



Office of Inspector General

Office
202.692.2900
[Website](#)
[OIG Reports](#)

Hotline
202.692.2915 | 800.233.5874
[Online Reporting Tool](#)
OIG@peacecorpsig.gov

To: Sheila Crowley, Chief Executive Officer
Emily Untermeyer, Acting Regional Director/Chief of Operations, IAP Operations
Anne Braghetta, Country Director, Peace Corps/Costa Rica
Angela Kissel, Acting Chief Compliance Officer

From: Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General

Date: November 22, 2017

Subject: Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Costa Rica (IG-18-01-E)

Transmitted for your information is our final report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Costa Rica.

Management concurred with 13 recommendations. We closed 6 recommendations based on a review of corrective actions and supporting documentation. Recommendations 4, 5, 7 and 10-13 will remain open pending confirmation from the chief compliance officer that the documentation identified in management's response has been received. In its response, management described actions it is taking or intends to take to address the issues that prompted each of our recommendations. OIG will review and consider closing recommendations 11 and 13 when the documentation reflected in OIG's comments and the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 4, 5, 7, 10 and 12 additional documentation is required.

We wish to note that in closing recommendations, we are not certifying that the agency has taken these actions or that we have reviewed their effect. Certifying compliance and verifying effectiveness are management's responsibilities. However, when we feel it is warranted, we may conduct a follow-up review to confirm that action has been taken and to evaluate the impact.

Our comments, which are in the report as Appendix E, address these matters. Please respond with documentation to close the remaining open recommendations within 90 days of the receipt of this memorandum.

You may address questions regarding follow-up or documentation to Assistant Inspector General for Evaluation Jeremy Black at 202.692.2912.

Please accept our thanks for your cooperation and assistance in our review.

cc: Kathy Stroker, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Carl Sosebee, Acting Chief of Staff
Matthew McKinney, White House Liaison

Tony Marra, Acting General Counsel
Kristin Besch, Acting Associate Director of Global Operations
George Like, Chief of Operations, IAP Operations
Lindsey Suggs, Chief of Programming and Training, IAP Operations
Stephanie Rust, Director, Overseas Programming and Training Support
Jill Carty, Acting Associate Director, Office of Health Services
Shawn Bardwell, Associate Director for Safety and Security
Rachel Horta, Director of Programming and Training, IAP Operations
Heather Phillips, Country Desk, Peace Corps/Costa Rica
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General/Legal Counsel, Office of Inspector General
IGChron
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GENERAL**



A Volunteer, his counterpart, and their class.

Final Country Program Evaluation

Peace Corps/Costa Rica

IG-18-01-E

November 2017



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

More than 3,600 Peace Corps Volunteers have served the people of Costa Rica since the program was first launched in 1963. There are currently three projects in Peace Corps/Costa Rica (hereafter referred to as “the post”): teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), community economic development (CED), and youth development (YD). At the onset of this evaluation, 100 Volunteers were serving in Costa Rica.

WHAT WE FOUND

The post had an effective strategy for placing Volunteers in areas of need, and the three projects were well aligned with Costa Rica’s development priorities. Relationships between the post and its project partners were positive and included project advisory committees. Other areas of no concern included: the post’s use of project performance data, Volunteer integration, medical support and confidentiality, site visits, communication between the post and headquarters, the post’s relationship with the embassy, staff performance appraisals, onboarding, and compliance with the required staff training for sexual assault risk reduction and response. Furthermore, we found that Volunteers felt safe at their sites and would report crimes against them to Peace Corps. The emergency action plan was embassy approved and had been tested as required. Senior leadership encouraged collaboration between units, and there was good communication with Volunteers.

However, we identified areas of post operations that required management attention. CED Volunteers struggled to achieve their project objectives due to problems with the project’s framework, technical training, site placement, and reporting forms. The post was undergoing a project review at the time of this evaluation in order to address these issues, but the newly focused project framework had not been finalized or implemented. We also found that Volunteers across all projects, especially those in smaller sites, had difficulty establishing and maintaining productive relationships with their counterparts.

In addition we found other aspects of Volunteer support needed attention. Primary consolidation points may be unreachable for some Volunteers in emergencies, and site history forms did not include adequate directions to locate Volunteers. Some Volunteer housing did not have sufficient burglary protection according to the post’s housing criteria. The post was not adequately assessing and documenting local health care providers, nor was a driver assigned to accompany the Peace Corps medical officer in an emergency. The role of regional Volunteer leaders was poorly defined. And though no recommendation was made, we assessed that post was pursuing multiple initiatives, pilots, and activities that impacted planning and levied a considerable workload on staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

Our report contains 13 recommendations, which, if implemented, should strengthen post operations and correct the deficiencies detailed in the accompanying report.

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HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND

Costa Rica is a Central American country, slightly smaller than West Virginia, lying between the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Caribbean Sea to the east, and bordered by Nicaragua to the north and by Panama to the southeast. Costa Rica has rugged mountains with several active volcanos, and a coastal plain with lowlands subject to flooding from strong storms.

Costa Rica has been a peaceful democracy since 1899 with the exception of two brief periods – the Federico Tinoco Granados dictatorship from 1917 to 1919 and the 1948 uprising following presidential elections. Since 1948, Costa Rica has held more democratic presidential elections than any other Latin American country, and in 1948 it dissolved its military forces.

Costa Rica's economy contracted during the 2009 global economic crisis and inflation rose to 14 percent. The economy has stabilized since 2010, and in 2016 the inflation rate stood at an estimated 0.3 percent, with a real growth rate at 4.3 percent and unemployment at 9.3 percent. Youth unemployment was estimated at 25 percent in 2014. Approximately 25 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Costa Rica also has high income inequality as measured by a Gini coefficient of 48.5.¹

In 2015, Costa Rica spent 7.6 percent of its GDP on education, and its literacy rate was estimated at 98 percent. Approximately 96 percent of eligible primary school-aged children and 71 percent of secondary school-aged children attend school. The Ministry of Education has made English a priority in Costa Rica, where approximately 10.7 percent of Costa Ricans speak English as a second language. Costa Rica's human development index is ranked 66th globally at 0.776,² the second highest among all Peace Corps posts.

PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Peace Corps first entered Costa Rica in 1963 with 26 English and science education Volunteers, and Peace Corps/Costa Rica has continued uninterrupted ever since. Over 3,600 Volunteers have served in Costa Rica in the health, education, environment, community development, agriculture, small business development, and youth development sectors. The post currently has three projects: teaching English as a foreign language, community economic development, and youth development.

The post has February and July inputs each year. At the beginning of fieldwork for this evaluation, the post had a total of 100 Volunteers and 24 trainees in country.

¹ A Gini coefficient is a measure of the deviation of the distribution of income among individuals or households within a country.

² "The Human Development Report" publishes an annual Human Development Index. The Index provides a composite measure of three basic dimensions of human development: health, education and income. Countries are ranked from "very high human development" to "low human development" based on related data.

The post's Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 operational budget plan was approximately \$3.2 million.³ The most recent OIG evaluation of Peace Corps/Costa Rica took place in August 2005.

More detailed descriptions of the three project areas are as follows:

- **Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

The TEFL project prepares students and teachers for personal, professional, and academic opportunities through English education. Volunteers work with primary- and secondary-level teachers to improve linguistic competence and teaching practices. They also work directly with students to improve English language proficiency, academic success, and leadership skills. At the time of fieldwork, there were 35 TEFL Volunteers in country.

- **Community Economic Development**

The CED project focuses on sustained economic growth and improved standard of living for families and communities. Volunteers work in rural and semi-rural communities developing the workforce skills of community members, especially women and youth, and improving the business skills and cultivation of business opportunities for a new generation of entrepreneurs. This project was undergoing an end-of-cycle review conducted by the post, the Inter-America and Pacific Operations (IAP) region, and the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS). At the time of fieldwork, there were 36 CED Volunteers in country.

- **Youth Development**

The YD project empowers youth in making informed decisions about their education, health, and lifestyles. Volunteers work with schools, community development organizations, youth groups, health facilities, and other organizations serving youth in urban and semi-urban communities targeted for Volunteer placement based on poverty levels, unemployment, delinquency, drug consumption, school drop-out rates, and teenage pregnancy. At the time of fieldwork, there were 29 YD Volunteers in country.

EVALUATION RESULTS

This evaluation addresses researchable questions in the following topic areas:

- Programming, Training, and Evaluation
- Volunteer Support
- Post Leadership and Management

PROGRAMMING, TRAINING, AND EVALUATION

We assessed programming, training, and evaluation using the following researchable questions to guide our work:

³ This amount does not include the salaries, benefits, and related cost of U.S. direct hires assigned to the post and other costs the agency has determined should be centrally-budgeted.

- Is the program focused on the country's stated development priorities in the poorest areas of the country?
- How well qualified and prepared are Volunteers for service?
- Are Volunteers achieving project objectives? How are staff using monitoring, reporting, and evaluation results?
- Does the site development process provide Volunteers with an environment conducive to Volunteer success? Are sites, housing, and work assignments appropriate and meeting established criteria?

The evaluation revealed that the post implemented programs that met Costa Rica's development needs and that Volunteers were making a difference in their communities. The post's programming aligned well with Costa Rica's stated development goals, particularly the country's emphasis on becoming a bi-lingual country and its focus on youth empowerment. Because the program operates in a relatively developed environment by Peace Corps standards, this evaluation places special emphasis on the researchable question, *Is the program focused on the country's stated development priorities in the poorest areas of the country?*

In general, we found many examples of effective post management related to programming, training, and evaluation. These do not necessitate action by the post or agency and are described below.

