




# Office of Inspector General

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**To:** Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Director  
Dick Day, Regional Director, Africa Operations  
Anne Hughes, Acting Chief Compliance Officer

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

**Date:** September 4, 2015

**Subject:** Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Benin  
(IG-15-04-E)

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

Management concurred with all 14 recommendations, ten of which remain open. Based on the documentation provided, we closed recommendations number 1, 4, 7, and 9. 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 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10 through 14 when the documentation reflected in the OIG's comments and the agency's response to the preliminary report is received.

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

You may address questions regarding follow-up or documentation to Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black at 202.692.2912 or Senior Evaluator Greg Yeich at 202.692.1757.

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

cc: Elizabeth Ogunwo, White House Liaison  
Rudy Mehrbani, General Counsel  
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IG



# PEACE CORPS *Office of Inspector General*

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*Peace Corps/Benin Volunteer Sandy Noel (at left) talking to a mother at a baby weighing event.*

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## **Final Program Evaluation Report**

Peace Corps/Benin

IG-15-04-E

September 2015



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### BACKGROUND

Approximately 2,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served the people of Benin since the program was first launched in 1968. At the time of our evaluation there were four projects in Benin: community economic development (CED), environmental action (EA), rural community health (RCH), and teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). At the onset of this evaluation, 96 Volunteers were serving in Benin.

### WHAT WE FOUND

PC/Benin (hereafter referred to as “the post”) coordinated well with the government of Benin and other development partners. The post utilized strategic partnerships with other U.S. government agencies and local organizations to strengthen programming and improve training opportunities for Volunteers and counterparts. However, long staffing gaps in post U.S. direct hire (USDH) positions negatively affected Volunteers’ perceptions of the post senior staff’s accessibility and support. Volunteers were also frustrated with ineffective Volunteer-staff communication. Nonetheless, high performing host-country national staff, coupled with focused programming and training objectives, resulted in most Volunteers having a productive service.

The post was implementing projects that met the development needs of the communities where Volunteer serve. In general, Volunteers reported being satisfied with their sites and engaged in productive work in their communities. However, some Volunteers struggled to achieve project goals with their assigned primary counterparts but were able to identify other counterparts at their sites with whom to work. In addition, the post’s management of Volunteer site history files should be improved to ensure information for successive Volunteers is available to staff during the site development process.

The training program, especially technical training, was highly effective and provided Volunteers with the skills necessary to succeed with their projects at site. The post’s intentional use of strategic partnerships to enhance technical training for Volunteers and counterparts was effective and is a best practice that could be emulated at more posts. One aspect of training that was deficient was local language training. The post recently implemented an in-site local language tutor program to improve Volunteers’ local language skills.

Along with issues identified above, the post struggled with some additional areas of Volunteer support: the settling-in allowance, the Volunteer reimbursement process, clarity on roles and responsibilities of regionally-based staff, and the effectiveness of the Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC). Some elements of the safety and security program also required attention, specifically emergency preparedness and whereabouts reporting. We also found that new staff members did not receive mandatory sexual assault training within thirty days of being hired, which we previously identified in [IG-14-07-E, Final Report Evaluation Report: Training Peace Corps’ Overseas Staff](#) (September 2014).

Resources and management practices were generally adequate for the post to effectively operate. Post senior staff maintained excellent relationships with the U.S. Embassy and other U.S.

government development partners. The post was adequately staffed and regular staff performance appraisals were completed.

**RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF**

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

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## HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND

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The Republic of Benin is in West Africa. Benin is slightly smaller than Pennsylvania and borders Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and the Bight of Benin. Benin has a population of approximately 10 million. The median age of Benin's population is 18 years, and the average life expectancy is 61.

Benin obtained independence from France on August 1, 1960.<sup>1</sup> A military coup in October 1972 marked the rise to power of Mathieu Kerekou, who established a Marxist-Leninist government that lasted until 1989. After the move to a representative government in 1989, the first free elections were held in 1991. This transfer of power marked the first time an African country successfully transferred power from a dictatorship to a democracy. Since 1991, Benin power has transferred between three different elected administrations. The presidency and most ministries are located in Cotonou while Porto-Novo is the seat of the National Assembly.

According to the 2014 United Nation's Human Development Report, Benin falls within the low human development category,<sup>2</sup> ranking 165 out of 187 countries and territories on the Human Development Index. The economy is driven mainly by regional trade, subsistence agriculture, and cotton production and is highly connected to the Nigerian economy. Thirty seven percent of the population lives in poverty. Agriculture employs roughly 70 percent of the population. Environmental issues associated with agriculture include deforestation and desertification. The risk of contracting infectious diseases in Benin, such as malaria, diarrhea, typhoid and yellow fever is high.

Although French is the official language of Benin, there are over 40 ethnic groups and more than 50 indigenous languages. Benin is also a religiously diverse country. The three main religions in Benin are: Catholicism, Islam, and Vodoun.<sup>3</sup>

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## PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND

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Peace Corps/Benin began operating in 1968 and approximately 2,000 Volunteers have served the country. At the time of the evaluation, there were 96 Volunteers serving in Benin. Volunteers were roughly equally distributed across the post's four projects. The post receives one group of trainees each year in June. The training input typically includes 50 to 54 trainees.

The post's four projects can be summarized as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> When the country received independence from France the country was named French Dahomey. The name was changed to Benin in 1975.

<sup>2</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>3</sup> Benin is the birthplace of Vodoun (also known as voodoo).

- **Community Economic Development**

This project was created in 1994. As stated in the CED project framework, the purpose of the project is to help communities in Benin “enjoy sustainable livelihoods in vibrant local economies.” To accomplish this, Volunteers work on two related goals: developing new economic opportunities for community members and improving individuals’ ability to manage their financial situation. There were 23 CED Volunteers serving at the time of the evaluation.

- **Environmental Action**

The purpose of the EA project is to increase community members’ food security and resilience to climate change. Volunteers work with community members, including farmers, teachers, and other individuals in their communities on three goals: increasing resiliency to climate change through proper forest management; improving individuals’ access to food through increased agricultural production and other income generation activities; and increasing protection of natural resources through improved environmental awareness. There were 22 EA Volunteers serving at the time of the evaluation.

- **Rural Community Health**

This project looks to improve the health of individuals and communities. Based at rural health centers, social centers and local non-governmental organizations, Volunteers work with women, children under five, youth, and other community members to achieve two broad public health goals: improve maternal, neonatal, and child health; and increase community member adoption of practices that decrease the risk of malaria, diarrheal diseases, and HIV/AIDS. There were 25 RCH Volunteers serving at the time of the evaluation.

- **Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

This project’s purpose is to increase access to personal, professional, and academic opportunities through English. TEFL Volunteers work with three groups of stakeholders; teachers, students, and community members. With teachers, Volunteers work to improve teachers’ English proficiency and implementation of student-centered teaching techniques. Volunteers work with students to raise academic achievement, develop leadership skills, and improve language proficiency in English. Volunteers also seek to improve the school community by increasing community members’ participation in the school and students’ learning. There were 26 TEFL Volunteers serving at the time of the evaluation.

The post’s fiscal year (FY) 2015 operating budget was approximately \$3.5 million.<sup>4</sup> The last Office of Inspector General (OIG) evaluation was conducted in 2001: IG 01-04-AE, Program Evaluation and Audit of Peace Corps/Benin.

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<sup>4</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.



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## EVALUATION RESULTS

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### *PROGRAMMING*

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The evaluation assessed the extent to which the post has developed and implemented programs intended to increase the capacity of host country communities to meet their own technical needs. To determine this, we analyzed the following:

- the coordination between the Peace Corps and the host country in determining development priorities and Peace Corps program areas;
- whether post is meeting its project objectives;
- counterpart selection and quality of counterpart relationships with Volunteers;
- site development policies and practices.

Through the evaluation we determined that the post was implementing programs that were meeting the development needs of the communities where Volunteers served, and most Volunteers were satisfied with their sites. Although a few Volunteers believed they were placed with organizations that did not need a Volunteer, most Volunteers reported there was enough work to be productive. In reviewing the coordination with the government of Benin, collaboration with other development partners, project objectives, staff feedback on Volunteers' performance reports, and grants, we found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post.

**Coordination with the Government of Benin.** The post coordinated well with the government of Benin. In the past two years, the post signed an updated country agreement with the government of Benin. Since April 2014, the post also entered into memoranda of understanding with four government ministries, one for each project the post was implementing. According to officials from three government ministries, Volunteers were supporting ministry goals and objectives. The post also invited ministry representatives to participate in training and other workshops, such as annual project advisory committee meetings.

**Collaboration with Other Development Partners.** In addition to coordinating well with the government of Benin, the post also collaborated with other development partners. The post entered into formal memoranda of understanding with partners such as Plan International, Population Services International, World Food Programme, and the Songhai Center.<sup>5</sup> Other collaborating partners, such as Strengthening Partnership, Results, and Innovation in Global Nutrition and WASHplus, also supported the post's programmatic goals and objectives. The post was also part of the Peace Corps/United States Agency for International Development (USAID) West Africa Food Security Partnership (WAFSP). The WAFSP is supported by Feed the Future<sup>6</sup> and supports food security related programming in 11 Peace Corps posts in West Africa. The WAFSP Coordinator worked out of the post's main office in Cotonou.

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<sup>5</sup> Songhai Center is a development organization with integrated development approach to find social, economic, technical, and organizational solutions for sustainable development.

<sup>6</sup> Feed the Future is a U.S. Government initiative to sustainably reduce global poverty and hunger.

These collaborative partnerships created a number of tangible benefits for the post's training program and are a good example of leveraging partnerships to support the broader country program strategy. This will be discussed in more detail in the "Training" section of the report.

**Project Objectives.** All Volunteers interviewed stated that they understood the goals of their sector's project "well" or "very well."<sup>7</sup> The average rating for all Volunteers on their ability to accomplish project goals was 3.5.

**Staff Feedback on Volunteers' Performance Reports.** Generally, Volunteers were receiving feedback from staff on their submitted Volunteer reporting forms (VRFs). Our analysis of VRF feedback data determined that 84 percent (16 out of 19<sup>8</sup>) of interviewed Volunteers received VRF feedback from staff for the first reporting period of FY 2015.<sup>9</sup> On average, interviewed Volunteers rated the helpfulness of the feedback as 3.8.

**Grants.** Volunteers faced some challenges related to grants. The functionality of the program used to submit grants, Peace Corps Grants Online (PCGO), in a low bandwidth country like Benin, frustrated Volunteers, particularly because PCGO's did not work offline. As one Volunteer stated, "It is not the content of the application [PCGO] but the access to the application. It would be nice to have an application like the VRF where we download a file, complete it on your computer, and then send it to someone as an attachment." Another Volunteer described a situation where the Volunteer had to travel 40 kilometers to an Internet café for three days in a row to complete two grant applications. The Volunteer then stated "... of course PCGO did not work, so I downloaded the form and submitted them to [the grants team to be entered into the system.]" Because PCGO has an offline workaround solution for Volunteers with limited Internet access, we are not issuing a recommendation at this time.

Another challenge that Volunteers faced related to grants was inconsistent communication with post staff. This will be discussed in more detail in the "Volunteer Support" section of this report.

While the post had many strong programming elements in place, the evaluation uncovered some areas that require management attention, particularly related to counterpart identification and management of site history files. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

### ***Many Volunteers struggled to achieve project goals with assigned counterparts.***

According to Characteristics and Strategies of a High Performing Post, "An unsupportive, frequently absent, disinterested, unmotivated, or disorganized supervisor or counterpart" can "compromise a Volunteer's chances for a satisfying and successful work experience."

