

Using a Process-based Approach to Evaluate the Peace Corps TEFL Certificate Program

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Program evaluation has long been recognized as a valuable tool to provide essential data to help inform decisions, improve program effectiveness, and ensure that the desired goals of the program are being achieved (Spaulding, 2014). This commentary aims to provide insight into the program evaluation process through a concrete example of how CAL conducts evaluation for the Peace Corps TEFL Certificate program. The document will provide a deeper understanding of the process followed to create the evaluation framework and to conduct specific evaluation activities.

Background: Peace Corps TEFL Certificate Program

As the preeminent international service organization in the U.S., the Peace Corps sends Americans abroad to tackle the most pressing needs of people globally. Since 1960, more than 215,000 Americans of all ages have served in 139 countries worldwide.

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Given the impact of the Peace Corps in the U.S. and around the world, President Obama made a call in 2009 aiming to double the number of Peace Corps Volunteers by the Peace Corps 50th anniversary in 2011. Meanwhile, Peace Corps partner countries requested a larger number of English teachers with TEFL credentials (Brady, n.d.). Visit www.peacecorps.gov to learn more.

To assist in reaching this mandate, the Peace Corps established a 30-month TEFL certification program with the broader goals of: a) building counterpart teacher capacity (i.e., English teachers in host countries); b) improving student achievement in English in the host countries; and, c) encouraging community engagement in school improvement and student learning (Brady, n.d.).

To provide quality assurance to funders and stakeholders, Peace Corps has contracted the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to serve as the external validator of the program.

Creating a Program Evaluation Framework

A program evaluation framework is important in that it serves as the guide for program evaluators and ensures that all necessary data are collected to address the evaluation questions (Spaulding, 2014). CAL developed the program evaluation framework for the Peace Corps TEFL Certificate program through four sequential steps: a) Selecting a Program Evaluation Approach; b) Creating a Logic Model; c) Drafting Evaluation Questions; and, d) Designing Evaluation Activities. These four steps are described below.

Step 1: Selecting a Program Evaluation Approach

From the plethora of program evaluation models available for use, CAL chose to employ a process-based approach, or a formative approach, to evaluate the Peace Corps TEFL programs, because the goal of evaluation was to determine the extent to which the program activities were implemented as intended and to provide ongoing formative feedback for continuing improvement of the program (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015).

Step 2: Creating a Logic Model

After determining the appropriate evaluation approach, the next step was to clarify program elements and expectations. Logic models are typically used to serve this purpose (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). Building a logic model is critical for gaining clarity with stakeholders about expectations for a program, identifying key evaluation questions and translating findings into recommendations for ongoing program improvement (Chapel, 2011).

As shown in Table 1, the logic model clarifies the logical relationships among the key components of a program that is evaluated, which include: a) *input*: the resources that go into a program; b) *process*: activities that are carried out in a program; c) *output*: activities, services, events and products that reach stakeholders of the program; and, d) *outcomes and impacts*: consequences of implementing the program.

Within the context of the Peace Corps TEFL program, the *input* component of the logic model includes the Peace Corps central staff who provide oversight to the program, Peace Corps TEFL volunteers and staff from the local posts, and CAL staff with expertise in program evaluation and teacher education. The *process* component refers to all the training and assessment activities that Peace Corps Volunteers must undertake to become a certified TEFL educator. Through these training and assessment activities, Peace Corps aims to produce a target number of certified volunteers to meet the needs of the local posts and other potential employers, which represents the *output* component of the model.

In terms of *outcomes*, the Peace Corps TEFL Certification program is intended to have a beneficial impact on a number of stakeholders, including increasing the number of certified TEFL educators to meet the demands of future employers, building capacity in Peace Corps host countries by enhancing host country educators' knowledge about TEFL pedagogies, and improving English language proficiency of host country students.

The Peace Corps TEFL Certificate Program is intended to increase the number of certified TEFL educators to meet the demands of future employers, build capacity in Peace Corps host countries, and improve English language proficiency of host country students.

Table 1. Evaluation Framework for Peace Corps TEFL Certification Program

	Logic model components	Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Activities Examples
Input	a) Peace Corps central staff; b) Peace Corps Volunteers and post trainers; c) CAL staff with expertise in program evaluation and teacher education	Do all trainers meet the minimum qualifications required by Peace Corps?	Review of trainer credentials
Process	a) learning activities; b) assessment activities	a) How effective is the overall structure of the training program? b) Does the training program reflect current development in TEFL and foreign language instruction? c) How effectively are training sessions delivered?	a) Review of the Peace Corps TEFL Standards; b) Comprehensive reviews of the contents of the learning and assessment activities.
Output	Targeted number of certified volunteers in Peace Corps host countries	Do a sufficient number of Volunteers meet the certification criteria and obtain the certificate?	Review of Volunteer assessment results
Outcomes	a) sufficient number of highly qualified TEFL educators with credentials; b) host country teachers with enhanced knowledge about English language education pedagogies; c) higher English language proficiency for language learners in host countries	Is there an increase in Volunteers' knowledge and skills about English education?	Review of Volunteer assessment results

Step 3. Drafting Evaluation Questions

After using the logic model to clarify the interrelated components of the program, CAL evaluators proposed evaluation questions that are related to each component of the logic model, which are also shown in Table 1.

