

**PEACE CORPS/HONDURAS
A CASE STUDY OF EFFECTIVE
PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS**

TOOLS FOR THE ROAD



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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H. David Kotz, Inspector General

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INTRODUCTION

This report is one of nine in the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) Study of Effective Peace Corps Programs. The study consists of nine case studies of Peace Corps programs—three in each region: Africa; Inter-America and Pacific; and Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia. Chosen in consultation with regional management, the posts selected were Niger, Malawi, Mauritania, Panama, Paraguay, Honduras, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Philippines. The purpose of the study was to document what these posts do to effect high quality programs.

We defined high quality programs as:

- Programs that prepare and place Volunteers in sites where they can be productive and are hosted by communities and organizations organized to be their partners in achieving the purpose of their assignment (goal one).
- Programs and assignments that bring Volunteers satisfaction, provide a healthy cross-cultural exchange (goal two), and inspire them to bring the world home (goal three).

The study of these programs was conducted in two phases. In phase I, OIG staff conducted extensive interviews with the staff at each overseas post involved with designing and planning programs; training Volunteers; developing sites; providing technical, medical, emotional, and administrative support to Volunteers; and managing the operational aspects of ensuring that these functions are performing effectively. Initial reports were then drafted and sent to the staff for their review.

In phase II, we spoke with Volunteers, mostly in small groups, about the same subjects: training, site development, site visits, support, and satisfaction with their Volunteer experience. In this phase, we asked Volunteers for their perspective on what the staff described they did in phase I. In three posts, Paraguay, Honduras, and Panama, we also interviewed counterparts during phase II for their viewpoints on implementing an effective Peace Corps program and a mutually beneficial Volunteer site placement and assignment.

The purpose of this study is to describe how some of the agency's best programs are led, managed, and administered: the procedures they use, the management approaches, the staffing assignments, and the programming and administrative details that distinguish one post's operations from another. The objective was to use real life examples as the basis for setting expectations for assessing program effectiveness and as a resource for staff to understand what it takes to run an effective program, as well as to provide some tools and ideas for establishing high-performing programs.

In some of our discussions with Volunteers in phase II, they felt that some of what the staff described to us in Phase I was not actually being done, was not being done effectively, or was not having the intended positive effect. This is not reflected in this

report, because of its focus on describing what the posts do well. But we did we report this information to the staff on an informal basis, and the instances of this type of feedback were not common. In general, the Volunteers' views did not contradict the staff in terms of the principal elements represented in well-run programs that are described here.

In writing these case studies, we decided not to name staff we credit for what we found to work well, but only to make reference to staff position titles. Our intention in doing this was to put the emphasis on the actual accomplishments, rather than who performed them. We do not mean in any way to minimize the credit that many individuals rightfully deserve for their excellent work. What we want to demonstrate is that there are actions that anyone can take or make an effort to initiate that are shown to effect positive Peace Corps program outcomes.

Phase I of the Peace Corps/Honduras case study was conducted by Senior Evaluator Carlos Torres October 2 – October 9, 2005, who also conducted counterpart interviews as part of phase II May 29 – June 7, 2006. Senior Evaluator Lynn Khadiagala conducted the Volunteer interviews for phase II during May 29 – June 7, 2006.

PC/HONDURAS: TOOLS FOR THE ROAD

BACKGROUND

Since 1962, over 4,500 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Honduras, working in both urban and rural communities. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, and its high birth rate¹ has caused government social services to struggle to meet the needs of its growing population.

These factors create the demand for Peace Corps projects such as child survival and HIV/AIDS and youth development. Food production by inefficient farming methods contributes to the increasing destruction of the environment and natural water sources, which spawned the Peace Corps' protected areas management, water and sanitation, and business development projects. Recent efforts by the Government of Honduras to stimulate participation by the population in the political process gave impetus to the Peace Corps' municipal development project.

Volunteer strength peaked at over 400 in the mid-1980s. At the time of this study, 213 Volunteers were serving in Honduras, assigned to one of the following six projects (see Table 1):

- **Water and Sanitation:** The water and sanitation Volunteers carry out topographical surveys and assist with building water and sanitation systems in rural communities.

¹ "A birth rate of 30.98 per 1,000 and a mortality rate of 7.14 per 1,000 results in an annual rate of growth estimated in 1999 at 3.24 percent that is among the highest in the world and highest in Central America." PC/Honduras Welcome Book, August 2002, p. 16.

The Volunteers also offer environmental and sanitation education workshops, resulting in improved health and less environmental degradation.

- **Protected Areas Management:** This project improves the living conditions of inhabitants in ecological buffer zones by increasing and diversifying agricultural production and promoting the preservation and conservation of biodiversity, water, soil, and other natural resources.
- **Youth Development:** Youth development Volunteers support youth in rural and semi-urban communities through structured programs that emphasize positive youth development, develop the abilities of the youth, help them to make better decisions, and increase their knowledge of and participation in local government.
- **Business Development:** The business Volunteers work with local organizations to develop their business skills and management practices, thereby helping these organizations to increase their economic opportunities.
- **HIV/AIDS Prevention and Child Survival:** The Volunteers in this project help to improve the quality of HIV/AIDS and child survival health services at the community level by training community health workers. Strategies focus on HIV/AIDS/sexually transmitted diseases prevention and counseling in nutrition, childcare, and reproductive health, which includes teen pregnancy prevention.
- **Municipal Development:** The Volunteers work with communities and municipal governments to increase citizen participation, improve the capacity of municipal governments to deliver public services, and promote participation in local government among the youth.

Table 1. Volunteers by Project

Project	Water and Sanitation	Protected Areas Management	Youth Development	Business Development	Municipal Development	HIV/AIDS Prevention and Child Survival
Number of Volunteers	40	45	32	35	40	37

Source: FY 2005 Project Status Reports

PC/Honduras' projects are managed by a Project Management Team, rather than individual Associate Peace Corps Directors (APCDs). The Project Management Team (PMT) is composed of an APCD, a project specialist, and a Volunteer Leader (PCVL). Each project has a PMT. The APCDs serve as project managers for the PMTs and have management responsibility for the PMT. PC/Honduras has six APCDs working on programming and training: the six APCDs are responsible for the post's six projects, and the seventh APCD is the post's programming and training officer. The project specialists are the technical experts on the PMTs. They provide most of the technical assistance to the Volunteers and have a primary role in determining the competencies for technical training for PSTs and ISTs. They also conduct some of the training. The project specialist is the project manager's partner and participates fully in the management and

leadership functions of the PMT. The role and expertise of the project specialists in PC/Honduras is an important contributing factor to Volunteer satisfaction. They have technical expertise and provide technical training and support.

PC/Honduras has been diligent in selecting and hiring competent project staff with formal training congruent with the project's technical demands. For example, the Protected Areas Management project is managed by an Agro Engineer with the support of a project specialist with a B.S in Forest Engineering and a specialization in geographical information systems (see Table 2).

