

Katradi logo

US Consulate  
logo

# Volunteer For India

February 10-14, 2020

Chennai, India



# summary

## Vision

Building an inclusive network of volunteers with active civic participation who will develop a just and equal society with sustainable solutions across the country

1. Create volunteer opportunities in schools and communities
2. Build capacity to respond to problems at community-level through awareness, peer-to-peer training, and Train the Trainer models, incorporating results from needs assessments
3. Participate in policy interventions and advocacy through partnerships with other organisations and governments, building awareness of existing policies and researching policy gaps
4. Construct a digital platform to build VFI brand, create database of volunteers and collaborate with other organisations

## Mission

## Two-month plan

Each participant will identify a local problem statement to engage with. They will draw up a detailed plan in response to this, mapping out the intended intervention, the volunteer base and other resources. An example project was a volunteer sensitization journey across Kerala focusing on transforming volunteers to leaders through three camps catering to twenty volunteers each. The projects emerging from each of these sixty individuals will then be compiled into a report. Another project was a study seeking to understand the perception of students towards the LGBTQIA+ community and mental health issues in Guwahati, Assam.

While the group presented the three logos that emerged, the participants agreed that the VFI logo will be finalized based on consensus.

## Logo

## Social Media Marketing

Given the importance of having an online presence today, the team decided to undertake a series of blogs as the first step. The blog would be language-agnostic. VFI also needs a good website, to ensure that the first impression the organization makes is impressive. In the longer run, the team also hopes to launch a mobile application connecting NGOs and volunteers.

The team identified multiple individual teams to take Volunteer for India forward:

1. Building volunteer opportunities
2. Capacity Building
3. Communications
4. Conflict Resolution
5. Digital Platform
6. Events & Logistics
7. Finance, Accounting & Legal Affairs
8. Fundraising
9. Policy & Advocacy
10. Research

Conflict resolution will be managed internally while all other teams will be supported by one of the five-member Strategy team.

## Organisation Structure

# from Katradi

## Liz Haynes, Program Director/Facilitator

She spoke of the potential of a platform like VFI to change participants personally as well as professionally. Referring to the detailed engagement with every application, she explained why the cohort included the people it did, achieving a balance of experiences, sectors and backgrounds. She flagged off the need to keep gender equality and inclusion in mind when planning volunteer interventions and reiterated the need for volunteers to focus on self care.

## Sangeeta Isvaran, Lead Facilitator

She spoke of how VFI provided the opportunity to be a community changemaker. In the face of polarization, this was a platform to promote cooperation and teamwork, bringing diverse people together in conversation. She reiterated the need to build inclusive volunteer groups, honour stories and acknowledge feelings as a means of inspiring people to volunteer.

# from the US Consulate

## Lauren Lovelace, Consul for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy

She spoke briefly about Volunteer For Bangladesh, the model that inspired the idea of Volunteer for India. The organization began with Korvi Rakshand, a beneficiary of the US Consulate's exchange programs, and his dream to create a culture of volunteering in Bangladesh. She concluded by reaffirming the Consulate's support for the initiative and encouraging all participants to reach out for any assistance. In her time with the participants, she also participated in some of the activities!



## David Kennedy, Public Affairs Officer

He congratulated the participants on their ideas, passion, and commitment to community, and applauded the Volunteer For India platform that allowed participants to leverage this energy. He concluded by pledging the US Consulate's support for the cause, suggesting participants reach out for any assistance including networks and venues.



# playing frisbee

## Ultimate Frisbee: The Game

Ultimate or Ultimate Frisbee is a non-contact team sport played with a flying disc or frisbee. Though the athletic requirements of the sport are fairly similar to those of many others, it stands apart due to its focus on self-officiating. The sport thus intrinsically relies on the spirit of sportsmanship and teamwork amongst the players to maintain fair play. Due to its non-contact nature, the sport has also been increasingly used to engage with gender norms and encouraging sports amongst young girls and women.

## The game as a tool

At the end of every day, participants would walk over to a nearby sports field to play frisbee. It was a time that was eagerly awaited by all and one that contributed the most memories at the end of the four days. Led by Liz Haynes, participants learnt teamwork, inclusion, cooperation, and embracing discomfort in the most fun way possible! The air was often filled with cheers and clapping and chants, not uncommonly borrowed from cricket!



