

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

QUANTITY WITH QUALITY



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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INTRODUCTION

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

We defined high quality programs as:

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

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

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

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

In some of our discussions with Volunteers in phase II, they felt that some of what the staff described to us in Phase I was not actually being done, was not being done effectively, or was not having the intended positive effect. This is not reflected in this report, because of its focus on describing what the posts do well. But we did we report this information to the

staff on an informal basis, and the instances of this type of feedback were not common. In general, the Volunteers' views did not contradict the staff in terms of the principal elements represented in well-run programs that are described here.

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

The PC/Ukraine case study was conducted by Alice Bunker. Dr. Bunker was in the Ukraine for the phase I of the study September 19-23, 2005, and for phase II June 11-21, 2006.

PC/UKRAINE: QUANTITY WITH QUALITY

PC/Ukraine is a case study in managing a large Peace Corps program (370 Volunteers at the time of this study) in a geographically large country. It is the agency's largest program and has developed organizational strategies that help make it a high-performing post. Because of the effectiveness of PC/Ukraine's organizational structure and operating principles, staff can provide high quality programming, training, and support for the Volunteers. The country director established an open work environment that facilitates feedback among program, training, and administrative staff. The structure feeds valuable information to management for making decisions, and this information has been acted upon in programming, training, and Volunteer support.

The country director defined the central requirement for any Peace Corps post as its ability to recruit exceptionally able local people who believe in the Peace Corps' mission and its value for their country. This concept is reflected in the staff of PC/Ukraine. The country director attributed the high quality of the PC/Ukraine program to the skills, teamwork, dedication, and many long hours of work by the staff, extending over nights, weekends, and holidays. The country director believed that PC/Ukraine benefited immensely because the staff were exceptionally able people and because they all had a deep commitment to make Peace Corps succeed in helping Ukrainians become well-educated and competent citizens of a democratic country.

“What makes this a good post? The management, the staff, and the teamwork make it a good post.”

“Peace Corps is the best development agency in Ukraine because it brings people rather than money... Peace Corps brings change.”

-- *Regional Managers*

The Peace Corps has been in Ukraine since 1992, and since that time, over 1,400 Volunteers have served there.

Table 1. Volunteers by Project

Project	Business Development	Environmental Protection	Teaching English as a Foreign Language	Youth Development
Number of Volunteers	60	8	158	22

Source: FY 2005 Project Status Reports

PC/UKRAINE’S OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The post’s organizational structure was specifically designed to maximize staff’s responsibility to find good jobs for Volunteers and provide them with effective support.

Below are the most important principles that staff credited with keeping PC/Ukraine running smoothly and productively.

- **An open work environment based on mutual trust and respect.** The country director¹ created an open environment in several ways. The country director communicated an expectation that staff will be independent thinkers and that management will entertain well-thought-out ideas from staff, even when they are counter to a previous position. The country director makes the ultimate management decision, but he signals respect for staff by listening to their suggestions and giving staff credit for ideas.
- **Professionalism as a code of conduct.** The country director set a high standard for staff and Volunteers. The country director stated, “If the staff are professional and efficient in their support to the Volunteers, then they can expect the same from the Volunteers.”² The extensive job descriptions for staff put concrete details to the expectation of professionalism.
- **Detailed job descriptions with clearly defined duties and responsibilities.** Several staff spoke about the importance and value of having clear and detailed descriptions of their responsibilities, duties, and expectations. One staff member told us that knowing what is expected of them gives them the confidence and freedom to make decisions on a daily basis. Another felt that the organization works effectively because, “Everyone knows what they are responsible for.” Job descriptions include the lines of supervision, required skills, criteria for judging the quality of work, and detailed

“[The country director] works very hard at staff communications. Staff meetings are a good example. Everyone has an opportunity to participate.”—
-- Program Staff

¹ All references to staff are to those at the time of our visits to the post.

² Interview, November 2005, Kiev.

descriptions of responsibilities and duties in program management, training, support, and communications.

- **Addressing problems immediately.** The staff reported that the country director moved quickly to identify the cause of a problem and take corrective action. After a discussion with the affected staff, he established policy, clarified an agreement, or reiterated an understanding.

- **Listening to the Volunteers.** This mantra extends beyond the individual and professional relationships between the Volunteers and the staff. PC/Ukraine is a Volunteer-centric organization. In the minds of the staff, the priority is undoubtedly the Volunteer. Even the four-story office is organized according to the needs and priorities of serving the Volunteers.

“This post works well because we are always trying to do things better. [The country director] created an atmosphere that facilitates innovation. We collectively come to decisions to make changes. We have more chances to succeed when more people are involved. He also gives us the space to admit when things didn’t go very well and figure out new steps.”

-- *Program Staff*

- In addition to the guard station, the ground floor is dedicated to the medical unit, allowing Volunteers maximum privacy and confidentiality.
- The first floor contains the resource center and the offices of the regional managers, who are the staff most likely to be visited by the Volunteers.
- The second floor is home to the administrative offices and the cashier.
- The country director, the programming and training officer, the program manager, the public relations manager, and the Volunteer activities manager occupy the third floor.
- Finally, on the fourth floor, the training staff manage the Volunteers’ arrival-to-departure training program.

THE VOLUNTEER ADVISORY COUNCIL (VAC)

One distinctive feature of PC/Ukraine’s organizational design is the role given to the VAC as a management tool. The PC/Ukraine VAC is more a part of the management process than its comparable equivalent in other posts. Placement of the VAC at the top and center of the post’s organizational chart is more than symbolic.³ It plays a key role in 360° feedback between Volunteers and staff. According to their organizational document, the mission of the VAC is to “...improve the performance of the Peace Corps mission in Ukraine by reviewing the service capabilities and operations of the staff and Volunteers.”

The VAC provides a check on staff performance through its confidential surveys of the Volunteers. Each training group is surveyed twice – once at four months of service and again at the Volunteers’ first year anniversary. The VAC survey provides staff with important information about what the Volunteers think is working and where additional

³ See Appendix A.

attention is needed. For example, in one survey, the VAC queried the Volunteers on language learning, safety, Volunteer support, the usefulness of Peace Corps publications (newsletter, website), and Volunteer accomplishments.

The VAC compiles the survey results and makes a presentation to the staff. Staff attendance is mandatory, and in response to the findings of the VAC survey, staff develop action items, for which they are held accountable by the country director. Most of the staff whom we interviewed admitted that they feared the surveys initially, but after one or two of them, they have come to value the feedback from the Volunteers.

