

Laidlaw Programme Leadership in Action (LIA) Reflection

I have completed my Leadership-in-Action with make_sense americas through their re_action for impact programme, working with the plastic recycling company Rennueva. The bulk of our 6-week project focused around designing and implementing changes to their digital platform (website). The first few weeks were spend establishing the key roles of the team members and how many volunteers we would have to manage. As the weeks progressed we were able to mostly meet our deadlines and would communicate if any issues arose. An example of one of the key changes were adding a carbon footprint display to show the client how much carbon they had saved by donating their plastics to Rennueva. We worked with volunteers to design changes to the website and think of improvements beyond the initial scope of the project. This project is particular important in Mexico as Mexico City is the largest city in North America and is one of the poorest in terms of recycling its waste, companies like Rennueva therefore serve a vital function in reducing the carbon footprint of Mexico City. Through implementing transparent measures of how much carbon clients save by donating their plastic it further encourages clients to reuse rennuevas services and reduce their own carbon footprint. Typically, the team would meet every morning to run through any training the make_sense staff had for the group, mostly however we worked in our own time half the team on designing the new elements of the website and managing 3 volunteers to help and the other half on coding these new elements into the website.

The project we have undertaken is important in a variety of ways. The changes to the digital platform allows users to more easily navigate the site and submit collection requests. Furthermore, we have added a display for the amount of carbon saved per kg of plastic along with a comparable metric (i.e. the equivalent carbon in miles driven) donated allowing user to visually grasp how their choices to recycle have contributed to reducing their carbon output. Furthermore, there is a display how big their contribution is compared to the total plastic collected that month. This all aids in giving the clients more information and a greater understanding of the impact that their donations have on reducing their carbon footprint. As well as further changes that should have the effect of gamifying the experience. For rennueva, this has saved them the costs of hiring staff to make these changes and allowed their current programmers to make changes in other areas of their system. This all contributes to encouraging recycling in a city with the largest outputs of waste in North America and contribute to shifting the culture to on that is more sustainably conscious.

The project has shown me the differing issues that are prevalent in different countries and the efforts individuals are making in order to combat these local issues. It has also shown me how large these issues are and despite the scale, people are still prepared to commit their lives to these causes. The SMART goals I had set at the start of the project have all been achieved, while there was confusion at the start of the project we quickly clarified our deliverables and have been able to expand the scope beyond that of the original outline. It is difficult to measure the full extent of the changes prior to them being implemented however we have been able to give the website a smoother aesthetic and made an indicator of how much carbon has been saved by donating plastic. We were realistic about what we could achieve in 6 weeks as we had already achieved the initial outline of the project by week 3 so we have expanded the initial scope of the

project. An increase in users or verbal user satisfaction should indicate that the changes have been a success. When needed we arranged check-ins with the make_sense staff or the Rennueva members in order to gain any advice or direction when needed. No individual lead in isolation, during the project we all communicated clearly and gave our opinion when needed, this ensured everyone felt able to contribute and no-one's opinion was neglected. There were often moments whether we thought we would not have enough time to implement all changes made but we made clear communication with rennuevas team to understand what we were able to do and what task we were to handoff to rennuevas team.

Through this project I believe I have demonstrated a multitude of leadership skills such as acknowledging limitations and adjusting roles in accordance with what each member of our team is able to contribute, as our task revolved around software development half the team who were able to code worked on the development whereas the other half focused on the design side as well as gathering and calculating any data we would need. Furthermore, we've had to utilise and build networks such as working with and managing the volunteers to aid with the design process as well as working with the contractors Rennueva have employed to work on the digital platform. Finally, whenever we encountered any roadblocks within the project we'd inform the make_sense staff and make plans to gain clarification so our project can continue. The day of volunteering we did helped us make a tangible impact on Mexico within a short amount of time while aiding the plant life within Mexico City and adjusting to working within an unfamiliar team. Learning about the different social issues in Mexico compared to the UK was insightful and was a way to demonstrate continuous learning on issues such as gentrification, gender violence, climate change and education within Mexico. The first week we had presentations from Planeteando (a charity that specialises in audio-visual climate education) about eco-feminism. We heard about the links between climate change and gender-based violence (the two social issues the wider group were working on) by showing how environmental stressors can intensify existing inequalities. It highlighted how women, particularly in areas more vulnerable to climate change, often shoulder disproportionate risks and responsibilities. Many of the scholars on these projects were from a variety of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds aswell having challenging personalities & working styles. This taught me patience and gave me the ability to navigate difficult interpersonal dynamics while still maintaining professionalism.

