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From: Kathy A. Buller, Inspector General   *Joaquin Ferrao for K.B.*

Date: September 30, 2014

Subject: Lessons Learned: New Country Entries Report

Transmitted for your information is our report Lessons Learned: New Country Entries.

This report synthesizes and highlights lessons learned from 33 Office of Inspector General (OIG) reports issued from 1990 to 2013 on newly opened or re-opened posts. Our objective was to provide insight and guidance to help strengthen the agency's ability to effectively open or re-open posts. We announced our intention to produce this report in our FY 2014 annual plan as part of our strategic plan goal to utilize OIG report findings, recommendations, and trends as a tool to support and effect change in management practices.

We are not issuing recommendations in the report, but we conclude with a section that summarizes important best practices and lessons learned. There is not a requirement that a written response to the report be transmitted.

Should anyone wish to comment on the quality or usefulness of this report to help us improve our products, they may address comments or questions to Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jim O'Keefe at jokeefe@peacecorps.gov or 202.692.2904.

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Peace Corps
Office of Inspector General

New Country Entries: Lessons Learned

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Establishing a new Peace Corps country program is one of most important and challenging aspects of agency operations. Successful programs are built on solid, mutually respectful partnerships with host governments, national and local agencies, and the communities where Volunteers serve. Success is also dependent on how well Peace Corps staff develops projects, identifies work sites, delivers training, and supports Volunteers during service.

OBJECTIVE

This report synthesizes and highlights lessons learned from Office of Inspector General (OIG) reports in order to provide insight and guidance that can strengthen the agency's ability to effectively open or re-open posts.[1] We reviewed 33 OIG reports issued from 1990 to 2013 on newly opened or re-opened posts, including evaluations, inspections, and special reviews (See Appendix C for a list of all OIG reports reviewed). The purpose of the study was to answer the following questions:

- What strategies and best practices have proven effective in opening new posts?[2]
- What common challenges are encountered in opening new posts?
- Has the agency adequately addressed the challenges of opening posts?

While we are not issuing recommendations, we conclude with a section that summarizes important best practices and lessons learned to facilitate and support successfully opening or re-opening a Peace Corps post.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

The agency has a New Country Entry Guide (hereafter referred to as the NCE Guide) that contains appropriate timelines and instructions for opening a post. However, we identified recurring issues that proved problematic for newly opened posts when timelines, resources, or new country entry assessment recommendations were not sufficiently considered and planned. We also identified a number of successful strategies and best practices that supported success. For instance:

- **Preparation Time.** Our review identified findings related to preparation time in nine of the 33 reports we examined.
    - Staff required sufficient time and resources to carry out the activities outlined in the NCE Guide before Volunteers arrive for training.
    - Opening timeframes shortened or accelerated by the presidential administration or the Department of State led to rushed and incomplete start-up, impacted relationships with host partners, and negatively affected training and Volunteer effectiveness.

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[1] For the purposes of this review, posts were considered new until five years from their opening date.
[2] Throughout this report "new posts" refers both to posts that are new entries and re-entries of closed posts unless otherwise specified.

- o Temporary and targeted support from headquarters, regional staff, and the U.S. Embassy proved crucial to successfully carrying out initial start-up activities.

- **New Country Entry Assessment Team Recommendations.** The agency's close adherence to these recommendations mitigated early problems or setbacks.

- **Piggy-backing.** Using staff resources at neighboring posts to manage new post operations (called "piggy-backing"), or relying too heavily on contractors or the U.S. Embassy were ineffective strategies and often exacerbated challenges in post start-up.

- **Initial Programming**. Many new posts experienced programming and training success by limiting the complexity of programming, often to just one project.

- **Succession Planning.** Attention to staff transition was especially critical during a post's formative years so that hard won gains are not undone by staffing gaps in key leadership positions.

Incorporating lessons learned, best practices, and successful strategies from the agency's broad experience into its current new country entry process is one of the best ways avoid pitfalls of the past and position the agency for success in this very important endeavor. Capturing lessons from the past is particularly important given the term-limited appointments of our United States Direct Hire (USDH) headquarters and field staff and challenges tapping into and applying institutional memory. We hope the information in this report contributes to the agency's new country entry process and the success of Peace Corps staff and Volunteers who lead this effort.

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BACKGROUND

On March 1, 1961 President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order that created the Peace Corps. By 1962, the Peace Corps had launched programs in 28 countries and by June of that year 2,816 Volunteers were serving in the field. Since its founding 53 years ago, over 215,000 Volunteers have served in 139 countries.

Volunteers contribute to the Peace Corps mission of world peace and friendship by working toward three goals:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

The Peace Corps establishes its programs in countries where it has been invited by the host government. To guide the entry or re-entry to a country that has closed or suspended activities, the agency has developed an NCE Guide.[3] Before the Director decides whether or not to open a program in response to an invitation, the agency's practice is to conduct an assessment of the social, political, and security conditions in the country. According to the agency's NCE Guide, the purpose of new country and re-entry assessment is to help the Director determine the feasibility of opening or re-opening a program. An NCE assessment team, assembled from current and former Peace Corps staff members, typically spends about two weeks in the country to conduct the study.

The NCE Guide provides instructions, checklists, and timelines for administration, logistics, financial systems, programming and training, and Volunteer support that headquarters, regional, and newly hired staff will undertake to stand up a new post. Staff are expected to adapt the suggested steps to the conditions in each country. The following graph illustrates the key steps outlined in the agency's NCE Guide for opening or re-opening a post.

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[3] The agency updated the NCE in August 2013. The format and content of the NCE handbook was developed and put in use in 1992 and has been periodically updated to reflect current conditions, policies and procedures. *Peace Corps Manual* section 340, "Opening a Post" provides an outline for the process to open or re-open a post.

