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From: Kathy A. Buller, Inspector General 

Date: September 27, 2019

Subject: Final Report on the Evaluation of Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic (IG-19-08-E)

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

Management concurred with all 9 recommendations. 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 1-5 and 9 when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 6-8, additional documentation is required. Our comments, which are in the report as Appendix E, address these matters.

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.

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.

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PEACE CORPS
Office of
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GENERAL**



A Volunteer with a community member and his donkey

Final Country Program Evaluation

Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic

IG-19-08-E

September 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an evaluation of Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic (hereafter referred to as “the post”) from April 9 to April 25, 2019. More than 1,250 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in the Kyrgyz Republic since the program was first launched in 1993. There is currently one project in the Kyrgyz Republic: teaching English as a foreign language. At the onset of this evaluation, 75 Volunteers were serving in the country. The post had over 41 staff and a Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 operating budget of approximately \$1.8 million.

WHAT WE FOUND

The post’s programming was closely aligned with the country’s development priorities, and Volunteers were serving in the poorest areas of the country. Most Volunteers were making progress towards their project objectives. The post effectively trained Volunteers in the areas of language and technical skills as well as intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Sites, housing, and work assignments met established criteria, and staff effectively prepared host families and counterparts for Volunteers. Volunteers who had experienced and reported harassment or crimes were satisfied with the support staff provided them. Most of the Volunteers we interviewed felt well integrated in their communities. The post’s medical unit was sufficiently staffed and supported, and Volunteers trusted the confidentiality of medical interactions. We had no concerns about the administrative support of Volunteers, including allowances and reimbursements. The Volunteer Advisory Committee was active and effective. Post staff and ministry officials reported they had a positive relationship. Post staff and U.S. Embassy staff also reported good relations.

We found several issues and challenges that required management attention. Chronic issues with leadership from U.S. direct hire (USDH) managers caused problems for Volunteers and staff. Volunteers rated mental health training as generally ineffective, which could make them more hesitant to approach medical staff for mental health support. The medical staff had not assessed local medical providers as required by agency guidelines. Training did not prepare Volunteers to cope effectively with harassment and sexual assault. The post mitigated transportation risks with a “safe driver” program, but we found that the identified safe drivers were not assessed or verified. Although the Kyrgyz Republic was located in a seismically active region, the post had not adequately mitigated the risk of earthquakes.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

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

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HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The Kyrgyz Republic is a landlocked country in Central Asia with a total area slightly smaller than that of South Dakota. Bordering China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the country's most distinguishing geographic feature is the Tien Shan mountain range. The vast majority of Kyrgyzstanis live in rural areas, with the exception of two cities: Bishkek, the nation's capital in the north and Osh in the west. After having been annexed to the Russian Empire in 1876, the Kyrgyz Republic declared its independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on August 31, 1991. As a parliamentary republic, the country operates with an elected president, majority party-nominated prime minister, and elected unicameral Supreme Council.



Figure 1. Map of the Kyrgyz Republic.

A lower middle-income country, the Kyrgyz Republic has an economy dominated by minerals extraction, agriculture, and reliance on remittances from citizens working abroad. The United Nations Development Programme categorized the Kyrgyz Republic as a medium human development country in 2017 with a Human Development Index score of 0.672; the country was ranked 122 out of 189 countries and territories.¹ With one of the world's lowest GDPs, the Kyrgyz Republic government relies on foreign donor support to cover budget deficits.

¹ The United Nations Development Programme compiles the index by measuring life expectancy, children's access to learning and knowledge, years of education among the adult population, and per capita national income.

PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND

OIG conducted fieldwork for this program evaluation of Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic from April 9 to April 25, 2019. OIG previously evaluated the post in 2011 and conducted an audit in 2016.

The Peace Corps program in the Kyrgyz Republic was established in 1993, and more than 1,250 Volunteers have served there since. At the time of fieldwork for this evaluation, there were 75 Volunteers in the country. The post received a new group of about 50 trainees each summer. The post's FY 2019 operating budget was \$1,838,083 USD.² The post did not have a country director at the time of this evaluation. The Peace Corps sent a senior advisor to provide leadership from August 2018 to September 2019.

According to the 2019 country briefing paper, the teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) project entails the following activities:

Volunteers in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) sector primarily build the capacity of English teachers through team-teaching English in secondary schools and universities. The focus is on the communicative methodology and building creative and critical thinking skills. TEFL Volunteers provide assistance to their schools and communities in establishing or expanding English teaching resources, contributing to curriculum development, and production of innovative teaching materials. TEFL Volunteers serve as regular members of the teaching faculty in their schools, with a workload comprised of co-teaching, lesson planning, and clubs for 36 hours per week. Volunteers are also involved in extracurricular activities such as conducting other clubs, computer training, and youth development.

² 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.

EVALUATION RESULTS

LEADERSHIP: COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION, AND STAFFING RESOURCES

In this evaluation, we assessed the effectiveness of communication, collaboration, and staffing resources using the following researchable questions to guide our work:

Does staff effectively communicate and collaborate with each other, Volunteers, and stakeholders?

Has leadership effectively managed staffing and staff capacity?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

Post and headquarters communicated effectively. Headquarters staff reported to OIG no areas of concern related to communications with the post. Staff at the post indicated they were satisfied with support provided by headquarters staff.

The post and U.S. Embassy had an effective relationship. Post and agency staff and officials at the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek all indicated the relationship between the post and Embassy was effective.

Staff and Kyrgyz Republic officials reported they had a good relationship. Staff reported to OIG that in general they had a positive relationship with their partners at the Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Education and Science. Staff said they sometimes had difficulty scheduling meetings with ministry officials and described cumbersome protocols that routed communications through the U.S. Embassy and the Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, headquarters managers and embassy officials informed OIG that the senior advisor had effectively engaged with Kyrgyz Republic officials. The senior advisor said she had made progress establishing more direct communications with the Ministry and had begun to implement a strategy to further improve collaborations by increasing the involvement of programming staff and communicating more transparently. Officials with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic reported to OIG that they were generally satisfied with their collaborations with the Peace Corps. The officials said they received only good feedback from teachers. Staff shared quarterly progress reports with the Ministry. OIG learned that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Peace Corps and the Ministry expired in 2016. OIG also learned that the project did not have a Project Advisory Committee (PAC). Staff reported to OIG they were working with the Ministry to renew the MOU and form a PAC, but did not think that the expired MOU impacted ministry support or prevented them from having good relationships with local schools.

The Volunteer Advisory Committee was effective. The post's Volunteer Advisory Committee met quarterly. Staff and Volunteers were satisfied with the committee's effectiveness as a mechanism for communication between staff and Volunteers.

