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To: Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Director
Daljit Bains, Chief Compliance Officer

From: Kathy A. Buller, Inspector General 

Date: May 21, 2014

Subject: Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Ecuador (IG-14-03-E)

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

Management concurred with seven recommendations and did not concur with one recommendation. All eight recommendations will remain open pending confirmation from the chief compliance officer that the documentation identified in management's response has been received. In its response, management described actions it is taking or intends to take to address the issues that prompted each of our recommendations. 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.

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

You may address questions regarding follow-up or documentation to Assistant Inspector General for Evaluation Jim O'Keefe at 202.692.2904. Please accept our thanks for your cooperation and assistance in our review.

Attachment

cc: Jacklyn Dao, White House Liaison
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Peace Corps Office of Inspector General



PC/Ecuador Volunteer Britany Nunez-Saraco and counterpart on Flag Day



Flag of Ecuador

Final Program Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Ecuador IG-14-03-E

May 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

More than 5,700 Volunteers have served in Peace Corps/Ecuador (hereafter “the post”) since 1962, making it one of the agency’s oldest country programs. There are four projects: community health (CH), natural resource conservation (NRC), youth and families (YF), and teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). At the time of our visit, 161 Volunteers were supported by 39 permanent staff positions. The post’s fiscal year 2013 budget was \$3.1 million.¹

WHAT WE FOUND

Many aspects of post operations reflect that of a high performing post with a strong Volunteer support structure. Projects have clear and well established site development procedures that identify sites where Volunteers can achieve their project objectives. Site development is well documented and includes multiple staff visits before site determinations are made and during the Volunteer’s service. The post has applied the Focus In/Train Up initiative (FITU) in all four projects; project frameworks for CH and YF have been finalized and frameworks for NRC and TEFL were in progress at the time of our visit.² While there were collaborative working relationships with project partners, the post had not maintained active project advisory committees (PAC) with host government or local partners to support project design and assessment. Additionally, some Volunteers were not working with the counterparts identified on their project memorandum of understanding (MOU), complicating training opportunities.

Training programs were generally effective in preparing Volunteers for productive work. However, some Volunteers did not find language training to be sufficient or well-structured and technical training for NRC business Volunteers needs to be enhanced. Additionally, the role of the program managers (PM) in pre-service training (PST) was not clearly defined, which created some misunderstanding and dysfunction between program and training staff.

Staff was responsive to Volunteers during emergencies. When crimes or security issues occur, Volunteers were quickly and competently supported. However, we found that the U.S. Embassy regional security officer (RSO) was not familiar with the Peace Corps and Department of State’s MOU that describes technical and procedural support for the security of Peace Corps operations abroad.³ Some site locator forms did not have sufficient detail to locate Volunteer residences. Additionally, the Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC) was raising and disbursing funds to support community projects in violation of Peace Corps policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

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

¹ This amount does not include salaries, benefits, and related costs of the post’s U.S direct hire staff and other costs the agency has determined should be centrally-budgeted.

² FITU seeks to focus on a limited number of highly effective projects designed to maximize the skills of generalist Volunteers with limited expertise and/or work experience.

³ On May 11, 2012 the Peace Corps and the Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DOS/DS) signed an MOU that established support by DOS/DS for the security of Peace Corps operations abroad.

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HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The Republic of Ecuador, slightly smaller than the state of Nevada, is located in South America to the west of Peru and south of Columbia and includes the Galapagos Islands. The country's varied natural environment and climate create a unique biodiversity. The western coastal region borders the Pacific Ocean, and the Andes Mountains bisect the center of Ecuador, separating the Amazon region to the east. The country's climate and geography makes it vulnerable to volcanic activity, landslides, floods, and earthquakes.

The region making up present day Ecuador was part of the Inca Empire, which later was conquered by the Spanish in 1534. The various territories, including what is now Ecuador, gained independence from the Spanish between 1819 and 1822, and in 1830 the republic of Ecuador was formally established. Ecuador's government is a constitutional republic. Democratically-elected President Rafael Correa assumed office in 2007, and was most recently reelected for a third term in February 2013. A new constitution (Ecuador's 20th) was passed in 2008, which restructured some of the government ministries, among other reforms.

The country's population of 15.4 million is ethnically mixed, including indigenous, mestizo, Afro-Ecuadorians, and citizens of European descent. Spanish is the official language but indigenous groups also speak other languages including Kichwa.⁴ Roman Catholic is the religious denomination of the majority of the population. The country is divided into 24 provincial regions. Sixty-seven percent of the population lives in urban areas, with coastal Guayaquil and Quito in the central highlands as the largest cities.

Ecuador is listed as "high human development" and ranks 89th out of 186 countries in the 2013 United Nations Human Development Report.⁵ Indigenous, mixed-race, and rural populations are the most impacted by poverty and income inequality. Its economy is primarily based on petroleum and agricultural production. Following a banking crisis in 2000, the country adopted the U.S. dollar as its legal tender, which stabilized the economy and fostered economic growth.

PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Peace Corps Ecuador program began in 1962 at the request of the Ecuadorian government. More than 6,100 Volunteers have served since the program began, making it one of the oldest continuously operating Peace Corps programs. Throughout its long history Volunteers have worked in various programmatic areas across the entire country. The Ecuador program currently includes four projects:

⁴ The Ecuadorian dialect of Quechua.

⁵ *The United Nations Human Development Report* publishes an annual Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI provides a composite measure of three basic dimensions of human development: health, education and income. Countries receive a ranking that ranges from "very high human development" to "low human development" based on related data.

- **Community Health**

Volunteers are placed in communities to work with women's organizations, schools, youth groups, and other local health promoters. Volunteers address food security and nutrition issues, and promote good hygiene practices and safe water consumption. Certain Volunteers in the CH sector focus their activities on HIV/AIDS mitigation and to reduce risky sexual behaviors.

- **Natural Resource Conservation**

Volunteers work with community-based organizations, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations to promote the sustainable use of natural resources and help organizations establish or improve environmentally friendly businesses. Some Volunteers are designated as business advisors to work with their counterparts to identify and promote environmentally sound income generating activities and improve overall business practices.

- **Youth and Families**

Volunteers partner with local governmental and non-governmental organizations to support youth and families in marginalized neighborhoods by providing capacity-building training to aid youth in developing life and vocational skills. Volunteers also work with communities to engage youth as active citizens and build community support for youth development.

- **Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

Ecuador's newest project initiated in 2011 works closely with the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education to place Volunteers in high schools where they co-teach English classes and work with teachers to improve their skills and develop new language teaching resources. Volunteers also implement afterschool activities and may work with their communities on other development projects.

