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## **REFINING THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE PROJECTS FOR PEACE: A GUIDE FOR CAMPUS SELECTION COMMITTEES**

September 2014

*What makes for a successful Project for Peace? What advice should “campus designated officials” give to potential Project for Peace applicants? What criteria should campus selection committees use to recommend a final proposal? This document is designed to help answer these questions. Its audience is the campus selection committees at the Davis UWC Scholar schools as well as at the International House, Future Generations, the Graduate Institute Geneva, the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and the University of Maine.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This document is based on ongoing research at Middlebury’s Center for Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) that has been generously funded by Middlebury College and the Projects for Peace program. It builds on interviews conducted by Lauren Kelly ’13 and a report authored by Samantha Strom ’14, based on material they studied in the CSE’s introductory course, “Social Entrepreneurship in the Liberal Arts.” The leader of the research team is Jonathan Isham, Professor of Economics and Director of the CSE. Please address all questions about the research to [jisham@middlebury.edu](mailto:jisham@middlebury.edu).

## **LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR PROJECT SELECTION COMMITTEES**

- 1. How familiar are the students with the target area? Do they know the local language or, if not, do they plan to work with translators?*
- 2. Do the students have mentors who know the region and have helped them design the project? Have they reached out to a diverse set of people?*
- 3. Have the students set realistic goals that cater to their skillsets?*
- 4. Do the students show a commitment to listening? Have they placed community members at the center of their implementation plans?*
- 5. Do the students plan to partner with existing organizations? If not, can they justify a plan in which they will be 'on their own'?*
- 6. Do the students have a clear plan to involve as many stakeholders as possible throughout the entire process?*
- 7. Are the students prepared for the complexities of creating and leading a project? Do they have a good understanding of potential risks?*
- 8. Do the students show a commitment to being as flexible and adaptive as possible?*
- 9. Do the students show a commitment to staying in the community as long possible? Are they considering a follow-up experience?*
- 10. Do the students plan to create an NGO? If not, can they make a case that an NGO is unnecessary for project sustainability?*
- 11. Do the students have a plan to train locals to help maintain and grow the project?*
- 12. Do the students have plans to connect new volunteers to their project?*

## I. Introduction

Projects for Peace, the vision of Kathryn W. Davis, is a uniquely successful philanthropic gift. Readers of this document know what extraordinary influence the program has had for hundreds of students as well as their partners around the world. Simply, there is nothing else like its, for its breadth and long-term commitment to promoting peace and addressing the root causes of conflict.

Yet in important ways, Kathryn Davis's vision was a precursor to a new movement in higher education: social entrepreneurship education, which over that last decade has grown to prominence at dozens of the world's most preeminent universities and colleges (Oxford, Duke, Tulane, Wesleyan and Middlebury, just to name a few.)<sup>2</sup>

A well-crafted evaluation of the Projects for Peace can take on, then, a two-fold purpose. It can help leaders at UWC scholar campuses and five affiliated programs to refine their decision making process, thereby choosing projects with even more potential to effect long-lasting social change. At the same time, it can offer guidance to faculty and staff on a wide range of campuses who are promoting, funding, and overseeing similar student-led projects under the banner of social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, and/or social innovation. Just one example: Swarthmore's Eugene M. Lang Opportunity Scholarship Program, which offers six undergraduates per year "the opportunity and related funding to conceive, design and carry out an Opportunity Project that creates a needed social resource and/or effects a significant social change or improved condition of a community in the United States or abroad."<sup>3</sup>

This document, designed specifically to fulfill the first of these two purposes, is one product of research that began in 2012 at Middlebury's Center for Social Entrepreneurship. Our research has been built around a comprehensive evaluation of the 2008 Projects for Peace cohort<sup>4</sup>; it is a precursor to subsequent evaluations of later cohorts. In brief, we have used three research methodologies: interviews with leaders of ten 2008 projects; a full-scale quantitative evaluation of the entire cohort; and field-visits to selected projects in India (including but not restricted to the 2008 cohort.)

Before presenting results of this research, we share a major caveat. The biggest determinant of success for the PROJECTS FOR PEACE is likely the caliber of the students who lead the projects – one of the hardest determinants to measure, even under the best of circumstances. We hope that the guidance we provide here will help many committees to refine their selection process.

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<sup>2</sup> AshokaU, found at [ashokau.org](http://ashokau.org), is the best resource for learning more about this growing movement.

<sup>3</sup> More information can be found at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/lang-center-civic-social-responsibility/lang-opportunity-scholarship-los-program>.