Another example of the level of respect the staff have for the role of the VAC was the selection of Volunteers to participate in a peer listening skills workshop held to create a peer support network. The VAC rejected a list of successful Volunteers previously selected by the regional managers and, instead, proposed their own candidates, which the staff accepted. Other examples include the VAC's role in assisting the program staff to re-design the Volunteer activity reporting system. The VAC is also contributing to the design of a computerized system for compiling the periodic Volunteer activity reports.

According to the staff, giving prominence to the VAC has had other benefits. All available programming, training, and support staff attend the VAC meetings. Both staff and Volunteers express uncommon candor and honesty during those meetings. The staff feel that being open to Volunteers' ideas and involving them in decisions signals that they view the Volunteers as adults. In return, the VAC helps to enforce adult behavior among themselves and among the Volunteers.

Each training group of Volunteers elects representatives to the VAC during the final week of pre-service training (PST). The number for each class is based on the size of the training group.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES: GROWTH WITHOUT STOVE-PIPING

As PC/Ukraine grew, the program staff became overwhelmed in their attempts to support Volunteers spread throughout the country. As a result, in FY 2000, the post reorganized the staff and reapportioned the work among them (see Figure 1). The site-level responsibilities were split between regional managers and lead specialists. Regional managers became responsible for providing administrative, non-technical, and on-going support to the Volunteers, and lead specialists were assigned the duties of site selection and Volunteer technical support.

The regional manager position is considered the most critical, because of the value placed on Volunteer support. As the primary point of contact for the Volunteers, the regional managers are the post's eyes and ears; they listen to the Volunteers, observe them in their work, and help them solve problems. One regional manager described their role as "the shock absorbers," because they are the first to intervene in conflicts between Volunteers and supervisors or between Volunteers and other Peace Corps staff. Their colleagues are equally appreciative of the role they play, but less glamorous in their description: one lead

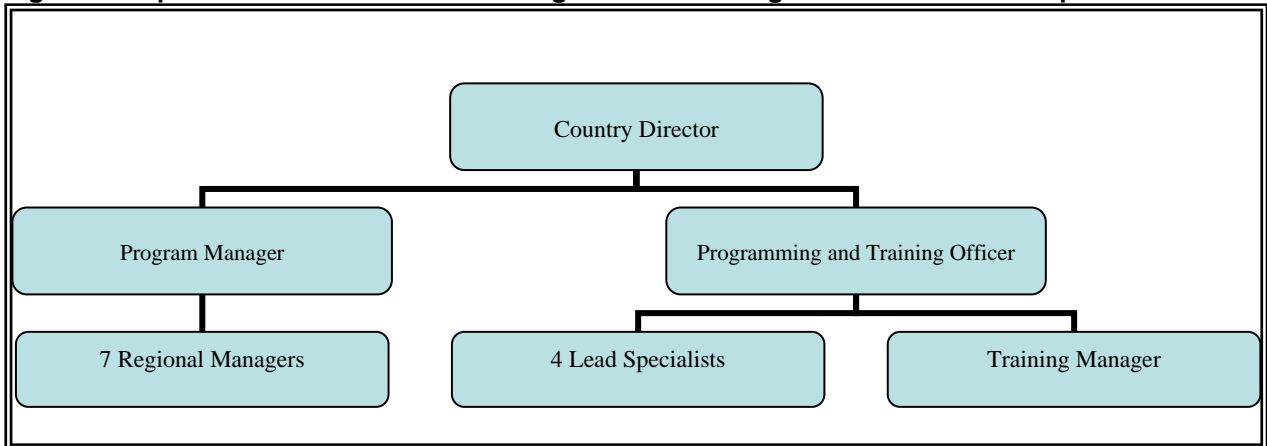
specialist sympathetically observed that the “lead specialists set the stage while the regional managers clean up our mistakes.”⁴

The regional managers have ultimate control/authority over the situation once the Volunteer is at site. This is by virtue of their position description, as well as by the reality of their role as first point of contact. It is formally acknowledged by all the staff. PC/Ukraine is too complex to have ambiguity about who does what or to have conflicts of interest about who does what. The goal is a good experience for each Volunteer. This requires: work and a workplace, security, a home, and a counterpart.

Because the regional managers and lead specialists report to different lines of supervision, the post recognized the need to prevent “stove-piping,” where information passes upward at the expense of communication and coordination across units, which would weaken Volunteer support. The strategies the post uses to combat this are:

- **Cross-Functional Training.** When the current management structure of regional managers and lead specialists was established, the country director rotated staff through different roles before settling them into a longer term position. Five of the regional managers had been part of the training staff for PST, and the training manager was, at one point, a regional manager. This technique helped integrate experiences and expertise throughout the post, and we suspect that it also creates valuable empathy among staff.

Figure 1. Representation of PC/Ukraine Program and Training Staff Inter-relationships



- **Functional Integration.** The post’s functional integration of staff roles makes cooperation and communication a necessary survival strategy for the regional managers, the lead specialists, and the training staff. They need to cooperate with each other to succeed in their respective positions. The linchpin to this trio is the regional manager. As the primary point of contact for the Volunteers, the regional managers are the first to see or hear about the problems. Through their frequent interactions with the

⁴ Ibid.

Volunteers, they collect information that helps the training staff and lead specialists improve how they support the Volunteers.

- **Systems.** The staff made frequent references to the high number of organizational systems devised to assist the staff and Volunteers meet the post’s mission of excellence in Volunteer programming, training, and support. A staff member defined the term as used in the PC/Ukraine office as follows, “The system means that if it falls apart in one place, it will not fall apart somewhere else—an organizational safety net.” As summarized by the administrative officer: “PC/Ukraine is a machine; everything is in order.” He pointed to the use of competent and trained people in every position (including guards and drivers) and to clear policies and rules that are documented, accessible, and transparent.

- **Technology.** Furthermore, the post seeks to maximize the use of all available technology to promote efficiency and effectiveness—to work smarter. Examples include:

“Why is PC/Ukraine successful?
It is a big machine that actually works!”
-- Regional Manager

- ▶ **Cell phones.** Cell phones allow staff to coordinate quickly and efficiently to make decisions. For instance, regional managers, who leave their cell phones on 24/7, can immediately communicate from the field their decision about a host family candidate to the lead specialists who are making Trainee assignments at the training site. Cell phones are also the tool of choice for communicating with Volunteers. Approximately 95% of the Volunteers have cell phones; staff can reach them quickly and efficiently to arrange site visits, respond to emergencies, provide feedback, and consult on health care. Volunteers feel well-informed and believe that the office and staff are accessible.
- ▶ **Email communication that is easily available to most Volunteers.** Almost all Volunteer communications that require detail or documentation can be completed via email. For example, Volunteers can request technical assistance, complete activity reports, or trouble-shoot problems by email.
- ▶ **Shared files.** To enhance Volunteer support and to meet the goal of responding to Volunteers’ email requests even when lead specialists and regional managers are traveling, all email traffic from Volunteers is channeled through the program manager. The program manager consistently responds, even if the response can only be, “we got the message, and someone will get back to you,” and monitors the action until it is completed. All information with potential relevance or concern to staff is available as shared files with read-only access. This information includes all staff travel and vacation schedule, headquarters visitors’ schedules, and PST and in-service training dates.