At the onset of this evaluation, 161 Volunteers were serving in Ecuador. The last Office of Inspector General (OIG) evaluation was conducted in 2007. The post's fiscal year 2013 budget was \$3.1 million.⁶ At the time of the evaluation the post had 39 permanent staff positions.

EVALUATION RESULTS

PROGRAMMING

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:

⁶ 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.

- 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.

We determined through our evaluation that the post has implemented effective programming. In reviewing project objectives, site development, and host country coordination we found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post. A discussion of several aspects of strong program management, as well as areas the post should consider to further strengthen the program, follows.

Project Objectives. The post has actively applied the agency’s FITU initiative and voiced its appreciation of the structured approach and resources provided as staff updated project plans and related objectives. Program staff worked with Volunteers and counterparts to select appropriate sector indicators and to finalize project frameworks.⁷ The post received support from Peace Corps headquarters staff throughout this process. The project frameworks for CH and YF have been finalized and the other two frameworks for NRC and TEFL were making good progress at the time of our visit.

Although all the projects are appropriately applying FITU initiatives, we found that project frameworks still contain a large number of indicators. Should the project focus remain widespread, the overall impact of the projects may be reduced. The frameworks for CH and YF each have over 40 indicators and those for NRC and TEFL have over 30.

There are several factors that led to the large number of sector indicators. Staff reported that with the closing of the agricultural project, some of the food security indicators were rolled into the CH project. Additionally, the post previously received Volunteers with specialized skills to work with disabled students, so the YF project has maintained these specific indicators until those Volunteers complete their service. Post staff is aware of the challenge of training Volunteers to work in activities spanning a large number of indicators and it recognized the need to monitor and analyze which indicators Volunteers are working in, and consider further streamlining the projects.

Site Development. All projects have established robust site development procedures to identify sites where Volunteers can achieve their project objectives. Site development is well documented and includes two visits conducted by staff before final site determinations are made. Staff maintain electronic site history files, which are referenced when considering prospective sites. Ninety-one percent of Volunteers we interviewed selected “above average” or “very satisfied” ratings with their sites.

While the site development process is thorough and generally effective, all the projects could benefit from having a more targeted and data driven approach to identify sites that have a greater need, such as less-served communities or schools away from the large urban areas. Volunteers in

⁷ As part of its Focus In/Train Up activities, the agency is developing standardized indicators that posts will use to monitor and evaluate projects.

the TEFL sector in particular reported that the program would be more effective if the post explored opportunities to serve such schools and communities. The site development process starts with a formal application from a community or organization and some PMs may not be taking additional steps to identify communities with the greatest needs. The CH project had a practical approach to developing sites by accessing data to identify areas that had a higher HIV/AIDS prevalence. Post leadership understood that it could take additional steps in site identification and encouraged PMs to use data and information developed with project partners to identify communities in need.

Host Country Coordination. Peace Corps staff has worked to develop a collaborative relationship with Ecuadorian project partners. The post recently signed an MOU with the Ministry of Education for the TEFL project and it was in the process of signing an additional MOU with the Ministry of Health. The post maintains positive working relationships with provincial, municipal, and local governments and has developed strong partnerships with non-profit organizations. We found that Volunteers often increased their impact beyond their host communities by leveraging these partnerships to jointly organize regional teacher conferences and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns.

While the post has strong programming elements, the evaluation uncovered two aspects of programming that require management attention: PAC development and counterpart identification. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

The post had not maintained active PACs for any of its projects.

The Peace Corps *Programming and Training Guidance: Project Design and Evaluation*, states that “PAC is the 'voice of key project stakeholders' that helps the Peace Corps ensure that it develops credible, realistic and responsive project plans and training programs. The guidance states that PACs should be established for each new project and should remain active throughout the life of a project. Furthermore, the guidance states “This committee shares responsibility for the design, evaluation, and revision of the project.”

The post staff reported regularly engaging with project partners in a variety of ways but not through regular, formalized PAC meetings. Previously, the post had not allocated funds to hold PAC meetings, but indicated it was planning to specifically allocate funds for this purpose in fiscal year 2014. PACs could be a valuable forum to provide strategic direction and secure support and host partner engagement for the projects. As previously discussed, some projects have over 40 indicators; suggestions from the PACs could assist the post in further focusing project activities. Additionally, PACs could provide advice to program managers to identify communities in Ecuador with the greatest needs that would most benefit from receiving a Volunteer.

We recommend:

- 1. That the post develop and maintain Project Advisory Committees for each of its projects.**

Volunteers worked more closely with other community members or partner agency staff than with the counterparts identified on their project MOUs.

According to Peace Corps *Programming and Training Guidance* “enthusiastic and dedicated work partners are often the most important factor in determining both Volunteer satisfaction and success.” The Peace Corps’ *Characteristics and Strategies of a High Performing Post: Post Management Resource Guide* emphasizes the importance of counterpart relationships by recommending that staff work with partner agencies to identify counterparts. Important aspects in the identification of counterparts are that “parameters for the counterpart selection [are] clear and understood by the organization or community” and the prospective counterpart is well matched and interested in working with the Volunteer. The guidance also notes that not having a productive counterpart relationship “can compromise a Volunteer’s chances for a satisfying and successful work experience.”

The post’s programming guidance requires that site development include “an in-depth several hours long visit with at least several community members and counterpart agency employees.” The guidance requires that “a local counterpart has been identified and shows commitment to work with the PCV [Peace Corps Volunteer].” According to the post’s site development process, before placing a Volunteer at a site, PMs select a primary counterpart for each Volunteer that is identified in a formal request by the community or organization.

Some Volunteers we interviewed were not working with counterparts originally identified during the site development process but instead worked with other community members. Volunteers reported that their official counterparts were often too busy or did not have responsibilities where they were engaged in community or classroom-level activities alongside the Volunteers. Therefore, Volunteers developed relationships with other community members that could work with them more regularly and directly.

During site development, PMs often identify additional community members who could also support the Volunteers’ work; however, these individuals are not specifically named in the MOU. The staff reported that it is important to establish the MOU with the higher level official, as they are more likely to remain in that position for the duration of the Volunteer’s service whereas the roles of other community members may change. As a result, the initial training for counterparts during PST usually includes only the official counterpart instead of the community member(s) who the Volunteer will work with more regularly over the course of the service.

While it is important that MOUs are established at the highest levels of the partner agency and with an individual that has the authority to enter into such an agreement, there are practical benefits to listing in the MOU the other individuals who will work directly with the Volunteer. This would help define the role of other community members active in the project. Additionally, Volunteers could more easily justify bringing the community member(s) they work with regularly to training events rather than the official counterpart listed in the MOU.