Table 2. Formal Training of the Program Staff

Project	Water Sanitation	Protected Areas Management	Youth	Business	Municipal Development	Health
APCD	BS Civil Engineering M.A (candidate)	BS Agro Engineer MA Project Management (candidate)	PhD Public Health MA Public Health Medical Dentist	MA Urban Planning policy BS Communication	Ph.D Agriculture Education and Extension MA Vocational Education and Rural Sociology BS Agriculture	MD and MA in Public Health
Project Specialist	BS Civil Engineering	BS Forestry Engineer Specialist in Geo Info Systems	BS Psychology	BS Business Management	BS Agricultural Engineer	BS Systems Engineer MA Project Management

Source: PC/Honduras

Effectively managing a large number of Volunteers and programs in this small, densely populated country takes a systematic approach. PC/Honduras' approach has been to develop "tools" that both facilitate managing all the tasks involved and assuring that they are carried out. Different tools are needed for each job, and doing the job well means using the right tools. For PC/Honduras, the toolbox is central to the work of PC/Honduras' program staff.

TOOLS FOR SITE EVALUATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND PLACEMENT

PC/Honduras defines site development as identifying resources and establishing the support network Volunteers need to be safe and healthy and accomplish their work. Site evaluation and development is the responsibility of the Project Management Team. Among the principles that guide staff in site development, the staff singled out two. First, they develop more sites than the expected number of Volunteers. They do this in case safety issues or other factors prevent them from placing a Volunteer in a site or they unexpectedly need to move a Volunteer out of a site. Second, they talk to current Volunteers about the possibility of assigning a new Volunteer to their site or area. Volunteers can provide staff with inside knowledge of an area or help the staff collect information about a particular site.

The Site Development/Assignment Procedures document provides staff with overall and detailed guidance on the multiple steps involved in finding and preparing good sites (see Appendix A). The tools that staff use in the site development process are the following:

Request for a Volunteer Form. This document helps PC/Honduras accurately assess the local resources and potential areas in which a Volunteer might work. A successful request clearly states the objectives, goals, and main projects of the requesting organization, how the Volunteer would help to achieve those goals and objectives, the type and kind of support the organization will provide the Volunteer, how the organization might help the Volunteer to adapt to the community, and other institutions in the vicinity that could collaborate with the Volunteer.

Site Evaluation. Sites are candidates for evaluation after a Request for a Peace Corps Volunteer form has been submitted to the APCD by a requesting host organization. Site evaluations are prepared during the last three months prior to the arrival of the Trainee and are conducted in conjunction with the host agency or the local group who requested the Volunteer. The PMT makes one to three visits to each site depending on their knowledge of the site and the negotiation process with potential local partners. The APCD/Youth Development project (see Box 1) meets with prospective organizations at least three times in the site development process.

Community Analysis, Community Partner Assessment, and Housing Criteria Assessment. These are guidelines to assess the quality of communities for Volunteer assignments. It tells the user what forms should be filled out, methods for collecting information about a community, and minimum standards a community must meet to receive a Volunteer. After a site has been selected, the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) and the safety and security coordinator (SSC) play important roles in the site development process, confirming the availability of medical facilities and the safety conditions of housing and community.

Box 1. Site Development Procedures for the Youth Development Program

Starting a new project is a labor-intensive process for program managers, especially when it comes to finding qualified host organizations and counterparts. The APCD/Youth Development has designed a site development process that results in many of the host organizations and counterparts being well prepared to work with the Volunteers. The youth Volunteers who participated in our discussion groups and responded to our survey felt that their counterparts understood the role of the Volunteer and what the Volunteers were in Honduras to accomplish, and they were prepared to work with them. Nearly 85% of the youth project Volunteers in the OIG survey said that their hosts were “well” or “very well” prepared. The APCD/Youth Development’s strategy involves multiple meetings with prospective counterparts before assigning a Volunteer to an organization. She also finds each Volunteer four counterparts so that the Volunteers are guaranteed full-time work.

In her first visit to a new site, she looks for youth organizations and educational institutions where a Volunteer could be productive and make a contribution. On the second visit, she presents the youth project to the prospective host organization and invites them to fill out a *Request for Volunteer* form if they are interested.

She meets prospective host organizations and counterparts a third time at a required training session. The session lasts three to four hours. The APCD explains the mission of the Peace Corps, how the Volunteers work, what it takes to be a good counterpart, and the role of the Volunteer. She hands out a brochure with the same information that they can review later. She meets with each one of them to review their Request for Volunteer Form to make sure that potential counterparts understand Peace Corps expectations. If they are not going to get a Volunteer, she explains why. In the case of successful placements, the APCD repeats this information to the Volunteers, so that they know what she told the counterparts.

During her first site visit to the Volunteer, done within the first three months, she reviews the work plan with the Volunteer and their counterparts. To preempt serious problems between counterparts and Volunteers, she periodically calls the counterparts to confirm that their projects are progressing smoothly.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A successful site development process results in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between PC/Honduras and the counterpart for the project. The country director views the job description or MOU as the most important component of a Volunteer assignment, followed by good counterpart selection, a safe and secure environment, and a monitoring and evaluation system. Box 2 offers an example of the level of detail that can go into a job description for a Volunteer.

The MOU contains 10 clauses to ensure a productive experience for both the Volunteer and the counterpart. It addresses the goals and objectives of Peace Corps and the specific project, as well as the responsibilities of the community partner/s, the Peace Corps, and the Volunteer. The MOU must be signed before the arrival of the Volunteer to the community and establishes the working relationship between the counterpart (host organization) and the Volunteer. The content of the MOU is discussed by the program

manager, the community partner, and the trainee during the Community Partner Day, and each signs it and receives a copy.

Volunteer Placement

Assessment. The information that staff have collected on a site is merged into one document called the Volunteer Placement Assessment (VPA).

This document includes information related to site, agencies, the Peace Corps, current and previous Volunteer

presence, security and communications, and housing and living arrangements. This document is written in English, but is translated into Spanish so that all parties involved in the placement process understand what it takes to host and work with a Volunteer at the community level. If the Volunteer is replacing a Volunteer at the site, the VPA is updated by the Volunteer who is closing service.

Box 2. Sample Volunteer Job Description in an MOU.

- *Prepare multimedia training materials, prepare operation platform to navigate the internet in Explorer 6.*
- *Participate in the planning and delivery of training events.*
- *Train participants in the use of MS Visual Studio NET.*
- *Train teachers in the use of Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, etc.*
- *Improve data base SQL Server 2000.*
- *Link our data base to the internet and the intranet.*

**Cooperation Agreement between Peace Corps
and the Association of Guías Cuevas**

Site Description Form. The site description document describes the site where the Volunteer will be assigned to live and work and is the result of the site development process. The project manager provides a hard copy of the site description to each Trainee during the site announcement process, and an additional hard copy is filed in the site database.

Site Assignment. The Project Management Team provides Trainees with a detailed site package and orientation prior to site assignment, and they work with other PMTs and the PTO to determine appropriate criteria to match skills, abilities, and Trainee preferences to a particular site. Three interviews are conducted with the trainee during PST. The APCD, project specialist, and technical trainer conduct the interviews, and the information from the interviews is supplemented by a site survey questionnaire administered to the Trainees for additional information on preferences, special interests, and special needs or concerns.