Staff had completed required Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response training. OIG reviewed training records and found that 100 percent of staff had completed the required Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response training.

AREAS OF LEADERSHIP THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

Chronic issues with the post's leadership caused problems for staff and Volunteers.

According to the agency's "Post Management Resource Guide," effective program direction and leadership relies on leadership having an in-depth understanding of the host country and knowledge of agency operations, policies, rules, and procedures. Staff and embassy officials that we spoke with emphasized the importance of deploying experienced staff due to the complicated nature of the leadership challenges, such as government relations and high rates of assault.

Staff at headquarters and the post informed OIG that the post had sustained a lengthy period of instability with regards to leadership from USDH managers. Staff indicated there has been poor leadership going back as far as 10 years. Staff related several problems over that period, including poor performing staff and a pattern of poor collaboration between the direct hire managers. The most recent country directors departed unexpectedly, leaving long vacancies covered by temporary staff. In the past 4 years alone, the 3 direct hire manager positions were filled by 13 different people, including temporary and full-time staff.

Headquarters managers told OIG they tried to transfer experienced internal staff to the post but often found a lack of interested candidates. As a result, staff were often deployed to the post without prior agency experience, including the two direct hire managers who arrived at the post in November 2018.

OIG found that chronic poor leadership had impacted the post in several important areas. Local staff expressed anxiety and uncertainty about the constant change, which had impacted staff morale. Staff said they had become used to working in silos, which eroded collaboration and communication, and managers reported that staff had difficulty seeing the "big picture." Staff also indicated that policies and procedures were not consistently practiced or enforced, and they expressed concern that inconsistencies eroded trust and credibility with Volunteers. Additionally, staff reported confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities due to a haphazard approach to task management by the previous country director.

OIG learned that Volunteers in the K-25 group ³ reacted strongly to perceptions that the USDH managers were indifferent and ineffective in supporting victims of sexual assault and harassment. Staff reported that this perception led to the development and amplification of a negative attitude among Volunteers. Staff described the attitude as pervasive among Volunteers, including Volunteers who were not victims. Although staff acknowledged that sexual assault and harassment were significant safety risks, they described Volunteers as “hyper-vigilant” with inflated perceptions of the seriousness of the risks.

At the time of fieldwork, staff and Volunteers reported that Volunteers experienced elevated levels of stress and anxiety related to the risks of sexual assault and harassment. Thirty of 53 Volunteers responding to an OIG survey reported that sexual assault and female safety was the top issue OIG should review. Some of the survey responses from K-25 Volunteers included expressions of alarm.

Managers at headquarters sent an experienced senior advisor to the post in 2018 to provide stability and normalize relationships between direct hire managers following the departure of the former leadership team. Staff and Volunteers reported to OIG that the senior advisor had worked to positively address the areas impacted by leadership deficiencies, including Volunteer support and interoffice communication and collaboration. Nevertheless, OIG was concerned that the senior advisor was scheduled to depart in 2019, and the post would again be led by a relatively inexperienced leadership team.

We recommend:

- 1. That the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia regional director develop a strategy to deploy to the post a leadership team with sufficient experience and expertise to support and facilitate effective communication and collaboration with staff, Volunteers, and stakeholders.**

VOLUNTEER HEALTH SUPPORT

In our evaluation, we assessed Volunteer health support using the following researchable question to guide our work:

Is the health care program meeting Volunteers’ needs?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

Volunteer satisfaction with healthcare had improved. Annual Volunteer Survey (AVS) data from FY 2018 revealed that Volunteers in the Kyrgyz Republic reported significantly higher

³ K-25 refers to the training class that arrived in the Kyrgyz Republic in August 2017.

percentages of dissatisfaction and distrust with medical staff than other posts in the Region. OIG surveyed Volunteers and found that Volunteers were generally satisfied that their medical health needs had been met. Most of the Volunteers we interviewed reported satisfaction with their medical care. However, the OIG survey revealed that only 43 percent of the K-25 group felt that their mental health needs had been met. By contrast, the survey showed that 86 percent of the group that followed in 2018 felt that their mental health needs had been met. OIG believes the K-25 group's high rate of dissatisfaction with mental health support correlates with the group's dissatisfaction with staff support related to sexual assaults and harassment, which we address in the Leadership section of the report.

The Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs) indicated that they felt comfortable providing Volunteers with appropriate levels of mental health support, and they felt well-supported by headquarters staff. In December 2018, Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) staff provided mental health support training to the PCMOs, who indicated the training improved their skills and increased their confidence levels. As part of the training, COU staff observed the PCMOs providing mental health support to Volunteers, and the Volunteer feedback reflected that the support was effective. OIG did not have any concerns regarding the medical unit's capacity or readiness to provide appropriate mental health support to Volunteers.

The medical unit was sufficiently staffed and supported. Headquarters and post staff reported that the staffing and support of the post's medical unit was sufficient.

Back-up PCMOs were sufficiently trained. The post occasionally used the services of two back-up PCMOs who also helped provide vaccinations during pre-service training (PST). OIG reviewed documentation provided by the post and determined that the back-up PCMOs met agency training requirements.

Volunteers trusted the confidentiality of their interactions with medical staff. A site assessment conducted by the Office of Health Services in 2017 found that the post's medical space was effectively configured to maintain patient privacy. Eighty-six percent of the Volunteers who responded to an OIG survey reported they were confident their interactions with medical staff would remain private.

AREAS OF VOLUNTEER HEALTH SUPPORT THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

Medical staff had not assessed local health facilities.

The agency's medical technical guideline 204, "Peace Corps Volunteer Site Visits/Health Facility Assessment," requires PCMOs to assess all local providers that have been selected to provide care to Volunteers at least once every 3 years. During fieldwork, OIG found that two regional hospitals and multiple facilities in Bishkek were missing documentation of the required assessments. PCMOs acknowledged that some assessments had not been completed, particularly

for those facilities not frequently used. Without proper assessments, the post's response to medical emergencies could be impeded by poor familiarity with local health facilities.

We recommend:

- 2. That the post's medical officers conduct and document assessments of health facilities that have not been assessed in compliance with the agency's medical technical guidelines.**

VOLUNTEER SAFETY AND SECURITY SUPPORT

In our evaluation, we assessed Volunteer safety and security support using the following researchable questions to guide our work:

Is the post sufficiently prepared to respond to emergencies and security incidents?

Are preventative safety and security measures adequate?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

The emergency action plan (EAP) had been recently updated and tested without any significant concerns. OIG found that the EAP was last updated in 2018. A consolidation drill took place in March 2019 and resulted in all Volunteers reporting to consolidation points in acceptable timeframes. The post developed lessons learned from the activity.