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<sup>7</sup> Volunteer interviews were conducted using a standardized interview questionnaire, and Volunteers were asked to rate many items on a five-point scale (1 = not effective, 3 = neutral, 5 = very effective)." The percentage of Volunteers who gave a favorable rating includes those who gave ratings of "4" or "5".

<sup>8</sup> One Volunteer did not submit a VRF for the first reporting period of FY 2015.

<sup>9</sup> The first reporting period for FY 2015 covered October 2014 to March 2015. This reporting period represents the first opportunity post staff had to provide feedback on VRFs for all interviewed Volunteers.

Volunteers described a variety of challenges with their assigned counterparts, including counterparts who had: little or no presence in the community, limited availability to work with the Volunteer because of other work or personal commitments, or a general lack of interest in working with the Volunteer. Comments from Volunteers reflect some of these challenges:

The worst part was my counterpart. When I [did my training] site visit, the counterpart did not do anything ... the counterpart showed me that the NGO [non-governmental organization] does not put value on a Volunteer.

The counterpart is really trying their best, but the person has other jobs and responsibilities. The person teaches full time and the person does not have all the time to dedicate to me.

The first [counterpart] assigned by Peace Corps ... was too busy doing his own thing.

The counterparts need to be qualified and willing to implement.... No one at my [workplace] wants to do the work until they see the Peace Corps truck roll in. PC [Peace Corps] should interview the [workplace] to make sure they're ready, willing, and able.

Program staff acknowledged that identifying counterparts was difficult and were aware that some Volunteers had unmotivated or unavailable counterparts. Because of these challenges, staff encouraged Volunteers to identify other community members to act as counterparts. Fortunately, some Volunteers who expressed challenges with their assigned counterparts reported that they were able to identify effective replacement counterparts. As one Volunteer stated "my [counterpart] was not ready. I have another [counterpart] at the other school and he is ready. Peace Corps needs to be choosing better people and needs to pick someone who wants to work with [the Volunteer.]" Another Volunteer described how his assigned counterpart was rarely at the workplace; however, the Volunteer was able to find a different counterpart who was described as "excellent and top notch."

Program staff reported that it was sometimes difficult to find appropriate, motivated counterparts. According to post staff, counterparts were identified by the host organization, not Peace Corps staff. The head of the host organization or the individual that submitted the request for a Volunteer typically acted as the Volunteer's supervisor. The supervisor was then responsible for identifying a counterpart. Peace Corps staff found it difficult to assess and predict the actual level of motivation and availability of the proposed counterpart to collaborate with the Volunteer. As one staff member stated "It is hard to know if the [counterpart] is really motivated."

Furthermore, the post only provides the incoming Volunteer with the name of one counterpart. The Peace Corps Programming, Training, and Evaluation Guidance, as well prior OIG evaluation reports, have identified the selection of multiple counterparts or community contacts as a best practice. Some posts identify different counterparts or contacts that could assist the Volunteer with project support, community introductions, cultural integration and local language skills.

To ensure assigned counterparts are motivated and available work partners the post's selection of a single counterpart may need to be revised or broadened. Additionally, Volunteers often need assistance in understanding how to work with community leaders, learning about workplace

expectations, identifying other development projects and partners, learning local languages, introducing themselves to community leaders, and integrating into the community. Because a single counterpart may be unable to provide support in all these areas, the post may want to expand the number of community stakeholders who are partnered with the Volunteer. More control over the selection of counterparts, including an approval process for counterparts selected by supervisors, host organizations, or other community stakeholders will also help eliminate many of the current issues Volunteers face with their counterparts.

**We recommend:**

- 1. That the director of programming and training improve the process programming staff use to identify and select counterpart to ensure that counterparts are willing, motivated, and available work partners to the Volunteers.**

*Some site history files were incomplete and were not organized in a manner that supported access to safety and security information for successive Volunteers.*

According to Peace Corps Manual section (MS) 270 posts are required to maintain site history files, which are used by staff during site development to make Volunteer placement decisions and help Volunteers be safe and productive. The Peace Corps' Programming, Training, and Evaluation Guidance recommends that site history files be organized by geographical location rather than by sector or Volunteer group. According to Safety & Security Office "Standard Operating Procedure: Site History Files," the site history files should contain site preparation reports and notes about safety or security concerns.

The post maintained site history files in two locations – one with programming staff and another with the safety and security manager (SSM). Each program manager had a programming-related site history file for all sites within the sector. These files contained Volunteer request forms, site visit reports, and site development packets that included site selection criteria, housing checklists, site survey forms, the Volunteer's job description, and counterpart and supervisor profiles. The SSM maintained a second site history file for each site. According to post staff, the SSM's site history files were supposed to include site locator forms, crime or security incident reports, and a completed housing checklist for each Volunteer residence.

During our evaluation, we found that safety and security site history files did not always contain completed housing checks. While conducting fieldwork, the evaluators reviewed a random sample of safety and security site history files and determined that 30 percent did not contain housing checks. For some of the missing housing checks, they were stored in the programming files. However, other missing housing checks were not maintained in either the programming or safety and security site history files. The lack of consistent coordination between programming staff and the SSM had created gaps in the SSM's site history files.

The ability of programming staff to review readily available site history information is important step in making decisions about future Volunteer placements. We found that the safety and

security site history files were not organized in a manner that supported easy access to safety and security information for successive Volunteers. The safety and security site history files were organized by training group and then by Volunteer name within a large geographic region. Therefore, files for different Volunteers who had served in the same site would be in separate locations based on when the Volunteer served. It was not possible to pull up the entire history for a given site without knowing exactly which Volunteers had served there and when they had served. This organization made it difficult to understand the site's complete history and learn about all the safety and security issues that had occurred over time.

These weaknesses in the post's site history files could create security risks for Volunteers. When the staff who participates in site development cannot easily access safety and security information related to successive generations of Volunteers at a potential site, Volunteers may be inadvertently placed in sites that expose them to greater safety and security risks.

**We recommend:**

- 2. That the director of programming and training, programming staff, and the safety and security manager develop and implement a process to ensure that all required documentation is included in the safety and security site history files.**
- 3. That the safety and security manager organize the safety and security site history files geographically to include all Volunteers who have served or are serving at a site.**

## ***TRAINING***

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Another objective of the post evaluation is to answer the question, "Does training prepare Volunteers for Peace Corps service?" To answer this question we considered such factors as training adequacy and planning and development of the training life cycle.

The post's training program worked well to prepare Volunteers in most aspects of Peace Corps service. During the evaluation, the training program stood out as an area of high performance for the post, especially technical training. The post's use of strategic partnerships was one reason for the highly effective technical training. The post had utilized strategic partnerships with other development partners to support many technical training opportunities for Volunteers. Partners provided financial resources, technical experts, and training material to support Volunteers.

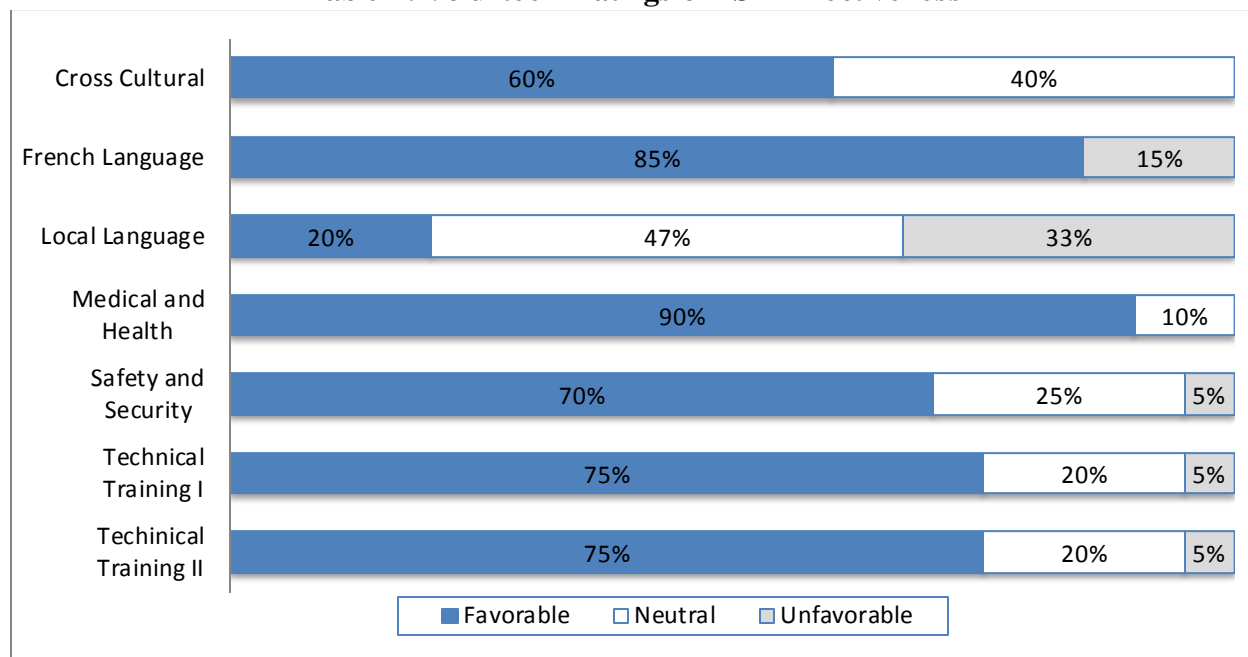
Another aspect of the post's Volunteer training that supported such positive results was the extent which staff from the programming, medical, and safety and security units worked well together to develop a solid training program. In reviewing trainee assessments and staff involvement in training development we found no significant areas of concerns that would necessitate action by the post.

**Trainee Assessments.** Staff used a variety of methods to determine whether trainees were prepared to serve as Volunteers. The post implemented a trainee assessment portfolio and conducted post-tests for safety and security, medical, and administration policies. In addition, trainees were tested on their French language proficiency. In the past two training inputs, 91 percent of trainees achieved the post’s requirement of “intermediate high” in French. French language test scores were maintained and all Volunteers who had not passed at the end of pre-service training (PST) were retested three months later. All retested Volunteers achieved the post’s language requirement.

**Staff Involvement in Training Development.** The post included staff from multiple units to support training. Programming, medical, and safety and security staff stated they were included in training design, development, and revision. The post used an annual training design and evaluation review process, which included a training review, training design workshop, and training-of-trainers before each PST.

**Volunteers Views on Training.** Interviewed Volunteers had positive views about almost all areas of PST and all interviewed Volunteers rated mid-service training as favorable.

**Table 1. Volunteer Ratings of PST Effectiveness**



Source: Volunteer interviews conducted by OIG evaluators.

Overall, most Volunteers felt PST was effective. Volunteers generally described cross cultural training as effective, while some Volunteers commented that the cross cultural training was centered on southern Benin and did not always cover the cultural differences throughout the country. Volunteers also felt the safety and security training was effective, though a few Volunteers expressed a desire to learn more about Vodoun fetishes that might affect their safety and security at site. Volunteers overwhelmingly agreed that the medical and health training was

effective. Volunteers also reported that technical training, including technical training II,<sup>10</sup> was effective.

Volunteers' perceptions of language training effectiveness were mixed, but Volunteers believed that French language training was effective. They stated that the limited local language training they received during PST was not effective. The area of PST that needed the most improvement is local language training.

The remainder of this section will provide more information about post's utilization of strategic partnerships to strengthen technical training and local language training.