The Post Had an Effective Strategy for Placing Volunteers in Areas of Need in the Poorest Parts of the Country. Costa Rica is, relative to other countries where Peace Corps operates, well-developed with strong social indicators. Understanding this, Peace Corps OIG placed special emphasis in this evaluation on understanding how the post approached placing Volunteers in areas of need in the poorest parts of the country, as the Peace Corps Act requires. OIG found that the post implemented a thoughtful site identification strategy related to focusing the program in areas of need. Specifically, OIG found that 91.5 percent of currently-serving Volunteers were in cantons⁴ where the Human Development Index (HDI) was lower than the national average, 39 percent served in cantons that fell in the lowest 20th percentile of HDI, and 67 percent served in cantons in the lowest 30th percentile of HDI. (See Figure 1) Twelve of the 21 Volunteers interviewed stated that they were serving in the poorest region or area of Costa Rica and 8 of the remaining 9 Volunteers stated that they were in communities with significant poor populations in need. In-country ministerial partners also reported that Volunteers were placed in the poorest and most needy areas of Costa Rica. Looking forward, post leadership has developed a multi-year site identification strategy that prioritizes placements in the poorest and most under-resourced parts of the country, to include indigenous regions; cantons with low socio-economic mobility; border communities; and areas negatively impacted by youth marginalization, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and low female labor force participation. Included in the post's placement strategy were medical and safety considerations, and recognition that Volunteers in cantons with higher HDI will get placed in the areas of most need within each of those particular cantons.

⁴ A canton is an administrative area in Costa Rica. There are 81 cantons in Costa Rica.

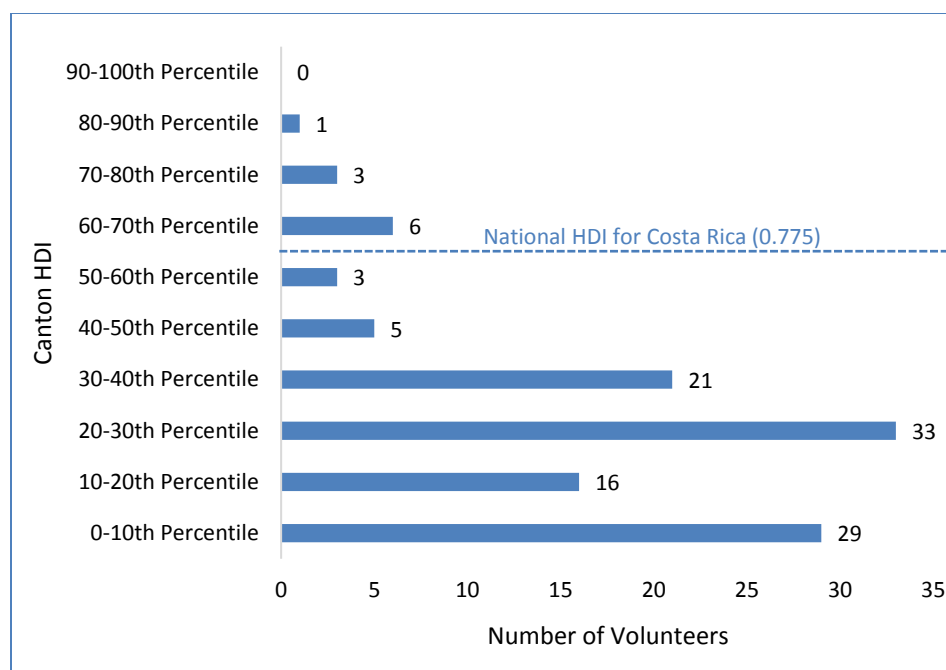


Figure 1: Human Development Index (HDI) for Volunteer Placements by Canton (2014) Sources: 2014 UNDP Human Development Index by Canton and PCV Roster provided by the post
Number of Cantons = 81; Number of Volunteers = 117.

Projects Were Aligned with Costa Rica’s Development Priorities. Costa Rica had identified general peace and sustainability goals that were in line with the Peace Corps mission. Headquarters staff, Volunteers, the U.S. Embassy, in-country partners, and post staff were in agreement that Peace Corps programming met Costa Rican development priorities and reached areas of need. Alignment with Costa Rica’s stated interest in becoming a bilingual country and its focus on youth development were often cited as areas of particular harmonization.

Project Advisory Committees (PACs) were Active and Engaged. PAC meetings occurred regularly, and both YD and TEFL primary project partners were part of these meetings. Headquarters staff who were conducting the CED project review reported that the PAC was included in the early stages of the review.

Relationships with Project Partners were Positive. The staff and partners for each of the three projects reported solid, productive working relationships.

The Post Had an Effective Training Continuum. The post conducted Volunteer training that connected terminal learning objectives with specific training events across a 27-month training continuum and included assessment of trainees during pre-service training (PST). Training content and delivery was informed by the assessment of training events by both staff and Volunteers.

Language and Cultural Training was Effective. Volunteers and staff reported that language training was effective. Volunteer language proficiency, tested before and after PST, at mid-service training, and at the conclusion of service showed Volunteers meeting language standards.

Volunteers reported that cultural training was also effective, and each trainee was assessed prior to swearing in as a Volunteer.

Technical Training for TEFL and YD Was Effective. Technical training for the YD and TEFL projects aligned with project frameworks, Volunteer activities, and position descriptions. Moreover, when surveyed, 17 of 19 TEFL Volunteers and 16 of 18 YD Volunteers responded that technical training was either “very” or “somewhat” effective. Deficiencies with CED technical training are addressed under the CED project finding listed below.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation (MRE) Data was Utilized Effectively. The post reported that Volunteers were trained in collecting and reporting data on the Volunteer Report Form, and MRE “champions” helped ensure forms were completed properly. The post shared this data with project partners and programming staff used the data in making decisions. The post also used MRE data to inform the Integrated Planning and Budgeting System (IPBS) process. Deficiencies with CED project reporting are addressed under the CED project finding listed below.

Volunteers Felt Integrated at Site. In the agency’s 2016 All-Volunteer Survey (AVS), 61 percent of PC/Costa Rica Volunteers said they felt integrated into their communities. In-country interviews during fieldwork revealed that 16 of 18 Volunteers felt integrated into their communities.⁵ The post was trying to better understand AVS results regarding integration by discussing this issue with Volunteers through the Volunteer advisory committee (VAC) and regional meetings in order to make adjustments.

The Site Identification Process Was Conducive to Volunteer Success. Programming teams performed at least three visits for potential new sites and at least two visits for repeat sites. Moreover, the site identification process was collaborative and included appropriate input from the Peace Corps medical officer (PCMO) and safety and security manager (SSM). Several Volunteers, however, expressed concern about counterpart motivation and community buy-in, which is addressed in the counterpart finding below in this section. In addition, CED site selection criteria was not met for all sites, an issue addressed below in the CED project finding.

The Homestay Policy was well Regarded by Volunteers and Staff. Volunteers and staff agreed that the six-month in-site homestay policy was effective for Volunteer security and integration, though some thought it was too long and could be reduced to three or four months. Of the 21 Volunteers interviewed, 16 spoke positively of the policy, and 70 percent of surveyed Volunteers said that host families understood the role of a Volunteer.

Training for Placements in Indigenous Sites Was Part of PST. At the time of fieldwork, several Volunteers served in indigenous communities throughout the country as part of the post’s multi-year site identification strategy that prioritized placements in poor and remote communities. Both staff and Volunteers recognized that serving in indigenous areas requires special preparation and training. Though the post had implemented training focused on Volunteer service in indigenous communities with the most recent trainee input, and had incorporated this training emphasis in its multi-year site development strategy, Volunteers

⁵ Regional leaders were excluded from this measure since they do not have traditional Volunteer assignments.

reported that they did not feel prepared to work with indigenous populations in their communities. Since the completion of fieldwork, post has formalized training for Volunteers placed in indigenous sites, and this finding has not resulted in an OIG recommendation.

Areas of Programming, Training, and Evaluation that Require Management Attention

The evaluation uncovered programming, training, and evaluation issues that require management attention, including Volunteers' ability to achieve CED project objectives and to work effectively with assigned counterparts. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

Volunteers in the community economic development project struggled to achieve project objectives.

According to agency programming, training, and evaluation guidance, a well-designed project “focuses on a few specific issues and desired outcomes. With a focused project, a post can provide more in-depth technical training, it can share clear expectations with host country partners, and it can determine roles more easily.”

Of the 23 CED Volunteers we surveyed, 8 (35 percent) reported that they did not believe their work was contributing to the project's objectives. One Volunteer in particular told us, “I have been extremely unsuccessful in that I have not been able to contribute to my project goals even though I have done a lot to forward the development of the community.” There were several reasons for this. The CED project objectives were too broad, technical training was insufficient, site development did not adhere consistently to post standards, and Volunteers were unable to report all their activities using the reporting form the agency provided them.