The embassy had a copy of the post's current emergency action plan. During fieldwork, OIG confirmed with embassy staff that they had incorporated the post's current EAP into the Embassy EAP.

The post had developed standards for selecting consolidation points. The post provided OIG with procedures and guidelines that included minimum standards for selecting consolidation points. OIG reviewed a concern from staff that consolidation points included the homes of host families who had not been adequately trained. OIG found that host families' homes are no longer selected as consolidation points, and hotels are now used.

Volunteers were familiar with their consolidation points. During fieldwork, OIG asked Volunteers to name their consolidation points, and 17 of 20 Volunteers correctly named their consolidation points. The remaining three Volunteers either forgot their consolidation point or recalled an outdated consolidation point, however OIG had no significant concerns that Volunteers would have difficulty knowing where to go in an emergency due to the strength of the warden program.

Wardens were familiar with their responsibilities. OIG interviewed six Volunteers that had warden or assistant warden responsibilities and they all expressed confidence with understanding

their responsibilities. Post and regional safety and security staff expressed confidence with the warden program.

Volunteers who experienced a crime reported the crime and were very satisfied with the response from staff. Nine of the Volunteers interviewed by OIG said that they had experienced a crime during their service. Seven of those Volunteers said they had reported the crime to the Peace Corps. The remaining two Volunteers told OIG that they preferred to deal with the incident themselves and did not feel the need for support from the Peace Corps. The Volunteers who reported crimes expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the response from staff, particularly the safety and security manager.

Volunteers who reported harassment were satisfied with staff support. Six of the Volunteers interviewed by OIG said they had reported incidents of harassment to staff. The Volunteers informed OIG that they were satisfied with the response from staff and found that staff were helpful and empathetic.

Volunteers were integrated into their communities. In the agency's FY 2018 annual survey, 75 percent of Volunteers in the Kyrgyz Republic reported that they felt integrated into their communities, compared to 67 percent of Volunteers regionally and 68 percent of Volunteers globally. As we note in the Training section of the report, a few staff said that some Volunteers had difficulty accepting the local culture and planned to incorporate Intercultural Competence, Diversity, and Inclusion (ICD&I) topics into training. OIG also heard from both staff and Volunteers that urban areas were more challenging to integrate into than villages and rural communities. However, OIG surveyed staff prior to fieldwork and found that most staff believed Volunteers were well-integrated. Most of the Volunteers that OIG interviewed said they felt well-integrated in their communities.

The post was working to mitigate, prevent, and respond to the most significant safety risks to Volunteers. Agency crime data from 2018 revealed that the post's overall crime rate was above average but not in the highest crime level category. However, due to high rates of serious crimes, the post was designated as being in the "high" crime category. The serious crimes with high rates included kidnapping, rape, aggravated physical assault, and aggravated sexual assault. The 2018 data indicated that both kidnapping and aggravated sexual assault were above the post's historical rates. Other crimes with high rates included non-aggravated sexual assault and non-aggravated physical assault.

Headquarters and post staff reported to OIG that sexual assaults and harassment, particularly on public transportation, were the safety risk that most concerned them. Half the Volunteers we interviewed reported feeling unsafe on public transportation due to concerns about sexual assault, harassment, pickpocketing, drunk drivers, and poor road conditions. More than half the Volunteers OIG interviewed reported feeling unsafe in urban areas, which many attributed to increased levels of unwanted attention.

OIG reviewed the post's efforts to mitigate, prevent, and respond to the most significant safety risks and determined that the senior advisor, who arrived in August 2018, had a significant and positive impact. The senior advisor worked with staff to revise the post's crime action plan to include more strategies to address the risks of kidnapping, rape, and physical and sexual assaults. One of the planned steps to mitigate sexual assaults and harassment was the formation of an all-Volunteer Sexual Assault and Harassment Task Force. In March 2019, the Volunteer task force presented staff with 20 recommendations to improve areas including Volunteer training, host family training, site development, and travel and transportation. The senior advisor developed action items and assigned staff to each of the recommendations to ensure they were implemented.

The senior advisor also invited a psychologist from the agency's COU to visit the post after determining that Volunteers did not feel supported in the context of sexual assaults and harassment. The psychologist provided resilience and coping training to K-25 Volunteers and trained staff on providing interpersonal and mental health support to victims of sexual assault and harassment.

AREAS OF VOLUNTEER SAFETY AND SECURITY SUPPORT THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

The post had not adequately mitigated the risk of earthquakes.

An Office of Safety and Security standard operating procedure for safety and security managers directs them to use risk assessment results to inform EAP revisions. The agency's regional safety and security officer conducted a risk assessment in May 2019 and determined that "earthquakes are one of the major threats to the country's population and economy." Agency safety and security staff expressed concerns to OIG that the post had not adequately prepared for the risk of earthquakes. Staff at the post said they had made some preparations but acknowledged they were not fully prepared and had not completed an earthquake response plan. The regional safety and security officer proposed a mitigation strategy to annually review and update an earthquake checklist as part of the EAP. Insufficient preparations could impede the post's response to a major earthquake.

We recommend:

- 3. That the country director implement a procedure to annually review and update an earthquake checklist with the safety and security manager and incorporate the checklist into the emergency action plan.**

VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

In our evaluation, we assessed volunteer administrative support using the following researchable question to guide our work:

Does the administrative unit provide sufficient support to Volunteers, including allowances and reimbursements?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

Volunteers were satisfied with settling-in allowances provided by the post. In interviews and survey responses, most Volunteers indicated they were satisfied with settling-in allowances. The post's administrative staff regularly conducted settling-in allowance surveys.

Living allowances were increased. In interviews and survey responses, many Volunteers indicated their living allowances were insufficient to meet their needs. Following the completion of fieldwork, OIG learned that Volunteers received a 42 percent increase to their living allowance, and we had no further concerns.

Volunteers were satisfied with reimbursements. Most of the Volunteers interviewed by OIG were satisfied with the timeliness of their reimbursements from the administrative unit. Staff reported that some Volunteer reimbursements were delayed due to the Federal government shutdown, but OIG did not have any concerns with the administrative unit's performance in this area.

PROGRAMMING

In our evaluation, we assessed programming using the following researchable question to guide our work:

Is the program focused on the country's development priorities, in the poorest areas of the country?

Are Volunteers achieving project objectives?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

Programming addressed host country development priorities. The Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Education and Science reported to OIG that teacher training meets a development need and English education helps facilitate communication with other nations. Headquarters and post staff agreed that English education was a host country priority.