***The post leveraged resources from partners to provide strong technical training for both Volunteers and counterparts.***

MS 201 "Eligibility and Standards for Peace Corps Service" states that by the end of training, a trainee must demonstrate a proficiency in the technical skills needed to carry out their service.

The post provided effective technical training to Volunteers. The effectiveness of technical training was enhanced by post's utilization of strategic partnerships. The post leveraged resources from these partnerships to provide many technical training opportunities to Volunteers and counterparts. The abundance of technical training allowed the post to provide training that was focused on the specific projects Volunteers were working on at site. Volunteers had the opportunity to develop skills specifically relevant to their project work at site. This provision of differentiated technical training in Benin contrasts with other Peace Corps posts, where all Volunteers within a project typically receive the same technical training.

The post provided technical training opportunities in several ways, including mandatory, project-specific in-service trainings (ISTs); optional, topic-specific ISTs; and technical exchanges. Following is a brief description of these training types:

- **Mandatory, Project-specific ISTs**

These ISTs were technical training opportunities that all Volunteers within a particular sector are required to attend. At mandatory ISTs Volunteers learned about a specific skill or topic. All Volunteers within a project learned the same topic or skill because the material was relevant to a goal or objective within their project framework. TEFL and RCH projects held mandatory ISTs. Mandatory ISTs for TEFL Volunteers included safe schools and TEFL cross sector.<sup>11</sup> RCH Volunteers were required to attend the community-led total sanitation IST and nutrition summit, which provided Volunteers with knowledge and skills in enhance their implementation of essential nutrition actions and essential hygiene actions. For the mandatory project-specific ISTs, Volunteers brought a counterpart to attend.

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<sup>10</sup> Technical training II is one-week long technical training that occurs three months after Volunteers are sworn-in. Other Peace Corps countries consider this in-service training; however, this training is considered part of PST in Benin.

<sup>11</sup> TEFL Cross Sector IST provides an overview on some of the post's cross-sector programming priorities, such as malaria, food security, and hygiene/sanitation

- **Optional, Topic-specific ISTs**

These ISTs were technical training opportunities provided to all Volunteers regardless of sector. Volunteers attended optional ISTs with a counterpart they identified. The post provided these optional ISTs to support Volunteers and their counterparts in acquiring specific skills that only a small number of Volunteers and counterparts might utilize at their site. Volunteers had to apply and be selected to attend an optional IST. Volunteers and their counterparts were expected to actively participate during the training and implement the skills back at their site. Some examples of optional ISTs included: school and community gardening; small animal raising; beekeeping and live fencing; water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH) in schools; WASH household water treatment and storage; and Grassroots Soccer.



**Figure 1. Peace Corps Volunteer Dave Amnett (right) and counterparts participating in the Grassroots Soccer IST April, 2015**

- **Technical Exchanges**

Technical exchanges allowed a Volunteer and counterpart to visit another Volunteer or a training center and learn a technical skill that is relevant to a specific activity they were implementing at site or a skill that had not been covered in other Peace Corps training sessions. Technical exchanges usually lasted a few days and utilized other Volunteers, counterparts, or partners as technical experts. Technical exchanges could be organized by

Volunteers, counterparts, Peace Corps Volunteer leaders (PCVLs), or post staff.

The post's use of strategic partnerships to support many technical training opportunities for Volunteers and counterparts likely contributed to the effectiveness of technical training. Based on our analysis of the trainings the post provided to Volunteers in FY 2014, we found that 92 percent of the cost of ISTs came from partnership funds. By strategically using partnership resources to support multiple training opportunities, the post provided Volunteers with the skills necessary to be productive at site. We believe that as a best practice other posts should consider utilizing partnerships to strategically enhance technical training where appropriate.

***Some Volunteers struggled to integrate and implement activities in their communities due to their limited local language ability.***

Though the official language of Benin is French, there are over 50 indigenous languages spoken throughout the country, and most Volunteers need to use a local language throughout their service. Proficiency in local language is an important component of successful Peace Corps service in Benin. As the Peace Corps Act states "No person shall be assigned to duty as a volunteer ... unless at the time of such assignment he possesses such reasonable proficiency as his assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he is assigned."



Some interviewed Volunteers faced challenges in their communities because they could not communicate in the local language. Only 20 percent (three out of 15) of interviewed Volunteers rated local language training favorably.<sup>12</sup> For some Volunteers, these language limitations hindered their ability to integrate into their communities. As one Volunteer said “[I need] local language in this community. People do not speak French.” For others, the limited local language ability made it challenging for them to implement activities in their community. One Volunteer stated, “people [in this community] do not speak French...At [my workplace] people are supposed to speak French, but people do not...I think it is a huge problem.” Another Volunteer said “the youth and women in this community don’t speak much French, so they are not great targets [for activities].”

Post staff acknowledged that limited local language ability is a challenge for Volunteers. However, staff and Volunteers recognized the difficulty providing effective local language training in a country with over 50 indigenous languages. One post staff member stated, “I understand why we are having trouble with local language because there can be five different dialects within the same language.” A Volunteer stated, “there are over fifty local languages in Benin. The language in my community is spoken in four villages in [a neighboring country] and along the border... In fact, the language spoken in my community is a mix of local languages and French.”

The post was being proactive in addressing concerns about Volunteers’ local language learning through an in-site local language tutor program. Through the program the post provided two days of training for the local language tutors. The training was facilitated by post staff and focused on language learning strategies. The training also covered technical terminology in local languages to help Volunteers communicate in their local language while implementing work activities. The trained tutors worked with the Volunteer in their community throughout his/her service, with an emphasis on when the Volunteer first arrived at site. The in-site local language tutor program was implemented in FY 14 so it was not yet possible to determine its effectiveness. Because the post was taking important steps which we believe should improve local language training, we are not issuing a recommendation.

### ***VOLUNTEER SUPPORT***

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Our country program evaluation attempts to answer the question, “Has post provided adequate support and oversight to Volunteers?” To determine this, we assessed numerous factors, including staff-Volunteer communications; medical support; safety and security support including staff visits to Volunteer work sites, the Emergency Action Plan (EAP), and the handling of crime incidents; and the adequacy of the Volunteer living allowance.

During this evaluation, we determined that post provided adequate support and oversight to Volunteers in some areas, including site visits, medical unit management, and regional houses; we found no significant areas of concern related to these areas that would necessitate action by the post.

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<sup>12</sup> Volunteers are not required to answer or provide a rating to any question.

**Site Visits.** Volunteers in Benin appeared to be receiving enough programmatic site visits to meet their support needs. According to post guidelines, Volunteers were to receive at least two site visits during their service. Based on our analysis of the number of site visits each interviewed Volunteer received, the post met or exceeded that standard. Seventy-five percent (15 out of 20) of interviewed Volunteers stated the site visits met their support needs “well” or “very well.” However, site visits from other staff, including the medical unit and safety and security unit have been less frequent recently. The less frequent site visits by the medical and safety and security staff might influence their relationships with Volunteers, thus reducing the quality of support Volunteers perceived they receive from the medical and safety and security staff.



**Figure 2. Map of Regional Workstations**

**Medical Unit Management.** Generally, Volunteers were satisfied with the quality of medical care provided by the Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs). Even though the medical unit had been understaffed due to the medical secretary’s long absence, 68 percent (13 out of 19) of interviewed Volunteers rated the quality of medical support favorably. Some Volunteers reported that the PCMOs can be judgmental and slow to return Volunteers’ calls. Volunteers also stated they would like a Peace Corps medical presence outside of Cotonou, particularly in northern Benin, to improve Volunteer support and to reduce the need to travel to Cotonou every time they need medical support.

**Regional Workstations.** The post maintained a regional workstation in four cities: Natitingou, Parakou, Kandi, and Cotonou. We visited all the workstations during our evaluation and found them to be clean, well maintained, and in compliance with sign-in/sign-out policies.

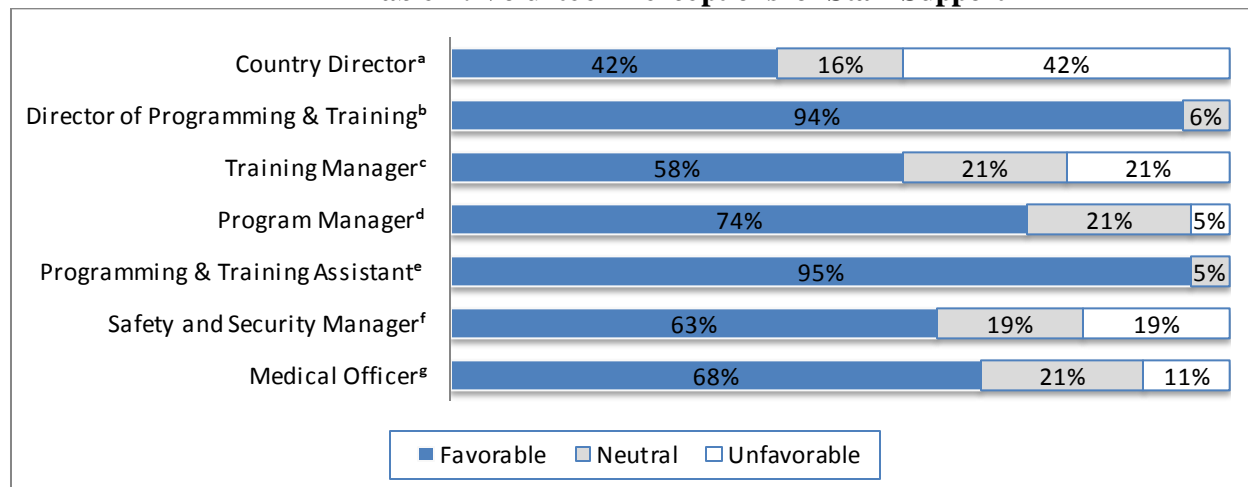
While the post performed well in the aforementioned areas of Volunteer support, our evaluation also uncovered some areas that require management attention, particularly post senior staff’s support and responsiveness to Volunteers’ concerns, Volunteer-staff communication, settling-in allowance, Volunteer reimbursement process, clarity on regional-based staff roles and responsibilities, and effectiveness of VAC. Some elements of the safety and security program also required attention, specifically emergency preparedness, whereabouts reporting, and staff sexual assault training. The issue of newly hired staff completing the sexual assault policy overview and procedure update training within 30 days of start date will be addressed in the “Other Areas of Concern” section of this report. The agency’s unclear guidance related to sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training, which only certain post staff have to complete based on position, will be addressed in this section of the report.

***Staffing gaps negatively affected Volunteers’ perception of the post senior staff’s support and accessibility.***

During our evaluation, Volunteers rated the level of support they received from various post staff. Volunteers reported vary levels of support from post staff. As the table below shows, Volunteers provided mostly favorable ratings for support from the post’s programming and

training; safety and security; and medical staff. However, some Volunteers reported concerns about the supportiveness and unresponsiveness of some staff. Volunteers expressed that the training manager was sometimes hard to relate to and did not always listen to them, and a few Volunteers perceived that the SSM had not followed-up on Volunteer security concerns. Only 42 percent (eight out of 19) of interviewed Volunteers rated the support of the country director (CD) as favorable.