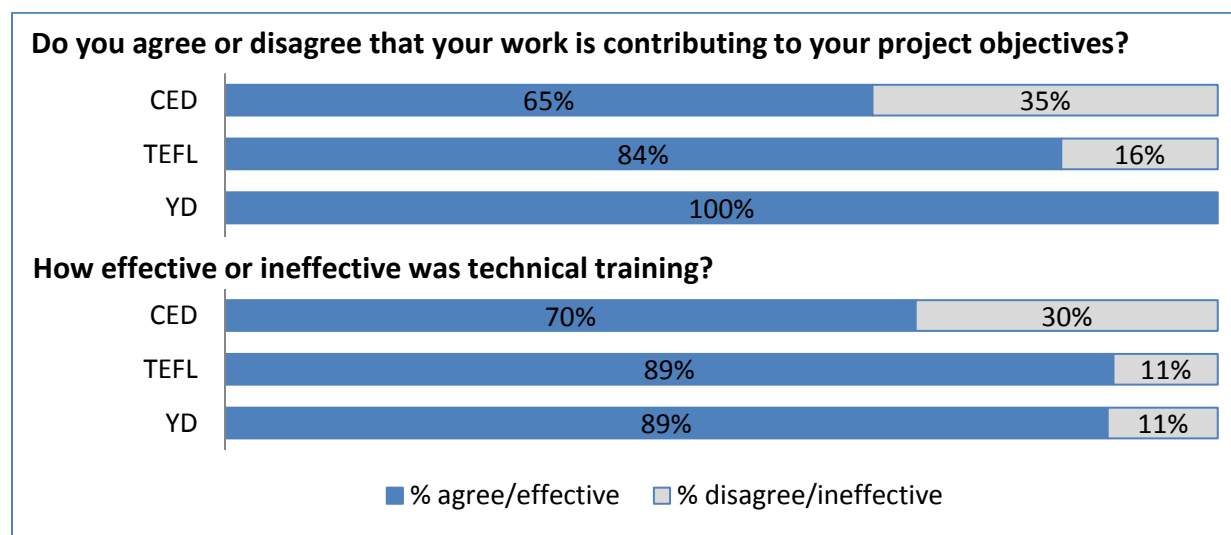


Figure 2. Comparison of Survey Results by Project Source: Volunteer survey conducted by OIG evaluators. For CED N= 23, for TEFL N= 19, for YD N= 18

The graph above illustrates two of the challenges facing CED Volunteers as compared to YD and TEFL Volunteers. (See Figure 2)

Post and headquarters staff told us that the framework was very broad which made it difficult to identify specific Volunteer activities that contribute to project objectives. Volunteers agreed that the project was not specific enough, with one telling us: “CED is a very broad program ... It is hard to feel completely prepared when there is such a variety of work you can do and you do not know what will be the priority until you arrive to your site.”

Technical training for the CED project was ineffective according to 30 percent of CED Volunteers. The unfocused set of CED project objectives presented design challenges for staff who struggled to identify technical training that was applicable to a very wide range of potential activities Volunteers could undertake at their sites.

In addition to challenges in technical training, we found that the CED project sites were not consistent with the post’s site selection criteria with regard to sufficient community size. Specifically, 3 of the 5 sites we reviewed did not meet the post’s own guidance that Volunteers should be placed in sites that have a population greater than 500. As noted by a headquarters staff member, there is more need in rural areas, but working in rural communities can be challenging due to fewer work opportunities. One Volunteer told us in an interview that working in a rural community is challenging because although there is potential for development, skills and infrastructure are so low that it limits work opportunity.

Finally we noted that the CED project’s many reporting indicators did not align well with the sorts of activities Volunteers had undertaken. CED Volunteers said that they often could not report their activities to the Peace Corps because they did not clearly fit within the CED project’s indicators and objectives. As a result, several CED Volunteers did not believe that their work was contributing to the project’s objectives.

One result of the struggles Volunteers experienced in identifying viable CED activities and meeting project objectives was that the project as a whole missed its targets on some objectives. For objective 2.2—which is expected will be eliminated after implementation of the new framework—the number of Volunteers reporting on the objective was only 68 percent of the 4-year target, and the project did not achieve all of its targets.

Since technical training was deficient and the project’s objectives were difficult to meet, some CED Volunteers expressed a need for support from staff that was not met. Only 61 percent of CED Volunteers surveyed were satisfied with the responsiveness of staff compared to 79 percent and 100 percent for TEFL and YD respectively.

CED Project Framework:

Goal 1: Workforce Development

- Objective 1.1: Employability skills
- Objective 1.2: Financial Literacy
- Objective 1.3: Vocational Skills, ICT
- Objective 1.4: Vocational Skills, English

Goal 2: Economic Opportunities

- Objective 2.1: Entrepreneurship
- Objective 2.2: Access to Business Finance
- Objective 2.3: Promote Strong Business Management

At the time of writing for this report, the CED project was undergoing an end-of-cycle review conducted by the post, IAP, and OPATS in order to focus the project's objectives which were understood to be too broad. A more focused CED project framework had been developed and submitted but not yet endorsed for use by the post.

We recommend:

- 1. That the director of programming and training and the community economic development program manager focus the community economic development project objectives in line with agency guidance.**
- 2. That the director of programming and training and the community economic development program manager provide more effective technical training that aligns with the endorsed, focused project objectives.**
- 3. That the director of programming and training and the community economic development program manager improve site selection so that all approved sites comply with the post's applicable site selection criteria.**

Volunteers, particularly those serving in smaller sites, struggled to establish and maintain productive relationships with their counterparts.

According to the post's site selection criteria, a counterpart must be identified during site development who "shows commitment to work with the Volunteer." The site development process requires that the post receives a written request for each Volunteer, and all new sites must be visited at least three times with repeat sites only requiring two visits. Staff meets with counterparts during the second and third visits.

Though a majority of Volunteers thought their counterpart understood their role as a Volunteer, half of those interviewed said that they had a counterpart who lacked the time or motivation to work with them. Most of these Volunteers were assigned or found an alternative counterpart with whom to work. However, several of the Volunteers we spoke with had only one counterpart and reported that their counterpart lacked motivation to work with the Volunteer. Most Volunteers placed in small communities faced a more difficult challenge maintaining a productive relationship with their counterpart or finding someone else to collaborate with. While staff always tried to identify multiple work partners when feasible, we found that, especially in smaller communities, teachers often lived outside the community where they worked, and work partners in general were harder to find.

We looked at the counterpart survey conducted by the agency to try to understand their perspective. While the survey was limited in sample size, we assessed that at least a few counterparts who responded felt demotivated by the Volunteer being inexperienced, leaving their site too much, or having too little patience with their work partners. The respondents also expressed that the Peace Corps should spend more time preparing the community for a Volunteer.

In our analysis of Volunteer and staff interviews we were not able to determine with confidence the cause of struggling Volunteer-counterpart relationships, especially given the limited number of respondents to the agency's counterpart survey. Post staff and regional leaders involved in site development were aware of Volunteer concerns regarding their counterparts, and they were in the process of creating videos that they could send to counterparts and host families to help establish expectations. A programming staff member told us that preparing Volunteers to find and work with counterparts was an important aspect of motivating counterparts. Gaining a counterpart's trust and keeping them motivated partially depended on the Volunteers themselves. Though preparing Volunteers to work with counterparts was part of PST, some Volunteers we interviewed said they did not feel prepared to work with unmotivated counterparts when they arrived at site.

Establishing and maintaining good relationships with counterparts is a key to a Volunteer's ability to be successful in their work, and Volunteers reported to us that difficulties with their counterparts had a negative effect on their success as a Volunteer.

We recommend:

- 4. That the director of programming and training assess the causes of unproductive Volunteer/counterpart relationships and develop a plan that addresses them.**

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Our country program evaluation assessed Volunteer support using the following researchable questions to guide our work:

- How well prepared is the post to respond to emergencies and security incidents, and are preventative safety and security measures adequate?
- Is the healthcare program meeting Volunteers' needs?
- Does the post provide adequate housing to Volunteers to maintain health and safety?
- How constructive is the relationship between staff and Volunteers?

OIG found Volunteer support at the post was strong, with only a few issues rising to the level of concern. Volunteers felt safe at site, felt supported by the medical team, were provided environments in which they could remain healthy, and had good relationships and communication with staff. These areas do not necessitate action by the post or agency and are described below.

Volunteers Felt Safe at Site and Said They Would Report Crimes to the Peace Corps.

Twenty of the 21 Volunteers in Costa Rica interviewed during fieldwork felt safe at their site and all said that if victimized by a crime, they would report it to the Peace Corps.

Safety and Security Training Was Effective. OIG assessed that safety and security training was effective. Safety and security lesson plans were organized and thoughtfully prepared, and the post's training continuum emphasized safety and security terminal learning objectives.

The Emergency Action Plan (EAP) was Tested With Positive Results. According to the Peace Corps safety and security officer, the post's EAP was sound, and the post was proactive with respect to crime and natural disasters. Additionally, the EAP was reviewed annually by the U.S. Embassy's regional security officer in Costa Rica. The post performed an EAP drill in 2016 in which all Volunteers responded within 7 hours.

The Medical Action Plan Met Peace Corps Standards. The post's medical action plan was sufficiently detailed to comply with Peace Corps standards in Technical Guidance 385. The post also maintained a regional medical action plan for each region in Costa Rica, though it was awaiting Office of Health Services (OHS) approval at the time of fieldwork.

Volunteers Were Satisfied With The Medical Care They Received. According to the 2016 All-Volunteer Survey (AVS), satisfaction with medical support was low. However, the post had recently brought on two new PCMOs, and we discovered through interviews that Volunteers were very positive about the care they received from the PCMOs, including recognition of improved mental health support. As we heard from one Volunteer: "The medical staff is incredible ... All the doctors are wonderful and have responded to my needs in a satisfactory manner."

Peace Corps Medical Officers Respected Volunteer Confidentiality. We found that the large majority of Volunteers were confident that PCMOs would not share confidential medical information with others.

Medical Training Was Viewed Positively by Volunteers. Volunteers were provided a health manual resource upon arriving to the post, and were generally positive of overall medical training, including mental health training.

