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Daljit Bains, Chief Compliance Officer

From: Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General 

Date: September 16, 2013

Subject: Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/Moldova
(IG-13-04-E)

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

Management concurred with all 11 recommendations. The 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 C, address these matters. Please respond with documentation to close the 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 or to Evaluator Danel Trisi at 202.692.2936.

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

Attachment

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Peace Corps Office of Inspector General



Peace Corps/Moldova Volunteer Brendan McInerney and host mother



Flag of Moldova

Final Program Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Moldova IG-13-04-E

September 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 1,100 Peace Corps Volunteers have served the people of Moldova since the program began in 1993. There are currently four project sectors: English education, health education, community and organizational development, and small enterprise development. At the onset of this evaluation, 104 Volunteers were in Moldova.

PC/Moldova (hereafter, “the post”) is a strong performing post with qualified and dedicated staff. The post has been well-managed despite undergoing a complete turnover of the three U.S. direct hire (USDH) positions in 2012. The local staff demonstrated a high level of professionalism and commitment to Volunteers and the Peace Corps mission. The post maintains a good working relationship with the U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps headquarters.

The post has a strong programming foundation and has applied the Focus/In Train Up initiative (FITU) to all its projects.¹ All government ministry partners interviewed expressed appreciation for the Volunteers’ work and look forward to future collaboration with the Peace Corps. The post’s comprehensive site selection process has placed Volunteers with meaningful assignments, strong counterparts, and good host families. However, Volunteers placed in urban sites faced challenges integrating into their communities.

The training program in Moldova is effective at helping trainees prepare for service. The post benefits from experienced language training instructors who have been working with the post for many years. Additionally, because Volunteer site placements are announced in the fourth week of pre-service training (PST), the staff can tailor the training to specific site placements for the rest of PST. However, the post is not utilizing the results of Volunteer language proficiency interviews in a meaningful way and it could improve its use of trainee assessment tools.

The post has developed a solid Volunteer support structure. Volunteers feel well-supported by staff and have found them to be responsive to the concerns they raise. Staff conduct comprehensive site visits and distribute informative weekly email newsletters to Volunteers. Post staff has adequately responded to crimes committed against Volunteers and is prepared to support them during emergencies. However, we identified some issues related to Volunteer safety and emergency preparedness that require attention. Some Volunteers were unaware of their consolidation points, and many Volunteer Site Locator Forms (SLFs) were missing important information.² The post is using electronic site history files but recent security incidents had not been properly documented. Post staff was using different versions of the Volunteer housing checklist that did not contain identical housing elements, which creates inconsistency in the housing review and approval process. Also, some Volunteers did not have locks to their rooms or functioning smoke/carbon monoxide detectors.

Our report contains 11 recommendations, which, if implemented, should strengthen post operations and correct the deficiencies detailed in the accompanying report.

¹ 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.

² Site Locator Forms include information that may be used to locate a Volunteer in an emergency.

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HOST COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The Republic of Moldova is a small land locked country in Eastern Europe located between Romania and Ukraine. It is approximately the size of Maryland. Moldova declared its independence from the former Soviet Union on August 27, 1991. Soon after, the eastern Transnistria region seceded from Moldova leading to conflict with the newly created state. However, this conflict has been stable since a cease fire was established in 1992. The country had parliamentary elections in July 2009, where the opposition gained a narrow majority over the communist party, leading to the president's resignation the following September. The country was without a president until March 2012 when the current president obtained enough votes through parliament to be elected.

Moldova has a population of 3.6 million. Most people are of Romanian descent but there are also small percentages of Ukrainians, Russians, and Gagauzians. The majority of the population lives in rural areas with poor living conditions. Moldovan is the primary language spoken, while Russian and Gagauz, a Turkish dialect, are spoken in other parts of the country. Eastern Orthodox is the religious denomination of the majority of the population.

The country's climate and geography makes it vulnerable to landslides and has suffered from severe flooding in the past. The country is also subject to earthquakes.

