

# PEACE CORPS Office *of* Inspector General



## Evaluation of the Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System

IG-25-03-E

September 2025

---



## PEACE CORPS

# Office of Inspector General

202. 692. 2900 · [OIG@peacecorpsoig.gov](mailto:OIG@peacecorpsoig.gov) · [www.peacecorpsoig.gov](http://www.peacecorpsoig.gov)

### Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Peace Corps evacuated nearly 6,900 Volunteers from its overseas posts in 2020. The Peace Corps began reinstating Volunteers in March 2022 and, as of this report issuance, has approximately 3,000 Volunteers in the field. In the post-pandemic environment, the Peace Corps has contended with obstacles that have impacted its Volunteer recruitment and placement success rate. As a result, the Peace Corps has failed to meet its own Volunteer and Trainee onboard strength expectations.

### Objectives

The objective of this evaluation was to assess the challenges the agency has recently faced in recruiting, selecting, and placing Volunteers. The following researchable questions were used to meet this objective:

- Did the agency provide effective management oversight to meet the challenges in Volunteer recruitment and selection?
- Was the VDS sufficiently staffed to meet agency Volunteer recruitment and selection goals?
- What worked and what did not work with Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies and approaches?

### Evaluation of The Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System

September 30, 2025

#### What We Found

The Peace Corps lacked an agencywide strategy to allocate its resources where they were needed most: to increase the number of Volunteers in service. To meet its mission of promoting world peace and friendship, the Peace Corps needs to recruit a large cadre of American Volunteers to apply for service in partner countries around the world. However, of the 22 performance goals the agency listed in its fiscal year (FY) 2022-26 Strategic Plan, only 1 goal explicitly focused on Volunteer recruitment. Moreover, the strategic plan did not have specific Volunteer recruitment target numbers, which could be used to help the agency's recruitment components successfully develop and meet their programmatic goals.

We found that the Peace Corps did not have effective information management systems that appropriately support its Volunteer Delivery System (VDS). For example, the information system that the agency used for recruitment and marketing did not communicate with its Volunteer application management system. The agency also lacked effective information systems for tracking time-to-hire and processing travel requests and reimbursements.

In addition, the agency had not sufficiently filled its vacant recruiter positions, in part because the Office of Human Resources (OHR) was inadequately staffed. High recruiter turnover further hampered the agency's ability to fill recruiter vacancies in the VDS.

Furthermore, we determined that the VDS Steering Committee, which was responsible for ensuring a seamless continuity of operations between offices, did not provide effective oversight of VDS and struggled to address numerous challenges.

Finally, we found varied results from the recruitment approaches that the Peace Corps had employed to increase Volunteer numbers.

#### What We Recommend

This report contains seven recommendations: two are related to the Peace Corps' recruitment strategies and five are related to the Peace Corps' systems, personnel, and processes. We identified what worked and what did not with respect to the Peace Corps' strategies and approaches for recruitment. The agency should consider this information when planning future recruitment investments. For the full list of recommendations, see page 24 of this report.

---

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

---

### *WHY OIG CONDUCTED THIS REVIEW*

---

The success of the Peace Corps' mission depends on its ability to recruit and place individuals in host countries that have requested Volunteers. Since early 2020, when nearly 6,900 Volunteers were required to return from service abroad to the United States, the Peace Corps has struggled with recruiting and maintaining Volunteer numbers. In FY 2024, the agency reported that 3,337 Volunteers—less than half of the pre-pandemic number of Volunteers—were serving abroad.

In FYs 2023 and 2024, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) identified Volunteer recruitment—specifically the VDS—as a Top Management and Performance Challenge. Since FY 2024, the agency consistently reported low Volunteer numbers in its Congressional Budget Justifications (CBJ). The agency's FY 2024 CBJ noted a shortfall in active Volunteers serving abroad. In its FY 2025 CBJ, the Peace Corps reported that “application numbers remain well below pre-pandemic levels and are insufficient to fully meet the robust demand for Volunteers worldwide.”

Based on the persistent shortages in the Peace Corps' post-pandemic Volunteer numbers, OIG initiated this review to evaluate the agency's challenges with recruiting, selecting, and placing Volunteers. This report addresses (1) the effectiveness of the Peace Corps' management oversight in addressing Volunteer recruitment and selection challenges, (2) whether VDS staffing sufficiently meets the agency's Volunteer recruitment and selection goals, and (3) what did and did not work with the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection's (VRS) recruitment and selection strategies and approaches.

### *HOW OIG CONDUCTED THIS REVIEW*

---

To perform this evaluation, OIG reviewed the agency's strategic planning and performance documents, recruiting and hiring data, and documentation related to various VRS recruiting strategies, to include details about the Peace Corps' \$14 million *Bold Invitation* marketing and communications campaign. OIG also conducted in-person and virtual interviews with headquarters-based and regional recruitment staff. Evaluators traveled across the country to interview recruiters and recruitment supervisors in person between June and August 2024. The evaluation also included an overseas staff survey and a review of relevant documentation.

The scope of this evaluation included:

- Management oversight of the VDS between calendar years 2021 and 2023,
- VDS staffing numbers for FYs 2020 through 2023, and
- VRS' recruitment and selection strategies and approaches between FYs 2022 and 2023.

OIG conducted this evaluation in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020).

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

### WHAT OIG FOUND

---

Since Volunteers returned to service in March 2022, the Peace Corps has experienced significant challenges meeting Volunteer onboarding goals. While part of these challenges may be attributed to a significant shift in cultural and socioeconomic factors, a variety of issues with agency planning and resources have compounded Volunteer recruitment and placement difficulties.

OIG found that the Peace Corps lacked an agencywide strategy to address Volunteer shortages. While VRS established goals for the total number of Volunteer applications, the agency did not develop any specific milestones regarding Volunteer recruitment or retention. For example, in the Peace Corps FY 2022-26 Strategic Plan, only 1 of the 22 listed performance goals focused on Volunteer recruitment. The strategic plan did not provide specific target numbers for Volunteer recruitment and placement, making it difficult for the various offices involved to have defined goals and a measure of success. Once the Peace Corps returned to service after the evacuation, its strategy was to start with small cohorts. While the Peace Corps FYs 2024 and 2025 CBJs listed Volunteer projection numbers, even those smaller projections were not realized. Consequently, the agency's ability to meet participating host countries' Volunteer requests has been adversely affected. In addition, agency staff reported their concerns that low Volunteer numbers would negatively impact the Peace Corps' relationships with host country partners.

OIG also found that the agency's numerous information management systems, which are used across multiple offices that support the VDS, were ineffective. For example, the information systems that the agency used for recruitment and marketing did not interconnect with its system for managing Volunteer applications. Moreover, the agency lacked effective information systems for tracking time-to-hire and processing travel. The Peace Corps also experienced long-term vacancies for positions that support and maintain these systems.

Due to inadequate staffing numbers in OHR, along with high turnover, the agency has struggled to fill its recruiter vacancies in the VDS. The agency has faced a steady decline in the number of its recruiters, who are tasked with promoting the Peace Corps' mission at universities, job fairs, speaking engagements, and other outlets.

The Peace Corps also lacked processes to address its post-pandemic challenges. OIG reviewed records from and interviewed members of the VDS Steering Committee, a multi-office entity that monitors VDS activities and oversees its quality improvement. The review revealed that the Steering Committee did not provide effective oversight of the VDS and struggled to address numerous internal and external challenges.

To address these issues, VRS employed a number of Volunteer recruitment and selection methods and, of the nine reviewed, OIG found varied results with what did and did not work. The initiatives OIG reviewed included: the agency's *Bold Invitation* Marketing and Communications Campaign, which was intended to increase brand awareness, generate leads, and drive applications; the Strategic Campus Recruiter Program, which was located across 32 different colleges and universities; and a variety of service model pilots that were intended to provide a wider range of Volunteer service opportunities.

## **WHAT OIG RECOMMENDS**

---

This report contains seven recommendations: two related to Peace Corps' strategy and five related to the Peace Corps' systems, personnel, and processes. OIG identified what did and did not work with respect to the Peace Corps' strategies and approaches for recruitment. The agency should consider this information when planning future recruitment investments. For the full list of recommendations, see page 26 of this report.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                                                                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Background.....                                                                                                                                                                          | 1  |
| Peace Corps' Global Evacuation of Volunteers and Post-Pandemic Recruitment Challenges.....                                                                                               | 1  |
| Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System.....                                                                                                                                              | 2  |
| OIG's Previous Work on the Volunteer Delivery System .....                                                                                                                               | 4  |
| Evaluation Results .....                                                                                                                                                                 | 5  |
| While VRS Developed Volunteer Recruiting Targets, the Agency Lacked an Organization-Wide Strategy to Address Shortages and Meet Host Country Needs .....                                 | 5  |
| Finding 1: VRS Identified Volunteer Recruiting Targets, but the Agency Lacked an Organization-Wide Strategy to Drive a Common Definition of Volunteer Recruitment Success.....           | 5  |
| Finding 2: Persistent Volunteer Shortages Have Hampered the Agency's Ability to Meet Host Country Requests and Impacted Key Relationships .....                                          | 7  |
| Peace Corps Prepared for a Variety of Challenges But lacked the Systems, Personnel, and Processes to Address Post-Pandemic Recruitment Shortages .....                                   | 10 |
| Finding 3: Peace Corps' Information Management Systems Were Ineffective and Understaffed Across Work Units That Supported the VDS.....                                                   | 10 |
| Finding 4: Peace Corps Lacked Sufficient Recruiters Due to A Limited Pipeline of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Human Resources Staffing Gaps, and High Turnover Among Recruiters..... | 13 |
| Finding 4a: The Peace Corps Was Unable to Fill Recruiter Positions Due to Severe Staffing Shortages in the Office of Human Resources .....                                               | 15 |
| Finding 4b: The Agency Had a High Rate of Recruiter Vacancies Because of a High Recruiter Turnover Rate .....                                                                            | 16 |
| Finding 5: The Peace Corps Lacked Effective Processes for Overseeing and Supporting the Volunteer Delivery System .....                                                                  | 17 |
| VRS Employed Numerous Recruitment and Selection Methods with Varied Success .....                                                                                                        | 19 |
| Recommendations.....                                                                                                                                                                     | 24 |
| OIG Response to Agency Comments.....                                                                                                                                                     | 25 |
| Appendix A: Objective, Scope, and Methodology.....                                                                                                                                       | 26 |
| Appendix B: List of Acronyms .....                                                                                                                                                       | 27 |
| Appendix C: Agency Comments.....                                                                                                                                                         | 28 |
| Appendix D: Key Contributors .....                                                                                                                                                       | 33 |

---

## BACKGROUND

---

The Peace Corps Act describes the United States’ intent to “make available to interested countries and areas men and women of the United States qualified for service abroad and willing to serve....” and aims to maintain a Volunteer corps of 10,000 individuals, consistent with programmatic and fiscal considerations. Despite the Peace Corps Act’s aspirational goals, the agency has not maintained 10,000 Volunteers in service since the policy was established by Congress in 1985.<sup>1</sup> The agency’s mission continues to depend on its effective recruitment and placement of individuals to meet host country requests for Volunteers. However, the Peace Corps continues to experience substantial challenges in recruiting individuals to serve abroad, resulting in an underfill of Volunteers that has affected programmatic goals and participating country service needs.