Communication Between Staff and Volunteers was Strong. We found that staff was proactive in engaging Volunteers and maintaining open communication. The post also solicited feedback from Volunteers through regional meetings conducted by regional leaders and a monthly survey called the Volunteer Check-in Tool. Additionally, in response to low AVS scores, the post started a Volunteer working group to assess the results and provide feedback to staff, indicating a willingness to seek the opinions of Volunteers.

Volunteers Found Site Visits Useful. Volunteers in Costa Rica receive between three and four site visits throughout their service. Staff and Volunteers generally agreed that site visits were useful, providing an opportunity for feedback and open communication. Although fieldwork revealed that PCMOs were not conducting site visits once per Volunteer service in accordance with Technical Guidance 204, the post had since rectified this with a PCMO site-visit plan it was implementing prior to issuance of this report.

Areas of Volunteer Support Requiring Management Attention

The evaluation uncovered some areas of Volunteer support that required management attention, including issues with respect to medical and consolidation-worthy emergencies, security back-up preparation, assessment of local medical providers, and Volunteer housing. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

Crime Incidents Committed Against Volunteers Were Not Recorded in Site History Files.

Fieldwork revealed that only 2 of 10 randomly selected Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) reports were recorded in site history files. In addition, security issues were not consolidated in a site history file, but instead recorded in individual Volunteer folders. Within these Volunteer folders, incidents were documented only with a note to check CIRS, and we discovered that programming staff did not know how to use CIRS. Following fieldwork and as this report was being developed, the post provided OIG with documentation that showed how it had modified its site history file management process. Staff had updated site history files to include CIRS and safety incidents in site-specific files, and added CIRS report numbers to the documentation. Post has addressed this concern sufficiently and this finding has not resulted in a recommendation.

Consolidation points may be unreachable by some Volunteers in emergencies.

In the post's emergency action plan (EAP), in an emergency Volunteers and trainees are instructed to move to a specified consolidation point for their region. The EAP acknowledges that primary consolidation points may be impossible to reach in an emergency, so it also requires the post to assign secondary consolidation points for all regions in case Volunteers cannot reach their primary point.

We found that every Volunteer we spoke with knew the exact location of their primary consolidation point. We also found that staff included Volunteer input when choosing consolidation points and ensured that the locations had all necessary supplies and facilities. Furthermore, the post trained Volunteers on what to do in case of natural disasters.

However, 20 percent of Volunteers we spoke to were not certain that they could reach their consolidation point in an emergency. Ten percent of Volunteers in our survey said that the bus schedule from their site was limited to only a few buses per day or certain times of the day and others stated that flooding or other natural disasters could make the roads impassable. One Volunteer said that the road to their consolidation point "shuts down from time to time" when there are "floods" or "strong winds."

An issue with reaching consolidation points was that some Volunteers lived in remote sites with limited transportation options to and from the community. While we are not recommending that the post reduce the number of Volunteers in remote sites, communication with these Volunteers regarding contingencies if the roads are impassable will be important.

Natural disasters such as floods or volcanic eruptions are a legitimate concern in Costa Rica, and in the event of an emergency Volunteers could be stranded without access to their emergency consolidation points. Ensuring that Volunteers can reach their consolidation point is important to guarantee Volunteer safety in an emergency.

We recommend:

- 5. That the country director develop accessible consolidation points and consolidation procedures for Volunteers serving where transportation is difficult or impossible during emergencies.**

Site history forms did not include adequate directions to Volunteer sites and/or houses.

Safety and Security Instruction (SSI) 603 addresses Volunteer site location management, stating that “[l]ocating Volunteers in their site is one part of Peace Corps’ overall emergency management strategy.” While GPS coordinates are often a good method for locating Volunteers, SSI 603 requires that “[i]f geographic coordinates are not a viable navigational tool for a specific site, APCDs/PMs or other delegated staff ... must write narrative directions from the PC Office (or from a nearby, well-known city/landmark)” The directions should be stored in hard copy with the site contact form as well as being stored in the Volunteer Information Database (VIDA). While programming staff may know Volunteer sites well enough to locate a Volunteer’s house, an emergency situation may require a staff member unfamiliar with the site to locate a Volunteer.

Peace Corps/Costa Rica provided GPS coordinates and directions written by the Volunteers in site contact forms for finding Volunteer communities and residences. During our evaluation, the evaluator visited 20 Volunteers in their homes to conduct interviews. In traveling to sites, 2 of the 20 Volunteer communities could not be found by GPS coordinates or the directions in the site contact form. In addition, another 5 of the 20 Volunteer communities were found, but their residences were not. In each of these seven instances, communities and residences were eventually found by asking locals for directions or calling the Volunteers.

While some post staff can find certain Volunteers, fieldwork showed that directions provided to Volunteer communities and residences were inadequate. If Volunteer homes cannot be located by someone using site contact forms or Volunteer files, there could be a delay in locating Volunteers. During emergencies, some of the ways staff use to locate Volunteers—such as calling them on the phone or asking a passerby—may not be available, putting the Volunteer at further risk.

We recommend:

- 6. That the post improve directions to Volunteer sites and houses where geographic coordinates are not viable and include this information in site contact forms and the Volunteer Information Database.**

The Back-Up SSM had limited experience managing and documenting security incidents, and training Volunteers on safety and security training, other than Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR).

Peace Corps posts are required to cross-train backups for coverage of essential responsibilities during absence of staff. According to agency guidance “Characteristics and Strategies of a High

Performing Post,” back-up procedures should be outlined, and staff should be able to fill in for one another.

Although the back-up SSM at the post had received training, the back-up had limited experience performing safety and security training, incident management, or the incident documentation process. Though as a certified sexual assault response liaison the back-up SSM participated in sexual assault risk reduction and response training, the back-up did not participate in other safety and security training, nor have significant experience in incident reporting and documentation.

The Peace Corps safety and security program recognizes that safety is the responsibility of both staff and Volunteers, and depends on staff to mitigate safety risks and respond to incidents. Without an experienced back-up for the critical role of SSM, Volunteer safety and security could suffer. The back-up SSM has assisted in documenting site-specific security incidents in site history files, but has expressed the need for hands-on engagement with learning how to carry out more of the SSM position responsibilities.

We recommend:

- 7. That the country director and safety and security manager provide more opportunity for the back-up safety and security manager to gain experience and skills important for the job.**

Peace Corps/Costa Rica was not adequately assessing and documenting local health care providers.

According to Peace Corps Technical Guideline 204, “the PCMO will visit all sites that have been selected to provide care to PCVs [Peace Corps Volunteers] (hospitals, clinics, private doctors, etc.) at a minimum of once every three years utilizing the facility and provider assessment tools provided by OHS.”

Although post staff reported that they kept a record of local providers in the emergency action plan, they acknowledged that the assessments were not documented according to OHS procedure and standards. Staff also stated that they did not update the local provider list as often as they should. The medical unit was understaffed until it brought on two new PCMOs in May 2015 and March 2016 respectively, so patient care was prioritized over local provider assessments causing them to fall behind in this area.

Maintaining a network of qualified local providers around the country allows a post to better support Volunteers. Without thorough and documented assessments of local providers, the post cannot fully ensure that Volunteers receive timely and quality medical care when getting to the Peace Corps medical unit is not feasible or sufficient. With the post moving more Volunteers to remote sites where they may face transportation challenges, having accessible local providers has become even more important. The post’s medical staff planned to complete and document all local provider assessments by August 2017.

We recommend:

- 8. That the Peace Corps medical officers develop a plan to visit, assess, and document local health care providers.**

The post did not have a driver to accompany the PCMO during medical emergencies, including during off-duty hours.

According to Peace Corps Manual section (MS) 522, Section 3.2.2, “Motor Vehicle Use and Insurance Procedures,” country directors are required to establish procedures to ensure that there is 24-hour access to a driver for medical treatment of Volunteers. In addition, the agency’s guidance document “Characteristics and Strategies of a High Performing Post” states that a “PCMO must have adequate administrative, logistical, and secretarial or clerical support for carrying out his or her duties. This ...includes access to a vehicle and a driver, as needed, for transport needs and emergencies.”

The post did not have drivers on staff. Instead, staff drove themselves for work-related business. The post did not have a driver to accompany a PCMO during medical emergencies, including during off-duty hours. Although the post had a duty officer system to ensure someone was available to respond to emergency situations involving a Volunteer, their required duties did not specify that they act as a driver for the PCMO.

The management of medical emergencies is difficult and dangerous if PCMOs drive while at the same time coordinating logistics and Volunteer medical care, usually over the phone. During a 2017 medical emergency, the back-up PCMO drove to the hospital while also managing logistics related to the ambulance and care for the Volunteer, which delayed and complicated arrival to the hospital, support to the Volunteer, and communication with relevant staff.

We recommend:

- 9. That the country director document a plan to ensure that a driver is available at all times, including during off-hour periods, for medical emergencies.**

Volunteer housing did not meet the post’s established housing criteria, particularly the standards related to burglary protection.

MS 270, Section 6.4, requires that housing or host family arrangements be inspected prior to occupancy “to ensure each house and/or homestay arrangement meets all minimum standards as established by the Peace Corps and the post.” Peace Corps/Costa Rica has set housing criteria that, according to the post’s procedures, must be met before the housing arrangement can be approved for Volunteers.