The post served poor areas of the country. Seventy percent of the Volunteers who completed an OIG survey believed that they were working to meet the basic needs of people in poor areas

of the country.⁴ Several staff and Volunteers indicated that some Volunteers were placed in well-resourced schools. However, staff told OIG that most Volunteers were placed in poor areas of the country and 70 percent of Volunteers interviewed by OIG reported that their school needed a Volunteer. Each year the post received a list of approved site placements from the ministry, which restricted post's ability to exclusively develop poorly-resourced schools. OIG did not find that the list provided by the ministry favored better-resourced schools.

Volunteers achieved most of the project objectives. Many of the staff we spoke with said that Volunteers made good progress towards the first and second project objectives (teacher capacity building and student achievement, respectively). One staff member said it was one of the only posts in the region to be successful with co-teaching. Another staff member commented, "This is one of the most effective TEFL programs I have seen. Volunteers are actually working 18 hours [a week] and doing co-teaching."

Volunteers and staff reported that the third objective, strengthening school communities, had been more challenging. Forty-five percent of the Volunteers interviewed by OIG said they were not making substantial progress towards the objective. However, the 2018 Project Status Review showed that the post met indicator targets for the objective. Eighty nine percent of the Volunteers who responded to our survey reported that their work contributed towards their project objectives.

We reviewed other areas of programming and found that staff and Volunteers felt that Volunteers were making a difference in their communities, that most Volunteers were conducting community needs assessments, and that staff met most of the Volunteers' programmatic support needs.

TRAINING

In our evaluation, we assessed training using the following researchable question to guide our work:

Do trainings prepare Volunteers for service?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

Technical training was effective. AVS data from FY 2018 showed that 78 percent of Volunteers reported they were effectively trained to perform technical aspects of their work. An

⁴ OIG conducted an online survey of Volunteers at the post prior to fieldwork. Fifty-seven Volunteers completed the survey. Volunteers were asked to rate many items on a four-point scale (1 = not effective, 4 = very effective)." The percentage of Volunteers who gave a favorable rating includes those who gave ratings of "3" or "4."

OIG survey showed that 79 percent of the responding Volunteers felt effectively prepared to perform their primary assignment. OIG surveys also reflected that just under 90 percent of staff and 90 percent of Volunteer respondents agreed that Volunteers had the technical skills needed to do their work. Seventy-five percent of the Volunteers interviewed by OIG said technical training helped them develop the skills they needed for their work.

Language training was effective. An OIG survey showed that 79 percent of responding Volunteers felt that language training was effective, and 82 percent reported they were able to communicate well in the language needed at their site. AVS data from FY 2018 indicated that 88 percent of Volunteers reported that they were effectively trained to use the language needed in their work/community. OIG reviewed language test results from PST and found that 6 trainees in 2017, and 2 trainees in 2018, had not met the language requirement by the end of training. These trainees were required to work with a tutor at their sites or with a language and culture facilitator and were retested at in-service training (IST).

Most Volunteers had the intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes they needed to be successful. In interviews with OIG, 85 percent of Volunteers said that training provided them sufficient skills and cultural understanding to be effective in their community. Programming staff reported to OIG that most Volunteers had the intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes they needed to be effective. A few staff said that some Volunteers had difficulty accepting the local culture and became angry and anxious as a result. Staff reported plans to strengthen skills in this area by incorporating agency ICD&I topics into training for the next PST.

Physical health training was improving. AVS data from FY 2018 revealed that only 32 percent of Volunteers reported that training effectively prepared them to maintain physical health at their sites. By contrast, 60 percent of Volunteers in the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia (EMA) Region reported that they felt the training was effective. A training staff member said they implemented training improvements in 2018 and received positive comments as a result. Medical staff agreed that in the past 2 years they had worked to improve health training. A survey conducted by OIG prior to fieldwork showed that 61 percent of Volunteers reported that physical health training was effective, which indicated significant improvement had occurred. OIG determined from interviews and an OIG survey that some Volunteers were dissatisfied with health training related to nutrition. Volunteers told OIG that medical staff advised them to eat more fruits and vegetables, but those were difficult to find and expensive, and they wanted nutrition instruction that was more practical. Staff acknowledged that since 2016, when the Ministry began identifying new sites, there had been more Volunteer placements in remote areas where food is relatively scarcer. Staff reported they had responded to Volunteers' concerns by incorporating nutrition training into IST.

We reviewed other areas of training and found that staff properly documented trainees' readiness to serve, and program managers were sufficiently involved in technical training.

AREAS OF TRAINING THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

Training on maintaining mental/emotional health and managing the stress of service was ineffective.

The agency's strategic plan for FY 2018-2022 established a strategic objective to enhance Volunteer resilience by optimizing the ability of Volunteers to successfully navigate the challenges of service, in part by increasing the capacity of Volunteers to manage adjustment challenges outside the clinical environment. Agency AVS data from FY 2018 showed that only 30 percent of Volunteers reported that training effectively prepared them to maintain their mental/emotional health. Forty-seven percent of Volunteers in the EMA Region felt that this area of training had been effective. A survey conducted by OIG revealed that only 39 percent of Volunteers reported that mental health training was effective.

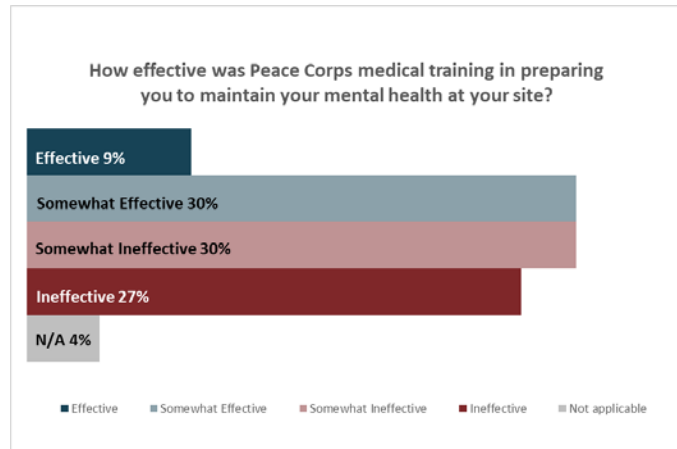


Figure 2: Volunteers' Rating of Medical Training Effectiveness.

Source: OIG Volunteer Survey.

Although staff reported that they provided all required mental health sessions, staff and Volunteers indicated that there were too few sessions, and Volunteers reported that the sessions were not given sufficient time and felt rushed. Volunteers expressed that mental health training sessions did not identify effective strategies they could use to cope positively with the array of challenges and stressors they faced during service. For example, one Volunteer said, "the training seemed bare bones, and the solutions were pretty simple – if you're feeling down, exercise or read a book." Additionally, OIG heard from both staff and Volunteers that staff delivering the training appeared to be uncomfortable presenting information about mental health during training.

