In Skillshare International’s Corporate Strategy 2005-2010 it was stated that “while our approach to organisational change has benefited individual organisations, a sector wide approach demands that we look to work beyond these boundaries. In our corporate strategy, we set out our approach to working to facilitate broader based social change, both in supporting partners and in the way Skillshare International operates.”

The approach that we have been implementing can be characterised by this quote from Jay Earley, Ph.D., “While it is valuable to fight against the worst abuses of our current society, social transformation requires that we be proactive in creating bits and pieces of the new society, in our personal, activist, and professional lives. Cooperation, dialogue, and participation from everyone are probably the most effective means of achieving social transformation in today’s world. Therefore creating social structures that involve these is an important social change activity.”

What we have been doing during the current corporate strategy is to put in place a variety of approaches that encourage participation in social change and also enable us as an organisation to understand more fully the breadth of social change activities that our international volunteers are involved in. These can be broken down into five main areas:

1) **Social Change as a focus of the International Volunteer’s work**
We have been working across the organisation to make sure that all of our systems for assessment of placements, recruitment, selection and training of international volunteers are geared towards the ultimate aim of engaging volunteers in programmes focused on social change in every country where we work.

2) **Systems that give us a deeper understanding of the impact of our work**
This is linked to 1). We have been working on improving systems for learning about the long-term changes that our work brings about, and improved systems for using that learning in terms of accountability to our various stakeholders. This includes such things as a revamped IV Review and Improvement System which not only looks at the work based outcomes but also at changes within the volunteer and within the community where they are working; new approaches to reporting to funders on social change and impact; and currently work is going on to bring our Stories of Change into line with the new approach.

3) **Encourage volunteers to be part of ‘All One Team’**
In some cases in the past there has been the tendency to see international volunteers as simply delivering the programmes that they were recruited to support. We now actively encourage volunteers to look at their skills and their interests to see in what other ways they can contribute to the overall aims of the organisation.

Some examples of the deeper engagement being promoted are:

- Work is being done to improve our ability to involve post-placement volunteers in selection panels.
• At an in-country meeting, all the volunteers in the country agreed to take on at least one task that would improve an aspect of the programme in that country. This is currently being supported.

• Serving volunteers have engaged their relatives and communities back in the UK to raise funds to support our development partners.

• We are about to launch an alumni association to promote continued involvement after the volunteer completes their placement.

4) **Build a constituency to support our work in social change**

New sessions were developed for use in volunteer training and in-country meetings which look at broader issues of social change and what the volunteers role is in becoming involved. This may be directly through their work on an advocacy programme, through writing a blog and sharing it with people back home, through links with diaspora communities etc. (See Annex One for many more routes.)

5) **Opportunities for international volunteers to contribute to Development Awareness activities**

Examples of where we have used the expertise and experience of our international volunteers are running sessions on our course on global health at Trinity College Dublin and the Special Studies Modules at Leicester and Nottingham Universities.

In summary, our approach is to place international volunteers where they can work towards social change and contribute to a broader understanding of the impact of the work; but also to encourage international volunteers to work as part of the whole team, to provide routes for them to become involved in development awareness activities and to assist in building a broader constituency for social change.
Annex One – The Variety Of Routes For Volunteers To Become Involved

Before working as an IV
- Pre-departure learning, including an understanding of thematic areas
- Interactions with diaspora communities
- Campaigning
- Fundraising
- Family/Friends informed and involved
- Improved capacity to meet the objectives of the Partner Organisation and effect change
- Shared cross-cultural experience
- Active staff and volunteers involved in change
- Improved capacity of communities to effect change
- Politicians/local Governments/Business leaders more open to change
- Bureaucracy changed
- Opinion makers influenced and influencing the debate

While working as an IV
- Changes within the Partner Organisation
- Changes within the IV
- Changes brought about by the IV’s work
- Improved environment for change
- Actions led to improvement
- Interactions with diaspora communities
- Promotion of links e.g. between schools
- Family/Friends more informed and involved
- Development awareness through media work
- Developed a new perspective
- Understanding that the IV is not the “expert”

After Working as an IV
- Social Change and International Volunteering
- Continued links with host community
- Resource mobilisation for host community
- Sensitisation on issues
- Changing people’s minds
- Improving participation and taking action
- Advocating and lobbying
- Interactions with diaspora communities
- Increased knowledge and understanding of development issues
- Interactions with diaspora communities
- Advocating and lobbying
- Campaigning
- Fundraising
Annex Two – Some More Quotes On Volunteering and Social Change

1) “Three rationales for sending volunteers: the development model, which focuses on poverty reduction and skills transfer; the learning model, which focuses on personal development and cultural exchange; and the civil society strengthening model, which focuses on supporting civil society organisations and their human resource needs.”
(Opportunities and Challenges for International Volunteering - Betty Plewes and Rieky Stuart - IVCO 2007)

2) (There are) “two critical questions: Whether or not individuals who volunteer abroad translate their experience into affective change in their own communities upon returning home; and whether or not the experience of having outside volunteers actually benefits the organizations and communities in which they are working.”
(Creating Global Citizens? A Review of Literature on Learning/Volunteer Abroad Programs - Atkinson’s School of Social Work - York University)

3) “Whatever the future holds, two things are perhaps clear. Firstly, that the concept of international volunteering will secure its future by continuing to demonstrate its flexibility; and, secondly, that the concepts of mutuality and global citizenship will need to take centre-stage in our thinking about the future”
(New Developments in Programme Models - Cliff Allum, Skillshare International - IVCO 2007)

4) “International volunteering has a marked impact on the worldview and attitudes of the people who do it. It seems logical, then, that what IVCOs should strive to do in this context, is to design programs that facilitate and lead more deliberately to the long-term engagement of returning volunteers, and reproduce for people who have not had an international volunteer experience, some of the conditions that lead to the types of attitude change and actions that we witness among volunteer alumni.”
(What’s New? - Jean Christie - IVCO 2007)

5) Volunteering can “promote social change by contributing to personal transformation, whereby individuals change their beliefs, perspectives and day-to-day behaviours once they have developed a new awareness or understanding about a particular situation.”
(Volunteering and Social Activism – CIVICUS/UNV/IAVE 2009)