<sup>4</sup> A full list can be found at <http://www.davisprojectsforpeace.org/projects/2008>, with links to project documentation. We use the titles of the listed projects in this document.

But we are sure that no guide can replace the judgment of those on each campus, particularly when it comes to judging the human qualities of student applicants. There's a 'sparkle in the eyes' of the most effective change agents that can not be captured with a number, and that may be the most important indicator for many committee members. Even for those using the checklist that we provide here, that should not change.

## II. Results

Based on our research, we suggest that the PROJECTS FOR PEACE selection committees assess potential projects by considering three phases of each potential project: preparation, implementation, and sustainability. Ideally, every PROJECTS FOR PEACE will have been thoroughly and thoughtfully prepared, will be implemented carefully and collaboratively, and will have a lasting effect.

In the rest of this section, we break down the project cycle into these three phases. In each section, we offer questions *in italics* that are prompted by the projects we have studied. We suggest that members of PROJECTS FOR PEACE selection committees use these 12 questions to guide their process; we provide supporting evidence for the questions in the subsequent text.

### Preparation

*1. How familiar are the students with the target area? Do they know the local language or, if not, do they plan to work with translators?*

Projects are more likely to succeed when students work in an area that they know well. Shabana Basij-Raskih, Middlebury '11, who is from Kabul, Afghanistan, created *Giving Afghan People Access to Clean Water*. Because of her familiarity with rural Afghanistan, her proposal to build deep wells in an Afghan village was based on what she knew was a basic need: lack of clean water. She was able to navigate the project thanks to her connections to contractors and other local leaders.

If students are not from the area, it helps if they have lived there before, such as during a study abroad semester. Betto van Waarden (Lewis and Clark '10) helped to lead *Cultivating Peace: Empowering the Orphaned Children of Criamar in Ceilândia, Brazil* in an area where he had studied the previous year. According to Betto, "It definitely helped to have some knowledge and experience of how things work in Latin America and Brazil. If we hadn't spoken any Portuguese it would have been extremely difficult."

If students are not proficient in the local language, they should plan to work with trustworthy translators. Before leading *Reclaiming Childhood for Iraqi Children in Jordan*, Katherine Kreig (Williams '08) had never been to Jordan, but she contacted and employed translators before the project was underway. She consequently had little trouble with the language barrier. Krieg also found that researching the culture in Jordan and Iraq was vital to her success. She advises future Projects for Peace leaders:

“Wherever you’re going, the more research you can do and the more you can understand the community, and the more local organizations you can partner with, I think the more effective you’ll be.”

Students need to know the area well and/or have plans to connect with those who do.

*2. Do the students have mentors who know the region and have helped them design the project? Have they reached out to a diverse set of people?*

Projects are more likely to succeed when students seek out a mentor who is familiar with the region and can offer guidance on the potential and possible limitations of their idea. And many Projects for Peace veterans emphasize the importance of network building. Katherine Kreig’s project in Jordan was sparked by what she learned in a class on the Middle East; her professor went on to help her and her colleagues design the scope and goals of their project and find contacts in the region. Krieg reminisces that “we very much engaged a lot of people in the process. We let a lot of other professors know, we told our friends, we spread a lot of awareness. Once we expressed interest in continuing it, a lot of those people came out and said ‘Oh I know this person you should talk to.’” For *Protein Malnutrition in Rural Swaziland: Introducing Moringa as a Nutritional Supplement*, Edward Lin (U. Florida ’07) counted on his mentors. “We researched a lot and it was a good scheme, but when it got down to the nitty-gritty, that’s when we used help from our mentors, [on] strategic and tactical levels.”

The best projects consistently rely on mentors and networks of allies.

*3. Have the students set realistic goals that cater to their skillsets?*

Less is sometimes more. Shujaat Khan (Middlebury ’10), one of the organizers of *Healing the Rift*, a rally for peace in New York City, learned that “there needs to be idealism for a project to be successful or for it to be even interesting, but a lot of the times people tend to be too idealistic about what they can achieve.” Arianna Schindle (Kalamazoo ’08), one of the leaders of *Nets for Prevention and Peace* in Burma, agrees: “The scope of the project and the way you approach it should be really based on how much time and energy you believe that you’re going to stay and give to that community.” And note that students do not need technical skills to effect change. Lauren Slive (UNC Chapel Hill ’09) and her colleagues hoped to work on global health in Ghana. For *Project Heal*, they decided to focus on first aid. They thought: “We don’t have medical training, but what if we work with some Ghanaian doctors? We can do something for first-aid. You don’t have to be a doctor to do that.”

