




# Office of Inspector General

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

**Hotline**  
202.692.2915 | 800.233.5874  
[Online Reporting Tool](#)  
[OIG@peacecorpsoidg.gov](mailto:OIG@peacecorpsoidg.gov)

**To:** Jody Olsen, Director  
Gregory Huger, Regional Director, Inter-America and the Pacific Region  
Anni Galdames, Country Director, Peace Corps/Panama  
Angela Kissel, Chief Compliance Officer

**From:** Kathy A. Buller, Inspector General 

**Date:** March 6, 2020

**Subject:** Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Panama (IG-20-01-E)

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

Management concurred with 14 recommendations. All 14 recommendations 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 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 1, 2, and 7, additional documentation is required and is described in the OIG Comments section in Appendix E.

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.

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:** Michelle 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  
Chip Taylor, Acting General Counsel  
Patrick Young, Associate Director, Office of Global Operations  
Traci DiMartini, Chief Human Capital Officer  
Karen Becker, Associate Director, Office of Health Services  
James Golden, Deputy Director, Office of Health Services  
Jill Carty, Director, Counseling and Outreach Unit  
Renee Ferranti, Director, Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response  
Program Da Shawonna Townsend, Director, Office of Victim Advocacy

Shawn Bardwell, Associate Director, Office of Safety and Security  
Mary Kate Lowndes, Chief of Operations, Inter-America and the Pacific Region  
Lindsey Suggs, Chief of Programming and Training, Inter-America and the Pacific Region  
Gonzalo Molina Zegarra, Chief Administrative Officer  
Joshua O'Donnell, Regional Security Advisor, Inter-America and the Pacific Region  
Melissa Meno, Director of Programming and Training, Peace Corps/Panama  
Raul Ramirez, Director of Management and Operations, Peace Corps/Panama  
Stephanie Rust, Director, Overseas Programming and Training Support  
Marie McLeod, Director, Office of Global Health and HIV  
Jeffrey Kwiecinski, Deputy Director, Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning  
Kweku Boafo, Director, Peace Corps Response  
Panama Country Desk



Peace Corps  
Office of

# INSPECTOR GENERAL



*A Volunteer and community members at his site*

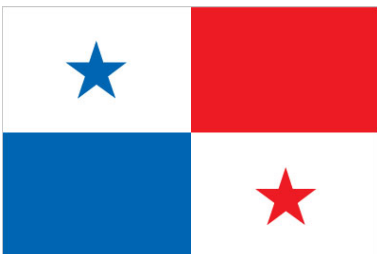
---

## Final Country Program Evaluation

Peace Corps/Panama

IG-20-01-E

March 2020



---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

### *BACKGROUND*

---

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an evaluation of Peace Corps/Panama (hereafter referred to as “the post”) from September 23 to October 11, 2019. More than 2,800. Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Panama since the program first opened in 1963. At the time of our fieldwork, there were four project sectors in Panama, including: (1) education, (2) environment, (3) agriculture, and (4) health, as well as a Peace Corps Response program. At the onset of this evaluation, 193 Volunteers were serving in Panama. The post had 52 staff members and a Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget of approximately \$4.2 million.

### *WHAT WE FOUND*

---

**Programming:** Volunteers were largely working in areas of need and staff provided them with sufficient programmatic support. However, the post’s HIV activities were not aligned with the country’s stated development priorities or project framework. Also, staff across all project sectors reported challenges with the project objective indicators and targets, resulting in an ineffective system for accountability and program improvement.

**Training:** Post staff successfully assessed the effectiveness of training in preparing Volunteers for service. Language and cultural training in Panama were effective due to the full-time language and cultural facilitators on staff. Strong language and cultural training contributed to Volunteers’ effective integration into their communities. Training on mental health care, however, required improvement.

**Site Management:** We found that the post’s site identification strategy was effective; staff conducted visits to Volunteers during service, as required; and staff trained host families and counterparts, as required. However, some Volunteer houses did not meet the post’s safety criteria. Upon inspection, several Volunteer houses were missing locks on the doors, which posed an increased risk for burglaries. In addition, site history files were not complete, organized, and used for site development which could lead to staff placing Volunteers in unsafe sites.

**Volunteer Safety:** We found that Volunteers reported crimes to the post, the post’s transportation policy was adequate, and Volunteers were well integrated in their communities. However, some Volunteers we interviewed were not able to correctly identify their consolidation point, and therefore may not have sufficient information on where to go in the event of an emergency.

**Volunteer Health:** Volunteers were generally satisfied with the medical support they received, and Peace Corps medical officers reported no challenges in supporting Volunteers with medical accommodations. The post’s medical action plan did not fully comply with agency-wide guidelines. The post may not be sufficiently prepared to respond to a medical emergency, increasing the risk of adverse health outcomes for Volunteers.

**Administration:** We had no concerns with the housing allowance. The settling-in allowances, however, were inadequate, particularly for those Volunteers moving into unfurnished houses. Also, the post did not effectively administer the allowance surveys, and too few Volunteers responded. This left the post with insufficient information to make decisions about allowances.

**Communication and Collaboration:** The post effectively communicated and collaborated with headquarters staff, the embassy, local partners, and Volunteers. However, the executive team did not effectively communicate with senior staff about decision making, and the administrative unit did not effectively collaborate with other units. Ineffective collaboration and communication contributed to a lack of trust and divisiveness among staff.

**Staffing:** Staffing was inadequate in the administrative and medical units. The post did not effectively mitigate the risks of self-driving for staff. Also, post leadership did not provide sufficient guidance to staff about responsibilities delegated to them, or oversee their completion of required trainings.

#### ***RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF***

---

Our report contains 14 recommendations, which, if implemented, should strengthen post operations and correct the deficiencies detailed in the accompanying report.

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EVALUATION RESULTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Programming .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Training.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Site Management .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Volunteer Safety and Security.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Volunteer Health Support.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Volunteer Administrative Support.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Communication and Collaboration.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Staffing Resources .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: OIG COMMENTS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT .....</b>	<b>38</b>



## HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The Republic of Panama is located in Central America. It is bordered by Costa Rica to the west, Columbia to the southeast, the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. According to the United Nations Development Programme's human development index (HDI),<sup>1</sup> Panama is ranked in the high human development category. Between 1990 and 2017, Panama's HDI increased nearly 20%. Between



Figure 1: Map of Panama.

2006 and 2012, poverty in Panama reduced by 10 percent. Panama has a dollar-based economy with a well-developed service sector which accounts for more than three-quarters of the GDP. However, Panama has the second worst income distribution in Latin America. Rates of income and gender inequality are relatively high. Nearly one-quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. Rural and indigenous communities have not benefitted from economic growth as much as urban areas. Approximately 12 percent of Panama's population is indigenous Native American. In rural areas, 42 percent of the population lacks improved sanitation facilities<sup>2</sup>, and 11 percent lacks improved drinking water. Nearly one-fifth of the labor force works in the agricultural sector. Environmental issues include water pollution, deforestation, and soil erosion.

## PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND

OIG conducted fieldwork for this program evaluation of Peace Corps/Panama from September 23 to October 11, 2019. OIG previously evaluated the post in 1998 and audited the post in 2018. At the time of our fieldwork, a total of 2,806 Peace Corps Volunteers had served in Panama since the post opened in 1963. The post had closed in 1971 due to political and security concerns and reopened in 1990.

The post's total annual budget for FY 2019 was \$4,178,900<sup>3</sup>. During our evaluation, the post had 193 Volunteers serving in 4 project sectors, supported by 52 staff members. The three U.S. direct hire positions were the country director (CD), the director of programming and training (DPT),

<sup>1</sup> "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.

<sup>2</sup> "Improved sanitation includes sanitation facilities that hygienically separate human excreta from human contact." World Health Organization [https://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/monitoring/jmp2012/key\\_terms/en/](https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2012/key_terms/en/)

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

and the deputy director of programming and training (DDPT). The director of management and operations (DMO) was a local hire.