**Table 2. Volunteer Perceptions of Staff Support**



Source: Volunteer interviews conducted by OIG evaluators. Some Volunteers did not answer every question. <sup>a</sup>N=19, <sup>b</sup>N=17, <sup>c</sup>N=19, <sup>d</sup>N=19, <sup>e</sup>N=19, <sup>f</sup>N=16, <sup>g</sup>N=19. Support score for administration was not available.<sup>13</sup>

According to the Peace Corps’ Characteristics and Strategies of a High Performing Post, “the country director has frequent personal contact with Volunteers...Country directors do this to establish and reinforce relationships with Volunteers, assess training and service-related issues, and convey their own messages to Volunteers on a personal level.” Unfortunately, the CD had not established a positive relationship with a notable percentage of the Volunteers. Volunteers stated that the CD did not support them when they raised issues or concerns to him. Volunteers also felt that the CD viewed Volunteers as complainers. Volunteers did not appear to understand the pivotal role the CD had played in developing partnerships that had resulted in enhanced technical training opportunities for them, or consider those opportunities as indicators of the CD’s supportiveness. Nonetheless, Volunteers did acknowledge that the CD did a good job with the administrative and management roles of the position.

Volunteers’ perception of the CD’s ability to support them varied depending on when they arrived in country. Volunteers in the June 2014 training input<sup>14</sup> were far less likely to have a favorable impression of the CD’s support compared to Volunteers who arrived in the June 2012<sup>15</sup> or June 2013<sup>16</sup> training inputs.

<sup>13</sup> At the time of the evaluation, the DMO had not been in the position very long, therefore most Volunteers did not provide a rating.

<sup>14</sup> Volunteers who arrived in June 2014 are considered group 27 Volunteers.

<sup>15</sup> Volunteers who arrived in June 2012 are considered group 25 Volunteers.

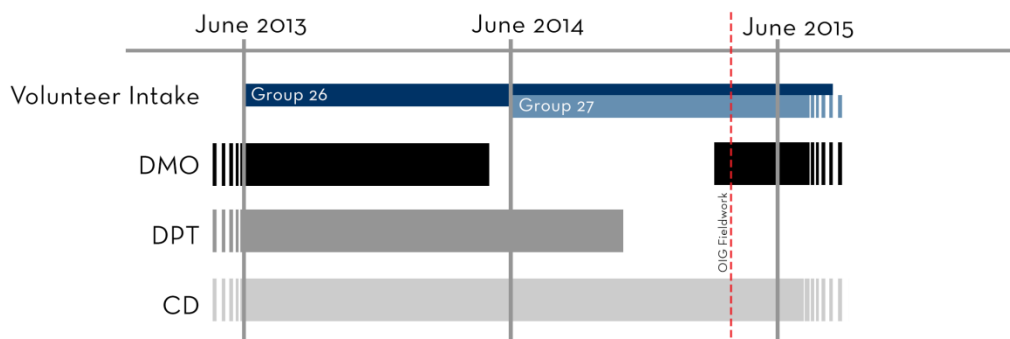
<sup>16</sup> Volunteers who arrived in June 2013 are considered group 26 Volunteers.

**Table 3. Volunteers’ Perception of CD Support by Training Input**

Training Input	Favorable	Average Rating <sup>17</sup>
Groups 25 & 26	70%	3.8
Group 27	11%	2.3

Source: Volunteer interviews conducted by OIG evaluators

Staffing gaps and long absences in USDH positions, particularly the director of management and operations (DMO) and the director of programming and training (DPT), likely contributed to the low support scores for the country director. The post had a 10-month staffing gap in the DMO position during FYs 2014 and 2015. The agency provided coverage to the DMO position through temporary duty (TDY) DMOs. However these TDY DMOs were likely unknown to the Volunteers and would have provided minimum support to Volunteers. The DPT was also absent from the post for six months prior to the evaluation.<sup>18</sup> As a result the CD was the only USDH staff in Benin for roughly five months.



**Figure 3. Staffing gaps in USDH position**

Source: OIG visualization from data collected during evaluation

As discussed in [IG-12-05-E, Final Evaluation Report: Impacts of the Five-Year Rule on Operations of the Peace Corps \(June 2012\)](#) vacancies in USDH positions can contribute to deficiencies in Volunteer support. There was also indication in Benin that any long staffing gaps in the DMO and DPT positions would negatively affect Volunteer support. The results of the annual volunteer surveys in 2012, 2013, and 2014, showed roughly 20 percent of Volunteers responded the CD was “minimally aware” or “unaware” of their concerns and issues, and the agency recognized that some Volunteers had a negative perception about the CD’s support. The agency tried to address this issue by hiring a DPT with good Volunteer support skills. When the DPT unexpectedly left the post for six months, the agency did not provide a temporary duty DPT for five of the six-month absence. Volunteers recognized that the CD and DPT were a team in handling Volunteer issues. They stated

<sup>17</sup> Average rating is based on a five-point scale with 1= very unsupportive, 3=neither supportive or unsupportive, and 5=very supportive.

<sup>18</sup> DPT was on extended leave in Washington, DC for six months.

The [DPT] and CD complemented each other well. You would go to the DPT and she would sit there and figure out a solution. You [would] go to talk to [the CD] about your solutions and he will still come up with his own solutions [to solve your issue].

[The DPT] and [CD] were both well suited where they were...when [the CD] was alone there was a large need for a figure like [the DPT].”

The DMO and DPT absences increased the CD’s operational responsibilities, which reduced his ability to travel and develop relationships with Volunteers through face-to-face interactions in their communities. This made it difficult for Volunteers to receive support from and discuss issues with another American. Furthermore, with the absence of the DPT, Volunteers stated that they lost their Volunteer advocate and the first person they would go to if they needed support or had issues. Comments reflecting the DPT’s roles as a Volunteer advocate are as follows:

It is a bummer that she is not here anymore. Her door was always open ...She was the number 1 advocate for all the Volunteers.

[The DPT was] very affirming and a good listener. She was an advocate for Volunteers.

Our [DPT] is gone...it is important to have American staff to be an advocate for the Volunteers. The staffing turnover and gap is too long.

Extended USDH vacancies created a large additional work load for the CD and left Volunteers with the perception that he was unresponsive to their needs. If Volunteers continue to perceive post leadership as unsupportive, Volunteers’ morale, productivity, and attitude regarding Peace Corps service may suffer.

The agency had begun to address some of the USDH staffing gaps at the time of our evaluation. A new DMO arrived at post in March 2015, and a new DPT was scheduled to arrive in July 2015. However, the CD is scheduled to leave in August 2015 and a replacement has been identified. It is important the post function with a full complement of USDH staff to ensure more consistency in the quality of Volunteer support.

**We recommend:**

- 4. That the regional director for Africa Operations ensures a replacement country director for Peace Corps/Benin is in country as soon as possible to minimize future vacancies at post.**

***Volunteers were frustrated with staff communication to Volunteers.***

According to Peace Corps’ Characteristics and Strategies of a High Performing Post, “the country director and staff communicate regularly and openly with Volunteers, through a variety of means. They convey useful technical and program information and policies, and give encouragement, constructive suggestions, and admonitions, as appropriate.” The post’s Staff Handbook also states “email should not be the sole method of official communication with Volunteers as not all Volunteers have access or ready access to email.”

During our evaluation, interviewed Volunteers expressed frustration with communication from staff. Only 47 percent (eight out of 17) of interviewed Volunteers rated staff's responsiveness to issues favorably. Volunteers described situations where they felt staff was unresponsive to issues they raised regarding security, PST host families, the grant application process, and technical questions. Volunteers also said that sometimes staff did not answer emails. Volunteers felt like they had to travel to the staff member's office to get an answer.

Volunteers' challenge with the grant application process provided a good example of Volunteers' frustration with staff communication. As stated in the "Programming" section of this report, the functionality of PCGO in Benin was limited due to connectivity and other technological challenges. These challenges also resulted in limited Internet access throughout Benin, which made it difficult for Volunteers to access email regularly. Because of connectivity and technological challenges in Benin, which limited PCGO functionality, Volunteers could not always complete the grant application at a local Internet café or the regional workstation. To get around this issue the Volunteers downloaded sections of the grant application and sent them as email attachments to staff. The grant application would be reviewed and processed by the grant committee. However, Volunteers were frustrated that they did not receive confirmation that submitted grant documents were received and were being processed. One Volunteer stated:

"I send an email to [the grants team] to let them know that the grant application was in PCGO and I sent the budget as an attachment in the email. I never heard back from the staff about the grant. I even scheduled a trip to a [regional workstation] to work on the grant and when I got there, I found out that no one looked at the grant."

Volunteer frustration with staff communication was not limited to the grants process. A Volunteer also described a situation where post staff sent a text message to all Volunteers telling them that important security information was sent to them via email. The text had no further information about the content or nature of the email. As the Volunteer stated "[sending a text stating that I should check my email] is fine for me because I can check my email easily, but not all Volunteers can do that. I would prefer to hear about the important security information in the text and then be referred to an email for more details."

Volunteer-staff communication issues were likely caused by the difference in technology available to staff and Volunteers. Generally, reasonable Internet access and cellular phone reception was available for staff in the Cotonou office so it was easy for staff to email Volunteers. However, Internet access was limited at most Volunteers' sites and cellular phone reception could be difficult in some areas. Internet access at regional workstations was also not always reliable or fast enough for Volunteers to complete work.

Volunteer communication with staff was also hindered by the staff's limited use of the cellular phone network in Benin, MOOV. Peace Corps had a MOOV plan to allow users to call or text each other without charge. The plan was optional for staff and Volunteers. At the time of our evaluation, roughly 80 percent of the Volunteer population was on the MOOV network. However, only seven staff member phones and the PCMO emergency phone were on the network. Three program managers, the SSM, and the safety and security duty office phone were not on the network. Moving other staff phones to the MOOV plan, especially the safety and

security duty officer phone, would increase the possibility that Volunteers would be able to easily contact staff members in case of a safety and security incident. Also moving the SSM's phone to the MOOV network should reduce Volunteer's concerns about the responsiveness of the SSM.

Challenges in Volunteer-staff communications resulted in Volunteers' perception that post staff was unresponsive and at times, out of touch with Volunteers. For example, some Volunteers believed that staff did not understand which communication methods were most readily available or practical for Volunteers at sites. Poor Volunteer-staff communication has fueled rumors among Volunteers that post administrative decisions and enactment of policies have been unfair. This negative perception has resulted in some Volunteers' reduced willingness to report whereabouts, crimes, and medical conditions to post. As one Volunteer stated "a lot of Volunteers have gone home and the rumor mill spins. It has consequences because people won't go to staff or the doctors." Poor Volunteer-staff communication and a well-developed rumor mill among the Volunteer population should be addressed in order to improve whereabouts reporting and help post support Volunteers' safety and security.

**We recommend:**

- 5. That the country director and director of programming and training work with the VAC to identify specific ways to improve Volunteer-staff communication to enhance transparency, reduce hearsay, increase trust between staff and Volunteer, when appropriate.**

*Some Volunteers were unprepared to respond to emergencies.*

The Office of Safety and Security's standard operating procedure "EAP Testing and Training" states that the "SSC will ensure that all Volunteers are familiar with the name and location of their respective consolidation point." Each Volunteer received a copy of the post's Emergency EAP during PST. The EAP contained emergency contact numbers, phases, consolidation points, and code words.

During our evaluation, only 62 percent (13 out of 21) of interviewed Volunteers could correctly identify their consolidation point.<sup>19</sup> Some Volunteers misidentified it while others did not know it at all. Although the evaluators gave Volunteers the opportunity to refer to their EAP to identify their consolidation point, only seven out of 17 Volunteers could produce their EAP.<sup>20</sup>

Although Volunteers received training on the EAP and consolidation points, the post did not take full advantage of opportunities to verify that Volunteers had the information they needed to respond to an emergency. We found that 65 percent (13 out of 20) of the site locator forms for

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<sup>19</sup> There is a different interview guide for the PCVL, which does not ask questions rated to rating training or staff member. However the PCVL is asked to identify the consolidation point.