I have also never played sports. The idea of Frisbee is to learn life skills and leadership. This is new to me.



# expert lecture

## Korvi Rakshad | Volunteer for Bangladesh

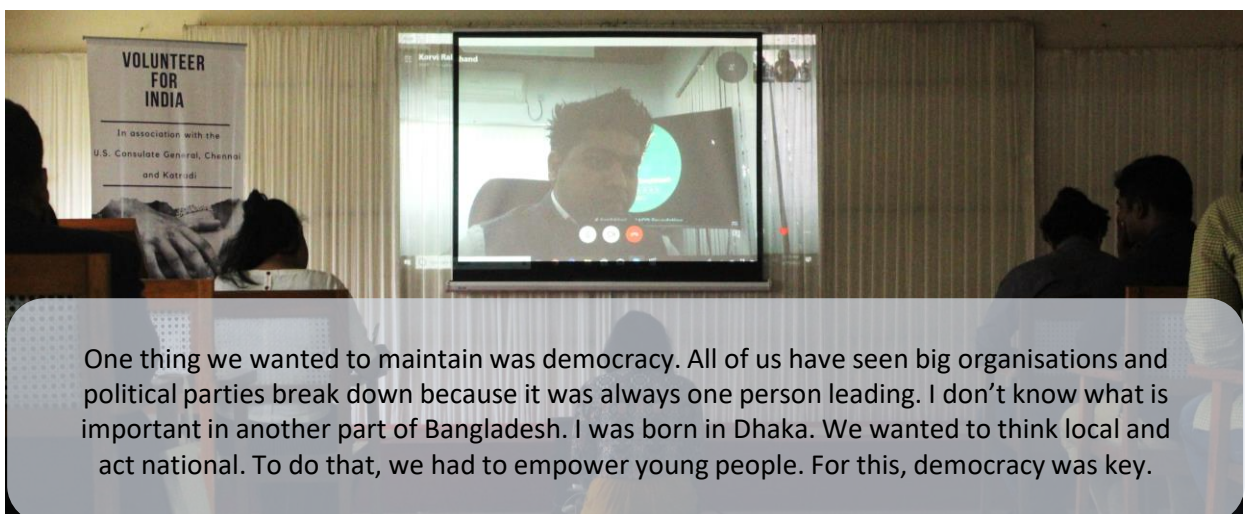
*Korvi Rakshad attained a Diploma in Law from the University of London and a subsequent LLB Honors. His earliest formal introduction to development work came as Project Director for 'The Dhaka Project'. In 2007, Korvi founded the JAAGO Foundation with a group of young students. The JAAGO Foundation today is dedicated to the betterment of the underprivileged and poverty-stricken communities of Bangladesh. Volunteer for Bangladesh is the youth wing of the Foundation*

Joining the team via Skype, Korvi spoke about his journey in setting up Volunteer for Bangladesh (VFB), and the successes and challenges the team had experienced over the years. Thirteen years ago, there were limited opportunities for young people to volunteer and participate in social work, and VFB was founded to fill this gap. Initially, the team worked in the area of children and education, Korvi's pet fields. Very early on, democracy was identified as a core value of the new organization. Board members were elected and projects were proposed by individual on-ground teams. Growth was organic and slow, and today the organization works across half of the country. At their core, the team seeks to think local and act national.

All of VFB's events are now aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. What began as single-day interventions (lake clean ups, for example) has now grown to more engaged programs. One of VFB's greatest successes has been the national recognition of Children's Week in Bangladesh. After the team celebrated Children's Day actively involving street children for seven years, corporates and other organisations began participating as well. Eventually it became a government-recognised celebration. The organization has also coordinated Pledge For Peace, a campaign focused on responsible voting, and has facilitated conversations between government leaders and members of the opposition. Today, they are gearing up to have a Youth Advisory Panel in select local governance offices, focused on bridging the gap between young citizens and politicians.

Korvi acknowledged that working with the youth also comes with its challenges. The primary hurdle is the inability to plan for the future, since young people have a short vision. He also acknowledged the need to choose project sizes wisely, ensuring that it did not demotivate volunteers. Parents should also be included in the conversation to ensure their buy-in. He stressed the importance of building good government connections and prioritizing national corporates over international funding agencies.