However, we found that Volunteers lived in housing that did not meet the post’s standards. We inspected the housing of 20 Volunteers against the post’s housing criteria and found that 18 houses had at least 1 deficiency. A significant number of houses had issues related to burglary-protection criteria, including houses with open areas or patios that lacked a lockable fence, bedroom windows in urban communities that lacked burglar bars or metal screens, bedroom

windows in rural communities that did not meet standards, and externally-facing windows that lacked covered bars or a heavy metal screen. In addition, we found some houses had a space greater than 6 inches between the walls and roof, another requirement related to burglary protection. While housing in all types of Volunteer communities fell short of criteria, housing in smaller sites was less frequently compliant than in larger communities. Because Volunteers lived in housing that did not meet the post's standards, Volunteer safety and security was at risk.

Staff and regional leaders who conducted housing checks were not consistently following the housing criteria established by the post. A staff member acknowledged that some of the housing criteria was difficult to meet. For example, bars on windows may ostracize or draw attention to the Volunteer in some Costa Rican communities. While a local equivalent to bars on the windows is acceptable, the post's procedures did not define what constituted local equivalents.

We recommend:

- 10. That the country director revise the post's housing standards, so that all housing criteria and acceptable equivalents are clearly defined.**
- 11. That the safety and security manager train staff and Volunteer leaders to use post's revised housing standards to take a more consistent approach in reviewing and approving Volunteer housing.**
- 12. That the country director develop and implement a plan to address the housing deficiencies that currently exist.**

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Another key objective of our country program evaluation focused on leadership and management using the following researchable questions to guide our work:

- How effective is senior staff in leading post operations toward the achievement of the agency's mission?
- Does the post's planning and budgeting process yield the resources necessary to achieve agency objectives?
- Is the post staffed appropriately for efficient and effective operations?
- Do administrative practices at the post support effective post operations?

Fieldwork revealed a high-functioning management team that has improved inter-unit collaboration, maintained good communication with headquarters and the U.S. Embassy, followed sound staffing protocol, and resourced both staff and Volunteers adequately. In general, OIG found many examples of effective post management related to leadership and management. These do not necessitate action by the post or agency and are described below.

Senior Leadership Encouraged Collaboration Between Units. Though preliminary research indicated some concerns regarding collaboration between units at the post, post staff revealed

that management had gotten better at setting a tone of cooperation over the last two years, since the current senior leadership team came on board. A senior staff member said that the training team did a particularly good job of bringing other units together, and we found that staff across all units worked collaboratively in the IPBS process.

Communication Between the Post and Headquarters Was Good. Senior leadership at the post as well as staff at headquarters agreed that communication and understanding between the post and headquarters was good. Post staff were communicative and willing to reach out to headquarters when needed.

The Relationship Between the Post and the U.S. Embassy Was Good. The post had a good relationship with the U.S. Embassy, including the regional security officer. Senior leadership participated in the country team meetings at the embassy every week.

The Post Had Sufficient Resources. With respect to resources, a member of senior leadership said that the post had not suffered from budget constraints. The post also reported that when fully staffed, they had enough personnel to support operations. The post had suffered from high staff turnover, due mostly to the availability of higher-paying job opportunities in Costa Rica.

Performance Appraisals Were Completed as Required. A random selection of 10 performance appraisals showed that the post was completing performance appraisals as required and on time. All staff we spoke to had received their annual performance appraisals and said they felt the feedback from their supervisor was useful.

Staff Was Fully Compliant with The Sexual Assault Risk Reduction And Response Training Required by the Kate Puzey Volunteer Protection Act of 2011. We found that 100 percent of staff had received SARRR training as required, including a 100 percent certification of designated staff.

The Post's Onboarding Process Was Sufficient. The post had a documented onboarding process for staff to follow to familiarize themselves with the units and basic work processes. We also heard from a senior staff member that each unit had a tailored onboarding process.

Living Allowances Were Properly Assessed by Staff. Although only 61.7 percent of PC/Costa Rica Volunteers surveyed thought the living allowance was adequate, we found that staff conducted living allowance and market basket surveys as required, and they conducted analyses that resulted in a recent raise to the allowance.

Area of Leadership and Management Requiring Management Attention

The role of regional leaders was poorly defined.

At the time of fieldwork, Peace Corps/Costa Rica had six extension Volunteers acting as regional leaders, supporting the post through Volunteer support, site identification, and partner relations while also functioning as a liaison between staff and Volunteers.

The statement of work that outlined the regional leaders' duties was overly broad. The statement of work included several functions that would typically be performed by staff, such as

conducting site visits, providing technical support, and performing housing checks. As one regional leader told us, the regional leaders were neither members of staff nor were they Volunteers. Regional leaders were not assigned a traditional Volunteer project with a host agency.

Because regional leaders were performing staff functions, OIG determined that they should be held to standards that staff are required to have, namely having clearly delineated roles that are aligned to their statement of work and having adequate skills to perform their responsibilities.

Our evaluation found that regional leader roles were poorly defined and in flux. For example, at the time of our evaluation, their role in Volunteer support was shifting away from emotional support, focusing instead on technical support. Staff had also recently emphasized including regional leaders in communication loops with Volunteers. Additionally, regional leaders said that their role in site development differed across projects, and their involvement in engaging project and community partners was poorly defined.

Another area of concern regarding regional leaders is the training they receive. Regional leaders received 3 days of training, as well as training to become a “monitoring, reporting, and evaluation champion.” Regional leaders were also trained for site development duties through shadowing program teams. However, we found that there was a steep learning curve for regional leaders, and they were not prepared for all of their duties by the end of the 3-day training, instead requiring continued on-the-job training before feeling fully prepared.

There was additional uncertainty for the regional leaders since the post was dependent on having enough high-quality Volunteers extending to fill the positions from year to year. While all regional leaders we interviewed said the workload was manageable, this could change if the number of regional leaders in country changed. Staff told us during fieldwork that they were planning for those types of contingencies, but found five Volunteers to serve as regional leaders for the upcoming year.

Without clarity in their role, regional leaders had trouble setting boundaries with Volunteers. The Volunteers should know what they can expect from regional leaders in terms of Volunteer support. At the same time, staff in different projects have different expectations of regional leaders as well, so clarifying their roles would help staff know what they should expect of regional leaders. Lastly, insufficient training or lack of clarity in roles regarding site identification could cause regional leaders to misunderstand their role or duties. For example, misunderstanding their role in assessing counterparts may have contributed to some Volunteers having unmotivated counterparts as described in the finding above.

We recommend:

- 13. That the director of programming and training assess the roles and responsibilities for regional leaders, and clarify their scope of work and training as needed.**

OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

The post was pursuing multiple initiatives, pilots, and activities that impacted planning and levied a considerable workload on staff.

At the time of this evaluation, the post was engaged with several initiatives, including:

- increasing placements of Volunteers in small, remote, and indigenous sites;
- managing a relatively new regional leader program for which duties and roles were not clearly defined;
- overseeing the CED project framework review rollout;
- planning for the TEFL project framework review and rollout for next year;
- implementing the TEFL certificate program; and
- piloting Participatory Analysis for Community Action 2.0.

Considered together, these activities created a heavy lift for staff. In addition to these new initiatives—and the everyday slate of tending to core operations—the post was preparing for a Peace Corps Response (PCR)⁶ program that would add a full-time PCR coordinator staff position by late FY 2017 and 10 to 15 PCR Volunteers to the post by mid- to late-FY 2018.

Staff at both headquarters and the post expressed a range of concerns about the input of Peace Corps Response Volunteers, including that:

- it would stretch the capacity of staff in all units to support the additional Response Volunteers;
- the post was considering implementing a Response program before it had completed reviewing the three project frameworks;
- the program managers would need to coordinate the incorporation of the Response program into their programs and projects;
- potential budget cuts may force staff reductions, including a newly-hired PCR Coordinator and/or other positions;
- the IAP region did not have a strategy related to Peace Corps Response; and
- there may be challenges with supporting potential Response Volunteers who lacked previous Peace Corps Volunteer experience.

However, the same post and headquarters staff who expressed these concerns were nevertheless confident that the PCR program could deliver the number and type of Volunteers that the post requests. Moreover, staff reported that bringing in a large PCR input would meet in-country partner demand for more skilled Volunteers and improve existing programming by placing highly-skilled Volunteers in organizations that provide support to more local organizations with which Volunteers work in smaller communities. The current country director served as a coordinator for Crisis Corps, the precursor to PCR, approximately 10 years ago, and most post

⁶ Peace Corps Response provides qualified professionals the opportunity to undertake short-term assignments in various programs around the world.

staff interviewed were in favor of implementing PCR in Costa Rica. Key headquarters staff also stated that the post was in the best place to decide if the program should be implemented.

Despite all of the challenges associated with implementing PCR, there was reason to think the post could achieve this successfully. We found at the post a talented, motivated staff, about whom one headquarters staff member said, “staff can do it, they can do anything.” Their achievements in programming and training, volunteer support, and management was evident. Moreover, the post had proven strategic with other initiatives, having hired a programming and training specialist when Peace Corps/Costa Rica became a TEFL certification post and a Volunteer support manager as it ramped up the regional leader program. That the post wants such a large PCR program, based in part on its confidence in its ability to manage it, should come as no surprise. But equally unsurprising was their willingness to take on everything asked of them, an observation repeated about this post by both headquarters and post staff. One staff member said about taking on initiatives, “this post always seems to say, ‘okay, let’s go for the workload.’”

