

Lessons of Localization

Adapting the Pro Bono Model into China

August 2012



About this Report

In September 2010, Aaron Hurst, Founder of the Taproot Foundation, spoke in Beijing about Taproot's proven model of pro bono service, which makes business talent available to the non-profit sector in the US. His talk ignited enthusiasm for the model's potential in China – where a large pool of professional employees is increasingly engaged in volunteering and a growing non-profit sector struggles to gain traction with limited resources. In the following months, BSR identified a Beijing-based NGO partner, Huizeren, to adapt Taproot's model locally and drive the development of pro bono service in China. As of August 2012, Huizeren has been implementing the model for 20 months supported by a cross-sector, global partnership between Taproot, Hewlett-Packard (HP), the Narada Foundation (a leading Chinese organization), and BSR.

This report, written by Ingrid Larson with support by Adam Lane, aims to capture lessons learned from this unique approach of localizing an international program model into the Chinese market. It was developed between June and July 2012, alongside an evaluation of Huizeren's Pro Bono program. Research is based on internal document review, direct observation, and over 35 interviews and focus groups with Huizeren staff, funding partners, program participants, and program stakeholders from local companies and civil society.

The authors would like to thank the interviewees and focus group participants for their thoughtful contributions. Any errors that remain are those of the authors.

ABOUT TAPROOT

The Taproot Foundation engages business professionals in pro bono consulting projects with non-profits in five US metro areas. Through its signature Service Grant model, Taproot makes grants to local non-profits for high-quality professional consulting services that strengthen the infrastructure, management, and governance capabilities of these organizations. Following a decade of focusing only in the US, in 2012, Taproot began to investigate the potential for a Global Fellows Program that would support leaders driving the pro bono movement around the world. Visit www.taprootfoundation.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 HP and the Narada Foundation to localize Taproot's program model and drive the development of pro bono in the local Beijing market, with the goal of being financially sustainable after two years. Beginning in 2011, Huizeren has implemented pilot projects with corporate volunteers and local NGOs in Beijing. Visit www.huizeren.org.cn for more information.

ABOUT BSR'S CIYUAN INITIATIVE

A leader in corporate responsibility since 1992, BSR works with a global network of over 250 member companies to develop sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. CiYuan is a three-year BSR initiative that builds innovative cross-sector partnerships to enhance the value of social investment in China. CiYuan improves the capacity of local foundations and NGOs to serve as durable and effective partners with business. Visit www.ciyuan.bsr.org for more information.

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Introduction

China faces a wide variety of social, environmental and economic challenges. Solving these in such a large country is a herculean task, yet one that is urgent for China's—and the world's—continuing prosperity. Although China is developing its own solutions unique to its context, it also needs new ideas and expertise from other countries. To succeed in China, proven models from abroad must be adapted effectively. These models can inspire new forms of localized innovation and bring scalable solutions to longstanding issues.



“Thirty years of phenomenal economic growth has come at great social and environmental costs, leaving an imbalance that the [Chinese] government is addressing through a ‘scientific outlook on development.’”

- William Valentino, Professor at Beijing Normal University's China Institute of Social Responsibility

Proven prescriptions for one society's problems are not easily exported abroad. History has shown that replicating best practices across national boundaries is not always effective, especially when driven by outside investment and control. Instead, this report is based on the premise that an inventive idea can be mindfully *adapted* into another country, seeded and grown into a new solution through localized innovation, global partnership, and patience.

Now, at a critical stage in its development, China is a laboratory for innovation. transformation of the social sector. Uneven development has given rise to a

“It is [in China] that urgency and innovation come together – not only in the same era, but in the same country.”

- Bill Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

widening wealth gap, rural-urban disparity, unequal access to education and healthcare, and severe environmental damage. Faced with this range and complexity of issues, there is a need for innovative solutions. Recognizing this, the government has begun reforming regulations to be more supportive of social sector development, seeing its value as an alternative to purely business or government-led solutions and seeking to build a philanthropic platform through which society’s wealth can be channeled—and new ideas piloted and scaled—to reach those most in need. From 2007 to 2010, total charitable donations increased fivefold while the number of private foundations tripled, reflecting a collective will to find solutions to China’s pressing issues. In partnership with government and businesses, the booming foundation, NGO and social enterprise community is positioned to serve as a key vehicle for testing and delivering these solutions. With government backing, a local program that has proven its value and scalability can be rolled out rapidly across the country.

This report is for Chinese and international organizations from civil society, foundations, academia, and the private sector that see potential for their ideas, to meet this need. We define *localization* as adapting an idea or model to fit the unique culture, language, and environment of a local market. Insights are based on the recent work of BSR’s CiYuan Initiative in adapting the Taproot Foundation’s pro bono service program from the US to China in partnership with Beijing-based Huizeren.

The report:

- » Discusses approaches for scaling to China;
- » Presents an example of the Partnership Adaption approach through BSR’s collaboration with the Taproot Foundation and Huizeren;
- » Identifies lessons of localization for organizations considering this approach.

Approaches for Scaling to China

Note: In our case study, Taproot responded to the request from China to help a local organization create a pro bono program, and was not actively seeking to scale its program into China.

Guiding Questions:

- What are our goals for scaling? Can we achieve them by ourselves?
- Are we focused more on results or innovation?
- How much control versus flexibility do we want?

When companies expand their business to China, entry decisions are guided by careful market assessment and cost-benefit calculations. In the social sector, how do we make these decisions – without profit as a clear marker and when the “product” is a pioneering idea that requires careful adaptation to local conditions?

Multiple options exist for organizations seeking to scale their solutions to China. The chosen entry approach will depend on the organization’s goals for scaling and desired level of investment, risk, and control. Each approach involves a trade-off between advantages and inherent risks.

For simplicity’s sake, the table below shows five possible approaches along a continuum with one end representing more localized control and lower risk and investment for the foreign organization, and the other representing more foreign control and higher risk and investment.

	← Localized Control Low Investment & Risk			→ Foreign Control High Investment & Risk	
	Motivated Individual	Grant Model	Partner Adaption	Franchise	In-Country Office
Funding:	Local	Foreign	Mixed	Mixed	Foreign
Success Factors:	Determination Personal network	Accountability Partner sustainability	Partner readiness Partnership structure	Model scalability Network management	Local staff Reputation
Example:	Friends of Nature (Liang Congjie)	Leaders’ Quest Foundation (grantee: ActionAid China)	Taproot-Huizeren China Foundation Center	Dialogue in the Dark Junior Achievement	Save the Children Greenpeace ORBIS

These five approaches will serve a basis for discussing the decision factors and tradeoffs involved in choosing an entry strategy. A brief overview of each is provided, highlighting potential advantages and disadvantages. It is important to note that over time, the approach can transform – for example, the organization built by a motivated individual could later join a franchise model, or an in-country office could evolve into a partner adaption (as the organization localizes). However, this report focuses on initial entry approaches by the organization.

Motivated Individual

Advantages

- Self-initiated within the community
- Driven by local leadership and entrepreneurial vision
- Low investment and risk

Disadvantages

- Longer time to scale
- Highly dependent on individual’s personal qualities and resources
- No foreign control

Motivated Individual

This approach involves inspiring a motivated individual based in China to drive the development of the concept or mission from scratch. This option is highly dependent on that person’s entrepreneurial capabilities, determination, and personal network. Because the individual is building something out of nothing, it will likely take the longest time to develop and scale up. This approach offers the greatest opportunity for localized control, requiring little to no initial involvement or investment from the foreign organization. The local individual bears all the risk. This approach might be effective when the local market for an idea is in early-stages, meaning that awareness or demand for program services is low. In this situation, a forward-looking, entrepreneurial leader committed to the idea can build momentum, inspire others, and modify it to fit local needs.