### *Peace Corps’ Global Evacuation of Volunteers and Post-Pandemic Recruitment Challenges*

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Peace Corps evacuated nearly 6,900 Volunteers from their overseas posts back to the United States in 2020—an unprecedented event in the Peace Corps’ 60-year history. The Peace Corps began placing Volunteers back into the field in March 2022 and, by October 2022, more than 900 Volunteers had been deployed to 41 posts. OIG marked the milestone in its FY 2022 Management and Performance Challenges Report but noted that the Volunteer program would continue to be strongly impacted by global, regional, and country-specific complications stemming from the post-pandemic environment.

In FY 2023, OIG noted that the Peace Corps failed to meet its own Volunteer and Trainee onboarding strength expectations, even though it had substantially decreased its expected number of Volunteers from 3,900 to 2,530 for FY 2023. Moreover, the agency’s fill rate<sup>2</sup> for Invitees<sup>3</sup> had decreased; between FYs 2019 and 2023, the fill rate at invitation deadline decreased from 148 percent to 139 percent. During that same period, the fill rate at entry-on-duty steadily decreased from 94 percent to 64 percent.

The Peace Corps also contended with a variety of cultural and socioeconomic factors that have impacted its recruitment and placement of prospective Volunteers. Agency staff who OIG spoke with identified a variety of service barriers, such as the increasing student loan debt, which has made it difficult for individuals to volunteer abroad for 2 years, and that people have become more insular in the post-pandemic environment, which has made a 2-year commitment overseas less attractive.

In response to these shortfalls, the agency hired a contractor in 2023 to conduct research on public perceptions of the Peace Corps among the general U.S. population, which confirmed that

---

<sup>1</sup> See section 2 (b) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. § 2501(b)).

<sup>2</sup> Fill rates reflect the number of Invitees as a percentage of the total Volunteer Request. Fill rate is calculated at two points, at the time of invitation, and at the time of entry-on-duty, both of which decreased. Fill rates should exceed the Volunteer Request at invitation deadline to account for attrition.

<sup>3</sup> An Invitee is an individual who has applied to the Peace Corps and has been invited to serve by the Office of Placement. Once the individual completes medical and legal clearance, they attend a staging event and depart for post. After the individual enters on duty, they become a Peace Corps Trainee.

financial concerns and being separated from family and friends were some of the main obstacles in Volunteer recruitment and retention.

Peace Corps staff also reported that volunteerism and public service were at an all-time low. This challenge has been reported by several Federal entities, including the Government Accountability Office, which reported that the military has also noted a decline in recruitment following the global pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, multiple agency staff reported that a lack of trust in Federal Government institutions was another recruitment barrier. The Pew Research Center reported in 2024 that public trust in Government has been at an all-time low.<sup>5</sup>

### *Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System*

VDS is the cycle of activities that the agency employs to recruit, place, and ensure the delivery of qualified and suitable Volunteers to overseas posts.

The VDS cycle begins when posts work with their host country partners to determine the number and types<sup>6</sup> of Volunteers to request. VRS receives these Volunteer requests approximately 12 months before the individuals are expected to arrive in their country of service and develops recruitment strategies to fill host country requests. The Office of Placement and Assessment determines each candidate's suitability for service and invites qualified applicants to serve overseas (see Figure 1 above). The Office of Medical Services medically clears Invitees, and the agency completes a background investigation prior to service.

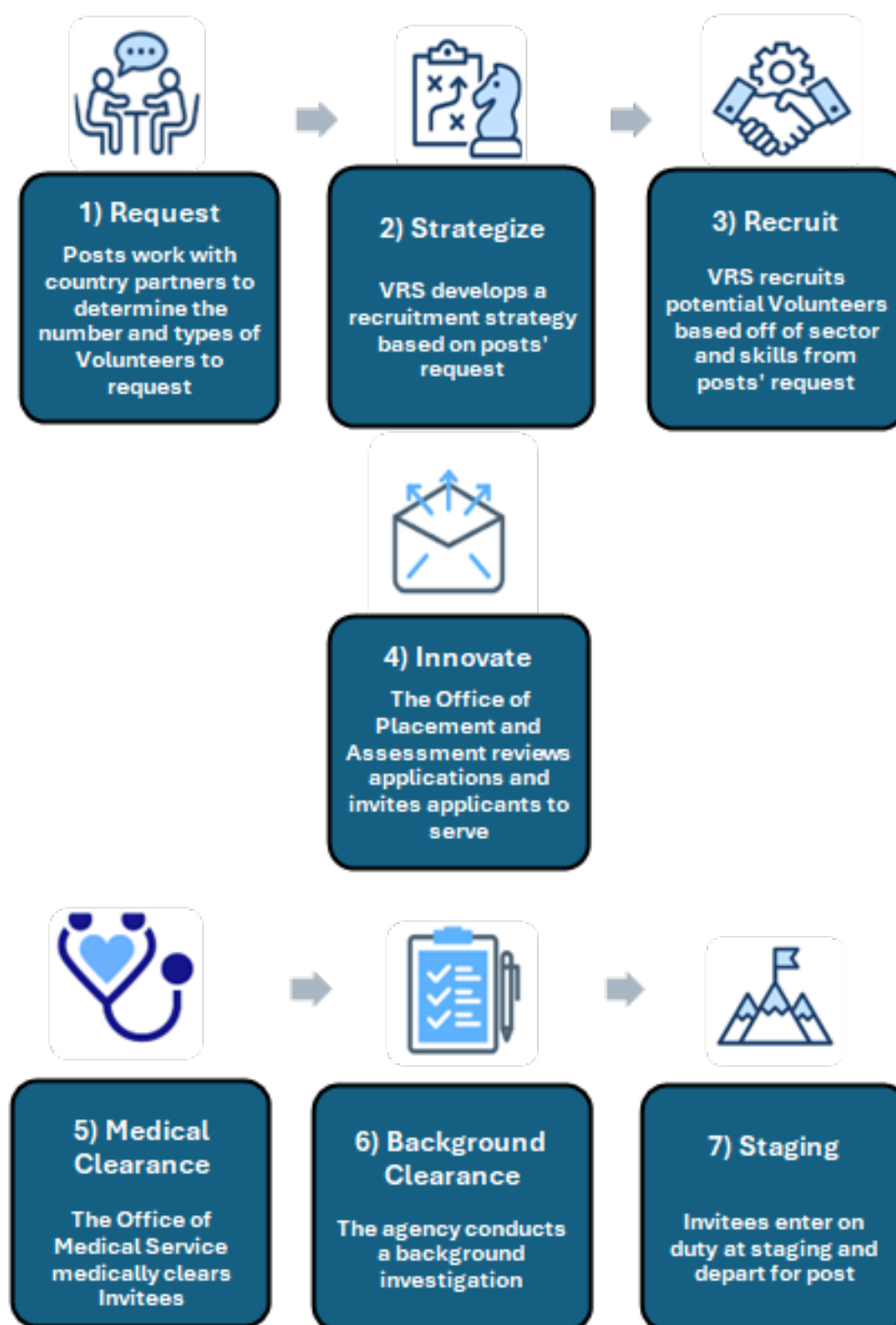
---

<sup>4</sup> Coast Guard: Progress Made to Address Recruiting Challenges but Additional Actions Needed.

<sup>5</sup> [Public Trust in Government: 1958-2024](#).

<sup>6</sup> The Peace Corps places Volunteers to work in multiple sectors, including, agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health, and youth development.

Figure 1. Volunteer Delivery System



Note: The VDS cycle concludes with a staging event where Invitees enter-on-duty and depart for post.

*OIG's Previous Work on the Volunteer Delivery System*

The VDS has undergone multiple reviews and revisions to better service the Peace Corps recruitment process. OIG has made findings and recommendations to the Peace Corps that support greater oversight of the VDS and help improve its effectiveness and efficiency. Below are a few examples of the work OIG has conducted in relation to the VDS.

- In 2003, OIG completed an [Evaluation of the Volunteer Delivery System \(IG-02-11-E\)](#) which identified the following areas for improvement: (1) leadership and organizational changes in order to influence public perception of the agency and renovate the VDS, (2) system integration and information flow, (3) information technology, (4) medical screening, (5) communication, and (6) staffing and training. OIG made 24 recommendations to help improve the VDS.
- In 2008, OIG completed an [Evaluation of the Peace Corps/Medical Clearance System \(IG-08-08-E\)](#), and found that the pre-service unit did not follow a standard process for reviewing applicants' medical files. OIG found that staff turnover from the five-year rule<sup>7</sup> had a negative impact on the medical clearance process. OIG also found that a lengthy medical clearance process—with an average of approximately 133 days—was one of the main reasons applicants withdrew their applications. OIG recommended changes to improve the efficiency of the medical clearance process.
- In 2010, OIG conducted a follow-up to its 2003 report, [Follow Up Evaluation of Volunteer Delivery System \(IG-11-01-E\)](#), to assess whether the agency was positioned to support increasing the numbers of Volunteers without decreasing Volunteer quality. While the evaluation found that some staff were concerned about their ability to maintain Volunteer quality, OIG was unable to determine whether the agency could increase Volunteer numbers while maintaining quality because the agency lacked a formalized definition of "Volunteer quality." OIG recommended that the agency develop a method to measure Volunteer quality.

