Program Through Volunteer Engagement

Date: February 27, 2019

Time: 10:00 – 11:00 am (EST)

SPEAKERS

Elena Haba, Director of Investments, *EWB Canada*

Jennifer Snow, Associate Director of Agriculture & Volunteer Programs; and Farmer-to-Farmer Program Director, *Winrock International*

MODERATOR

Jim Delaney, Director of Programming and Partnership, *WUSC*

QUESTIONS

For All Presenters

Q: Do you put quality control systems in place once the volunteers are placed and engaged in their assignment?

Winrock: For short-term (2-4 week) volunteers, our field staff accompany volunteers during their assignments. The field staff may provide translation/interpretation, help manage the assignment, continually provide important local context as needed to the volunteers, and generally ensure that things are going smoothly. For longer-term volunteers, field staff frequently check in with the volunteers and the local organizations that the volunteers are working with. Field staff communicate to home office frequently, and if there are any issues, we address them right away.

EWB: Yes, both from a partner perspective and a volunteer perspective.

For Fellows (volunteers), we have mandatory monthly pulse checks where the Fellows are able to report any challenges they are facing in their placement and where our Country Officers can become further involved when necessary. The Country Officers are also actively engaged in the Fellow community and monitor the placement satisfaction at EWB community events and gatherings.

For partner organizations who have not received capital from our investment team, there are periodical check-ins that are done by our Country Officers. This is where partners have an opportunity to voice any challenges they are having with a placement, and where Country Officers get further involved when necessary. For the social ventures receiving capital investment, the Investment team actively monitors the Fellow placements on a monthly basis –

if not more depending on the stage and needs of the enterprise. In addition, our partners fill a bi-annual survey which allows us to evaluate the value of the fellowship placement and other support offered to our partners.

In addition, at the beginning of the Fellowship placement each Fellow fills an Impact Plan (Work Plan and Goals for the Fellowship) where course corrections methods are identified and agreed upon between the Fellow, the partner organization receiving the Fellow and for EWB. This is where communication methods in the event of challenges, and clear relationship managers and relationship management strategies in the event of difficulties are outlined.

Q: How has EWB or Winrock or WUSC supported the long-term linkages maintained by returned volunteers? And how do you measure its value?

Winrock: We support these longer-term relationships/linkages as much as we can. This might mean helping to connect the volunteer and their beneficiary organizations (sometimes passing information or arranging calls if the local organization does not have access to internet). Or in some cases, it could mean helping to courier materials (books, small donated equipment, etc.) that the volunteer wants to pass to their beneficiary organization. Or it can mean setting up follow up assignments so that the volunteer can return to provide additional support later... or just simply staying in the loop if the volunteer chooses to communicate directly or return on their own in the future. The question about measuring the value is a good one, and it is indeed tough to quantify this to the full extent. Certainly, we do quantify the value of resources and time that volunteers continue to donate after their assignments, when we know about it. That said, we don't always need to be in the middle of transactions, so sometimes these additional exchanges are happening without our involvement... and that's great – because then these relationships and linkages are owned by those directly involved. We have many examples from both local organizations and volunteers about these interactions and how it has added value for either the organization or the volunteer – but much of this is qualitative.

EWB: This is something that we would hope to support and measure in the future, especially considering the breadth of our EWB alumni network, but that we do not currently measure.

Q: Do either of your organizations ever work with younger volunteers/students, and do you have a different approach for ensuring that their work is impactful?

Winrock: we sometimes will engage with graduate students that have skills and training relevant to on-the-ground needs – e.g., related to analyses or monitoring and evaluation (e.g., for students studying a specific technical subject or for international development grad students with M&E skills), or business planning (e.g., for MBA students). In these cases, we develop partnerships with specific universities that we trust to provide additional preparatory training for the students, and/or oversight from faculty, to help ensure that the student

volunteers are ready for work on an international development project. And as with any assignment, we carefully match these volunteers to an appropriate scope of work.

EWB: Yes, we also do 4-month volunteering placements for university students that are members of our Engineers without Borders university chapter network– the Junior Fellowship. Junior Fellows are chosen based on a proven commitment to excellence, to building a more equal and sustainable world, and to taking on a leadership role in their EWB university chapter and in Canada upon their return.

The program is not just an overseas volunteer placement. It is run over the course of 18 months (four of which are the volunteering placement). The program focuses on leadership development, systemic change skill building, and provides an opportunity for young leaders to learn how to address the root causes of poverty.