- **Staff retreats.** Staff retreats are used to focus on substantive issues and team-building. One retreat was dedicated to improving communication among staff and coordinating more effectively on Volunteer support. In a more recent retreat, the training staff conducted a workshop for the regional managers on how to observe Volunteers in their work and provide them with useful technical feedback.⁵ While the training was to help the regional managers make site visits more productive, it also gave the training staff and regional managers a chance to work together.

The staff provided several examples of the entire staff's ability to mobilize to address an issue. The example in Box 1 below shows the many levels of responsibility, the number of people, the careful consideration of all the issues, and the responsiveness of the staff as a whole.

Box 1. Collaboration

During an In-Service Training, a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Volunteer reported headaches, stress, and aggressive nagging by her site coordinator to a Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO). The PCMO contacted the TEFL lead specialist and the Volunteer's regional manager. The Volunteer in question was known to be very capable and positive, and the staff did not want to allow the situation to harm the Volunteer or to waste the Volunteer's potential contribution to Ukraine. Staff discussed the issue at the weekly Operations Team meeting, where the lead specialist and the regional manager reported that the situation at the Volunteer's site was indeed difficult. They decided to request a change of the Volunteer's coordinator.

The lead specialist called the school director and asked her to appoint a different coordinator. However, the director hesitated and assured the lead specialist that relations at the site would improve. The regional manager visited the school, where she found good reasons to press the director again to designate a new coordinator. Although the director agreed, the social environment in the school did not improve for the Volunteer with a new coordinator.

Subsequently, during a follow-up review of the situation in an Operations Meeting, the lead specialist, regional managers, PCMOs, and senior and administrative staff assessed the situation again. The staff decided unanimously on a site transfer. The lead specialist identified several prospective sites, out of which the staff selected one. The administrative office and the regional manager arranged for the Volunteer to visit the proposed new site. After the Volunteer reported back that she felt welcome and potentially useful at the new site, the lead specialist negotiated the Volunteer's teaching load with the school to assure that she would be fully occupied in accordance with PC/Ukraine's guidelines. The Volunteer's new regional manager and the administrative office worked with the new site to arrange for a host family, whereupon a Peace Corps vehicle delivered the Volunteer and her belongings to the new site.

⁵ Communication with Post, January 2006.

SITE SELECTION AND PREPARATION

SELECTING A HOST AGENCY

Based on results from a VAC survey, the post set as its priority that each Volunteer have a meaningful assignment. The staff and the country director accepted that it was destructive for a Volunteer not to have challenging work. Volunteers know that 40 hours is an indicator of a “productive” Volunteer, and they expect an environment conducive to that. It is important not only to have a plan that meets real needs in the country, but also communities or institutions that can use the skills Volunteers have. Finding a setting in which the Volunteer has work and can feel productive drives the post’s host agency selection process.

Site selection requires constant collaboration among the regional managers and lead specialists, who also call on current Volunteers in the selection process. The process draws on the technical knowledge of the lead specialists, the regional manager’s familiarity with an area, and the current Volunteers’ ability to serve as a reality check on the whole process. One staff member described the division of labor this way: “The lead specialists have the big picture, while the regional managers focus on the details.”⁶

In general, lead specialists identify new sites and conduct the initial assessments of an organization’s or school’s capacity to host a Volunteer. Following a lead specialist’s assessment, the appropriate regional manager conducts a follow-up visit to gauge whether the host school or organization would generally work well with Peace Corps and a Volunteer. Specifically, the regional manager determines if the host’s expectations would mesh with the experience and skills of a potential Volunteer. The final voice in the decision is that of a current Volunteer, who accompanies the regional manager to the site. The Volunteer’s opinion is seminal, because they see the situation through a Volunteer’s eyes. As one staff member put it, “The worst thing is a disappointed Volunteer.”

“Goal one is about the job. Goals two and three will not occur without goal one. I believe that Volunteers want to make a contribution. We owe every Volunteer a good job, and in turn, they owe Peace Corps responsible behavior and achievement.”

-- *Country Director*

Not surprisingly, the system of checks and balances that results can cause friction between the lead specialists and regional managers if a difference of opinion emerges. After both have completed their site visits, they discuss their findings; if either has doubts about a site, the site is removed from consideration. Motivated by their past failures, they have improved the site selection process by adding additional questions to the applications and interview guides and learned to pick up

on clues when an organization or family might not meet the Volunteer’s and Peace Corps’ needs.

PC/Ukraine is also sensitive to the needs of the host agencies. Volunteers are in high demand in Ukraine, and generally, Volunteers are not replaced in the same site immediately. Instead, PC/Ukraine allows a one-year pause between Volunteers to

⁶ Interview, Kiev.

encourage sustainability for the host agency; the staff are also concerned about the impact of the expected comparison of the replacing Volunteer to the former Volunteer. As a result of this policy, only about 30% of work sites are replacement sites, requiring that staff develop sites for about 70% of each group of Trainees. One regional manager reported that of 18 education sites, only two were replacement sites.

“The days of people being in love with all things American are over. The schools in Ukraine now want Volunteers to be professionals.”

-- *Lead Specialist*

Site development for the business development project is undergoing change, due to the difficulty the post has had in matching Volunteer skills with organizations’ needs.

The new approach is to place a Volunteer with multiple organizations. Experience showed that Volunteers’ success was driven more by personalities than by skills,

because “relationships are the key to success.” NGOs are typically not larger than three persons, and if a Volunteer did not get along with one person, the Volunteer was unproductive and unhappy.

To implement this approach, the lead specialist identifies a lead organization and asks that organization to invite other organizations to an initial meeting. To apply for a Volunteer, the lead organization, along with four other organizations, must agree to cooperate in hosting a Volunteer. Together, they design a job description based primarily on the lead organization’s needs, but also accommodating the interests of the other partners. The intent is to help the Volunteers expand their networks in the community; in the process, they hope this will produce more tangible work for the Volunteers and better meet the needs of the community. After all, as a staff member pointed out, “Volunteers do not sign up with Peace Corps to work with one thing – for the Volunteer, the idea is to help people.”⁷

The post’s latest challenge is to respond to the Government of Ukraine’s request to address the needs of rural communities. The staff are just beginning to develop experience in rural site placements. The lead specialists report a high demand, and the regional managers think that the shift to rural communities will help Volunteers be more connected to their communities and enrich their experience.