To disseminate information about the project I have posted weekly updates on the Laidlaw Scholars Network, shared a post about my experience on LinkedIn and shared my experience on the Laidlaw programme through word of mouth. I also promote the program to perspective students and encourage them to apply for the program to ensure the most passionate and deserving candidates get on the program.

Cultural experiences in Mexico have been enlightening, we been shown many sides of the city. We have been living within Cuauhtémoc, the cultural centre of the city which contains some of its most prosperous areas. The language barrier was mostly not an issue as many Mexicans spoke English or we could easily translate between the languages additionally we were often accompanied with people fluent in both English and Spanish. Food was varied and very good! Many of the Mexican dishes were usually quite spicy but there were a lot of options to pick from. The public transport in Mexico city was varied and cheap, with cable cars, busses the metro all being easily accessible.

We were only told to be cautious of any petty theft (which thankfully never occurred). Iztapalapa, the most populated borough in Mexico city, faces different issues compared to its more prosperous areas such as transport around the area, issues with crime and poverty. To combat these issues, investment into transport such as the cable car system has helped locals get to work much more safely as well as the utopias programme, 14 public spaces designed with the intent to provide residents with access to cultural, sports, and educational resources. Being able to see these areas and the effort that has been invested to improve their issues is great to see. We took part in a Temazcal in Xochimilco, which is a traditional healing ceremony that uses steam, to promote physical and mental wellbeing which was an intense but rewarding experience that brought us closer together as a group. The many day trips we organised ourselves also aided in our cultural understanding and gaining a greater grasp of the city itself.

I'm currently still drafting my future career/educational plans but from my experience in Mexico I have had a slight shift in priorities and I have reflected more on what pursuit will give me the most sense of satisfaction and meaning. Prior to visiting Mexico I had a much more self-centred focus on what I want to achieve in the coming years whereas now I am much more conscious about what will also be best to support the community around me. Having the ability to help people in whatever capacity you can, and seeing people here in Mexico so passionate about tackling issues within their country is inspiring to see. Many of the people within organisations have started small and had a larger impact than they ever planned for, taking action out of necessity is the key to finding a strong purpose with what you do.

Project Leader

Please comment on your scholar's LIA period, what you consider to be your scholar's strengths and which leadership attributes (please refer to the leadership attributes below) you feel your scholar has demonstrated and is particularly skilled in. You could also identify areas which the scholar can develop further.

During his LIA period, Oliver demonstrated strong intellectual ability and empathy by combining data-driven analysis with a deep sensitivity to social and environmental issues. His reflections often connected solid background research with an awareness of lived experiences, which enriched group discussions and contributed meaningfully to the program. He also showed curiosity and openness in learning about Mexican culture and socio-economic realities, which speaks to his cultural intelligence and capacity for empathy.

Oliver displayed emotional intelligence in the way he shared his perspectives and built harmonious relationships within the group. His ability to use digital tools effectively also supported the development of his team's project, highlighting his adaptability and collaborative spirit.

One area to continue developing is greater proactivity in communicating directly with host organizations about needs or gaps. Strengthening this habit will further enhance his capacity to turn ideas into action and to build even stronger coalitions with external partners.

It was a true pleasure to have Oliver in the program, and I am confident that the skills and qualities he has demonstrated will continue to grow and support his future as a social leader.

Signature of Scholar Oliver Fletcher

Date: 12/08/2025

Signature of Project Leader Nuria Soistata

Date: 18/09/2025