

About BSR

A leader in corporate responsibility since 1992, BSR works with its global network of more than 250 member companies to develop sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. Visit www.bsr.org for more information.

About CiYuan

BSR's three-year CiYuan (China Philanthropy Incubator) initiative builds innovative cross-sector partnerships to enhance the value of social investment in China. With guidance from international and Chinese leaders in the field, CiYuan improves the capacity of local foundations and NGOs to serve as durable and effective partners with business. Ultimately, CiYuan will integrate philanthropy with core business strategy, foster collaboration, and inspire innovation. Visit ciyuan.bsr.org for more information.

About Huizeren

Based in Beijing, Huizeren was established in 2003 as a local capacity building organization specializing in volunteer training and civil society development. In 2010, with guidance from BSR's CiYuan initiative, Huizeren received funding from Hewlett-Packard (HP) and the Narada Foundation to localize Taproot's model and drive the development of a pro bono program in China with the goal of being financially sustainable after 2 years.

About HP Global Social Innovation

Social innovation at HP centers on the belief that the same passion, energy, and culture of innovation that make HP a successful company can also be used to make a profound and positive social impact in the world. HP's Office of Global Social Innovation helps share HP talent and technology where they are needed most, in the areas of education, entrepreneurship, health, and community involvement.

HP and Huizeren Bring Business Talent to China's NGO Sector

September 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines the evolution of the partnership between Hewlett-Packard (HP) and Huizeren, a local Chinese nonprofit. Both of these organizations came together as part of a broader initiative; to drive forward the concept of pro bono work between corporates and local NGOs in China. Additional partners in this initiative included the Taproot Foundation (US), The Narada Foundation (China) and BSR. The pro bono work which is described in this case study is based on the Taproot Foundation's US model. Their program aims to connect business talent with local NGOs and facilitate professional volunteering projects that strengthen NGO capacity.

BSR applied its expertise in cross-sector partnerships to convene and facilitate the partnership through; clarifying the roles, value added, and expected strategic benefits of each organization, to develop the initial two-year plan as well as provide ongoing support for Huizeren. Together, the five partners set out to combine financial resources, unique competencies, and networks to ignite the growth of pro bono activity in China.

This case study focuses primarily on the roles of HP and Huizeren in this partnership. It demonstrates the challenges faced by a company that seeks to use its core competencies to help a grassroots NGO in China develop a new corporate-NGO partnership model. For further details on the broader partnership, refer to the report: "[Lessons of Localization: Adapting International Models in China](#)".

Based on this, there are seven recommendations:

1. Understand your own resources before making a commitment to a potential partner
2. Understand intra-organizational dynamics and ensure all key staff have appropriate buy-in and incentives to provide support
3. Test different employee outreach strategies before committing to a particular strategy to recruit volunteers
4. Learn from similar initiatives within the company including those overseas
5. Pay attention to cross-sector dynamics where different working styles and perspectives can affect communication and undermine trust
6. Establish appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms to monitor progress, overcome challenges and reflect on learnings
7. Reduce dependency on key individuals by improving knowledge management and governance mechanisms

Lastly, we have included lessons specific to third party facilitators of corporate-NGO partnerships in China.

BACKGROUND

In September 2010, Aaron Hurst, Founder of the Taproot Foundation, was invited to join CiYuan's International Advisory Board. Whilst he was in China, he spoke about Taproot's pro bono service in the US and his talk ignited enthusiasm for the model's potential in China—where there is large pool of increasingly engaged professional employees but a growing non-profit sector which struggles to gain traction and operates with limited capacity.

Taproot and BSR saw potential for the pro bono concept in China to build capacity among local non-profits but to operationalize this idea they required a capable intermediary, to match the right NGOs with professional volunteer teams.

With Aaron's membership on the CiYuan advisory board and the CiYuan initiative's funding to support BSR's time to develop innovative corporate-NGO partnerships in China, BSR's CiYuan team identified Huizeren, a Beijing-based NGO, active in the volunteering sector, as the intermediary partner. Not only would Huizeren be able to adapt the model locally through enabling more companies to contribute skilled volunteers to build NGO capacity, but it also provided Huizeren with a corporate partner to implement Taproot's model in China.