<sup>20</sup> Three Volunteers were interviewed at the office or a training location. Only Volunteers who were interviewed at their homes were asked to produce the EAP.

interviewed Volunteers were missing specific or accurate directions to consolidation points. Knowledge of consolidation points was also not included in the PST final safety and security test. We also found discrepancies for the consolidation points in the Bohicon, Dassa, and Azove regions listed in the full version EAP, which is distributed to staff and Volunteer security wardens, and the EAP reference card distributed to Volunteers. The inability of Volunteers to produce their EAP or correctly identify their consolidation point raised concerns about post's ability to efficiently consolidate Volunteers in an emergency.

**We recommend:**

- 6. That the country director and safety and security manager ensure that all Volunteers know the location of their consolidation point.**
- 7. That the safety and security manager ensures that both versions of the emergency action plan have accurate consolidation point information.**

***The post had an incomplete medical evacuation plan.***

MS 264 "Medical Evacuation" requires each post to prepare a country-specific medical evacuation plan to serve as a guide to assist the post with the safe and efficient medical evacuation of Volunteers. Medical Technical Guideline (TG) 380 provides a detailed list of contents to be included in a medical evacuation plan. Some content that must be included are medevac procedures, emergency contacts, Volunteer contact information, and communication systems.

At the time of our evaluation, post had an incomplete medical evacuation plan. The post's medical evacuation plan did contain medevac procedures, roughly 25 pages of medical specialists and emergency contacts in Benin, and roster of Volunteers. While the plan had a roster of Volunteers it did not contain maps to Volunteer sites. The medical evacuation plan also did not contain instructions for emergency in-country communication services or instructions on how to access the health unit or supplies in case of an emergency. Contact information for local airports was included in the plan; however, procedures for obtaining clearance at local airports by air emergency services were not included in the plan.

Insufficient guidance from the Office of Health Service (OHS) over required content of medical evacuation plans is a likely cause in the post's incomplete medical evacuation plan. The post's medical evacuation plan was reviewed and listed as in compliance in a 2013 OHS site assessment at the post. During the evaluation, when OHS staff was presented the post emergency medical plan, they stated the post's plan was sufficient and that not all required content in TG 380 is necessary in a post's medical evacuation plan. OHS staff also acknowledged that the TG 380 is currently being revised. Clear and thorough guidance on the essential requirements of post's medical evacuation plan is necessary to ensure adequate response and care to Volunteers in the event of an emergency.



**We recommend:**

- 8. That the Office of Health Service revises guidance to clarify the essential requirements of post's medical evacuation plan.**

*Unclear guidance on sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training could result in knowledge gaps for some designated staff.*

According to the Office of Safety and Security "Safety and Security Overseas Staff Training Guidelines" the CD, DPT, DMO, APCD/PM, TM, PCMO, SSM, PTS, and any other staff that functions as a duty officer must complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training within 30 days of their start date. In addition to the staff positions mentioned in the guideline all sexual assault response liaison (SARL) must complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training prior to SARL certification training. The requirement that SARLs complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training was provided to the OIG in a communication with the Office of Safety and Security during the evaluation.

During our evaluation, we found that two recently hired post staff did not complete the required sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training within 30 days of their start date. This included one USDH who was hired within the last six months and attended Overseas Staff Training before arriving at post. When OIG identified this issue, both post staff completed the required sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training during the course of the evaluation

We also found a SARL did not complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training. The SARL has completed the sexual assault policy overview and procedure training and also participated in the sexual assault continuing medical education event in 2013. However, the SARL did not hold a position at post that required sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training based on the safety and security overseas staff training guidelines.

The failure of the SARL to complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training could be the result of multiple factors. One likely contributing factor was the agency's lack of a centralized system to track completion of mandatory staff training programs. This issue will be addressed in the "Other Areas of Concern" section of this report.

A second contributing factor to the failure of the SARL to complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training was unclear guidance provided to post. The guidance available to post was the safety and security overseas staff training guidelines, which can be found on the agency's intranet. Based on the requirements stated in this guideline, the post would not know that the SARL was required to complete the sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity training because the SARL did not hold a position required to complete the training. Unclear guidance on sexual assault training requirements for SARLs could lead to knowledge gaps for some designated staff.

**We recommend:**

- 9. That the Office of Safety and Security clarify sexual assault training requirements for all post staff, especially designated staff.**

***Volunteers were not consistently reporting their whereabouts to the post.***

According to the post's Volunteer Handbook, "Volunteers are required to inform the Peace Corps office any time (including official Peace Corps events) they will not be spending the night in their communities." The whereabouts notification policy ensures that post can contact and locate a Volunteer or trainee during an emergency or crisis.

Despite its importance, only 35 percent (nine out of 20) of Volunteers interviewed reported they report their whereabouts "always" or "most of the time" when they leave their site. Volunteers provided a variety of reasons why they did not report their whereabouts. Some Volunteers admitted to not reporting their whereabouts because they were going overnight to a Peace Corps workstation. Others stated that they did not understand the purpose of the whereabouts policy. In their opinion, because there were other individuals, including Volunteers, counterpart, or community members, who knew where they are, it was not important for them to report their whereabouts to Peace Corps. Other reasons Volunteers gave for not reporting whereabouts were lack of enforcement by staff and the fear that staff would track their time away from site. Volunteers' inconsistent reporting of whereabouts could inhibit the post's ability to communicate with or consolidate Volunteers during an emergency.

**We recommend:**

- 10. That the country director reinforce the importance and purpose of whereabouts reporting with Volunteers.**

***The settling-in allowance was inadequate for some Volunteers moving to unfurnished sites.***

MS 221.4 "Settling-in Allowance" states, "Volunteers are provided a settling-in allowance to purchase necessary housing supplies and equipment. This allows them to be involved immediately in their communities..." Forty percent (eight out of 20) of interviewed Volunteers reported that their settling-in allowance was insufficient. This often occurred when the Volunteer was not replacing another Volunteer at the site. Typically the first Volunteer at a site has to purchase many large, essential home items, such as a bed, tables, chairs, cookware, and other large items. Normally, when a Volunteer leaves a site, these large home items are "passed down" or "inherited" by the next Volunteer whose actual settling-in cost is correspondingly reduced.

Some Volunteers stated that the settling-in allowance was sufficient only because they replaced a former Volunteer. Post provided the same settling-in allowance for all Volunteers, regardless of what was already available at their house. As a result, some Volunteers used personal money or

waited months until they could save enough to furnish their homes to the basic standard for which the settling-in allowance was intended.

**We recommend:**

- 11. That the country director and director of management and operations review and make changes, if necessary, to the settling-in allowance and ensure that it is adequate to cover all reasonable expenses Volunteers sustain when entering their site.**

***The post's late or delayed distribution of Volunteer reimbursements resulted in financial hardship to Volunteers.***

According to the Volunteer Handbook, the post tries to minimize out-of-pocket expenses Volunteers incur when attending post-sponsored event, such as ISTs. The post attempted to minimize these expenses by depositing per diem into Volunteers' accounts before arriving at the event. However, Volunteers still pay out of pocket for transportation to events, and then submit the travel receipts to post. The post processed the travel receipts and reimbursed Volunteers through the volunteer in-country allowance (VICA) system, an application that allowed post to order monthly allowances and reimbursements for Volunteers.

During our evaluation, 40 percent (eight out of 20) of interviewed Volunteers stated that their living allowance was insufficient. This was particularly the case for group 27 Volunteers who had been at their sites for roughly seven months at the time of our evaluation. The following table shows the response break-down by Volunteer cohort.

**Table 4. Percent of Volunteers Who Stated Living Allowance Was Insufficient**

<b>Training Input</b>	<b>Insufficient Living Allowance</b>
Groups 25 & 26	22%
Group 27	62%

Source: Volunteer interviews conducted by OIG evaluators

Upon further analysis, we discovered that Volunteers' concerns about not having enough money on a monthly basis were linked to delayed reimbursements, particularly reimbursements for IST travel expenses. This placed a financial hardship on Volunteers, especially those in group 27. Some reasons for financial hardship among the group 27 Volunteers could be: they were using living allowance to settle into site or they had less time to accrue savings from their living allowance.

When we reviewed the FY 15 expense reimbursement data, we determined that post generally processed IST per diems within a reasonable period; Volunteers received per diems either before the event or soon thereafter. However, the post was not always processing the travel per diem for

ISTs within a timely manner.<sup>21</sup> It took up to three and half months for travel per diems to be deposited into Volunteer accounts after some training events. There were also multiple times when Volunteers waited over two months to receive travel per diems. The following table shows the late reimbursements in our analysis:

**Table 5. Reimbursement Processing Dates for Late Per Diems**

Expense Type	Training End Date	Reimbursement Date
EA Tech II travel costs	December 5, 2014	January 20, 2015
RCH Tech II travel cost	December 6, 2014	March 19, 2015
CARE travel cost	December 6, 2014	March 19, 2015
Dare to Innovate travel cost	January 24, 2015	March 26, 2015
CLTS travel cost	February 18, 2015	April 16, 2015
TEFL IST travel cost	February 27, 2015	April 16, 2015

Source: OIG analysis of VICA reimbursement data provided by post

There are typically two VICA payment periods each month, and it usually takes two weeks to process the reimbursement and deposit the money into a Volunteer's account. Therefore, it is important for post to submit reimbursements into VICA as soon after the training event as possible. It is a multiple step process to submit a reimbursement. Volunteers submit travel receipt at the training event; then after a training event, the programming staff provides travel receipts to the Volunteer liaison. Next, the Volunteer liaison submits the reimbursement claim into VICA within the next payment period. The reimbursement is processed through VICA and deposited into the Volunteer's account. Delays in submitting the travel receipts to the Volunteer liaison resulted in Volunteers waiting over two months to receive a reimbursement. As a result, some Volunteers experienced financial hardship and needed to use personal money to supplement their living allowance.

**We recommend:**

- 12. That the director of management and operations and the director of programming and training develop a process to ensure that Volunteer reimbursements for Peace Corps events are processed in a timely manner.**

***Roles and responsibilities of regional-based staff were unclear to Volunteers.***

The post's Integrated Planning and Budget System: strategic plan for FY 2015-16 stated that the post would continue with its regional model of Volunteer support. The regional model of support allocated resources, including a driver and programming and training assistant (PTA), to the Parakou regional workstation to improve safety and security, site development, housing, and other support to Volunteers. In April 2014, the post moved the PTA for the RCH project to the

<sup>21</sup> For this analysis, OIG assumed that processing reimbursement within a timely manner would be processing a reimbursement within the VICA payment period the expense occurred or the payment period immediately following the expense.

Parakou regional workstation. The PTA continued fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of the PTA position while also supporting the post's regional model of Volunteer support.

Even though more than a year has passed since the PTA moved into this new role, many Volunteers did not know the PTA was at the workstation and could provide support to Volunteers outside of the RCH sector. A Volunteer stated, "She has never introduced herself. She could do a better job to support Volunteers." A second Volunteer said, "My workstation is Kandi. So I don't see [the PTA]." A third Volunteer in northern Benin described an incident where a Cotonou-based staff member was unable to visit the community because of travel challenges. Under this circumstance, the regional-based PTA should have been able to visit the site and provide support; however, she was not called on to do so.

Communicating the PTA's support role to all Volunteers in northern Benin is important so that Volunteers will be able to recognize and utilize the PTA for general support needs. This recognition of regional-based Volunteer support staff is important for the post because in April 2015 the post added another regional-based Volunteer support position. To ensure that both of the regional staff members are utilized as efficiently as possible, the post needs to adequately communicate the roles and responsibilities to staff and Volunteers, especially Volunteers serving in northern Benin.

**We recommend:**

- 13. That the country director and director of management and operations clarify and communicate to staff and Volunteers the roles and responsibilities of the regional Volunteer support positions.**

***Volunteers question the effectiveness of the VAC.***

The post's Volunteer Handbook identifies VAC as a mechanism to improve communication between Volunteers and staff. Furthermore, Characteristics and Strategies of a High Performing Post describes the VAC as one of the best mechanisms to gather and analyze Volunteer concerns and suggestions to staff. However, seven out of 14 Volunteers<sup>22</sup> who provided a rating for the VAC rated it as "neither effective nor ineffective" or "ineffective." Other Volunteers were unable to provide a rating for the VAC generally stated that they did not participate in the VAC because they believed it was ineffective.

There were two main reasons that Volunteers did not think the VAC was effective – they did not think post leadership took their concerns seriously and they did not see any solutions or results. The following Volunteer comments reflected their views:

The VAC meetings are good for new things. But if you bring up something that is critical of staff that is not a good forum. [Post leadership] reacts negatively to critical comments about the staff. I do not know if the issues brought up to [at national VAC meeting] are actually answered.

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<sup>22</sup> Volunteers are not required to answer or provide a rating to any question.

I know the PCVs [Peace Corps Volunteers] on VAC talk about things but as far as getting anything done, I don't know. It's just kind of there. No grand problems that have been solved through the VAC.

I did not go to the last meeting because I did not think the meetings were effective.

Without an effective VAC, the post lacks a mechanism for staff and Volunteers to work together to solve issues, including issues identified in this report, such as poor whereabouts reporting and Volunteer-staff communications. In addition, some Volunteers viewed the VAC as ineffective and decided to not participate in the meetings. A reduction in VAC meeting participation could exacerbate the misunderstandings of Volunteers' concerns. If staff does not correctly understand Volunteer issues and concerns, then staff time, energy and resources to support Volunteers may be misallocated.

**We recommend:**

- 14. That the country director work with the Volunteer Advisory Committee representatives to increase the effectiveness of the committee.**

## ***MANAGEMENT CONTROLS***

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Another key objective of our country program evaluation is to assess the extent to which the post's resources and management practices are adequate for effective post operations. To address this question, we assess a number of factors, including staffing; staff development; and office work environment.

We found that the post's resources and management practices were generally effective for post operations. In reviewing the post's relationship with the U.S. embassy, staff performance appraisals, PCVL roles, and post's strategic planning and budgeting, OIG found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post.

**Relationship with the U.S. Embassy.** The post had an excellent relationship with the U.S. Embassy. Multiple officials from the embassy expressed appreciation for the CD's ability to elevate Peace Corps' work in Benin and collaborate strategically with U.S. government partners. As one embassy official stated, "I have never seen a Peace Corps program that coordinates with the country team like they do. It's separate in the way it needs to be but is also strategic and integrated in an appropriate way."

**Staff Performance Appraisals.** During our evaluation, we reviewed staff files for ten random staff members. All files contained performance evaluations from the past year.

**PCVL Roles.** The PCVL position was being utilized effectively by post. The post had one PCVL position that was funded through the WAFSP. The PCVL did not take on roles or responsibilities assigned to PTAs but instead worked to support food security as a cross sector

programming priority. The PCVL's responsibilities were to support Volunteers with food security grants, write reports, and monitor projects.

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## OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

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We noted the following additional area that could be improved to enhance efficiency at the post.

***New staff members did not receive mandatory sexual assault training within thirty days of being hired.***

According to the Office of Safety and Security's Safety and Security Overseas Staff Training Guidelines all post staff must take sexual assault policy overview and procedures update training within 30 days of starting. The post staff that was hired after the agency rolled out mandatory sexual assault training did not receive the training required to meet agency guidelines.

During our evaluation, we found that three recently hired post staff did not take the required sexual assault policy overview and procedure update training within 30 days of their start date. This included one USDH who was hired within the last six months and attended Overseas Staff Training before arriving at the post. When we identified this issue, all post staff passed the required sexual assault policy overview and procedure training during the course of the evaluation.

As discussed in IG-14-07-E, Final Program Evaluation Report: Training Peace Corps' Overseas Staff (September 2014), the agency lacks a centralized system to track completion of mandatory staff training programs, including these important sexual assault trainings. Furthermore, the agency does not have a consistent, comprehensive training program for newly hired overseas staff. Instead, the agency expects each post to ensure new staff receives appropriate sexual assault training. We found that the post did have an onboarding checklist for new staff; however, that checklist did not include a process to ensure that the appropriate sexual assault trainings were provided to newly hired staff. Ineffective or incomplete sexual assault training may result in staff not having the appropriate skills or information to respond properly in case of a Volunteer sexual assault.

Because all staff completed the required sexual assault trainings during the evaluation, we are not issuing a recommendation at this time. As the agency confirmed in its response to a recommendation in the overseas staff training report, the establishment of a process to ensure all overseas staff are trained in sexual assault policy according to job responsibilities is needed. The situation we found in Benin further reinforces that the agency needs to implement a process to ensure that all overseas staff, including newly hired staff, complete the appropriate sexual assault trainings.



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## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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### WE RECOMMEND:

1. That the director of programming and training improves the process programming staff use to identify and select counterpart to ensure that counterparts are willing, motivated, and available work partners to the Volunteers.
2. That the director of programming and training, programming staff, and the safety and security manager develop and implement a process to ensure that all required documentation is included in the safety and security site history files.
3. That the safety and security manager organize the safety and security site history files geographically to include all Volunteers who have served or are serving at a site.
4. That the regional director for Africa Operations ensures a replacement country director for Peace Corps/Benin is in country as soon as possible to minimize future vacancies at post.
5. That the country director and director of programming and training work with the VAC to identify specific ways to improve Volunteer-staff communication to enhance transparency, reduce hearsay, increase trust between staff and Volunteer, when appropriate.
6. That the country director and safety and security manager ensure that all Volunteers know the location of their consolidation point.
7. That the safety and security manager ensures that both versions of the emergency action plan have accurate consolidation point information.
8. That the Office of Health Service revises guidance to clarify the essential requirements of post's medical evacuation plan.
9. That the Office of Safety and Security clarify sexual assault training requirements for all post staff, especially designated staff.
10. That the country director reinforce the importance and purpose of whereabouts reporting with Volunteers.
11. That the country director and director of management and operations review and make changes, if necessary, to the settling-in allowance and ensure that it is adequate to cover all reasonable expenses Volunteers sustain when entering their site.

12. That the director of management and operations and the director of programming and training develop a process to ensure that Volunteer reimbursements for Peace Corps events are processed in a timely manner.
13. That the country director and director of management and operations clarify and communicate to staff and Volunteers the roles and responsibilities of the regional Volunteer support positions.
14. That the country director work with the Volunteer Advisory Committee representatives to increase the effectiveness of the committee.

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## APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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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 January 22, 2015.<sup>23</sup> For post evaluations, we use the following researchable questions to guide our work:

- To what extent has post developed and implemented programs to increase host country communities' capacity?
- Does training prepare Volunteers for Peace Corps service?
- Has the post provided adequate support and oversight to Volunteers?
- Are post resources and management practices adequate for effective post operations?

The evaluation team conducted the preliminary research portion of the evaluation July 22-September 4, 2014 and January 22-April 3, 2015. This research included review of agency documents provided by headquarters and post staff; interviews with management staff representing the Africa region, Overseas Programming and Training Support, Office of Safety and Security, Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, Office of Health Services, Office of Global Health and HIV; and inquiries to Office of Strategic Partnerships.

In-country fieldwork occurred from April 6-24, 2015, and included interviews with post senior staff in charge of programming, training, and support; the U.S. ambassador; the U.S. Embassy's regional security officer; host country government ministry officials; and partners from NGOs and other U.S. government agencies. In addition, we interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 21 Volunteers (21 percent of Volunteers serving at the time of our visit) based on their length of service, site location, project focus, gender, age, and ethnicity.

The evaluation team conducted an analysis of reimbursement data and IST training cost. Data for the reimbursement analysis was provided by the post Volunteer liaison and covered reimbursements from the start of FY 2015 through April 13, 2015. The IST training cost analysis was conducted using post created cost spreadsheets for all ISTs held from January 2014 to March 2015. Cost spreadsheets were provided by the post's Deputy DMO.

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<sup>23</sup> Although the evaluation was initially announced on July 22, 2014, it was postponed in September 2014. It was subsequently resumed in January 2015.

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

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

As part of this post evaluation, interviews were conducted with 21 Volunteers, 18 staff in-country, and 28 representatives from Peace Corps headquarters in Washington D.C., the U.S. Embassy in Benin, key ministry officials, and partners from NGOs and other U.S. government agencies. Volunteer interviews were conducted using a standardized interview questionnaire, and Volunteers were asked to rate many items on a five-point scale (1 = not effective, 3 = neutral, 5 = very effective). The analysis of these ratings provided a quantitative supplement to Volunteers' comments, which were also analyzed. For the purposes of the data analysis, Volunteer ratings of "4" and above are considered favorable. In addition, 18 out of 21 Volunteer interviews occurred at the Volunteers' homes, and we inspected 18 of these homes using post-defined site selection criteria. The period of review for a post evaluation is one full Volunteer cycle (typically 27 months).

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

**Table 6. Volunteer Demographic Data**

Project	Percentage of Volunteers
EA	23%
RCH	26%
SED	24%
TEFL	27%
Gender	Percentage of Volunteers
Female	67%
Male	33%
Age	Percentage of Volunteers
25 or younger	66%
26-29	22%
30-49	9%
50 and over	3%

Source: Peace Corps Volunteer roster as of March 2015.

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

At the time of our field visit, the post had 72 staff positions. The post also employs temporary staff to assist with PST. Given the time of our visit, these positions were not staffed. We interviewed 18 staff. The staffing configuration of posts often varies and staff may hold additional responsibilities relevant to the evaluation in addition to their official job title. We conduct interviews with sexual assault response liaisons; grants coordinators; monitoring,

reporting, and evaluation champions; and Peace Corps Response coordinators as necessary and when appropriate for the post.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 7. Interviews Conducted with Post Staff**

Position	Status	Interviewed
Cashier	FSN	
Deputy DMO	FSN*	X
Administrative Assistant	PSC	
Associate Peace Corps Director (4)	PSC*	X
Driver (7)	PSC	
Executive Assistant/Grants Coordinator	PSC	X
Grant Manager and Monitoring Reporting Evaluation (MRE) Assistant	PSC	
General Service Assistant	PSC	
General Service Manager	PSC	
Guard (30)**	PSC	
IT Specialist	PSC	X
Junior Financial Assistant	PSC	
Laboratory Technician (2)	PSC	X (1)
Language and Cross-Cultural Coordinator	PSC	
Medical Janitor	PSC	
Medical Secretary	PSC	
Messenger	PSC	
Peace Corps Medical Officer	PSC	X
Programming and Training Assistant (4)	PSC	
Programming and Training Secretary	PSC	X
Receptionist	PSC	
Safety and Security Manager	PSC	X
Site Development and Regional Volunteer Support	PSC	
Training Manager	PSC	X
Volunteer Liaison	PSC	X
West Africa Food Security Coordinator	PSC	X
Peace Corps Medical Officer	TCN*	X
Country Director	USDH	X
Director of Management and Operations	USDH	X
Director of Programming and Training	USDH	X

Data as of August 2014.

\*PSC is personal services contractor; TCN is a third country national; FSN is foreign service national.

\*\* Count includes part-time guards

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

<sup>24</sup> PCR provides qualified professionals the opportunity to undertake short-term assignments in various programs around the world.

**Table 8. Interviews Conducted with Peace Corps Headquarters Staff, Embassy Officials, Key Ministry Officials, and Project Partners**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Executive Director	Association Beninoise pour le Marketing Social (ABMS)
CDC Regional Advisor (PMI)	Centers for Disease Control/Benin
Director	Centre Songhai Regional
English Teacher Inspector	Ministry of Education
Second Vice Minister for Employment Promotion	Ministry of Microfinance
Administrator	Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Leisure
Second Vice Minister	Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Leisure
Regional Director	PC Headquarters/Africa Region
Chief of Programming and Training	PC Headquarters/Africa Region
Chief of Operations	PC Headquarters/Africa Region
Chief Administrative Officer	PC Headquarters/Africa Region
Country Desk Officer	PC Headquarters/Africa Region
Regional Security Advisor	PC Headquarters/Africa Region
Director, Office of Medical Services	PC Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Manager, Quality Improvement	PC Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Deputy Director, Counseling and Outreach Unit	PC Headquarters/Office of Health Services
Program Specialist (2)	PC Headquarters/Office of Global Health and HIV
Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer	PC Headquarters/Office of Safety and Security
Nutrition Specialist	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Program and Training Specialist (Education)	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Agriculture Specialist	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Program Specialist, Community Economic Development	PC Headquarters/Overseas Programming and Training Support
Director of Assessment and Placement	PC Headquarters/Volunteer

	Recruitment and Selection
Volunteer Placement & Assessment Specialist	PC Headquarters/Volunteer Recruitment and Selection
Mission Director	U.S. Agency for International Development/Benin
Ambassador	U.S. Embassy/Benin
Regional Security Officer	U.S. Embassy/Benin

Data as of April 2015.



## APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS

APCD/PM	Associate Peace Corps Director/Program Manager
CD	Country Director
CED	Community Economic Development
DMO	Director of Management and Operations
DPT	Director of Programming and Training
EA	Environmental Action
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
FY	Fiscal Year
IST	In-Service Training
MS	Manual Section
OHS	Office of Health Service
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PCVL	Peace Corps Volunteer Leader
PCGO	Peace Corps Grants Online
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
PST	Pre-Service Training
PTA	Programming and Training Assistant
PTS	Programming and Training Specialist
RCH	Rural Community Health
SARL	Sexual Assault Response Liaison
SSM	Safety and Security Manager
TDY	Temporary Duty
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TG	Technical Guideline
TM	Training Manager
USDH	United States Direct Hire
VAC	Volunteer Advisory Committee
VICA	Volunteer In-Country Allowance
VRF	Volunteer Reporting Form
WAFSP	West Africa Food Security Partnership
WASH	Water, Hygiene, and Sanitation

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## APPENDIX D: AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT

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Since 1961.

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Kathy Buller, Inspector General

**Through:** Anne Hughes, Acting Chief Compliance Officer *AH*

**From:** Dick Day, Regional Director *Day*  
Robert Friedman, Country Director

**Date:** August 17, 2015

**CC:** Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Director  
Laura Chambers, Chief of Staff  
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General  
Jerry Black, Assistant IG/Evaluations  
Ken Yamashita, Acting Associate Director, Global Operations  
Shawn Bardwell, Associate Director for Safety and Security  
Paul Jung, Associate Director, Office of Health Services  
Carl Swartz, Chief of Operations, Africa  
Dec Hertzberg, Chief of Operations, Africa  
Rosemary Traoré, former Director of Programming and Training  
Lisa Mirande-Lind, Director of Programming and Training  
Adam Stalczyński, Director of Management and Operations  
Noel Adjibogoun, Safety and Security Manager  
Zachary Rosen, Country Desk Officer

**Subject:** Agency Response to the Preliminary Evaluation Report of Peace Corps/Benin  
(Project No. 14-EVAL-05), July 2015

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Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for Peace Corps/Benin as outlined in the Preliminary Evaluation Report sent to the Agency on July 2, 2015.

The Region and the Post have addressed and provided supporting documentation for four of the fourteen recommendations provided by the OIG in its Preliminary Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Benin. The Region will continue to work with Post and the departments identified in the

The Region will continue to work with Post and the departments identified in the Preliminary Report to ensure closure of these recommendations by the dates included within for outstanding recommendations.

**Recommendation 1**

**That the Director of Programming and Training (DPT) improve the process programming staff uses to identify and select Counterparts to ensure that Counterparts are willing, motivated, and available work partners to the Volunteers.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** Post believes that the current wording of this recommendation should be changed to reflect realistic and “doable” actions. Post cannot guarantee willing, motivated, and available work partners as there are many factors outside its control. Post recommends that the OIG consider rewording the recommendation as follows:

- 1. That the Director of Programming and Training (DPT) improve the process programming staff uses to identify and select Counterparts to *better* ensure that Counterparts are willing, motivated, and available work partners to the Volunteers.**

**The improved process includes three aspects:**

1. Recognizing the importance of more than one potential Counterpart-Supervisor (Work Partner), during the most recent PST three Host Country Nationals (HCN) (two Counterparts/Supervisors and one local Language Tutor) were trained on how to better ensure that at least one of these partners is willing, motivated, and available for successful collaborative work with Volunteers. The documents we are providing show that there were fifty Trainees and fifty HCN language tutors who participated in the training and for every Trainee there were two HCNs at the Partner Workshop. This newly instituted practice will be continued.
2. Conducting a two-day Counterpart-Supervisor (Work Partner) workshop to clarify roles and expectations. (Agenda included in documents submitted.)
3. Encouraging all PCTs/PCVs to identify/choose other people with whom to work on various projects depending on the skills and interests of those in their communities and let them know that for many ISTs they can bring someone not previously assigned as a Work Partner depending on their level of interest, availability, motivation and/or skills. The message during PST is *“Most Volunteers find that having multiple work partners during their service helps them be more successful. We cannot always select someone for you and guarantee that it will work.”*

**Documents Submitted:**

- List of Participants at PST Counterpart-Supervisor Workshop
- List of Language Tutors trained
- Counterpart-Supervisor Workshop Agenda

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** Completed

## **Recommendation 2**

**That the DPT, programming staff, and the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) develop and implement a process to ensure that all required documentation is included in the safety and security site history files.**

### **Concur:**

**Response:** During the process in which the SSM and the DPT examined all of the current files, it was discovered that some current Volunteers' Site History files were missing the Housing Checklists. The DPT held a meeting with all programming staff on August 4 to reinforce what is required to be in the Site History files. The SSM will verify that every Site Book has a completed Housing Checklist.

These missing Housing Checklists will be put into the Site History files by August 31 and at that time all the files of current Volunteers will be complete including Site Locator Form, Housing Checklist, and any incident reports that are not confidential. With this new input, it is an appropriate time to make a clear and consistent change in the way the programming staff contributes to the Site History files.

The OIG found that one PCV had not as yet turned in her Site Locator Form. The form was completed and filed April 22, 2015 while the OIG was still at post.

### **Documents Submitted:**

- Benin Site History File SOP
- Benin Site History Control Checklist

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

- Picture of Completed Volunteer File

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 30, 2015

## **Recommendation 3**

**That the SSM organizes the safety and security site history files geographically to include all volunteers who have served or are serving at site.**

### **Concur:**

**Response:** Post classifies files geographically and has done so since 2005. However, there was a differentiation in filing arrangement between current and former sites which will now be changed to adhere to the Safety & Security Office "Standard Operating Procedure: Site History Files". The SSM is in the process of moving all former PCV information into one file per site as requested by the OIG. The reorganization of these files will be completed by September 2015.

### **Documents Submitted:**

- Benin Site History File SOP (same as mentioned above)

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

- Picture of reorganized files

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 30, 2015

**Recommendation 4**

**That the Regional Director for Africa Operations ensures a replacement Country Director for Peace Corps/Benin is in country as soon as possible to minimize future vacancies at post.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** Working with ORSS, Africa Region undertook two special recruitments for French-speaking Country Directors. Although the first effort was unfruitful, from the second exercise, Africa Region has recruited and selected an individual to replace the currently serving Country Director. A selection memo has been approved by the Director of the Agency, and a transition plan has been developed to minimize a staffing gap, including a short-term extension of the current Country Director.

**Documents Submitted:**

- Selection Memo for new Benin Country Director
- Extension Memo for current Country Director

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** Completed

**Recommendation 5**

**That the Country Director (CD) and DPT work with the VAC to identify specific ways to improve Volunteer/staff communication to enhance transparency, reduce hearsay, increase trust between staff and Volunteers, when appropriate.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** Post best practices include monthly calls, site visits, participation in PCV projects, and feedback on VRF, etc. Staff expects two-way communication so that PCVs, as professionals, are able to reach out, respond, and react effectively with staff members. VAC committee representatives have been involved in all training events. Beginning with PST FY15 and at yearly ISTs, MST, COS, and as a permanent VAC agenda item, strategies for maintaining effective staff and Volunteer communication will be discussed as an on-going topic.

Additionally, Post has just received new smart phones and all senior staff including the SSM will be issued a phone with dual SIM card (MTN and MOOV) capabilities to ensure country wide coverage.

**Documents Submitted:**

- VAC By-laws

**Documents to be Submitted**

- VAC Agenda – Aug 7 2015
- VAC Minutes from August 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting
- Confirmation of new smart phone integration

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 30, 2015

**Recommendation 6**

**That the CD and SSM ensure that all Volunteers know the location of their consolidation point.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** During PST, the Peace Corps Trainees (PCTs) receive a safety and security session which enables the PCT to identify their consolidation point. All consolidation points are posted and each PCT has to select the correct consolidation point for their assigned site. Additionally, each PCT receives a laminated copy of the short version of the EAP that contains the list of the consolidation points, with instruction to keep it always in their wallet or purse (Safety and Security card).

The PST S&S Post-test now includes a question requiring the PCT to identify their consolidation point venue. The test for PST 28 was given on July 29, 2015. By the end of PST, a second round will be administered to those PCTs who did not pass the first exam. A similar test will be given to PST 27 Volunteers at the Mid-Service Training (MST) in September. The SSM will organize EAP quizzes for all PCVs at different IST training events

The session plan for the EAP which includes a section on the consolidation point has been amended to include a specific action for PCTs to take during their two-week “On the Job 1” site visit. They must pay a visit their consolidation point and be able to correctly name the specific venue before swearing-in.

**Documents Submitted:**

- PST Safety and Security Session EAP Plan with changes
- Example of Short Version of EAP
- PST S&S Post-Test

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- MST S&S Post-Test

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 30, 2015

**Recommendation 7**

**That the SSM ensures that both versions of the emergency action plan have accurate consolidation point information.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** The SSM has reviewed both the long and short versions of Post's emergency action plan (EAP) and has updated both versions accordingly so that each version of the EAP clearly conveys the same consolidation point information and is completely up to date.