Master site roster. The roster helps staff track sites and Volunteers. It tells the user if the site is a new site or a replacement; where the site is located; who has been assigned to that site; who the counterparts in that site are; and who the primary and secondary organizations are. The roster also includes a checklist of Volunteer requests, housing availability, and Volunteer work focus areas.

TOOLS FOR INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING

PC/Honduras expands the impact of its programming by grouping together Volunteers from different sectors. The Volunteers tackle a specific problem, such as watershed management, but because they bring different skill sets, their strategies are more comprehensive than if approached through the lens of a single sector.

One example is an environmental restoration project. The goal of the project was to reverse the degradation of Lake Yojoa and initiate the environmental recovery of Lake Yojoa's watershed. This project involved Volunteers from protected areas management (PAM), water/sanitation, municipal development, and business development projects. They worked together under the guidance and coordination of a PAM Volunteer in response to a special request from a regional development NGO.

The cross-sector collaboration of the Volunteers had an impact beyond environmental restoration. The Volunteers helped local communities by building their capacity in participatory decision making, environmental education, ecotourism, and small business development. In addition, the communities established the boundaries of the watershed and protected areas, developed leadership skills, improved their sanitation practices, and started restoration efforts through reforestation, waste management, and recycling.

Another example of targeted programming is Youth with No Borders, a group organized by the Global Fund that works closely with the HIV/AIDS prevention and child survival project. Traditionally, HIV/AIDS prevention work focuses on women, but in this project, an innovative curriculum has been developed to target the male population. Volunteers, with the collaboration of their host organization and PC/Honduras staff, identify sites where males gather such as pool halls, soccer fields, and bus stations to recruit attendees for workshops. Volunteers from other projects have joined to help spread information about men's health in the communities where they live. According to the APCD/ HIV/AIDS and Child Survival:

Now male PCVs across projects can participate; females identify male counterparts that are interested in educating others about HIV, and these men are trained, using a TOT model. During the current PST, we gave all the Trainees at least a day of HIV/AIDS education training using a very participatory curriculum/active learning, and by getting all the Trainees early on, they can do HIV education right from the start, rather than wait until a year into service.

TOOLS FOR PROJECT MONITORING AND REPORTING

One of PC/Honduras' greatest assets has been its flexibility and adaptability, allowing it to change to meet new conditions. New activities are being developed all the time, based on looking at what things are working and what needs to be done for them to work better. The tools used to make these assessments are monitoring and evaluation reports.

The post understands that Volunteer compliance with monitoring and reporting procedures improves when the time they invest in writing reports is beneficial to the Volunteers. In Box 3, the programming and training officer summarizes how PC/Honduras staff respond to reports submitted by Volunteers.

Box 3. Motivating Volunteers to Comply with Reporting Requirements

It's important to emphasize that if staff expect PCVs to do work reports, then PCVs expect acknowledgement/feedback from staff. The latter needs to be personalized and more than thank you, good job! Naturally, PCVs want and need guidance. This also needs to be done in a timely fashion. (The kiss of death is asking someone to write a detailed report and not even acknowledging receipt.) Each project also sends a response letter, which summarizes what each PCV is doing. This is sent to all the other PCVs within the project. It takes the projects 30 or more days to collect all of the data and send out the response letter. Prior to that, we send them a short note, stating that the report has been received and give them some brief feedback.

-- Programming and Training Officer

Monitoring Documents

PC/Honduras' monitoring documents are grouped into two areas of responsibility: the Volunteer's and the Project Management Team's. Volunteers are expected to complete the following five different reports for the PMT:

1. Monthly Adjustment Report: The Volunteer advises the PMT on how s/he is doing and/or if the PMT need to follow up on anything. The PMT encourages the Volunteer not to wait until the end of the month if there is anything that needs to be reported earlier.
2. Project Planning Tool: This is the Volunteer's three-month plan that the Volunteer and counterpart sign. It includes the resources needed by the Volunteer to complete a project. Having the counterpart sign shows that he is aware of the Volunteer's plans and also helps with communication.
3. Semiannual Project Report: This quantitative and qualitative report is due in March and September and captures data for the yearly reports required by Peace Corps headquarters. This report provides information on Volunteers' work and activities.

4. Yearly Report: At the end of their first year, Volunteers submit a report about their site and projects in Spanish. (Many of the counterparts would not be able to read a report in English.) The purpose of the report is to give general and summary feedback about their work and experiences and to provide their counterparts with a document describing the past year's achievements.
5. End of Service Report: This report is similar to the yearly report, except it covers two full years of service. The Volunteers are expected to write the reports in both Spanish and English. The Spanish version is less detailed; the Volunteers use the English version as their Description of Service (DOS) statement.

The Project Management Team's Reports

In addition to the documents required by headquarters (project plans, Volunteer Assignment Descriptions, and the Project Status Reports), the PMT prepares:

- Mini-Project Status Reports every six months.
- Responses to Volunteer Project Reports (two times per year).
- Descriptions of Work (DOW) for PST and ISTs.
- Site Visit and Site Development Reports.
- Site and Volunteer file maintenance reports.
- Responses to requests from PC/Headquarters.
- Critical incident documentation.

The Monitoring Handbook

In order to monitor communication between the Project Management Team and Volunteers, a Monitoring Handbook has been created to chronologically maintain a record of all communication with each Volunteer. The APCDs who maintain these handbooks find it very useful, as one noted as follows:

The Monitoring Handbook helps me to keep track of when I last communicated with a Volunteer. It also tells me how much time has passed without being in contact with a Volunteer. Volunteers know that I have such a book and because of it, I am attentive to our communications...it takes time to maintain the notebook, but it keeps me alert as to any communication gaps with one of my Volunteers.

TOOLS FOR VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

The tools for Volunteer support are: site visits, the Volunteer support network, and the Community Partner Team.

Site Visits

A project manager and/or the project specialist must visit a Volunteer at their site a minimum of three times during their service to review project activities and ensure appropriate supervision, guidance, and support by the host agency. Site visits are scheduled during the first three months of service, middle of service, and end of service. The purpose of these visits is to:

- Discuss programming issues with Volunteers and community partners.
- Evaluate safety, housing, language, and health.
- Discuss concerns and problems.
- Set up action and follow-up plans.

In addition to providing support, the site visits serve as an opportunity for the PMT member to assess Volunteer performance, to confirm that job assignments are in compliance with established agreements and projected goals and objectives, to inquire about personal and work related problems or limitations, and to provide advice and consultation as necessary.

Each site visit requires personal interviews with the Volunteer, community partner, and supervisor/counterpart for each of the Volunteer's projects, and meetings with regional directors/coordinators. This requires a considerable amount of travel to isolated areas and time away from the staff's assigned duty station. Site visits may be by the APCDs or project specialist. According to the APCD for Protected Areas Management project:

We select PCVs from different groups and geographical areas and provide them with training in listening skills. We emphasize that the purpose is to create a culture of support rather than punishment....This promotes better communication particularly among programming staff, medical staff, and Volunteers. In addition to having a staff liaison for each group, we provide them with financial support, so that each group can have two meetings per year.