With support from Taproot Foundation, HP was brought in as the corporate partner, to provide funding and additional resources for Huizeren. With a strategic business interest in developing its pro bono program globally, HP wanted to develop Huizeren into a capable intermediary that could provide skilled volunteering opportunities for its staff in China.

BSR leveraged its local network in Beijing to secure additional funding from the Narada Foundation, a Chinese foundation prominent in NGO capacity building. Narada saw the pro bono program as an opportunity to strengthen civil society and potentially strengthen capacity for its own NGO grantees.

PARTNERSHIP ROLES AND RESOURCES

By December 2010, this unique cross-sector, global partnership was united, by the shared purpose of developing pro bono partnership in China:

Partner	Value Added	Strategic Benefits
Originating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual property worth over \$1 million • \$50,000 in-kind staff time to train and mentor • Thought leadership and program management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Low-risk global expansion of mission and model</i>
Implementing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local staff to build and implement the program • Expertise in volunteering • Access to local NGO community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Support to launch pro bono in China</i> • <i>Expansion into skilled volunteering space</i>
Supporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$60,000 over 2 years • Expertise in working with local NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Capacity building for NGO grantees</i> • <i>NGO sector development</i>
Supporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$30,000 over 2 years • IT skills to develop online platform • Access to professional volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Employee development</i> • <i>Brand leadership in social innovation</i>
Facilitating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$40,000 in-kind staff time for technical support to Huizeren team • \$6,000 for US study trip • Expertise in partnership development • Access to member companies and local NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Corporate-NGO partnership in China</i>

Phase 0: Sourcing Funds December 2010

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

With the support of Taproot Foundation, BSR worked with Huizeren to develop a \$90,000 proposal to HP foundation, which included defining partner roles, program outcomes, an implementation plan with phased goals, budget, and a staffing plan. HP in the US confirmed a \$30,000 grant over two years to Huizeren. Narada Foundation also approved a \$60,000 grant application from Huizeren following earlier meetings they had with BSR.

Phase 1: Preparation
January 2011

Early on in this process, Huizeren identified they needed to hire a new program manager to develop and run the pro bono program, and an IT manager to be responsible for the online platform to recruit volunteers and NGOs. Huizeren hired a program manager and BSR began meeting with her twice a month to provide advice.

Huizeren held a meeting with HP China, BSR and Narada Foundation in February. The partners agreed to meet regularly as a project Steering Committee. They agreed the committee would keep partners updated and allow partners to give feedback on plans and suggestions to overcome challenges. At this time, Huizeren also began conversations with HP about how to best source volunteers for pilot projects. HP had a large volunteer association in place, which would serve as an access point into the staff pool. Huizeren's program manager would work directly with the head of the volunteer association to promote and recruit volunteers. HP also offered their public relations department to assist with promotional activities, although this offer was never taken up by Huizeren due to other priorities.

Phase 2: Learning
March 2011

In March, Huizeren's founder and program manager, along with a public relations manager from Narada Foundation, traveled to Taproot's headquarters in San Francisco to learn about Taproot's program and participate in several pro bono activities. Whilst they were there, HP hosted a promotional event on pro bono activity and volunteering in China in order to attract further support for Huizeren from companies and stakeholders in Silicon Valley.

Upon returning to Beijing, Huizeren organized the second Pro Bono Steering Committee meeting to share findings from the study trip and discuss the plan for the upcoming year. This was to be the last steering committee meeting that Huizeren would hold until August 2012, after the evaluation recommended reinstating it. This was partly due to increasing staff focus on program pilots, lack of clear purpose, structure, ownership for the committee, and internal organizational challenges within Huizeren.

Phase 3: Localization
April 2011

Huizeren began the initial steps of localizing the Taproot model. They began with adapting and translating Taproot's materials. In addition, HP and Huizeren met to discuss volunteer recruiting strategies for the program. However, without an IT manager who was still not hired, Huizeren did not have sufficient capacity to manage the proposed IT platform project that HP volunteers were originally supposed to help with.