One staff member expressed concern to OIG that mental health training deficiencies could make Volunteers hesitant to approach medical staff for mental health support. As we report in the Volunteer Health Support section of this report, the Peace Corps had provided additional mental health support training for the medical staff at the post, and PCMOs reported to us they felt prepared to provide appropriate levels of mental health support to Volunteers. Improvements to the content and delivery of mental health and resiliency-related training sessions should instill more confidence in Volunteers to approach medical staff for mental health support, when needed, and to manage the challenges of service through other coping strategies, thus advancing the agency's strategic objective.

We recommend:

- 4. That the director of programming and training improve pre-service training to include more effective coping skills Volunteers can employ to manage the stress and challenges of service.**
- 5. That the director of programming and training evaluate mental health training and ensure sessions are effectively delivered and provided adequate time.**

Training did not adequately prepare Volunteers to cope effectively with harassment and sexual assault.

Peace Corps Manual Section 270 and “Safety and Security Instruction” 310 from the Office of Safety and Security require comprehensive safety and security training, including coping with unwanted attention. Additionally, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 required the agency to provide Volunteers with in-country training tailored to the country of service that included cultural training related to gender relations and risk-reduction strategies.

In interviews with OIG, only 30 percent of the Volunteers reported that training adequately prepared them to respond to harassment and sexual assault. Volunteers who found the training ineffective said there were too few sessions focused on harassment and sexual assault, and the sessions minimized the extent to which harassment would occur.

Staff reported that they provided required sexual assault training, however Volunteers reported that they experienced directly, or believed other Volunteers had experienced, higher levels of harassment and sexual assault than they had expected. Some Volunteers commented that training should have provided more information about strategies and practical solutions to respond to harassment. The high level of dissatisfaction prompted the post’s senior advisor to invite a psychologist from the COU to visit the post to provide training and support. Training improvements should help to reduce Volunteer frustration and dissatisfaction related to sexual assault and harassment.

We recommend:

- 6. That the director of programming and training ensure sexual assault and harassment training includes practical response techniques.**
- 7. That the director of programming and training improve training to establish appropriate expectations regarding sexual assault and harassment.**

SITE MANAGEMENT

In our evaluation, we assessed site management using the following researchable question to guide our work:

Are sites, housing, and work assignments appropriate and meeting all established criteria?

AREAS OF NO CONCERN

The post had adequate programmatic and safety and security criteria, and sites met the criteria. During fieldwork, OIG reviewed the post's compliance with site selection criteria at 20 Volunteer sites. We found that most of the sites met all of the required site selection criteria. Staff acknowledged that site selection criteria were being updated and therefore did not align with the site development manual. However, OIG determined that programmatic and safety and security criteria were being met. Volunteers informed OIG they were satisfied with their site placements, and most Volunteers said they felt safe in their sites.

The post's site development process began after staff received a list of approved sites from ministry partners. Staff reported that they had focused their efforts on getting the site list to avoid delays with site development.

Volunteer housing met the post's standards. During fieldwork, OIG reviewed the post's compliance with housing criteria at 20 Volunteer sites. Seventy-five percent of the reviewed housing met all of the criteria. OIG determined that the areas of non-compliance identified during the review did not signify inadequate housing procedures or staff performance issues. Volunteers did not express any safety concerns with their living conditions, and OIG had no concerns.

Medical and safety and security staff were adequately involved in site development and selection. The safety and security manager stated that he visited each site that was selected, and he expressed confidence that he was adequately informed before he signed site approval forms. The PCMOs reported that they reviewed each site on the list of potential sites provided by the ministry, and either approved or rejected the site based on their existing knowledge or visited sites to learn more. The staff said that the programming team didn't begin developing sites until they were approved by the medical and safety units.

Staff effectively selected and oriented host families and counterparts. Programming staff informed OIG that host families were oriented during the site selection process and after Volunteers arrived at sites. Eighty-five percent of the Volunteers interviewed during field work lived with host families, and all of those Volunteers said they had positive relationships with their host families.

Staff provided orientation and training to counterparts during site development, at the end of PST, and again after Volunteers arrived at site. Eighty percent of the Volunteers interviewed by OIG reported that they had motivated and supportive counterparts. Programming staff also noted that Volunteer counterparts were motivated and supportive.

AREAS OF SITE MANAGEMENT THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

Staff did not assess or verify “safe drivers.”

The post’s risk mitigation strategy, as outlined in the “Site Development and Monitoring Manual,” includes staff identifying “safe drivers” at sites. New Volunteers were provided contact information for these safe drivers in their site information packets. In interviews with OIG, staff said they collected information about safe drivers, which was compiled in a database, but they did not meet or contact the drivers to assess their suitability. Staff explained that the driver information was usually collected by programming staff from school officials, who often had their own cars and were not familiar with transportation options. Staff also noted that school officials may provide favorable but inaccurate information to improve their chances of receiving a Volunteer. Staff required Volunteers to submit safe driver information, but staff reported some Volunteers didn’t have a safe driver and submitted information that was made up or hadn’t been verified.

Safety and security staff said they were concerned that the post’s database of safe drivers included drivers that were unreliable and unsuitable. If new Volunteers utilize drivers who have not been vetted, their safety could be at risk.

We recommend:

- 8. That the country director implement procedures to ensure “safe drivers” are suitable.**

Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) incidents were not recorded in site history files.

“Safety and Security Instruction” 401 from the Office of Safety and Security requires posts to include relevant safety and security information in site history files. OIG reviewed CIRS reporting of security incidents at Volunteer sites and found that none of the incidents were recorded in the post’s paper or electronic site history files. The post’s “Site Management Manual” included procedures to ensure relevant safety and security information was included in site history files, but the procedures had not been followed. OIG was concerned that inadequate or missing safety and security information could result in Volunteer placements in unsafe locations.

We recommend:

- 9. That the safety and security manager ensure relevant safety and security information is included in all site history files.**

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

1. That the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia regional director develop a strategy to deploy to the post a leadership team with sufficient experience and expertise to support and facilitate effective communication and collaboration with staff, Volunteers, and stakeholders.
2. That the post's medical officers conduct and document assessments of health facilities that have not been assessed in compliance with the agency's medical technical guidelines.
3. That the country director implement a procedure to annually review and update an earthquake checklist with the safety and security manager and incorporate the checklist into the emergency action plan.
4. That the director of programming and training improve pre-service training to include more effective coping skills Volunteers can employ to manage the stress and challenges of service.
5. That the director of programming and training evaluate mental health training and ensure sessions are effectively delivered and provided adequate time.
6. That the director of programming and training ensure sexual assault and harassment training includes practical response techniques.
7. That the director of programming and training improve training to establish appropriate expectations regarding sexual assault and harassment.
8. That the country director implement procedures to ensure "safe drivers" are suitable.
9. That the safety and security manager ensure relevant safety and security information is included in all site history files.