Figure 1. Key Agency Steps in Opening a Post

Step 1. Assessment team conducts in-depth feasibility study, identifies risks, challenges, and potential project areas.

Step 2. Country Director works with region to conclude country agreement with host government, agree upon a strategy, and lay out start-up staff schedules, budget, and procurement.

Step 3. USDH staff arrive in Host Country, establish relationships with partners, set up office, and hire local staff.

Step 4. Project planning, baseline data collection, site development, Training of Trainers, and PST planning.

Step 5. Trainees arrive.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

NEW COUNTRY ENTRY ASSESSMENTS

Newly opened posts benefitted from assessment team recommendations, and experienced setbacks when recommendations were not followed.

A number of OIG reports drew attention to new country entry assessment team recommendations that contributed to posts' start-up success. For example, PC/Cambodia (2006) developed programming in project areas identified by the assessment team which closely aligned with the host country development priorities and fostered host-country buy-in.[4] District officials played active roles in Volunteer site identification and participated in trainings and conferences. National leaders praised Peace Corps contributions to the country. Volunteers in Cambodia reported high levels of job satisfaction. Our report on PC/Colombia (2010) concluded that successful assessment team and host government collaboration helped to identify programming opportunities that met host country priorities and led to a solid programming foundation.

Conversely, we found that some setbacks at newly opened posts could have been avoided had the agency followed assessment team recommendations. In re-opening PC/Chad (1987), managers did not follow the assessment team's recommendation to allow 12 to 15 months of preparation time prior to PST for the first group of Volunteers. Instead, staff arrived four months before the start of PST. As a result, Volunteers were not adequately prepared for service, struggled with their assignments, and many elected to end their service early. Additionally, PC/Chad staff had difficulty securing staff housing, hiring local staff, and managing a range of administrative and resource issues.

The assessment team for PC/Ethiopia (2010) recommended that staff establish an emergency communication method, yet an OIG evaluation four years after the post's opening found no such emergency communication method in place, a significant safety and security weakness. The assessment team for PC/Liberia recommended that the country director (CD) have a strong programming and training background to compensate for the lack of a full-time director of programming and training (DPT) at the post. Neither of the first two CDs had sufficient background to mentor and guide local staff, which negatively affected the post's programming and training.

It was unclear from our review why some assessment team recommendations were not followed.

> Lesson Learned:
>
> While there are no agency requirements or procedures to ensure that a new post implements assessment team recommendations, our review suggests that closer adherence to recommendations would mitigate early challenges or setbacks.

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[4] Dates in parentheses indicate the date of post entry or re-entry. Refer to Appendix C for year OIG report issued.

Poorly executed new country entry assessments created challenges.

The NCE Guide establishes guidance for assembling an assessment team. Members should be drawn from currently serving or former Peace Corps staff members with expertise in management, administration and logistics, programming and training, safety and security, and medical services. The NCE Guide provides a structured outline for conducting each section of the team's study.

We found that some new posts were at a disadvantage because the NCE assessments were poorly executed. The assessment of Peace Corps' feasibility to enter Cape Verde (1988) was rushed and did not sufficiently take into account key political, logistical, and economic factors; programming was poorly planned as a result. Similarly, the evaluation of PC/Guinea Bissau (1988) found that the assessment was conducted under a tight schedule and underestimated logistical and programmatic challenges, and the post was not properly prepared and equipped to face those challenges.

Three other NCE assessments, those of Sao Tome e Principe (1990), Romania (1991), and South Africa (1997) failed to adequately inform the agency of significant challenges in areas such as logistics, materials, staffing, programming, administration, and site development that led to significant challenges in these areas during the start-up period. The assessment of PC/Czechoslovakia (1991) did not review environmental health concerns and Volunteers reported adverse health effects to OIG after being placed in polluted sites.

Lesson Learned:

Assessment team members should possess appropriate skills and experience and be provided sufficient time and resources to carry out a thorough, detailed assessment with recommendations to guide staff entrusted with opening the post.

PLANNING, STAFFING, AND RESOURCES

Adequate preparation time is essential for a successful post opening.

The NCE Guide includes guidance and a timeframe for when staff should conduct particular start-up activities prior to the arrival of the first group of trainees. The guide also provides a detailed staffing-up chart with target dates for hiring and training host country staff.

Our review determined that new posts faced tremendous challenges when staff was not provided sufficient time to prepare for the arrival of the first training group. The period of time provided to staff for start-up activities was inconsistent. Our review identified findings related to preparation time in nine of the 33 reports we examined. The 2001 report of PC/Bangladesh (1998) attributed the post's success in hiring personnel, establishing operations, and developing site placements and training programs to staff being on site well in advance of the first training group.