Grant Model

Advantages

- Control over objectives
- Allows flexibility of terms
- Donors can handle risk

Disadvantages

- Short-term commitment
- Lack of localized, sustainable control
- Administrative burden on local partners
- Lack of visibility into execution

Partner Adaption

Advantages

- Jointly initiated
- Driven by multi-stakeholder, international partnership
- Localized control aimed at sustainability
- Low investment and risk

Disadvantages

- Dependent on local partner's readiness
- Risk of poor partnership governance
- Risk of partnership dependence

Franchise Model

Advantages

- Locally initiated and financed to some degree by franchisee
- Access to peer network
- Proven model and brand

Disadvantages

- Risk to brand reputation
- Restricted local control
- Cost of monitoring

In-Country Office

Advantages

- High control
- Established presence
- Long-term perspective

Disadvantages

- High investment (office, hiring, registering, building credibility)
- Risk of failure
- Registration obstacles

Grant Model

With this common approach, grant makers spend money to pursue their objectives through independent grantees. Based on its goals, values, and priorities, the organization funds a recipient to support discrete projects with specific outputs that are normally specified by the grantee through submission of a proposal, as well as some reporting and compliance. Grants may be rigid (requiring certain outcomes for the full disbursement of funds) or flexible (experimenting with high-risk new solutions) and often allow flexibility for the grantee to define the exact project based on what is best for the local context. In many cases, flexible grants carry a higher level of risk without the guarantee of results but may ultimately be more successful by allowing for greater flexibility. Grants tend to be short-term commitments that rarely lead to sustainable programs and may create dependency on the foreign organization.

Partner Adaption

Instead of inspiring a single visionary, this approach involves motivating a new or existing organization to adapt an existing program model into a local context. This could happen when a local organization seeks outside support, when a group of stakeholders jointly decide to start the partner organization, or a third party sees a high-potential match between the model and a local partner. Success hinges on the local partner's readiness to take on the program, including staff capacity and stability, strategic alignment, and financial security.

In addition to a local partner, this approach often involves engaging supporting partners – aligned around strategic goals – to help fund or promote the program. In this way, the approach offers innovative opportunities to combine resources, capabilities, and networks across different partners to accelerate program development with little investment from the foreign organization. The long run goal of this approach is sustainable program management by the local partner. Especially in the program's early stages, the partnership should have a clear governance structure to share leanings and ensure accountability from all sides.

Franchise

This can take the form of a traditional franchise model but for non-profits or for social businesses. For non-profit organizations, the franchise can be a global network of independently run local partners that share a brand name. In both situations, the local partner is responsible for sourcing financial resources necessary for start-up and potentially franchise fees. In exchange, the foreign franchisor contributes some form of branding and established reputation, best practices, and access to a global network of peers. The network could include shared technologies or infrastructure that provides economies of scale. To qualify as a franchisee, the local organization will need to meet requirements and follow guidelines, which will depend on the franchisor's desired level of control. Despite the potential for less autonomy, this approach offers less risk for the local organization compared to starting a program from scratch.

In-Country Office

To establish a long-term local presence, a foreign organization can open an office in China. This approach requires the highest level of investment, risk, and control of operations. Regulatory hurdles in China have forced many non-profit organizations to set up as companies instead or to remain unregistered. However, these organizations cannot lease space, hire employees, obtain tax benefits, enter into cooperative agreements, or open bank accounts. Entering the market with established credibility, deep networks, and financial resources helps the chances of registration. Another option for foreign organizations is to ally with existing organizations by setting up an office with an academic or legal center.

“Our mission is to support the development of the third sector and help foster civil society so we think if this program can take off in China, it will play an important role in meeting our goal and long-term vision.”

- Lin Hong,
Program Manager,
Narada Foundation

“Because our employees have deep expertise in high-value fields such as technology, engineering, human resources, and manufacturing, we encourage them to focus those desperately needed talents on social challenges.”

- HP Global Social
Innovation website

Partner Adaption – Pro Bono to China

In response to a request from China to help create a local pro bono program, Taproot agreed to collaborate with BSR in pursuing **Partner Adaption** as a low-risk, highly localized approach to spreading their model to China in late 2010. This method engaged Taproot in the training and mentoring process. This section provides background on the partnership, program timeline, and results as an example case study of the Partner Adaption approach.

Taproot and Huizeren

Before being introduced in November 2010, Taproot and Huizeren were separate operating organizations with distinct histories, missions, and programs. In the US, Taproot had established itself as a global pro bono leader through its Service Grant program, which mobilizes teams of business professionals to deliver quality, high-impact work for non-profits. In China, Huizeren had established itself as a recognized leader in promoting and supporting sustainable volunteering and building NGO capacity to better utilize volunteers.

Taproot and Huizeren as of August 2010

Partner	Taproot	Huizeren
Founding Date	» 2001	» 2003
Areas Served	» San Francisco (HQ), New York City, Chicago, Washington DC, Los Angeles	» Beijing
Staff	» 48	» 7
Annual Budget	» \$4.2 million	» \$150,000
Mission	» Lead, mobilize and engage professionals in pro bono service that drives social change	» Improve the contribution of volunteering to Chinese civil society
Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Service Grant Program: signature pro bono program giving non-profits access to business talent » Thought Leadership » Advisory Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Volunteer training » Volunteer management system development » Research and publicity for volunteering in China
Achievements (as of 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expanded program from San Francisco to 5 cities nationwide » Engaged about 5,000 business professionals in over 780,000 hours of pro bono service » Delivered more than \$85.4 million in pro bono services through over 1,300 pro bono projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Built a pool of 100 volunteer trainers » Trained more than 600 NGOs and youth groups with about 10,000 volunteers and managers around China » Advised 50 NGOs on setting up volunteer management systems

In September 2010, Aaron Hurst, Founder of the Taproot Foundation, came to China as part of the newly formed CiYuan initiative’s international advisory board,






and spoke in Beijing about Taproot’s proven model of pro bono service. His talk ignited enthusiasm for the model’s potential in China – where a large pool of professional employees is increasingly engaged in volunteering and a growing non-profit sector struggles to gain traction with limited capacity.

A global partnership across sectors

Taproot and BSR saw market potential for the pro bono idea and a need for a capable intermediary to match NGOs with volunteer teams and ensure project quality. The next step was deciding how to bring the model over. As a non-profit focused on serving US cities at that time, expansion to China was not Taproot’s priority. Instead, with Aaron’s membership on their advisory board, BSR’s CiYuan team helped create a partnership in China to implement a Chinese “Pro Bono” service program and identified Huizeren, a Beijing NGO active in the volunteering space, as the implementing partner to adapt the model locally.

BSR recognized additional supporting partners were needed to contribute funding and resources. Taproot connected Huizeren to one of its own funders, Hewlett-Packard (HP). With a strategic business interest in developing its pro bono program globally, HP agreed to provide funding and access to its pool of employees in Beijing. BSR leveraged its local network in Beijing to secure additional funding from the Narada Foundation, a prominent Chinese foundation. Narada saw the Pro Bono program as an opportunity to strengthen civil society and potentially build capacity for its own NGO grantees.

BSR applied its expertise in cross-sector partnership development to bring the partners together, clarify the roles, value added, and expected strategic benefits of each organization, and to develop the initial two-year plan. Together, the five partners set out to combine financial resources, unique competencies, and networks to facilitate the growth of pro bono in China.