The four project sectors included: (1) education, (2) environment, (3) agriculture, and (4) health. Volunteers were divided fairly evenly across sectors—47 were in education, 62 were in environment, 40 were in agriculture, and 51 were in health. Education and environment Volunteers arrived for pre-service training in February, and agriculture and health Volunteers arrived in June. Typical activities for the four project sectors included:

- **Education: Teaching English, Leadership, and Life Skills (TELLS)**  
English language instruction, teacher training, co-teaching, curriculum development, English clubs, life-skills, and professional skills development.
- **Environment: Community Environmental Conservation (CEC)**  
Watershed protection, working with community groups, aiding primary schools, promoting resource conservation, appropriate technologies, waste management, organic gardening, eco stoves, and reforestation.
- **Agriculture: Sustainable Agriculture Systems (SAS)**  
Assistance to indigenous and rural communities; information exchange in best agricultural practices to improve food security; improving production of staple crops, cash crops, soil improvement, organic gardening; management and storage practices; and teaching business skills.
- **Health: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)**  
Helping local groups and committees to improve their access to and management of potable water; promoting good hygiene practices; promoting appropriate technologies for water collection and storage, pit latrines, food preparation, and hand washing.

The post also had a Peace Corps Response program<sup>4</sup> that focused on building organizational capacity. The Response program aligned with the four technical sectors or other cross-cutting sectors such as youth or gender.

---

<sup>4</sup> Peace Corps Response provides qualified professionals the opportunity to undertake short-term assignments in various programs around the world.



---

## EVALUATION RESULTS

---

### *PROGRAMMING*

---

We assessed programming using the following researchable questions to guide our work:

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

### AREAS OF NO CONCERN

**Volunteers worked in areas of need.** We conducted a survey of all Volunteers in Panama and found that 87 percent of respondents agreed that their work focused on meeting basic needs of the poor. Likewise, we conducted a survey of staff and found that 89 percent of respondents agreed that Volunteers worked in poor areas of the country. The post conducted community needs assessments when they identified potential sites where Volunteers would serve. The post's site identification handbook directed regional Volunteer leaders to collect demographic information about the community during their initial visit to new sites. As a result, we found that Volunteers largely worked in areas of need, despite the fact that Panama ranked in the high human development category, as noted above.

**Staff provided sufficient programmatic support to Volunteers.** Based on the agency's annual Volunteer survey, between 2016 and 2018 Volunteer satisfaction with technical project support from staff steadily increased. In 2018, all program areas were rated above global and regional averages. Among Volunteers we surveyed, most described program staff as supportive.

### AREAS OF PROGRAMMING THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION

Our evaluation uncovered some programming areas that required management attention, including alignment with the country's stated development priorities and achievement of project objectives. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

***HIV activities were not aligned with the country's stated development priorities or project framework.***

The agency's global Programming, Training, and Evaluation Guidance states that "Peace Corps projects support host country priorities at the national and local levels." The national development plan, Panama 2030, included the following priority areas: poverty reduction; food security, nutrition and agriculture; health and wellbeing; education; social equality; industry and infrastructure; and ocean conservation.

We found that Volunteers assigned to the WASH sector engaged in HIV activities, which were not aligned with the country's stated development priorities or the project framework. While Panama's plan did cover sexual and reproductive health, the stated goal was focused broadly on

health and wellbeing. The prevalence of HIV in Panama was low (0.9 percent in 2018). Post staff acknowledged that the WASH project framework did not include goals and objectives related to HIV.

We found that the WASH project framework lacked a clear focus and this contributed to Volunteers working in activities outside of the project framework. Staff sometimes referred to the project generally as a health project, and other times referred to it more specifically as the water, sanitation, and hygiene project. As one staff member described, the WASH project had, ‘an identity crisis between public health and infrastructure’. Staff explained that the project framework was not based on an assessment of community needs because the most recent project design was rushed. Over time, the project focus transitioned from infrastructure development to behavior change, such as hand washing and safe food preparation. Staff turnover and prolonged vacancies on the programming team contributed to the lack of vision for the project. Staff described how project activities changed based on the experience and interests of staff, as opposed to the needs and interests of the communities where Volunteers served. Staff reported that the post had plans to redesign the WASH project in the upcoming year.

The lack of focus in the WASH project made it difficult for Volunteers to achieve sector goals, described in more detail in a subsequent finding. Because some Volunteers in the sector were generalists and others were engineers, the post experienced challenges providing technical training to a diverse audience. The project previously administered grants for infrastructure improvements and Volunteers reported challenges meeting the expectations of some community members for material support.

**We recommend:**

- 1. That the director of programming and training align the health project goals with national development goals and the work Volunteers can realistically accomplish as part of the agency’s programming, training, and evaluation realignment process.**

***The post had an ineffective system for accountability and program improvement.***

One of the agency’s strategic goals for FYs 2018-2022 was to improve Volunteer effectiveness through developing and implementing a project-level monitoring and evaluation strategy. We found that the post did not have a monitoring, reporting, and evaluation action plan as described in the global guidance on programming, training, and evaluation. According to the agency-wide guidance, at minimum, the post should do the following:

- A. Design and develop systems based on reporting and evidence-based decision needs. Prepare Volunteers for data collection.
- B. Collect high-quality monitoring data and internally report on progress toward project goals.
- C. Analyze and interpret data; report, share, and learn from data.
- D. Assess progress, processes, and make revisions and decisions based on evidence.

OIG reviewed the project status reports for all sectors. The project status report contains the goals, objectives, indicators, and results for each year of the project. We found that, with the

exception of Peace Corps Response, the “life-of-project” results<sup>5</sup> for all four projects (TELLS, CEC, SAS, and WASH) fell below targets for almost all of the indicators. In addition, the WASH project was not achieving most of its annual targets.

Staff reported that the indicators and targets were unclear and not applicable, which we determined to be the reason projects did not achieve targets. Staff described the targets as ‘subjective,’ ‘arbitrary,’ and ‘superficial.’ Staff also explained that indicators were confusing and driven by global requirements. As one staff member described, “We told headquarters we did not want those indicators. They insisted. Through the whole life-of-project they were low.”<sup>6</sup>

Because of the challenges with indicators and targets, post staff did not have high quality data on which to base decisions about programmatic changes.

**We recommend:**

- 2. That the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation specialist develop an action plan to improve monitoring, reporting, and evaluation that addresses staff and Volunteer capacity, data quality, reporting to stakeholders, and data driven program improvement.**

## ***TRAINING***

---

We assessed training using the following researchable question to guide our work:

- Do trainings prepare Volunteers for service?

### **AREAS OF NO CONCERN**

**Peace Corps Response Volunteers were sufficiently trained.** The post recently revised the training for Response Volunteers and increased the length of training from 1 week to 2 weeks. As a result, Peace Corps Response Volunteers were sufficiently trained and qualified for their positions.

**Staff adequately assessed trainees.** We found that staff adequately documented trainees’ readiness to serve. The post provided documentation that communicated to trainees the expectations for service and how they would be assessed. The post also provided evidence of the training assessment portfolio results for FY 2018.

**Safety and security training was effective.** Volunteers in Panama consistently reported that training on safety and security was effective.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cumulative results for the lifespan of the project.

<sup>6</sup> In 2011, the Peace Corps initiated the Focus in/Train up initiative which standardized programming, training, and indicators across countries.

**Language and intercultural training was effective.** The majority of Volunteers we surveyed (88 percent) reported that language training had effectively prepared them for service. Moreover, 92 percent of Volunteers achieved the required benchmark on the language proficiency index when tested at the end of their 2 years of service. Likewise, most Volunteers we interviewed reported that intercultural training effectively provided the skills and understanding that they needed for service. As one Volunteer described, “there was a lot of interactive cultural learning that was super helpful. It was really fun.” OIG found that one of reasons why Peace Corps/Panama had an effective language and intercultural training program was because the post had a staff of permanent, full time Language and Cultural Facilitators. As a result of the effective language and intercultural training, we found that Volunteers were well integrated into their communities.