When asked how he maintained quality of volunteers while scaling across the country, Korvi spoke of how initial growth was through word of mouth and referrals. VFB also trains all volunteers in project design and has a strong culture of communication within the organization. Another participant asked how volunteering in communities with political unrest can be navigated. Korvi stressed the importance of speaking to the community about their pain points, and finding ways to engage with those issues. He also recognized the life cycle of volunteerism, observing that the more a country develops, the harder it is to attract volunteers. He spoke of the need to invest in volunteers and keep them motivated through incentives and understandable language to ensure volunteer retention. Another interesting way to attract volunteers was by projecting VFB as a network to make friends and build a community.



One thing we wanted to maintain was democracy. All of us have seen big organisations and political parties break down because it was always one person leading. I don't know what is important in another part of Bangladesh. I was born in Dhaka. We wanted to think local and act national. To do that, we had to empower young people. For this, democracy was key.

# expert lecture

## Rishi Moudgil | GreenLight Fund

*Rishi Moudgil is the Founding Director of GreenLight Fund, Detroit, a venture philanthropy that runs a community-led process to identify critical issues for low-income residents. The Fund then invests in and replicates the best national programs that have a proven solution. Rishi founded the University of Michigan's Centre for Social Impact at the Ross School of Business where he created practical learning programs, a regional Social Innovation Summit and trainings for consultants and board members. As a social entrepreneur, he founded the K-grams, a mentoring and tutoring agency that served 2,000 youth across the US annually. He has recently been active in filmmaking to drive social change.*

Though he is the Founder at GreenLight Fund in Detroit today, Rishi's talk focused largely on his experiences as a student volunteer. As a student at the University of Michigan, Rishi founded a student volunteer movement that mentored school children. His focus was on ensuring maximum impact, and so he created a system that mapped each school with a dorm at his university. This ensured a sense of accountability and involvement from the volunteers as well. In less than two years, they were working with 1000 kids across 12 schools. He believes that the key to this scaling was their focus on not just skilled volunteers but enthusiastic ones. Volunteers were also sourced from diverse backgrounds, moving past the initial wave of teachers and social workers to include business students, engineers and architects. The team also made a conscious decision to choose the schools most in need instead of those closest to their university, and designed their programs in such a way that it did not need very consistent long-term commitments but was focused on building relationships. However, he also accepted that the organization did not focus enough on its resources. Though they had reached out to 3000 children by their second year, they were relying too heavily on the most enthusiastic volunteers without providing them avenues for self-care and support. The learnings from this experience, Rishi said, went on to influence the rest of his life and career.



Passion, skills and networks, perspectives, community needs and internal resources. These are the factors to focus on. You need to do something you are passionate about but the community needs as well. And you need to remember that volunteering is all about people - who they are, how you treat them, whether you listen to them.

Today, Rishi works in the non-profit sector, which works in spaces that have been underserved by both government and business. Their focus is to lift people in the USA out of poverty. The values of the organization are those that were reaffirmed through his days as a volunteer – the importance of listening to those you serve, the strength of learning from past mistakes, and the power of research and evidence. At the GreenLight Fund, impact is measured by how far the community has moved out of poverty because that is the core of what they are seeking to achieve.

Rishi then responded to questions and comments from participants, stressing on the need for diversity and evidence-based solutions. When asked how he managed conflict, he spoke about the need for people different from oneself. Thinking about who was in the room and encouraging different perspectives was key. He also encouraged participants to start working on issues that affected them personally, thereby creating a culture of involvement and speaking together. He concluded by warning participants against burning out, encouraging them to focus on managing their time and drawing boundaries.

# expert panel

## Emergency Preparedness & Disaster Relief

*Ameer Salman O M is a teacher, academician and trainer in Communication Studies. He contributed significantly to disaster relief during the Kerala floods.*

*Bhupender Mishra is a development profession and founder of The Resilient Foundation which works on disaster risk reduction. He has delivered over 250 sessions on the subject.*

*Manu Joseph is a student who believes disaster management is an essential part of volunteerism. He works as an independent volunteer wherever there is the most need.*

*Rajan Thakur started conducting awareness workshops in disaster mitigation and rescue from 2015. He has impacted 17,000 lives so far.*