Partner	Resources	Competencies	Networks	Strategic Benefits
Originating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IP worth over \$1 million • \$50,000 in-kind staff time to train and mentor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought leadership • Program management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global - Multinational funders (HP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Low-risk global expansion of model</i>
Implementing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local staff to build and implement the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise in volunteering • NGO training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local - Community of NGOs • Local – ICT Volunteer Alliance (of companies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Support to launch a pro bono program in China</i> • <i>Expansion into skilled volunteering</i>
Supporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$60,000 over 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise in working with local NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local - NGO grantees 	<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 • Staff as pro bono consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT skills to develop online platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global and Local – Employee 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 of staff time to develop partnership and technical support to Huizeren • \$6,000 for study trip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership development • Cross-sector facilitation • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global and Local - Member companies’ CSR programs • Local – social sector community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Corporate-NGO partnership in China</i>

By December 2010, the cross-sector, global partnership was solidified, united by the shared strategic purpose of developing pro bono in China. With partners in place and Huizeren at the wheel, Taproot's model was ready for localization.

Implementation Plan Timeline

January 2011

BSR worked with Huizeren to develop an implementation plan that would break the work into six phases over two years, with specific goals for each phase. Activities that occurred over the past 20 months are included below.

PHASE 1: PREPARATION

- » *Finalized Huizeren staffing*
Project Manager for Pro Bono Program hired after considering several candidates

March 2011

- » 1st Steering Committee meeting
Huizeren convened a meeting in Beijing with HP, Narada, and BSR to discuss committee purpose and plans

PHASE 2: LEARNING

- » Study Tour at Taproot
Two staff members from Huizeren and one from Narada spent a month at Taproot in the US learning about the history of Taproot's program development, management processes, and infrastructure, as well as participating first-hand in pro bono activities
HP hosted a promotional event on volunteering in China
Huizeren and Narada visited other stakeholders in the social innovation and pro bono ecosystems

April 2011

PHASE 3: INITIAL LOCALIZATION

- » 2nd Steering Committee meeting
Huizeren staff shared their findings from the Study Tour and discussed the plan for the upcoming year
- » Developed program documentation
Leveraging Taproot's materials, Huizeren created application, assessment, and agreement forms to support the program
- » Conducted NGO needs assessment
Huizeren assessed needs of 20 NGOs in Beijing through interviews and surveys to identify potential service offerings

PHASE 4: PILOT

- » Ongoing: bimonthly mentoring sessions
BSR staff met with Huizeren every two weeks to check in on progress and offer mentoring and advice as needed
- » Recruited and selected NGOs and volunteers
Using its ICT Volunteer Alliance, Huizeren promoted the program at multinational ICT companies in Beijing to mobilize volunteers
- » Implemented pilot projects
Started several projects with mixed degrees of success and collected feedback afterwards through informal discussions

PHASE 5: LAUNCH & OUTREACH

- » Promotion to CSR managers
BSR hosted a promotional event for Huizeren's program to CSR managers from 11 local corporations

GOALS

Documentation translated and localized

Website and IT systems functioning

August 2011

GOALS

25 volunteers providing Pro Bono to 5 NGOs

3 companies in addition to HP provide volunteers and funding

March 2012

GOALS

1 official program launch

1,000 NGOs and companies reached through email

Planned

- » Evaluated program progress towards end of pilot phase
 - BSR supported a formal evaluation of the Pro Bono program
- » Held event to launch results of pilot
- » Developed marketing plan

PHASE 6: SCALE-UP

- » Improve program based on evaluation results
- » Expand program in Beijing and explore replication in other cities

PROGRAM RESULTS

COMPLETED

Needs assessed for **30 NGOs** working in education, health, and community, reporting greatest needs in **Marketing, Human Resources, and Information Technology**

Three projects completed with **18** volunteers from **six** companies contributing over **400** hours of service to benefit **12** local NGOs



Marketing strategy project

Professionals from IBM and BOE Technology Group teamed together over six months to develop a marketing and branding strategy for a grassroots community development NGO.

“Most NGOs focus on activities. We don’t spend time and resources to market our program...but we realized we need to, otherwise we will only have an impact within our small community. These professionals brought in new ideas about marketing and branding.”

- NGO leader

Legal Training to NGO Leaders

HP’s legal department provided a dynamic training session to 10 local NGO leaders on basic NGO regulations and environmental law in China.

“During our daily work we have little opportunity to connect with NGOs directly but we wish to help NGOs, society, and other people... Maybe this training was only given to ten individuals but they will help millions through their NGOs.”

- HP Legal Volunteer

ONGOING

Five projects ongoing with **20** volunteers from **eight** companies including HP, IBM, and Lenovo

DISCONTINUED

Project Type	Status	Explanation
Software Development	<i>Postponed</i>	Support from Huizeren discontinued after project manager transition
Website Development	<i>Cancelled</i>	Lack of response / interest from volunteers
Management System Design	<i>Cancelled</i>	Lack of NGO readiness due to unexpected staff departures

Lessons of Localization

UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES FOR HUIZEREN

- » Difficulty recruiting volunteers
- » Lack of project management and consulting experience
- » Succession planning
- » Staff departures
- » Time spent recruiting and retraining new staff slowed down pro bono program progress

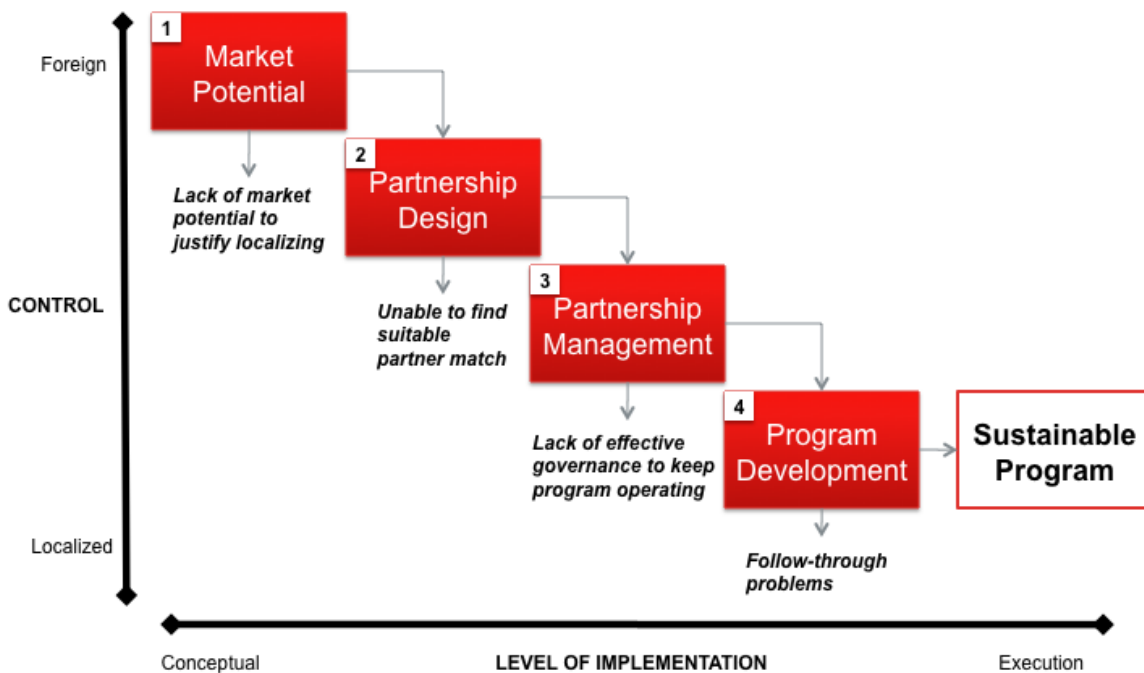
Built on a multi-stakeholder partnership, Huizeren’s adaption of Taproot’s pro bono model met with success, faced challenges, and underwent returning along the way. This section aims to capture lessons learned thus far for organizations interested in applying the Partner Adaption approach in China. We acknowledge the limits to generalizing conclusions based on one case study and the fact that this approach is still evolving and improving. Recognizing that every organization is different, and in order to be most useful for readers, the lessons are not framed as clear-cut best practices or a specific structured strategy but rather as a basis for discussing key constraints, decisions, and factors that influenced the effectiveness of this approach.