LIVING WITH HOST FAMILIES

PC/Ukraine requires that Volunteers live with host families. This policy was instituted by the country director. Obviously, some Volunteers objected. Interestingly, some staff did, as well. Staff felt that Ukraine was a westernized country in which it was not a problem for females, for example, to live alone. Finding suitable host families added significant time and complexity to the site selection process. For a site selection to go forward, staff had to identify two potential suitable host families at the site. The job of finding host families fell to the regional managers, and they had to allow time for this process. The time required was another objection. It is much easier to access information about potential host institutions than about potential host families. Staff had to rely on personal networks and the experience of other Volunteers and staff to build a database of families.

⁷ Staff interview, Kiev, November 2005.

Ultimately, however, staff were won over by the results. They saw that Volunteers living with host families had better language skills, better cross-cultural understanding, and better adjustment and integration into their communities. Volunteers seen attending the cinema or going to the market with host family members were accepted as belonging. The Volunteer's integration into the community had programming benefits, as well. As part of a host family, the Volunteer was more involved with the community and was introduced to many people in the community who are potential contacts for project ideas and collaboration on projects. Project ideas were more likely to be accepted because of the trust the Volunteer gained from being perceived as belonging to the community. Safety was not an impetus for the host family policy decision but clearly was observed to be a positive by-product.

The home-stay policy fits particularly well in the post's more recent emphasis on sites in smaller, more rural communities, where separate housing is almost impossible to find and family support is essential to integration and acceptance.

SITE VISITS: QUALITY TRUMPS QUANTITY

PC/Ukraine makes quality site visits. The Volunteers know what to expect from the visit, and the staff invest sufficient time to make the visits productive.

In the 2004 Volunteer Survey, almost 96% of the Volunteers rated the informative content of the visits as adequate or more than adequate, compared with the global average of 78%. The Volunteers in Ukraine expressed satisfaction with the frequency and content of site visits and the responsiveness of staff to their issues. The Volunteers in Ukraine were also quite satisfied with the responsiveness of staff to their issues: 96% of the Volunteers rated the responsiveness of staff as adequate or more than adequate compared to the global average of 81%. PC/Ukraine, however, does not beat the global average in the number of site visits to the Volunteers. This fact suggests that the quality of visits is more important to the Volunteers than the quantity of visits.

A large board for tracking site visits hangs over the country director's desk. It has the names of each Volunteer and which staff member had visited the Volunteer. The staff identified the following elements that they felt were important:

- **Observe the Volunteer in their work environment and focus on solving problems.** The regional managers emphasized their role as advisors and problem solvers. If a Volunteer was struggling in the classroom, the regional manager spent time observing the Volunteer teach and talking with that person on how they might improve. Several of the regional managers have teaching experience and feel comfortable helping the TEFL Volunteers on teaching techniques. Many of the regional managers said that creative problem solving with the Volunteers was the best aspect of their job.

- **Provide moral support and empathy.** Over and over again, the staff stressed the need to recognize that Peace Corps is about working with people. An ability to empathize with the Volunteers as they adjust to a new culture and work environment helps the staff develop rapport. They all agreed on the importance of gaining the trust and confidence of the Volunteers. One of the regional managers told us that he feels responsible for his Volunteers, because he knows what it is like to be a foreigner, having spent years in the United States. He considers the Volunteers to be part of his family in Ukraine.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT: SECRETS OF SUCCESS

“My job is about people. In every situation, I need to figure out how to achieve a result for the Volunteer and for the program. I have opportunities to be a student, a parent, a teacher, a supervisor. But most of all, it is important to be trusted and have the confidence of my Volunteers and do everything to not disappoint them.”

-- *Regional Manager*

We identified several aspects that contribute to the quality of Volunteer support:

- **Responsiveness.** A sacrosanct rule at PC/Ukraine is that staff must respond to all emails and phone calls from Volunteers within one day. In the 2004 Global Survey, the effects of this rule are clear: almost 82% of the Volunteers rated communications with staff as excellent or good. Globally, only 66% of the Volunteers felt the same.
- **Backup Systems.** One of the roles of the program manager is to back up his regional managers when they are traveling. Any email that a Volunteer sends to a regional manager is automatically copied to the program manager. A few staff said that they were initially uncomfortable with this but have come to appreciate knowing that their Volunteers will be taken care of if they are out of reach. Regional managers also back each other up. In short, there is always someone in the office who can respond to the Volunteers.
- **Cross-Cultural Skills.** Many of the regional managers and lead specialists have lived or worked in other countries, including the United States. They understand the challenges of learning new languages and adjusting to different cultures and use their own experiences to help the Volunteers adjust to Ukrainian ways of doing things. Several staff expressed the importance of a country director who can bridge the cultural gaps between Ukrainians and Americans.

- Customer Service.** The country director viewed the regional manager position as a critical position in PC/Ukraine because of the value placed on Volunteer support. With some pride, the program manager acknowledged that he "...cannot remember when a Volunteer complained that they didn't have a response from the PC/Ukraine office." As one regional manager put it, "He [program manager] is our institutional memory device." He knows the names and sites of all Volunteers. If the regional manager is not in the office, the Volunteers automatically come to the program manager. The program manager describes the concept as "a circle of support within a larger circle of support."

"I want my Volunteers to be able to transfer skills, think creatively, obtain leadership skills, and have the opportunity to be busy with something that gives them fulfillment."
-- Regional Manager

"My job is a balance of moral support and objective strategizing."
-- Regional Manager

- Accountability.** One of the requirements of the host institution is to provide feedback about the performance of the Volunteer bi-annually. This requirement builds in accountability and sets up an expectation for a high level of performance from the Volunteer. PC/Ukraine finds these reports to be frank and helpful in managing the Volunteer-host agency relationship.

The staff take pride in their achievements. The result of the painstaking care the staff take to create good opportunities for Volunteers pays off. It is hard work to provide jobs for Volunteers in good sites that are well prepared. Constant attention and support over the Volunteers' two-years of service yield results. PC/Ukraine enjoys enviably low termination rates that are among the lowest in the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia Region and among all Peace Corps countries. As one regional manager stated, "It is no accident that our termination rate is so low."

Table 2. Early Termination Rates, PC/Ukraine, EMA, and Worldwide

Year	PC/Ukraine (%)	EMA Region (%)	Worldwide (%)
2001	13.1	13.2	12.3
2002	7.4	12.2	11.7
2003	8.9	10.8	10.5
2004	10.2	11.4	11.3
2005	7.8	14.3	11.7

Source: Office of Policy, Planning, and Analysis, Peace Corps, 2005

TRAINING: COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AND MOBILIZATION

How PST works. PC/Ukraine begins training even before the new Invitees pack their bags. The Invitees receive a compact disc with critical information about Ukraine, the training process, introductions to the staff, and safety and security information. In addition, beginning lessons in Ukrainian provide an introduction to cultural expectations and the key vocabulary needed for the Trainee to meet and greet the homestay family.