We Recommend:

- 2. That the post modify its site development process to identify additional community members the Volunteer is expected to work with and, where appropriate, include these individuals in training and conferences.**

TRAINING

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 evaluation determined that the training program in Ecuador is generally effective at helping Volunteers prepare for service and work productively at their sites. Each project’s program and training specialist (PTS), who supports the Volunteers during their service, remains on-site for the duration of PST to deliver technical training sessions and establish working relationships with the trainees. The post has continued to strengthen its training program and at the time of our visit was in the process of incorporating the new FITU training sessions into all its training events. The majority of classes are held at a training center with all Volunteers housed nearby with host families. Staff and Volunteers have found the sessions to be beneficial; however, trainers have struggled to fit all the required sessions into a tightly packed training schedule and include important technical or Ecuador-specific training sessions. To deliver all the FITU-mandated sessions and provide the necessary country specific training, the post was planning to budget for an additional week of training in the next PST.

Even though staff faced some difficulties incorporating the FITU sessions into the PST program, the post’s training effectiveness was not impacted. Overall, we found that Volunteers were satisfied with the cross-cultural, safety and security, medical/health training, as well as with the in-service training (IST) that takes place throughout a Volunteer’s service.

The following tables summarize the post’s training events and Volunteers’ perceptions on the effectiveness of their training.

Table 1: Volunteer Perceptions of Training Effectiveness

Training	Percent of Volunteers Who Rated Training Favorably⁸	Average Rating
PST:		
Local Language ^a	34%	3.2
Cross-Cultural ^a	72%	3.9
Safety and Security ^a	88%	4.4
Medical/Health ^a	78%	4.0

⁸ 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 = average effective, 5 = very effective). For the purposes of the data analysis, Volunteer ratings of “4” and “5” are considered favorable.

Technical ^a	47%	3.3
3-Month IST ^b	58%	3.6
12-Month IST ^c	71%	3.8

Source: OIG interviews.

^aN = 32, ^bN = 24, ^cN = 17 (Volunteers interviewed were at different points in their service and had not yet participated in all the training sessions.)

Trainee Assessment. The post has developed a comprehensive trainee assessment package that records each trainee’s status and progress during the 11-week training program for all competencies covered during PST including: safety, health, language, site-visits, cross-culture, professionalism, and the host family experience. The assessment includes pre-tests and post-tests with both written and interview components. The results from these assessments are used to determine if trainees are meeting expectations and determine who may require additional support from staff.

Other Specialized Trainings. Volunteers appreciated and benefited from additional trainings provided by the post on specific topic areas including: program design and management (PDM) workshop, recycled art workshops, and HIV/AIDS training for CH Volunteers. Volunteers stated that the PDM and other training were effective and they were able to apply what they learned in their communities.

Volunteer Technical Exchange. The post has implemented an innovative program that allows Volunteers to share skills and learn from each other through technical exchange visits to other Volunteer work sites. Under the technical exchange program, Volunteers apply for funding to pay transportation costs for another Volunteer to visit and provide technical assistance on a topic of interest. The receiving community supports housing and food needs for the visiting Volunteer. These exchanges frequently occur between Volunteers working on different projects, offering rich opportunities for cross-sectoral support. Along with the technical support delivered to host Volunteers and their communities, the Volunteers leading technical exchange sessions were provided an opportunity to improve training delivery skills. Sixteen of the Volunteers we interviewed had participated in a technical exchange visit, either as trainers or hosts, and 15 rated the experience favorably.

Although training programs were rated by Volunteers as generally effective, the evaluation uncovered some areas that require management attention, particularly related to PST language training, and the technical training provided to the business Volunteers in the NRC project. Additionally, the overall training process and effectiveness could be strengthened by more clearly defining the role of program managers during training. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

Volunteers did not find their language training to be sufficient or well-structured.

The Peace Corps Act states that Volunteers will not be assigned to their sites “unless at the time of such assignment [the Volunteer] possesses such reasonable proficiency as his assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he is assigned.” The ability to speak the language of their host community is often the basis for a Volunteer’s success in

accomplishing all three of the Peace Corps' goals. A working knowledge of a nationally or regionally spoken language is also essential to the personal safety and well-being of Volunteers.

The post's *Welcome Book for Volunteers* explains other important aspects of language ability:

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program.

All Volunteers are provided language training during PST. While the Volunteers ratings for language training sessions indicated they generally appreciated the quality of language training provided, they identified some areas of improvement:

"During PST, I felt like the language training always took second or third place to all the other categories, culture, safety security, technical, and it was disappointing. I felt like it should be every morning three to four hours, and it wasn't like that."

"Came with advanced [Spanish]... They did not know how to give us the sessions we needed; I wanted an advanced lesson, tired of playing Jeopardy for hours."

"All the words they told me not to say, they say here (the coastal area of Ecuador). I'm not sure if what they taught was more of a sierra than coastal Spanish... coastal slang, I didn't learn anything about it. The only coastal teacher... teaches beginner Spanish, but the teachers are from the sierra. The classes are mixed coastal and sierra."

As demonstrated by the following chart, the number of hours specifically dedicated towards language training was less than 34 percent of total training hours and slightly fewer than technical training hours.

Table 2: PST Training Session Distribution in FY 2012

Training	CH/YF		NRC/TEFL	
	Hours	Percent	Hours	Percent
Language	107	33%	114	34%
Technical	125	38%	125	37%
Cross-Cultural	28	9%	32	10%
Diversity	8	2%	8	2%
Medical/Health	24	7%	24	7%
Safety and Security	30	9%	30	9%
Administrative	5	2%	3	1%
<i>Totals:</i>	327	100%	336	100%

Source: PC/Ecuador Training Status Report 2012

Furthermore, the ratio of trainees to facilitators is high. While one may assume the six facilitators (five of which are new to Peace Corps) brought on to teach 30 trainees would lead to a classroom ratio of five to one, the reality is often different. Because trainees' language can vary drastically, the language and cross cultural coordinator often must decide between assigning trainees of varying levels to one facilitator, or allowing unequal groups of trainees. This problem becomes even more difficult when several trainees must also receive language training in Kichwa.

Only 34 percent of the 32 Volunteers who responded to our survey question rated pre-service language training favorably. Volunteers reported that language ability was one of the challenges to integrating into their communities. Volunteers who struggle to learn and use the local language are often less integrated into host community life, which can impact their work productivity and satisfaction with service, or increase their vulnerability to crime. An increase in language training hours could also allow trainers to incorporate more regional language differences and to better cater to the needs of advanced speakers.

We recommend:

- 3. That the post increase the number of language hours provided during pre-service training and review the teaching methodology to address regional language differences and the needs of advanced Spanish speakers.**

Technical training did not sufficiently prepare the business development Volunteers working in the natural resource conservation project.