The agency closed all OIG recommendations from these previous evaluations. In FY 2014, the agency made significant reforms to the VDS. This 2025 evaluation is not considered a follow-up to the previous evaluations conducted in 2003, 2008, or 2010, because the VDS has changed significantly since the last OIG evaluation.

OIG's FY 2023<sup>8</sup> and 2024<sup>9</sup> Management and Performance Challenges reports noted that the agency had not met its own expectations for the number of Volunteers placed globally (see Figure 2 below). The reports cited VDS staffing shortages and turnover, and challenges related to the system's oversight.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Peace Corps Act, Peace Corps employees can only serve appointments limited to terms of 5 years, subject to certain statutory exceptions.

<sup>8</sup> [FY2023 Top Management and Performance Challenges](#).

<sup>9</sup> [FY2024 Top Management and Performance Challenges](#).

---

## EVALUATION RESULTS

---

### **WHILE VRS DEVELOPED VOLUNTEER RECRUITING TARGETS, THE AGENCY LACKED AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE STRATEGY TO ADDRESS SHORTAGES AND MEET HOST COUNTRY NEEDS**

---

As an agency component, VRS has established its target application numbers since FY 2023, however, the Peace Corps lacked an agencywide strategy to focus its resources in addressing the Volunteer shortages. For example, VRS set goals for the total number of Volunteer applications it aimed to receive in recent fiscal years. However, the agency's most recent strategic plan for FY 2022-26 did not contain any agency-specific targets for the number of Volunteers it sought to recruit, making it difficult for the various agency components responsible for recruitment to work towards a commonly understood definition of success. While the Peace Corps has set Volunteer projections in its FYs 2022, 2023, and 2024 CBJs, the projections have consistently not been realized (see Figure 2 below), hampering the agency's ability to meet host country Volunteer requests and impacting stakeholder relationships.

#### *Finding 1: VRS Identified Volunteer Recruiting Targets, but the Agency Lacked an Organization-Wide Strategy to Drive a Common Definition of Volunteer Recruitment Success*

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993,<sup>10</sup> as amended by the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010,<sup>11</sup> requires Federal agencies to prepare a strategic plan that includes goals and objectives that define the level of performance the programmatic activity will achieve. However, of the 22 performance goals listed in the Peace Corps FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan<sup>12</sup>, only 1 performance goal explicitly focused on Volunteer recruitment, despite Volunteers being the central component for the Peace Corps' mission fulfillment (see Table 1). In addition, none of the performance goals established Volunteer recruitment target numbers. Peace Corps Performance Goal 1.7 is to deliver Volunteers with competencies and technical skillsets that meet community priorities by FY 2026. However, the agency's performance indicator for this goal does not directly measure how many Volunteers have been placed into service.

---

<sup>10</sup> Public Law No. 103-62.

<sup>11</sup> Public Law No. 111-352.

<sup>12</sup> [Peace Corps FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#).

**Table 1. Peace Corps Volunteer Recruitment Performance Goal**

| <b>Performance Goal 1.7: Recruit and retain candidates for Volunteer service</b><br><i>Deliver Volunteers, via equitable processes, with competencies and technical skillsets that meet community priorities by FY 2026.</i> |         |         |                                                          |                                       |                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Indicator 1:</b> Updated system and related processes that deliver Volunteers aligned with desired competencies and technical experiences                                                                                 |         |         |                                                          |                                       |                                                                                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | FY 2020 | FY 2021 | FY 2022                                                  | FY 2023                               | FY 2024                                                                           |
| <b>Targets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | -       | -       | Full system audit conducted and roadmap established      | Conversion to new system 50% complete | Recommendations for Volunteer Delivery System (VDS) improvements are 75% complete |
| <b>Results</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | N/A     | N/A     | Project plan developed and Volunteer application revised |                                       |                                                                                   |

Source: Image from the Peace Corps' Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2022-2026

The agency also lacked a centrally defined, measurable recruitment goal from top-level leadership. As a result, the Peace Corps did not have an agencywide roadmap for prioritizing initiatives, allocating resources, and monitoring progress in addressing VRS challenges. Subsequent annual performance reports did not specify such targets (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2. The Peace Corps' FY2024 Annual Performance Report**

| <b>Performance Goal 1.7: Recruit and retain candidates for Volunteer service</b><br><i>Deliver Volunteers, via equitable processes, with competencies and technical skillsets that meet community priorities by FY 2026.</i> |                                                          |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Indicator 1:</b> Updated system and related processes that deliver Volunteers aligned with desired competencies and technical experiences                                                                                 |                                                          |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | FY 2022                                                  | FY 2023                                                                                           | FY 2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Targets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Full system audit conducted and roadmap established      | Conversion to new system 50 percent complete                                                      | Recruit and hire case manager with a focus on customer service<br><br>Synergize recruitment and outreach approaches across service models, including refreshed website design and integrated recruitment and placement training which spans all agency programming<br><br>Initiate Volunteer service barrier analysis research |
| <b>Results</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Project plan developed and Volunteer application revised | Office of the Executive Secretariat received approval in Annual Staffing Pattern for case manager | Customer-service focused case manager hire in process.<br><br>Barrier analysis contract executed, awarded, and project launched.                                                                                                                                                                                               |

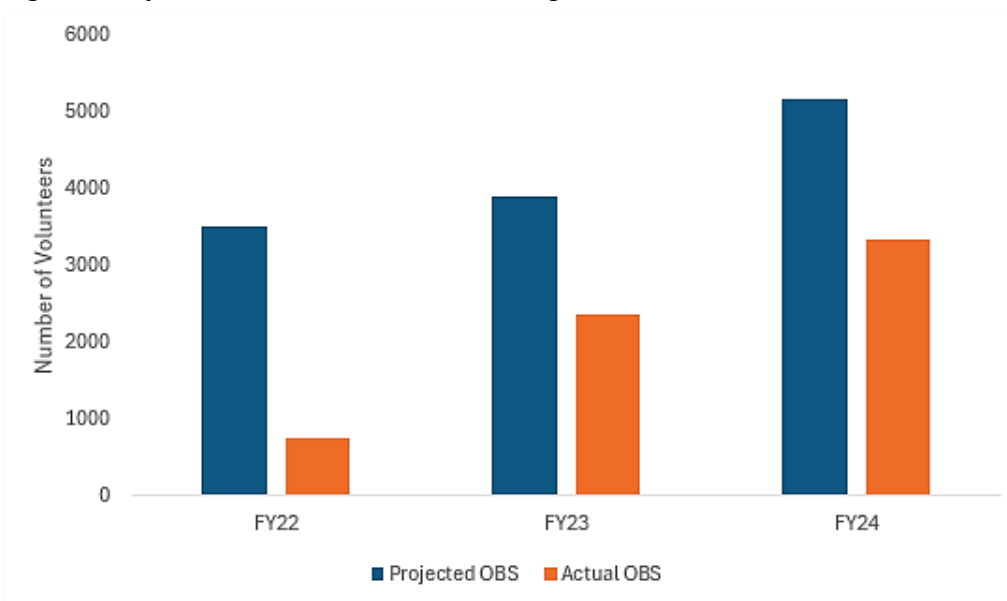
Source: Image from the Peace Corps' Annual Performance Report Fiscal Year 2024

VRS leadership notified agency leadership in August 2022 that Volunteer application numbers were insufficient to fill the posts' Volunteer requests. The memorandum warned that, "[VRS's] ability to fill posts' requests for years to come could be adversely impacted." The memo indicated that almost 15,000 applications were needed to meet VRS's target for FY 2023. Despite VRS leadership's concerns, the Peace Corps did not set an agencywide goal for the number of applications needed to meet host country requests for Volunteers. VRS did not meet its 15,000-application target for FYs 2023 and 2024; VRS only received 10,333 Volunteer applications in FY 2023, and 9,903 applications in FY 2024.

*Finding 2: Persistent Volunteer Shortages Have Hampered the Agency's Ability to Meet Host Country Requests and Impacted Key Relationships*

The agency has fallen short of its projections since it began returning Volunteers to service in 2022. In the last 2 fiscal years, the Peace Corps' CBJ Volunteer projections have underperformed by 36 to 40 percent. For example, the agency's FY 2023 CBJ projected 3,900 Volunteers in the field by the end of the fiscal year, but only 2,354 Volunteers were placed. In the FY 2024 CBJ, the Peace Corps projected that 5,180 Volunteers would be in the field by the end of the fiscal year, but only 3,337 were placed (See Figure 2 below).

**Figure 2. Projected Versus Actual On-Board Strength**



Persistent Volunteer shortages have hampered the Peace Corps' ability to meet host country requests. In FY 2023, the posts requested a total of 2,993 Volunteers in response to host country requests, however, the agency only provided 1,773 Volunteers; a 40 percent underfill. From OIG's most recent country program evaluations in Guyana and Madagascar, OIG learned that Peace Corps/Guyana requested three groups, or cohorts, of Volunteers from 2022 to 2024 that were underfilled by 27 percent, 36 percent, and 51 percent, respectively. Peace Corps/Madagascar requested four Volunteer cohorts from 2022 to 2024 that were underfilled by 27 percent, 31 percent, 34 percent, and 78 percent, respectively. Both country program

evaluations revealed that underfills can impact the Peace Corps' relationships with its host country communities, which are vital for successful Volunteer placements.

