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FAMILY FOUNDATION

# Executive Summary

## 2011 LIN Assessment of NPO Readiness for Skilled Volunteers

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Skilled volunteerism has been viewed as a benefit for not-for-profit organizations (NPOs). Since 2009, the LIN Center for Community Development has introduced the Skilled Volunteer Matching service to help local NPOs in Ho Chi Minh City build their capacity. The service sees its potential and high expectation for what NPOs can achieve, but how the skilled volunteerism concept is embraced by local NPOs has remained a question.

The 2011 LIN Assessment of NPO Readiness for Skilled Volunteers was commissioned to understand the awareness of NPOs about “skilled volunteer” concept, and find out their readiness for the service. We hoped to assess what the demands of NPOs for skilled volunteers are, and to determine what LIN Center could do to bridge the demand and supply.

We would like to thank the Judith Carey Zesiger Family Foundation for funding the survey, which we believe to be the first of its kind to be conducted in Ho Chi Minh City.

### Key findings

- Only 48% NPOs fully understand the role of a skilled volunteer.
- 2/3 of NPOs are ready to work with skilled volunteers.
- Most NPOs listed executive and/or practical skills as necessary from a skilled volunteer, instead of leadership or managerial-level skills.
- How to get skilled volunteers fit in and committed are two major issues facing NPOs.

### About this survey

The LIN Assessment of NPO Readiness for Skilled Volunteers is a part of LIN’s efforts to raise the awareness about skilled-based volunteerism amongst our local NPO partners. LIN advocates for the strategic use of local resources to strengthen the not-for-profit sector, and the use of skilled volunteerism is one powerful vehicle to help NPOs achieve their goals.

### About LIN Skilled Volunteer Matching Service

Skilled Volunteer Matching is one of LIN’s services to strengthen capacity for local NPOs by bringing pro bono professionals to share their knowledge and expertise with NPO staff. LIN facilitates the matching process, receiving Job Descriptions from NPOs, finding a match and following up with the partnership.

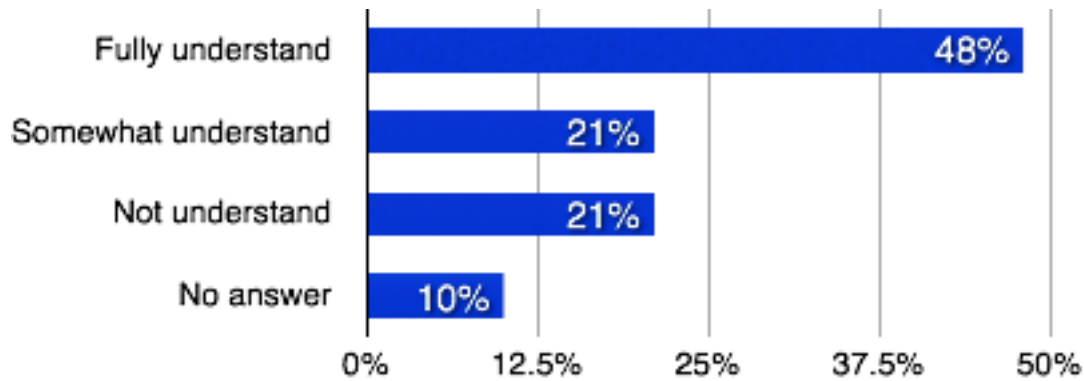
### Survey Methodology

Results of 2011 LIN Assessment of NPO Readiness for Skilled Volunteers are based on interviews of staff from 29 local NPOs in Ho Chi Minh City who personally manage their organization’s volunteers. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, on the phone and via email by 6 LIN volunteers from October 6-30, 2011.

The following is a summary and analysis of key research findings.