Though OIG is not issuing a recommendation related to the post’s planning for a PCR program, our observation is that the post has likely undertaken a sufficient number of challenging initiatives simultaneously and that the post and IAP leadership should carefully weigh the merits of committing Peace Corps/Costa Rica to any further initiatives, pilots, or extra activities, including the development of a PCR program, that would create additional demands on management and staff, since such decisions could result in sub-optimal implementation or results.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

WE RECOMMEND:

1. That the director of programming and training and the community economic development program manager focus the community economic development project objectives in line with agency guidance.
2. That the director of programming and training and the community economic development program manager provide more effective technical training that aligns with the endorsed, focused project objectives.
3. That the director of programming and training and the community economic development program manager improve site selection so that all approved sites comply with the post's applicable site selection criteria.
4. That the director of programming and training assess the causes of unproductive Volunteer/counterpart relationships and develop a plan that addresses them.
5. That the country director develop accessible consolidation points and consolidation procedures for Volunteers serving where transportation is difficult or impossible during emergencies.
6. That the post improve directions to Volunteer sites and houses where geographic coordinates are not viable and include this information in site contact forms and the Volunteer Information Database.
7. That the country director and safety and security manager provide more opportunity for the back-up safety and security manager to gain experience and skills important for the job.
8. That the Peace Corps medical officers develop a plan to visit, assess, and document local health care providers.
9. That the country director document a plan to ensure that a driver is available at all times, including during off-hour periods, for medical emergencies.
10. That the country director revise the post's housing standards, so that all housing criteria and acceptable equivalents are clearly defined.
11. That the safety and security manager train staff and Volunteer leaders to use post's revised housing standards to take a more consistent approach in reviewing and approving Volunteer housing.
12. That the country director develop and implement a plan to address the housing deficiencies that currently exist.

13. That the director of programming and training assess the roles and responsibilities for regional leaders, and clarify their scope of work and training as needed.

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In 1989, OIG was established under the Inspector General Act of 1978 and is an independent entity within the Peace Corps. The purpose of OIG is to prevent and detect fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement and to promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency in government. The Inspector General is under the general supervision of the Peace Corps Director and reports both to the Director and Congress.

The Evaluation Unit provides senior management with independent evaluations of all management and operations of the Peace Corps, including overseas posts and domestic offices. OIG evaluators identify best practices and recommend program improvements to comply with Peace Corps policies.

The Evaluation Unit announced its intent to conduct an evaluation of the post on March 13, 2017. For post evaluations, we use the following researchable questions to guide our work:

A. Programming, Training and Evaluation

- Programming: *Is the program focused on the country's stated development priorities, in the poorest areas of the country? Are Volunteers making a difference in their communities?*
- Volunteer Training: *How well qualified and prepared are Volunteers for service?*
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting: *Are Volunteers achieving project objectives? How are staff using MRE results?*
- Site Development: *Does the site development process provide Volunteers with an environment conducive to a successful service? Are sites, housing, and work assignments appropriate and meeting all established criteria?*

B. Volunteer Support

- Safety and Security: *How well prepared is the post to respond to emergencies and security incidents, and are preventative safety and security measures adequate?*
- Health: *Is the health care program meeting Volunteers' needs?*
- Housing: *Does the post provide adequate housing to Volunteers to maintain health and safety?*
- Staff-Volunteer Relations: *How constructive is the relationship between staff and Volunteers?*

C. Leadership and Management

- Leadership: *How effective is senior staff in leading post operations toward the achievement of the agency's mission?*
- Planning: *Does the post's planning and budgeting process yield the resources necessary to achieve agency objectives?*
- Staffing: *Is the post staffed appropriately for efficient and effective operations?*
- Oversight: *Do administrative practices at the post support effective post operations?*

The evaluator conducted the preliminary research portion of the evaluation from March 13 through April 28, 2017. This research included review of agency documents provided by headquarters and post staff; interviews with management staff representing IAP, the Office of Health Services, OPATS, the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, and the Office of External Affairs, and Peace Corps Response; and the results of an online survey of 62 Peace Corps/Costa Rica Volunteers.

In-country fieldwork occurred from May 2 through May 25, 2017, and included interviews with post senior staff in charge of programming, training, and support; the U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission and Regional Security Officer; host-country government ministry officials; and other project partners. In addition, we interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 21 Volunteers (21 percent of Volunteers serving at the time of our visit) based on their length of service, site location, project focus, gender, age, and ethnicity.

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. The evidence, findings, and recommendations provided in this report have been reviewed by agency stakeholders affected by this review.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

As part of this post evaluation, interviews were conducted with 21 Volunteers, 19 in-country staff, 20 Peace Corps headquarters staff in Washington, D.C., 2 representatives from the U.S. Embassy in Costa Rica, and 5 key ministry officials. Volunteer interviews occurred in 20 out of 21 Volunteers' homes, and we inspected these 20 homes using post-defined site selection criteria. The period of review for a post evaluation is one full Volunteer cycle (typically 27 months).

The following table provides demographic information that represents the entire Volunteer population in Costa Rica; the Volunteer sample was selected to reflect these demographics.

Table 1: Volunteer Demographic Data

Project	Percentage of Volunteers
Teaching English as a Foreign Language	35%
Community Economic Development	36%
Youth Development	29%
Gender	Percentage of Volunteers
Female	56%
Male	44%
Age	Percentage of Volunteers
25 or younger	41%
26-29	44%
30-49	12%
50 and over	3%

Source: Peace Corps Volunteer roster as of March 2017.

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

At the time of our field visit, the post had 31 staff positions. The post also employed 11 temporary training staff to assist with PST. We interviewed 19 staff. The staffing configuration of posts often varies and staff may hold additional responsibilities relevant to the evaluation in addition to their official job title. We conduct interviews with sexual assault response liaisons; grants coordinators; monitoring, reporting, and evaluation specialists; and Peace Corps Response coordinators as necessary and when appropriate for the post.

Table 2: Interviews Conducted with Post Staff

Position	Status	Interviewed
Administrative Assistant / Cashier	FSN*	
Administrative Assistant – Health Unit	PSC*	
Administrative Assistant / Human Resources	PSC*	X
Administrative Assistant / Finance	FSN*	X
Assistant Training Manager	PSC*	X

PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Country Director	USDH	X
Director of Management and Operations	FSN*	X
Director of Programming and Training	USDH	X
Executive Assistant	PSC*	
General Services Specialist	PSC*	
Grants Manager / MRE Specialist	PSC*	X
Host Family and Logistics Coordinator	PSC*	X
Janitor (2)	PSC*	
Language and Culture Coordinator	PSC*	X
Language and Culture Facilitator (11)	PSC*	
Messenger/Driver	PSC*	
Peace Corps Medical Officer (3)	PSC*	X
Program Assistant (2)	PSC*	
Program Manager (3)	PSC* (2) / USDH (1)	X
Programming and Training Specialist (3)	PSC*	X
Safety & Security Manager	PSC*	X
Secretary / Receptionist	PSC*	
Training Manager	PSC*	X
Volunteer Support Manager	PSC*	X

Data as of June 2017. *PSC is personal services contractor; FSN is foreign service national.

An additional 27 interviews were conducted during the preliminary research phase of the evaluation, in-country fieldwork, and follow-up work upon return to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Table 3: Interviews Conducted with Peace Corps Headquarters Staff, Embassy Officials and Key Ministry Officials

Position	Organization
Chief of the Health and Environment Department	Costa Rica Ministry of Education
National Adviser	Costa Rica Ministry of Education
Director	Costa Rica United States Foundation for Cooperation
Director	Dirección Nacional de Desarrollo de la Comunidad
Journalist and Associate	Dirección Nacional de Desarrollo de la Comunidad
Program Specialist	PC Headquarters/External Affairs/Office of Gifts and Grants Management
Chief Administrative Officer	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations
Chief of Operations	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations
Chief of Programming and Training	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations

PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Country Desk Officer	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations
Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Specialist	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations
Programming and Training Specialist	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations
Regional Security Advisor	PC Headquarters/Inter-America and the Pacific Operations
Acting Associate Director	PC Headquarters/Office of Health Services
International Health Coordinator	PC Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Medical Officer	PC Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer	PC Headquarters/Office of Safety and Security
Placement Officer	PC Headquarters/Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection
Community Economic Development Specialist	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Education Specialist	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Language Testing Specialist	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Learning Management System Administrator	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Project Lead	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Youth in Development Specialist	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Chief of Operations	Peace Corps Response
Acting Deputy Chief of Mission	US Embassy/Costa Rica
Regional Security Officer	US Embassy/Costa Rica

Data as of April 2017.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS

OIG	Office of Inspector General
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
CED	Community Economic Development
YD	Youth Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FY	Fiscal Year
IAP	Inter-America and Pacific Operations
OPATS	Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support
HDI	Human Development Index
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteer
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
PST	Pre-Service Training
MRE	Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation
IPBS	Integrated Planning and Budgeting System
AVS	All-Volunteer Survey
VAC	Volunteer Advisory Committee
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
SSM	Safety and Security Manager
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
OHS	Office of Health Services
CIRS	Consolidated Incident Reporting System
SSI	Safety and Security Instruction
VIDA	Volunteer Information Database
MS	Peace Corps Manual Section
SARRR	Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response
PCR	Peace Corps Response
FSN	Foreign Service National
PSC	Personal Services Contractor
USDH	U.S. Direct Hire

APPENDIX D: AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT



MEMORANDUM

To: Kathy Buller, Inspector General

Through: Angela Kissel, Acting Chief Compliance Officer *AK*

From: Emily Untermeyer, Acting Regional Director IAP Region
Anne Braghetta, Country Director, Costa Rica *EB*

Date: November 3, 2017

CC: Sheila Crowley, Acting Director
Carl Sosebee, Acting Chief of Staff
Kathy Stroker, Acting Deputy Director
Kristin Besch, Acting Associate Director of Global Operations
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General
Jeremy Black, AIG/Evaluations
George Like, Chief of Operations, IAP Operations
Lindsey Suggs, Chief of Programming and Training, IAP Operations
Rachel Horta, Director of Programming and Training, Costa Rica

Subject: Agency Response to the Preliminary Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Costa Rica (Project No. 17-Eval-02)

Enclosed please find the Agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for Peace Corps/ Costa Rica as outlined in the Preliminary Report on the Evaluation of Peace Corps/Costa Rica (Project No. 17-Eval-02) given to the agency on September 19, 2017.