Scaling to China (as with other emerging markets) through local partners inevitably involves risk and uncertainty, as conditions can change without warning in the country or across organizations. Partner Adaption strategically pulls together complementary resources, competencies, and networks, distributing risk and ownership across partners. In this way, the approach creates an outcome that no one organization could achieve individually. However, to secure the benefits of collaboration, the partnership must be carefully designed, nurtured, and managed.

To organize lessons learned, we introduce four elements of the Partner Adaption approach that build on each other over time:

1. Market Potential
2. Partnership Design
3. Partnership Management
4. Program Development

Acknowledging that control will vary widely in different partnerships, as the adaption transitions from conceptual (Market Potential) to execution (Program Development), this control—or influence over the program—becomes increasingly localized, moving closer to the long-term goal of sustainable local ownership and a program fully adapted to the local circumstances.

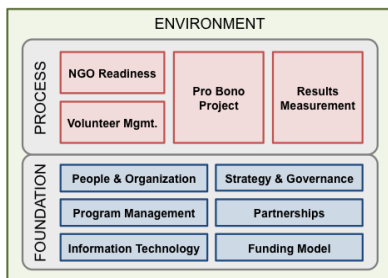


TIP

When testing assumptions, develop a framework for brainstorming possible areas of divergence between China and the original market.

Based on Taproot's model and organizational capabilities, this framework below was developed for the Pro Bono program and considers:

- » **Environment:** factors outside of Huizeren's control
- » **Foundation:** Huizeren's organizational capacity and infrastructure needed to operate Taproot's model
- » **Process:** day-to-day program delivery of Taproot's model



Environment components:

Culture:

- Awareness of Pro Bono
- CSR Value & Styles
- Corporate-NGO Collaboration

Civil Society:

- Maturity
- Values
- Proven Impact

Policy & Regulations:

- Transparency
- Social Policy Priorities
- Regulations on NGOs & CSR Programs

Market Potential:

- NGO Environment
- Local Professional Volunteer Pool
- CSR Programs
- Pro Bono Competitors

Market Potential

To move forward with the approach, the organization will need to understand if, how, and why the local environment will accept its idea.

Challenge the model's underlying assumptions to clarify which parts to transfer versus adapt

A key factor to consider early on is how much of the originating organization's model might be transferred instead of adapted to fit the local context. As a starting point, the organization could brainstorm the original assumptions on which the program was built. During the study tour, Taproot introduced Huizeren to 50 assumptions underlying the pro bono program model. Taproot's assumptions were based on key questions:

- » Who do we serve?
- » What do they need?
- » What do we offer?
- » How do we provide these services?
- » How is it funded? What is the business model?
- » What is our value proposition?

Identifying initial assumptions focuses on **why, not how, the program was built** the way it was – questioning, testing, and challenging these assumptions in a Chinese context can help anticipate key areas where adaptation will be needed and will define the parameters of localization.

It is important to **clarify the parameters of localization early on** and eventually communicate them to all partners. Although these parameters will surely evolve as more learning occurs, it is necessary to **reinforce that the focus is on creative adaption, not replication** throughout the partnership. Especially with various organizations and individuals involved, this message can become lost over time and lead to misunderstanding.

One problem that emerged in the case study is a lack of clarity across the five partner organizations around what degree of adaptation should be allowed or encouraged, recognizing that the adapted model should still leverage Taproot's Intellectual Property and experience. Understanding market conditions and speaking with potential program stakeholders to identify parameters of localization early in the process can help avoid confusion and clarify the shared purpose later on.

Market need does not necessarily translate into market demand

Although the basic elements of market opportunity may be evident, it can take time and effort to build up demand for a new and unfamiliar idea. With Taproot's model, the partnership developed quickly based on advice of local organizations familiar with the NGO community and employee volunteering landscape of multinational companies. Without any formal "market testing," they identified a growing NGO sector with limited capacity, a large pool of business professionals interested in volunteering, and multinational corporations and local foundations that would fund Pro Bono to advance their strategic goals. The partners did not identify any current players in the space or hard barriers to the model's

“It’s not easy to trust an NGO in China. When I donate something, I’m not sure whether it’ll be used for people who really need help... some people may use NGOs as a mask to do other things.”

- HP China employee

“In grassroots NGOs, people have to do everything. There’s no support system, no one can help us. Each NGO is a lonely island. In a company, each person does his own work. Businessmen can’t understand the grassroots culture.”

- Local NGO leader

“We work together with friends and familiar people, never with strangers. So Huizeren needs to train and teach people to work together for Pro Bono.”

- Zhai Yan, Huizeren Founder

acceptance, such as technology, regulation, or availability of resources, though they noted previous attempts to launch similar models that had not succeeded. However, **soft barriers** did exist. Culturally and intellectually, professionals and NGOs did not easily grasp the concept of pro bono service. Volunteering is a relatively new idea in China with most people only recently becoming familiar with hands-on volunteering, which has a direct, immediate, and tangible impact, compared with the longer-term, cumulative impact of building an NGO’s internal capacity through pro bono consulting projects. Other cultural and contextual factors slowed the acceptance of the pro bono model, including a lack of mutual trust between the non-profit and corporate sectors, which are unfamiliar with each other’s working styles, expectations, and constraints. A generational gap between NGO leaders and young professional volunteers led to communication and credibility issues.

As a result, Huizeren spent more time than expected on promotion to CSR managers, volunteers, and NGOs in order to build awareness and enthusiasm for the pro bono “movement.” Looking back, some form of **market testing with direct program stakeholders** – users, beneficiaries, participants, potential funders – would have been helpful before moving forward with the idea. While market *research* uses data and surveys, market *testing* involves developing several “prototypes” of the model and conducting focus groups with direct stakeholders to understand their decision-making processes. This input would be used to determine **how** to successfully implement the idea. As a local facilitating partner, BSR could have taken a more active role in market testing. Information collected could have impacted partner selection and goal setting, provided insight for adaption, and helped build early enthusiasm for the idea.

Testing the market now versus trial and error testing later

Although the originating organization or a local facilitating partner could spend months or years investigating market potential, at some point the decision must be made that there is sufficient evidence to proceed and knowledge on how to proceed. Depending on the idea’s complexity, sensitivity, and potential barriers, spending a long period of time testing the market might dampen original momentum around the idea, especially if implementing and supporting partners are eager to move forward. Timing might also depend on the schedules of donors and other partners, and recognizing that particularly in emerging markets the market and context is rapidly evolving.