The *Peace Corps Manual* section (MS) 201 “Eligibility and Standards for Peace Corps Volunteer Service” states that by the end of training a trainee must demonstrate technical competence, which is defined as “proficiency in the technical skills needed to carry out the assignment.”

The post provided 125 hours of technical training to NRC Volunteers during the 2012 PST. None of the interviewed business development Volunteers working in the NRC project gave a favorable rating to the effectiveness of the business related technical training. Volunteers explained why they were disappointed with the business instruction and information provided:

“We don't need to be trained on how to do business, we needed to be trained on how the business world works in Ecuador.”

“They really didn't talk about business, focused more on environmental education.”

The program and training staff were aware that the business training sessions needed to be improved. Since the NRC programming staff had limited experience in the business sector, the post was planning on engaging a Peace Corps Volunteer leader (PCVL) to review sessions and help strengthen the business training that is provided.

The post would benefit from additional training guidance from headquarters specialists and input by experienced Volunteers already working in the NRC sector. More effective technical training sessions could better prepare Volunteers for working in the Ecuadorian business development context and help them more quickly identify and launch appropriate activities in the initial months of work on their projects.

We recommend:

- 4. That the country director, training manager, and programming staff members develop a strategy and plan to improve business technical training and seek headquarters technical support as necessary.**

The role of program managers during PST was not clearly defined.

The Peace Corps Programming and Training Guidance: Management and Implementation, states:

Programming drives training, and training informs programming. Programming and training staff need to work together to build and maintain quality programming and training. Programming and training staff are often physically separated from each other and because their perspectives are different, sometimes opportunities for effective teamwork are lost, and training may become disconnected from programming.

Both programming and training staff expressed some concerns regarding misunderstandings over the role and involvement of PMs during PST which created some dysfunction in training delivery. Staffing changes in key positions likely contributed towards the uncertainty regarding the appropriate role of PMs during training. The director of programming and training (DPT) position had been vacant for three months when the 2013 training program took place. The DPT is the single position that performs oversight and supervises both the programming and training staff. Additionally, in fiscal year 2013 a new training manager was hired. While each project's PTS was heavily involved in on-site training throughout the PST program, it is also crucial that Volunteers develop a relationship with the PMs who will serve as a primary point of contact for project-related support during service. Post leadership was aware that the roles and relationships of program and training staff needed clarification and at the time of our visit had organized staff development sessions to improve relationships.

We recommend:

- 5. That the country director clearly define the role of the program managers during training events and develop a plan for pre-service training planning and communication by programming and training staff.**

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Our country program evaluation attempts to answer the question, "Has post provided adequate support and oversight to Volunteers?" To determine this, we assessed factors such as staff-Volunteer communications; the project and status report process; 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.

In general, we determined through our evaluation that post has developed a strong Volunteer support structure. Post staff understood its support roles and responsibilities and was prepared to

support Volunteers. Volunteers feel well supported by all post staff and described them as responsive to their needs and issues, both programmatic and administrative. During emergencies or when crimes or security issues have occurred, staff quickly responded to and supported Volunteers. Volunteers spoke appreciatively of the work of the safety and security coordinator (SSC), who they describe as proactive and effective. Volunteers were generally satisfied with the quality of their health care. Post senior staff, with involvement of OHS headquarters, had recently responded to concerns raised by Volunteers related to medical unit customer service, which may be reflected in the lower ratings in Volunteer perception of the effectiveness of medical unit support (see Table 3).

The post has established a robust Volunteer support program through comprehensive site visits and timely, targeted responses to Volunteer communications. Some PMs have incorporated coaching methodologies to guide regular, substantive communication with Volunteers about their service and progress on projects. This coaching-style approach is based on the Volunteers and PMs communicating regularly in structured sessions to review progress and constraints and identify and act with strategies and solutions to the challenges encountered during service.

In reviewing staff-Volunteer communications, Volunteer performance report feedback, site visits, PCVL program, Volunteer allowances, whereabouts reporting policy, and crime incident response, we found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post. Many aspects of the post's support to Volunteers were examples of a well-organized and administered country program. A discussion of several aspects of the post's strong Volunteer support program management, as well as areas the post should consider to further strengthen the program, follows.

Staff-Volunteer Communications. The evaluation determined that there was productive, open communication between Volunteers and staff. Staff was generally aware of Volunteer needs and concerns. The Volunteers we interviewed stated that staff was responsive and timely in assisting with the issues they raised.

The post used a variety of methods to reach Volunteers and communicate important information, including text messages, emails, and phone calls, as Volunteers have cell phones and frequent access to the Internet. Volunteers appreciated the availability of staff, including the administrative and support staff, and their genuine interest in and support of their work. Along with one-on-one contact with individual Volunteers, examples of the feedback mechanisms used to gather Volunteer input include pre- and in-service training evaluations and communication from the VAC.⁹

⁹ The VAC is a group of elected Volunteer representatives that discuss issues with Peace Corps staff and help develop solutions.

The following table demonstrates the strength of the post’s Volunteer support system:

Table 3: Volunteer Perception of Effectiveness of Staff Support¹⁰

Support Area	Percent of Volunteers Rating “Above Average Support” or Better	Average Rating for Support
Leadership	93%	4.6
Programming & Training	83%	4.4
Safety and Security	94%	4.5
Medical	67%	3.9
Administrative	80%	4.2

Source: OIG interviews.

Volunteer Performance Report Feedback. Staff provides regular, timely, and substantive feedback to Volunteers Report Forms (VRF). Volunteers were pleased with the relevant and specific feedback provided by PMs and support staff. Volunteers who had submitted their reports considered the staff’s VRF feedback helpful in fulfilling project goals: 78 percent (25 of 32) of interviewed Volunteers rated the feedback quality as above average or better (4.2 average).¹¹

Site Visits. The staff conducts thorough, comprehensive site visits that may include observations at the Volunteer’s work site and classroom, conversations with counterparts, and substantive visits with host families. In advance of the site visit, programming staff communicate with the Volunteers to plan the itinerary, determine what topics need to be covered, and ensure the visit meets their needs. Volunteers interviewed stated that they had received an adequate number of site visits, and 85 percent rated the effectiveness of the visits as “above average” or better (4.2 average). After the site visit, the staff document what occurred at the work site and provide feedback or follow-up as necessary.

Regional Office. The post has established a regional office in Guayaquil in partnership with a locally established non-profit organization that provides additional support to Volunteers in surrounding sites. The CH program manager works from this office along with one PTS. Additionally, the Peace Corps medical officers (PCMO) routinely visit the regional office to conduct medical consultations with Volunteers using the clinic rooms provided by the partner organization. Volunteers also use this space to conduct meetings and training events in support of their projects.