Eight reports in our review determined that staff was not provided sufficient preparation time. The staff for PC/Romania (1991) was only provided two to three months to prepare for the first training group's arrival. Several other posts, including the Baltics (1992), Liberia (2008), and Indonesia (2012), had their opening timeframes shortened or accelerated by the presidential administration and the Department of State. Inadequate and accelerated time frames led to rushed start-up activities at these posts, giving rise to a host of problems, including:
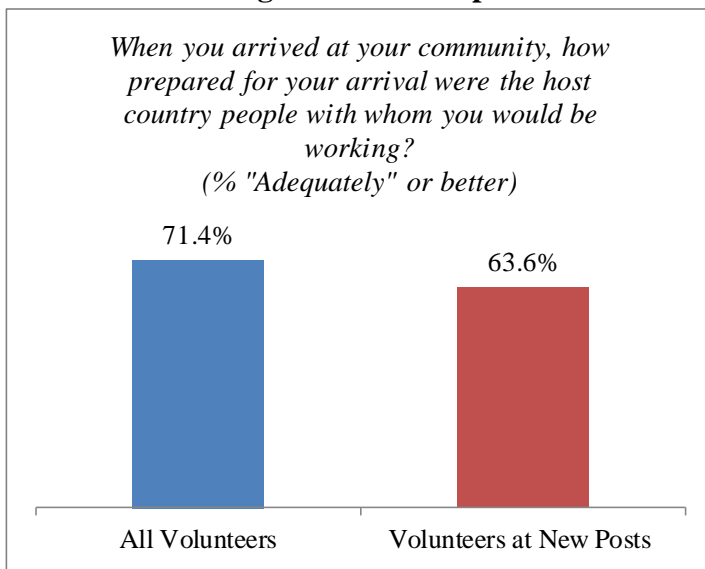
- Weak relationships and support agreements with host country partners or the U.S. Embassy.
- Misalignment of programming with host country needs.
- Hastily completed project planning, resulting in vaguely defined Volunteer assignments.
- Disorganized or inadequate Volunteer training.
- Overwhelmed and overworked staff.
- Poorly developed or supported sites, resulting in low Volunteer morale and high early termination rates.
- Administrative challenges in the areas of banking, communications, office space, contracting, and establishing an imprest fund.[5]
- Uneven quality in staff hiring or training.
- Rushed Volunteer recruitment activities that diverted top quality Volunteers who had been nominated to other countries, weakening the quality of those training classes.

The rush to open these posts compounded the difficulty of start-up activities that are challenging in the best of circumstances. The inherent difficulty of opening a post can be inferred from agency Annual Volunteer Survey (AVS) data. The AVS is distributed to all active Volunteers and provides them the opportunity to confidentially share their views and experiences. We reviewed AVS data from 2002 through 2013 and found that Volunteers at new posts felt their site was not as well prepared for their arrival (see Figure 2). Survey data also showed that Volunteer satisfaction with staff support at new posts lagged behind global satisfaction in key areas (see Figure 3).
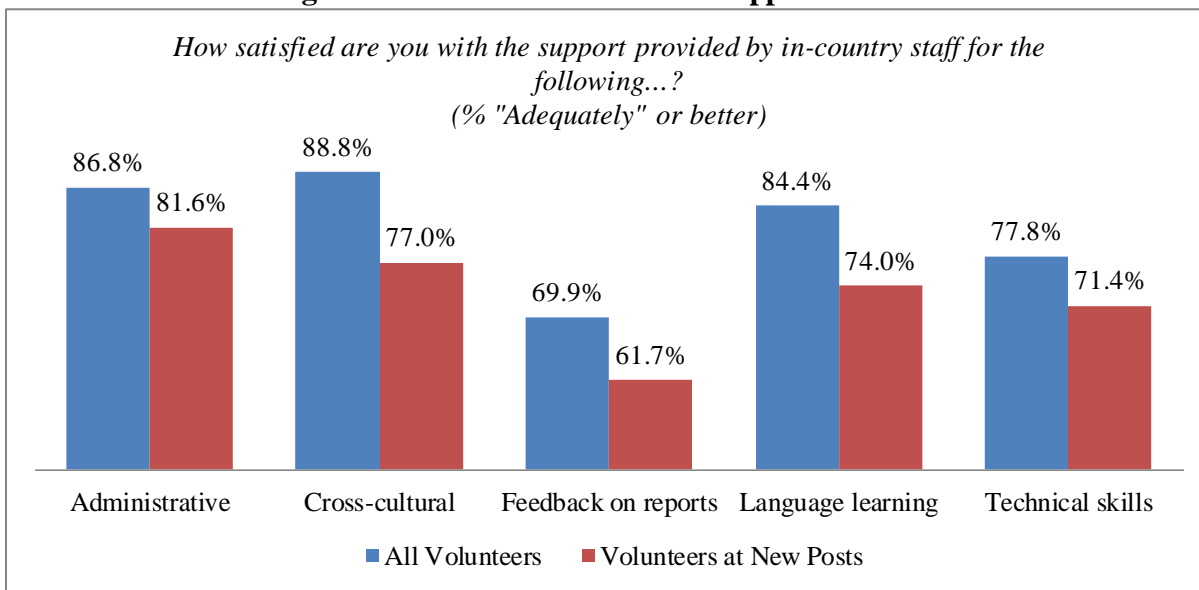
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[5] According to the Peace Corps' *Overseas Financial Management Handbook*, section 13.1 "The Peace Corps operates in many culturally diverse countries and economies, many of which are dependent on cash (rather than checks or EFTs [electronic fund transfers]). Therefore, imprest funds (petty cash funds) are a critical component of post operations."

Figure 2. Site Preparation

When you arrived at your community, how prepared for your arrival were the host country people with whom you would be working?
(% "Adequately" or better)

71.4% — All Volunteers
63.6% — Volunteers at New Posts

Source: OIG analysis of AVS Data

Figure 3. Satisfaction with Staff Support

How satisfied are you with the support provided by in-country staff for the following...?
(% "Adequately" or better)

Category	All Volunteers	Volunteers at New Posts
Administrative	86.8%	81.6%
Cross-cultural	88.8%	77.0%
Feedback on reports	69.9%	61.7%
Language learning	84.4%	74.0%
Technical skills	77.8%	71.4%

■ All Volunteers   ■ Volunteers at New Posts

Source: OIG analysis of AVS Data

This data suggests that staff is typically stretched thin by start-up activities. Our review confirmed that insufficient preparation time was especially problematic for new posts.

Lesson Learned:

Staff need sufficient time to complete the crucial start-up steps required for post to be prepared to receive its first group of trainees.

Getting staff with relevant experience and expertise is critical for opening a new post.

The NCE Guide encourages hiring staff with previous Peace Corps field experience and explains that "opening" a post is different than "running" a post. Opening a post requires leaders familiar with the Peace Corps, who can both train new host country staff and set up strong systems. Our review of newly opened posts also indicates that previous regional experience, in addition to previous Peace Corps experience, has been an important asset for staff opening a new post.