Community-based training. PC/Ukraine uses an almost completely community-based training model. Trainees are placed in small groups (clusters) and assigned to a community along with a language and cross-cultural instructor (LCI). Every Saturday, several clusters are brought to a central location for cross-cultural and technical sessions, referred to as link days. To develop closer relationships between the Trainees and the technical trainers, the technical and cross-cultural facilitators (TCFs) live in the community with the Trainees. They rotate around to each cluster, spending two days with each cluster.

Participation of current Volunteers. PC/Ukraine also deploys serving Volunteers in an “adopt-a-cluster” program. The Volunteers apply for this appointment to the training director; they must offer three technical sessions that they could facilitate and agree to observe classes or work sessions and provide constructive feedback. The training director assigns the selected Volunteers to a cluster and gives them a ten-day window in which to visit the Trainees. She has used this approach for three PSTs and has found it helped build a support network for the soon-to-be Volunteers.

Practical experience. PC/Ukraine PST is increasingly emphasizing practical experience for Trainees, letting them try out different skills before reaching their sites. For example, TEFL Trainees spend time preparing lesson plans and teaching Ukrainian students in actual classrooms that are not screened or pre-selected and give the Trainee a realistic view of their likely teaching experience for the next two years.

Mobilizing the community. One of the hardest skills for trainees to acquire is mobilizing community members. PC/Ukraine has been experimenting with different ways to develop these skills among the Trainees in community-based projects, such as the new Youth and Community Economic Development projects. To get the Trainees comfortable with small community development work and working with multiple organizations, the post gave each cluster \$50. After completing a community mapping exercise to identify needs, the trainees set out to recruit several organizations in their training site to design and execute a project. The challenges to the Trainees are many. They have to approach the organizations for a contribution of 25%; the community must implement the project; and the Trainees have to persuade organizations that may otherwise compete with each other to work together.

This practical approach to the needs of the Trainees continues throughout training and gives them practical experience to develop different skills before reaching their sites. The training director was very enthusiastic about several projects from the Youth Development PST:

- One cluster decided to launch a cleanup campaign in their community. They wanted it to be more than a one-day event; they wanted to involve the children in the community, especially the orphans; and they wanted to include an anti-smoking theme. The Trainees worked with a trade association for the local newspapers on the anti-smoking campaign and recruited the children to clean up a park, including

painting the benches and trash bins. At the end of the project, the Trainees issued certificates to the children.

- Another cluster used their \$50 to pay for internet lessons and computer time at a local internet club for groups of youth after they completed community projects, including helping an elderly couple with chores around their house.

SUMMARY: MAINTAINING QUALITY

The country director is well aware that quality persists only as long as attention is paid to it from the top. The Peace Corps has few resources for awards, advancement, and professional training, which makes the country director's job more challenging in terms of keeping good staff and motivating them. One technique the country director uses to

maintain quality is to simply challenge the staff to consider how their work "could be done better" regardless of its present quality. Staff respond well to this approach. Some of the staff's recent suggestions include further enhancements to site selection and development, addressing the unique features of rural placements, and strengthening the youth development project. To enrich the

"The administrative staff do not have many training opportunities. I have them go to COS and IST events to see the Volunteers. With contacts at other US agencies, I negotiate training for the drivers. The local RSO trains the guards. I invite technical exchanges to give PC/Ukraine staff a chance to share skills."
-- Administrative Officer

Volunteers' experience, the staff also proposed coordinator/counterpart training, funds for program design and management (PDM) training, regular funding of IST events, and testing strategies to help select, prepare, and support home-stay families. The country director felt certain that the expectations the staff set for themselves will come to fruition.

A passion to improve is the primary characteristic of a good post; that passion is the fuel that spurs staff's willingness to tackle challenges, whatever the limitations.

In the case of PC/Ukraine, the administrative officer said, "It is more challenging and interesting to work around your limitations; to be successful under such circumstances is more rewarding--you are the champion." At PC/Ukraine the requisite ingredients for success have been put in place: a good staff that respect each other, inter-departmental communication and collaboration, feedback solicited from the Volunteers, and well-deserved pride in a job well-done.

PHASE II: THE VOLUNTEERS' PERSPECTIVE

Approximately nine months after recording the staff's view of the post's elements of programming success, we spoke to the Volunteers. With the assistance of the post, we convened small groups of Volunteers to learn the factors that most contributed to their service in PC/Ukraine. We met with 13% of the Volunteers in the country at the time in small groups of 6 to 15 Volunteers in each group. The meeting sites were in Simferopol, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zhytomyr. The sessions lasted from three to five hours.

THE VAC SURVEYS

The various Volunteer surveys conducted by the PC/Ukraine VAC provided a second and vital source of information about the effectiveness of the PC/Ukraine program and reinforced the positive aspects that were learned from the staff interviews about the VAC. We found the VAC surveys of PC/Ukraine to uniquely represent the importance and value the staff place on Volunteer opinion. With input from the staff, the VAC members constructed the questions, distributed the surveys, collected the results, and analyzed the data. Volunteer responses were anonymous and confidential. The survey responses we reviewed contained information from the Volunteers in country with more than one year of service and included questions targeted to specific groups of Volunteers.

The surveys were:

1. A four-month survey (Group 27) focusing on questions regarding their PST experience.
2. A six-month survey (Group 28) identifying the experiences of "educators," including all TEFL, teacher trainers, and youth development Volunteers.
3. A one-year survey (Group 25) asking questions about the Volunteer's site, work, and general Peace Corps support issues.
4. A one year survey (Group 26) that asked questions about continued language learning, safety and security, and general Volunteer support.

We found the data to be useful. The extensive commentary provided by the Volunteers helped us understand the quality of the Volunteers' experience, and demonstrated the seriousness with which the Volunteers responded to these confidential surveys. The quality of the reports also showed the professionalism of the VAC.

VAC MEETINGS

We had the opportunity to attend a special session of the VAC called by the new country director. The VAC members met together in a morning session without staff. In the afternoon, all the available programming and training staff, administrative officer, etc. attended the formal session. This session included the newly elected representatives of the most recently trained group. There are no elected offices; the VAC chairmanship role is shared on a rotating basis. The agenda consisted of items gathered by the VAC representatives from their constituents consolidated during the morning session.