Volunteer Committees. The post has a number of active committees through which Volunteers provide support to each other. Volunteers and staff acknowledged the value of Volunteer-led groups and committees that provide targeted support to Volunteers on a variety of issues and concerns. Volunteers appreciated the post-authorized site visits made by Volunteer committee members, often in the first weeks after arrival at their work site. The following table summarizes these committees.

¹⁰ Leadership was derived from the CD score. Programming & Training was derived by averaging the scores of the DPT, PMs, PAs, and training manager. Safety and Security was derived from the SSC’s score. Medical was derived by averaging the scores of the PCMOs. Administrative was derived from the DMO’s score.

¹¹ At the time of the evaluation fieldwork not all Volunteers had been required to submit their VRF.

Table 4: Volunteer Committees

Committee Name	Description
VAC	Enhances productive problem solving and communication between Volunteers and staff.
Peer Support Network (PSN)	Provides quality support that enhances the well-being and effectiveness of the Volunteers.
SPECQTRUM	Provides a support space for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and trans-gendered Volunteers to meet and talk about common needs, problems and other issues.
FREE	Supports individuals of color and other minority Volunteers

Source: PC/Ecuador Handbook; for FREE: member description.

Whereabouts Policy Reporting. Almost all the Volunteers we interviewed stated that they report their travel away from their site to the post “always” or “most of the time.” Some acknowledged that they had forgotten to do so or did not do so to avoid using vacation time.

The post has identified specific areas of the country as “off-limits” to Volunteers. These areas either have the potential for serious natural disaster, including volcanic eruption, or are where narcotics trafficking may occur, such as near the Colombia border or along some coastal areas. Volunteers are restricted from any travel to those areas. While we determined that most Volunteers understand the rationale for these restrictions and adhere to the policies, some Volunteers nonetheless travel to coastal resort areas that are in the no-travel zone.

During our visit to the post the country director (CD) indicated that he was aware of whereabouts and off-limit policy violations. Among other actions to address these issues, he initiated a review of the off-limit restriction for one of the coastal areas that was within a zone with current Volunteer sites and did not appear to pose a security or personal safety risk. He also had post security staff and the regional Peace Corps security officer review the security status of the coastal border region bordering Colombia, and he confirmed the need to maintain the off-limit policy for that region. Based on the attention directed to these issues we are not making a recommendation, but we encourage the post to continue to review off-limit areas and fully communicate the rationale for such decisions to Volunteers.

Crime Incident Response. The post has developed and maintains robust safety and security procedures and is led by an experienced SSC who has the respect and trust of the Volunteers. Volunteers we interviewed cited specific examples when the SSC quickly and competently intervened in response to a safety or security incident. The SSC is supported by an assistant who is integral to maintaining communication with Volunteers, up-to-date whereabouts status, and other records.

Emergency Preparedness. The post’s Emergency Action Plan is regularly reviewed and updated. The Volunteers we interviewed were aware of procedures to follow in the event of an emergency and knew the location of their consolidation points. The post has organized and maintains Volunteer emergency cluster coordinators who help keep the Volunteers informed of pertinent information in the event of an emergency. The post’s duty officer (DO) system is

functioning well, contact information is kept up to date, and DOs are aware of their responsibilities.

The evaluation uncovered one aspect of emergency preparedness and Volunteer safety and security that requires management attention.

The information recorded in some site locator forms was not sufficient to locate the Volunteer's residence.

Site locator forms (SLFs) contain information about the Volunteer's site, including communication and logistical information that could be needed in an emergency situation. As part of the post's emergency communication system, each Volunteer in Ecuador is required to complete a SLF that forms part of the post's emergency communication system. According to Peace Corps safety and security standard operating procedures, the SSC should coordinate with appropriate staff to ensure that SLFs are reviewed during site visits and a system is in place for the review and improvement of maps and directions to Volunteer residences.

During the fieldwork we used the information contained in SLFs and in the Volunteer Information Database Application (VIDA) to locate Volunteers. The maps included in the SLF were adequate to locate the general vicinity of the Volunteer's residence. However, some SLF maps and narrative descriptions lacked sufficient descriptive details, such as the color of the Volunteer's house, location along a block of houses, or the street number, all of which would help to more quickly identify the Volunteer's exact residence. Volunteers may be exposed to additional risks during an emergency situation if the information in SLF and VIDA is not sufficient to quickly locate a Volunteer's residence.

We recommend:

- 6. That the safety and security coordinator ensure that site locator forms are reviewed during site visits and a system is in place to review and improve maps and narrative descriptions of Volunteer residences.**

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

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; office work environment; collection and reporting of performance data; and the post's strategic planning and budgeting process.

We found that post maintains productive and regular communication with headquarters offices and with the U.S. Embassy. The U.S. ambassador was well informed regarding projects and periodically visits Volunteers in the field to gain a first-hand perspective on Volunteer accomplishments. It is notable that program staff and the country director are regularly turned to

for mentoring other region staff, sharing best practices, or assisting with agency initiatives and pilot programs, including the agency's same-sex married couple initiative. For the latter, the post played an integral leadership role in formulating policies and procedures for this program. The same-sex married couple we interviewed during our visit was satisfied with and appreciative of the post's pre-placement planning and support, and reported that they were serving safely and productively.

In reviewing the staff performance appraisal process, staff development, strategic planning and budgeting, and performance reporting processes, we found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post. However, during the latter half of calendar year 2013, the CD, DPT and director of management operations all transitioned to other posts or ended staff service. The region has indicated that it is aware of the need to monitor and direct any necessary support to the post during this period of transition so that this high functioning post continues to provide the same level of training, program management, and support to Volunteers as in the past. We encourage the region to stay abreast of any support needs the post may have during this transition period.

The evaluation uncovered some areas that require management attention. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

The CD had not reviewed the MOU between Peace Corps and the Department of State with the RSO.

As required in MS 270.3.2.4 the CD is "responsible for maintaining regular contact with the U.S. Embassy on security concerns." Establishing a clear understanding of the range of RSO and embassy services available to the post when a crime or emergency situation occurs can be critical to the timeliness and response to such an event. On May 11, 2012 the Peace Corps and the Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DOS/DS) signed an MOU that established:

- Physical, technical and procedural support by DS for the security of Peace Corps operations abroad;
- DS support in responding to crimes against Peace Corps Volunteers;
- Personnel security investigations by DS of Peace Corps staff;
- Training services provided by DS to Peace Corps staff and Volunteers; and
- Funding and reimbursement for services provided to the Peace Corps by DS...

Without clear awareness by all parties of roles, responsibilities, and resources, there is a concern that coordination and support problems between the U.S. Embassy and the Peace Corps may develop, putting Volunteers or staff at risk.