**Table 3. Underfill Percent at PC/Guyana and PC/Madagascar**

| PC Post       | FY 2022 | FY 2023           | FY 2024 |
|---------------|---------|-------------------|---------|
| PC/Guyana     | 27%     | 36%               | 51%     |
| PC/Madagascar | 27%     | 33% <sup>13</sup> | 78%     |

OIG found that the posts were substantially impacted by decreased Volunteer numbers. In 2024, OIG surveyed the agency's country directors, directors of programming and training, and directors of management and operations. Of the 99 overseas staff who responded, 78 respondents (79 percent) stated that the underfilled Volunteer positions damaged their relationships with community partners, among other impacts. (See Figure 3 below)

**Figure 3. Survey of Effects of Low Volunteer Numbers on Field Operations**



Survey respondents felt that they had wasted their time by developing Volunteer sites that would not get filled and expressed concerns that they could not meet Volunteer project targets due to low Volunteer numbers. OIG heard from interviewed staff in Peace Corps/Guyana that the underfill also disappointed the homestay families who had spent time and resources to meet the Peace Corps' Volunteer housing and site requirements but would then not receive the benefits of

<sup>13</sup> The average of two cohorts of Volunteers placed in that year.

hosting a Volunteer. Post staff told OIG that such disappointing outcomes could make it difficult to recruit future host families.

Staff in Peace Corps/Madagascar reported that Volunteer shortfalls have limited the post's programmatic reach and reduced the Peace Corps' impact in a country with significant needs. They also reported having strained relationships with local communities that had unmet expectations to host Volunteers. In addition, staff reported a decline in morale, believing that fewer Volunteers may result in staffing cuts or the post's closure.

In 2024, the agency implemented a realignment exercise to reduce the number of post staff in order to increase staff to Volunteer ratios. In response to staff cuts, 91 percent of the 99 survey respondents reported that staff morale declined, and 87 percent of the respondents reported concerns about increased workloads. Additional concerns regarding staff cuts reported by respondents included losing staff with valuable institutional knowledge and not being able to complete important tasks. For example, one field staff member provided the following description of their current work environment, "Overworked and exhausted USDH staff at posts don't feel supported. Post staff can't take leave in the midst of all the staffing cuts and low morale." Another staff member said, "In general, we ask our team to do a lot, and we expect a lot from them to develop Volunteer sites and support staff. Staff are burnt out."

Without a clearly developed agencywide strategic vision from Peace Corps leadership that defines goals and performance measures related to Volunteer recruitment, the Peace Corps will continue to struggle to make progress on increasing Volunteer numbers, which is central to its mission fulfillment and success.

**OIG Recommends:**

1. The Peace Corps Director<sup>14</sup> revises the Peace Corps' strategic and annual performance plan to prioritize the recruitment and retention of a predetermined number of qualified Volunteers.
2. The Peace Corps Director, in collaboration with the Associate Director of the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, develops and implements a plan to generate the predetermined number of qualified Volunteers.

---

<sup>14</sup> As of the publication of this report, the Peace Corps was under the leadership of the Chief Executive Officer, who performs the duties of the Director until one is appointed and confirmed.

## **PEACE CORPS PREPARED FOR A VARIETY OF CHALLENGES BUT LACKED THE SYSTEMS, PERSONNEL, AND PROCESSES TO ADDRESS POST-PANDEMIC RECRUITMENT SHORTAGES**

---

While the Peace Corps leadership prepared for a variety of post-pandemic challenges, the agency lacked the systems, personnel, and processes to address post-pandemic Volunteer shortages. OIG found that the Peace Corps was not staffed sufficiently to meet Volunteer recruitment and selection goals and lacked effective information management systems across the work units that supported the VDS. For instance, the agency did not sufficiently fill its vacant recruiter positions in part because OHR was inadequately staffed. Additionally, high recruiter turnover further hampered the agency's ability to fill VRS recruiter vacancies. The Peace Corps also lacked processes to address post-pandemic challenges while the VDS Steering Committee did not provide effective oversight of the VDS and struggled to address numerous challenges.

### *Finding 3: Peace Corps' Information Management Systems Were Ineffective and Understaffed Across Work Units That Supported the VDS*

OIG found that the Peace Corps' information management systems were understaffed and ineffective across the offices that supported the VDS (see Table 4 below). Across the various offices that supported the VDS, staff reported technical challenges with information systems. In addition, staff reported that they lacked personnel to manage their information systems. This included staff in VRS, the Office of Health Services (OHS), OHR and the Office of Management. Specifically, staff reported on challenges that stem from the incompatibility of VRS's two key information systems: Peace Corps Recruitment and Marketing (PCrm) and DOVE. VRS uses PCrm to manage contacts and potential applicant leads. VRS uses DOVE to manage the application, pre-screening, and onboarding system for applicants and Invitees up to their enter-on-duty status. Because the information is housed in two different systems that do not work together, staff have been unable to effectively determine which applicants were recruited by which recruiters. Staff said that they needed information from both systems to adequately monitor the number of applicants that each recruiter had recruited and evaluate each recruiter's performance.

OIG found that the entire VRS Office of Analysis and Evaluation (OAE), which analyzes data from PCrm and DOVE, was vacant for a significant portion of time during Volunteers' return to service following the pandemic. As a result, the newly hired OAE Director had to focus on recruiting staff for vacant OAE positions instead of meeting requests for Volunteer recruitment data and conducting analyses for leadership and other decision makers who manage the VDS. Furthermore, while applicants use DOVE to apply for service, they have to apply for medical clearance in a separate system through OHS called MAXx, which may pose challenges for applicants who must use multiple systems to provide all the necessary information for application consideration.

OHS uses MAXx to manage the applicant medical clearance process. Staff reported challenges with the MAXx system, including difficulty accessing and analyzing the data, and the system's inability to capture the reasons why some applicants did not complete the medical clearance phase. As a result, OIG found inconsistencies in staff interpretations of agency data on medical non-clearance. Some staff reported a significant increase in medical non-clearance, whereas others thought there had been no change in the non-clearance rates.

OHS has experienced long-term vacancies within the small team that supported MAXx. Staff reported on the challenges of not having a clear division of responsibilities due to vacancies on the MAXx team and requiring staff to cover multiple positions.

The Peace Corps' OHR has also faced challenges with their information management systems because the agency lacked an effective system for tracking time-to-hire. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) developed a requirement to hire staff in 80 days in response to a 2010 Presidential Memorandum on improving the hiring process.<sup>15</sup> OPM recognized that agencies would need to adjust the number of days for each step in the hiring process based on each agency's practices and procedures. Despite this, OHR did not use an information management system to effectively track the number of days it took the agency to hire new personnel.

OHR staff described numerous approaches that they had implemented to help track their time-to-hire, however, they lacked an effective information management system to support these efforts. Staff reported challenges that stemmed from not tracking their time-to-hire, including how newly hired staff onboarding dates were not accessible to the hiring offices. Staff in VRS described how challenging it was to not have this information, stating: "Knowing when staff will be onboarded is a challenge. What would be cool is to have a project management system and know where applicants are in the process. We don't have one, rather it is verbal updates." The severe staffing shortages OHR experienced has complicated its efforts to manage its information systems.

Numerous staff in VRS reported challenges related to travel, particularly recruiters. The Peace Corps largely uses manual processes for travel management, aided by PDF management and Microsoft office suite software. VRS had approximately 40 regional recruiters on average across the United States who travelled regularly and have been impacted by these inefficiencies. For example, recruiters told OIG that the manual processes led to significant delays in receiving reimbursement for their Government travel, which was required to be primarily charged to a Government travel credit card that recruiters were responsible for paying. Several recruiters described challenges paying their Government credit card statements on time due to the agency's delays in providing reimbursement. One recruiter indicated that these issues impacted their personal credit score.

While the lack of an automated travel management system did not have the same impact on VRS' success as the system challenges described above, it did have notable impacts on VRS employees. Many Federal agencies use an automated travel management system to more efficiently manage their travel authorizations, submit vouchers and reimbursements, and comply with Federal travel regulations. Apart from switching to an automated system, the agency could employ other methods that have been used across the Government to alleviate some of the financial burden on employees, such as allowing recruiters to charge as much of their travel as possible to a centralized billing account where permissible, which would limit the amount placed on Government travel charge cards.

---

<sup>15</sup> On January 20, 2025, the President issued Executive Order 14170, Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service, which required Government agencies to reduce the time-to-hire to less than 80 days. Time-to-hire is measured from a request to fill (RTF) to a tentative job offer.

**Table 4. Peace Corps Information Systems Challenges**

| Information            | Purpose                                                                                                     | Challenges                                                                                                           |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Recruiting Contacts    | Interact with contacts and organizations for recruitment and marketing                                      | PCrm is unable to determine the number of applicants each recruiter generated<br>PCrm is not interoperable with DOVE |
| Volunteer Applications | Manage Volunteer applications                                                                               | DOVE is not interoperable with PCrm                                                                                  |
| Travel                 | Manage travel authorizations, submit vouchers and reimbursements and comply with federal travel regulations | No agency-wide travel system                                                                                         |
| Medical Clearance      | Manage the medical clearance process                                                                        | Data must be pulled manually from MAXx; Unable to track why applicants do not complete medical clearance in MAXx     |
| Time to hire data      | Track time spent on the hiring process                                                                      | Lack of an effective system and metrics                                                                              |

In its FY 2025 performance plan, the agency stated that it was committed to enhancing data systems to better track candidates. In its FY 2024 annual performance report, the agency reported that enhancing data systems was a key pillar for achieving performance goal 1.7: to recruit and retain Volunteers for service. Although agency leadership recognized the need to modernize its systems, several senior leaders, including the former Peace Corps Director, explained to OIG that the agency’s appropriated budget limited their ability to upgrade their outdated systems. With a relatively flatlined budget over the last 10 years, and in conjunction with increased fixed costs and new congressional mandates,<sup>16</sup> the agency directed resources toward implementing other priorities.