Volunteer support network

PC/Honduras has a Volunteer peer support network in the form of a number of Volunteer interest groups.² Peer support enables Volunteers with diverse experience, before and during their Peace Corps service, to help other Volunteers in their cross cultural and personal adjustment. These groups also provide education about cultural diversity by

² The post's Volunteer support groups include: the Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC); Volunteers Offering Support (VOS); COLORS (a resource on diversity); Gay and Lesbian Bisexual Experience (GLOBE); Older and Knowing Souls (OAKS); and ENLACE (a Gender and Development resource).

building awareness among staff and Volunteers. These groups collaborate with pre-service training and offer suggestions on policy. Each group has a staff liaison in order to increase staff/Volunteer coordination and communication. Volunteers receive in-depth information about each of the Volunteer groups during PST. Additionally, each group has a bulletin board and information shelf in the Volunteer lounge.

Participation by Volunteers in a group is meant to support project initiatives and not to detract from the role of the Volunteer as a community development worker. Volunteers are to dedicate the majority of their time to their work in communities.

The purpose of the Volunteer support groups is not to help you “escape from” Honduran culture but rather to learn strategies for quicker and improved integration.

Programming and Training Officer

Another aspect of the Volunteer support network is newsletter published by and for Peace Corps Volunteers called *Allí No Más* (ANM). ANM is published twice a year and is distributed to all Volunteers and Trainees in Honduras, Peace Corps offices in the Inter-American and Pacific Region, Peace Corps Washington, and the U.S. Embassy in Honduras.

ANM is designed to provide information on administrative matters (medical, general announcements, country director commentary, library news, project updates from the APCDs, funding information, and programming and training information), material submitted by Volunteers (articles, stories, poems, artwork, recipes, and letters to the editor), as well as general interest articles written by Volunteers or reprinted from other publications. Volunteers are encouraged to submit articles in order to inform other Volunteers about what is happening in their projects. Articles written by host country nationals are welcomed and encouraged.

The Community Partner Team

A principal feature of Volunteer support is the Community Partner Team, which is put together at the site. An example of such a team can be seen in a Volunteer Placement Assessment for an environment Volunteer:

For this assignment, we have defined a Community Partner Team. One member of that community partner team is the Cooperativa de Café de San Luis. There, [in the Cooperativa] your main and direct community partner is Mr. T____. Mr. T____ is a member of the organization and the treasurer of the patronato. Mr. T____ is a local environmental leader with strong support from the communities and a lot of knowledge about Santa Bárbara National Park. He is also a Guide for the park. He enjoys much respect from the communities. The other member of your Community Partner Team is Mr. F____. He is a recognized leader around the

communities. He currently is managing many activities in the Cooperativa de Café de San Luis, but also understands the role of the Volunteer in working with the whole community in many areas. He is a carpenter and has volunteered in many construction projects such as the newly built kindergarten. One more person that will be instrumental, both for you and your wife, is Professor R____. He is an environmentalist at heart and would love to coordinate some work with you. He is the current Principal of the local middle school. He has worked with several other Volunteers in the past and demonstrates a real understanding of the role of the Volunteers in the community.

Each Project Management Team reviews and supports PC/Honduras policies from the Volunteers' perspective and provides Volunteers with guidance on Peace Corps policy. The PMT advises and assists Volunteers in the preparation of proposals for community development projects. These projects are normally, but not exclusively, funded by Small Project Assistance funds (SPA), the Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP), and other local and external sources of funding. When appropriate, the PMT provides Volunteers with project assistance during the implementation stage and assesses project progress to ensure compliance with original goals and good use of financial resources.

The Community Partner Team for five of the six projects includes at least two counterparts, while the Youth Development Project identifies four counterparts. This ensures that Volunteers have adequate amounts of work and that the Volunteers have opportunities to work with different members of the community. The Volunteers are clustered around an experienced Volunteer who has the technical capacity to offer advice and provide guidance.

The Community Development Notebook

One of the challenges PC/Honduras has taken on is to build an institutional memory of its 40 years of work in Honduras. Too much of Peace Corps' experience and accomplishments are lost when Volunteers complete their service. PC/Honduras has developed a tool to accumulate and retain site-specific information called the Community Development Notebook (CDN). Its use remains limited to the Family Hillside Farming Project, a project within the protected areas management (PAM) project, which is the first to utilize CDNs and keep them updated in electronic and hard copy format.

The CDN contains information on the communities where Volunteers live and work. Volunteers in the PAM project are required to maintain activity files that document their progress and results. A typical CDN contains:

- *Information on the Community.* In addition to general information on a site, such as its location, population, and a description of living conditions, the information includes the history of Volunteers who have served at that site, important contacts, and Volunteers' bi-monthly reports.

- *Community Analysis.* The CDN includes an analysis of the community that describes the general problems that the Volunteer has observed at site, efforts to address the problems, and any obstacles encountered along the way.
- *Site-Specific Project Plans.* A reader of a CDN should be able to discern how the work at a particular site fits into the sector's project plan. Site-specific project plans explain how the Peace Corps intends to address the problems identified in the project plan and provide a strategy for monitoring and evaluating the Volunteer's project. The CDN describes the activities the Volunteer is carrying out to reach the goals and objectives of the plan, results, lessons learned, and best practices.
- *Family History.* In this part of the plan, Volunteers are encouraged to record personal observations about their host families, taking note of important events in the household, such as the arrival of a newborn, or when a child becomes the first in a household to go to high school or the university, receives honors, and participates in leadership activities. The Volunteers are encouraged to include information related to personal relationships, but they need to be as objective as possible. In sum, what the reader should get out of this section is a description of an activity from beginning to end, how to work better with the family, what should be avoided, and how family members react to different cultural, religious, educational, and development issues.
- *Community Development History.* Volunteers are asked to record information about the community as a whole. For example, the installation of new infrastructure such as electricity, a water system, or a new road may be recorded. Volunteers watch out for new organizations that have arrived to work in the community. They record how events have affected their activities, the community, and the future of Peace Corps at the site. Finally, the Volunteers are asked to take note of safety and security issues, health concerns, and the strategies the Volunteer developed to cope with them.

PHASE II: THE VOLUNTEERS' PERSPECTIVE

We met with 45 Volunteers in seven focus groups in the regions of Lago de Yojoa and Santa Barbara, and the cities of Santa Rosa de Copan, Choluteca, Tegucigalpa, La Ceiba, and Catacamas. The size of the groups ranged from 5 - 8 persons.

Volunteers who participated in our discussion groups in Honduras evaluated their Peace Corps experiences around meeting two goals: (1) to be productive at work and (2) to integrate culturally into their communities. When asked what PC/Honduras staff do that helps them reach these goals, they identified five elements that made a difference:

- Quality of sites (host organizations, counterparts, and communities).
- Projects with clear goals and structured activities.

- Staff support.
- Support from other Volunteers.
- Training that gave Volunteers skills directly applicable to project goals.