Moldova is listed as "medium human development" and ranks 113 out of 186 countries in the 2013 United Nations Human Development Report, making it the European country with the lowest ranking.³ Its economy is one of the poorest in Europe. Moldova imports almost all of its energy supplies and is quite dependent on Russia. Moldova has an agro-based economy focused on wine, fruits, vegetables, and tobacco.

PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Peace Corps Moldova program began in 1993 at the request of the government to build the English-teaching capacity of Moldovan educators. More than 1,100 Volunteers have served continuously since the program began. The program has since expanded to include the following four projects:

- **English Education (EE)**

The first Volunteers arrived in 1993 to teach English to primary and secondary students to address the country's shortage of English teachers. The program changed direction in 2008 to focus more on teacher development instead of having Volunteers directly

³ *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.

teaching. Volunteers support Moldovan teachers in planning and co-teaching lessons and organize training workshops for students and teachers.

- **Health Education (HE)**

The Peace Corps initiated a health education project in 1997 by placing Volunteers in health centers to promote health education and training in communities. In 2000, Volunteer activities were refocused on schools and other community agencies. Volunteers co-teach on relevant health topics in secondary schools. Additionally, Volunteers develop health education resource centers, health clubs, and other social clubs at sites.

- **Community and Organizational Development (COD)**

The project started in 1996 and has evolved to now place Volunteers with community-based organizations and municipalities. Volunteers work with their counterparts in a variety of projects to promote youth development, environmental awareness, minority and human rights, volunteerism, and effective use of information communications technology.

- **Small Enterprise Development (SED)**

This project separated from the COD project in 2004 to better meet the distinct needs in the agricultural and rural business sectors. The project has recently changed its primary focus from agriculture to business and economic development to keep pace with the country's development. Volunteers work with a variety of business support organizations to strengthen the economic viability of farmers, small business owners, and cooperatives.

At the onset of this evaluation 104 Volunteers were serving in Moldova. The last Office of Inspector General (OIG) evaluation was conducted in 2003. The post's fiscal year 2013 budget was \$1.9 million.⁴ At the time of the evaluation the post had 31 permanent staff positions.

EVALUATION RESULTS

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

One of the key objectives of our country program evaluation is to assess the extent to which the post's resources and agency support are effectively aligned with the post's mission and agency priorities. To address this question, we assess a number of factors, including staffing; staff development; office work environment; collecting and reporting performance data; and the post's strategic planning and budgeting.

⁴ 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 evaluation found a generally well-managed post despite a complete turnover of the three USDH positions in 2012; the country director (CD), director of programming and training (DPT), and director of management and operations (DMO). The local staff demonstrated a high level of professionalism and commitment to Volunteers and the Peace Corps mission. The post staff worked well as a team and with the new USDH employees. They also maintained effective relationships with staff at the U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps headquarters. The staff was looking forward to receiving larger trainee inputs in the future. In reviewing the post's management, work environment, growth plans, relationship with the U.S. Embassy, and relationship with headquarters we found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post.

Post Management and Office Work Environment. Staff members reported that morale is high, and they are proud of the communication and collaboration that occurs across the units. Their commitment to the Peace Corps was one of the primary reasons the post performs so well despite the change in post leadership. They are also appreciative of the supervision and guidance provided by the post leadership. Additionally, the post benefits strongly from highly skilled and professional in-country staff. The in-country staff feel a great sense of camaraderie and respect for their peers and leadership:

“It’s a nice place to work. Each person knows what to do. It’s a very different climate in Peace Corps than other Moldovan organizations.”

“Even with the most challenging situations I don’t hesitate to approach [the leadership]. [The CD] has a good way of handling situations diplomatically but forcefully.”

“Everyone has a value. When someone is missing for whatever reasons... then you feel like something is missing.”