We recommend:

- 7. That the country director review with the embassy's regional security coordinator the memorandum of understanding between the Peace Corps and the Department of State and ensure that it is on file and accessible.**

The VAC was raising funds and administering a small grant program in violation of Peace Corps policy.

MS 721 establishes that only certain Peace Corps offices and positions are allowed to accept monetary donations. Additionally, MS 720 establishes that “PCVs are not authorized to accept donations on behalf of the Peace Corps.”

We found that the VAC was selling calendars and t-shirts to fund a small grants program intended for small community projects. The VAC reviewed Volunteer requests and approved certain projects to receive small grants of up to \$100. The funds were managed entirely by the VAC outside the Peace Corps’ financial systems and were stored and disbursed from one of the VAC member’s personal bank account. In the past year the VAC had funded less than ten projects and shared its budget and project information with the CD. The CD had previously ended a much larger funded scholarship program that was also organized by the VAC, and realized that this small grants program may not be an appropriate VAC activity. However, at the time of our fieldwork the CD had not taken action to end VAC fundraising activity or close this account.

When Volunteers are self-administering all aspects of a small grant program, the funded community projects may not be sufficiently initiated, designed, or implemented by the local community, which may affect the sustainability of the project. Additionally, Volunteers who fundraise and disburse funds outside of Peace Corps’ financial systems may be exposed to additional risks, including personal liability, if funds are misused or embezzled.

We recommend:

- 8. That the country director in coordination with the Office of Gifts and Grants Management bring an orderly closure to the Volunteer Advisory Committee’s small grant program.**

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

WE RECOMMEND:

1. That the post develop and maintain Project Advisory Committees for each of its projects.
2. That the post modify its site development process to include any additional community members the Volunteer is expected to work with and, where appropriate, include these individuals in training and conferences.
3. That the post increase the number of language hours provided during pre-service training and review the teaching methodology to address regional language differences and the needs of advanced Spanish speakers.
4. That the country director, training manager, and programming staff members develop a strategy and plan to improve business technical training and seek headquarters technical support as necessary.
5. That the country director clearly define the role of the program managers during training events and develop a plan for pre-service training planning and communication by programming and training staff.
6. That the safety and security coordinator ensure that site locator forms are reviewed during site visits and a system is in place to review and improve maps and narrative descriptions of Volunteer residences.
7. That the country director review with the embassy's regional security coordinator the memorandum of understanding between the Peace Corps and the Department of State and ensure that it is on file and accessible.
8. That the country director in coordination with the Office of Gifts and Grants Management bring an orderly closure to the Volunteer Advisory Committee's small grant program.

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 (IG) 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 PC/Ecuador on May 24, 2013. We used 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 evaluators conducted the preliminary research portion of the evaluation from May 24 until departure to the post for fieldwork on July 13, 2013. This research included review of agency documents provided by headquarters and post staff and interviews with the Inter-America and Pacific Region, Office of Programming and Training, Office of Health Services, Office of Global Health/HIV, and the Office of Safety and Security.

In-country fieldwork was conducted by the assistant inspector general for evaluations and the evaluator from July 15 to August 2, 2013. Fieldwork included interviews with post senior staff responsible for programming, training, safety and security, administrative support and medical care; interviews with the U.S. ambassador, deputy chief of mission and the deputy RSO and with ministry of education officials. In addition, we interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 32 Volunteers (20 percent of Volunteers serving at the time of our visit) based on their length of service, site location, project focus, gender, age, and ethnicity.

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE). 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: 32 Volunteers; 14 in-country staff members; 11 staff members at Peace Corps headquarters; the Peace Corps safety and security officer stationed in San Salvador, El Salvador; the U.S. ambassador, the deputy chief of mission, the deputy RSO at the U.S. Embassy in Quito, Ecuador; and with host government ministry officials in Ecuador.

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 = average effective, 5 = very effective). For the purposes of the data analysis, Volunteer ratings of “4” and “5” are considered favorable. The analysis of these ratings provided a quantitative supplement to Volunteers’ interview responses, which were also analyzed. In addition, 30 out of 32 Volunteer interviews occurred at the Volunteers’ homes, which were inspected 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 Ecuador; the Volunteer sample was selected to reflect these demographics.

Table 5: Volunteer Demographic Data

Project	Percentage of Volunteers
Community Health	20
Natural Resource Conservation	32
Youth and Families	19
Teaching English as a Foreign Language	34
Gender	Percentage of Volunteers
Female	72
Male	33
Age	Percentage of Volunteers
25 or younger	17
26-29	10
30-49	5
50 and over	1

Source: VIDA.

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

Table 6: Interviews Conducted with PC/Ecuador Staff Members

Position	Status	Interviewed
Country Director	USDH	X
Director of Management Operations	USDH	X
Program Manager, Community Health	PSC	X
Program Manager, Natural Resource Conservation	PSC	X
Program Manager, Teaching English as a Second Language	PSC	X
Program Manager, Youth and Family	PSC	X
Medical Officers (3)	PSC	X
Training Manager	PSC	X
Master Trainer	PSC	X
Safety and Security Officer	PSC	X
Language and Cross Cultural Coordinator	PSC	X
Host Family Coordinator	PSC	X
Director of Program and Training	Vacant	
Program and Training Assistants (4)	PSC	
Executive Assistant	PSC	
Safety And Security Assistant	PSC	
Medical Assistant	PSC	
Financial Assistant	FSN	
Cashier	FSN	
Administrative Assistant- Financial Matters	PSC	
IT Specialist	PSC	
General Service Manager	PSC	
General Services Assistant	PSC	
Receptionist	PSC	
Records Manager	PSC	
Messenger	PSC	
Administrative Assistant - Training	PSC	
Janitors (4)	PSC	
Mechanic	PSC	

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 as necessary.

Table 7: Interviews Conducted with PC/Headquarters (HQ) Staff, U.S. Embassy Officials and Key Ministry Officials

Position	Organization/Location
Acting Regional Director	Inter-America and Pacific Region (IAP), HQ
Chief of Operations	IAP, HQ
Acting Chief Administrative Officer	IAP, HQ
Chief of Programming and Training	IAP, HQ
Country Desk Officer	IAP, HQ
Regional Security Specialist	IAP, HQ
Education Program and Training Specialist	Office of Programming and Training (OPATS) , HQ
Health Specialist	OPATS, HQ

Nutrition and Food Security Specialist	OPATS, HQ
Natural Resource Management Specialist	OPATS, HQ
Program Specialist	Office of Global Health/HIV, HQ
Safety and Security Specialist	Office of Safety and Security, San Salvador, El Salvador
U.S. Ambassador to Ecuador	Department of State, Quito
Deputy Chief of Mission	Department of State, Quito
Deputy Regional Security Officer	Department of State, Quito
English Language Project Manager	Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, Quito

APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CD	Country Director
CH	Community Health
DO	Duty Officer
DPT	Director of Programming and training
DOS/DS	Department of State, Diplomatic Security
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
FITU	Focus In/Train Up
IAP	Inter-America and the Pacific
IST	In-Service Training
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Manual Section
NRC	Natural Resource Conservation
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPATS	Overseas Training and Program Support
PAC	Project Advisory Committees
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteer
PCVL	Peace Corps Volunteer Leader
PDM	Program Design and Management
PM	Program Manager
PSN	Peer Support Network
PST	Pre-Service Training
PTS	Programming and Training Specialist
RSO	Regional Security Officer
SLF	Site Locator Form
SSC	Safety and Security Coordinator
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
VAC	Volunteer Advisory Committee
VIDA	Volunteer Information Database Application
YF	Youth and Families

APPENDIX D: AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT



Since 1961.