Several important features of the meeting were:

- **The Volunteers were the focus.** Even the seating arrangements seemed to mean something special. The members of the VAC and the country director sat in comfortable chairs around the large conference room table. The staff occupied chairs around the perimeter of the room.
- **The country director showed respect.** The new country director asked permission to amend the agenda by beginning the meeting to introduce herself and to address an issue known to be most on the mind of the VAC—the implementation of a recent policy that limited Volunteers’ time away from site.
- **There was a negotiation process.** The country director proposed change to the policy, but emphasized the importance of the Volunteers’ presence at site, which included facilitating community integration, continued language learning, generating productive projects, and supporting safety and security. “The issue,” the country director said, “is to balance the intense focus required of Volunteer service and the need for personal time.” Volunteers discussed the implications of the country director’s proposal. The agreement reached was on a modification to the proposal to be tested over a specified period with data collected regarding Volunteers’ reactions and feedback to staff at a future VAC meeting.
- **The staff listened.** The VAC presented the rest of their agenda items including a number of complaints. The staff listened to all complaints politely and respectfully; at one point, a more experienced Volunteer leaned over and whispered: “I can’t believe that the staff still listen to these issues; they come up again and again every time a new group is sworn in. And I have been here only 1½ years! Some of these problems have no easy solution!” Five hours later, the meeting adjourned.
- **Volunteers recognized and appreciated the VAC.** Volunteers stated they appreciated that staff valued the VAC and the VAC surveys. They reported that prior to each VAC meeting, their VAC representatives called to gather issues, opinions, and complaints. VAC minutes were distributed in the electronic format used by PC/Ukraine staff to communicate with the Volunteers.

THE OIG FOCUS GROUPS

We began each focus group with an explanation of the purpose of the study, emphasizing confidentiality, and responded to questions from the Volunteers. We distributed a short survey and discussion question worksheets that contained open-ended questions, and asked Volunteers to write down the factors that contributed most to their Peace Corps experience. After the Volunteers offered information detailing their initial response to the work sheet questions, we asked specific questions to verify the descriptions provided by staff earlier in the study.

The Volunteers were fairly equally divided between male (46%) and female (54%), and time in country; 42% reported they had been in country for less than one year and 58% for one year or more. Sixty-nine percent of the Volunteers were age 30 or less and 22% were age 40 or more. The majority of Volunteers (89%) were TEFL Volunteers reflecting the fact that approximately 80% of the PC/Ukraine Volunteers serve in education.

VOLUNTEER PRIORITIES

The Volunteers shared thoughtful insights about their experiences during these focus group sessions. While Volunteers acknowledged that effects of staff efforts are not experienced positively and perfectly by every Volunteer, all Volunteers seemed to understand the intent behind staff policies and procedures; the participants also understood that PC/Ukraine staff seek, accept, and act on feedback. The Volunteers identified and prioritized the factors that contributed the most to the quality of their experience as follows:

Factor #1: Work to do . . .

While the majority of the Volunteers who participated in the focus groups were TEFL Volunteers teaching in primary or secondary schools or at the teacher training or university levels, Volunteers in all sectors agreed that schools are advantageous host agencies for Volunteers. They are structured, and the expectations are perfectly clear without extra effort on the part of the lead specialists to convince the host country supervisors and colleagues about the role of a Volunteer—everyone, including the rest of the community, knows what the Volunteers are supposed to do. Eighty-one percent responded they understood their assignments “well” or “very well,” and 69% reported they believed their time and service in Ukraine was valued.

Volunteers also spoke of the vast need for the services of English-speaking Volunteers in the school system. According to the Volunteers, the schools are experiencing a great demand for English teaching and understand that there is a great deal of competition—especially in Western Ukraine—for a Volunteer. In the Eastern regions of Ukraine, the education assignments are not as numerous and tend to be more frequently located in larger urban schools, because a significant proportion of the population is sympathetic to the politics of the former Soviet Union and do not request American Volunteers.

As the PC/Ukraine staff move to assign Volunteers to rural areas, the Volunteers noted that rural site characteristics have a different impact on the quality of their service. According to the Volunteers serving in smaller communities, adjusting to the community is a much easier job, the need is greater, but there are more physical challenges. The Volunteers acknowledged that because they are treated very well and as “novelties,” they may have more impact on the community. The role of the Volunteer in the villages is less focused on the school environment and more on the community as a whole, but the school gives the Volunteer legitimacy. “It is more like the real Peace Corps experience—good and bad,” said one.

Factor #2: . . . in a good site, and . . .

Describing the “perfect” site was not difficult for the education Volunteers but it was more complicated for the business/NGO development and youth development Volunteers. However, all the Volunteers agreed that the qualities of good sites fell into two general categories—social/supportive characteristics and work-related assets.

Most often, Volunteers spoke of a good site as one where their working role was understood and where the Volunteer’s work was challenging and meaningful. A “good site” also had needs that could be addressed by the Volunteer either with skills the Volunteer possessed before coming to Ukraine or obtained in PST. Sixty-nine percent of the Volunteers reported that their sites were “well” or “very well” prepared for their arrival. Volunteers commented good sites included the following characteristics:

- A good match of Volunteer skills and host agency needs.
- Good host organization; dedicated staff.
- Well- prepared for the Volunteer’s arrival.
- Solid schedule of work/classes.
- Supportive of ideas and the Volunteer.
- Sufficient work load to be “busy.”
- Plenty of opportunities for secondary projects.

Social/supportive sites demonstrated appreciation for the Volunteer, which contributed greatly to their satisfaction. However, Volunteers insisted that social characteristics did not compensate for lack of work or purpose for the Volunteer. Volunteers provided examples, which included:

- Being invited to birthday celebrations.
- Working with or teaching “polite” students.
- Being treated “regally.”
- Being invited to social events involving the faculty.
- Having good rapport with a number of the teachers and students.
- Having an “enthusiastic” site with enthusiastic students.
- Being wanted and desired by the site.
- Observing a positive attitude displayed by the teaching staff.

Factor #3: . . . with a good coordinator.

Volunteers in the focus group discussions were clear that the “coordinators” (aka counterparts) were intrinsically linked to a “good” site but played a special role in their experience. The Volunteers emphasized that their relationship with their host country colleagues—particularly their working relationship with their designated coordinator—was very important. That coordinator can be the Ukrainian link with the rest of the workplace colleagues, providing more work opportunities for the Volunteer. Even in a host agency

that is indifferent to the Volunteer, a good coordinator can still make the experience positive, successful, and productive for the Volunteer.