Moderate Growth. The post received 66 trainees in June 2012 and requested 60 trainees for its June 2013 input and 80 trainees for its June 2014 input. The staff was confident in their ability to handle the increased trainee input and was looking forward to it as they had received and supported larger trainee inputs in the past.

Relationship with the Embassy. The post has an effective working relationship with the U.S. Embassy in Chisinau. The post leadership participates in embassy meetings and regularly meets with the ambassador. The embassy staff are very knowledgeable of the Peace Corps’ operations in Moldova and coordinate with post staff on programmatic and administrative issues as needed.

Headquarters Support. In general, the staff appreciated the support provided by headquarters’ offices. Staff have benefited from the support and resources provided during staff trainings and headquarters’ staff visits to Moldova. They also value the availability and flexibility of headquarters staff to provide support when issues arise.

Because of the strength of the post’s management practices and effective operations there are no recommendations at this time that require management attention.

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:

- 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 elements. In reviewing project objectives, host country coordination, management of small grants, Volunteer performance reporting, monitoring and evaluation initiatives, and site identification initiative we found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post.

Project Objectives. The post has applied the agency’s FITU initiative and is appreciative of the structure and resources provided as staff update the project plans and related objectives. Post staff worked with Volunteers, counterparts, and project partners to choose the sector indicators and finalize their project frameworks.⁵ The post received support from staff at Peace Corps Headquarters throughout this process and has submitted all four projects frameworks to headquarters for review. Even though the project frameworks were not finalized, 84 percent (21 of 25) of interviewed Volunteers rated their ability to achieve their project objectives “moderately well” or better.⁶

Some headquarters staff questioned whether the post would benefit from combining the COD and the SED projects into one project because they share some similarities and operate under the same *community economic development* project sector. Post staff felt strongly that the COD project is meeting specific, discrete needs in the public sector by working with municipal offices and nongovernmental organizations (NGO); the SED project does not meet these same needs because it focuses on the private sector. At the time of the evaluation, 19 COD Volunteers were partnered with NGOs while only 10 COD Volunteers were working with municipal offices. Post staff mentioned that the recent elections had made it harder to identify Volunteer placements in municipal offices. We encourage the post to continue to identify opportunities for COD Volunteers to work with municipal offices, and note that both the ministry partners and the U.S. Embassy found the municipal development component of the COD project to be the most beneficial for Moldova.

Host Country Coordination. Peace Corps staff worked to develop a collaborative relationship with Moldovan project partners. The post invites ministry partners to participate in Peace Corps events and seeks their support in identifying potential Volunteer sites. Ministry partners interviewed at the time of the evaluation were familiar with the Peace Corps’ programs and

⁵ As part of its Focus In/Train Up activities, the agency is developing standardized indicators that posts will use to monitor and evaluate projects.

⁶ 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, 5 = very effective).

expressed appreciation for the work Volunteers are doing. Ministry partners also reported that Volunteer work aligns well with Moldovan development goals. They were satisfied with their coordination with the post and would like to receive more Volunteers. Post staff expressed an interest in further strengthening the relationships with the ministry partners because recent government elections had created turnover in the ministries and affected the post's ability to maintain some ministry-level contacts.

Management of Small Grants. The post successfully implemented the new agency-wide small grant procedures and forms.⁷ Three grants had been submitted since the new small grants procedures began and the post has maintained well-organized grant project files. Over half of the interviewed Volunteers were involved in grant activities supported by the Peace Corps. Volunteers were using the following small grants: Peace Corps Partnership Program, Small Project Assistance (SPA), and Volunteer Assistance Support and Training grants. The post has a small grants committee that reviews and approves grants and consists of Volunteers and staff from the administrative and programming units. Volunteers and counterparts applying for SPA grants are required to do a presentation before the small grants committee.

Volunteer Performance Reporting. Volunteers were completing their Volunteer reporting forms (VRFs), and most of the Volunteers we interviewed reported that the information they provided was reliable. The programming staff raised some concerns regarding technical issues and limitations with the VRF form. For example, the character limits for some data fields were too restrictive and the staff found the built-in feature to provide VRF feedback to Volunteers to be cumbersome. The staff communicated these issues to the post's information technology specialist, who informed headquarters.