Building on collective enthusiasm and seeing no hard barriers to acceptance, BSR identified complementary partners, secured funding, and developed an implementation plan in three months. Although there was no formal market research beforehand, BSR designed the partnership to accommodate testing later on. Through pilot tests with HP employees and Narada’s NGO grantees, theoretically Huizeren would be able to market test within the low-risk boundaries of the partnership. Whether they are inside or outside the formal partnership, finding organizations for “**safe pilots**” provides a head start for program development and a low-risk environment for learning and adapting.

Another consideration is that the new program should not only respond to the existing market but also anticipate the future market. For example, although a model may not be suitable in today’s environment, it could potentially be effective several years from now. The question then becomes how to **balance designing for today versus designing for the uncertain future**. In addition, recognizing different stages of market development and different needs, different services or products can be designed for different “user groups.” For example, each multinational corporation in Beijing has its own employee volunteering culture, policies, and structure. Huizeren has adapted its program accordingly to fit the

preferences and needs of each corporate partner, as they have learned about them through pilot projects. At the same time, the partner should still aim for economies of scale by having few, standardized products.

Partner Types:

- » **Originating Partner:**
 - Owns the idea
- » **Implementing Partner**
 - Owns the adaption and local implementation
- » **Supporting Partner**
 - Provides support through funding, capabilities, and/or networks
- » **Facilitating Partner**
 - Initially owns the partnership by connecting and driving it forward

Seeding the Sector

An important consideration for scaling an idea to China is the *degree of exclusivity*.

Is the goal to seed the idea with one local partner and support them closely? Or is the goal to spread the idea as widely as possible throughout China with no exclusivity to one organization? If Taproot had decided to “seed the sector,” they could have invited multiple organizations to the study tour in the US, openly shared their IP and even divided funding across multiple partners.

However, the long-term effect of this approach on the sector would be unclear – the competition could grow the market or splinter it, cause confusion in the local market and ultimately impede the acceptance of this new idea.

Partnership Design

After the market has been explored, the right partners must be identified and assembled in a way that is strategic, complementary, and built on trust.

Recognize limited resources to support the partnership and plan accordingly

Once an organization moves forward with the idea, it should be realistic about its role in the adaption process. Taproot recognized early on that as a non-profit organization with limited resources and a domestic focus, it was not strategic to open an office in China or spend extended periods of time on the ground conducting needs assessments, identifying partners, or closely evaluating Huizeren’s progress. Taproot was not actively seeking to expand into China but wanted to respond to a local request for help in developing a similar program.

As a facilitating partner, BSR could lead the approach by:

- » Sourcing additional funding
- » Designing the partnership
- » Driving the partnership forward
- » Providing Huizeren with technical support and access to networks
- » Evaluating program and partnership progress

By effectively passing responsibility to BSR, Taproot could contribute the level of support and resources that made sense for their situation, which included giving access to intellectual capital, program tools, operating models, and training to encourage Huizeren’s efforts in the global pro bono movement.

Trust more crucial than contracts – searching within local networks may be more realistic than systematic assessment

In theory, a transparent process should be used to evaluate potential partners against clear selection criteria and after due diligence. Following careful assessment of the market, this formal process would ensure that partners are capable, committed, and strategically matched for the partnership.

In the case study, all partners were identified through pre-existing relationships. Taproot had a close partnership with HP, which is one of its own corporate funders, and BSR has strong and diverse contacts with HP China. BSR had a relationship with leaders at both Huizeren and the Narada Foundation. Huizeren had previously collaborated with Narada, though not as a grantee.

Each partner was also uniquely positioned and highly motivated for Pro Bono. Huizeren’s leadership wanted to revamp its mission and vision around the program while Narada is the leading Chinese foundation building NGO capacity. HP was expanding its pro bono program around the world, with HP China’s Legal Department already engaged.

Though somewhat ad-hoc, this approach ensured that **organizations entered the partnership with some level of shared trust and understanding of each**

other's strengths and weaknesses, which otherwise would have taken time to build up before moving forward. Especially in China, establishing trust is crucial to successful working relationships. In addition to accelerating partnership development, it prevented the need for complex contractual agreements. With existing relationships and motivation across the leadership levels of these organizations, executive buy-in was secured. However, a more far-reaching investigation into potential partners may have led to different results.

A local partner's commitment is more important than its capacity, but more difficult to prove

Selecting the local implementing partner is the most critical decision for adaption, as this organization will ultimately have control over innovating the model and developing and scaling the program. With all resources and support in place, but without the right partner to take advantage of it, the adaption could fall apart. The sidebar lists key criteria to consider in an implementing partner. BSR identified Huizeren based on:

Criteria to Consider in an Implementing Partner:

- » Visionary, creative, and committed leadership
- » Staff skill-sets that match with requirements of program management
- » Local and relevant networks
- » Fit with core competencies and services
- » Mission alignment
- » Organizational and staff stability
- » Communication skills
- » Financial security
- » Focus in resource allocation

- » Passionate, motivated, and experienced leadership
- » Prominence and credibility in the volunteering space
- » Perceived commitment to the pro bono mission
- » Networks with local NGOs
- » Some relationship with ICT companies
- » Financial stability
- » Pre-existing relationship and familiarity with BSR

Initial concerns centered on staff capacity, including a lack of project management capabilities and experience with corporations, which could make recruiting volunteers difficult. Although Huizeren is a volunteering organization, the staff competencies and skill-sets required for volunteer management and pro bono program management are very different. Taproot's staff has extensive consulting backgrounds, whereas Huizeren's team did not. Most critically, Huizeren did not have key staff members in place before funding was secured. In the initial phase of implementation, Huizeren was to hire a project manager and IT manager for Pro Bono. Though highly motivated and eager to learn, the selected project manager lacked professional experience and required support along the way.

These capacity issues were partially addressed through the partnership. HP provided access to its pool of corporate volunteers, while BSR held bimonthly meetings with Huizeren's project manager to mentor and advise her, developing her skills in communication and project management. She left the organization in early 2012 for family reasons and Huizeren now has a new project manager.

It is easier to compensate for a lack of capacity than a lack of commitment.

The partner will likely face several setbacks adapting a new concept, so steadfast dedication to the mission is critical. As an organization, Huizeren's has stood the test of time – emerging from a series of staff changes and organizational transitions with renewed enthusiasm for the Pro Bono program. Assessing dedication is a challenge. While an application process would show some practical time commitment, it might lead NGOs to over-promise or frame the adaption as a grant to be delivered by a Chinese NGO, not a program to be shaped and developed by an equal partner. Some risks to commitment include:

Recruitment Challenges

Recruitment is a common challenge for nonprofits and social enterprises, particularly in emerging markets, where a lack of talent and funding affect the quality of staff—and often staff turnover is high due to restricted salaries.

- » **Competing priorities** – what other “legacy” programs and funders is the partner committed to, and over what time period? Can the existing programs be integrated with the new program?
- » **Lack of Board involvement** – do they have a Board of Directors, and is the Board aware of and supportive of the program?
- » **Unclear strategy** – how does the partner evaluate new opportunities to pursue? Do they have a transparent process with decision criteria?

“In China, grassroots NGOs can’t have a reasonably long-term strategy because it all depends on funding.”

- Local NGO leader

“There’s a lot of motivation to achieve change in the volunteer sector... but they don’t have stable employees. Knowledge transfer cannot occur.”

- Partner staff

“The reality of staffing [challenges] undermines the implementation of the strategy.”

- Local NGO leader

TIP:

Before implementation, consider having the facilitator conduct a **Partners Capacity Needs Assessment** to determine critical areas where the implementing partner could use external support and guidance.