**Documents Submitted:**

- Short Version of EAP
- Long Version of EAP

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** Completed

**Recommendation 8**

**That the Office of Health Service revises guidance to clarify the essential requirements of post's medical evacuation plan.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** The Office of Health Services is currently in the process of updating the Technical Guidelines (TG) that contain standard guidance relating to post medical evacuation plans. The revisions will bring the TGs up to date, reflecting current practice in the field and clarifying the essential requirements of posts' medical evacuation plans.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- TG 380 Medical Evacuation
- TG 385 Emergency Medical Evacuation

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** November 1, 2015

**Recommendation 9**

**That the Office of Safety and Security clarify sexual assault training requirements for all post staff especially designated staff.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** Post staff are required to complete two online trainings related to sexual assault. The first training, "Sexual Assault Awareness and Victim Sensitivity" was released in December 2012. Agency Director Hessler-Radelet sent the attached memo titled "Sexual Assault Awareness Training Course" to all Peace Corps staff with instructions regarding this requirement on December 14, 2012. The second training, "Sexual Assault Policy Overview and Procedures Update" training was released with the rollout of restricted reporting and accompanying policies on September 1, 2013. Global Operations included *instructions for staff training* in the attached memo, "Implementation of the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program" on August 30, 2013.

The ongoing requirement of staff completion for these two trainings is communicated to post staff in a variety of ways. The attached "instructions for post staff sexual assault online trainings" document is distributed to all OST participants during the sexual assault policy and procedures session at every OST. To further reinforce these training requirements, the

Office of Safety and Security (OSS) released Safety and Security Instruction (SSI) 101, “Mandatory Staff Training Requirements” in July 2014. The attached SSI is located on the intranet and was sent to all PCSSOs and RSAs with instructions to distribute to their posts in summer 2014. Additionally, all new staff receive an automated email with login instructions to Peace Corps University, the agency’s Learning Management System (LMS), within ten days of entry on duty. See the attached “sample of system generated email for new users”. In addition to their login credentials, this email notifies staff of the requirement to complete the two mandatory sexual assault related trainings within 30 days of their start date. Supervisors are responsible for tracking their staff’s completion of the two trainings and are able to do so via a customized dashboard, access to which is granted by the LMS administrator upon request.

The auto-generation of an email indicating the mandatory training requirement by PCU and ability to track completion via dashboards began in the summer of 2015. Until that time, tracking the completion of the training was a cumbersome process in which supervisors had to cross-check completion records from manually generated reports against their staff lists. The new dashboard tracking capability will also be available with the implementation of the agency’s new LMS set for release in March 2016. At that time, OSS will work with the LMS administrator to further reinforce the mandatory training requirements as well as supervisors’ ability to individually track their staff’s completion rates.

All new designated staff are required to attend in-person trainings due to the need for personal interaction and feedback on providing a victim centered-response to Volunteer victims of sexual assault. The first in-person training event for designated staff took place during the global CME trainings over the course of the summer of 2013. Since that time newly on-boarded designated staff members have been trained at several in-person training events including an in-person SARL training held in Albania in September 2014, Backup and new SSM trainings conducted regionally by OSS during the summer of 2014, and at Medical Overseas Staff Trainings (MOST) held in DC for new PCMOs in Fall 2014. The in-person trainings for new SARLs and SSMs is set to take place in DC in October 2015. New designated staff are required to complete training pre- and post-tests and must receive an 80% or better on the post-test to become certified to work as members of the designated staff team. Existing designated staff have received training from table top exercises delivered by their PCSSOs in FY15. In FY16, all posts will receive SARRR refresher training delivered by PCSSOs and headquarters staff on updates to the procedures for responding to sexual assault and practice-based training on interacting with victims.

The attached Designated Staff training plan outlines the training requirements for new and existing designated staff members. This plan will be shared with all CDs at the Global Leadership Summit SARRR session in September 2015. The training plan will also be shared with PCSSOs during the October 2015 PCSSO conference which they will subsequently disseminate to all of their respective posts during the FY16 SARRR refresher trainings.

**Documents Submitted:**

- “Sexual Assault Awareness Training Course” message from the Director
- “Implementation of the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program” message from Global Ops



- Instructions for post staff sexual assault online trainings (OST)
- Safety and Security Instruction (SSI) 101, Mandatory Staff Training
- Sample of system generated email for new users
- Designated staff training plan

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** Completed

**Recommendation 10**

**That the CD reinforces the importance and purpose of Whereabouts Reporting with Volunteers.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** The Post's Whereabouts Reporting procedures are clearly outlined in the Volunteer Handbook. Reminders have been raised at VAC meetings and through the CD's regular newsletters. This is an issue discussed at PST as well as MST.

In addition to the above practices, the CD, or designated staff member, will explain to VAC on August 7, and subsequently at every future training event, the serious potential consequences to a Volunteer's disregard of Whereabouts Reporting.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- VAC Minutes from August 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting
- Volunteer Handbook
- Training Materials on Whereabouts Reporting from PST and MST

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 1, 2015

**Recommendation 11**

**That the CD and Director of Management and Operations (DMO) review and make changes, if necessary, to the settling-in allowance and ensure that it is adequate to cover all reasonable expenses Volunteers sustain when entering their sites.**

**Concur**

**Response:** Volunteers receive a one-time settling-in allowance of 130,000 CFA (USD \$225) which is intended to cover costs to set up a modest residence. This allowance has not changed in at least 10 years. However, when PCVs receive their settling-in allowance, they also receive a survey form in order to keep track of what purchases they made and how much they needed to spend. They are instructed to return the completed form to the DMO within three months of moving to their post. The DMO uses these surveys to verify whether the amount of the settling-in allowance was adequate and makes recommendations as needed for the benefit of future PCVs. Fifty-one PCVs were posted in September 2014. Only seventeen PCVs responded to the survey; of these, six PCVs reported household expenses greater than the settling in amount, mostly associated with furniture purchases. Forty-eight PCVs were posted in September 2013. Of the fifteen PCVs who responded to

the survey, only five reported household expenses greater than the settling in allowance, also associated with furniture purchases.

The next training group will be posted in late September 2015. The DMO will review the content of the survey prior to issuing to ensure information to be collected remains relevant. Before the end of PST, the DMO will present the survey to the PCTs emphasizing the need to complete and return the survey so that a thorough assessment of the settling-in amount can be made. PCTs will also be informed that, per MS 221, a response rate of at least 75% is required to increase the amount more than 10%. PCVs who report significant deficiencies will have those addressed on a case by case basis. The next assessment of settling allowance surveys will take place in January 2016. Drawing from those responses, if an increase is deemed reasonable, the DMO will recommend a new settling in allowance rate for CD approval for the next PST in 2016.

**Documents Submitted:**

- Volunteer Handbooks for 2014 and 2015 that include explanation of the settling in allowance procedures, guidelines, and related surveys issued to all PCT/V and explained in all PST admin sessions
- 2013 and 2014 settling in allowance surveys returned

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- 2015 settling allowance survey results from December 2015

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** January 31, 2016

**Recommendation 12**

**That the DMO and the DPT develop a process to ensure that Volunteer reimbursements for Peace Corps events are processed in a timely manner.**

**Concur**

**Response:** To ease the financial burden encountered by PCVs during official events such as ISTs, the Admin Team works with P&T to ensure that appropriate per diem amounts are deposited into PCV bank accounts before arriving to an event. PCVs will still have to pay for transportation and other out of pocket expenses, although they have been, and continue to be able to submit receipts for reimbursement during the event.

Reimbursement payments are deposited directly from PC HQ into PCV local bank accounts. This happens twice a month on pre-determined dates via the VICA Payroll Calendar. In order to receive a reimbursement, the PCV must complete a reimbursement form and include the required supporting documentation. Reimbursement forms are readily available in all workstations and can be dropped off at the PCV Liaison office. Forms can also be sent via shuttle to Cotonou for processing. PCVs' are instructed to log reimbursement requests submitted to the PCV Liaison's office, or with the shuttle driver, to ensure all requests submitted can be tracked by the Admin Team.

The P&T Team has established a schedule for all remaining FY15 and FY16 ISTs and other similar events. The schedule indicates which PCV groups' participation is mandatory and which is optional. For all mandatory events, per diem advances will be entered in VICA to ensure all payments are sent prior to the event occurring. PCVs will be notified of all scheduled events for the following twelve months at quarterly VAC meetings and will be asked to confirm their participation in optional events at least six weeks prior to ensure timely deposits of per diem through VICA. PCVs will also be requested to inform P&T staff of other travel costs and out of pocket expenses they anticipate incurring, such as homologue participation, at least six weeks prior to the event so that they may be reimbursed for those costs at the event itself.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- Schedule of events for the following twelve months that includes PCV notification, confirmation, and VICA processing deadlines.
- Volunteer Handbooks for 2014 and 2015 issued to all PCT/V and explained in all PST admin sessions.

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 30, 2015

**Recommendation 13**

**That the CD and DMO clarify and communicate to staff and Volunteers the roles and responsibilities of the Regional Volunteer Support positions.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** Since the OIG visit, Post has hired and trained a Site Development/Volunteer Support Coordinator who will be based in the north of Benin in Natitingou. She has already been introduced and worked with staff and PCTs as well as a growing number of PCVs.

During PST, both Regional Support staff were introduced and they explained to PCTs their roles and responsibilities. They participated in site announcement followed by the regional meeting of their respective regions. In addition, they participated in the Partner Workshops organized prior to PCTs' visit to their assigned sites.

One of them will visit all trainees in the northern part of the country during "On the Job 1" (August 6-13, 2015). Both regional staff will be involved in mandatory events during PST and COS.

The newest Regional Support staff will be formally introduced to the other PCVs at the MST in September. The other PC Benin Regional Staff member is posted in Parakou and her role and responsibilities will also be reinforced at the PST and Mid-Service Conference. Post has adapted a draft document outlining what PCVs can expect and not expect from these Regional Staff members. This document will be shared with the VAC to formulate a final version which will be shared at PST and at MST and posted in all regional workstations.

**Documents Submitted:**

- Site Development/Volunteer Support Coordinator SOW

- Handout for PCVs and Work Stations on Regional Support Positions

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** September 30, 2015

**Recommendation 14**

**That the CD works with the Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC) to increase the effectiveness of the committee.**

**Concur:**

**Response:** VAC meets four times a year with staff in Cotonou. Members are elected on a regional basis by their peers. Prior to each quarterly meeting, the VAC holds a one-day meeting to elicit Volunteer feedback on what was decided at the last meeting and identify issues, challenges, and opportunities for the upcoming meeting. Each representative sends their meeting minutes to the VAC President who prepares a synopsis for the VAC the night before the meeting in Cotonou. VAC then prepares an agenda based on the issues to be raised from the regional meetings.

The next VAC meeting is scheduled for August 7<sup>th</sup>. The CD will request that the VAC undertake a review of its effectiveness with peers and staff and consider its usefulness, viability, and if necessary, look at ways to increase its effectiveness. Feedback from PCVs and staff will be reviewed at the November VAC meeting. Additional interactions will include a session at PST to present the VAC to PCTs, as well as a session at the MST in September.

**Documents to be Submitted:**

- VAC Minutes from August 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting
- Report from VAC with recommendations, if any – TBD
- VAC PST and MST Presentation

**Status and Timeline for Completion:** November 30, 2015

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## APPENDIX E: OIG COMMENTS

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Management concurred with all 14 recommendations, ten recommendations will remain open. The ten recommendations that will remain open are: recommendations 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10-14. Based on the documentation provided, we closed four recommendations: recommendations 1, 4, 7, and 9. 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 appreciates the thorough manner the agency used to respond to each recommendation in the preliminary report. OIG will review and consider closing recommendations 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10-14 when the documentation reflected the agency's response to the preliminary report is received.

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## APPENDIX F: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

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### PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION

This program evaluation was conducted under the direction of former Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jim O’Keefe, by Senior Evaluator Greg Yeich and former Lead Evaluator Heather Robinson. Additional contributions were made by Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jerry Black and Outreach Specialist Kate Pote.



Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations  
Jerry Black

### OIG CONTACT

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

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