The Region and the Post have addressed and provided supporting documentation for 11 of the 13 recommendations and will work to address the remaining recommendations by the set target dates.

Recommendation 1

That the Director of Programming and Training and the Community Economic Development Program Manager focus the community economic development project objectives in line with agency guidance.

Concur

Response: Since 2015, the Community Economic Development (CED) project team has been in the process of shifting the project framework and project objectives for this development sector. After the current Director of Programming and Training arrived at Post in February 2016, it was agreed that Costa Rica would serve as a pre-pilot for the Programming, Training & Evaluation (PTE) alignment process in the fall of 2016. In December 2016, The CED Sector Specialist and the IAP MRE Specialist traveled to Costa Rica to assist Post with the project review and design process. In May 2017, a final draft of the new Logical Project Framework (LPF) for the CED program was submitted by Post to HQ for review. After a revision exchange process, Post received final Endorsement from HQ on October 15, 2017.

Documents Submitted:

- Official HQ endorsement received

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 2

That the Director of Programming and Training and the Community Economic Development Program Manager provide more effective technical training that aligns with the endorsed, focused project objectives.

Concur

Response: In coordination with the new, re-focused LPF and PTE alignment for the CED program (reference Recommendation #1), the updated CED training continuum for 2018 and beyond will be much more targeted at preparing Trainees/Volunteers to conduct the activities outlined in the LPF. These changes are reflected in the CED Programming and Training Bridge (PT Bridge), which is a valuable component of the PTE alignment process. It is important to note that the entire PTE Alignment process and the affiliated guidance documents are in draft form at the present time. The PT Bridge is a living document and ongoing changes are expected. However, the PT Bridge that PC/CR submitted provides a road map for technical training that directly aligns with the newly endorsed framework.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Draft PT Bridge for new CED LPF

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, November 2017.

Recommendation 3

That the Director of Programming and Training and the Community Economic Development Program Manager improve site selection so that all approved sites comply with the post's applicable site selection criteria.

Concur

Response: In alignment with Post's commitment to placing Volunteers in areas of greatest need in Costa Rica, program sectors have been coordinating with ministry officials in site identification. Recognizing that the most under-resourced communities also tend to be the most isolated from routes of transportation, some Volunteers have been placed in small, remote communities with few schools and significant development needs. Moving into FY 2018, Post will adapt the CED site criteria to ensure that Volunteers are assigned to communities with greatest needs and with school work opportunities, allowing collaborations with multiple counterparts and co-teachers.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Site Selection Criteria
- Site Selection Criteria Checklist

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 4

That the Director of Programming and Training assess the causes of unproductive Volunteer/counterpart relationships and develop a plan that addresses them.

Concur

Response: As mentioned in the recommendation three response, the most under-resourced Costa Rican communities tend to be small and in isolated, border regions of the country. It is not uncommon for these school teachers, who are typical counterparts for Volunteers, to live outside of these communities and commute on a weekly basis. Furthermore, Ministry teachers in the early stages of their career are rotated frequently to schools around the country. Such frequent transitions pose challenges to Volunteers as they strive to build trust and meaningful collaboration with co-teacher counterparts. In order to help improve Volunteer/counterpart relations, Post has developed a three-pronged approach to empower Volunteers and counterparts alike to work proactively to improve local communications.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Site Assignment Survey form to include mention of community liaison in communities where all counterparts/project partners live outside of the community.
- Overview of the three-pronged approach to improve local communications.

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 5

That the Country Director develop accessible consolidation points and consolidation procedures for Volunteers serving where transportation is difficult or impossible during emergencies.

Concur

Response: PC/Costa Rica maintains a robust and very thorough Emergency Action Plan (EAP) which is explained to Trainees and Volunteers during training events, and is shared electronically with all. This EAP outlines 6 primary provincial Consolidation points as well as 3 additional Sub-Regional Consolidation points to which the Volunteers would be expected to travel in case of regional or nation-wide emergency. As mentioned in the OIG report, all Volunteers are fully aware of their primary consolidation points. To increase Volunteer awareness of the Sub-Regional Consolidation points, Post has implemented plans to increase awareness of Volunteer transportation options in case of emergency consolidation.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated EAP Quick Reference Guide to include listing of all Sub-Regional Consolidation points.
- PCCR Emergency Action Plan
- Plan outline to increase awareness of Volunteer transportation options in case of emergency consolidation

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 6

That the post improve directions to Volunteer sites and houses where geographic coordinates are not viable and include this information in site contact forms and the Volunteer Information Database.

Concur

Response: Post will request that Volunteers add information to the Site Contact Form related to driving directions to their communities and homes. Additionally, PC/CR staff will add notes to VIDA regarding preferred driving directions and landmarks that will assist staff members with location of Volunteer homes. Post will also be looking into the possibility of testing more advanced GPS systems to see if Costa Rica locational mapping would be improved by access to better technology.

Documents Submitted:

- Screenshots of notes in VIDA for driving to PCV homes
- Example site contact forms for traveling to PCV homes

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 7

That the Country Director and Safety and Security Manager provide more opportunity for the back-up safety and security manager to gain experience and skills important for the job.

Concur

Response: In 2015, the Back-Up SSM (who also serves as the Volunteer Support Manager) participated in the Introduction to Safety and Security Training, which took place in Washington, DC from October 19th to October 23rd. The Back-Up SSM also participated this year at the SARL training in Orlando, Florida (March 5-10, 2017).

During and following the OIG visit in May 2017, PC/CR has developed plans for the Back-Up SSM to gain more practice with SSM responsibilities and gain more technical background with the art and science of Safety & Security preparation. As such, PC/CR developed a training plan for the Back-Up SSM, including a number of actions that have already been taken.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Training Plan for the Back-Up SSM, including examples of how Back-Up SSM will be offered more training opportunities at Post.

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017

Recommendation 8

That the Peace Corps Medical Officers develop a plan to visit, assess, and document local health care providers.

Concur

Response: In 2016, the Peace Corps Costa Rica Health Unit began visiting medical facilities across Costa Rica located near Volunteer communities. In order to coordinate with the designated Consolidation areas in the PC/CR Emergency Action Plan, the Health Unit has prioritized visits to coordinate service agreements with the following regional medical clinics:

- 1) Northern region (November 2016)
- 2) Southern Caribbean region (May 2017)
- 3) Northern Caribbean region (November 2017)
- 4) Central Pacific coastal region (December 2017)

Documents Submitted:

- PCCR Health Unit, Site visit planning, 2017 – 2018
- PCCR Emergency Action Plan

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 9

That the Country Director document a plan to ensure that a driver is available at all times, including during off-hour periods, for medical emergencies.

Concur

Response: Post maintains a very thorough Duty Officer Manual (DO Manual) which is regularly updated by the Safety & Security Manager (SSM). In this DO Manual, the Roles and Responsibilities are outlined in great detail in Section 100. In February 2017, Post discussed the need to develop an Emergency Driver protocol with the Duty Officer team. A team decision was taken to stipulate that effective immediately, the Duty Officer would assume responsibility for the Emergency Driver role in an emergency situation. This new protocol was intended to be incorporated into the updated 2017 version of the Duty Officer Manual. For the October 2017 edition, the DO Manual has been reformatted to create a separate section for the Emergency Driver scenario in the interest of increasing clarity of Duty Officer responsibilities as related to driving responsibilities in case of medical emergency.

Documents Submitted:

- Duty Officer Manual, updated to highlight specific responsibilities related to driver responsibilities in case of medical emergency.
- Email to staff about the new update has been submitted

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, November 2017.

Recommendation 10

That the Country Director revise the post's housing standards, so that all housing criteria and acceptable equivalents are clearly defined.

Concur

Response: In May, June and July 2017, Post worked in close collaboration with Safety & Security Managers (SSM) in the IAP region to update Post housing standards so that housing criteria and acceptable equivalents are clearly defined. In July and August, the Post SSM trained Regional Leaders and programming staff members on the updated Housing Checklist. The SSM also developed a robust plan for future training of programming staff members on the Housing Checklist and expectations regarding housing checks when Volunteers move away from host families to live independently. (Please refer to Recommendation #11 response below.)

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Housing Checklist
- House Check Flow Chart

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 11

That the Safety and Security Manager train staff and Volunteer leaders to use post's revised housing standards to take a more consistent approach in reviewing and approving Volunteer housing.

Concur

Response: In September 2017, all Regional Leaders received training on the newly approved Housing Checklist form with the updated housing standards approved by Peace Corps IAP/Washington, per the submitted Housing Checklist Training session plan. This Regional Leader (RL) training focused not only on Volunteer housing with host families considered during the original site development process, but also on the housing inspection process to be considered for Volunteer independent living after six months at site. Along these lines, a "House Check Flow Chart" document (submitted) was distributed to all RLs and PCVs to better prepare them in their search for new housing in the case that they ultimately decide to live alone following the required host family stay. The document stresses some of the most important safety and security features the house must have in place even before inspection.