Supporting partners can offset limitations of implementing partner and be testing grounds for piloting programs and business models

As discussed above, supporting partners can reduce risks in the partnership by contributing resources, capabilities, and channels. For example, Narada felt more confident funding the program knowing that HP would lend its pool of volunteers to Huizeren, and that BSR would give access to its network of global companies.

Choose supporting partners to test potential business models. One aim of Huizeren’s localization was to create a Pro Bono business model that was revenue generating and thus at least partially self-sustaining. This would transform Huizeren from a grassroots NGO into a social enterprise. Recognizing that a *sustainable* business model was critical to the program’s future, BSR designed the partnership to test two potential models – corporate partners willing to pay for their employees to develop skills and experience through pro bono, and foundations and companies willing to pay for pro bono to build their NGO grantees’ capacity. Having a stake in program success, the idea was that supporting partners could “incubate” the new program. After pilot projects with HP’s volunteers and Narada’s NGOs, successful case studies would be used to prove the program’s value to other corporate partners and local foundations.

Building stable partnerships in an unstable environment requires patience and persistence

When partner organizations are operating under uncertainty due to a changing external environment, it is difficult to construct a cross-sector partnership built on long-term predictability, order, and process. The challenge is balancing structure with enough room for flexibility to accommodate partners from different sectors.

China’s dynamic regulatory and economic environment affects organizations across all sectors – history has shown that systemic changes and events can happen suddenly, influencing organizations’ strategies, people, and focus. However, these effects are especially visible in grassroots NGOs. Many of China’s NGOs are unregistered or registered as companies due to legal registration difficulties, dependent on charismatic founders, reliant on funding from overseas (which is declining) or one or two domestic donors (due to a lack of local grant-making foundations and restrictions on public fundraising), and lack the financial resources to develop staff. As a result, most NGOs have **very few employees, frequent turnover, fluid and flat structures, and strategic priorities that shift as funding opportunities arise.** Funding tends to cover projects, not NGO overhead costs, which further hinders capacity building and resource stability. In this way, the external environment shapes NGO organizational foundations, and their capacity to operate in a partnership setting.

Huizeren’s organizational capacity and stability has been a challenge for developing the pro bono program, as issues of succession planning and staff transitions have arisen. It takes time to recruit, train, and rebuild a team, and some organizational and programmatic knowledge is inevitably lost in turnover. All the partners were supportive of Huizeren’s situation, viewing it as a common issue faced by many Chinese NGOs. However, this made reaching goals and targets challenging. As a partner, transferring best practices around

documentation and knowledge management, developing back-ups, and trying to institutionalize the program as early as possible would be helpful – both for the program and for the long-term capacity of the partner.

This partnership did not involve so-called “Government-Organized NGOs” (GONGOs, which dominate the sector in China, particularly in regards to funding) or government agencies. Since they have tremendous resources, capacity, and influence and operate over a longer time-horizon, it is possible that GONGOs could be a more stable partner. However, partnering with a grassroots NGO could provide better local access, agility, innovation, and added benefits of building the growing sector’s capacity through partnership. Additionally, GONGOs may be less open to innovation and more restricted by government priorities in program direction, hiring, partner selection, and salary structures.

Partnership Management

The Pro Bono Steering Committee – A good idea that never took off

After BSR established the partnership, Huizeren took control over maintaining the steering committee. In the early months, Huizeren convened two quarterly Pro Bono Steering Committee meetings with partnership liaisons attending in person or by phone. However, these meetings did not continue. Potential reasons include:

- » Huizeren became more focused on program piloting
- » Lack of clear purpose and structure for Committee
- » Lack of clarity around who “owned” the Committee
- » Internal organizational challenges within Huizeren

Partnership design is a blueprint for building and managing a lasting partnership. Cross-sector, international partnerships require effective – and adjustable – governance to establish roles, expectations, and decision-making authority.

Individuals are often the glue holding partnerships together, but they should not be.

As discussed, partnerships can naturally emerge from pre-existing relationships. Though formal agreements may be in place, these relationships can continue to steer the partnership throughout implementation, giving rise to informal governance systems centered on key individuals.

Huizeren’s Pro Bono program faced unexpected challenges at the implementation level, some of which stemmed from communication issues with staff at a partner organization. When setbacks persisted, executives originally involved in establishing the partnership intervened and reaffirmed the organization’s strategic commitment to the program. BSR also acted as a neutral party to resolve problems, facilitating dialogue around their root causes and potential solutions. Without a formal governance system mapped out, key individuals stepped in when problems arose to ease the situation and keep the program moving forward.

Though they can be effective, **these informal governance systems are reactive and dependent on key individuals**. If people leave their organizations, would the partnership fall apart or fragment into multiple bilateral partnerships? A transparent governance system with established processes and procedures for addressing challenges can help orient new partner staff and mitigate risks of organizational turnover. To varying degrees, Huizeren, Taproot, Narada, and BSR have each experienced staff changes over the past 20 months. Fortunately, some key individuals have remained sources of continuity, relying not on a formal governance structure but their own personal efforts to motivate and inspire commitment across partners.

Reevaluate roles and expectations as the partnership evolves

Despite the amount of careful planning that goes into partnership design, the inevitable reality of any learning process is *change*. As the implementing partner adapts the idea, the partnership must remain adaptable as well. The challenge is pinpointing when change has “officially” occurred, which would then signal that

TIP:

At regular points, conduct a **Partnership Readiness Profile** to evaluate partner alignment and differences in expectations. Ask each partner to complete a series of questions independently. For example:

- » What makes or breaks a good partnership?
- » What are strengths and challenges of NGO and corporate partners?
- » What do you want to achieve through the partnership?
- » In what areas do you need support as a partner?

“We could have learned more had we evaluated earlier on. We could have discussed problems and connected resources for [Huizeren].”

- Partner staff

partner roles and expectations should be revisited and formally discussed amongst all partners rather than assumed or informally agreed amongst selective partners.

As Huizeren began localizing and adapting Taproot’s model, their focus shifted from learning the foundations of Pro Bono to recruiting volunteers to implementing pilot projects. Through bimonthly mentoring sessions, BSR could see Huizeren’s needs evolving and aimed to provide targeted support to meet them. For example, when it was clear that Huizeren was having trouble recruiting professional volunteers, BSR convened a meeting between HP’s leadership and Huizeren to discuss alternative approaches to attracting volunteers. HP was also flexible and constructive in brainstorming solutions to challenges. For example, after setbacks in completing a traditional pro bono consulting project with HP employees through the Volunteer Association, HP suggested working with functional department heads to recruit specific skillsets directly – and started with the legal department. A few months later, BSR leveraged their network of member companies to host a promotion event for Huizeren’s pro bono program to CSR managers, which resulted in some projects that are now ongoing. One example in which BSR did not adjust its role was the Pro Bono Steering Committee. Looking back, BSR could have redefined its role to “own” the Steering Committee after realizing that Huizeren was not driving it forward, perhaps due to organizational changes or capacity issues. However, after the study tour, BSR aimed to build capacity and encourage Huizeren to drive both the program and the partnership, in order to foster local ownership. Thus BSR did not want to “own” the steering committee. A balanced solution might have involved BSR being the Chair of the steering committee and thus still being able to drive it while not exerting undue influence over the program.

A governance system could facilitate this regular reevaluation of needs by conducting Partnership Readiness Profiles at key milestones. In addition, the governance system could have identified potential risks early on and tracked them throughout the partnership, encouraging Huizeren to communicate challenges and needs openly, as part of a collaborative partnership.