*Savitha K A is a student of Commerce from North Chennai. Her experience with disaster relief is linked intrinsically to her own experiences of the Chennai floods in 2015.*

*Vazeem Iqbal is the first tribal candidate to receive a PhD, specialising in disaster management. With more than eight years of experience in the field, he currently works with the Directorate of Disaster Management, Andaman and Nicobar Administration.*

In this sector-specific panel, select participants working in the area of disaster relief presented their work and learnings from the field. Malabar Flood Relief is an unofficial collection of volunteers who came together to work towards a common cause. Resilient Foundation was born from a near-death experience and a commitment to save lives in crisis. Through multi-tiered programs, the team builds capacity of the victims, enabling them to act as effective first responders. Manu works as a stand-alone volunteer, most often as one of the first responders to the crisis. Rajan spoke about ensuring disaster preparedness amongst the general public, focusing on providing basic CPR and other training to as many as possible. Savitha spoke of her experiences serving her community during the Chennai Floods 2015, an act that led to her participating in disaster relief meetings conducted by the city Corporation. The final panelist, Vazeem, spoke of how the approach to disaster relief has changed in Andaman & Nicobar Islands following the 2004 tsunami. Today, school teachers are trainers for disaster preparedness and every month, there is a state-wide mock tsunami drill. Common citizens have been incorporated into the formal structure.

When asked what challenges NGOs face when working on disaster relief, panelist spoke of the need for communication and necessary permissions, the importance of efficiently using technology, and insufficient funding in the immediate aftermath of crisis. They stressed the importance of networks like VFI in sourcing resources in times of geographically focused disasters.





# introspection & self care

## Day 1 | Identity

On the first day, participants reflected on diversity and pluralism, with representatives from various states, linguistic backgrounds and abilities. Soon after, Sangeeta Isvaran guided the team through an activity that illustrated the multiplicity of identities and their ability to both unite and divide.



All participants stand in two concentric circles. They step out if they identify with the markers presented to them, spanning religion (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, believers, atheists), colour of skin (fair/white, brown, black), and language (Hindi, English, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati) amongst others. All identities are rooted in self-identification. The purpose of the exercise is to show the axes on which individuals are divided or united in different circumstances.

## Day 1 | Mindfulness and volunteer burnout

The participants were guided through an exercise in mindfulness before being steered to think about volunteer burnout. They were asked to engage with four introspective questions. Over the next half hour, there was an unmistakable murmur in the room. Some participants wrote judiciously, dotting the walls of the hall, on chairs, on stage, on the floor. Others were having muted but passionate conversations with their partners. There seemed to be a sense of comfort in the room.



Answer the following questions:

What is your story? Why did you start volunteering?

Give an example of how a service project changed you.

Give an example of where you felt you incarnated the change you wanted to bring about.

What role does inner transformation play in your service journey?



# introspection & self care

## Day 2 | Inclusion and stereotyping

The day began with two activities that focused on stereotypes and discrimination. By participating in a game where people are “virused” when they are touched, Sangeeta led a conversation around who are often discriminated against in our communities. Answers included those from the LGBTQIA+ community, those with mental illness, those from particular professions, and the homeless. Next, individuals took turns to act out stances or behaviours that are typically associated with particular genders, such as washing clothes (woman) and standing with feet wide apart (man). Participants then introspected on the composition of their own teams and some participants shared personal experiences. The core issue, they realized, was one of separation and the only way forward was through conversation.



When I studied in 11<sup>th</sup>, I felt [discrimination]. Till then, I studied with my own community. At that point, I did not have anyone to guide me. In 10<sup>th</sup>, I liked Math a lot but only got 88%. I wanted to join PU in Thoothukudi but could not keep up with their social behavior, slang, etc. I escaped from there in one month. After that, for my higher studies, I could not come out and finished locally. Later, I went to St Joseph's in Trichy. There were many of us tribals there, so I was able to cope easily. There were other people like me there, so I had friends.



Most of the work I do in rural communities is with women farmers and women-centric problems. They are more willing to speak to women. There are many men who do not allow their women to speak to men.



We conduct disaster management sessions for 6-7 hours in a day. We prefer men to conduct them because women don't have much stamina. We travel out of town a lot for training. We prefer male candidates because who will look after safety of that girl if she travels?