Projects for Peace applicants need to balance idealism with a realistic sense of what’s possible for them.

## Implementation

*4. Do the students show a commitment to listening? Have they placed community members at the center of their implementation plans?*

Among the 2008 Projects for Peace recipients we interviewed, the most frequent advice was to listen to community members about their needs, priorities, and ideas for solutions. The most important part of listening, many of them underlined, is figuring out what locals want; to not have a preconceived notion of what they need. Just one example from Edward Lin: “Listen to everything. Listen to the community, listen to your mentors, get all the information you can and figure out what’s going on. Don’t just rely on reports and columns and opinions—go figure out what’s going on. You won’t know what’s going on until you get there.”

This was also Slive’s experience in Ghana: “We went to a hospital one day and saw that [a] foreign government had donated this beautiful centrifuge machine but it was sitting in the corner in plastic wrap, and the hospital didn’t have gloves. We saw that, and that was huge for us: ‘You know, this is a really big awakening, we need to make sure that we aren’t imposing what we think these people need’”. Her advice to future leaders was to “get really integrated into the community and make sure that you’re spending a lot more time listening than talking, and really hear what people need and what they want.” One of Slive’s collaborators, Emma Lawrence (UNC Chapel Hill ’09) underlines the point: “The biggest thing is to make sure to involve the community every step of the way, not just at the planning or execution phase, but in that very first phase when you’re thinking of a project. It [may be] easy for you—as an outsider—to think that there’s a need or that there’s not. The community members are the experts, so partner with them from the very beginning.”

Listening will not only help students to identify local needs; it can also help to create a community network. Slive continues: “We had this snowball effect with the contacts we made. We would meet someone great, and then they would introduce us to someone else who was great, and we got to know the leaders in health and government in that small community.” Lawrence concurred: “[These leaders] not only lived there their entire lives, but they’re intimately involved in all of the health and development stuff in that community. They knew what needed to get done, and how to do it.”

Deep listening, a real commitment to listening to others, may be the most important determinant of project success.

*5. Do the students plan to partner with existing organizations? If not, can they justify a plan in which they will be ‘on their own’?*

The best projects do not just listen to the community’s needs; they partner with specific organizations and locals who are working in the area, thereby establishing trust with the

local communities. In Jordan, Kreig found that “girls want[ed] to participate, but their parents [were] very skeptical: what are we teaching them? Is it good for them? Are we trying to benefit from this? Is there a cost? ... I think that’s another reason why it’s important for these new Davis Peace Project applicants to partner with local organizations that are already trusted in the communities, because it can take a really long time to build up that trust—maybe longer than you have in the Davis Peace Project timeline.”

Lin and his partners struggled with this same issue in Swaziland. Their initial instinct was to “engage directly with the community and target audience. But we actually realized that we had to engage with the NGOs because they already had the trust. You can’t just go into someone’s community and expect them to trust you and accept your advice. These organizations have been there and have relationships with the communities.”

Aside from helping to gain community trust, local organizations often provide advice and insight for how to conduct a project in their local area. For Sujaat Khan and his colleagues, local organizations shared ideas on how to organize their peace rally and tactics for reaching out to their members. Krieg’s work with local organizations helped to recruit Iraqi refugees for her program: “I think it’s better if you’re willing to partner with other organizations. ... They’re really willing to help you, and they know a lot more about the region.”

In the short time that students have to implement a Projects for Peace project, working alongside a local organization can be a critical determinant of success.

*6. Do the students have a clear plan to involve as many stakeholders as possible throughout the entire process?*

In conjunction with listening to local needs and working with an organization, it’s vital to involve as many stakeholders as possible through every step of the project. During the implementation of *Water Purification System in South Africa*, Eric Harshfield (University of Virginia ’09) and his partner “tried to involve everybody. We worked with NGOs in that area. We went to a meeting with community leaders [where they talked] about different issues.” He reports that this was a key factor for program sustainability, uncovering issues related to power at the local level. “[We] faced issues with jealousy in the communities and with the tribal leadership certain people had more power than others, trying to control what was happening in the community, so we had to learn how to work with everyone and involve all of the stakeholders to make sure we’re not just hearing one voice, but also hearing the voice of the marginalized people in the population.” We believe that this is a critical set of insights to share with Projects for Peace applicants.

Harshfield’s experience illustrates the power of involving a diverse set of stakeholder. “We were all working together: with faculty at the university, and with the local

community members. We talked about the issue of safe water in the community, did a survey that addressed the problems, and tested water samples for microbes. We found E. coli and salmonella and things in the water showing it was contaminated, and so we presented all the findings to the community and said ‘What do you want to do about it? Can we do something?’” Harshfield included the community at every phase, used his expertise in research to further identify the problem, and then did not assume the next step of what to do. He asked first if he and his team could help, and then secondly, how they could help.

Projects for Peace applicants should present persuasive evidence that they plan to involve a range of participants throughout the project cycle.

*7. Are the students prepared for the complexities of creating and leading a project? Do they have a good understanding of potential risks?*

Many Projects for Peace veterans shared another key piece of advice: do one’s best to understand the complexities of trying to create a project. Emily Usher Shrair (Mt. Holyoke ’08) led *Computers and Childcare: Training Mothers for a Peaceful Future* with a goal of teaching computer skills to single mothers in a shelter in Argentina. As the project got started, Shrair realized that offering classes to these mothers was not enough; she needed to provide childcare for their children during the class time. She soon arranged to pay local unemployed women to watch over the children. She reflects that in dealing with the unexpected, she found a way to fix a problem and create more jobs and opportunities in the process.

Based on his experience in South Africa, Harshfield’s advice to future leaders echoes Shrair’s experience: “Try to understand all of the issues because things are always more complex than they seem. You might think you understand something just by doing research and learning about the problem, but there are always many layers. Human beings are very complex and we don’t live alone, we live in communities where there are a lot of forces at work.”

Projects for Peace recipients need to be prepared for unexpected complexities and show an understanding of the risks they may face.

*8. Do the students show a commitment to being as flexible and adaptive as possible?*

It is impossible to prepare for everything. One of the key pieces of advice from past leaders was to be willing to change when new information comes to light. Krieg’s program in Jordan is a prime example of reassessing original project goals. “We had originally written the project to work specifically with Iraqi refugee girls [but] the fact of the matter was that in these refuge communities, you had some Syrian girls, you had some Lebanese girls, you had some Israeli girls, you even had some really poor Jordanian girls, and they were all living together and they were all friends. We had to



reevaluate whether it was worth saying ‘no we’re only accepting Iraqi refugee girls’ because that’s what our project is supposed to be.” They also had to change the location of their project for unanticipated legal and political reasons.

Slive’s global health project in Ghana also changed dramatically. “We had an idea in our head: maybe we would build a library at first. But then we quickly realized that was a terrible idea. We didn’t have the money to build a new structure. So then we worked with the hospital to find a room that they could dedicate to this library instead. By the end I just learned not to have a hard and fast set of expectations.”

Students need to show an awareness of the need to be flexible as the project gets underway.

### **Sustainability**

*9. Do the students show a commitment to staying in the community as long possible? Are they considering a follow-up experience?*

Few students will be able to stay in their project area for longer than the summer. Yet staying longer may increase the probability of project success. Reflecting on his experience in Brazil, Van Waardan’s advice is: “If we had had a bit more time it might have been easier to [secure] more structural things that we were trying to do, like the collaboration with the international school. Ultimately it didn’t really matter if we were there two months or four months or six months—we would leave and somebody would need to take over. It was just that if you had more time it gives you more of an ability to figure out how things will be continued when you’re gone.” Schindle found that staying longer than the length of her project contributed to long-term success: “I stayed there for almost three and a half years after I did the project... what was interesting was that I constantly came across that issue where [outside] people came, didn’t understand the complexity of working with grassroots organizations and in contexts that were really diverse... to create ownership from the ground up takes a lot of training, is a really long process, and involves complex dynamics that we’re often not aware of. ... If I knew I was going to be there longer I think I’d really think about sustainability a lot more.”

Some Projects for Peace applicants should be open to the possibility of extending their experience with their project.

*10. Do the students plan to create an NGO? If not, can they make a case that an NGO is unnecessary for project sustainability?*

A plan to convert a Projects for Peace project to an NGO is one possible path to sustainability. For *Cover One in Honduras: Promoting Athletics and Health Care*, Max Green (Colorado College ’08) found that nonprofit status was a cornerstone for project success. “The biggest thing about [the nonprofit status] was that it allowed us to go to

sporting equipment stores and say, 'we're a nonprofit organization, here's what we're doing, do you have any equipment that was last year's model and you're no really going to be able to sell? [You] can you donate it to us so we can give you all the tax write-off benefits from that.' Getting the nonprofit stature was very beneficial." According to Green, Cover One still exists and still has its nonprofit affiliation.