Partner	Ownership
Taproot (Originating)	Idea
Huizeren (Implementing)	Adaption Program
Narada (Supporting)	None
HP (Supporting)	None
BSR (Facilitating)	Partnership

Navigate the blurred boundaries of ownership through governance

As the adaption evolves from concept to concrete implementation, control becomes increasingly localized. The implementing partner makes more and more critical decisions about building the program, steering towards the long-term goal of sustainable, local ownership. A crucial feature of this approach is that partners are not investing in a specific, predetermined outcome but rather in the potential for transformative, localized innovation. As adaption continues, how can partners navigate the sometimes blurred boundary between providing helpful support as partners learn through experimentation versus seizing ownership that is not theirs?

Unwrapping the layers and boundaries of ownership

Taproot owned the initial **idea** and passed on control to BSR to design, build, and drive the **partnership**. The partners then passed on control to Huizeren for **adaption** and **program** development. Although these divisions were never defined so explicitly, the table, left, looks back on the partnership and identifies layers of ownership that emerged over time.

The reality of partnership was not so clearcut, as boundaries of ownership came into question, especially in the following areas:

- » **Staffing:** Huizeren has control over its organizational development. Seeing that a qualified pro bono project manager was critical to program success,

“Our principle is to not be a mother or boss. We want to respect the partner’s choice and we will try to connect or make recommendations where appropriate.”

- Narada program manager

some partners recommended potential candidates. In the end, the partners respected Huizeren’s decision, but looking back, some question whether they should have been more involved at this stage.

- » **Budget and goal-setting:** BSR took the lead in developing the funding proposal, which included a budget and program goals. Although BSR reviewed the proposal with Huizeren before submitting to HP, Huizeren was not deeply involved in the writing process. Some partners feel that the goals, timeline, and budget may not have been realistic for Huizeren. Although it would have taken more time, involving more partners in the process could have given a more complete view into potential risks.
- » **Localization:** due to their participation in pilot projects, HP was involved in brainstorming ideas for adapting the pro bono model. For example, after facing difficulty attracting volunteers for short-term consulting projects, HP and Huizeren decided to test a training model, in which HP legal employees would deliver a 2-hour training to a group of NGO leaders to then select one of the NGOs for a longer-term pro bono project after using the training to better understand their needs. HP continues to work closely with Huizeren to develop new strategies for expanding pro bono across its China offices.
- » **Implementing:** during their bimonthly check-in meetings, BSR helped Huizeren develop workplans, brainstorm potential solutions to challenges, and create localized documentation. Although Huizeren has commented that these sessions were incredibly helpful to staff, BSR had to be mindful of giving advice versus giving direction, trying to build a sense of local ownership while knowing when to step in.

Aside from decisions related purely to the program, those related to the implementing partner as an *organization* were especially challenging, since a healthy organization is essential to successful program development and yet no outside partner can claim control in that arena.

Governance for accountability without undermining autonomy

All partners come together – across sectors and countries – with the same strategic goal of local, sustainable program adaption. Although innovation and execution are ultimately in the hands of the implementing partner, supporting partners will want to stay updated on progress, both to understand how their resources are being used and to identify ways they can contribute to a successful outcome. To facilitate this, the governance structure should have mutual accountability mechanisms built in – holding all partners responsible for their commitments and tracking against original goals to identify problem areas.

“It is common in China. People only like to communicate good things. Unless you probe, people tend not to talk too much about the challenges and difficulties.”

- Partner staff

However, rigorous accountability systems can themselves create administrative burdens on the implementing partner. It can also shift decision-making control towards supporting partners, and weaken the environment for locally driven experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation.

Program adaption of Taproot’s model involved ***balancing trust with pressure***. With no regular Steering Committee meetings, partners had only informal, irregular visibility into Huizeren’s activities, challenges, and needs. Although the lack of transparency prevented the sharing of targeted advice, partners respected Huizeren’s ownership and ability to steer the program’s direction without the burden of accountability to supporters.

It also became clear throughout adaption that each partner had its own approach to accountability and preference for staying involved. For example, Narada was relatively hands-off to its grantee, trusting Huizeren to make decisions and reach out for help on its own. After the study tour, Taproot followed up with Huizeren via email to check in on progress and offer any help. However, this did not turn into a regular mentoring relationship and Taproot became relatively removed

from program development. Because HP and BSR were more directly involved in supporting day-to-day implementation, they were more interested in getting regular updates. For the past few months, HP and Huizeren have been holding monthly update calls with HP's Asia and Global Social Innovation team.

Communication of partner needs, learnings, and potential risks should be designed into the governance process, especially in China when failures are rarely discussed and help is not requested easily. Reviewing plans during monthly or quarterly reviews with a Steering Committee could facilitate regular sharing of information and needs. Basing the governance system on mutual learning and experimentation can create transparency while encouraging risk-taking and local ownership.

Program Development

With all the scaffolding in place, the implementing partner assumes control to build, adapt, test, and grow the model.

Adapt to China and to the native organizational environment



Taproot, Huizeren, and Narada staff on the study tour to the US in March 2011.

Unless a new organization is formed to localize the idea, the implementing partner will bring its own history, stakeholders, culture, and strategic priorities to the adaption process. In addition to tailoring to the Chinese environment, the idea must be adapted to the *organizational* environment, in a way that complements core competencies, networks, and program mix. Integrating the new program into existing programs can help ensure that the partner's limited resources are allocated efficiently. This is especially important for Chinese grassroots NGOs, in which a handful of staff members are often spread across several programs at any given time.

While applying creativity to the adaption, the implementing partner should remember to **leverage the intellectual property, tools, and experience of the originating partner**. These tools, documents, and processes that already exist can serve as reference points for adaption and can accelerate program development. Discussing parameters of localization early on can help pinpoint areas in which these tools might need to be modified. In many cases the **originating partner's processes will reflect a scale of operation much larger than the implementing partner**, who will be starting with small-scale pilots before expanding. The challenge for the implementing partner then is to pull from existing "best practices" while tailoring them appropriately to the program's scale (and still preparing for a future that will be at a larger scale). Through mentoring, the originating partner can choose to help advise on these decisions.

During Huizeren's study tour in the US, Taproot shared extensive information on program history, development, management, and documentation that had been perfected over the years. They also gave Huizeren staff access to Taproot's internal website. Afterwards, Huizeren's founder wrote a detailed report reflecting on what was learned from the study tour. In the original proposal, Huizeren was to translate many of these documents and adapt them as needed to the Chinese environment. Today, Huizeren staff refers to the documents on occasion, but there was no consolidated effort to translate or integrate them into day-to-day program delivery, mainly due to language and time constraints, and a different approach to documentation.

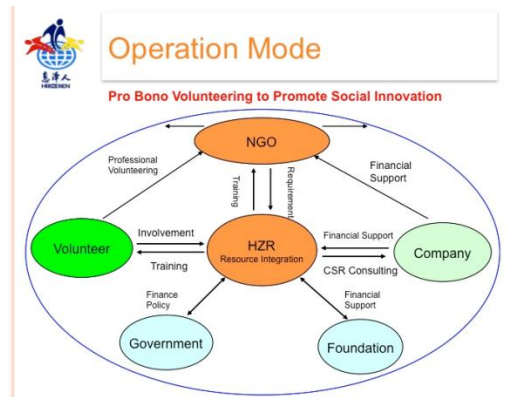


Diagram explaining partner relationships

A new idea needs a common language and proof of concept



Diagram used to explain the pro bono program. “Huizeren: Professional Volunteer Matchmaker”

Workshops with Program Participants

In the past few weeks, with leadership from Huizeren's current project director, the team has engaged pro bono volunteers in the evaluation and piloting process, through a lively workshop bringing together volunteers from various projects to discuss challenges and brainstorm solutions for improving the program.