#### **AREAS OF TRAINING THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation found that training on mental health required management attention. The remainder of this section provides more information about this finding.

##### ***Training on mental health care required improvement.***

The authorizing legislation for the Peace Corps requires the agency to provide health care to Volunteers during service. Agency guidelines require Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs) to conduct a standardized mental status examination in order to refer Volunteers to a licensed medical professional. One of the key objectives outlined in the agency’s strategic plan is to improve Volunteer resiliency, including to ‘enhance the ability of post staff to address individual Volunteer adjustment challenges and/or resilience gaps.’

Only half of the Volunteers in Panama described training to maintain mental and emotional health as effective. Among the Volunteers we interviewed, the majority of critical comments about health training focused specifically on the topic of mental health. Volunteers reported confusion about the mental health services that were available to them, a lack of clarity about how to access care, and uncertainty about getting sent home if they disclosed concerns about their mental health. Some Volunteers said that they wished the Peace Corps was more transparent about the risk of mental health complications during service. During interviews, a few staff acknowledged that training on mental health was challenging and that there was room for improvement.

As a result of ineffective training on mental health, some Volunteers may have unrealistic expectations for service and unmet needs for mental health care during service.

#### **We recommend:**

- 3. That the Peace Corps medical officers collaborate with the training manager and the Counseling and Outreach Unit to revise the post’s training about mental health care so that it clarifies the process for accessing mental health services and sufficiently acknowledges the adjustment challenges and risks of mental health complications during service.**

## ***SITE MANAGEMENT***

---

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**

**Most Volunteers had motivated and supportive counterparts.** The majority of Volunteers we interviewed said they had at least one motivated and supportive counterpart. In addition, the proportion of Volunteers that reported their local work partners were prepared for their arrival was higher than global and region averages for the past 3 years. The post also provided documentation of the training materials for the required training on sexual assault for counterparts.

**The post selected and trained host families as required.** OIG reviewed the materials the post used to train host families. We concluded that staff selected and oriented families, as required. In addition, the majority (80 percent) of Volunteers we interviewed reported a positive relationship with their host families at site.

**The post had an effective site identification strategy.** The post provided ample documentation that clearly described the site identification strategy for each project. In addition to safety and medical criteria, the post required that potential sites have clearly identified work that met sector objectives and the needs of the community. The post's site identification handbook listed specific community attributes and indicators staff could use to help assess the potential availability of work in the sector. Post staff reported that this topic had been a high priority for the last few years.

**Staff conducted site visits as required.** The post provided documentation of its requirements for Volunteer site visits, including four visits from staff during the 2 years of service for each Volunteer. All of the Volunteers we interviewed reported they had received a site visit from a staff member. Volunteers and staff described how staff often visited Volunteers when they presented the results of their community analysis. Regional Volunteer leaders also visited Volunteers in their areas to provide more informal peer support.

### **AREAS OF SITE MANAGEMENT THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation uncovered some areas of site management that required management attention, particularly Volunteer housing and site history files. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

***Some Volunteer houses did not comply with the post's safety criteria, increasing the risk of burglaries.***

Agency-wide policy requires that all Volunteer housing meets all minimum standards as established by the Peace Corps and the post. The post's housing criteria requires Volunteer

houses to have two locks on the doors. The post's Volunteer handbook requires that all housing must be inspected by a staff member prior to occupancy. During our fieldwork, we observed numerous Volunteer houses that did not meet the post's housing criteria.

Volunteers in Panama were required to stay with a host family for their first 3 months at site, after which they could move to independent housing. The majority of Volunteers in Panama moved into independent housing after completing the required homestay. Volunteers were responsible for identifying independent housing on their own. Staff reported challenges with completing site approval in time for Volunteers to go to site, and described this as a recent area of focus. Conversely, independent Volunteer housing was up to the Volunteer to identify once they got to site so there was not the same time pressure on staff to inspect it.

Staff reported that they trained regional Volunteer leaders and wardens<sup>7</sup> to inspect Volunteer housing for staff to approve, and that staff relied on pictures of the doors to approve housing. While it may have appeared more efficient for regional Volunteer leaders to inspect Volunteer housing, it may not have been an effective approach, given the lack of locks we observed.

Post staff described some of the actions they had taken to address the issues with the site approval process, however, we determined that these actions were not entirely effective.

Recently, Volunteers in Panama experienced increased rates of burglary. The incidence of burglary was something the post was aware of and had tried to address. The lack of locks posed a safety risk to Volunteers given the incidence of burglary in Panama.

**We recommend:**

- 4. That the director of programming and training collaborate with the safety and security manager to develop a plan to improve the post's compliance with safety criteria for Volunteer housing.**

***Site history files were not complete, organized, and used for site development.***

Safety and Security Instruction 401 Site History Files, requires that posts maintain site history files and consult the documentation as part of site development. At minimum, the post is required to document relevant security incidents at sites. In the case of serious crimes, the post can reference the incident identification number in the site history file.

We reviewed the post's site history files and found that crime incidents were not recorded as required by agency policy or in accordance with the post's standard operating procedures for site history files. We looked at 13 crime incidents that occurred at the post between July 2018 and August 2019 and found that none of the crime incidents were referenced in the post's site history files.

---

<sup>7</sup> The post assigned responsibilities to regional Volunteer leaders and safety wardens to help implement the emergency action plan and maintain contact with Volunteers in hard-to-reach locations.



Post staff described how they recently transitioned their site history files to the Volunteer Information Database Application (VIDA). As one staff person described, “The platform itself has been a challenge. We have made strides. Our vision is limited by the platform’s capacity.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to challenges with VIDA, staff reported that their files were organized by year, as opposed to site, and this made it challenging to use the information.

Staff acknowledged that they relied on memory to recall crime incidents. The post’s standard operating procedure stated that it ‘may’ be necessary to consult site history files during site approval, whereas agency policy requires that the post consult this documentation prior to approving a site. By relying on staff memory, the post was out of compliance with agency policy. Moreover, the post ran the risk of missing important information and placing Volunteers in potentially hazardous situations.

**We recommend:**

- 5. That the director of programming and training organize site history files by site, ensure that staff are properly documenting crime incidents in the files, and institute a procedure to consult site history files as part of site development.**

***VOLUNTEER SAFETY AND SECURITY***

---

We assessed Volunteer safety and security 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**

**Volunteers reported incidents of crime to staff.** Many Volunteers we interviewed said they had a high degree of confidence in the safety and security team and would feel comfortable reporting a crime to them. The vast majority of Volunteers we surveyed (97 percent) described the Safety and Security Manager as being supportive.

**The post had an effective transportation policy.** The majority of Volunteers we interviewed (81 percent) said that they were able to follow the post’s rules regarding travel within the country. Likewise, staff also reported that Volunteers were following the transportation policy.

**Volunteers were well integrated into their communities.** The proportion of Volunteers in Panama who reported that they were well integrated into their communities was consistently higher than global and regional averages. The vast majority of staff we surveyed agreed that

---

<sup>8</sup> In 2017, OIG recommended that the agency provide systems to posts for maintaining site history files. At the time of this report, that recommendation was open.

Volunteers were integrated into their communities. The main factors that contributed to Volunteer integration in Panama included language skills, visiting community members, and participating in community events and activities.

#### **AREAS OF VOLUNTEER SAFETY AND SECURITY THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation found that Volunteers' awareness of their consolidation points required management attention. The remainder of this section provides more information about this topic.