We found several positive trends related to staff at posts that OIG reports determined were opened successfully. The reports described staff at these posts as highly capable, experienced, and high-performing. Staff had previous field experience with the Peace Corps, regional expertise, and strong Peace Corps institutional knowledge. As a result, the new posts had in place key systems, processes, and infrastructure, and Volunteer projects were effectively established. Experienced staff guided successful new country entries due to their awareness of and ability to implement agency best practices.

Experienced headquarters and regional staff provided critical assistance to new posts.

The NCE Guide refers to the important roles of staff members from nearby posts, regional stations, or headquarters. These staff, including U.S.-based personal service contractors, can provide crucial support to project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, training design and implementation, and the design and development of the safety and security program. According to the guide, the Office of Health Services should deploy a temporary duty (TDY) Peace Corps Medical Officer to assist with start-up medical equipment and supply needs. A regional Information Technology (IT) specialist should travel to the post to help staff configure a temporary computer network, interview IT specialist candidates and vendors, and assess what types of services are available in country.

Our review of OIG reports underscores the important role that experienced staff at headquarters or other posts have played in supporting the opening of a new post. Experienced staff helped new posts achieve positive host country relations, solid administrative systems, effective training, and programming that met host country development needs. Training and support from experienced staff during the posts' beginning stages prepared new staff for both the routine and more complex tasks that lay ahead. For example, prior to the opening of PC/Bangladesh (1998) senior headquarters staff conducted several visits in advance of the opening to establish a memorandum of understanding and plan programming with host country representatives. Staff in PC/Colombia (2010) successfully conducted their first PST with the assistance of experienced staff from headquarters on TDY assignment.

Some new posts received particularly effective assistance from experienced staff of nearby posts: implementing administrative systems, planning programming, navigating political challenges, and training start-up staff either on site or at their own post. New posts received strong support from regional safety and security and medical staff, such as Peace Corps safety and security officers and regional medical officers.

> Lesson Learned:
>
> New posts benefit from the temporary and targeted support of experienced headquarters and regional staff to successfully carry out start-up activities.

Insufficient staffing strained programs and operations at new posts and impacted Volunteer early termination rates.

The introduction to the NCE Guide encapsulates a lesson learned from previous new country entries: "Invest fully in the staff and resources required to get the program off to a successful start. Building a strong base is essential for development of a quality program."

The problem of not having sufficient staff resources in place was a common theme among new posts that struggled. Senior staff positions at many new posts were not filled in a timely fashion and remained vacant for long periods. Other new posts became unsettled by turnover of experienced senior staff or extended absences in key positions.[6] Understaffed posts relied on staff or contractors to fill gaps and vacancies. In addition to staffing inadequacies, the staff hired at new posts often lacked the experience, skills, and training required to effectively conduct start-up operations.

The lack of appropriate staff resources had a significant impact on newly opened posts. The reports we reviewed included the following effects:

- Multiple programming and training weaknesses, including a lack of project plans, unfocused Volunteer projects, insufficient programming and training development and evaluation processes, and inadequate training programs.
- Volunteer dissatisfaction with training, programming, and support.
- Overworked, overwhelmed, and sometimes demoralized staff.
- Lack of mentoring and guidance for newly-hired staff.
- Deterioration of internal controls due to management instability.
- Financial management and budgeting weaknesses, including violations of federal regulations and agency guidelines.
- Weak Volunteer support systems resulting in poor programming, health care (services and supplies), site placement, and logistics.
- High rates of Volunteer early termination.

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[6] In our FY 14 Peace Corps Overseas Staffing Audit (IG-14-01-A) we reported on the impact of inadequate planning for direct hire staff vacancies, the need to develop an overarching timeline for the hiring process and to maintain a master calendar to manage when post senior staff positions will become available. In our FY 12 Impacts of the Five-year Rule on Operations of the Peace Corps Evaluation (IG-12-05-E) we reported that legislatively mandated limited-term staff appointments contributed to an abbreviated average tenure of USDH employees throughout the agency and particularly in overseas staff positions.

As an example, PC/Romania (1991), which experienced a high level of U.S. staff turnover during its first two years and relied on temporary staff and contractors, had a particularly high early termination rate. Only four of 18 original Volunteers remained to close their service, an attrition rate of 75 percent. More broadly, we analyzed early termination rates at new posts, using the agency's data from 2003 to 2013, and found that resignation rates at new posts started out lower than the global average in the post's first year of operation, then rose above the global average for several years thereafter (see Figure 4).[7]

Figure 4. Resignation Rates
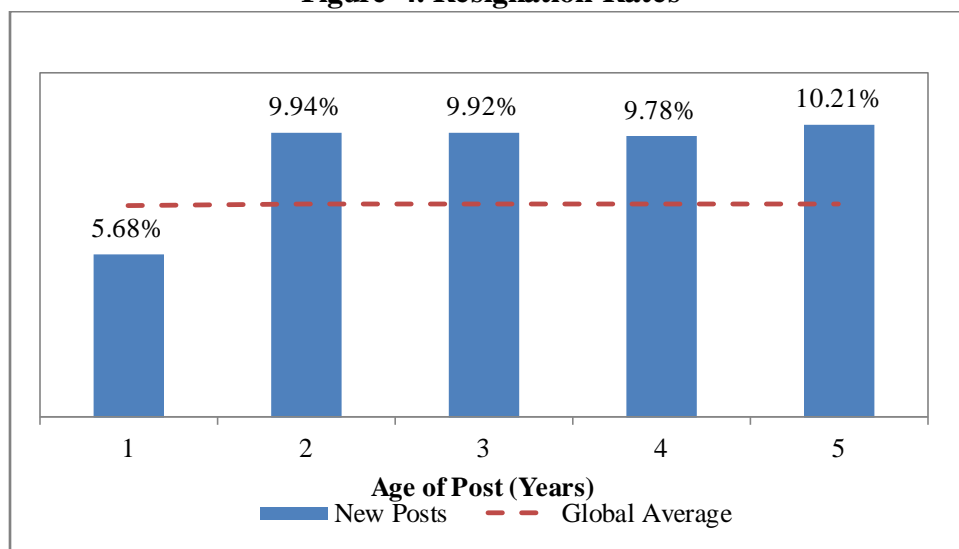
Source: Early Termination Rate Reports