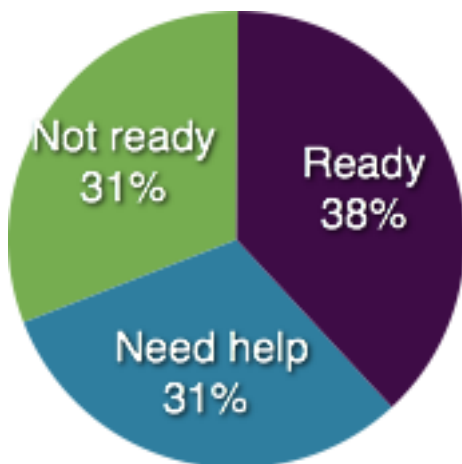
### Awareness: Only 48% NPOs fully understands the role of a skilled volunteer

The survey found that nearly half of NPOs understood the definition of skilled volunteers and their roles in strengthening NPO by building capacity for NPO staff (48%). Another half of respondents were confusing skilled volunteers with non-skilled volunteers at some point.



When asked to distinguish skilled and non-skilled volunteers in terms of skills required and collaboration process, 3 in every 4 NPOs could point out the theoretical differences (76%). However, when put into practical context, nearly half of respondents were confused about the role of skilled volunteers (42%). They expected skilled volunteers to complete a job for the NPO staff who were too busy with other tasks, while in fact the role of a skilled volunteer is more of a mentor/consultant than an executive.

2 in every 3 respondents said they knew LIN Center provide Skilled Volunteer Matching Service (66%), indicating that there remains a communication gap between LIN and local partners.



### Readiness: 2/3 of NPOs are ready to work with skilled volunteers

Of 29 NPOs surveyed, 1/3 found themselves not ready to work with skilled volunteers (31%), citing organization's policy, and/or lack of resources (human, capital, experience). Among 20 NPOs who were ready to embrace skilled volunteers, 11 NPOs (55%) have established a strategy to work with skilled volunteers, including a complete policy of recruitment, orientation, management, evaluation and recognition. The rest

### Where do NPOs find skilled volunteers:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| LIN Center                                | 30% |
| Other sources (friends, universities,...) | 21% |
| Other NPOs                                | 16% |
| Self-recruited inside NPO                 | 14% |
| HR agencies                               | 5%  |

### Readiness for Volunteer Management:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Staff possess related skills and experience           | 38% |
| Staff received some training                          | 38% |
| Staff received no training (due to lack of resources) | 17% |
| It is not a priority for the NPO                      | 7%  |

### Assessment:

Among 29 NPOs surveyed, 17 had been supported by skilled volunteers at least once (59%), while the rest had little or no experience working with skilled volunteers. The following answers reflect experience from 17 former NPOs.

### Top skills needed at NPOs

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Soft skills <sup>1</sup>  | 31% |
| Marketing & Communication | 23% |
| Fundraising               | 15% |
| HR & Development          | 15% |
| IT                        | 15% |

Since most NPOs were operating with less than 5 staff and in the first stage of development, executive skills were of great demand. Most NPOs needed skills that could help them to achieve a short term goal or solve an urgent problem, for example Marketing & Communication, Fundraising, HR & Development, IT, etc. And in most cases, NPOs expected the volunteers to perform the tasks instead of building capacity for the staff so that they can do it by themselves.

There was also demand from NPOs for soft skills training, either for NPO staff or for the beneficiaries served by the NPOs (children, young adults, people with disabilities, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> These skills include living skills, communication skills, personal skills.

## Experience working with skilled volunteers:

“The skilled volunteers who supported us were very enthusiastic. They worked proactively and explained with great patience what we did not understand. They did not only improve and strengthen our capacity but also acted as an ambassador to communicate our images to potential donors and skilled volunteers.”