To identify potential pro bono service types relevant for China, Huizeren conducted a needs assessment with 20 local NGOs. Huizeren chose three NGOs for pilot projects and promoted the program to companies including HP and members of the ICT Volunteer Alliance (a Huizeren-run group involving companies like Intel, Ericsson, and Baidu) to recruit volunteer teams for the projects.

Phase 4: Pilot
June 2011

HP and Huizeren were facing challenges mobilizing employees with the right skills, interests and availability through the volunteer association. These volunteers tended to be younger and lacked the specialized experience necessary for projects. Many were in the sales department, and these skills did not easily transfer to pro bono projects. Despite having paid time off, employees also had trouble getting permission from middle managers. Huizeren tried adapting the job descriptions that were sent to HP volunteers in order to source the relevant skilled employees for shorter-term pro bono positions (to work with the Huizeren project manager and develop the pro bono project blueprints) compared to the positions they originally asked for however they still failed to get enough suitable volunteer applications.

To boost volunteer recruitment efforts, HP arranged for Huizeren to present to 100 staff at the end of August 2011. Afterwards, HP (including the global lead for pro bono activity), Huizeren, and BSR brainstormed potential solutions to recruitment issues, realizing that perhaps the volunteer association was not the appropriate vehicle for sourcing pro bono volunteers. Instead, they decided to approach the heads of functional departments directly to source volunteers, starting with the legal department, whose lawyers had annual requirements for pro bono service. The group also discussed testing a training model, in which a preliminary training session would be used to identify NGO needs before starting a longer-term pro bono project.

During a meeting in September, HP's legal department expressed interest in this idea for 2012.

Of the three pilot projects that began in August, only one was completed: a marketing strategy project with IBM and a community development NGO. The other two were discontinued due to staff transitions at Huizeren during the summer of 2011 and a lack of capacity at the NGO to manage the volunteer team. Those projects that involved HP volunteers discontinued due to a lack of clarity around roles and expectations and a changing statement of work throughout the project.

Organizational turnover at Huizeren and challenges in volunteer recruitment caused delays in program localization and piloting during the summer and fall of 2011. In December, BSR worked with Huizeren to re-evaluate strategy and develop a revised program plan, experimenting with shorter projects that involved training and coaching. In February 2012, the first program manager left for family reasons and a new project director – with significant experience in the private sector – was hired to rebuild the team and launch more pilot projects. This project director initiated monthly meetings with HP China and HP US to check in on progress and discuss ideas, such as integrating the pro bono program into HP's global "Top Talent" program designed to provide development opportunities to exceptional employees in the HR department.

Phase 5: Launch and Outreach March 2012

BSR promoted the Pro Bono program to CSR managers in Beijing and Shanghai. Huizeren organized a pro bono legal training, delivered by HP lawyers to 10 local grassroots NGOs. Huizeren also connected with the HP volunteer team in Shanghai, which was interested in participating in the pro bono program. Most of HP Asia's finance team is based in Shanghai, and HP had experience engaging finance professionals in pro bono projects in the US. HP gave Huizeren an additional \$9,000 to support more projects in different departments and geographies.

In May, the new project director mobilized staff energies around the pro bono program, initiating partnerships with new companies, conducting more needs assessments, and starting several new pilot projects. BSR also began a three-month evaluation of progress so far. In August 2012, Taproot's founder, Aaron Hurst, visited Beijing to review the evaluation findings and offer strategic advice on building the pro bono program in China. During this time, the Pro Bono Steering Committee reconvened and BSR hosted two successful promotional events in Beijing and London with HP and the other partners speaking. The goal was to raise greater awareness around the pro bono concept and seek to recruit more companies and foundations as partners.

PROGRAM RESULTS AND KEY LEARNINGS

The pro bono program has been successful in breaking new ground. Huizeren achieved several targets and exceeded some, though others were harder to attain. The number of companies and NGOs reached through the program exceeded proposed goals. As of early August 2012, Huizeren had assessed the needs of over 30 NGOs and completed three pilot projects with 18 volunteers from six companies contributing over 400 hours to benefit 12 local NGOs. A further five projects with 20 volunteers from eight companies, including HP, are still ongoing. Since beginning the project, Huizeren has discontinued at least five projects, either due to a lack of NGO capacity to manage volunteers, staff transitions within Huizeren, or misaligned expectations between participants.