Lower than average resignation rates in a post's first year likely results from the agency's strategy to place resilient applicants in the initial input of trainees.[8] According to the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection's Guide to Placement:

> With an NCE comes the opportunity (as well as burden) of getting new projects off the ground . . . These trainees are breaking new ground; developing, testing, and solidifying projects; and creating first impressions for an organization and country. Looking for applicants who can handle the inevitable ambiguities of a NCE is critical.

However, this emphasis only applies to the first group of trainees and subsequent groups are no better prepared to confront the additional challenges of serving at a new post.

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[7] Early termination refers to ending service early, which can occur by resignation, medical separation, interrupted service, and administrative separation. Resignation refers to the voluntary exit of service by the Volunteer.
[8] It should also be noted that a post's opening year might not represent a full calendar year of operations and there would be no early terminations from Volunteers in their second year of service.

> Lesson Learned:
>
> The agency's NCE Guide provides sufficient guidance to avoid significant staffing problems.
>
> To mitigate the harmful effects of frequent staff turnover and leadership gaps, proactive succession planning is especially critical during posts' formative years.

Piggy-backing on the staff resources of existing posts and relying on contractors or the U.S. Embassy were ineffective.

Several of the posts in our review were not provided USDH in-country staff when they were opened or re-opened. Most of these newly opened posts were administered by staff provided from nearby posts, a strategy the agency used to refer to as "piggy-backing," which was seen as a cost-saving strategy. For example:

- PC/Cape Verde (1988) was administered from Guinea Bissau.
- PC/Sao Tome e Principe (1990) was administered from Gabon.
- PC/Estonia and Lithuania (1992) were administered from Latvia.

Early operations at some new posts were conducted by designated representatives, such as embassy staff and contractors, rather than official Peace Corps staff. PC/Panama (1990), when re-opened, was initially represented by the U.S. Embassy, supported by a contractor, and administered by PC/Costa Rica. The lack of USDH staff on the ground affected the agency's ability to officially represent the Peace Corps and directly engage and communicate with the host government regarding program plans. Another post in our review, PC/Equatorial Guinea (1988), was opened by a contractor in violation of federal regulations and agency guidelines, which called into question the post's procurements, leases, contracts, etc. When re-opened, PC/Liberia (2008) was supported by a PC/Sierra Leone DPT based in Freetown.

Our review revealed that the piggy-backing strategy and use of designated staff or contractors was problematic for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Staff was not given sufficient time to prepare for the responsibilities related to opening and administering a new post.
- The piggy-backing posts did not always share the same language and currency, which complicated administrative procedures.
- Staff encountered travel and communication difficulties due to poor infrastructure.
- The posts that shared staff were burdened by frequent and prolonged staff absences and heavy workloads.
- Staff was stretched thin, demoralized, and in disarray.
- Posts without in-country USDH staff at their inception had difficulty establishing effective agency representation and partner relations.
- When full-time dedicated staff arrived in-country, they were overwhelmed with work.

> Lesson Learned:
>
> In opening new posts, the agency should avoid unconventional staffing strategies such as "piggy-backing" or using designated representatives or contractors.

Insufficient funds and material resources strained programs and operations at new posts.

According to the NCE Guide, prior to arriving at a new post the CD should project the post's 12-month budget to cover start-up expenses. Once in country, senior staff is responsible for acquiring the post's necessary material resources and regularly reviewing the budget and contacting headquarters if an increase is deemed necessary. The guide states that some budget adjustments may be necessary due to "the lack of firm precedence on which to base cost calculations." Agency guidance can help staff determine which start-up operations are likely to require additional support should external pressure or other influences shorten post opening timeframes.

Two posts in our review, PC/Panama (1990) and PC/Liberia (2008) were launched without adequate provision of funds or material resources. The regional budget was insufficient to fully fund the opening of PC/Panama, but the agency launched the program under external pressure from the Department of State. The post's budget was then supported by U.S. Agency for International Development funds that had been earmarked for the host country agency with which Peace Corps would be collaborating. This arrangement resulted in a disagreement between the Peace Corps and the Panamanian partner over control of funds and temporarily strained relationships. Peace Corps' independence was put at risk by the reliance on outside funding.

PC/Liberia (2008) was launched by the Office of Peace Corps Response (PCR) rather than the Africa Operations office that supports the region.[9] Because the country program only consisted of PCR Volunteers when opened, with plans to transition later to a traditional post model, the post was provided just a few drivers and vehicles, small office space, and a reduced number of staff members. The post also was not afforded the benefit of support from experienced Africa Operations staff who routinely manage and support program, training, and administrative operations in the region. The lack of support, resources, and personnel placed a heavy burden on in-country staff and contributed to Volunteer dissatisfaction and unusually high early termination rates for the post's first two years of operations. In response to OIG's evaluation report on PC/Liberia, the agency reported that PCR will no longer be fully responsible for leading a new country entry or re-entry.

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[9] The Peace Corps Response program offers short-term, high-impact assignments to qualified professionals in various programs around the world.

> Lesson Learned:
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> The agency should ensure that new posts have in place sufficient financial and material resources to support start-up operations and safeguard the agency's independence and interests.

HOST COUNTRY AND U.S. EMBASSY SUPPORT AND COOPERATION

Successful start-up posts established cooperation and secured support from the host government.