Monitoring and Evaluation Initiatives. The post is well-positioned to start a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program. As part of Eastern Mediterranean Asia (EMA) region's monitoring and evaluation initiative, a programming staff member was identified to serve as the lead for the post.⁸ The selected staff member has previous monitoring and evaluation experience and has already started engaging with staff and Volunteers on current opportunities to incorporate monitoring and evaluation into post activities. In addition to the data reported by Volunteers, the post has other data gathering instruments that could be incorporated into a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program. For example, the HE Volunteers distribute surveys before and after education campaigns, and the COD and SED Volunteers use a tool that measures organizational development. Post staff were looking forward to fully initiating their monitoring and evaluation efforts after finalizing the project frameworks.

In addition to the aforementioned programming elements, the post has also excelled in identifying Volunteer sites, which is highlighted below. While the post has strong programming elements, the evaluation uncovered some areas that require management's attention, particularly documenting security incidents in site history files and placing Volunteers in urban sites. The remainder of this section provides more information about these topics.

⁷ On September 23, 2012, Peace Corps announced a new streamlined initiative for all small grants programs.

⁸ Moldova participated in the region's monitoring and evaluation initiative where a post staff member was identified to devote 25 percent of their time to enhancing the post's monitoring and evaluation activities. Additionally, the EMA region hired a headquarters-based monitoring and evaluation specialist to work with posts on this effort.

All projects have established robust procedures to identify Volunteer sites.

According to the *Peace Corps Programming and Training Guidance: Management and Implementation*, “Volunteers can more easily thrive when their sites and homes are safe, their families and neighbors are welcoming, their role and work assignment are well-defined, and partners and host families understand their roles.” The guidance emphasizes the importance of “encouraging potential partner agencies to request Volunteers” and “to orient the potential partners and host families to the Peace Corps development philosophy and the project’s purpose, goals and objectives.”

Volunteers interviewed were overwhelmingly content with the sites the post had identified and their working relationships with counterparts. All Volunteers (25 of 25) rated their sites favorably and the majority gave their sites the highest rating possible of “very satisfied.” Additionally, all Volunteers had counterparts, and all but one of these counterparts had been identified with the support of Peace Corps. Eighty-four percent of Volunteers (21 of 25) gave their counterparts favorable ratings in supporting them to meet their project objectives, and all interviewed Volunteers (25 of 25) reported having a positive working relationship with their counterpart. Volunteers are required to live with a host family during their first three months at site, and 88 percent (22 of 25) rated this experience and their living accommodations favorably.

There are several aspects to program operations that lead to such effective identification of sites, host families and counterparts. Post staff begin their site identification process well before trainees arrive. They engage their ministry partners, NGOs, and current Volunteers to start identifying a list of potential sites. All organizations and communities interested in hosting a Volunteer are required to submit an application for consideration. The staff develop more sites than trainees requested to provide flexibility in site assignments and to provide a back-up in case any sites are not ready by the end of PST. Because Moldova is a small country, post staff are able to easily visit potential sites to meet with project partners and host families.

The community is asked to identify potential counterparts and prepare three host families where the Volunteer could reside during the initial three months at site. Post staff meet with community leaders, counterparts, and the host families to set accurate expectations and inspect the housing options. As site development is started early the programming staff is able to spend more time during PST learning Volunteers’ strengths and preferences, information they use when assigning Volunteers to their sites. Near the conclusion of PST, both counterparts and host families attend training sessions to learn more about the mission of Peace Corps and about working and living with a Volunteer.

Volunteers can be successful in all aspects of the Volunteer experience when sites are carefully selected and when counterparts and host families are adequately oriented. Volunteers can develop strong relationships with their counterparts to achieve their project objectives and become more integrated into their communities by living with a host family. The post’s comprehensive site identification approach contributes significantly to the overall effectiveness of its program.