Input:

- Do all trainers meet the minimum qualifications required by Peace Corps?

Process:

- How effective is the overall structure of the training program?
- Does the training program reflect current development in TEFL and foreign language instruction?
- How effectively are training sessions delivered?

Output:

- Do a sufficient number of Volunteers meet the certification criteria and obtain the certificate?

Impact:

- Is there an increase in Volunteers' knowledge and skills about English education?

Step 4. Designing Evaluation Activities

After the evaluation questions were drafted, the next step was to design evaluation activities to collect data to address the evaluation questions. CAL discussed with Peace Corps stakeholders to understand what evaluation activities were practical given the resources available in the program and what evaluation activities would be most valued by stakeholders. As a result of these discussions, CAL proposed four activities to address the evaluation questions.

Annual review of trainer credentials: To ensure that the programs have high-quality trainers to deliver the program content, CAL proposed to conduct an annual review of TEFL trainer credentials for new posts entering the TEFL Certificate track.

Review of Peace Corps TEFL Standards: To ensure that the Peace Corps TEFL standards serve as a solid foundation for rigorous and high-quality training for TEFL certificate participants, CAL proposed to conduct a standards-review by following the process model of standards validation recommended by Kuhlman and Knezevic (n.d.). This will be elaborated upon in the next section as a specific example of implementing program evaluation activities.

Review of learning and assessment activities: CAL proposed to review the course content as well as classroom assessment activities to ensure that Peace Corps Volunteers are exposed to quality instruction that would sufficiently prepare them for the future needs of being an TEFL educator.

Review of assessment results: CAL proposed to conduct annual reviews of Volunteer assessment results, with the goal of tracking the number of Volunteers that successfully meet the certificate requirements.

Conducting Specific Program Evaluation Activities: Review of Peace Corps TEFL Standards

The overall framework provides the blueprint for the evaluation activities to be carried out in order to address the evaluation questions. After the overall framework is established, the next step is to determine how to conduct specific evaluation activities. In this case, I will use the example of evaluating the Peace Corps TEFL Standards to illustrate the steps for conducting specific evaluation activities.

Step 1: Investigating stakeholder expectations

At the inception of the Peace Corps TEFL Standards evaluation process, CAL assembled a panel of four CAL language education experts with a long history of program evaluation experience. In order to determine whether the Peace Corps TEFL Standards matched stakeholder expectations, the panelists gathered information about the intended use of the standards and examined whether the organizing format of the standards matched their intended use.

Step 2: Identifying key evaluation questions

The primary evaluation question CAL identified revolved around whether the standards represent the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for both domestic and international contexts as required by the Peace Corps' mission, and as defined by the current literature on TEFL and foreign language education.

Step 3: Gathering and analyzing data

The CAL panelists scrutinized the standards as well as the curriculum to determine the extent to which the standards are aligned with topics covered in the training sessions. Furthermore, the panelists evaluated the ease by which the standards could be assessed.

Step 4: Making recommendations

After the CAL panelists reviewed the standards, they provided a cohesive set of recommendations for revising the standards based on the questions of coverage and alignment. The CAL panelists re-reviewed the standards subsequent to revision to ensure that all crucial gaps had been adequately addressed.

Takeaways

This commentary describes how a program evaluation framework was created and how program evaluation activities were conducted in the context of the Peace Corps TEFL certification program. These examples bring to light key elements of successful program evaluation processes that are applicable to other contexts, which includes selecting an appropriate evaluation approach, creating a logic model to clarify anticipated outcomes of a program and resources available to attain those outcomes, defining evaluation questions and designing evaluation activities. For more information about meeting your program evaluation needs, please contact CAL at info@cal.org.

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About CAL

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is a non-profit organization founded in 1959. Headquartered in Washington DC, CAL has earned an international reputation for its contributions to the fields of bilingual and dual language education, English as a second language, world languages education, language policy, assessment, immigrant and refugee integration, literacy, dialect studies, and the education of linguistically and culturally diverse adults and children. The mission of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is to promote language learning and cultural understanding by serving as a trusted resource for research, services, and policy analysis. Through its work, CAL seeks solutions to issues involving language and culture as they relate to access and equity in education and society around the globe.

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