The NCE Guide advises staff to conduct a series of meetings with host country government officials to confirm commitments, negotiate and finalize programming decisions, and secure the support of host country governments, authorities, and local communities. The guide explains that, "success in these efforts lays a foundation essential to an effective post." In addition, the NCE guide advises staff on the importance of ensuring that Volunteer programming is focused and appropriately designed to meet host country development priorities, as defined by the host country government and key stakeholders.

Posts that OIG determined were opened successfully had worked hard to establish buy-in from ministries at multiple levels, which included field visits by staff to educate and inform host government officials at regional and district levels. As a result, the Peace Corps enjoyed strong and collaborative relationships at multiple levels with host governments, from the heads of state, ministry officials and local district officials. The strength of these relationships was evidenced by senior government officials' participation in Peace Corps ceremonies and the engagement of regional officials in site identification and Volunteer training activities. In one example from posts we have evaluated, the deputy prime minister of Cambodia (2006) attended the swearing-in ceremony of the program's fourth group of Volunteers and delivered an opening address that highlighted Peace Corps' contributions to the development of the country. Early, concentrated efforts building strong relationships with government partners at all levels had an extended positive effect in the communities where Volunteer served and among host families unfamiliar with the Peace Corps mission or the American culture.

Relatedly, our review underscored that poor coordination with host country partners led to significant programming issues at new posts. For example, staff at PC/Czechoslovakia (1991) failed to conduct a host country needs assessment and allowed host country partners to determine Volunteer roles without adequate participation of staff. This resulted in Volunteer assignments that were not viable and did not align with Volunteers' skill and experience levels. Volunteers were not successful in their work efforts and experienced job dissatisfaction. Staff at PC/Kyrgyzstan (1993) did not sufficiently engage host country partners to determine a viable strategy to carry out an education project, which resulted in ineffective classes and frustrated Volunteers and students.

Our review identified several causes of inadequate host government support. Staff at some re-opened posts, such as PC/Chad (1987), found that host government representatives had unresolved negative feelings related to the previous closure of the post. At another post, PC/Bolivia (1990), the agency's image was tarnished by perceived association with other U.S. government foreign policy activities, and the host government was concerned about controversial publicity. The 1990 re-opening of PC/Panama followed the invasion of the country and the economic embargo in 1989, and the agency had not fully anticipated and planned around these politically sensitive issues. Some host governments simply lacked the resources to fulfill their obligations, which OIG found to be the case in Uganda (1991).

In addition, several newly opened posts experienced difficulties because host country officials developed unrealistic expectations and made incorrect assumptions regarding the agency's mission. Officials in Jordan (1997) did not understand why the agency wanted to place Volunteers in resource-poor rural areas and pushed to place Volunteers in well-resourced urban areas. Officials in Guinea Bissau (1988) had an expectation that Volunteers were highly skilled technicians with their own vehicles, equipment, and project financing. Staff at these posts had to divert time and resources to manage expectations and secure the necessary host country support. Officials in Guinea Bissau were also not prepared or equipped to absorb the Volunteers they had requested and a second input of Volunteers was canceled. Volunteers were directly impacted and experienced misunderstandings with their counterparts and were unable to do an effective job. After eight months, almost half the first group of Volunteers had terminated their service early.

Host country officials in newly opened posts may anticipate that the Peace Corps functions like other development or U.S. governmental organizations. For all posts, both new entries and re-entries, the NCE Guide emphasizes relationship building and communicating with partners. The road map provided in the NCE guide includes sufficient opportunities to foster appropriate understandings of the agency's mission and expectations regarding Volunteer placements and activities.

> Lesson Learned:
>
> Staff at new posts should conduct a major effort with host country partners and local project stakeholders to communicate the agency's mission and goals, foster cooperation and set appropriate expectations concerning how to use Volunteer resources effectively.

U.S. Embassy support is critical to the start-up process.

U.S. embassies routinely provide logistical and diplomatic support to new posts. Several of the posts in our review sought additional support from the U.S. embassy during start-up operations. For example, PC/Bolivia had not been staffed with a cashier (agency guidance indicates a cashier should be hired five to six months prior to the first PST) and the embassy provided the use of a cashier, which allowed the post to carry out reimbursements and other financial administrative activities.

Our review found that embassy support was not typically an area of difficulty for new posts, but we did determine that a few posts experienced challenges related to embassy support. For example, the U.S embassy in Chad (1987) failed to provide promised administrative and logistical support services, including the use of vehicles and assistance in procuring and paying for supplies and in its start-up phase the post struggled to develop host country relations and select sites. The embassy also destroyed Peace Corps files when the program previously closed, which impacted staff hiring.

The NCE Guide provides descriptive information about the resources and assistance often available to new posts through the U.S. Embassy, such as customs support, cash advances, and car pool services. The guidance directs staff to negotiate short-term support and determine the extent to which the embassy can support the post in setting up and operating its financial systems.