The updated Housing Checklist form and House Check Flow Chart were formally presented to all Program Managers during the September 2017 Programming and Training meeting. Included in the new policies of the Checklist is the requirement that all house checks be accompanied by photographs of some of the main safety and security features of the house, such as windows, doors, walls, etc., to ensure that houses fully comply with the housing standards before being considered for Volunteer housing approval. A more in-depth follow-up training for Program Staff on the updated Housing Checklist form will take place in December, 2017.

Documents To Be Submitted:

- Updated Housing Checklist
- House Check Flow Chart
- Housing Checklist Training Session Plan

Status and Timeline for Completion: December 2017.

Recommendation 12

That the Country Director develop and implement a plan to address the housing deficiencies that currently exist.

Concur

Response: Post carefully reviewed the OIG notes regarding Volunteer housing concerns that were considered to be out of compliance with PC/CR's IAP-approved housing checklist. Of the 18 Volunteers that were identified by OIG to have housing conditions not meeting checklist criteria, 8 departed country and those houses are no longer in use by PC/CR. Of the remaining 10 Volunteers still in country, Post reviewed all areas needing attention. Many of the OIG recommendations were addressed/resolved in the months of June through October, 2017.

One remaining installation of bars on a bathroom window is scheduled for early November. The remaining areas of housing concern identified by the OIG were determined to Meet Criteria or

had received waivers, as determined by the specific living conditions of the Volunteer community.

Documents Submitted:

- PCCR Housing Compliance responses

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

Recommendation 13

That the Director of Programming and Training assess the roles and responsibilities for Regional Leaders (RLs), and clarify their scope of work and training as needed.

Concur

Response: The Director of Programming and Training and the Volunteer Support Manager (VSM) shared OIG findings relative to the Regional Leaders (RLs) in the most recent RL training (September 2017) and discussed areas which need further clarification per the OIG recommendation. In this September 2017 RL training, current RLs expressed confidence in their role and stated that recent shadowing visits with senior RLs and Program Staff (completed June – September 2017) have been very effective in clarifying RL roles and responsibilities. Building upon the Site ID-focused conversations in the September training, RLs are currently working with Program Teams to develop an SOW support document clarifying RL roles pertaining to the Site ID process, tailored to different program sector needs. To continue RL training and role-verification, Post will continue to open space with RLs to discuss their roles and responsibilities in monthly RL Review phone calls, as well as during bi-annual RL trainings during the months of May and September. Additionally, Post will continue to provide RLs with opportunities to shadow PCCR Staff members on site ID and PCV site visit trips.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Regional Leader Scope of Work
- Calendar of dates (June – September 2017) of the professional shadowing performed by new RLs with both PCCR Staff members and experienced RLs for training purposes.
- Agreement on Regional Leader Site ID Responsibilities, clarifying needed Program-Specific roles of RLs

Status and Timeline for Completion: December 2017.

APPENDIX E: OIG COMMENTS

Management concurred with all 13 recommendations. Based on the documentation provided, we closed recommendations 1-3, 6, 8, and 9. Seven recommendations, including 4-5, 7, and 10-13, remain open. In its response, management described actions it is taking or intends to take to address the issues that prompted each of our recommendations. We wish to note that in closing recommendations, we are not certifying that the agency has taken these actions or that we have reviewed their effect. Certifying compliance and verifying effectiveness are management's responsibilities. However, when we feel it is warranted, we may conduct a follow-up review to confirm that action has been taken and to evaluate the impact.

OIG will review and consider closing recommendations 11 and 13 when the documentation reflected in the OIG's comments and the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 4, 5, 7, 10, and 12, additional documentation is required. These recommendations remain open pending confirmation from the chief compliance officer that the documentation reflected in our analysis below is received.

4: That the Director of Programming and Training assess the causes of unproductive Volunteer/counterpart relationships and develop a plan that addresses them.

Concur

Response: As mentioned in the recommendation three response, the most under-resourced Costa Rican communities tend to be small and in isolated, border regions of the country. It is not uncommon for these school teachers, who are typical counterparts for Volunteers, to live outside of these communities and commute on a weekly basis. Furthermore, Ministry teachers in the early stages of their career are rotated frequently to schools around the country. Such frequent transitions pose challenges to Volunteers as they strive to build trust and meaningful collaboration with co-teacher counterparts. In order to help improve Volunteer/counterpart relations, Post has developed a three-pronged approach to empower Volunteers and counterparts alike to work proactively to improve local communications.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Site Assignment Survey form to include mention of community liaison in communities where all counterparts/project partners live outside of the community.
- Overview of the three-pronged approach to improve local communications.

OIG Analysis: Because it is not clear what the "overview" document will include, OIG requests that the proposed documentation include post's assessment of the causes of unproductive Volunteer/counterpart relationships. Documentation should reflect communication or training to staff regarding the new approach or plan for improving Volunteer/counterpart relationships.

5: That the Country Director develop accessible consolidation points and consolidation procedures for Volunteers serving where transportation is difficult or impossible during emergencies.

Concur

Response: PC/Costa Rica maintains a robust and very thorough Emergency Action Plan (EAP) which is explained to Trainees and Volunteers during training events, and is shared electronically with all. This EAP outlines 6 primary provincial Consolidation points as well as 3 additional Sub-Regional Consolidation points to which the Volunteers would be expected to travel in case of regional or nation-wide emergency. As mentioned in the OIG report, all Volunteers are fully aware of their primary consolidation points. To increase Volunteer awareness of the Sub-Regional Consolidation points, Post has implemented plans to increase awareness of Volunteer transportation options in case of emergency consolidation.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated EAP Quick Reference Guide to include listing of all Sub-Regional Consolidation points.
- PCCR Emergency Action Plan
- Plan outline to increase awareness of Volunteer transportation options in case of emergency consolidation

OIG Analysis: A critical component of this finding was that some Volunteers reported they could not leave site when weather-related conditions washed out the only roads to and from the community. The EAP provided does not address situations for which Volunteers cannot leave site and consolidate due to washed-out roads or other conditions that make transportation impossible. OIG requests that the proposed documentation reflect the guidance or communication of expectations for Volunteers in these situations.

7: That the Country Director and Safety and Security Manager provide more opportunity for the back-up safety and security manager to gain experience and skills important for the job.

Concur

Response: In 2015, the Back-Up SSM (who also serves as the Volunteer Support Manager) participated in the Introduction to Safety and Security Training, which took place in Washington, DC from October 19th to October 23rd. The Back-Up SSM also participated this year at the SARL [Sexual Assault Response Liaison] training in Orlando, Florida (March 5-10, 2017).

During and following the OIG visit in May 2017, PC/CR has developed plans for the Back-Up SSM to gain more practice with SSM responsibilities and gain more technical background with the art and science of Safety & Security preparation. As such, PC/CR developed a training plan for the Back-Up SSM, including a number of actions that have already been taken.

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Training Plan for the Back-Up SSM, including examples of how Back-Up SSM will be offered more training opportunities at Post.

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017

OIG Analysis: OIG requests that the proposed documentation reflect the back-up SSM's participation in training events, incident management, or recordation of crimes and incidents since the OIG exit briefing, delivered during the May 2017 fieldwork.

10: That the Country Director revise the post's housing standards, so that all housing criteria and acceptable equivalents are clearly defined.

Concur

Response: In May, June and July 2017, Post worked in close collaboration with Safety & Security Managers (SSM) in the IAP region to update Post housing standards so that housing criteria and acceptable equivalents are clearly defined. In July and August, the Post SSM trained Regional Leaders and programming staff members on the updated Housing Checklist. The SSM also developed a robust plan for future training of programming staff members on the Housing Checklist and expectations regarding housing checks when Volunteers move away from host families to live independently. (Please refer to Recommendation #11 response below.)

Documents Submitted:

- Updated Housing Checklist
- House Check Flow Chart

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

OIG Analysis: A critical aspect of the finding was that acceptable "local equivalents" to housing criteria were not clearly defined or detailed in the criteria and checklists. OIG requests that the proposed documentation define these local equivalents and any condition that merits a waiver for criteria not met.

12: That the Country Director develop and implement a plan to address the housing deficiencies that currently exist.

Concur

Response: Post carefully reviewed the OIG notes regarding Volunteer housing concerns that were considered to be out of compliance with PC/CR's IAP-approved housing checklist. Of the 18 Volunteers that were identified by OIG to have housing conditions not meeting checklist criteria, 8 departed country and those houses are no longer in use by PC/CR. Of the remaining 10 Volunteers still in country, Post reviewed all areas needing attention. Many of the OIG recommendations were addressed/resolved in the months of June through October, 2017.

One remaining installation of bars on a bathroom window is scheduled for early November. The remaining areas of housing concern identified by the OIG were determined to Meet Criteria or had received waivers, as determined by the specific living conditions of the Volunteer community.

Documents Submitted:

- PCCR Housing Compliance responses

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, October 2017.

OIG Analysis: OIG requests additional documentation that includes a plan reflecting that all housing across the country is assessed and approved. Because 90% of the houses selected in the Volunteer sample fell short of established criteria, OIG assumes that houses not in our sample also have deficiencies that need to be addressed.

APPENDIX F: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION

This program evaluation was conducted by Senior Evaluator Paul Romeo, under the direction of Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black. Additional contributions were made by Evaluations Apprentice Alexandra Miller.



OIG CONTACT

Following issuance of the final report, a stakeholder satisfaction survey will be distributed to agency stakeholders. If you wish to comment on the quality or usefulness of this report to help us improve our products, please contact Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black and at jblack@peacecorpsoig.gov or 202.692.2912.

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P.O. Box 57129
Washington, D.C. 20037-7129

For General Information:

Main Office: 202.692.2900

Website: peacecorps.gov/OIG

 Twitter: twitter.com/PCOIG