On January 20, 2025, the President issued an executive order to improve Government efficiency by modernizing software and technology across Federal agencies.<sup>17</sup> The executive order stated that the administration will, “promote inter-operability between agency networks and systems, ensure data integrity, and facilitate responsible data collection and synchronization.”

<sup>16</sup> Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 (Public Law 112-57), and Sam Farr and Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-256).

<sup>17</sup> Executive Order 14158, Establishing and Implementing the President’s Department of Government Efficiency, (January 20, 2025).

**OIG Recommends:**

3. The Peace Corps Director, in collaboration with the Chief Information Officer, develops a prioritized plan to upgrade information management systems used to support the Volunteer Delivery System. If funding is insufficient, the prioritized plan should be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget as part of the agency's annual budget request for consideration.

*Finding 4: Peace Corps Lacked Sufficient Recruiters Due to A Limited Pipeline of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Human Resources Staffing Gaps, and High Turnover Among Recruiters*

### Sunsetting

In 2017, agency leadership developed the Peace Corps' Agency Reform Plan and Long-Term Workforce Plan, which outlined the agency's strategy for streamlining its operations. The reform plan included a 12.7 percent reduction in the agency's staff over a period of 5 years. This reduction in staff was primarily accomplished by not backfilling vacant positions, which staff referred to as 'sunsetting'. The agency targeted domestic positions for sunsetting in order to maintain operations in the field.

As some staff recalled, sunsetting disproportionately impacted VRS. The reform plan included cuts other than staffing, such as closing regional recruiting offices. Consequently, VRS shifted from a regional recruitment model to a national model. In addition, the agency significantly cut its strategic campus recruiter program.

OIG determined that the agency did not sufficiently fill its vacant recruiter positions within VRS based on its FY 2024 strategy, which included a goal of having no fewer than 60 recruiters. Peace Corps recruiters identify, mentor, and guide prospective Peace Corps Volunteers through the application process. Recruiters provide information to students, higher learning institutions, and the surrounding communities about the Peace Corps' Volunteer service. This work requires both traditional and digital recruiting techniques to engage with potential candidates; for example, organizing classroom discussions with Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCV), using Handshake online career platform to make connections, and attending career events at various universities. Despite the Peace Corps' reliance on its recruiters to find new potential Volunteers, the recruiter vacancy rate was approximately 40 percent throughout FY 2023, with about 30 of 70 positions unfilled at any given time.

Data provided by VRS showed that the number of recruiters positively correlated with the number of Volunteer applicants (See Figure 4 below). Based on this correlation, high rates of vacancies among recruiter positions have likely contributed to low Volunteer applications. As described in a previous finding, the agency could not effectively attribute the number of applications to recruiters since the DOVE and PCrm information systems used for recruitment and applications were not interoperable.

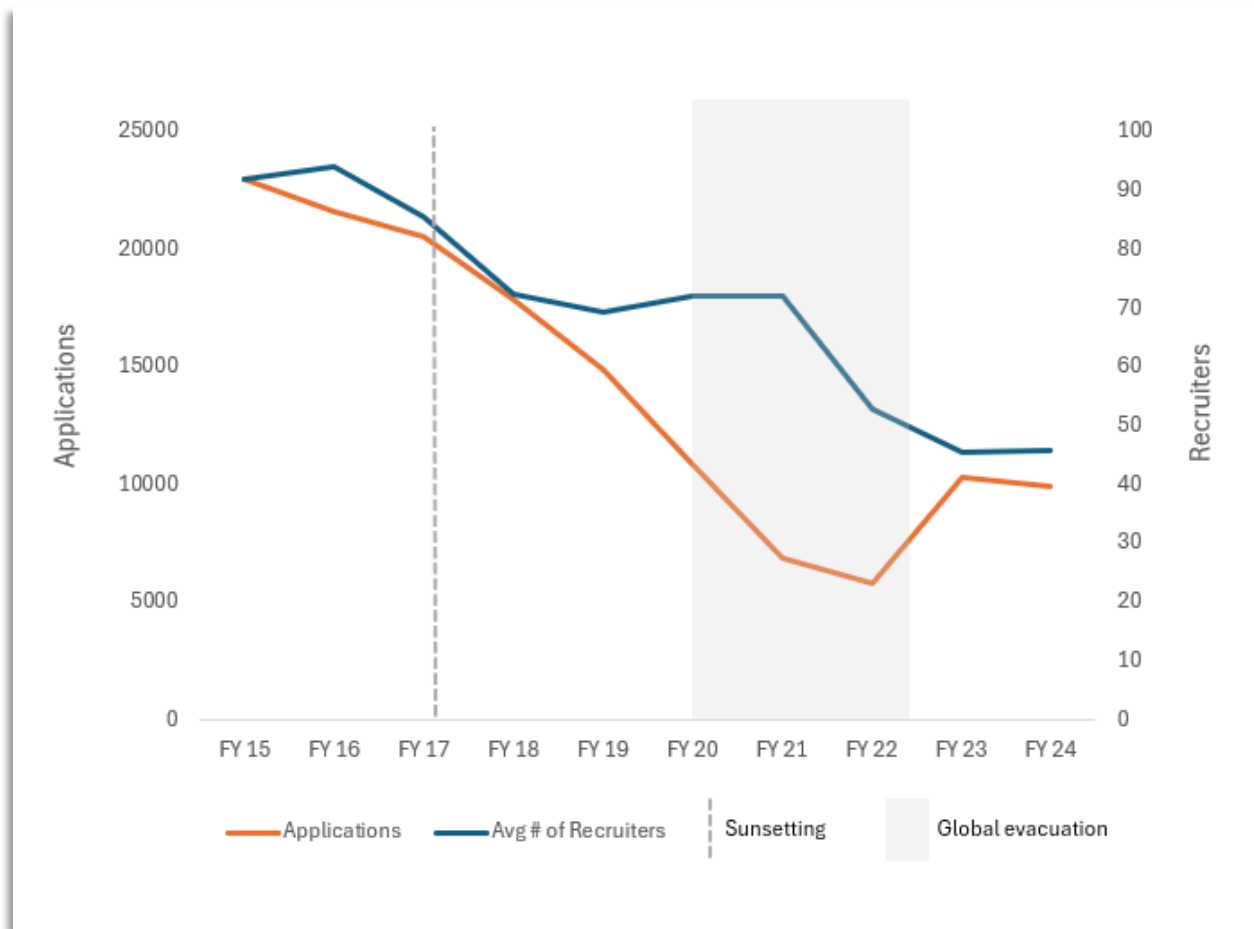
The Peace Corps has had a high vacancy rate among recruiter positions because of the limited number of RPCVs. Before the global evacuation of Volunteers, the agency relied on RPCVs to fill its recruiter positions. Under Executive Order 11103<sup>18</sup>, RPCVs receive non-competitive eligibility (NCE), a status that makes hiring RPCVs into the Federal Government more efficient. As described in OIG's FY 2024 report of the Peace Corps' Management and Performance Challenges, hiring RPCVs with NCE streamlines the hiring process by bypassing competitive-

<sup>18</sup> Executive Order 11103, Providing for the Appointment of Former Peace Corps volunteers to the Civilian Services (April 10, 1963).

based personnel actions while providing the agency with talented, mission-driven workers. NCE allows managers to fill positions quickly because they do not require a job announcement or a regular competitive hiring assessment process. However, the NCE status expires after 1 year and, following the global evacuation of Volunteers between 2020 and 2022, the supply of RPCVs with NCE dwindled, resulting in an increased burden on OHR to hire recruiters through standard competitive hiring mechanisms.

Subsequently, the agency implemented the Peace Corps Eligibility Hiring Benefit policy, which allows the agency to hire RPCVs non-competitively within 3 years after the successful completion of their service. Candidates must apply to the Peace Corps Eligibility roster, a continuously open general vacancy announcement for domestic, entry-level positions. The low Volunteer fill rate has significantly impacted field operations and fundamentally jeopardized the agency's ability to achieve its mission. Following interviews with senior leadership, VRS staff, and recruiters, OIG determined that two major factors accounted for the lack of recruiters in VRS: OHR staff shortages and recruiter turnover.

**Figure 4. Correlation Between Volunteer Applications and Number of Recruiters**



*Finding 4a: The Peace Corps Was Unable to Fill Recruiter Positions Due to Severe Staffing Shortages in the Office of Human Resources*

Another significant reason for the agency's inability to fill recruiter positions is because OHR, which has the primary responsibility for filling domestic staff positions,<sup>19</sup> has experienced severe staffing gaps. OIG's FY 2024 Management and Performance Challenges Report noted that Human Resources (HR) management and staffing impeded on the agency's ability to effectively address Volunteer recruitment challenges. When the Peace Corps returned Volunteers to service, OHR was inadequately staffed. The Staffing and Classification Division in OHR, which is primarily responsible for agency hirings, had high vacancy rates between FYs 2022 and 2024 (see Figure 5 below). Numerous staff illustrated how the crisis surrounding OHR vacancies and turnover rates impacted their work. One staff member in OHR told OIG how, in their view, the agency's ability to hire "broke," stating, "at one point, 1 team had 3 people when it should have been 12. It is one thing that you have 12 positions, and you have 11 people and can shift the workload. But when you have 3 people, there is only so much you can do with the hours [...] When asking people to do a job for 12 people, it will break. It broke."

**Figure 5. Percent of Staff Vacancies in the Peace Corps' Office of Human Resources**



Specifically, there has been a high vacancy rate for HR specialist positions in the last 3 fiscal years, which are the key positions for processing personnel actions within the Staffing and Classification Division. OHR staff explained that they were short-staffed because it was difficult to recruit and retain HR staff for positions that were term-limited and excepted service.<sup>20</sup> In FY 2024, the agency worked to exempt certain HR positions from the five-year rule, however, staff in OHR were concerned that these exemptions were not widespread enough.

<sup>19</sup> MS 601, Administration of the Peace Corps Direct Hire Personnel System, effective May 6, 2025.

<sup>20</sup> Excepted service positions do not confer competitive status. Term appointments are not permanent and only for a specified amount of time.