PROGRAMMING AND TRAINING

Programming and training success was achieved by limiting the scope of programming operations.
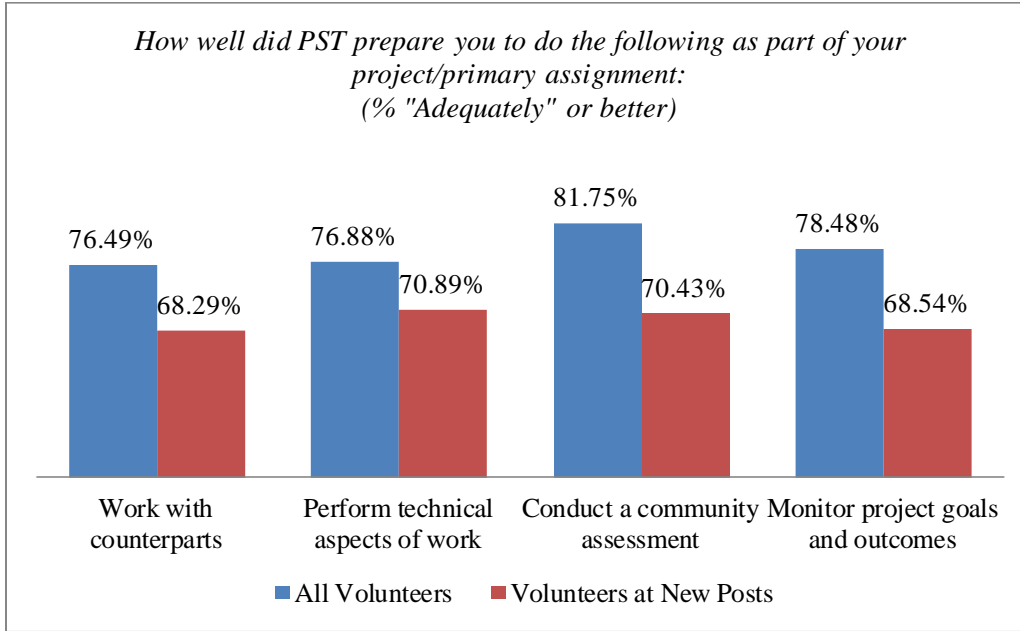
The NCE Guide indicates that most successful start-ups have focused on a single project rather than on several at once. Our review found that programming and training challenges were compounded when new posts launched multiple projects. The OIG inspection of PC/Cape Verde (1988) revealed that there were five active project sectors for 22 Volunteers and only one staff member to provide management and support. The staff was overwhelmed and the projects lacked structure and support. The Volunteers were poorly utilized and the post was forced to close projects. PC/Guinea Bissau (1988) also launched multiple projects when the program opened but staff had not developed effective project plans and assignments were not clearly defined. This impacted technical training which tried to cover too many areas without any particular focus and was too densely packed for trainees to absorb.[10] The training was inadequate and Volunteers were not prepared for their jobs.

We assessed Volunteer training adequacy at new posts by reviewing agency Volunteer survey data. We reviewed survey data from 2002 to 2013 and compared responses from new posts to global responses (see Figure 5). Our analysis revealed that Volunteers at new posts felt less prepared for key elements of their project activities.

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[10] As an added challenge, PST was conducted jointly with two other posts.

Figure 5. PST

How well did PST prepare you to do the following as part of your project/primary assignment:
(% "Adequately" or better)

Work with counterparts: All Volunteers 76.49%, Volunteers at New Posts 68.29%
Perform technical aspects of work: All Volunteers 76.88%, Volunteers at New Posts 70.89%
Conduct a community assessment: All Volunteers 81.75%, Volunteers at New Posts 70.43%
Monitor project goals and outcomes: All Volunteers 78.48%, Volunteers at New Posts 68.54%

■ All Volunteers   ■ Volunteers at New Posts

Source: OIG analysis of AVS Data

This survey data likely reflects the inherent challenges in opening a post and underscores the benefit in minimizing the complexity of program management, Volunteer training, and technical support.

Lesson Learned:

New posts should limit the scope of programming during the initial years of operation.

LIST OF LESSONS LEARNED

The following is a summary of identified best practices and lessons learned from our review.

NEW COUNTRY ENTRY ASSESSMENTS
- While there are no agency requirements or procedures to ensure that a start-up post implements assessment team recommendations, our review suggests that closer adherence to assessment team recommendations would benefit the agency.
- Assessment team members should possess appropriate skills and experiences and be provided sufficient time and resources to carry out a thorough and accurate assessment and develop a useful set of recommendations to guide staff entrusted with opening the post.

PLANNING, STAFFING, AND RESOURCES
- Staff should be provided sufficient time to complete the crucial start-up steps required for post to be prepared to receive its first group of trainees.
- New posts benefit from the temporary support of experienced headquarters and regional staff to successfully carry out start-up activities.
- The agency's NCE Guide provides sufficient guidance to avoid significant staffing problems.
- To mitigate the harmful effects of frequent staff turnover and leadership gaps, proactive succession planning is especially critical during posts' formative years.
- In opening new posts, the agency should avoid unconventional staffing strategies such as "piggy-backing" or using designated representatives or contractors.
- The agency should ensure that new posts have in place sufficient financial and material resources to support start-up operations and safeguard the agency's independence and interests.

HOST COUNTRY AND U.S. EMBASSY SUPPORT AND COOPERATION
- Staff at new posts should conduct a major effort with official host country partners and local project stakeholders to communicate the agency's mission and three goals and to foster cooperation and set appropriate expectations concerning how to use Volunteer resources effectively.

EMBASSY SUPPORT
- Negotiate short-term support with the embassy early on and determine the extent to which the embassy can support longer term operations.

PROGRAMMING AND TRAINING
- New posts should limit the scope of programming during the initial years of operation.

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In 1989, the Peace Corps 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 began work on the review of new country entries and re-entries in September 2013. The following researchable questions were used to guide the review:

- What strategies and best practices have proven effective in opening new posts?
- What common challenges are encountered in opening new posts?
- Has the agency adequately addressed the challenges of opening posts?

To answer these questions, we compiled a list of posts opened since the earliest OIG reports were issued and searched the OIG archives for evaluations, inspections, and special reviews conducted at those posts within five years of the Posts' opening or re-opening. In total, we retrieved 33 OIG reports dating from 1990 to 2013 (see Appendix C for the full list of reports). We analyzed each of these reports and identified findings and observations related to start-up activities and operations.

As additional support for our analysis, we reviewed Annual Volunteer Survey data from 2002 to 2013, during which time eighteen posts were opened or re-opened.[11] We compared responses from new posts, which we defined as posts opened for five years or less, to global responses, and analyzed Volunteer satisfaction related to community preparedness, staff support, and the effectiveness of PST.