Krieg's experience in Jordan was similar: "It's after that initial [Projects for Peace] \$10,000 grant you need to find a way to get money and if you don't have that nonprofit status, people don't have that tax benefit way of donating to you. They also don't trust you as much. If you're established as a nonprofit they're more trusting of where their money is going." A registered non-profit must have a board, also a key part of sustainability. According to Krieg: "[Having a board] helps us continue to drive forward because we have to report to them, and they really have great insight."

But creating an NGO is not the only key to sustainability. Schindle's plans for an NGO changed after her experience in Burma: "We didn't officially file for a 501c3, but we intended to make it a lot more sustainable. [After the summer though,] we recognized that the need ... and the context had changed. We didn't want to be there doing the fundraising and advocacy; we wanted to be teaching and training on the ground. So our project morphed, and our ideas of sustainability towards the project morphed a lot too."

Students should consider creating an NGO as one avenue for assuring long-term sustainability.

#### *11. Do the students have a plan to train locals to help maintain and grow the project?*

A group of college students can only help run a project for so long. If the project is designed to last, it's imperative to have collaborators on the ground who can subsequently lead the project. Lin's project in Swaziland was built around such a plan from the beginning: "We trained a Swazi farmer that was recommended to us. We hired him and trained him on everything. He knows how to grow it, farm it, cultivate it, everything. We provided workshops for all of the communities. He ran all of the workshops because we didn't want the relationships to be farmers and foreigners. We wanted it to be among peers. We charged money for these workshops because we wanted [participants] to be interested [and invested]. Our trainer [still] makes a living doing these workshops." Many projects that we studied were built around training programs for women that taught them a basic skill and business management. Julie Carney (Yale '08 ) led *Growing One Mango Tree* in Uganda. Carney's project selected 20 women for a training program; she paid trainers, rented space, and bought sewing machines and fabric for each trainee. "One Mango Tree" also hired a director to help coordinate orders and make payments. The women who still work for "One Mango Tree" know how to sew and how to sell their products and make a profit.

Many of the best projects have a training program built into project design and implementation.

*12. Do the students have plans to connect new volunteers to their project?*

Another option for sustainability is to create a system where new volunteers continually cycle through the program. After founding a 501c3 in the spring of 2009, Krieg carefully developed a model built around new volunteers. “We started this volunteer program where US-based volunteers could apply to coach for the summer and to have this really unique experience living in Jordan. We made it a rigorous application process: they have to apply, write several essays, provide a number of different details about themselves and get a letter of recommendation. A pretty intense process, and we’re very selective about who we take.” Students can also get a flow of volunteers through their own universities. Since Harshfield finished his water project, “UVA professors and students have formed an NGO and they’re continuing to work in this community and continuing to do more water projects.” UVA now sends undergraduates back to work on water projects every year; these new leaders have changed the water purification model with new and improved versions.

Cycling in new volunteers is a proven model to ensure sustainability.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The 12 sets of questions we have assembled here are designed to help campus selection committees – but not to put them in a bind. We feel confident in saying that it is the rare proposal that will meet all of the criteria suggested in these questions, from knowing the local language to partnering with a local organization to setting up a new NGO. At the same time, we are confident that a proposal that meets few of these criteria will have a much tougher road to success. Our questions capture a certain amount of common sense, common sense that many campus designated officials have gained themselves after several years of shepherding Projects for Peace proposals. Be familiar with the region; use mentors; be realistic; listen to others; be flexible; plan for the future: these are basic ideas at the heart of any successful enterprise.

Nevertheless, we hope that the checklist at the start of this document and the accompanying material will help to refine the selection process at the Davis UWC Scholar schools as well as at the International House, Future Generations, the Graduate Institute Geneva, the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and the University of Maine. There’s a lot at stake for the unique vision of Kathryn W. Davis. It’s sensible to try to select projects with the greatest chance of making a difference in the world.

We end this document with what may be the greatest tribute to Mrs. Davis’s vision. In the course of our research on the 2008 projects, we learned in detail what many of these former students are now doing. So many of them lead lives of real meaning, and it’s clear that for many of them, the Projects for Peace experience was the spark. Just two examples: Julie Carney, who

led *Growing One Mango Tree*, is now the Country Director of Gardens for Health in Rwanda; Shabana Basij-Raskihi, who led *Giving Afghan People Access to Clean Water*, is the Founder and Executive Director of the School of Leadership in Afghanistan. Time and time again, we uncovered examples like this.

The deepest legacy of Projects for Peace is the lives that these young women and men are now leading, lives of purpose and meaning dedicated to promoting peace and addressing the root causes of conflict.