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 December 18, 2018. For post evaluations, we use the following researchable questions to guide our work:

A. Programming:

- Is the program focused on the country's development priorities, in the poorest areas of the country?
- Are Volunteers achieving project objectives?

B. Training:

- Do trainings prepare Volunteers for service?

C. Site Management:

- Are sites, housing, and work assignments appropriate and meeting all established criteria?

D. Volunteer Safety and Security Support:

- Is the post sufficiently prepared to respond to emergencies and security incidents?
- Are preventative safety and security measures adequate?

E. Volunteer Health Support:

- Is the health care program meeting Volunteers' needs?

F. Volunteer Administrative Support:

- Does the administrative unit provide sufficient support to Volunteers, including allowances and reimbursements?

G. Communication and Collaboration:

- Does staff effectively communicate and collaborate with each other, Volunteers, and other stakeholders?

H. Staffing Resources Management:

- Has leadership effectively managed staffing and staff capacity?

The evaluation team conducted the preliminary research portion of the evaluation between February 1, 2019 and April 8, 2019. This research included a review of agency and post documents provided by headquarters and post staff; interviews with headquarters staff representing the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia Region; Office of Safety and Security; Office of Health Services; Overseas Programming & Training Support; Office of Victim Advocacy; and Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection. It also included inquiries to the Office of Global Health and HIV and Peace Corps Response. We also conducted online surveys that were completed by 57 Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic Volunteers and 17 Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic staff.

In-country fieldwork occurred from April 9, 2019, to April 25, 2019, and included interviews with post leadership and staff in programming, training, and support roles. At the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek we met with the Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, and Assistant Regional Security Officer. We met with 5 host country government ministry officials. In addition, we interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 20 Volunteers (24.7 percent of Volunteers serving at the time of our visit) and inspected 20 Volunteer living spaces.

The scope of the evaluation encompassed 3 years, from 2016 to 2019, to include the 27-month span in-country of most Volunteers (which includes three months of training) and additional time for Volunteers that extended their service beyond 2 years.

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the “Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation,” 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 20 Volunteers, 17 staff in-country, and 23 key stakeholders, including Peace Corps headquarters staff, officials with the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, and host country ministry officials.

The following table provides demographic information for the entire Volunteer population in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Volunteer sample was selected to represent these demographics in addition to length of service, geographic location, and ethnicity.

Table 1: Volunteer Demographic Data

Project	Percentage of Volunteers
Education	99%
Health	1%
Gender	Percentage of Volunteers
Female	52%
Male	48%
Age	Percentage of Volunteers
25 or younger	62%
26-29	23%
30-49	14%
50 and over	1%

Source: VIDA, February 2019.

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

At the time of preliminary research for the evaluation, the post had 41 staff positions. The post periodically employed additional temporary staff to assist with training, however these positions were not staffed at the time of our visit. We interviewed 17 staff.

Table 2: Interviews Conducted with Post Staff

Position	Interviewed
Acting Country Director/Director of Programming and Training	X
Back-up Medical Provider (2)	
Cashier	
Deputy Director of Management and Operations	X
Director of Management and Operations	X
Driver (4)	
Backup Guards (4)	
Administrative Assistant of Finance	
General Services Specialist	
Guards (4)	
Head Guard	
IT Specialist	
Language and Cross-Cultural Coordinator	X
Backup Maintenance	
Maintenance	
Medical Assistant	X
Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation Specialist/Small Project Assistance Coordinator	X
Peace Corps Medical Officer (2)	X
Regional Coordinator	X
TEFL Manager (2)	X
Public Relations Coordinator and Executive Assistant	X
Regional Manager (2)	X (1)
Safety & Security Manager (2)	X (1)
Senior Advisor	X
Gardener	
Training Manager	X
Administrative Assistant for Volunteer Support	X

Data as of February 2019.

OIG interviewed an additional 23 key stakeholders during the preliminary research phase of the evaluation and in-country fieldwork.

Table 3: Interviews Conducted with Key Stakeholders

Position	Organization
Ambassador	U.S. Embassy
Deputy Chief of Mission	U.S. Embassy
Assistant Regional Security Officer	U.S. Embassy
Acting Head of Vocational Education Department	Ministry of Education and Science
Head of International Cooperation Department	Ministry of Education and Science
Lead Specialist of the Pre-School, Secondary School, and Extracurricular Activities Department	Ministry of Education and Science
Chief Administrative Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters/EMA Region
Chief of Operations	Peace Corps Headquarters/EMA Region
Chief of Programming & Training	Peace Corps Headquarters/EMA Region
Country Desk Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters/EMA Region
Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist	Peace Corps Headquarters/EMA Region
Regional Security Advisor	Peace Corps Headquarters/EMA Region
Chief, Quality Improvement, Education and Training	Peace Corps Headquarters/Office of Health Services/ Office of Medical Services
Director of the Office of Counseling and Outreach	Peace Corps Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Psychologist	Peace Corps Headquarters/Counseling and Outreach Unit
Director of the Office of Medical Services	Peace Corps Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Peace Corps Safety & Security Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters/Office of Safety and Security
Associate Victim Advocate (2)	Peace Corps Headquarters/Office of Victim Advocacy
Director	Peace Corps Headquarters/Office of Victim Advocacy
Education Specialist	Peace Corps Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Placement Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters/Volunteer Recruitment and Selection/Placement

Data as of April 2019.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS


AVS	Annual Volunteer Survey
CIRS	Consolidated Incident Reporting System
COU	Counseling and Outreach Unit
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
EMA	Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia
FY	Fiscal Year
ICD&I	Intercultural Competence, Diversity, and Inclusion
IST	In-Service Training
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAC	Project Advisory Counsel
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
PST	Pre-Service Training
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
USD	United States Dollar
USDH	United States Direct Hire
VIDA	Volunteer Information Database Application


APPENDIX D: AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT



MEMORANDUM

To: Kathy Buller, Inspector General

Through: Anne Hughes, Chief Compliance Officer 

From: Jeannette Windon, Regional Director, EMA 
Anna Hoffman, Country Director, Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic

Date: September 25, 2019

CC: Jody K. Olsen, Director
Michelle K. Brooks, Chief of Staff
Matthew McKinney, Deputy Chief of Staff/White House Liaison
Maura Fulton, Senior Advisor to the Director
Carl Sosebee, Senior Advisor to the Director
Robert Shanks, General Counsel
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General
Jerry Black, AIG/ Evaluation
Richard Swartz, Chief Financial Officer
Scott Knell, Chief Information Officer
Clark Presnell, Acting Associate Director, Office of Management
Karen Becker, Associate Director, Office of Health Services
Ryan Monroe, Director of Programming and Training, Kyrgyz Republic
Angela Kissel, Compliance Officer

Subject: Preliminary Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/ Kyrgyz Republic
(Project No. 19-EVAL-04)

Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic as outlined in the Preliminary Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/ Kyrgyz Republic (Project No. 19-EVAL-04) given to the agency on August 8, 2019.