The survey data that we reviewed included the percentage of Volunteers that responded to each question but not the number of responses. To ensure Volunteer responses were weighted equally, we took each question in a post's survey and calculated the number of satisfactory responses and then determined a percentage that could be compared to global response percentages. We then compared satisfaction rates at newly opened posts to global averages for those same questions.

We also reviewed agency early termination and resignation data from 2003 to 2013. We aggregated resignation rates at new posts for each of their first five years of operation to determine average resignation rates by age of post. We compared these rates to a global average

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[11] The agency first instituted a biennial survey in 2002 and transitioned to an annual survey in 2009.

rate that we determined by averaging all annual resignation rates from 2003 to 2013. These analyses provided information to corroborate and supplement the results of our review.

Our review was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

APPENDIX B: LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVS	Annual Volunteer Survey
CD	Country Director
DPT	Director of Programming and Training
IT	Information Technology
NCE	New Country Entry
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PCR	Peace Corps Response
PST	Pre-Service Training
TDY	Temporary Duty
USDH	United States Direct Hire

APPENDIX C: OIG REPORTS REVIEWED

OIG Reports Reviewed[12]

Post	Report	Report Type	Report Year[13]	Entry Year
Comoros	IG 90-010[14]	Special Review - Security Of Volunteers Following Assassination of President	1990	1988
Chad	IG 90-014	Special Review - Volunteer Support/morale & Security Issues	1990	1987 (re-entry)
Equatorial Guinea	IGI-91-17	Special Review - New Country Entry	1991	1988
Guinea Bissau	IGI-92-04	Inspection	1991	1988
Panama	IGI-91-07	Evaluation	1991	1990 (re-entry)
Bolivia	IGI-91-13	Special Review - Peace Corps Re-Entry	1991	1990 (re-entry)
Poland	IGI-91-18	New Country Entry Review	1991	1990
Hungary	IGI-91-19	New Country Entry Review	1991	1990
Czechoslovakia	IGI-93-03	Inspection	1992	1991
Sao Tome e Principe	IGI-92-03	Inspection	1992	1990
Cape Verde	IGI-92-05	Inspection Report	1993	1988
Uganda	IGI-93-09	Evaluation	1993	1991 (re-entry)
Romania	IGI-93-06	Evaluation	1993	1991
Baltics	IG 94-14	Evaluation	1994	1992
Kyrgyz Republic	IG 96-06	Evaluation	1995	1993
Namibia	IG 95-19	Evaluation	1995	1990
Madagascar	IG-96-08	Evaluation	1996	1993
Moldova	IG-96-07	Evaluation	1996	1993
Zambia	IG-96-19-1	Evaluation	1997	1993
Suriname	IG-99-12-1	Evaluation	1999	1995
South Africa	IG-99-10-1	Evaluation	2000	1997
Bangladesh	IG-00-09-ES	Evaluation	2000	1998
Haiti	IG 00-17-AE	Joint Evaluation/Audit	2000	1996 (re-entry)
Jordan	IG-01-11-EA	Joint Evaluation/Audit	2002	1997
Chad	IG 05-24-EA	Joint Evaluation/Audit	2005	2003 (re-entry)
Botswana	IG 06-18-E	Evaluation	2006	2003 (re-entry)
Azerbaijan	IG-07-11-E	Evaluation	2007	2003
Albania	IG-08-12-E	Evaluation	2008	2003 (re-entry)
Ethiopia	IG-11-02-E	Evaluation	2011	2010 (re-entry)
Liberia	IG-11-07-E	Evaluation	2011	2008 (re-entry)

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[12] The OIG conducts audits, country program evaluations and special reviews of agency operations. Three of the reports listed here were conducted as joint audit/country program evaluations.

[13] The Report Year column reflects the year field work was conducted; in some cases the report was issued the following year.

[14] The report tracking numbering protocol has been altered during the past 25 years.

Cambodia	IG-11-04-E	Evaluation	2011	2006
Indonesia	IG-12-07-E	Evaluation	2012	2010 (re-entry)
Colombia	IG-13-03-E	Evaluation	2013	2010 (re-entry)

APPENDIX D: ALL VOLUNTEER SURVEY ANALYSIS

Due to AVS revisions, the survey questions we reviewed for our report appeared at different times. The following table shows when each question was included in the survey.

Question[15]	Years Included in AVS
When you arrived at your community, how prepared for your arrival were the host country people with whom you would be working?	2004–13
How satisfied are you with the administrative support provided by in-country staff?	2006–13
How satisfied are you with the cross-cultural support provided by in-country staff?	2008–11
How satisfied are you with the feedback on work reports provided by in-country staff?	2006–13
How satisfied are you with the language support provided by in-country staff?	2006–11
How satisfied are you with the technical skills support provided by in-country staff?	2006–13
How well did PST prepare you to work with counterparts as part of your project/primary assignment?	2006–13
How well did PST prepare you to perform technical aspects of work as part of your project/primary assignment?	2006–13
How well did PST prepare you to conduct a community assessment as part of your project/primary assignment?	2006–13
How well did PST prepare you to monitor project goals and outcomes as part of your project/primary assignment?	2006–13

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[15]The formatting and phrasing of survey questions varied from year to year.

APPENDIX E: REPORT COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

REPORT COMPLETION

This report was developed, under the direction of Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jim O'Keefe, by Senior Evaluator Reuben Marshall and Evaluator Apprentice Ben Simasek. Additional contributions were made by Senior Evaluator Jerry Black, Program Analyst Kaitlyn Large, Writer/Editor Lisa Chesnel and Administrative Specialist Sydni Porter.

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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 Jim O'Keefe at jokeefe@peacecorps.gov, or 202.692.2904.

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