##### ***Some Volunteers were not aware of their consolidation points.***

According to agency guidance, the safety and security manager must ensure that all Volunteers are familiar with the name and location of their respective consolidation point. The majority of Volunteers we interviewed (60 percent) did not correctly name their consolidation point, and two Volunteers we spoke with did not know what a consolidation point was. In May of 2019, the Peace Corps safety and security officer recommended that the post conduct a consolidation point test. At the time of fieldwork, that recommendation was open. Conducting a consolidation point test is likely to lead to improved awareness among Volunteers of their respective consolidation points. Currently, Volunteers in Panama may be unprepared to react to an emergency and may face unnecessary risks as a result of not knowing where they are supposed to go in the event of an emergency.

#### **We recommend:**

- 6. That the country director and the safety and security manager conduct consolidation tests to improve Volunteer awareness of their consolidation point.**

#### ***VOLUNTEER HEALTH SUPPORT***

---

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**

**Volunteers were satisfied with medical support.** According to the agency's survey, the proportion of Volunteers in Panama who said they were satisfied with their medical care was higher than global and regional averages. Similarly, our survey of Volunteers in Panama found that the vast majority of Volunteers (96 percent) described the PCMOs as supportive.

**Peace Corps medical officers could adequately support Volunteers with medical accommodations.** The PCMOs in Panama reported that they were able to effectively support Volunteers with medical accommodations. According to the Office of Health Services (OHS), Panama had a variety of specialists that are able to treat a wide range of medical conditions.

**Most Volunteers trusted that interactions with medical staff would remain confidential.** The majority (92 percent) of Volunteers we surveyed reported that they were certain that their interactions with the PCMOs would be kept confidential. In a 2018 assessment, OHS reported that privacy for Volunteers in the medical unit was sufficient.

#### **AREAS OF VOLUNTEER MEDICAL SUPPORT THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation found that the post's medical action plan required management attention. The remainder of this section provides more information about this topic.

***The post's medical action plan did not fully comply with Peace Corps guidelines.***

According to agency policy (Technical Guidance 385), PCMOs are required to maintain a medical action plan to guide the post in the event of a medical emergency. Agency guidelines (Technical Guidance 204) stipulate that the post's medical action plan must include records of the PCMOs assessments of local medical facilities and providers. The Peace Corps requires that PCMOs assess local medical providers and facilities at least once every 3 years using the standard assessment tools provided by OHS.

In 2018, OHS reviewed Peace Corps/Panama's medical action plan and reported that it was complete. However, we reviewed the post's medical action plan and determined that it did not fully comply with agency guidelines. We found that the post had not assessed all local medical providers and facilities identified in the medical action plan using the standard assessment tool. In addition, the medical action plan did not include a regional medical action plan, review page with the date of last review, or instructions for accessing the health unit after hours, as required.

We identified two underlying factors that contributed to this condition. First, the medical unit was understaffed. This is addressed more fully in the finding about staffing in another section of this report. Secondly, we found that the list of local providers and facilities was unclear. PCMOs reported that the list included all known facilities, as opposed to facilities they had assessed for use in the event of an emergency.

The medical action plan is intended to help the post respond quickly to a medical emergency. An incomplete plan could result in potential harm to Volunteers in the event of an emergency.

#### **We recommend:**

- 7. That the Peace Corps medical officers update the post's medical action plan so that it complies with all agency guidelines.**

## ***VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT***

---

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**

**Volunteer housing allowance was sufficient.** Volunteers received a supplement for housing and utilities that was tiered based on locality. Among the Volunteers that we surveyed, 70 percent reported that their housing allowance was sufficient. All of the Volunteers we interviewed said their housing supplement covered their housing costs.

### **AREAS OF VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation found that the settling-in allowance and the administration of allowance surveys required management attention. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

#### ***Settling-in allowances were inadequate for Volunteers with unfurnished housing.***

The Peace Corps requires posts to provide Volunteers an allowance to purchase supplies and equipment for their houses when they move in. The policy, Peace Corps Manual Section (MS) 221, states that posts must assess the prices of commonly purchased items in order to determine the appropriate amount for the settling-in allowance. Over half of the Volunteers we surveyed reported the settling-in allowance was insufficient.

We found that settling-in allowances were insufficient for some Volunteers because the post did not factor in whether or not Volunteers were moving into a furnished house. We interviewed numerous Volunteers who said that the settling-in allowance was insufficient for those Volunteers who were the first ones in their sites. One Volunteer described the situation:

As a first-time Volunteer, I feel that the settling-in allowance should be greater, because purchasing an item such as a fridge alone could end up costing two-thirds of my settling-in allowance—a cost that many second and third follow-up Volunteers do not face. The settling-in allowance should have additional funds allotted for first-time Volunteers.

We also found that insufficient staffing in the administrative unit contributed to the issue of inadequate settling-in allowances. This topic is described more fully in a later finding.

Volunteers who reported insufficient settling-in allowances described how this impacted them:

“I had to buy things over time so I ate meals off a frisbee.”

“Slowly I bought a little more. I didn’t have a pillow for a long time.”

“I had to buy a bed and that was expensive. I had to use my own money. During those months I’ve had to call home and ask for more money. I can’t imagine. Some people have to choose between a stove and a fridge.”

Volunteers given an inadequate settling-in allowance were unable to afford some basic settling-in expenses without supplementing with funds from their living allowance, personal savings, or borrowed money.

**We recommend:**

- 8. That the director of management and operations develop a plan to differentiate settling-in costs between Volunteers with furnished and unfurnished houses.**

***The post ineffectively administered allowance surveys and too few Volunteers responded.***

According to agency policy (MS 221), at least 75 percent of Volunteers must respond to an allowance survey in order for a post to justify an increase in the allowance. We reviewed the allowance surveys in Panama and found that too few Volunteers responded. In 2019, only 7.9 percent of Volunteers completed the living allowance survey. The post conducted the last settling-in allowance survey in 2015, to which fewer than half (44 percent) of Volunteers responded.

The Peace Corps provided guidance to posts on how to administer allowance surveys.<sup>9</sup> This guidance stated that allowance surveys, “should be distributed at a time that will maximize participation, obtain the best data possible, and provide timely results.” Volunteers we interviewed reported several reasons why they did not complete the survey, including that the format was inaccessible to them at site and that they had too many emails. Some Volunteers reported that they did not complete the survey because they thought the allowance was sufficient.

While the allowance may have been sufficient for some Volunteers, it may not have been enough for those Volunteers in dissimilar situations, as described in the previous finding. Staff we interviewed assumed that if the need was greater, there would be more peer pressure to respond to the survey. However, we concluded that the post did not effectively administer the allowance survey to generate sufficient data and accurately assess Volunteers needs.

**We recommend:**

- 9. That the director of management and operations improve the administration of allowance surveys to raise the Volunteer response rate.**

---

<sup>9</sup> Overseas Financial Management Handbook, Allowances for V/T

## ***COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION***

---

We assessed the effectiveness of communication and collaboration using the following researchable question to guide our work:

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

### **AREAS OF NO CONCERN**

**The post had an effective relationship with headquarters.** We found that the communication between the post and headquarters was generally effective. Headquarters staff described the communication with the post as ‘appropriate’ and ‘transparent.’ Likewise, numerous post staff reported no concerns with the communication and support from headquarters. One post staff member described their communication with headquarters staff as ‘fantastic.’

**The post had an effective relationship with the embassy.** We determined that there was an effective relationship between the post and the U.S. Embassy. We interviewed staff at the Embassy and the post. Staff widely reported the relationship between the embassy and the post was effective.

**The post had memoranda of understanding with local partners.** Programming staff reported that the memoranda of understanding between Peace Corps/Panama and its partners generally reflected the focus of programming but that they needed to be updated due to the recent change in the Panamanian government. Post leadership reported that they were working with local partners to update two memoranda of understanding.

**The Volunteer advisory committee effectively facilitated communication between staff and Volunteers.** We reviewed Volunteer advisory committee (VAC) meeting minutes and the newsletter from staff to Volunteers and determined that the VAC was active. Post leadership reported that they met with the VAC three times per year. The majority of Volunteers we interviewed reported that the VAC was a useful mechanism for communication between staff and Volunteers.

### **AREAS OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation found that collaboration between the administrative unit and other units required management attention. The remainder of this section provides more information about this topic. We also found that ineffective delegation adversely effected staff communication and collaboration, however this finding is addressed in the staffing section.

***The administrative unit did not effectively collaborate and communicate with other units.***

The agency-wide handbook for managing a high-performing post states, “The country director and staff demonstrate through their actions that they intend to help the ‘customer’—the Volunteer, host country representatives and beneficiaries, other staff, and any others who have



business with the Peace Corps.” We found that the administrative unit did not effectively collaborate with other units at the post.

Staff provided several examples of challenges they had in collaborating with the administrative unit, including inconsistent practices with forms and reimbursements, poor communication about changes in procedures for forms and reimbursements, improper disclosure of personnel information, and challenging behaviors and attitudes.

Staff noted multiple underlying factors that contributed to this condition. First, the administrative unit was understaffed, as described in the staffing section of this report. Second, staff identified opportunities for improvement in the area of performance management. Third, staff reported that the roles and responsibilities in the administrative unit could be more effectively divided. Staff described how the lack of effective collaboration and communication between the administrative unit and other units had become divisive.

**We recommend:**

- 10. That the director of management and operations develop a plan to improve the administrative unit’s collaboration with other staff.**

***STAFFING RESOURCES***

---

We assessed the post’s management of staffing resources using the following researchable question to guide our work:

- Has leadership effectively managed staffing and staff capacity?

**AREAS OF NO CONCERN**

**The post adequately managed staff recruitment and retention.** Headquarters staff we interviewed reported that staffing gaps at the post were adequately managed. Likewise, post staff did not report any significant concerns about how staff turnover had been managed.

**AREAS OF STAFFING AND STAFF CAPACITY THAT REQUIRED MANAGEMENT ATTENTION**

The evaluation uncovered some areas of staffing and staff capacity that required management attention, particularly the level of staffing in some units, the lack of drivers, ineffective delegation of responsibilities, and incomplete mandatory training. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

***Staffing in the administrative and medical units was inadequate.***

Agency-wide guidance<sup>10</sup> describes a high performing post as one in which “the program has sufficient resources (e.g., staff, vehicles, computers, offices, funds, language skills, training materials) to run efficiently, and these resources are used effectively to support the program”. We determined that the medical and administrative units were not adequately staffed.

Staff widely reported that the medical and administrative units were understaffed. In 2018, the medical assistant position was not backfilled. As one person recounted, OHS agreed that the post needed a medical assistant, but the funding for the position was not approved by the regional office at headquarters. The post recently experienced a budget cut, and senior staff prioritized staff retention. To save money, instead of filling the vacant medical assistant position, a staff member from the administrative unit was assigned additional duties for the medical unit.

The post had experienced some negative effects of under staffing in the medical and administrative units. Staff cited the following examples: drills were not conducted in 2018; other units were asked to take on administrative tasks; administrative staff worked late, on weekends and were unable to take vacations; errors related to medical appointments occurred; no duty driver was available for medical emergencies after hours; and reimbursements were not timely.

**We recommend:**

- 11. That the country director hire a medical assistant and return the shared staff to the administrative unit.**

***The post did not effectively mitigate the risks of self-driving to staff.***

In 2019, the Peace Corps safety and security officer (PCSSO) recommended that the post develop a plan for addressing staff concerns about driving on challenging roads for extended periods of time. The post conducted driver training and identified traveling in pairs as a potential solution. Post staff reported that the driver training was helpful, but that traveling in pairs was not feasible. Even after driver training, staff reported to OIG that they still had concerns about the risks associated with self-driving. We concluded that the post did not effectively respond to the PCSSO’s recommendation to address staff concerns about self-driving. For example, the post could identify those trips that are most risky and prioritize those for traveling in pairs.

**We recommend:**

- 12. That the country director revise the post’s plan to more effectively mitigate the risks of self-driving for staff.**

---

<sup>10</sup> Indicators of a High Performing Post

***Leadership roles and responsibilities were not effectively delegated and managed.***

Agency-wide management guidance<sup>11</sup> states:

The country director appropriately delegates tasks and areas of responsibility to other staff members. Staff members have the authority and resources to carry out these delegated duties and are not burdened by micro-management, lack of trust, or insufficient support.

We found that the CD delegated tasks to some staff without providing sufficient guidance or support. Numerous staff members provided examples of how the CD was not sufficiently involved in overseeing delegated tasks and remarked that they desired more guidance.<sup>12</sup> In addition to insufficient involvement in delegated tasks, some staff also described how staff were working outside their roles. The CD described the intent, “Sometimes there are things the details people can do better than I can. I am fine with them doing that...I like to color out of the lines and invite people to use their creativity and what they have. I like people to have flexibility.”

We found that an unconventional management structure at the post contributed to the problem. The management structure at the post consisted of two different decision-making groups: an executive team (including the CD, the DPT, the DDPT, and the DMO) and the senior staff (including the program managers, safety and security manager, safety and security assistant, PCMOs, information technology specialist, and training manager). The executive team met weekly and was tasked with operational decisions, whereas senior staff met monthly and provided input on strategic decisions. The CD delegated primarily to the executive team, and staff reported that the executive team had become the de-facto decision making body for the post. This management practice was out of alignment with agency-wide management guidance that CDs ensure that staff are integral parts of the team.

Over-delegation to and insufficient oversight of the executive team in conjunction with the limited involvement of senior staff in decision making had several adverse effects on the staff. The post’s decision-making structure left some staff feeling over-extended, while others reported feeling insufficiently involved and disempowered. In addition, numerous staff members described how the management structure impeded communication about decision making and led to conflict. Numerous staff members raised concerns about a lack of transparency in decision-making and described how this eroded trust and contributed to divisiveness. For example, staff described an instance where changes were made to a job advertisement. Because the changes were not explained, staff became suspicious and lost trust in the leadership’s handling of the hiring process.

**We recommend:**

- 13. That the country director develop a plan to improve the decision-making structure at the post so that senior staff are sufficiently involved in operational decisions and supervision and oversight of delegated responsibilities are adequate.**

---

<sup>11</sup> Indicators of a High Performing Post

<sup>12</sup> Specific examples are not provided in order to maintain confidentiality.

***Some staff did not complete Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response training as required.***

The Kate Puzey Act requires the Peace Corps to train all overseas staff on sexual assault risk reduction and response. Based on a review of training records, we found that some staff did not complete the required sexual assault training in 2018. When asked why the training was not completed, staff explained that the post had a week set aside for training and some people may have been out during that week. We concluded that management's oversight and follow-up with staff regarding required training was insufficient. As a result, some staff may not possess important knowledge about how to effectively support Volunteers in sexual assault risk reduction and response.

**We recommend:**

- 14. That the country director develop and implement a plan to oversee the completion of Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response trainings, as required.**

---

## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

---

We recommend:

1. That the director of programming and training align the health project goals with national development goals and the work Volunteers can realistically accomplish as part of the agency's programming, training, and evaluation realignment process.
2. That the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation specialist develop an action plan to improve monitoring, reporting, and evaluation that addresses staff and Volunteer capacity, data quality, reporting to stakeholders, and data driven program improvement.
3. That the Peace Corps medical officers collaborate with the training manager and the Counseling and Outreach Unit to revise the post's training about mental health care so that it clarifies the process for accessing mental health services and sufficiently acknowledges the adjustment challenges and risks of mental health complications during service.
4. That the director of programming and training collaborate with the safety and security manager to develop a plan to improve the post's compliance with safety criteria for Volunteer housing.
5. That the director of programming and training organize site history files by site, ensure that staff are properly documenting crime incidents in the files, and institute a procedure to consult site history files as part of site development.
6. That the country director and the safety and security manager conduct consolidation tests to improve Volunteer awareness of their consolidation point.
7. That the Peace Corps medical officers update the post's medical action plan so that it complies with all agency guidelines.
8. That the director of management and operations develop a plan to differentiate settling-in costs between Volunteers with furnished and unfurnished houses.
9. That the director of management and operations improve the administration of allowance surveys to raise the Volunteer response rate.
10. That the director of management and operations develop a plan to improve the administrative unit's collaboration with other staff.
11. That the country director hire a medical assistant and return the shared staff to the administrative unit.
12. That the country director revise the post's plan to more effectively mitigate the risks of self-driving for staff.
13. That the country director develop a plan to improve the decision-making structure at the post so that senior staff are sufficiently involved in operational decisions and supervision and oversight of delegated responsibilities are adequate.
14. That the country director develop and implement a plan to oversee the completion of Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response trainings, as required.

---

## 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 May 30, 2019. We used 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:
  - Do staff effectively communicate and collaborate with each other, Volunteers, and other stakeholders?
- H. Staffing Resources Management:
  - Has leadership effectively managed staffing and staff capacity?

Senior Evaluators Erin Balch and Kaitlyn Large conducted the preliminary research portion of the evaluation between May and September 2019. This research included a review of agency and post documents provided by headquarters and post staff; interviews with headquarters staff representing OPATS, OGO, RCR, OHS, OSS, VRS; and inquiries to OGHH and OVA. We also conducted online surveys that were completed by 142 Peace Corps/Panama Volunteers and 37 Peace Corps/Panama staff.



## PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

In-country fieldwork occurred from September 23 to October 11, 2019, and included interviews with post leadership and staff in programming, training, and support roles. At the U.S. Embassy in Panama City, we met with Chargé, Roxanne Cabral, and Regional Security Officer, Thomas Rhodes. We met with 4 host country government ministry officials. In addition, we interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 36 Volunteers (20 percent of Volunteers serving at the time of our visit) and inspected 31 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 3 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 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 36 Volunteers, 28 staff in-country, and 18 key stakeholders, including Peace Corps headquarters staff, officials with the U.S. Embassy in Panama, and host country ministry officials.

The following table provides demographic information for the entire Volunteer population in Panama. 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
Agriculture	31 percent
Education	8 percent
Health	14 percent
Environment	42 percent

Gender	Percentage of Volunteers
Female	58 percent
Male	42 percent

Age	Percentage of Volunteers
25 or younger	67 percent
26-29	28 percent
30-49	6 percent
50 and over	0 percent

Source: VIDA May, 2019. Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

# PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

At the time of our field visit, the post had 52 permanent staff positions. We interviewed 28 staff.

**Table 2: Interviews Conducted with Post Staff**

Title	Interviewed
Language & Cultural Facilitator	
Language & Culture Facilitator	
Language and Cultural Facilitator	
TELLS Program Manager	
Financial Assistant	
PCMO Backup	X
Programming and Training Specialist - SAS	X
Training Logistics Coordinator	
Monitoring, Reporting & Evaluation Specialist	X
Executive Assistant	
IT Assistant	
Programming and Training Specialist- CEC	X
Language & Culture Facilitator	X
IT Specialist	
Country Director	X
Programming and Training Specialist - WASH	X
Peace Corps Response Program Manager/SARL	X
Cashier	
WASH Program Manager	X
General Services Office Support	
Language and Cultural Facilitator	
Master Trainer	X
Training Manager	X
Language and Culture Facilitator	X
Administrative Assistant	
Receptionist	
Programming and Training Specialist - TELLs	

## PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Programming and Training Specialist - SAS	X
Deputy Director of Programming and Training	X
Language and Culture Facilitator	
General Service Assistant	
PCMO	
Director of Programming and Training	X
Language & Cultural Facilitator	
Programming and Training Specialist - WASH	X
Administrative Assistant	
General Service Manager	X
Safety and Security Assistant/Back-Up Safety and Security Manager	X
Safety and Security Manager	X
Director of Management and Operations	X
PCMO	X
Language & Culture Coordinator	X
Language & Culture Trainer	X
Program Manager Community Environment Conservation	X
Programming and Training Specialist - TELLS	X
Medical Secretary	
Human Resources Administrative Assistant	
PCMO	
Program Manager Sustainable Ag Systems	X
Language & Cultural Facilitator	
Programming and Training Specialist - CEC	X
PCMO	X

## PEACE CORPS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

An additional 18 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders during the preliminary research phase of the evaluation and in-country fieldwork.

**Table 3: Interviews Conducted with Key Stakeholders**

Position	Organization
Chief Admin Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters
Country Desk Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters
Chief of Programming and Training	Peace Corps Headquarters
Office of Health Services	Peace Corps Headquarters
Office of Programming and Training Support, Agriculture	Peace Corps Headquarters
Office of Programming and Training Support, Education	Peace Corps Headquarters
Peace Corps Response (2)	Peace Corps Headquarters
Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer	Peace Corps Headquarters
Regional Director	Peace Corps Headquarters
Regional Security Advisor	Peace Corps Headquarters
Volunteer Recruitment and Selection	Peace Corps Headquarters
Forestry Engineer	Ministry of Environment
Director	Ministry of Agriculture
Regional Medical Director	Ministry of Health
Doctor	Antiretroviral Therapy Clinic
Regional Security Officer	U.S. Embassy to Panama
Chargé d’Affaires	U.S. Embassy to Panama

## APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CD	Country Director
CEC	Community Environmental Conservation
DDPT	Deputy Director of Programming and Training
DMO	Director of Management and Operations
DPT	Director of Programming and Training
FY	Fiscal Year
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MS	Peace Corps Manual Section
OGHH	Office of Global Health and HIV
OGO	Office of Global Operations
OHS	Office of Health Services
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPATS	Office of Programming and Training Support
OSS	Office of Safety and Security
OVA	Office of Victim Advocacy
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
PCSSO	Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer
SAS	Sustainable Agriculture Systems
TELLS	Teaching English, Leadership and Life Skills
VAC	Volunteer Advisory Committee
VIDA	Volunteer Information Database Application
VRS	Volunteer Recruitment and Selection
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene



---


## APPENDIX D: AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT


---



### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Kathy Buller, Inspector General

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

**From:** Gregory Huger, IAP Regional Director   
Anni Galdames, Country Director, Panama

**Date:** February 27, 2020

**CC:** Michelle K. Brooks, Chief of Staff  
Matthew McKinney, Deputy Chief of Staff/White House Liaison  
Patrick Young, Associate Director, Office of Global Operations  
Chip Taylor, Acting General Counsel  
Mary Kate Lowndes, Chief of Operations, Inter-America and the Pacific Region  
Lindsey Suggs, Chief of Programming and Training, Inter-America and the Pacific Region  
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General  
Jerry Black, AIG/Evaluations  
Melissa Meno, Director of Programming and Training, Panama  
Daniel Hinkle, Deputy Director of Programming and Training, Panama

**Subject:** Preliminary Report on the Evaluation of Peace Corps/Panama (Project No. 19-EVAL-06)

---

Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for Peace Corps/Panama as outlined in the Preliminary Report on the Evaluation of Peace Corps/Panama (Project No. 19-EVAL-06) given to the agency on January 14, 2020.

The Region and the Post concur with all 14 recommendations provided by the OIG in its Preliminary Evaluation of Peace Corps/Panama and will work to close the recommendations by the set target dates.

### **Recommendation 1**

That the director of programming and training align the health project goals with national development goals and the work Volunteers can realistically accomplish as part of the agency's programming, training, and evaluation realignment process.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The DPT in coordination with the MRE Specialist, HQ and WASH team will implement the Programming Training & Evaluation Alignment process starting in March 2020 and concluding in February 2021.