The agency took steps to fill staffing gaps, but they were not effective. For example, the agency entered into an interagency agreement with OPM to procure recruitment services and executed a small business contract to have additional HR specialists for hiring support, but staff reported challenges with these arrangements. Peace Corps staff explained that in both instances, outside staff (OPM and contractors) were accustomed to operating under Title 5 competitive service hiring authorities, while the Peace Corps operated under unique Excepted and Foreign Service hiring authorities that the contracted staff were not familiar with.<sup>21</sup>

**OIG Recommends:**

4. The agency develops a plan that determines appropriate staffing levels and addresses retention, resource allocation, tools and training for offices that provide critical support to the Volunteer Delivery System.

*Finding 4b: The Agency Had a High Rate of Recruiter Vacancies Because of a High Recruiter Turnover Rate*

OIG determined that high turnover was a major contributing factor to the high vacancy rate in the Peace Corps' recruiter positions. In FY 2023, the VRS staffing plan included approximately 70 recruiter positions. However, throughout the fiscal year, an average of 42 percent of the recruiter positions were vacant. At the beginning of 2024, only 36 percent of recruiters had been in their positions for 4 or more years.

OIG determined that recruiter turnover was caused in part by the Peace Corps' statutory five-year rule. According to the Peace Corps Act,<sup>22</sup> USDH employees can only serve appointments limited to terms of 5 years, subject to certain statutory exceptions. In 2023, the agency launched an analysis of all its offices and sub-units to identify positions to exempt from the five-year rule. At that time, the agency determined that positions which directly interacted with candidates, such as recruiters, should continue to be subject to the five-year rule, even though numerous staff reported that the high rate of turnover among recruiters was due to the five-year rule.

OIG found additional factors that contributed to high turnover among recruiters, including low salary levels for duty stations in urban areas that have a high cost of living, along with limited career advancement opportunities, heavy workloads, and low morale.

In FY 2024, VRS leadership recognized the need to address staff morale to improve retention and outlined approaches to address the issue, such as training for new managers, increasing one-on-one meetings between managers and staff, and having senior leadership regularly communicate with staff. VRS leadership also proposed an internal assessment to explore

---

<sup>21</sup> Most jobs in the Federal Government are considered part of the competitive service, which is governed by the civil service laws established by the Congress and regulations established by OPM. There is a smaller number of Federal Government jobs that are not part of the competitive service and are excepted from many civil service laws and regulations. These jobs are part of the excepted service. The Peace Corps is an excepted service agency. See MS 601 Administration of the Peace Corps Direct Hire Personnel System; Section 6 (a)(2) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. § 2506(a)(2)).

<sup>22</sup> Section 7(a)(5) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. 2506 (a)(5)).

increased compensation for recruiters, but staff reported that securing OPM approval was an obstacle, as were budgetary constraints.

Under the Peace Corps Act,<sup>23</sup> in special circumstances or for certain purposes, the Director may extend employees' terms by 1 or 2.5 years. One-year extensions are limited to a case-by-case basis, while 2.5-year extensions must be for exceptional employees for certain purposes and may not exceed 15 percent of the total of all USDH<sup>24</sup> Foreign Service appointments<sup>25</sup>. OIG determined that the number of extensions granted to recruiters fell short of offsetting the position's high turnover rate.

In addition to these authorities, the Director may also exempt Peace Corps positions from the five-year rule when they are critical for management or management support. These positions require specialized technical or professional skills and knowledge of Peace Corps operations.<sup>26</sup> The Director may make or extend appointments for these designated positions, which may not exceed 5 years but can be renewed. Positions designated as exempt are not subject to the general time limitations mentioned above.

As noted previously, the number of recruiters correlates with the number of Volunteer applications. Therefore, high vacancy rates among recruiters, combined with the agency's inability to hire recruiters, has contributed to low application numbers.

#### **OIG Recommends:**

5. The Associate Director for Volunteer Recruitment and Selection ensures that all eligible recruiters are considered for extensions by the Peace Corps Director.
6. The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection and the Office of Human Resources assess the appropriateness of existing monetary and non-monetary incentives and benefits for recruiters, taking into account industry standards, performance, and the impact of recruiter turnover.

#### *Finding 5: The Peace Corps Lacked Effective Processes for Overseeing and Supporting the Volunteer Delivery System*

The Peace Corps established a VDS Steering Committee, whose purpose was to oversee the recruitment and selection process across agency offices. OIG determined that the VDS Steering Committee was not an effective mechanism to provide oversight of and strategic support for the VDS.

The VDS Steering Committee proposed numerous strategic solutions but struggled to implement many of its own recommendations. For example, in May 2023, some members of the VDS Steering Committee advocated for a continuous open announcement for vacant recruiter positions to address the high vacancy rate, stating it was a number one priority. However, at the time of this evaluation, the agency had not implemented a continuous open announcement for its

<sup>23</sup> Section 7(a)(5) and Section 7 (a)(6) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. 2506 (a)(5)-(6)).

<sup>24</sup> An appointing (hiring) authority that Federal agencies receive from OPM to fill vacancies.

<sup>25</sup> Peace Corps employees are appointed to the Foreign Service under the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

<sup>26</sup> Section 7(a)(8)(A) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. 2506 (a)(8)(A)).

recruiter position. Similarly, the VDS Steering Committee recommended filling long-term vacancies to improve performance in critical areas, such as positions on the MAXx team. The vacancies on the MAXx team remained unfilled at the time of this evaluation. While a Federal hiring freeze is in effect at the time of this report issuance, the evaluation spanned a period of time when a freeze was not in effect, and actions related to vacancies for recruiters and the MAXx team did not see progress during that time.

The VDS Steering Committee struggled to implement its recommendations due to an ineffective governance structure. For example, the committee was led by a chair and co-chair, and the dual leadership structure made it difficult to move forward with implementing recommendations due to their differing views on how to improve the VDS. In addition, the committee was comprised of senior leaders who had competing mandates and reporting structures. The offices represented on the VDS Steering Committee reported either to the Director, the deputy director, or the chief of staff. The staff who OIG spoke with described the competing priorities among the office representatives. For example, OHS evaluates whether an applicant is fit for service and if they have medical issues that can be safely supported in country, while the goal of VRS and the Office of Global Operations is to meet each host country's request for Volunteers; two missions that differ in priorities and could potentially be at odds.

### VDS Steering Committee Overview

According to the VDS Steering Committee by-laws, the purpose of the VDS Steering Committee was to:

- a) coordinate the development of VDS activities that relate to providing qualified Volunteers to overseas assignments,
- b) promote seamless continuity of operations by and among all offices participating in VDS activities,
- c) propose strategic solutions to emerging challenges posed by VDS activities,
- d) monitor VDS activities to assure that those activities meet customer requirements and
- e) oversee continuous quality improvement of the VDS.

The VDS Steering Committee members included the following Peace Corps staff: chief of staff (committee chair), VDS senior advisor (co-chair), associate director for Global Operations, associate director for OHS, associate director for VRS, deputy chief of staff, chief financial officer, chief information officer, general counsel, director of communications, director of Peace Corps Response, Africa regional director, Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia regional director, and Inter-American and Pacific Regional director.

Due to difficulties in implementing committee recommendations, challenges with the VDS have remained unaddressed and the VDS Steering Committee was unable to achieve its goal of promoting seamless continuity of operations for the VDS.

### OIG Recommends:

7. The Peace Corps Director improves governance of the VDS steering committee, or establishes other mechanisms, to oversee VDS operations. The committee, or other mechanisms, should ensure clear decision-making authority, effective coordination, and improved program implementation across agency offices and components.

## VRS EMPLOYED NUMEROUS RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION METHODS WITH VARIED SUCCESS

---

VRS has employed numerous recruitment and selection methods, and, of the nine reviewed, OIG found varied results with what did and did not work. The Peace Corps should consider this information when planning or implementing future recruitment investments.

### *Bold Invitation Marketing and Communications Campaign*

In March 2023, the Peace Corps launched the *Bold Invitation* Marketing and Communications Campaign, which ran from March through September 2023. The campaign, which was developed and implemented by a Government contractor, cost \$14 million dollars in FY 2023 and was managed by the Peace Corps' Office of Communications.<sup>27</sup> The objectives of the *Bold Invitation* campaign were to increase brand awareness, generate leads, and drive Volunteer applications. However, the campaign did not include specific targeted goals for increasing Volunteer applications numbers.



### What worked

- The Peace Corps reported that the *Bold Invitation* campaign was effective and increased brand awareness following the global pandemic. The campaign's impact, according to the agency, included:
  - 1 billion ad impressions;<sup>28</sup>
  - 4 million total visits to the [peacecorps.gov](https://peacecorps.gov) website;<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A portion of the funding for the Bold Invitation Campaign came from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), Public Law No. 116-136, enacted on March 27, 2020. The CARES Act provided the Peace Corps with supplemental funding to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus epidemic in 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Ad impressions are when people view advertisements on a digital platform. One person can view an ad multiple times, which is why the impression target is so high.

<sup>29</sup> Total visits do not represent unique users.

- 73,894 high-value actions (clicks to contact a recruiter, attend an event, and email sign-ups as defined by the contractor); and
- 19,369 clicks to start a Volunteer application.

#### What did not work

- The Office of Communications coordinated with key stakeholders to develop the campaign objectives, including VRS, the Director's office, Peace Corps Response, the Office of External Affairs, and the Office of Global Operations. However, OIG found that recruiters were not included in the campaign development, despite being subject matter experts with respect to Volunteer application generation.
- The agency did not track the number of applications that were attributed to the campaign. The Office of Communications reported that the 4 million visits to the Peace Corps website represented the total visits as opposed to unique users, meaning that the "visits" number could include users who visited the site multiple times. In addition, The Peace Corps also did not track the number of individuals who had seen an advertisement and then completed an application, limiting the agency's ability to assess the campaign's success in driving applications.
- The agency reported that Volunteer applications increased between FYs 2022 and 2023 as an indicator of success for the marketing campaign. However, a separate contributing success factor could have been that Volunteers returned to service in March 2022, halfway through FY 2022. Furthermore, applications went down from 10,523 in FY 2023 to 9,902 in FY 2024.
- Agency staff had mixed views on the campaign's success, with some staff reporting that the campaign only heightened Volunteer interest but not applications, and others saying the campaign was strategic and effective.