The Region and the Post have addressed and provided supporting documentation for five of the nine recommendations provided by the OIG in its Preliminary Evaluation of Peace Corps/ Kyrgyz Republic and will work to close the remaining recommendations by the set target dates.

Recommendation 1

That the Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia regional director develop a strategy to deploy to the post a leadership team with sufficient experience and expertise to support and facilitate effective communication and collaboration with staff, Volunteers, and stakeholders.

Concur

Response: The Region has developed a detailed strategy plan to ensure post leadership has sufficient experience and expertise to support and facilitate effective communication and collaboration with staff, Volunteers, and stakeholders.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Strategy for Post Leadership

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

Recommendation 2

That the post's medical officers conduct and document assessments of health facilities that have not been assessed in compliance with the agency's medical technical guidelines.

Concur

Response: Post has been in compliance with the guidance to conduct and document assessments of health facilities and visits all facilities throughout the country each year, which is a higher standard than is required by the technical guideline. District (rayon) center assessments are done in conjunction with site development and PCV site visits.

While Post believes that practices have been in compliance with the guideline, some of the documentation was misplaced, specifically health facility assessments for Chui and for Gulcho Territorial Hospital in Osh. This documentation has been filed, as with the other Healthcare Facility Assessment forms in the Medical Action Plan binder as well as electronically.

Documents Submitted:

- Copies of the health facility assessment for Chui and Gulcho Territorial Hospital in Osh

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

Recommendation 3

That the country director implement a procedure to annually review and update an earthquake checklist with the safety and security manager and incorporate the checklist into the emergency action plan.

Concur

Response: After the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) conference in October 2019, the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) will be revised with new guidance and format from PC/HQ and earthquake preparedness will be part of that plan. This was also included in the posts' Integrated Planning and Budgeting System as a goal with specific actions. Post has already designated a team to work on earthquake preparedness, including the Country Director, Director of Management and Operations, SSM, and Head Guard/Back-up SSM. The team plans to look at earthquake preparedness for Volunteers, local staff, and the office. The focus for the team is on identifying "doable actions" for planning and mitigation.

As Post staff do not have particular expertise in earthquake preparedness, Post will rely on technical assistance from a variety of sources. The Embassy Regional Security Officer office has a new staff person who has been hired to work on disaster preparedness and will be collaborating with the local United Nations and Red Cross/Red Crescent offices as they have offered to be a resource for Peace Corps. Post will also work closely with the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, OSS, and Regional Security Advisor to determine what should be incorporated into the EAP.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Revised EAP with earthquake checklist

Status and Timeline for Completion: December 2020

Recommendation 4

That the director of programming and training improve pre-service training to include more effective coping skills Volunteers can employ to manage the stress and challenges of service.

Concur

Response: Post has already incorporated more effective coping skills into the most recent Pre-Service Training (PST). Post introduced a new series of coping skills sessions and debriefs in the PST that took place from July-September 2019. These sessions have been facilitated by a variety of staff, including the Regional Managers and Peace Corps Medical Officers, with the Director of Programming and Training and Country Director present to emphasize certain topics. In addition, currently serving Volunteers from previous cohorts have provided perspective on their coping strategies and how they have managed the challenges of service. Sessions have included a practical coping strategies matrix that trainees filled out at the beginning of PST, and revisited at the end of PST.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these sessions and to ensure Volunteers are able to adapt their coping skills for site, Post will incorporate follow up questions about Volunteers' coping strategies and use of the coping strategies matrix during site visits that occur during the first three months of service.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Session plans (#1 & #2)
- Coping strategies matrix
- First Regional Manager site visit form
- Results of follow-up questions

Status and Timeline for Completion: February 2020

Recommendation 5

That the director of programming and training evaluate mental health training and ensure sessions are effectively delivered and provided adequate time.

Concur

Response: Based on feedback from past Pre-Service Trainings (PST), session delivery was improved in the 2019 PST. These sessions were facilitated by the Peace Corps Medical Officers with input from the Peer Support Network Volunteers. The session was explicitly linked to the first coping strategies session.

Post will conduct an evaluation of PST, as well as a staff debrief, which will request feedback on session content and whether time for sessions was appropriate. Post will also incorporate follow-up questions about Volunteers coping strategies during site visits that occur during the first three months of service. Feedback from these site visits will determine if additional sessions or discussion is needed at In Service Training, which will take place in January 2020.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Session plan/presentation
- Evaluation/assessment of mental health and coping training

Status and Timeline for Completion: January 2020

Recommendation 6

That the director of programming and training ensure sexual assault and harassment training includes practical response techniques.

Concur

Response: Post has already taken significant steps to train Volunteers in practical response techniques. This year post introduced a Language and Safety Workbook that provides practical exercises for mitigating different types of safety situations, including a strong emphasis on sexual assault and harassment. Based on Volunteer feedback, the workbook includes both Kyrgyz and Russian safety phrases to detract unwanted attention. The workbook also includes vocabulary, dialogue, scenarios and role-plays. Practical exercises, including using local bus stops, traveling in marshrutkas (local public transportation vans), and interacting with local police were conducted during Pre Service Training.

Documents Submitted:

- Language and Safety Workbook

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

Recommendation 7

That the director of programming and training improve training to establish appropriate expectations regarding sexual assault and harassment.

Concur

Response: Post has already taken actions to address expectations of incoming training groups. The job-specific request (JSR) was revised in May 2019 for the next intake to arrive in June 2020. The language was edited to more clearly specify the types of sexual assault and harassment that Volunteers face during their service in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, this year, Post conducted conference calls with invitees six weeks prior to their arrival to outline expectations and realities of service. One of the topics discussed was the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in Kyrgyzstan. Post has also incorporated currently serving Volunteers as ‘resource’ Volunteers during Pre Service Training. Those Volunteers have supported session delivery and have also helped to set expectations of new trainees by sharing their own experiences.

Documents Submitted:

- JSR and invitation
- Expectations conference call notes

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

Recommendation 8

That the country director implement procedures to ensure “safe drivers” are suitable.

Concur

Response: Post acknowledges that the efforts to implement a ‘safe drivers’ program have been largely unsuccessful, due to the inability of Post to ascertain which drivers are safe in each community where a Volunteer is placed. It has proven impossible for Peace Corps staff to ensure that a driver is “safe” or “trusted” simply by meeting him or having a conversation. In addition, without being present in communities, PC staff is unable to keep a database of “safe drivers” up to date, given that phone numbers and driver locations change frequently.

Because the safe drivers program was initially implemented in 2016 based on recommendations from the PCSSO, Post consulted with the PCSSO to determine how to best address transportation concerns. In 2019, the current PCSSO acknowledged the challenge of determining safe drivers and closed the recommendation. In consultation with the PCSSO, Post has expanded the focus from specifically identified safe drivers to safe transportation, which includes an understanding of the transportation network and options for Volunteers. This focus has changed

site development practices. During site development, information about transportation is collected by multiple staff members from different members of the community: the SSM from community members for new sites, the PM from school directors and counterparts, the RM from community leaders and potential host families, and the driver from community members (including shop keepers and people on the street). All this information has given post a better understanding of the transportation realities, which is then communicated to trainees in their site information packets.

In addition, based on recommendations from the Sexual Assault and Harassment Taskforce, PC staff worked with the Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC) to design a spreadsheet accessible to all Volunteers. This spreadsheet contains detailed information about both good and bad experiences with drivers. Staff is relying on the Volunteer Advisory Committee to promote this list and keep it up-to-date.

Documents Submitted:

- Site development forms with transportation information
- VAC spreadsheet
- 2019 PCSSO Report
- Email from PCSSO noting the closed recommendations

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

Recommendation 9

That the safety and security manager ensure relevant safety and security information is included in all site history files.

Concur

Response: Post will review the current site history files Standard Operating Procedure and revise it in accordance with SSI 401. Then, the Safety and Security Manager and programming staff will collaborate to update all site history files with relevant safety and security information. This process will begin prior to site development for the 2020 cohort so that site history files will be complete in advance of site development.

Documents to be Submitted:

- Site History Files SOP
- Examples of Site History Files with relevant safety and security information

Status and Timeline for Completion: March 2020

APPENDIX E: OIG COMMENTS

Management concurred with all nine recommendations, all of which 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. OIG will review and consider closing recommendations 1-5 and 9 when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 6-8, 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.

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.

Recommendation 6

That the director of programming and training ensure sexual assault and harassment training includes practical response techniques.

Concur

Response: Post has already taken significant steps to train Volunteers in practical response techniques. This year post introduced a Language and Safety Workbook that provides practical exercises for mitigating different types of safety situations, including a strong emphasis on sexual assault and harassment. Based on Volunteer feedback, the workbook includes both Kyrgyz and Russian safety phrases to detract unwanted attention. The workbook also includes vocabulary, dialogue, scenarios and role-plays. Practical exercises, including using local bus stops, traveling in marshrutkas (local public transportation vans), and interacting with local police were conducted during Pre Service Training.

Documents Submitted:

- Language and Safety Workbook

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

OIG Analysis: OIG requests that the post include documentation that demonstrates how training has been revised to include practical response techniques. For example, this may include session plans for sexual assault and harassment training or any sessions that involve the language and safety workbook described above. Additionally, please include the calendar of training events (COTE) with an indication of when this training will take place.

Recommendation 7

That the director of programming and training improve training to establish appropriate expectations regarding sexual assault and harassment.

Concur

Response: Post has already taken actions to address expectations of incoming training groups. The job-specific request (JSR) was revised in May 2019 for the next intake to arrive in June 2020. The language was edited to more clearly specify the types of sexual assault and harassment that Volunteers face during their service in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, this year, Post conducted conference calls with invitees six weeks prior to their arrival to outline expectations and realities of service. One of the topics discussed was the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in Kyrgyzstan. Post has also incorporated currently serving Volunteers as ‘resource’ Volunteers during Pre Service Training. Those Volunteers have supported session delivery and have also helped to set expectations of new trainees by sharing their own experiences.

Documents Submitted:

- JSR and invitation
- Expectations conference call notes

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

OIG Analysis: Please also include evidence of how the post is using resource Volunteers in pre-service training to help establish appropriate expectations regarding sexual assault and harassment. For example, this may include the COTE with time scheduled for discussion with resource Volunteers about sexual assault and harassment. Alternatively, this may include sexual assault and harassment session plans that include time for resource Volunteers to share their own experiences.

Recommendation 8

That the country director implement procedures to ensure “safe drivers” are suitable.

Concur

Response: Post acknowledges that the efforts to implement a ‘safe drivers’ program have been largely unsuccessful, due to the inability of Post to ascertain which drivers are safe in each community where a Volunteer is placed. It has proven impossible for Peace Corps staff to ensure that a driver is “safe” or “trusted” simply by meeting him or having a conversation. In addition, without being present in communities, PC staff is unable to keep a database of “safe drivers” up to date, given that phone numbers and driver locations change frequently.

Because the safe drivers program was initially implemented in 2016 based on recommendations from the PCSSO, Post consulted with the PCSSO to determine how to best address transportation concerns. In 2019, the current PCSSO acknowledged the challenge of determining

safe drivers and closed the recommendation. In consultation with the PCSSO, Post has expanded the focus from specifically identified safe drivers to safe transportation, which includes an understanding of the transportation network and options for Volunteers. This focus has changed site development practices. During site development, information about transportation is collected by multiple staff members from different members of the community: the SSM from community members for new sites, the PM from school directors and counterparts, the RM from community leaders and potential host families, and the driver from community members (including shop keepers and people on the street). All this information has given post a better understanding of the transportation realities, which is then communicated to trainees in their site information packets.

In addition, based on recommendations from the Sexual Assault and Harassment Taskforce, PC staff worked with the Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC) to design a spreadsheet accessible to all Volunteers. This spreadsheet contains detailed information about both good and bad experiences with drivers. Staff is relying on the Volunteer Advisory Committee to promote this list and keep it up-to-date.

Documents Submitted:

- Site development forms with transportation information
- VAC spreadsheet
- 2019 PCSSO Report
- Email from PCSSO noting the closed recommendations

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed, September 2019

OIG Analysis: It is unclear from the agency response whether the post is discontinuing the “safe drivers” program or whether the post is continuing it within the context of an expanded focus on safe transportation options and/or more reliance on the VAC to maintain a list of “experiences with drivers”. If the safe driver program is continuing, please provide procedures designed to identify suitable safe drivers. If the program is being discontinued, please provide a clearer statement to that effect.

APPENDIX F: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION

This program evaluation was conducted under the direction of Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black, by Senior Evaluator Reuben Marshall, Senior Evaluator Paul Romeo, and Program Analyst Alexandra Miller. Additional contributions were made by Senior Evaluator Erin Balch, Evaluator Kaitlyn Large, and Senior Evaluator Kris Hoffer.



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 at jblack@peacecorpsig.gov.

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

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

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