Volunteers described the characteristics of a good coordinator as a combination of best friend, neighbor, guide, boss, friend, and co-worker. Some of the things good coordinators do for the Volunteers include:

- Identifying and facilitating work opportunities.
- Networking with the community or beneficiaries.
- Communicating to others in the workplace or community how to use the Volunteer.
- Helping the Volunteer find permanent housing (the responsibility of the supervisor/director of the host agency.)
- Serving as a guide and advocate at various levels throughout the host agency.

Volunteers were quick to acknowledge that the role of coordinator requires considerable time, patience, understanding, and tolerance of the American mentality. As one Volunteer explained, “The coordinators are not getting paid for the time they take with the Volunteer; time with the Volunteer is taking away their tutoring time—for money.”

According to the Volunteers, the coordinator is usually identified by the lead specialist. In the process of identifying potential sites and during the initial phase of site preparation, lead specialists attend English teacher training sessions or seminars where they describe Peace Corps and the role of the Volunteer. A teacher-trainer Volunteer explained, “Teachers motivated enough to attend the seminars tend to represent schools that are good candidates.” Participants not only ask questions of the lead specialists, but have the opportunity to discuss Peace Corps with experienced colleagues. If a seminar participant is enthusiastic, they convince their school director to complete the application and likely become the Volunteer’s coordinator. The reputation of Peace Corps in Ukraine is distinguished enough that the schools request Volunteers.

Volunteers in the other two projects state that such professional gatherings are not common for agencies working in business and NGO development or youth development. Both projects are smaller and less well-known throughout Ukraine, so the lead specialists’ efforts to network are more difficult in these sectors. According to the Volunteers, the positive influence of a Volunteer in the community motivates other host agencies to consider requesting a Volunteer for the business/NGO development or for youth development projects.

Factor #4: Language: “You can never learn enough language.”

PC/Ukraine Volunteers discussed the relative importance of the job/site versus language as factors contributing to a positive Volunteer experience. Those who had been able to achieve a workable competency in Russian or Ukrainian argued strongly that language competency was the key to their success as Volunteers; those who had not been able to achieve equal language competency agreed that the quality of their Volunteer experience was significantly diminished.

Volunteers stated that their ability to speak to Ukrainians in their language gave them almost instant acceptance into a family, social, or work environment. As one Volunteer put it, “Anyone that says language isn’t limiting isn’t being true to themselves.” Another stated, “I feel rude speaking to Ukrainians with my menial language skills. It is important!” Competent language speakers said their ability allowed them to initiate friendships that removed the isolation they experienced early in their service, helping them be less dependent on fellow Volunteers and enriching their cultural experience.

The attitude of the leadership and staff was reflected in the attitudes of the Volunteers. Explaining the emphasis the post places on language learning, a Volunteer related a conversation with the country director: “[The country director] says there are only so many hours in a day. PC/Ukraine training focuses on language.”

Language: how they do it. . .

In the VAC survey, Volunteers were asked to evaluate the statement “My PST language instruction was effective in teaching me basic language skills necessary for living and working in Ukraine.” Eighty-nine percent either “agreed” or “strongly agreed.” The OIG survey recorded that 83% of the Volunteers felt they were able to communicate in the language needed for their work assignment “moderately,” “well,” or “very well.” A focus group of Volunteers provided the following examples to describe the effectiveness of their training.

- **Pre-PST learning.** Some of the Volunteers were members of the training class that received and used the compact disc (CD) with Ukrainian language lessons prior to arriving in Ukraine. Most acknowledged they had not used the materials as much as they should have. One Volunteer suggested that even though she had not used the CD and did not come as prepared as she would have liked, she felt that the CD sent a message that language learning was important.
- **Sufficient time.** Volunteers pointed out that both the Russian and Ukrainian languages are complicated for most Americans; they also acknowledged that 12 weeks for PST is a long time. But no one complained and, indeed, several commented that more time would have been helpful with regard to language training. Said one: “We need more hours of language class every day during PST. It is an opportunity for learning the skills that are most important to accomplish things at site.”
- **The staff.** The first ingredient of successfully learning the language, according to the Volunteers, is the Language/Cross-Cultural Facilitators (LCF). They characterized the LCFs as “excellently trained and dedicated.” Indeed, one Volunteer stated: “The LCFs and the entire training staff is so helpful. They work like a well-oiled machine! In addition to the purely professional side, they are all just really wonderful people.”
- **Homestay families.** Another key was the homestay family experience. The satisfaction of the Volunteers with their PST home-stay is a tribute to the work of the

training staff who developed and prepared more than 100 families in about 24 communities to accommodate the Trainees for three months. “They were absolutely amazing; I cannot imagine beginning life in Ukraine without them” according to one Volunteer.

- **Practical learning.** Volunteers also identified memorable variations on standard language classes, such as actual visits to the train station, the stores, or the post office. LCFs rotated to other language groups for two weeks so that Trainees could hear and become accustomed to different speech patterns, voice inflections, or just the difference between male and female speakers.
- **The right tools.** Volunteers were also given tools and materials to learn a second language. Fifty-nine percent of the Volunteers responding to the VAC survey agreed that PST training was adequate to learn a second language, often needed in Ukraine’s bilingual society.
- **Tutors.** Once at site, language learning did not stop. Staff arranged for an extended three-month homestay experience with a family who ensured the Volunteer continued the language and cross-cultural learning. In addition, the role of the host family at site was to introduce the Volunteer and become a mentor and guide to the community. Said one Volunteer: “The second host family is very important, because we will live in that community for two years.” Another said, “This was such a great idea because not only did it really help language, [it created] a tighter support system when a Volunteer needs anything.”
- **Self-learning strategies.** Only a few Volunteers in each of the groups did not have a language tutor, and those who did not were actively seeking a tutor. The PST staff provided copies of language learning materials for the Volunteers to use and materials specifically designed for the tutors. During the focus groups, Volunteers often became engaged in lively discussions about the best way to find good tutors. Clearly, the on-going language learning was a priority for them.
- **Extended training.** IST events and other Volunteer conferences provided voluntary “language refreshers.” Volunteers could bring their tutor to the IST sessions, and the LCFs would help the tutors design and facilitate language lessons for the Volunteer. Another Volunteer recalled the “Language for Special Purposes” supplement provided at the Youth Development conference as being “immensely helpful.”

Volunteers summarized by saying that PC/Ukraine staff had done all they could to help the Volunteers with language learning. The remaining effort was left to the Volunteer. Two transferring Volunteers who had served in other countries agreed that the focus on language learning was more zealous in PC/Ukraine than during their previous experience. They expressed surprise that the PC/Ukraine Volunteers could achieve so much language competency in such a relatively brief time.