#### *Strategic Campus Recruiter Program*

The Peace Corps has a contract with 32 colleges and universities to hire campus-based recruiters called Strategic Campus Recruiters (STRAT). The STRATs are university employees who report to local supervisors, and the Peace Corps supports the hiring, training, and management of the STRATs.

#### What worked

- Numerous staff reported that the STRATs were exceedingly helpful for recruiting applicants. For example, staff reported that campuses with STRATs produced a high number of Volunteer applications. Staff explained that STRATs were embedded on campuses and had access to clubs and groups in the community. Other recruiters explained that the STRATs offered continuity in the context of high turnover among recruiters. One staff member reported, "I don't see why [we] wouldn't want to have [STRATs] in as many schools as possible." Another staff member said about the STRAT program: "It is a game changer – it is a where the agency needs to be."

### What did not work

- According to the director of recruitment, the Peace Corps significantly reduced its number of STRATs from 52 to 32 as part of its sunseting exercise, which began in 2017. As a result, the Peace Corps had significantly less recruitment presence at colleges and universities across the country.

### *Service Model Pilots*

OIG identified four service model pilots that the Peace Corps launched between 2020 to 2024: (1) virtual service, (2) 1-year service, (3) mid-service home leave, and (4) increased readjustment allowance.<sup>30</sup> The virtual service pilot began in October 2020 to continue the Peace Corps' mission following the global evacuation of in-person Volunteers. Participants in the virtual service pilot engage online with host country partners for 5 to 15 hours each week for 3 to 6 months.

In August 2024, the Office of Global Operations began three additional pilots that made changes to the Peace Corps service model. The three pilots—1-year service, mid-service home leave, and increased readjustment allowance—were designed to address barriers to service and meet host country partners' Volunteer requests. The 1-year service pilot includes 1 year of service plus 3 months of training and is aimed at generalists (i.e. a person who has a range of knowledge and skills, as opposed to a specialist). The pilot was launched in Cameroon, Eswatini, The Gambia and Mozambique.

The home leave pilot is offered to 2-year Volunteers. It provides 15 days of leave mid-service and was offered to Volunteers in Benin, Guinea, Madagascar and Sierra Leone.

The increased readjustment allowance was piloted in Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Togo. It offered twice the monthly rate for service; approximately \$20,000 at the end of 2 years. The pilots officially launched at the end of May 2025 and were expected to run for 2 years.

### What worked

- Staff largely reported that the pilots were likely to have a positive impact on Volunteer recruitment. While the agency continues to assess the results of the pilots, staff thought the pilots would address some obstacles and external factors impacting recruitment and placement of Volunteers, such as financial and social constraints. The agency took initial steps to integrate all service models within the VDS.

### What did not work

- Though the results of the pilots are not available yet, staff expressed concerns about the 1-year service model, particularly with respect to Volunteers having enough time to learn a host country language and engage in community integration.

---

<sup>30</sup> To finalize and implement the Virtual Service Pilot on a long-term basis, the Peace Corps likely requires legislative authorization, which the agency has previously sought in CBJs. Up to this point, such authorization has not been provided.

### *Each One Reach One*

VRS recruiters engaged RPCVs as part of VRS's FY 2024 strategy and launched a pilot program in Texas called 'Each One Reach One' where RPCVs were trained to conduct recruitment activities.

#### What did not work

- Staff reported that the pilot was not successful for a variety of reasons, including that recruiters were too overloaded to take on a new initiative; RPCVs did not have time to volunteer to recruit; difficulty in providing RPCVs the necessary recruitment materials; the agency had very little control over RPCV recruitment activities; and that the recent Peace Corps service model was substantially different from when some RPCVs had served.

### *Peace Corps Prep*

Peace Corps Prep was started in 2007 as a partnership with colleges and universities to prepare undergraduate students for intercultural fieldwork, such as Peace Corps service. The goal of the program is to inform students about the Peace Corps and help them prepare to become competitive candidates.

#### What worked

- Numerous staff reported that having a Peace Corps Prep program coordinator on campus was helpful in generating leads and increasing brand awareness.

#### What did not work

- Staff reported that their ability to engage with and leverage the program was limited due to the participating universities' capacities, VRS vacancies, and high workload among recruiters. Some staff reported that there were additional opportunities to leverage Peace Corps Prep graduates, such as requiring them to meet with a recruiter and interviewing them for Volunteer positions.

### *Digital Upgrades*

The agency implemented several digital recruitment upgrades, including a website refresh and application of the Handshake and LinkedIn platforms.

#### What worked

- Several staff reported that Handshake was a highly effective tool that enabled them to send targeted emails and promote recruitment events. In October 2024, the agency presented details on the website refresh, including website analytics that indicated an improved user experience.

#### What did not work

- Some staff reported that they were hesitant to use LinkedIn because they were required to use their personal accounts for work-related recruitment and that people who use LinkedIn were looking for paid employment, not Volunteer opportunities.

#### *Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program*

The Paul D. Coverdell Fellows program was initiated in 1985 to provide RPCVs with lifetime eligibility for tuition assistance at participating graduate programs. As of 2025, there were over 200 graduate degree programs in colleges and universities across the country participating in the Coverdell Fellowships.

#### What worked

- Several staff reported that the Coverdell Fellowship was an important benefit that many recruiters highlighted to encourage people to apply for Volunteer service.

#### What did not work

- Staff reported that the number of schools and programs that offered the Coverdell Fellowship were too limited. Staff explained that colleges and universities were expected to cover at least 25 percent of tuition and mandatory fees, which may contribute to limited participation in the program.

#### *Increasing Applicants from Historically Underrepresented Backgrounds*

The agency's FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan had a strategic performance goal to increase the percentage of Volunteers from historically underrepresented backgrounds. VRS set goals for individual recruiters to engage in activities that encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds. The agency also led a tour of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The agency reported progress in meeting its goals and recruiters said it was successful. Agency staff reported they were changing the strategic goal on increasing the number of applicants from historically underrepresented backgrounds in 2025 to comply with executive orders.

#### *Increasing the Value Proposition of Peace Corps Service*

In FY 2023, one of VRS's strategic goals was to increase the value proposition of Peace Corps Service (i.e. what makes Peace Corps service attractive to applicants). This included working with internal and external stakeholders to understand, communicate, and strengthen the perceived value of Peace Corps service. The goal included a special focus on historically underrepresented communities and plans to complete a barrier analysis. The agency hired a contractor to conduct a barrier analysis but terminated its contract in March 2025 in compliance with executive orders for certain contracting actions.

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS

---

### OIG RECOMMENDS:

1. The Peace Corps Director<sup>31</sup> revises the Peace Corps' strategic and annual performance plan to prioritize the recruitment and retention of a predetermined number of qualified Volunteers.
2. The Peace Corps Director, in collaboration with the Associate Director of the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, develops and implements a plan to generate the predetermined number of qualified Volunteers.
3. The Peace Corps Director, in collaboration with the Chief Information Officer, develops a prioritized plan to upgrade information management systems used to support the Volunteer Delivery System. If funding is insufficient, the prioritized plan should be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget as part of the agency's annual budget request for consideration.
4. The agency develops a plan that determines appropriate staffing levels and addresses retention, resource allocation, tools and training for offices that provide critical support to the Volunteer Delivery System.
5. The Associate Director for Volunteer Recruitment and Selection ensures that all eligible recruiters are considered for extensions by the Peace Corps Director.
6. The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection and the Office of Human Resources assess the appropriateness of existing monetary and non-monetary incentives and benefits for recruiters, taking into account industry standards, performance, and the impact of recruiter turnover.
7. The Peace Corps Director improves governance of the VDS steering committee, or establishes other mechanisms, to oversee VDS operations. The committee, or other mechanisms, should ensure clear decision-making authority, effective coordination, and improved program implementation across agency offices and components.

---

<sup>31</sup> As of the publication of this report, the Peace Corps was under the leadership of the Chief Executive Officer, who performs the duties of the Director until one is appointed and confirmed.

---

## OIG RESPONSE TO AGENCY COMMENTS

---

OIG appreciates the Peace Corps' collaboration throughout this evaluation. In response to the preliminary report, the Peace Corps concurred with five recommendations and did not concur with two recommendations, specifically recommendations 5 and 6 which were related to recruiter extensions and recruiter incentives and benefits.

Although the agency did not concur with recommendation 5, which related to the consideration of recruiter extensions, it submitted a staffing review process, including extension review, so OIG is closing this recommendation. Regarding recommendation 6, which related to assessing recruiter incentives and benefits, we urge the agency to reconsider our findings and develop responsive actions. OIG presented data in this report that supported the positive correlation between recruiters and application numbers in recent years. OIG acknowledges that recruiters are not the agency's only path to increase recruitment and application numbers, however it is worth noting that for other organizations that rely on applications, such as the military, recruiters remain essential.

As the agency implements other methods to increase recruitment and application numbers, it will be important to learn from the successes and failures of similar methods which were previously attempted by the Peace Corps. For example, agency officials indicated they may leverage additional marketing strategies in the future. Given the Peace Corps' recent efforts under the Bold Invitation marketing campaign, the agency should ensure it has a full understanding of the campaign's successes and challenges to inform future investments in this area. Moreover, it will be important for the agency to collect usable data about the efficacy of different methods to guide future decision making.

The agency submitted its FY 2026 Agency Performance Plan to close recommendation 1. While the plan did not include a predetermined number of Volunteers, the Peace Corps chief executive officer announced to the agency on August 20, 2025, their goal of placing 8,000 Volunteers in service by 2030. This goal was also referenced in its response. Therefore, OIG is closing recommendation 1 and looks forward to seeing the target of 8,000 Volunteers in the agency's performance and strategic plans moving forward.