The Junior Fellows are carefully matched with organizations that either have a long-term volunteer who can support them in their work, or a mature management structure. In addition, we work with partner organizations and social ventures to ensure that the Junior Fellows work on projects that are well defined, limited in time and achievable during the duration of the Fellowship.

Q: What steps are you taking to ensure that the word gets out regarding volunteering opportunities? In my experience, unless you are not operating in the sector, you are not aware that such opportunities exist.

Winrock: we do what we can to share information about potential assignments on our website and via social media. Our team of recruiters also do a lot of networking – both in person (e.g., at various agriculture-related conferences or events) and also via phone or email (e.g., to relevant industry associations or other groups). And our volunteers often help with this as well, by initiating or participating in outreach within their professional networks and local communities when they return from their assignments. As part of the wider USAID Farmer-to-Farmer (volunteer program) community, Winrock and other implementing organizations collectively target additional outreach efforts to get the word out about opportunities to engage in this kind of work and the impacts of our work.

EWB: We have a diverse chapter network and strong partnerships with Canadian Universities, as well as a broad-reaching EWB Alumni network, which allows us to spread the word about our Fellowship opportunities. We also post our volunteering opportunities on a variety of job boards, on public transit advertisements and on social media. We have found that a combination of a variety of these approaches allows us to have access to a diverse pool of candidates.

Q: From a community-based development approach, how do you make sure that the volunteers are not “taking ownership” on ventures or replacing local capacities? Especially, in terms of short-mid term service interventions.

Winrock: This is where being careful about scope of work design for each volunteer assignment is important. Our volunteer assignments are demand-driven, and the local organization receiving the volunteer plays a role in the scope of work development and final selection of the volunteer(s). We first make sure to understand the local context and market dynamics to ensure that a) there is not already local capacity to address this, and b) we have identified an appropriate beneficiary group that needs support and has the readiness and commitment to take advantage of volunteer assistance and implement volunteer recommendations, and that is hopefully also able to replicate or share the information with a wider audience.

EWB: Typically, the ventures that we work with do not have the ability to access talent either because of cost constraints or lack of available/accessible local capacity; meaning that without our Fellowship placements, these ventures would not be able to have access to the talent that is critical to their growth. Once we place Fellows, we make it clear both to the volunteer and the venture that our placements are limited in time, where no Fellow can stay for longer than three years within a venture. Transition planning is also a key component of this aspect where all fellowship placements aim to develop stakeholder resilience and sustainability, and plan for the replacement of the Fellow in a way that is realistic and in line with the growth plans of the organization.

Elena’s Presentation

Q: In addition to the criteria you set when assessing potential venture partners, do you have additional criteria to ensure that women founded, or women led ventures are included in your fellow program?

EWB believes gender inclusion is integral to its mission of achieving systemic change and creating a more just society, and that gender is both a key determinant and solution to global inequalities. As a part of its commitment to gender equality, EWB Canada has reflected on how to incorporate gender considerations throughout the impact investing work. While GLI efforts so far have largely focused on investing in women-led businesses, we believe in a holistic approach to gender inclusion where a strong gender-lens is embedded throughout our investment process, from how we source and screen potential investment opportunities to how we manage our investment portfolio post-investment, and how we build our internal team’s skillset. EWB Canada is currently exploring a number of these strategies to understand what works best for the type of portfolio ventures we support. We have incorporated a gender lens throughout our investment and due diligence process, and we recently welcomed a new Gender Inclusion Fellow to support in the process of identifying a gender equality scoring

system and technical assistance opportunities for our current portfolio ventures. We will be releasing an article on our journey towards operationalizing our holistic Gender Lens Investment Strategy in the next few weeks, so feel free to get in touch with us at investments@ewb.ca if you'd like to discuss this further or have other great strategies and resources to share.

Jennifer's Presentation

Q: What incentives are provided to volunteers in the coffee sector? How long were they engaged?

Winrock: We cover all the costs of the volunteer's travel (plane tickets, visa, inoculations, per diem, hotel, local transportation) so that all the volunteer needs to do is donate their time and expertise. Beyond that, we don't necessarily provide any other specific incentives to the volunteers... but we have found – almost unanimously – that the volunteers find their assignments to be enriching and worthwhile, not only for their beneficiaries, but for them personally and professionally. Volunteers can take the knowledge and relationships that they gain themselves from their international assignments and apply this to their ongoing work in the US or elsewhere. So that in and of itself becomes an incentive. Most of our volunteers are on short-term (2-4 week) assignments. Some volunteers complete multiple assignments.