To build awareness for a new idea, promotion is critical. Huizeren was creative in experimenting with different ways to convey the concept of pro bono volunteering to the Chinese market. First, they came up with a short, memorable Chinese name for “professional volunteering” to attract interest. They also created different diagrams to visually explain the underlying idea and market need for a pro bono program. As new staff members joined Huizeren, new ideas emerged for how to best represent the concept, as well as Huizeren's role in managing the program. Though experimentation along the way is expected, it could have been helpful to “test” multiple concepts at the beginning with a small group of program participants, and then choose a consistent messaging strategy.

Building a movement around a new idea also requires evidence of success. How do you promote a new and unfamiliar solution without proof of concept? Before an official launch, **“safe pilots” can serve as valuable case studies**. The implementing partner should focus on the successful completion of these pilots, documenting lessons along the way and measuring carefully for project results. Once case studies are created, supporting and facilitating partners can use them to promote the program internally and across their industry networks.

Trial and error as a path to success

On the path from idea to innovation, temporary failure is a helpful signpost. setbacks are used as powerful tools in a constructive learning process. However, there are different ways to arrive at failure. One extreme involves minimal planning and focuses instead on rapid execution – piloting as much as possible and hoping to gather lessons and modify along the way. The other extreme involves careful planning towards perfection, putting a great deal of effort into creating processes and tools, assuming they will be successful and reused in the future. Although the “rapid fire” approach can deliver quick results, the learning process will be ad-hoc, and tools and processes will have to be recreated at

With an active stake in the program's development, these volunteers can act as pro bono "champions" inside their companies, promoting the idea from the bottom-up.

some point. With the other approach, there is always the risk that the time investment will not pay off, requiring the implementing partner to start again from scratch.

Investing time early on to design high-quality tools and processes for a limited number of carefully managed pilots will ensure, however, that error is not due to carelessness or a lack of professionalism. These **standardized tools and processes can serve as a strong basis for scaling up later on**, even if adjustments are made along the way.



Huizeren conducts a workshop with team of pro bono volunteers from CiviCRM, IBM, AMD, Schlumberger, and Lenovo

In testing out ideas, the learning process should be structured and systematic. For example, instead of piloting indiscriminately as opportunities arise, the same model could be intentionally piloted with different "user groups" (e.g., volunteers at different corporations) to draw out helpful lessons based on the relative success and failure across pilots. Alternatively, different models could be piloted across similar user groups. Most critically, what was learned should be documented, discussed, and integrated into future pilots to ensure that errors remain temporary and constructive.

Conclusion

Scaling Taproot's pro bono model into China through the Partner Adaption approach involved the complementary resources, talents, and networks of five very different organizations. From the multinational corporation harnessing its global workforce for social innovation, to the local foundation positioned to strengthen China's civil society, to the Beijing-based NGO pioneering the course in a rapidly changing environment. These partners came together across sectors and countries to pursue a bold vision – encouraging a local organization to take a model for transformative social change and adapt it into China.

Yet differences in the market for pro bono services between the US and China are tremendous. In fact, the NGO capacity challenges that Huizeren's Pro Bono program seeks to take on are also a core challenge for Huizeren itself. The same differences in resources, working styles, and communication that surfaced between corporate volunteers and NGOs during pro bono projects also influenced the cross-sector partnership. Adapting a model to a radically different context, with a partner that exhibits some of the typical challenges of China's NGO sector, is the reality that Partnership Adaption aims to address. BSR believes this approach holds great potential for the future in China and elsewhere.

Drawing on the Taproot-Huizeren case study, this report discussed 14 lessons of localization for foreign and Chinese organizations interested in the Partner Adaption approach. Recognizing that each organization is different and that the approach is still taking form, these lessons are intended to encourage discussion around some of the key constraints, decisions, and tradeoffs of Partner Adaption. Lessons were explored across four elements of the approach: **Market Potential**; **Partnership Design**; **Partnership Management**; and **Program Development**.

- » Evaluating market potential for an idea involves breaking down the original model into its underlying assumptions, then challenging them to understand **why** the program developed the way it did. Using those assumptions to identify possible **parameters of localization**, market testing through prototypes and focus groups can be used to understand **how** to develop the program in China.
- » In the realm of partnership design, **trust** is more important than contracts, **commitment** outweighs capacity, and partners are matched to **complement** strategic resources, **offset** limitations, and serve as **testing grounds** for pilot projects and potential business models.
- » Once the program begins, managing a global, cross-sector partnership in a highly dynamic environment means balancing **flexibility** with **structure** – promoting accountability and communication between partners without undermining the **innovative autonomy** of the implementing partner.
- » Program development involves adapting the model to both the local **market** and the implementing partner's **organization**, yet still leveraging the **originating partner's IP, skills, and tools**. While building an inventory of case studies as evidence of impact, an organization needs to systematically pilot and **set up for success** by creating high-quality tools, documents, and processes that can be scaled up in the future.

These lessons reflect the diverse learning experiences of one partnership in China. BSR believes that the approach – in its potential to channel resources across countries and sectors into a highly strategic, resilient partnership – can ignite localized, sustainable innovation in emerging markets around the world.

We encourage other organizations to experiment with the Parter Adaption approach, “trial and error” with purpose, and share their own findings as part of a global, collaborative learning process.

Appendix

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Research was conducted from May through July 2012. During the first five weeks, the evaluator worked closely with Huizeren on a day-to-day basis, reviewing documents, conducting informal interviews, attending pro bono program events, and conducting formal interviews with program partners. During the last five weeks, the evaluator traveled to Huizeren’s pro bono participant organizations (NGOs and multinational corporations in Beijing) to collect program feedback through interviews with past participants and focus groups with potential participants.

<u>Huizeren</u> <i>10+ interviews</i> <i>5 program events</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Founder (various interviews) » Project Director (various interviews) » Program Staff (various interviews) » Chairwoman, Board of Directors (1 interview) » Long-term volunteer (1 interview) » Attended 5 pro bono program events, including meetings between NGO and volunteer teams, as well as promotional trainings to potential companies
<u>Partners</u> <i>9 interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Narada Foundation (2 interviews) » BSR (2 interviews) » HP US (1 interview) » HP China (2 interviews) » Taproot (2 interviews)
<u>Volunteers</u> <i>4 focus groups</i> <i>2 group interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » HP potential volunteer team (2 focus groups) » HP previous volunteer team (1 group interview) » VMWare potential volunteer team (1 focus group) » Intel potential volunteer team (1 focus group) » IBM previous volunteer team (1 group interview)
<u>CSR Managers</u> <i>2 interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » CSR manager currently in pro bono (1 interview) » Potential employee volunteer manager (1 interview)
<u>NGO Leaders</u> <i>2 interviews</i> <i>1 focus group</i> <i>3 email surveys</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » NGO leader currently in pro bono (1 interview) » Potential NGO staff (1 focus group) » Previous NGO leader (1 interview) » Previous NGO leader training participants (3 email surveys)
<u>Other programs</u> <i>2 interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Pro bono program in Hong Kong (1 interview) » Volunteer program manager in the UK (1 interview)

* Despite attempts via phone and email, Huizeren’s former pro bono project manager was unreachable during this evaluation. Her perspective would have provided valuable insight into initial program implementation.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS