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

- Endorsed health project framework

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** February 2021

### **Recommendation 2**

That the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation specialist develop an action plan to improve monitoring, reporting, and evaluation that addresses staff and Volunteer capacity, data quality, reporting to stakeholders, and data driven program improvement.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The DPT in coordination with the MRE Specialist, Program Managers, Training Manager, and Master trainer will implement MRE sessions, adapted to Post's needs (from the new Programming Training and Evaluation aligned MRE sessions from HQ), during PST, IST and Mid-Service Reflection to reinforce key concepts to address Volunteer capacity and data quality. In addition, the Community Environmental Conservation (CEC) and Teaching English Leadership and Life Skills (TELLS) teams are implementing the PT&E Alignment process through which each sector team will design or revise data monitoring tools to support the Volunteer's effectiveness to collect quality data. The WASH team will start this process in March 2020.

M&E training for staff is already included as part of Onboarding for new staff (since 2016). HQ is developing staff training in MRE – PC Panama participated in the Working Group that developed the M&E competencies needed for each P&T role, and the Office of Staff Learning and Development will develop the corresponding training sessions. In the meantime, for Existing PT&E staff, the MRES will survey them to find out in what areas they need reinforcement in M&E. The MRES will train staff individually according to their specific needs, scheduling the training for the days when said staff will be in the office. Lastly, the DPT will lead the Post in defining its Host Country Engagement strategy and continue to implement said strategy by 2021.

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

- Implement revised MRE Sessions –PST for Group 86 carry out M&E training for PT&E staff according to individual staff needs
- Define host country engagement strategy
- Implement host country engagement strategy

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** July 2020

### **Recommendation 3**

That the Peace Corps medical officers collaborate with the training manager and the Counseling and Outreach Unit to revise the post's training about mental health care so that it clarifies the process for accessing mental health services and sufficiently acknowledges the adjustment challenges and risks of mental health complications during service.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** PCMOs modified the current Mental Health session in February 2020 for PST and IST to detail and emphasize the in-country resources and COU resources available for Volunteers during their service. PCMOs will work with COU to design a flow-chart explaining the process on how to access such resources, which will be detailed during training sessions and serve as a reference for Volunteers during their service.

Special attention will be made on training staff on the challenges and symptoms of mental health disorders a Volunteer can experience during their Service.

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

- Updated Mental Health session slides
- Mental Health Resource flow chart
- Updated staff training slides

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** June 2020

### **Recommendation 4**

That the director of programming and training collaborate with the safety and security manager to develop a plan to improve the post's compliance with safety criteria for Volunteer housing.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The DPT in collaboration with the SSM will review HQ's safety criteria for Volunteer housing and revise Posts' criteria to ensure improved compliance. In addition, the DPT and SSM will lead strategic meetings among the P&T units to manage Volunteer housing challenges and promote effective communication within the teams. In addition, the Regional Coordinators (PCVLs) will be trained on revised safety criteria for housing and support the Post with monitoring changes to Volunteer housing during their service.

During Senior Leadership Team meetings staff will share cases of rental house options pending approval (PCVs still living with HFs, looking for options or pending houses to be built) in order to develop a follow up plan. In addition, after approval of a rental house during site visits or Regional Coordinator visits, houses will be re-inspected in order to validate the condition of the house. Staff or Regional Coordinators will report any changes to the conditions to the Security Team.

#### **Documents Submitted:**

- Revised housing (host family/independent) criteria for Post
- COTE of regional coordinator training
- Volunteer Management Tool

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** October 2020

### **Recommendation 5**

That the director of programming and training organize site history files by site, ensure that staff are properly documenting crime incidents in the files, and institute a procedure to consult site history files as part of site development.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The DPT in collaboration with the SSM will create a SOP focused on utilizing VIDA 2.0 to document crime incidents for effective site history management. Incidents will be reported in VIDA 2.0 by each sector team or SSM depending on the security incident beginning from January 2019 – present. Staff will be trained by SSM on which incidents can be reported in VIDA 2.0, how to report it and the use of the proper language while reporting. Paper files from Dec 2018 – 2011 will be purged (eliminating PII) in order to be digitalized and saved in Post archive share with limited staff access, which is to be consulted if site history was not migrated into VIDA 2.0. This is an effort that SSM will be managing in collaboration with assigned staff by the DPT.

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

- RSA email with instructions on inputting security incidents and Safety and Security Notes in VIDA 2.0
- SS Team incident files
- New SHF SOP
- Reporting in VIDA 2.0 training agenda

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** June 2020

### **Recommendation 6**

That the country director and the safety and security manager conduct consolidation tests to improve Volunteer awareness of their consolidation point.

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The CD in collaboration with the SSM and DMO will schedule a consolidation drill on an annual basis moving forward. PC/Panama will conduct a consolidation test in May 2020 for the Region Ñokribo, Comarca Ngabe Bugle on the days leading up to the Regional meetings.

The SS team will conduct a written quiz at the end of the sessions during PST and IST in order to improve Volunteer awareness of their consolidation point. Post will include an additional question related to consolidation points within the EAP drill questionnaire. Post will place the consolidation points on the office and volunteer lounge maps for Post awareness. Lastly, Post will increase awareness of consolidation points by sharing them in the Post monthly newsletters and in PST and IST.

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

- Photos of updated maps displaying consolidation points
- Report of consolidation point drill
- Written quiz with additional question regarding Consolidation points
- Consolidation points on office Map for staff to consult
- Chart with the consolidation points in order to start a campaign of awareness

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** May 2020

**Recommendation 7**

That the Peace Corps medical officers update the post's medical action plan so that it complies with all agency guidelines.

**Concur**

**Response:** The medical action plan was documented as complete by OHS. PC/Panama will continue to update the medical action plan according to TG 385 as new updates are communicated by OHS.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Complete medical action plan as advised in TG 384 (updated in 2019)

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** June 2020

**Recommendation 8**

That the director of management and operations develop a plan to differentiate settling-in costs between Volunteers with furnished and unfurnished houses.

**Concur**

**Response:** Post will work with Regional Coordinators and VAC board and representatives to identify incentives and consequences for survey completion. Senior leadership and VAC identified the term "survey" as interpreted as optional by the volunteer community. Therefore, Post will rename future surveys as "required reports".

In addition, Post will facilitate administrative sessions during PST and IST to ensure completion of allowance reports. Post enhanced the Settling-In Allowance Survey by creating a fillable pdf form (furnished/unfurnished) to allow PCVs to complete it via cellphone.

Starting G86, Post will require Volunteers to submit the Settling-In Allowance report during their first three months living with host families. Post will conduct an analysis of the Settling-In Allowance based on the reports and change the standard amount accordingly. In the meantime, the unfurnished settling in allowance will remain at \$300 and Post will reimburse Volunteers for any additional costs on a case-by-case basis.

Once received, settling-in allowance will be deposited through VICA. PCVs will be required to keep track of their expenses and submit documentation, including a revised survey to claim additional funds. The report deadlines will be included within the Volunteer Year Plan and Post monthly newsletter.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- VAC Meeting Agenda
- Settling-In Allowance Survey, new format
- Monthly newsletter

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** June 2020

**Recommendation 9**

That the director of management and operations improve the administration of allowance surveys to raise the Volunteer response rate.

**Concur**

**Response:** Post will work with Regional Coordinators and VAC board and representatives to encourage Volunteers to complete the allowance reports (Living Allowance and Settling in Surveys). In addition, Post will send out the Living Allowance reports in September for the PCVs to complete during the month of October. Post will work with Regional Coordinators to secure a session during Regional Meetings for Volunteers to complete pending reports.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Email to Volunteers
- Analysis Report
- Regional Meetings' Agenda

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** May 2020

**Recommendation 10**

That the director of management and operations develop a plan to improve the administrative unit's collaboration with other staff.