OIG will consider closing the remaining recommendations upon confirmation from the chief compliance and risk officer that corrective actions are documented and complete. In closing recommendations, OIG is not certifying that OIG has reviewed their effects. For the full text of the agency's comments, see Appendix C.

---

## APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

---

The objective of this evaluation was to evaluate the challenges the agency faced in recruiting, selecting, and placing Volunteers following the global evacuation.

The following researchable questions were used to meet the evaluation's objective:

- Did the agency provide effective management oversight to meet the challenges related to Volunteer recruitment and selection?
- Was the VDS staffed sufficiently to meet agency Volunteer recruitment and selection goals?
- What worked and what did not work with VRS's recruitment and selection strategies and approaches?

The scope of this evaluation included the following:

- VRS' recruitment and selection strategies and approaches between FYs 2022 and 2023,
- VDS staffing for FYs 2020 through 2023, and
- Management oversight of the VDS between calendar years 2021 and 2023.

Field work for the evaluation included in-person and virtual interviews with headquarters-based and regional recruitment staff. We interviewed staff from the Offices of the Director, Human Resources, Volunteer Recruitment and Support, Health Services, Chief Information Officer, Communications, and Global Operations. Evaluators traveled across the country to interview sixteen recruiters and recruitment supervisors from seven different locations between June and August 2024. This evaluation also included a survey of overseas staff and a review of relevant documentation. The survey was sent to 150 USDH staff, and 99 responded.

OIG conducted this evaluation in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020).

## APPENDIX B: LIST OF ACRONYMS

|        |                                               |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------|
| CBJ    | Congressional Budget Justification            |
| FY     | fiscal year                                   |
| HR     | Human Resources                               |
| NCE    | non-competitive eligibility                   |
| OAE    | Office of Analysis and Evaluation             |
| OHR    | Office of Human Resources                     |
| OHS    | Office of Health Services                     |
| OIG    | Office of Inspector General                   |
| OPM    | Office of Personnel Management                |
| PCrm   | Peace Corps Recruitment and Marketing         |
| RPCV   | Returned Peace Corps Volunteers               |
| VDS    | Volunteer Delivery System                     |
| STRATs | Strategic Campus Recruiters                   |
| VRS    | Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection |

---

## APPENDIX C: AGENCY COMMENTS

---



### MEMORANDUM

TO: Joaquin Ferrao, Inspector General

FROM: Paul Shea, Chief Executive Officer **PAUL SHEA** Digitally signed by PAUL SHEA  
Date: 2025.09.26 15:54:57 -04'00'

CC: Kris Besch, Deputy Chief Executive Officer  
Richard Swartz, Chief of Staff  
David Walker, Associate Director, Volunteer Recruitment and Selection  
Akoua Enow, Chief Human Capital Officer  
Michael Terry, Chief Information Officer  
Nancy Herbolsheimer, Associate Director, Office of Global Operations  
Kathryn Wallace, Acting General Counsel  
Emily Haimowitz, Chief Compliance and Risk Officer  
Julie Nelson, Compliance Officer Audit Liaison  
Jennifer Piorkowski, Director, Executive Secretariat

DATE: September 26, 2025

RE: Agency Response to the Evaluation of Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System

---

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this preliminary report from the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General as outlined in the OIG's Evaluation of Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System (VDS) sent to the agency on August 14, 2025.

In August 2025, the current Peace Corps leadership announced the ambitious goal of reaching 8,000 Peace Corps Volunteers in service by September 30, 2030 and to refocus agency resources to achieve this goal. This Administration recognizes that reaching this target requires a multidisciplinary approach, which may include some areas recommended by the OIG. The agency is collecting and analyzing data to build its marketing and recruitment plan, while also identifying other areas to increase Volunteer applications, reduce attrition during the application process, and ensure more qualified Volunteers have the opportunity to serve with the Peace Corps.

### **Recommendation 1**

The Peace Corps Director revises the Peace Corps' strategic and annual performance plan to prioritize the recruitment and retention of a predetermined number of qualified Volunteers.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The Peace Corps has already prioritized Volunteer recruitment and retention as part of its strategic planning process. Prior to receipt of this OIG report, and aligned with direction from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the agency published its *Fiscal Year 2026 Agency Performance Plan* with three strategic objectives, one of which is "bolster Volunteer opportunities." In addition, as required by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Fiscal Year 2026-2030 strategic planning process, the Peace Corps submitted a draft list of strategic objectives for the agency's next strategic plan, including one on reaching 8,000 Peace Corps Volunteers in service by September 30, 2030.

#### **Documents Submitted:**

- *FY 2026 Annual Performance Plan*

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 2025

### **Recommendation 2**

The Peace Corps Director, in collaboration with the Associate Director of the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, develops and implements a plan to generate the predetermined number of qualified Volunteers.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** As described in response to recommendation 1, the Peace Corps has been working internally and with OMB to set a goal of increasing the number of Volunteers in service by September 30, 2030. In its draft *Fiscal Year 2026-2030 Strategic Plan*, the agency has set a series of performance goals that will help meet this objective.

#### **Documents to be Submitted:**

- *FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan (draft)*

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** December 2025

### **Recommendation 3**

The Peace Corps Director, in collaboration with the Chief Information Officer, develops a prioritized plan to upgrade information management systems used to support the Volunteer Delivery System. If funding is insufficient, the prioritized plan should be

submitted to the Office of Management and Budget as part of the agency's annual budget request for consideration.

**Concur**

**Response:** The Peace Corps will ensure all relevant information management systems are effective and integrated. The agency is finalizing a tool that pulls data from across the various systems relevant to the VDS to ensure that decisions are data-driven. The agency will determine if any of the relevant information management systems, including those directly related to Volunteer recruitment, placement, or selection, require additional development or improvements.

While important systems, the Peace Corps disagrees that the travel system or time-to-hire data have a direct impact on the VDS. Furthermore, the agency currently has systems in place to track time-to-hire metrics.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- VDS tool
- Plan of any additional developments or improvements to relevant information management systems

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** March 2026

**Recommendation 4**

The agency develops a plan that determines appropriate staffing levels and addresses retention, resource allocation, tools and training for offices that provide critical support to the Volunteer Delivery System.

**Concur**

**Response:** The Peace Corps began the process of developing a plan to address resource allocations for offices that provide critical support to the VDS through an agency-wide reorganization and optimization effort underway. Once completed, each office will work to ensure they have the necessary tools and training to meet its critical objectives.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Description of annual staffing review process
- Documentation to support completion of the agency-wide reorganization and optimization effort

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** February 2026

### **Recommendation 5**

The Associate Director for Volunteer Recruitment and Selection ensures that all eligible recruiters are considered for extensions by the Peace Corps Director.

#### **Non-Concur**

**Response:** The Peace Corps has a multidisciplinary approach to increasing the number of applicants and Volunteers, which includes continuing the use of recruiters. The agency has a staffing review process in place to consider extensions for all positions, including recruiters.

The agency is also implementing other methods to increase recruitment and application numbers and plans to determine whether those address the issue before considering extensions for eligible recruiters.

#### **Documents Submitted:**

- Staffing review process, including extension review

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 2025

### **Recommendation 6**

The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection and the Office of Human Resources assess the appropriateness of existing monetary and non-monetary incentives and benefits for recruiters, taking into account industry standards, performance, and the impact of recruiter turnover.

#### **Non-Concur**

**Response:** As described in the agency's response to "Recommendation 5," the Peace Corps is working to implement additional methods to increase recruitment and application numbers, which will complement the roles of the recruiters. The agency will pursue those additional methods before considering additional incentives or benefits for any current staff.

#### **Documents Submitted:**

- N/A

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 2025

### **Recommendation 7**

The Peace Corps Director improves governance of the VDS steering committee, or establishes other mechanisms, to oversee VDS operations. The committee, or other mechanisms, should ensure clear decision-making authority, effective coordination, and improved program implementation across agency offices and components.

**Concur**

**Response:** The Peace Corps agrees that there must be mechanisms in place to continue to oversee the VDS that ensure clear decision-making, effective coordination and communication, and program implementation. The agency has established a VDS working group, led by a senior staff member, that will perform the coordination, communication, and program implementation roles. The agency is currently undergoing a reorganization and restructuring process, so while it is not yet certain who the working group led will report to, a senior executive will be responsible for clear and transparent decision making related to the VDS.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Description of VDS working group
- Agenda and/or meeting notes from VDS working group meetings

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** March 2026

---

## APPENDIX D: KEY CONTRIBUTORS

---

|                         |                                             |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>KJ Adler</b>         | Writer-Editor                               |
| <b>Rashawna Alfred</b>  | Supervisory Senior Evaluator                |
| <b>Carissa Anderson</b> | Administrative Specialist                   |
| <b>Erin Balch</b>       | Senior Evaluator & Team Leader              |
| <b>Belen Carriedo</b>   | Evaluator                                   |
| <b>Reuben Marshall</b>  | Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations |
| <b>Kareen Vares</b>     | Evaluator                                   |

# Help Promote the Integrity, Efficiency, and Effectiveness of the Peace Corps

Anyone knowing of wasteful practices, abuse, mismanagement, fraud, or unlawful activity involving Peace Corps programs or personnel should call or write the Office of Inspector General. Reports or complaints can also be made anonymously.

## Contact OIG

### Reporting Hotline:

U.S./International: 202.692.2915  
Toll-Free (U.S. only): 800.233.5874

Email: [OIG@peacecorpsoig.gov](mailto:OIG@peacecorpsoig.gov)

Online Reporting Tool: [peacecorpsoig.gov/contact/hotline](https://peacecorpsoig.gov/contact/hotline)

Mail: Peace Corps Office of Inspector General  
1275 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20526

### For General Information:

Main Office: 202.692.2900

Website: [peacecorpsoig.gov](https://peacecorpsoig.gov)

: [x.com/pcoig](https://twitter.com/pcoig)