MEMORANDUM

To: Kathy Buller, Inspector General

Through: Daljit K. Bains, Chief Compliance Officer *[Signature]*

From: Nina Favor, Acting IAP Regional Director
Alexis Vaughn, PC Ecuador Country Director *[Signature]*

Date: May 5, 2014

CC: Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Acting Director
Stacy Rhodes, Chief of Staff
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General
Jim O'Keefe Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations
Carlos Torres, Associate Director, Global Operations
Brian Riley, Chief of Operations, IAP
Amy Johnson, Chief of Programming & Training, IAP
Joshua O'Donnell, Regional Security Advisor, IAP
Cicely Lewis, Acting Chief Administrative Officer, IAP
Greg Jacobs, Director of Programming & Training, Ecuador
Brittanie Paquette, Director of Management & Operations, Ecuador
Ella Ewart, Country Desk Officer, Ecuador
Patricia Barkle, Deputy Chief Compliance Officer

Subject: Agency Response to the Preliminary Program Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Ecuador, March 2014

Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for Preliminary Program Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Ecuador, as outlined in the Preliminary Report sent to the Agency on March 7, 2014.

The Region concurs with 7 recommendations and does not concur with 1 recommendation provided by the OIG in its Preliminary Program Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Ecuador. The IAP Region has Provided supporting documentation for 7 of the 8 recommendations and will provide additional documentation for recommendations 1, 6 and 8 by the set target dates.

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 post develop and maintain Project Advisory Committees for each of its projects.

Response: Concur

Documents to be submitted:

Meeting agenda and membership list for each of the four projects to be submitted by September 30, 2014.

Status and Timeline for Completion:

To be completed by September 30, 2014

Post will establish PACs and will complete an annual meeting for each Program Area (Community Health, Natural Resources Conservation, TEFL, Youth & Families) before September 30, 2014. Agenda development and membership identification and cultivation are already in progress.

Recommendation 2

That the post modify its site development process to identify additional community members the Volunteer is expected to work with and, where appropriate, include these individuals in training and conferences.

Response: Do Not Concur

Post believes it has sufficiently robust site development practices in place to address the intent of the recommendation. Post provides Volunteers with a list of community members (with contact information) with whom Volunteers will work, as well as contact information of other relevant community members from the Volunteer Request Form (see attached). The Site Development Form (see attached) also includes a list with contact information of additional community members with whom volunteers might work. The congratulations letter, which tells Trainees their site assignments (see attached), given to Trainees upon site assignment also includes this information. All of these documents are provided to the Trainees prior to their site visits during PST. Volunteers are encouraged to work with not only their formal counterpart and the community members already identified by PC/Ecuador staff, but also to identify and cultivate community partners throughout their service. The Region and Post both believe strongly in Volunteer ownership of the development of community relationships as it is essential in all aspects of accomplishing the mission of Peace Corps.

Region and post agree that appropriate community partners need to be at training events. Constant change in host organization personnel, shifting community dynamics and personal initiative all play a role in determining the most appropriate counterpart for a volunteer, and staff

cannot predict this. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon Volunteers to become embedded in their communities and develop strategies for productive engagement.

Where there is flexibility, Volunteers bring the partner that they deem most appropriate to a training event. For example, during the most recent IST held the week of March 11, 2014, the majority of Ecuadorians who were attending were not official counterparts of Volunteers, but community members identified by the Volunteers as the most appropriate work partner for the training event.

A new training session for Volunteers called “Understanding My Work Partner” which has been delivered in PST as of FY2014 Q2 addresses various issues and challenges related to counterparts.

Documents Submitted:

Volunteer Request Form

Site Development Form

Congratulations Letter

Session Plan: Understanding my Work Partner

Recommendation 3

That the post increase the number of language hours provided during pre-service training and review the teaching methodology to address regional language differences and the needs of advanced Spanish speakers.

Response: Concur

The following steps have already been taken to address this issue:

1. Added another week to PST for FY 2014 to allow for more language hours. Training in FY 2013 had 95 language hours and training in FY 2014 has 123, an increase of 28 additional language hours.
2. Added two full time language facilitators to staff (hired in December 2013) who will provide language training to Volunteers at site while PST is not in session. Added two additional part-year language facilitators for the PST FY 2014 Q3 lowering the ratio of Trainees to facilitators for all groups, including the advanced Spanish speakers.
3. As of the Q2 FY 2014 input, included immersion days to provide more opportunities for speaking of Spanish at training.
4. Revised Spanish curriculum for advanced speakers based on feedback received from previous training groups. Two major changes are increasing a focus on Ecuadorian culture through a range of activities including a book club, visits to historical sites, meetings with cultural leaders, etc. Also, increased use of projects and activities outside of the classroom such as visits to schools, interview projects related to the

technical area that volunteers will be working, as well as providing mentoring to beginning Spanish students.

5. Incorporated information from counterparts at site to develop language sessions that incorporate various cultural and language aspects from areas from around the country.
6. Enhanced exposure to regional language and culture by adding a technical training trip to the coast during PST, thus increasing Volunteer knowledge of the coastal usage and accent as compared to the highlands, where the training center is located.

Documents Submitted:

COTE PST 110 (FY 2013 Q3)

COTE PST 111 (FY 2014 Q2)

Example Session Plan 1: Advanced Spanish Class

Example Session Plan 2: Advanced Spanish Class

Example Session Plan 3: Advanced Spanish Class

Weekly Evaluation Form 2014

Status and Timeline for Completion:

Completed: April 9, 2014

Recommendation 4

That the country director, training manager, and programming staff members develop a strategy and plan to improve business technical training and seek headquarters technical support as necessary.