TOOLS

TOOLS FOR SITE DEVELOPMENT AND PLACEMENT

Volunteers felt they could be the most productive when placed in sites that offered multiple opportunities for work and had the following characteristics:

- Host organizations that had work ready for the Volunteer and provided logistical support, e.g., transportation of materials to build water systems.
- Counterparts who were enthusiastic about working with the Volunteer and interested in new ideas.
- Communities with clear needs for a Volunteer and a willingness to work with the Volunteer.

Host organizations that have work. Volunteers said that the best host organizations fulfill two functions to help them adjust to their sites: The first is to have concrete projects ready for them to work on during their first few months at site. Volunteers want to be busy. Many of the water and sanitation Volunteers, for example, were put to work on water systems as soon as they arrived at their sites and have enjoyed a steady demand for their engineering skills. The business Volunteers also found themselves put to work quickly. One Volunteer wrote that his organization set him up immediately with people who needed business training and kept him busy for a few months. Being busy eases the adjustment process for the Volunteers by giving them time to observe how things are done and get to know people at work and in the community.

The second is to provide logistical and transportation support. Water and sanitation Volunteers, for example, depend on host organizations to provide materials and transportation to the communities where they build water systems.

Counterparts incorporating the Volunteers into their lives. Volunteers looked to their counterparts to introduce them to the community, help them get started on initial projects, and figure out what are the community needs and wants. Many said that their counterparts included them in their family lives, taught them survival skills (cooking, shopping, and gardening), and helped them think through potential projects. Through their counterparts, the Volunteers build a network of social and work contacts. Many of the Volunteers work with more than one counterpart, often “graduating” from their assigned counterpart after six months to one year.

A good counterpart appreciates the skills and presence of the Volunteer. Volunteers felt it important for their counterparts to be part of the community in which they were working. Volunteers want to be more than a status symbol or a grant-writing machine for

their host organizations. A Volunteer in the PAM project had an ideal situation. She was placed in a small site where her counterpart “took her under his wing.” He takes her to the fields on a regular basis where they have built irrigation systems together with other farmers. They plan on building a community center and developing biogas stoves. Many of the HIV/AIDS prevention and child survival (health) Volunteers were paired with counterparts who gave them freedom and support to develop new projects for the clinics and communities. They felt that clinic staff were eager to learn from them and to adopt their projects after the Volunteers had left.

Roughly three-quarters of the Volunteers in our discussion groups had switched counterparts and, sometimes, host organizations. In many cases, changing host organizations and counterparts was an outgrowth of meeting people and learning of other opportunities and needs. As communities came to know what the Volunteers could do for them, they sought out the Volunteers directly. This was often the case with the water and sanitation Volunteers; many of them spoke about people knocking on their doors at home to request the services of the Volunteer in designing a water system for their community.

Communities are active. Volunteers are energized by work that fulfills the needs of the community, especially when people perceive the benefits of the project and willingly participate in its implementation. Volunteers who found themselves in sites where the communities invited them to participate in *their* projects were clearly excited by being involved with communities that are willing to take the initiative.

“If your town isn’t behind you all the way, any success you have will be limited.”

Youth Development Volunteer

Volunteers’ skills are matched to the needs of the site. While some Volunteers were adamant that they required certain characteristics in their sites – small community, rural, comfortable climate, and creature comforts – many said that matching the skills of the Volunteer to the needs of the community was the most important factor. The business Volunteers attributed their productivity to being placed in sites where they could use their business skills and where their organizations and communities recognized the value of their skills and were interested in benefiting from them. Based on their experiences and observations, the Volunteers felt that their APCDs made good matches when they listened and got to know the Volunteers. The Volunteers also said that they benefited from the guidance that staff gave them in thinking about which criteria should guide their expectations of a site.

Consecutive Volunteers. Volunteers struggled when they were the first Volunteer in a new site because they spent the entire first year explaining the concept of Peace Corps and volunteerism. At the other extreme, however, were the Volunteers who were the 10th, 14th, or 20th Volunteer at the site. They worried that the host organization viewed having a Volunteer as a right rather than a privilege. Volunteers appeared to find being the third Volunteer the most comfortable. Their counterparts knew how to work with them and what to expect and the communities were still enthusiastic.

TOOLS FOR DESIGNING PROGRAMS TO MAXIMIZE VOLUNTEER PRODUCTIVITY AND SATISFACTION

Based on our discussions with Volunteers, their written comments, and the surveys, the water and sanitation and the HIV/AIDS prevention and child survival projects have several features that contribute to the productivity and satisfaction of the Volunteers:

“The water and sanitation project is the most productive and worthwhile of the Peace Corps projects in Honduras.... We are in constant demand...”
-- **Water and Sanitation Volunteer**

- The goals of the project plan are clear and meet the needs of poor communities.
- The goals translate into concrete activities that Volunteers can implement.
- Project activities do not require Volunteers to mobilize communities.
- There is ample support from the APCD.

Work assignments are clear. The Volunteers in the water and health projects attributed their productivity, in part, to the clarity of their projects’ goals and to the fact that the goals translate into concrete activities that they can implement. In the water and sanitation project, the Volunteers carry out the topographical studies and design work for building or rehabilitating water systems. They also help to locate funds for projects, work with water boards on pricing schemes for cost recovery, and teach communities about watershed protection and how to purify water systems.

The health Volunteers attributed their productivity to the clarity, but also to the breadth, of the project goals. They work with nurses, midwives, and community leaders to improve their teaching and training skills, including providing them with up-to-date technical information and training tools. Many of the Volunteers spoke about the workshops they have given with their counterparts in schools to students and parents on HIV/AIDS prevention. As several Volunteers stated, “we have well-defined work that we can implement and a range of project ideas to choose from, depending on the needs and resources of our sites.”

Sixty-four percent of the water and sanitation Volunteers who completed the OIG Survey rated the clarity of their work assignments as “well” or “very well,” while the remaining 36% rated the clarity as “moderately clear.” Every health Volunteer who responded to our survey rated the clarity of their work assignments as “well” or “very well.”

Volunteers meet the vital needs of poor communities. The Volunteers gain great satisfaction from addressing the vital needs of poor communities. The water and sanitation Volunteers know that their project has helped hundreds of people to gain access to clean water. Several of the Volunteers said that the link between clean water and child survival rates motivated them to work through any obstacles they met during the design and implementation phases of their work. The Volunteers in the HIV/AIDS prevention project work with segments of the population who are not adequately served

by other HIV/AIDS or other health programs. According to the APCD, he shifted the focus of the health project from working with youth to working with populations that are not as well served by other HIV/AIDS programs because this is where “the need and work are.” He has created a niche for Peace Corps Volunteers by using national health data to determine which segments of the population have the greatest needs. Volunteers work with men, as well as women and youth, in the Garifuna communities (the Africans who were brought to Honduras as slaves), and with other people living with HIV/AIDS.