- Thao Dan Shelter

## Feedback on past volunteer engagement (n=17)

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| a) The volunteer(s) delivered desirable results/solve the problem within the agreed period.                  | 29%            | 47%   | 18%     | 6%       | 0%                |
| b) The skilled volunteer(s) was motivated and showed enthusiasm for the job assigned.                        | 41%            | 47%   | 12%     | 0%       | 0%                |
| c) The skilled volunteer(s) had the right skills for the task.   | 44%            | 50%   | 6%      | 0%       | 0%                |
| d) We treated the skilled volunteer as an expert consultant and listened to his/her opinions.                | 44%            | 38%   | 6%      | 13%      | 0%                |
| e) We gave regular feedback and commented on the volunteer's work.   | 19%            | 56%   | 6%      | 13%      | 6%                |
| f) We communicated the job description, requirements, and responsibilities clearly to the skilled volunteer. | 31%            | 50%   | 13%     | 6%       | 0%                |
| g) We plan to recruit a skilled volunteer again.   | 35%            | 65%   | 0%      | 0%       | 0%                |
| h) We asked the skilled volunteer to do tasks other than what was initially agreed upon.                     | 6%             | 22%   | 17%     | 50%      | 6%                |

## Fit in and commitment issues

Although most NPOs had pleasant experience working with skilled volunteers (see table above), the survey revealed some challenges that NPOs faced while working with skilled volunteers. Two

most common difficulties cited by NPOs were getting skilled volunteers to be a part of the organizations (for example: difference in lifestyle, ideas, approach to solve a problem) and skilled volunteers failing to fulfill their commitment.

### **Size does matter**

Of the 12 NPOs that had no prior experience working with skilled volunteers, 83% admitted that there were jobs volunteers could perform but the organization did not have the resources/abilities to recruit and/or manage a volunteer. 75% indicated that they were open to the idea of working with skilled volunteers, and 67% said they considered looking for skilled volunteers to help. For those who said they were not yet ready for a volunteer, the main reason given was that they felt they were too small (not enough staff resources) to manage a skilled volunteer.

## **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The findings from our 2011 LIN NPO Skilled Volunteer Needs Assessment reveal that there is greater awareness of the roles and potential impact of skilled volunteerism among NPOs in HCMC. It shows that NPOs understand the importance of using skilled volunteers and the benefits they could get out of the partnership. However, the survey also indicates that there are still gaps between NPO expectations of skilled volunteers and the ability of skilled volunteers to meet their expectations.

The survey findings suggest possible solutions that NPOs, Volunteers and/or the LIN Center could do to improve the NPO-Volunteer experience:

### **Recommendations for NPOs:**

- Spend more effort in the orientation process. Through orientation, skilled volunteers could understand the work, the need being addressed and the culture of the organization/operations. The more they understand about their responsibility and expectation from NPO, the easier it is for skilled volunteers to set their commitment and fulfill their tasks. Similarly, the more time the NPO spends orienting the Volunteer to their work/organization, the more likely they will be able to offer solutions that are relevant in a manner that is suitable with the culture.
- Ensure open communication between NPO staff and skilled volunteers by deciding the communication channel (face-to-face meetings, email report, phone call, etc.) and the frequency (every week, every two week, at the end of each month, etc.). This should be enlisted in an agreement and signed by both parties at the beginning of the partnership.
- Collect and review feedback from volunteers, using an evaluation form, in the middle and the end of the partnership.

### **Recommendations for Volunteers:**

- Make a realistic commitment to the NPO and stick with it! It is much better to offer less and give more than to do the reverse.
- Spend adequate effort in getting to know the NPO, its culture and policy.
- Communicate regularly with NPO, inform NPO of volunteer's favorite time and means of communication.
- Even when the volunteer wishes to quit, it is appreciated if the volunteer could inform his/her decision to the NPO (or through LIN).

**Recommendations for LIN:**

- Organize networking events where NPOs could meet potential skilled volunteers (requested by 12/17 surveyed NPOs).
- Provide workshops on how to work with skilled volunteers. (Although LIN did hold one workshop in April, 2011, 11/17 NPOs asked for another one).
- Share templates/ best practices with NPOs (evaluation, feedback report, etc.).
- Improve orientation with skilled volunteers before matching with NPOs.