Both partners gained important insights from the program:

- » The market's need for pro bono does not necessarily translate into market demand. Volunteering is a relatively new idea in China with most people only recently becoming familiar with "hands-on" volunteering
- » Employee engagement programs require a solid understanding of employee interests, skills, and time constraints
- » To engage volunteers outside the legal department, the program must educate volunteers and show case studies as evidence of success and proof of concept
- » Recruiting volunteers through formal volunteer associations is not always successful; more individualized, targeted approaches are more effective, especially when the program is in its early stages
- » China's "trust crisis" creates suspicion between NGO and corporate sectors, making trust building essential between volunteers and NGOs
- » Standardized tools and processes for program management can serve as a strong basis for scaling up later on

For further details, refer to the document: "[Lessons of Localization: Adapting International Models in China](#)"

Lessons Learned From the Partnership

Through a detailed evaluation of the partnership, BSR identified the following key lessons:

- 1. Understand your own resources before committing to support a potential partner**

Each partner should understand and be candid about their capacity to support the program before committing to it. Although certain resources may seem readily available in the planning phase unexpected challenges may emerge during implementation. Thus, it is advisable to spend time at the outset to check the feasibility of using them. For example, recruiting HP employees with certain skills and time took more energy than expected, partially because both sides lacked understanding of employee skills, interests, and constraints. This would have been useful information to have early on in the planning stages. On Huizeren's side, limited resources and the lack of a full-time IT manager prevented the development of an online platform that would have made volunteer recruitment and matching easier.
- 2. Understand intra-organizational dynamics and ensure all key staff have appropriate buy-in and incentives to provide support**

Intra-organizational dynamics should be considered when designing and allocating staff resources for a new program. Although high-level leadership may support the program, this buy-in does not always trickle down through to middle management or to the implementation level. This can be problematic if implementation-level staff are lending time voluntarily and/or do not report directly to the executive that made the decision to commit to the new program. For example, the HP liaison tasked with recruiting volunteers did so on a voluntary basis, was unfamiliar with the pro bono program concept and common challenges, and did not have a direct reporting relationship with the executives funding and overseeing the project. Lacking strong incentives to dedicate the time needed to sourcing volunteers, the liaison delegated many tasks to other volunteers, which created delays and uncertainty over who was "owning" the project.
- 3. Test different employee outreach strategies before committing to a particular strategy to recruit volunteers**

When programs involve engaging the corporate partner's employees, it is helpful to brainstorm and test multiple forms of employee outreach before committing to one particular employee outreach strategy. HP and Huizeren dedicated several months to brainstorming solutions for how to better recruit volunteers through HP's volunteer association. Eventually Huizeren learned – through partner discussions and conducting projects at other companies – that it could be more effective to go through department heads or highly motivated senior managers to recruit volunteer teams. They also learned that it was helpful to create a grassroots approach by establishing employee "champions" that can promote the program to their colleagues. Although one strategy may seem like the obvious choice at first, developing back-up strategies early on can save time and help speed up program development.
- 4. Learn from similar initiatives within the company including those overseas**

In some cases, a multinational corporation may have implemented a similar program in another country office. Partners should take advantage of these opportunities to learn about critical success factors and challenges from their experiences working with local NGOs overseas. In addition to the US, HP has expanded its pro bono program to Brazil, where it uses a core team of volunteer program managers (including someone from corporate communications) to partner with several local NGOs to receive pro bono services from HP employees. The corporation's global network is a valuable starting point to find creative solutions to common problems.
- 5. Pay attention to cross-sector dynamics at the individual level where different working styles and perspectives can affect communication and undermine trust**

Take the time to build mutual trust and respect between corporate and NGO partners at the implementation level, where personalities dominate working relationships and ultimately affect program progress. Differences in age and professional experience between partners can exacerbate challenges to establishing mutual respect and open communication. At the implementation level, this partnership experienced delays due in part to strained communication between staff in the different partners. Before the program begins, the facilitator can help build in a time period for both sides to get to know each other's strengths, weaknesses, and expectations, to give each partner an opportunity to establish credibility and inspire confidence in each other.
- 6. Establish appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms to monitor progress, overcome challenges and reflect on learnings**