Volunteers are put in assignments where the host institution has prepared the community. Minimizing the need for Volunteers to mobilize communities before they can achieve their goals has also had a positive impact on the productivity and satisfaction of the Volunteers in the water and health projects. In the water and sanitation project, the Volunteers work with NGOs that specialize in community development or municipalities. The NGOs conduct community assessments and carry out educational activities as needed, leaving the water and sanitation Volunteers to focus on the design and implementation of water projects. By the time they interact with the communities, the latter already know what the Volunteers can do for them and are motivated to work with them. The water and sanitation Volunteers enjoyed the fact that communities often sought them out and participated actively in the project. Their major obstacle was the funding of materials for building a water system.

Nor do the health Volunteers need to invest much time, if any, in mobilizing communities around projects that are supposed to improve their health. The health Volunteers are in Honduras to train health workers and community members to be trainers. The responsibility of mobilizing communities and raising their awareness of health issues has shifted to Hondurans.

Training provides Volunteers with the right skills. Some, but not all, of the water and sanitation Volunteers come to Peace Corps with degrees in engineering. The Volunteers who were recruited as generalists for both programs, however, felt that training had prepared them for their work. During training, the water and sanitation Volunteers learn how to conduct topographical surveys and build the systems. Generalists felt their training prepared them well, but they also can call on the APCD or one of the Volunteers with an engineering background when they need help.

The same is the case for the health Volunteers – some arrive with strong backgrounds in public health, and others are recruited as generalists. Many felt that their training prepared them for their work, because during training they were put in situations that closely mirrored the conditions they encountered at site. As a result, they learned how to tailor their message to different audiences – health workers, communities, men versus women, and youth. The generalists emerged from PST with a solid foundation in health issues pertinent to Honduras and with ideas for projects.

The APCD is proactive in sustaining the productivity of the Volunteers. The health Volunteers said that the work ethic, creativity, and commitment of the APCD to fighting HIV/AIDS helped them to sustain their own enthusiasm. One Volunteer wrote that site

visits always left him energized. The APCD works hard to find funds for Volunteers' projects and to organize workshops for Volunteers, counterparts, and community members for training on various health issues. He understands that Volunteers want to stay busy with meaningful work. The workshops motivate the Volunteers, because they have an opportunity to exchange their experiences with their projects and brainstorm ideas for new projects. For example, Volunteers and some of the Peace Corps staff have been organizing health workshops for men. One of the Volunteers who participated in our focus groups had recently completed a three-day, training of trainers workshop for Volunteers, midwives, and government officials.

TOOLS FOR PROJECT MONITORING (REPORTING)

Each sector in Honduras has different reporting requirements. When the Volunteers found value in the exercise for themselves, they were more likely to take the time to report. Some said that the act of writing down what they did over a period of time helped them to see their achievements, identify future activities, and organize their work. The reports gained even greater value when staff gave them substantive feedback on their work. Volunteers tend to want to know how they are doing in the eyes of the staff and also to receive suggestions on how to be more effective in their sites. See Box 4 for the youth development project's approach to this.

Box 4. Explaining the Need for Reports to the Youth Volunteers

The youth development project's *Guide to Report Writing* offers the following reasons to Volunteers for submitting reports:

- To know what type of projects you are working on, in order to support you with materials and technical support and suggest collaboration where possible.
- To make a point of receiving some sort of communication from you, to know that you are safe, well and happy in your site or to the contrary if you need our support be that personal, professional, safety, security, technical, medical, etc.
- To assess our impact as a group in Honduras and submit general information to PC Washington for project evaluation and planning.
- To provide the volunteer with a detailed record of their work in Honduras for future references, resume writing, job applications and graduate school requirements.

TOOLS FOR VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Support from Staff. Volunteers spoke highly about the enthusiasm, technical knowledge, and work ethic of their APCDs. Many said that they felt energized after interacting with their APCD, whether it was through a project workshop, site visit, or a phone call. They look to their APCDs for new ideas and approaches and strategies for overcoming obstacles.

Site Visits. Volunteers told us that they benefit from site visits by APCDs in several ways. First and foremost, APCDs keep the Volunteers motivated and focused. One Volunteer said that the ability of his APCD to articulate a vision for him and his counterpart was one of the most valuable aspects of a site visit. Volunteers find it hard sometimes to recognize what they have achieved. One of the protected area management Volunteers said that his APCD has a talent for helping Volunteers and their counterparts to see their achievements and set new goals.

Second, the Volunteers look to their APCDs to resolve problems they are having with counterparts. In hierarchical and status-conscious societies, Peace Corps staff have the social clout to negotiate a resolution. Volunteers joked that the presence of the “white SUV” – the symbol of officialdom in many developing countries – awes people in ways that Volunteers do not. The presence of a Peace Corps vehicle and staff member confers a status on the Volunteer that eludes them by living at the same standard of living as their communities.

Volunteers were acutely aware of the heavy work load of the APCDs. They struggle to find a balance between getting the support they need and recognizing that APCDs have families and lives separate from Peace Corps.

Support from Other Volunteers. Volunteers are pragmatic about their work and the kind of support they need to get over hurdles and accomplish their goals. In figuring out where to find answers or help, they weigh the time it will take to reach and get a response from someone, the level of technical difficulty their question poses, and whether their question requires the expertise of someone engaged directly in the same or similar activity. Volunteers reach out to the APCDs on technical issues, but if their problem is more of a hands-on one, they turn to other Volunteers to see who has dealt with the issue before and how they solved it.

Site histories and overlapping service. Because of changes in training calendars, some of the Volunteers overlapped with more experienced Volunteers. They credited the overlap with making their adjustment easier and shorter. They learned the key players in the community, how to get things done, and basic things like public transportation.

One APCD has initiated community development notebooks as a way of passing down information from one Volunteer to another, although it remains a suggestion and not a requirement. Only two Volunteers in our discussion groups said they were keeping notebooks, but everyone agreed it was a good idea, and some thought they would start.

Cell phones. Volunteers frequently mentioned the ease of communication as an important factor. Several Volunteers even told us that they could not have survived their early months in Peace Corps had they not been able to talk with family, friends, and other Volunteers. Sharing their experiences with other Volunteers was important to them, and being able to keep in touch with family reduced their sense of isolation.

Collaboration. Volunteers find it useful to know which Volunteers are nearby and what skills and knowledge they have. In one example, a Volunteer was approached by people in the community with a project idea. He thought it was a good idea, but he did not have the technical skills. However, he knew of another Volunteer who did. They made arrangements for the Volunteer to visit the site for a few days to help get the project started.

Other Volunteers are engaged in longer-term collaboration that draws together Volunteers from different projects. In the Lago de Yojoa region, two Volunteers are collaborating on developing a youth tourism site around the natural caves that exist in the area. They have combined their skills and experience from working with youth, local organizations, and the tourism industry.

TOOLS FOR TRAINING

Language. Volunteers ranked language training as among the most important aspect of their pre-service training. Volunteers who spoke very little or no Spanish prior to coming to Honduras praised the language staff for giving them the skills to communicate with people. Being able to communicate, they agreed, was vital to getting to know people and accomplishing goals. One Volunteer wrote that “Learning the language is necessary to understanding the culture. Without a high level of language proficiency, it is difficult to understand the culture and work effectively.”