# capacity building

## Day 1 | Coordination and teambuilding

After a wholesome meal, the team shakes off the mid-afternoon dreariness with an energetic activity. While the activity is fun and full of laughter, it drives an important point home. Participants will need to work together in innovative ways to get Volunteer for India up and running!



Participants run around the room to chants of ‘fire in the mountain, run run run!’ When a number is called out, they are required to make groups with as many people. A condition to fulfil is called out. With four people in a group, only two feet can touch the ground. With eight people, the allowance is expanded to two feet, two hands and one bottom. Participants come up with innovative ways to accommodate this. Some lift others, step on others’ feet, or use tables and walls to balance. Someone even did a headstand!



## Day 2 | Appreciating each other’s passions, perspectives and skills

Taking off from the key factors Rishi identified through his talk, the next session asked participants to share something they had learnt from their fellow participants. This could relate to passions, skills, networks or perspectives. The key was to recognize the power of community.



Ayesha and I were talking about her interests and one was Buddhism. I liked the idea of how we have to find a middle path so that we are all at peace. It is all about understanding each other and creating peace.



# capacity building



Most people don't know that Ramalingam quit his job at an MNC because he was not enjoying it. I then realized how he has associated his skills with his passions – dance, theatre, and working with kids.

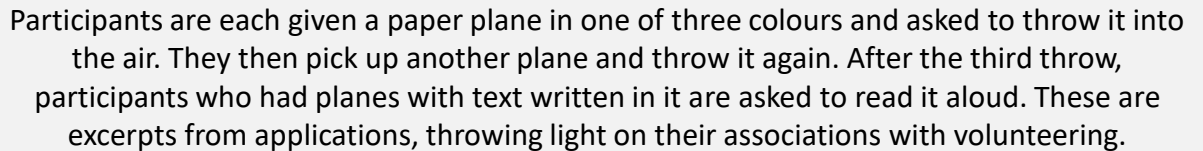
## Day 4 | The power of play and drawing boundaries

After some participants volunteered their own games to start off the day, Sangeeta broke down the thought process behind the other activities. She spoke about the need to get moving (dancing, jumping), become comfortable with eye-contact and progressively increase the amount of contact (namaste to handshake to hip bump). This is useful to break barriers, particularly those of gender. Following this, she also spoke about the need for volunteers to be safe spaces especially when working with children. Participants practiced naming the different parts of their body in their mother tongues as an exercise in respecting the body. Sangeeta then stressed the importance of having boundaries and rules when interacting with minors. Some rules would be to not ever be alone with the child, not exchange numbers and in case a child confides about abuse, to respect their courage, not gossip and take steps to ensure the child is supported.





## Day 1 | What is volunteering? What is VFI?



Even though the Indian National Youth Policy recommends setting up a volunteer platform, this is yet to happen. This can promote a culture of volunteerism.

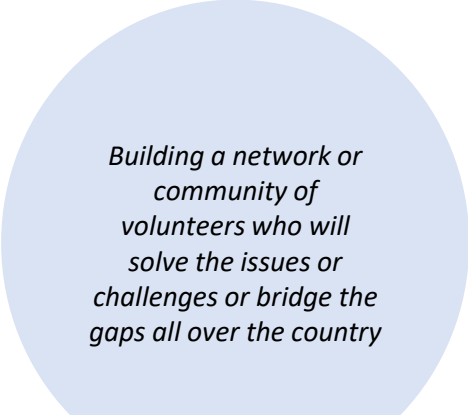
*voices from the applications*





# unpacking volunteering & constructing VFI

## Day 2 | Making a plan for VFI



*Building a network or community of volunteers who will solve the issues or challenges or bridge the gaps all over the country*

*what is VFI: First steps*

Liz led this session dedicated to deciding what the role of VFI would be and what gap the organization would fill. Answers ranged from ensuring better access to resources and best practices within the group to the local development of national concerns. When discussing the path forward, there were multiple ideas that emerged – amongst others, a network of school children, a digital platform, incubation platform, disaster relief corps, and policy intervention focus

Participants spent about an hour chalking out the path forward. From the possible ideas of interventions from earlier in the day, the team arrived at four buckets – **building volunteer opportunities, capacity building, policy level work and advocacy, and a digital platform.**


Participants were encouraged to focus on building volunteer opportunities for their two-month project and brainstorm the finer details pertaining to both beneficiary and volunteer communities.