An appropriate governance system should be in place to ensure mutual accountability – holding all partners responsible for their commitments and tracking against goals to identify problem areas and allocate resources as needed. However, the system should not be so rigorous as to undermine partner trust or introduce administrative burdens on the NGO, shifting decision-making control towards supporting partners and weakening the environment for experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation. With no regular Steering Committee meetings between all five project partners, HP had informal, irregular visibility into Huizeren's activities, challenges, and needs. Despite this, HP respected Huizeren's ownership over program implementation and their ability to steer the program's direction without the burden of accountability to other partners. To create transparency while encouraging risk-taking, the accountability system should prioritize incremental learning on both sides and incorporate lessons learned into short-term goals as evidence of progress.

Communicating challenges, needs, and lessons should be expected and encouraged among partners, not feared or avoided, despite the cultural preference in China not to admit mistakes or challenges.

- 7. Reduce dependency on key individuals by improving knowledge management and governance mechanisms**
With a program that spans multiple years, partners should expect some level of turnover in one or both sides. By planning accordingly, partners can minimize the effects of turnover, such as loss of organizational and programmatic knowledge and weakened relationships between partner organizations. A governance system with established processes and procedures could have helped orient new staff, re-align the mission across partners, and served as a centralized knowledge bank for program history. Corporate partners should encourage and share best practices regarding knowledge management. Both partners should try to ensure programs and relationships are not dependent on specific individuals but that relevant knowledge is shared amongst broader teams

LESSONS FOR THIRD PARTY FACILITATORS OF CORPORATE-NGO PARTNERSHIPS

Third parties can play an important role in creating and facilitating partnerships. From BSR's experience, such third parties should pay attention to the following:

Develop goals that encourage organizational buy-in, reflection, learning and sustainability in addition to specific program success - Facilitators should encourage goals that measure learning at each phase in addition to activities and program progress to encourage risk-taking and innovation throughout program development. In addition to clear responsibilities, it can also be useful to include goals for each partner and how they contribute to the overall program goals to support mutual accountability.

Ensure there is an appropriate governance structure to monitor the partnership - Partnership design lays the blueprint, but partnership management ensures results. Third-party facilitators should identify an appropriate governance structure, ensure clear ownership over any governance mechanisms that are established, and review the governance mechanism as the partnership evolves to ensure it is fit for purpose. Facilitators should also provide support to the partners so that they can utilize the governance mechanisms to meet their goals.

Reevaluate roles and expectations as partnership evolves – As the needs, risks, and challenges unfold, an appropriate governance system and/or intervention by a third party facilitator should facilitate a regular reevaluation of partner roles and expectations at key milestones.

Respect autonomy but identify high-risk decisions - Facilitators should identify critical success factors and intervene when important decisions are made related to these. Facilitators should intervene only to ensure that suitable input is gathered and the right questions are asked and discussed before decisions are made. Facilitators should allow partners to make—and own—their own decisions and then respect decisions once they are made.

Encourage regular reporting in order to create a culture of reflection and learning – Regular reporting that identifies challenges, lessons and changes are as important as reporting on progress. Facilitators should encourage and support reporting which does not need to be long but should be honest and instill a culture of reflection and learning by all partners. Facilitators should ensure partners are aware of each other's needs and challenges and encourage discussion to address the challenges.

Provide regular and structured mentoring, and do not underestimate its value – Facilitators can add tremendous value by providing mentoring to partners. Mentoring should be carefully designed, yet separated as much as possible from the partnership governance. Mentoring could thus focus on helping the NGO's program manager overcome current challenges, predict future challenges and develop appropriate plans and documents. Similar mentoring could also be helpful for corporate partners as well. Such in-person mentoring sessions should to be at least twice a month with frequent communication in between to review documents and provide advice—often through an approach of “ask the right questions” rather than just providing the answers. Important decisions on the program's development and strategy should be made through alternative governance mechanisms; in this case the steering committee.