Factor #5: Ukrainian host families, friends, and neighbors

The OIG survey recorded that 89% of the Volunteers felt they were “moderately,” “well,” or “very well” integrated into their community. “Another word for community integration is relationships—friends, neighbors, acceptance,” stated one Volunteer. As the discussions progressed, Volunteers agreed that their attitudes about the nature and value of those relationships were formed in their first experiences in Ukraine with their PST host families.

Whether the Volunteers’ relationship was positive or less so, they noted that their initial impression of the Ukrainian people during PST formed their family experience and hindered or facilitated future interactions. Volunteers with less helpful families acknowledged they were hesitant to form new relationships with families when they arrived at their sites. Volunteers who had a positive experience expected a good experience with future relationships—even if disappointed, they felt more willing to seek new interactions and new friends.

The host family is the initial introduction of the Volunteer to the community. Particularly, for youth development and TEFL Volunteers who arrive at site during the school breaks, their first interactions in a community are completely through their host families, because they do not work with their host agency until later. The family becomes the first, and often, lasting anchor for the Volunteers. Several members of the focus groups reported they have chosen to remain with their families. These Volunteers spoke of achieving enhanced language skill and receiving important assistance from members of their host family. In addition, host family members have helped initiate and support Volunteer work in the school or the community.

Other Volunteers spoke of developing an extended social network of friends in their work community. First and foremost, the TEFL teachers spoke of the enjoyment and friendships of students and fellow teachers. But almost all reported they maintained their relationship with their host family in the community by visiting frequently. One Volunteer stated she even visits the family she initially rejected in addition to the family she selected; the “rejected” family has become a very satisfying and important relationship to her.

Factor #6: PC/Ukraine Staff Support

When we asked Volunteers about the amount and quality of support they receive from the PC/Ukraine staff, the reaction was immediate. Said one, “I’m blown away by the support we get from PC/Ukraine.” Other Volunteers described the support they perceive as “...over the top of my expectations” and “...very attentive and responsive. I feel like if I need help someone will be there for me.” In the OIG survey, 75% responded they were “well” or “very well” satisfied with administrative support, and 72% were “well” or “very well” satisfied with technical support. In the following examples, the Volunteers identified the regional managers, the medical staff, the safety and security coordinator, and the resource staff as the most constructive or supportive of their experience.

- **The Regional Managers:** According to the Volunteers, the regional managers support the Volunteers by providing “attentive autonomy.” Volunteers stated that their regional managers are minimally involved, but can be reached by cell phone 24 hours a day if immediate assistance is necessary. According to one Volunteer, “My regional manager lets you be if you want—if you have a little control over your life, your confidence goes up. He enables you to try.”

Others related stories of their regional managers helping solve problems, giving advice, and negotiating with supervisors, coordinators, and host families. Many saw their regional manager as their advisor, friend, manager, and advocate. Most Volunteers agreed with their colleague who said, “The regional manager is the human contact I have with Peace Corps.” Others agreed that the regional manager is the “... face of the administration.”

- **The Medical Staff.** Volunteers were almost profuse in their praise and support of the medical staff. Most had a positive story to tell that demonstrated the prompt and supportive attitude of the medical unit. They described all of the medical staff as approachable and helpful. Particularly, Volunteers were impressed that the medical staff considered the connection between physical and emotional/mental health. They described the medical staff as proactive in their attentiveness to Volunteer satisfaction, in addition to caring for their physical health.
- **The Safety and Security Coordinator.** Volunteers described the safety and security coordinator as proactive, helpful, and supportive. Many of the Volunteers appreciated the fact that the safety and security coordinator travels around Ukraine to conduct consolidation tests of the emergency action plan. He works to analyze the results of the tests and spends time with them to hear about and understand the conditions in the region. Sometimes, he travels to sites to contact local police officials. As a result, Volunteers say they feel safe in Ukraine.
- **The Resource Center Staff.** Volunteers expressed their appreciation of the office’s resource center staff who help Volunteers find technical resource materials. The resource center staff are even more important in light of the fact that internet usage is relatively expensive. One Volunteer noted that as more Volunteers are placed in rural areas, the value of the resource center will increase.

Factor #7: Volunteer colleagues—humanizing a big organization

Throughout the discussions, Volunteers alluded to the large scale of PC/Ukraine. Nevertheless, they felt they were able to create an environment that reduced the sense of insignificance and anonymity and put their experiences in manageable proportions. According to the Volunteers, the key was their Volunteer colleagues. They rated the role of their Volunteer colleagues as an important factor that contributed to the quality of their service.

Volunteers stated that their Volunteer colleagues were important, because they were immediately available, non-judgmental, and supportive. While Volunteers stated they appreciated the ISTs and other Peace Corps group events, one stated, “Frankly, the most beneficial part of IST is seeing other Volunteers. Volunteers are the best support and source of information for each other. Especially since there are so many, we need to get together sometimes and share experiences.” Among other roles, Volunteers stated their colleagues took the place of:

1. Mental health counselors.
2. Technical problem solvers.
3. Secondary project advisors.
4. “Shoulders to cry on when things aren’t going well.”
5. “Cheerleaders when one is thinking of ETing.”
6. “Vacation destinations when you are broke.”
7. “Comic relief.”
8. Family when lonely.
9. Cooking mates when needing good food as solace.

One Volunteer stated, “The ideas, feed-back, advice, support, etc. I get from my co-Volunteers really helps—I get refreshed and go away with a clear mind. [This is] especially important during the winter; re-charging is important.”

Volunteers also appreciated the role of technology to link them to their friends and to the staff. They speculated about life as a Peace Corps Volunteer before cell phones and the internet and how Volunteers survived two years of service without easy access to friends, family, and home in the United States. Volunteers believed that some of the Volunteers who terminated their service early were, most frequently, those who had no cell phone reception, no access to the internet, and no nearby Volunteers. They also predicted that more assignments to the rural areas of Ukraine would produce a new range of challenges to both Volunteers and the staff.

CONCLUSION: QUANTITY WITH QUALITY

In building a quality program, the PC/Ukraine staff have excelled in three areas. The first is in paying attention to the Volunteers; this includes the Volunteers’ assignments, training, and support. The second is maximizing efficiency through collaboration—whether face-to-face or electronic—as the means to support a large number of Volunteers. The third lesson is to strive for continuous improvement, accepting that the job is always a work in progress.

As the Volunteers see it, the remarkable responsiveness of the staff helps them feel valued as individuals—a goal hard to achieve when one of many. They also appreciated that the staff seek and act on feedback as demonstrated by the staff’s respect for the VAC. One Volunteer commented, “It would be easy to take the staff for granted—until you realize that the excellent service they give me is multiplied 350 times. Amazingly, it works.”

APPENDIX A

PC/Ukraine's Organizational Plan

PEACE CORPS/UKRAINE ORGANIZATION PLAN