## Day 3 | Building volunteering opportunities

For an hour, the room was filled with the buzz of activity. Participants had settled into smaller groups. Some were gathered at the board, adding and deleting from old notes. The board was teeming with different colours, ideas and partitions of the space.

Following this time of discussion, individual participants came forward to present some of their ideas.

- Weekend sessions where volunteers are assigned tasks to complete in their community before next session
- Stratified volunteer base including corporates and school students who work to bridge gaps in schools, particularly with regard to parent-student conflict
- One-day workshops in schools teaching arts and crafts, and culminating in an exhibition
- Using surfing as a tool to work on community development and marine conservation
- Cultural mela to showcase traditional knowledges
- College blood donation camps and road safety awareness campaigns
- Painting classrooms for students to build interest in learning



*Workshop/Orientation  
+  
Activity in community by  
volunteers*

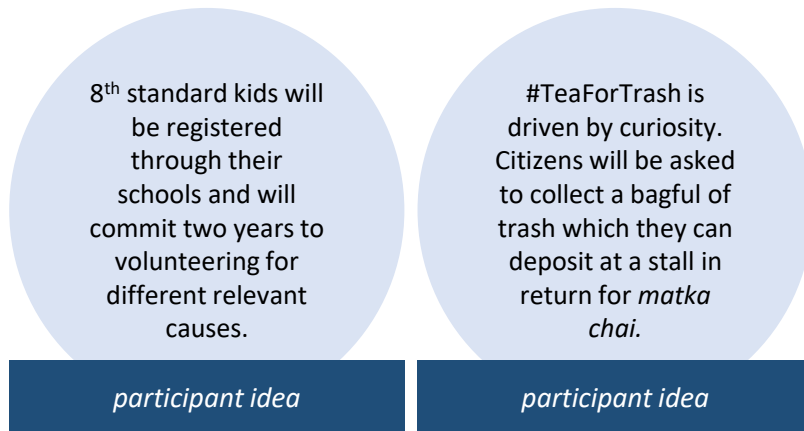
*structure of engagement*

After internal discussion, the participants arrived at a common understanding of what the model of engagement would be over the next two months.

Once the structure was decided upon, the team turned their attention to identifying a common, unifying characteristic. While each participant may lead interventions in different sectors, Liz asked them to think of what would bind them together as VFI projects. There were suggestions of hosting an event on the same day across geographies, having a shared t-shirt/certificates, etc. The final decision was to have an independent event or a VFI week.

# unpacking volunteering & constructing VFI

Participants also raised concerns over timelines and external limitations such as school exams and the harvest season coming in the next two months. Some participants then presented their ideas.



## Day 3 | From planning to delivery

Rishi led the participants in a session that focused on the six-step process of moving from planning to delivery.



## Day 3 | VFI in the long run

Participants were asked to strategise ways in which VFI could contribute to capacity building, intervene at the policy level, and build a digital platform. Three teams were formed, one for each topic, and participants banded together on the one that interested them the most. After about an hour of discussions, the groups presented their plans.

**Policy:** This team focused on increasing awareness in rural areas about existing policies and improving accountability of government officials both with regard to implementation and relevance of policies. To effectively liaison with the government, the team recognized the need to build relationships with the state, which would be done by inviting local leaders to events, for example. The team also suggested creating short awareness videos and policy briefs. Collaboration with existing government projects such as those catering to ‘aspirational districts’ could also be explored.

**Capacity Building:** The team focused on capacity building at various levels – within the cohort, cohort to other trainers (Train the Trainers) and for the cohort by external experts. They suggested the use of webinars, bi-annual bootcamps and an online resource repository to build the capacity of the cohort. External resources such as the NDRF or Fire and Rescue personnel could also be included as needed. With regard to capacity building for the community, they planned to conduct awareness sessions and record changes before and after these interventions.



# unpacking volunteering & constructing VFI

*Technology:* The team proposed a tiered Whatsapp group system, where there will be a primary group with the original cohort members and a series of auxiliary groups with each participant’s volunteers. A third layer of groups will be created on the basis of interests and skills to enable knowledge sharing across volunteer groups. A YouTube channel could be launched to build material that could be used in Train the Trainer capacity building. The VFI website and mobile app could act as a repository for volunteering opportunities. There could also be a blog where volunteers can record their experiences all around the country.