**Concur**

**Response:** In February 2020, PC/Panama participated in a Training of Trainer on Facilitation / Coaching Session using the DISC tool, addressing the need for enhancing the collaboration and communication among staff. Post also held a Focus Group Discussion with staff to brainstorm solutions as one team for implementing recommendations. In addition, Post will create a SOP for addressing changes and communication strategies, which will be presented at the all staff meeting. The same SOP will state that all changes will be effective at the beginning of each Fiscal Year. The administrative unit will train staff during the annual Staff Development Workshop in October.

In regards to performance management, to address potential challenging behaviors, PC/Panama will schedule a staff development course for supervisors and supervisees on performance management, including assertive communication, use of coaching memos, customer service, confidentiality, etc. Lastly, Post will solicit a consultation to conduct a task analysis of roles and responsibilities of the Admin Unit and create an action plan, including but not limited to modify division of tasks and/or to advocate for additional staff if need be.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Communications, SOP
- Staff Development Workshop Agenda
- Performance Evaluation Format
- Performance Management, SOP
- Task Analysis Report

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** October 2020

**Recommendation 11**

That the country director hire a medical assistant and return the shared staff to the administrative unit.

**Concur**

**Response:** The IAP Region approved the Medical Assistant position and it is currently advertised through March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Interviews are scheduled for the first week of March. Post will request OHS concurrence for shortlisted candidates and hire accordingly.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Assistant Contract
- Medical Assistant PD

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 2020

**Recommendation 12**

That the country director revise the post's plan to more effectively mitigate the risks of self-driving for staff.

**Concur**

**Response:** The CD in collaboration with the DPT, DMO, SSM, PMs, and GSM will develop a transportation policy for staff. The updated policy will include a map of the areas of most risk, identified sites that require two drivers, specific hours that staff are allowed to drive, criteria to determine if two drivers are required, and a database of possible contracted drivers with 4x4 experience in the areas of risk. It will also highlight other restrictions, such as prohibiting driving at night when alone. The transportation policy will be added to the staff handbook.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Transportation Policy
- Roster of sites
- Roster of drivers per region
- Updated staff handbook

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** June 2020

**Recommendation 13**

That the country director develop a plan to improve the decision-making structure at the post so that senior staff are sufficiently involved in operational decisions and supervision and oversight of delegated responsibilities are adequate.

**Concur**

**Response:** PC/Panama is implementing a one team approach for continued success of post. In addition, Post is implementing a new tool called “The Weekly Notes” to the communication structure, which will help share information among all staff. Additionally, the CD eliminated the executive team structure and instituted bi-weekly senior leadership meetings to increase collaboration, contribution, and communication regarding decision making for Post.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Senior Leadership Team norms and refresher
- Example of the Weekly Notes
- Example Meeting minutes
- Staff Norms

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** April 2020

**Recommendation 14**

That the country director develop and implement a plan to oversee the completion of Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response trainings, as required.

**Concur**

**Response:** This issue stems from a larger agency issue concerning the lack of ability to train in languages other than English. PC/Panama is working with the Office of Staff Learning and Development (OSLD) in Washington for assistance in translating all required training to allow staff to complete the training without limitations. Until that is complete, Post will schedule a training in Spanish for staff as part of an annual Post training during the second week of October.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Excel of completion of sexual assault training

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** October 2020



---

## APPENDIX E: OIG COMMENTS

---

Management concurred with all 14 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. 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 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received. For recommendations 1, 2, and 7 additional documentation is required. These recommendations remain open pending confirmation from the chief compliance officer that the documentation reflected in our analysis below has been received.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That the director of programming and training align the health project goals with national development goals and the work Volunteers can realistically accomplish as part of the agency's programming, training, and evaluation realignment process.**

#### **Concur**

**Response:** The DPT in coordination with the MRE Specialist, HQ and WASH team will implement the Programming Training & Evaluation Alignment process starting in March 2020 and concluding in February 2021.

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

- Endorsed health project framework

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** February 2021

**OIG Analysis:** In order to close this recommendation, please submit the situational analysis, implementation plan, programming and training bridge and the proposed project framework to OIG for review before it is finalized and endorsed.

**Recommendation 2**

**That the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation specialist develop an action plan to improve monitoring, reporting, and evaluation that addresses staff and Volunteer capacity, data quality, reporting to stakeholders, and data driven program improvement.**

**Concur**

**Response:** The DPT in coordination with the MRE Specialist, Program Managers, Training Manager, and Master trainer will implement MRE sessions, adapted to Post's needs (from the new Programming Training and Evaluation aligned MRE sessions from HQ), during PST, 1ST and Mid-Service Reflection to reinforce key concepts to address Volunteer capacity and data quality. In addition, the Community Environmental Conservation (CEC) and Teaching English Leadership and Life Skills (TELLS) teams are implementing the PT&E Alignment process through which each sector team will design or revise data monitoring tools to support the Volunteer's effectiveness to collect quality data. The WASH team will start this process in March 2020.

M&E training for staff is already included as part of Onboarding for new staff (since 2016). HQ is developing staff training in MRE-PC Panama participated in the Working Group that developed the M&E competencies needed for each P&T role, and the Office of Staff Learning and Development will develop the corresponding training sessions. In the meantime, for Existing PT&E staff, the MRES will survey them to find out in what areas they need reinforcement in M&E. The MRES will train staff individually according to their specific needs, scheduling the training for the days when said staff will be in the office. Lastly, the DPT will lead the Post in defining its Host Country Engagement strategy and continue to implement said strategy by 2021.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Implement revised MRE Sessions -PST for Group 86 carry out M&E training for PT&E staff according to individual staff needs
- Define host country engagement strategy
- Implement host country engagement strategy

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** July 2020

**OIG Analysis:** In order to close this recommendation please submit a post-specific MRE Action Plan that addresses how the post will improve staff and Volunteer capacity, data quality, reporting to stakeholders, and data driven program improvement. OIG is interested in seeing improved policies and procedures at the post related to MRE, as well as evidence of training for staff and Volunteers.

**Recommendation 7**

**That the Peace Corps medical officers update the post's medical action plan so that it complies with all agency guidelines.**

**Concur**

**Response:** The medical action plan was documented as complete by OHS. PC/Panama will continue to update the medical action plan according to TG 385 as new updates are communicated by OHS.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Complete medical action plan as advised in TG 384 (updated in 2019)

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** June 2020

**OIG Analysis:** In order to close this recommendation, please submit a medical action plan that includes: (1) an assessment of all local medical providers and facilities listed in the plan using the standard assessment tool, (2) a regional medical action plan, (3) a review page with the date of the last review, and (4) instructions for accessing the health unit after hours.

---

## 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 Jeremy Black by Senior Evaluator Erin Balch, Senior Evaluator Reuben Marshall, and Senior Evaluator Kaitlyn Large. Additional contributions were made by Senior Evaluator Kris Hoffer and Evaluations Fellow Rishi Udeshi.



**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 Jeremy Black at [Jblack@peacecorpsoig.gov](mailto:Jblack@peacecorpsoig.gov) or (202) 692- 2912.

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

Anyone knowing of wasteful practices, abuse, mismanagement, fraud, or unlawful activity involving Peace Corps programs or personnel should call or write the Office of Inspector General.

Reports or complaints can also be made anonymously.

## Contact OIG

### Reporting Hotline:

U.S./International: 202.692.2915

Toll-Free (U.S. only): 800.233.5874

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

Online Reporting Tool: [peacecorps.gov/oig/contactoig](https://peacecorps.gov/oig/contactoig)

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

### For General Information:

Main Office: 202.692.2900

Website: [peacecorps.gov/oig](https://peacecorps.gov/oig)

 Twitter: [twitter.com/PCOIG](https://twitter.com/PCOIG)