Technical. Just as Volunteers appreciated being placed in sites that offered them multiple options for work, they praised their technical training for preparing them to implement a variety of projects.

CONCLUSION: TOOLS FOR THE ROAD

PC/Honduras manages its large number of Volunteers by systematizing its processes around a set of “tools.” These tools help staff to manage the numerous tasks and details involved in training, developing new sites, and monitoring and supporting the Volunteers. From the Volunteers’ perspective, the attention to detail by staff translates into well-designed project plans, sites where Volunteers can be productive, and effective support for the Volunteers. The report singled out the Youth Project for the thoroughness of the site selection and preparation process. The APCD meets prospective host organizations several times before assigning a Volunteer. This is even more remarkable because each youth Volunteer has four counterparts. The Volunteers singled out the water and sanitation and health projects for the high level of productivity and satisfaction of the Volunteers. Their work assignments, they reported, are clear and meet critical needs of the communities. To many of them, that is the essence of Peace Corps.

APPENDIX A:

Site Development/Assignment Procedures

Honduras Site Development/Assignment Procedures

Site development is the identification of resources and the establishment of a support network that PC Volunteers need in order to have safe and healthy services and to be able to accomplish Peace Corps Honduras' goals.

Site development is the responsibility of the Programming staff (Project Managers and Program Specialists) with the Project Manager (PM) as the lead.

In addition, other staff members such as the Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMOs) and Safety and Security Coordinator (SSC) also play important roles in the site development process, especially when it comes to providing clearances that confirm medical facilities and safe/security conditions that ensure the well being of the potential Volunteer.

This document describes a series of steps to be followed in order to ensure a safe and healthy environment for PC Volunteer assignment purposes.

SELECTION OF POTENTIAL COMMUNITIES

Peace Corps assigns Volunteers based on written solicitudes presented by the interested parties. The requests may come from communities as a whole, locally organized groups within a given community or institutional entities such as municipalities; NGOs; international or local government agencies.

The electronic copy of the *Solicitud para Voluntario del Cuerpo de Paz* template should be filled out by the party and can be found in the Peace Corps' server in the following location:

1. Request for Volunteers

The first step is the selection of communities based on an analysis of the requests (*solicitudes*) for Volunteers. The programming staff generally receives these requests several months before the Trainees' arrival into the country.

2. Preparation of the master site roster

PMs proceed to make the first selection of potential sites. 5 months before the Trainees' arrival into the country all PMs transfer this information to the Program Specialist for Programming and Training (PS/PT) so that s/he can begin the initial master site roster. Subsequently, the Programming Staff, the SSC and a PCMO get together to cover several aspects such as:

- Identification of problematic areas.
This helps to:
 - prevent the assignment of Volunteers to locations where their safety/security or professional performance might be compromised due to criminal activity, natural conditions, or previously registered incidents.
 - prevent the assignment of Volunteers to sites which lack of appropriate medical facilities.

- Identify Volunteers currently assigned to specific sites.
This helps to:
 - prevent excess assignment of Volunteers to a given site.
 - identify other Volunteers who may provide peer support as well as to coordinate future work.
- Identify sites where Volunteers are being replaced

Finally, once the master roster has been carefully revised, following the above-mentioned observations, the SSC provides a copy to the Regional Security Officer (RSO) at the US Embassy for clearance.

PMs should always develop more sites than the number of trainees they expect.

3. Community analysis

PMs proceed with a thorough investigation of the local resources and possible support network in every approved site/community on the master site roster.

In order to collect the information it is necessary to utilize the format “*Descripción del Sitio*” which is to be found in the Peace Corps’ server in the following location:

The programming staff may collect the information in different ways:

- traveling to every site to undertake a community analysis. Interviewing community members, potential community partners and/or employees of local institutions can collect information.
- gathering the information through the Community Partner/s.
- talking to Volunteers currently assigned to the potential site/s (site mates) or surrounding areas.

According to current PC/Honduras policies, it is a mandatory procedure to inform local Volunteers about the possibility of assigning a new Volunteer in the site/area.

- collecting data about the community and potential counterparts by consulting previous Volunteer’s Personal Assessment of Site. COSing Volunteers, who may have lived and worked in a particular community often provide accurate information, that is valuable for the PM.

Additional resources and network support that PC staff identifies and evaluates prior to the assignment of Volunteers may include, but not be limited to, the following points:

General community information:

This involves data such as: population (quantity, ethnicity and distribution), location, villages, natural resources, weather, main economical activities, local leaders and authorities, locally organized groups, public and private services, celebrations, and transportation and/or communication means, and a political map of the community (this can be obtained through the Instituto Geográfico Nacional).

Safety and security status:

For this we recommend paying particular attention to the following aspects:

- Dangerous neighborhoods in the community. (Criminal activity, landslides, floods, etc.).
- Dangerous roads that lead into or outside of the community.
- Presence of bars and pool houses.
- Presence of gangs areas if any and where centered.
- Collect information about criminal activity in the area, especially a description of the kind of incidents that occur more regularly (where, when and targeted individuals).
- Law enforcement entities present in the community (office's addresses, names of officials and phone numbers).

In order to confirm the authenticity of the information the SSC recommends consulting each of these topics with at least three different sources such as:

- Law enforcement officials,
- Municipality,
- and community members.

Health information and Medical facilities:

This area is investigated in coordination with the medical unit. The information collected by the medical unit is centered at a regional level while the information collected by the programming staff is focused at a community level.

Among the data collected by the programming staff we have:

- Name of local health centers, clinics or hospitals.
- Addresses and telephone numbers.
- Names of the Dr/s, nurse/s or person/s generally responsible for medical care.
- Schedules.

Housing:

- Peace Corps/Honduras will provide Volunteers with one secure housing option upon site assignment where Volunteers are **required** to live for at least the first two months. Peace Corps Honduras will also present two other options that can be explored by Volunteers after the initial two-month period.
- Volunteers will not be assigned to communities where safe housing is not available.

- During the site selection process, Project Managers will determine the availability of adequate housing. If no options are available, this site will not host a Volunteer. In the event that safety and health upgrades are required, this can be accomplished in a number of ways described below.

Note: Not all communities where Volunteers live have electricity. All sites chosen for Volunteer placement which do not have electricity will have reliable transportation that allows a Volunteer to reach a community with telephone services within one hour. Upgrades should permit the Volunteer to live at the same level as the average community member in a secure, dry home or apartment with a pila, shower or basic bathing facility and toilet or latrine.

Whether a Volunteer lives independently or with a family, the following safety and health criteria must be met:

Safe Housing Criteria: The following safety criteria are absolutes and must be adhered to by Volunteers:

- Secure roof and ceiling.
- Secure doors and windows, this may include bars over glass or heavy lockable wooden windows, local/community norms will be the guide.
- Solid wall of adobe, brick, cinder blocks or wood.
- Close proximity to neighbors - calling distance.
- Located away from zones of flooding or landslides.
- Houses should not be close to bars or polls.
- In larger towns where houses have surrounding walls and serpentine, Project Team must make an extra effort to identify houses with those safety and security conditions.
- Where independent housing is not an option, Project Teams will identify families that can host the Volunteer and secure one for the first two months of service. However, the arrangements must ensure that the PCV will have a room for his/herself to provide privacy.