Response: Concur

Post has already taken several steps to address this issue. Business training in the Natural Resources Conservation (NRC) project increased from 9.17 hours in FY 2013 Q2 to 16.75 hours in FY 2014 Q2. Post also offered 6 additional hours of optional hands-on training with micro-entrepreneurs during the weekend for the FY14 training group. Finally, Post plans 2 more hours of business training for subsequent ISTs of Reconnect and Mid-Service.

To bolster technical expertise in business, Post selected a PCVL for the NRC project who had significant business experience to support training in these areas during PST and to help ensure the NRC PM and PTS are prepared to facilitate sessions for future training groups. The PCVL helped to develop and/or refine six new business training sessions for the NRC project, incorporating information from OPATS-developed technical sessions for three of them.

1. Ecuadorian small business culture
2. Better business practices: Pricing strategies
3. Introduction to income generating activities

4. Introduction to income generating activities II
5. Selecting an income generating activity: Business Planning
6. Organizational Management Case Studies (4)

Documents Submitted:

COTE PST 111 (Q2 FY2014)
Session Plan: Better Business Practices
Session Plan: Ecuadorian Small Business Culture
Session Plan: Intro to Income Generation I & II
Session Plan: Organizational Management
Session Plan: Selecting and Income Generation Activity

Status and Timeline for Completion:

Completed: April 9, 2014

Recommendation 5

That the Director of Programming & Training clearly define the role of the program managers during training events and develop a plan for pre-service training planning and communication by programming and training staff.

Response: Concur

Program Managers (PMs) expressed concern that they had limited interaction with training, specifically with PST. Following his arrival at post in November 2013, the Director for Programming and Training (DPT) has given clear guidance to PMs and Training Staff on several occasions that PMs should be involved with training activities and participate to maximum extent possible. This has been implemented for the most recent PST from January – April 2014.

Also, to improve regular communication, the DPT organized a Program and Training workshop in November 2013 to address issues including communication and also held an integrated planning meeting in December 2013 with program and training team. In December 2013, post established a P&T listserv combining all individuals in P&T team, and regular coordination meetings are held twice per month.

The result has been that Program Managers have a continuous presence and regular engagement with trainees. Post expects that newly sworn in Volunteers now have a clear understanding of the PM role and leave PST with an established relationship with their PM.

Documents Submitted:

Agenda from November and December 2013 meetings and email establishing bi-weekly meetings

Status and Timeline for Completion:

Completed: December 31, 2013

Recommendation 6

That the safety and security manager ensure that site locator forms are reviewed during site visits and a system is in place to review and improve maps and narrative descriptions of Volunteer residences.

Response: Concur

Beginning with Trainees arriving in FY 2014 Q3 post will collect photographs of the front of Volunteer houses and upload the images into VIDA. Further, post will work to train Volunteers so that they better understand the level of detail required in identifying the Volunteer residence once a traveler has arrived at the Volunteer site, for example the house number (where available), color, or any other special identifying characteristics.

The Site Locator Form (SLF) is one of several tools that post uses to locate Volunteers. Information from VIDA and phone calls are used in conjunction with the SLF. Post staff will continue to use cell phones to call Volunteers and/or community members en route in case they are not able to identify the house, and rely on all available tools like GPS coordinates, mapping software (when available), etc.

Currently, Ecuador's site locator forms contain several elements of a strong site locator form: address, GPS coordinates, neighboring landmarks such as schools, hospitals, and government buildings, contact information for local neighbors, contact information for nearest volunteers, hand-drawn maps, Google maps (where possible), narrative description of how to arrive by car and bus, as well as a narrative description of the block. As the cartography skills of Volunteers vary tremendously, Volunteers are encouraged to use Google Maps, Wayze, iMaps, and other GPS-based sources to provide specific directions and accurate maps for site locator forms.

In addition to the above response by post to improve Site Locator Forms at the local level, the IAP region is working in collaboration with the Office of Safety and Security, the Office of Global Operations and the Compliance Office to establish new procedural guidelines for locating Volunteers. The Region believes the existing guidance and resources are outdated, and innovative strategies can be better leveraged to reach our objectives. A working group has been formed for the purpose of drafting new guidance and options for moving forward are being evaluated. The working group anticipates that guidance will be rolled out no later than May, 2015.

Documents Submitted:

Site Locator Form, PC/Ecuador

Documents to be submitted:

Example image of Volunteer house from VIDA

Status and Timeline for Completion:
To be completed by August 6, 2014

Recommendation 7

That the country director review with the embassy's regional security coordinator the memorandum of understanding between the Peace Corps and the Department of State and ensure that it is on file and accessible.

Response: Concur

The current Regional Security Officer (RSO) is leaving Ecuador in June 2014, and the new RSO is scheduled to arrive in July 2014. The current Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) is also leaving this summer. The Country Director will request a meeting with the new DCM and the new RSO to occur by August 15, assuming no delay in the arrival of the new RSO or DCM.

Documents Submitted:

MOU Copy
DCM Meeting request

Status and Timeline for Completion:
To be completed by August 15, 2014

Recommendation 8

That the country director in coordination with the Office of Gifts and Grants Management bring an orderly closure to the Volunteer Advisory Committee's small grant program.

Response: Concur

Post has worked with Melissa Becchi, John Hrivnak, at the Office of Gifts and Grants Management, and Jean Deal from CFO/FS to plan the transfer of existing VAC grant funds to an in-country donation account at post. The VAC has been advised to discontinue fundraising and all funds deposited to the in-country donation account will be eligible for unrestricted use as post deems appropriate, per the Office of Gifts and Grants Management. In the spirit in which the funds have been raised, post will distribute the funds to approved in-country volunteer projects that meet Peace Corps Small Grant Program requirements, as recommended by the Volunteer Advisory Committee and the Small Grant Committee at post, until all transferred funds have been exhausted.

Post generated Bills of Collection to the VAC in the amount of \$2,491.05. The BOCs will then be paid to the Post cashier. This process will be completed and documentation will be made available by May 15, 2014.

Documents Submitted:

VAC financial documents spreadsheet

Emails between PC/Ecuador and Office of Gifts and Grants Management
Bills of collection

Documents to be submitted:

Letter from Post cashier confirming amount collected.

Status and Timeline for Completion:

To be completed by May 15, 2014.

APPENDIX E: OIG COMMENTS

Management concurred with seven recommendations and did not concur with one recommendation. 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.

All eight recommendations remain open. OIG will review and consider closing recommendations when the documentation reflected in the agency's response to the preliminary report is received.

APPENDIX F: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION

This program evaluation was conducted under the direction of Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jim O'Keefe, by Evaluator Danel Trisi. Additional contributions were made by Program Analyst Kaitlyn Large and Evaluation Apprentice Ben Simasek.



Jim O'Keefe
Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations

OIG CONTACT

Following issuance of the final report, a stakeholder satisfaction survey will be distributed. 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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