## Day 4 | Organisational strategy and structure

The strategy team had been finalized through a combination of self-nomination as well as candidates speaking of why they deserved the position. The five-member team was selected from thirteen who expressed interest. The team collectively decided to adopt a ‘5+2 model’ where the core group would be joined by regional representatives for any geography-specific concerns. This was decided upon to ensure diversity and representation. The team defined their role as helping liaison between teams and with external resource people. The members of the strategy team would also each be personally responsible for two of the other buckets identified.



# branding & logo making

## Day 1 | First steps

The next session was dedicated to taking the first steps to creating a VFI logo. The team participated in an activity and then were asked to work in groups to identify the words that best represent VFI. Thilaga Palani then guided the teams in making the first draft of the logos. They were asked to pick up objects they see around them and form shapes that could be preliminary versions of the logo.



Each participant is given a piece of paper with eight instructions on it. Not all instructions are the same. Participants then proceed to act out these instructions which include everything from making eye contact, crawling, growling, and dancing, to hugging, acting like a pregnant woman and hopping while holding their nose. The final step ends with identifying the others doing the same action and this became the groups that worked on the logo together.

## Day 3 | Presenting logos

The three 'logo teams' came forward to present their work over the last three days and explain the thought processes behind each design.

The key word is inclusion - no inequality or discrimination. The volunteers are connecting the dots, breaking repressive structures.

*logo 1*

A yellow bulb for light and happiness, a 'rock' solid foundation and unity binding everything. The logo is open to show growth.

*logo 2*

Agency is our core and soil represents it best. To us, soil represents people. When they realise their agency, they bloom as a flower in the centre.

*logo 3*

## Day 2 | Parameters

All the participants were guided through the expectations and parameters for the next two months. Liz explained how each participant would be expected to lead a project in their hometowns for the next two months. This project would need to involve a minimum of fifty volunteers. Each participant would receive funding of USD 500 for the two months. The cohort would also be expected to finalise the handbook that Katradi prepared and host it as a resource.

Liz then clarified doubts from the participants. She confirmed that participants can work together and pool their funding amounts and that holding a one-time event with fifty volunteers also fulfills the requirements.

## Day 3 | What is missing in the handbook?

Participants were asked to identify gaps in the handbook and brainstorm what additions they would like to make in the process of finalizing the document. Suggestions included including specific contextual details of the area(s) of work, cultural differences and success stories. Participants also wanted to add questions that sought to reflect not just knowledge but skills and networks as well. There was also a suggestion to include a list of games and activities that can be used in order to create an environment of understanding and empathy.

## Day 3 | Finances and Accounts

Liz and the participants discussed the details of the next two months. The participants were told to expect a Google Form from the Katradi team asking for project details similar to the six-step model detailed by Rishi (goal setting, recruiting, training, awareness, execution, reporting). The receipt of the form would lead to the release of the first installment of funds. In case of projects that had an element of time sensitivity, this schedule of fund disbursement could be revisited.

Participants were also instructed on the method of accounting expected of them. They were asked to maintain records of all payments as well as upload soft copies of all bills. Liz clarified that the funding could not be used to award prizes or for participants to give themselves a stipend.

# testimonials

I am comfortable only in Tamil but here someone always translated. At the beginning, I was wondering why I came because I was scared. Now, I am wondering why it got done so fast.



This experience was definitely beautiful but more than professionally, it was time for us to individually reflect as leaders.



My dream project is to run volunteerism for human assistance. Because of you all, it will not remain just a dream.



Writers are usually inspired by a sense of connectedness. After these four days, I can write a novel. My biggest learning is gratitude.



I've waited for a platform like this for the last two years. People tend to get exhausted by the end of day at events like this but here, we consistently kept energy up and were fully engaged.



Inclusion has now become subconscious. We have developed such a beautiful community here. This has opened doors to lots of progress. We can take the nation forward.



I am one step closer to a long-time dream. I am very happy to be taking the next steps with 32 others.



We have read about inclusion but here, we practiced it. The interactions have left me so fulfilled



Even if we are not related, we are all connected. We can unite to support each other and the nation. When I came here, I was hesitant. Slowly I realized I am not alone.