Healthy Housing Criteria: The following criteria are absolutes and must be adhered to by Volunteers:

- House must have a latrine and pila (standard cement water storage container) and basic bathing facilities.
- House must have a dry floor (cement, tile or wood).
- Screens on all windows.
- In areas where vinchucas and scorpions are prevalent, cracks in adobe walls should be mended.
- Specific housing criteria related to existing medical conditions and recommended by medical officer. In the case of Volunteers who arrive with a medical condition, housing should be approved before moving in.

Also when selecting a house or apartment, the PM should pay particular attention to the following questions:

- Are there long distances between the house and any bathing area or latrine?
- Are bathing areas and latrines secure?
- Are shouts for help easily heard by neighbors?
- What do co-workers say about the neighborhood and/or neighbors?
- Have previous renters had problems with theft or other problems with the house?
- Does the house have screens?
- Do bushes and trees surrounding the house allow for somebody to hide easily? If so, it is necessary to trim bushes and cut lower branches of trees

Additionally, once the PM has selected one housing option, it is important to explain to the landlord that when the Volunteer arrives s/he will be responsible for:

- Honoring the pre-established contract.
- In case the Volunteer is not satisfied with house/apartment, s/he will notify his/her decision to move at least one-month prior to moving.
- Make monthly rent payments.

In order to formalize the transaction we recommend signing a contract before the arrival of the Volunteer. For this purpose a contract template can be found in the Peace Corps' server in the following location:

4. **Analysis of the Community Partner**

The type of community partner may vary considerably depending on the nature of the Peace Corps' project involved and the Community partner's goals and objectives.

As part of the initial entry to the community, the PM coordinates with at least one community partner who will be the Volunteer's main source of work during the first months of service. However, it is highly recommendable that a second Community partner is identified, not only to ensure quantity but also variety of activities.

Among the topics that PC staff take into consideration to evaluate potential Community partners we may include, but not be limited to, the following points:

- Mission, purpose, goals, and objectives of the entity.
- Main projects.
- How the Volunteer could get involved in the achievement of their goals, objectives, and projects?
- Volunteer's roles.
- What kind of support the Volunteer would receive? (Initial introduction to the community and local culture, workspace within the office if applicable, office supplies and equipment, transportation, identification of a possible housing option, per diem, etc.).
- Possible inter-institutional coordination.
- The Community partner's Code of ethics.

This information should be inputted into the format "Solicitud para Voluntario del Cuerpo de Paz" which is to be found in the Peace Corps' server in the following location:

Once the Project Manager has made a decision to assign a Volunteer, it is of an utmost importance that the following roles are clearly understood by the Community partner/s:

- The community partner acts as the Volunteer's advisor, troubleshooter, and liaison to the community.
- The community partner is a role model for the Volunteer in regards to appropriate cultural behavior, customs, etc.
- The community partner is responsible for the initial Volunteer's community induction by introducing him/her to local officials such as the police, the parish priest or minister, the mayor, heads of NGOs, members of local cooperatives, service providers such as the postman or other organizations.
- The community partner should always sign the Volunteer's vacation form in order to indicate his/her approval of the Volunteers absence from the work site or community.
- The community partner should always know about the Volunteer whereabouts.
- Peace Corps does not consider the community partner as the Volunteer's supervisor.
- The community partner should always show a professional behavior in his/her interaction and/or coordination with the Volunteer especially at the workplace.

More detailed information on the roles of the community partner could be found in the Peace Corps' server in the following location:

5. Letter of Understanding

Before the assignment of a Volunteer to any site, the PM should clarify/establish in coordination with the community partner/s the future Volunteers roles and responsibilities.

For this purpose, the following points are to be discussed:

- Peace Corps' goals.
- PC project's goals and objectives.
- Responsibilities of the community partner/s.
- Responsibilities of Peace Corps.
- Collaborations of the Volunteer.
- Administrative procedures such as:
 - Vacations & absences from the community/work,
 - Communications,
 - Logistical support,
 - Liaisons,
 - Supervision,
 - Etc.

Additionally, in order to formalize the agreement a ***Letter of Understanding*** must be signed before the arrival of the Volunteer to the community.

For this purpose it is recommended that during the Community partner day the PM, in coordination with the community partner and the trainee, discuss the content of the ***Letter of Understanding*** and sign three original copies.

Examples of letters of Understanding can be found in the Peace Corps' server in the following location:

6. Community Partner Day

The community partner day is an event organized by Peace Corps programming staff in coordination with the training center staff.

It is expected that by this stage in the process of site development the PMs have a clear idea as to what individuals or entities will act as the Volunteer's community partner/s. It is then when the moment is appropriate for inviting them to participate in the Community Partner Day.

For this purpose, the PMs deliver to the community partner/s a written invitation, which is prepared by the training contractor. This document should clearly state when and where the event will take place and briefly why we want their participation in the event.

Additionally, the PMs will submit to the PTO a list of invitees who have confirmed their attendance to the event (names, community, and name of the represented entities if any), additionally, it is important to add details such as:

- Number of community partners per trainee attending the event.
- Names of the community partner who will need reimbursement for gas expenditures.
- Individuals who will need reimbursement for additional hotel nights while traveling (round trip) to the designated area.

Next, the PTO sends this information to the Training Director to allow the training center to start working on the logistical preparations of the event.

Among the topics that PMs discuss with the community partner/s and trainees during the event we may include, but not be limited to, the following points:

- Peace Corps' goals.
- PC project's goals and objectives.
- Expectations, roles and responsibilities of the community partner/s.
- Expectations and responsibilities of Peace Corps.
(Code of ethics, Peace Corps policies.)
- Expectations, roles and collaborations of the Volunteer.
- Administrative procedures such as:
 - Vacations & absences from the community/work,
 - Communications,
 - Logistical support: (office space, office supplies, housing options, transportation, per diem if any, etc.)
 - Liaisons,
 - Supervision,
 - Etc.
- Letter of Understanding.
- Etc.

7. Volunteer Site Assignment package

The final step is the preparation of the Volunteer site assignment package. This package contains several documents such as:

- The Volunteer site description (VSD), which is a document through which the PM provides the trainee all the collected information about his/her future site of assignment.

In order to prepare the VSD it is necessary to utilize the format "Volunteer Site Description". Examples of previous Volunteer Site Descriptions can be found in the Peace Corps' server in the following location:

Finally, the SSC and a PCMO (the representative to the G-5) should sign this document to confirm the accuracy of this information.

- Letter of understanding.
- Local, departmental and national maps.
- Copies of the "Solicitud para Voluntario del Cuerpo de Paz" sent to the PM for all the interested individuals and entities.
- Additional descriptive information about the Community partners.
- Regional medical facilities. The medical unit provides this information.
- Copies of the "Volunteer's Personal Assessment of Site-COS" if any.

8. Site Database

All Site information should be copied and placed in the vertical site database.