Recent security incidents were not properly documented in the site history files.

MS 270 “Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security” instructs all posts to “maintain a system for recording the history of a site,” including “security issues that could affect future Volunteer placements in particular areas.” The *Peace Corps Programming and Training Guidance: Management and Implementation* recognizes the value of site history information and further instructs all posts to rely on site history files during site development so staff can fully understand the site’s suitability. Additionally, the standard operating procedure for site history files requires that they be maintained electronically in a centralized place.

The evaluation found that site history files did not always contain information about security incidents. Four recent security incidents that occurred among currently serving Volunteers, and involved their host families or work sites, had not been documented in the electronic site history files.

There are several reasons why the post was unable to maintain accurate, up-to-date site history files. The post lacks a centralized location for site history files and, instead, information is stored in multiple places and formats. For example, some site history information was kept by the programming unit on the office’s electronic shared drive. This information was not organized geographically but rather by project sectors and trainee input group. This could make it difficult for staff to locate information about a specific site unless they know the sector and trainee input of the last Volunteer to be placed at that site. Additionally, post staff entered some site history information on safety incidents at specific sites into the Volunteer Information Database Application (VIDA).⁹ Site history information may be obtained by various post staff members as they all interact with Volunteers and their communities and may learn of important site information that should be documented. However, there was no documented procedure to ensure that relevant security information is regularly entered by staff into the site history files.

When previous security incidents are not properly documented, the post risks placing future Volunteers in inappropriate work sites or with inappropriate host families and makes Volunteers at risk of crimes.

We recommend:

- 1. That the safety security coordinator establish a process to ensure that safety and security incidents are properly documented in the post’s site history files in a centralized location.**

⁹ VIDA is a tool used by Peace Corps staff that manages Volunteer information at post.

Volunteers placed in urban sites faced challenges integrating into their communities.

Peace Corps' *Programming and Training Guidance: Project Design and Evaluation* explains that each "project normally has a strategy for placement of a smaller number of Volunteers in urban sites. Such higher level assignments are usually most appropriate for more experienced Volunteers, third-year Volunteers, and Volunteers age 50 and older." The guidance also explains that the majority of Volunteers are placed in rural sites because:

- Rural areas offer strong opportunities for Volunteer integration and development opportunities benefiting the lowest income groups.
- Other development organizations, even when their mission includes rural areas, do not have the resources to place staff in rural sites.
- Rural placements provide jobs that are appropriate for generalists, who make up the greatest pool of Peace Corps Volunteers.
- Rural areas often have lower crime rates than urban areas, decreasing Volunteer exposure to risk.
- These areas have the largest number of people needing assistance.

At the time of the evaluation 19 percent (20 of 104) of the Volunteers were serving in urban sites. This included twelve Volunteers in the capital, Chisinau, and eight Volunteers in the large cities of Cahul or Balti. Although many posts allow third year Volunteers to live in the capital city, only three of the Moldova urban Volunteers were third-year Volunteers and only one was over the age of 50. These urban Volunteers were predominately from two project sectors: 11 from the COD and six from the SED, which equates to 38 percent (11 of 29) and 22 percent (6 of 27) of all the Volunteers in those sectors, respectively.

Although there may be valid reasons to place Volunteers in an urban setting, the post has not developed a uniformed policy or approach. Staff reported that urban placements were more common for Volunteers in the COD and SED sectors because they cannot rely on schools to identify rural Volunteer sites. Urban placements are sometimes done for medical reasons; however, the Moldova medical officers stated that many medical conditions can be accommodated without placing the Volunteer in an urban site. Without a post-wide policy to guide urban placements programming staff in each project sector are making their own decisions.

Having numerous Volunteers in urban areas may have undesirable impacts for the post and the Peace Corps. For instance, smaller communities and rural-based organizations may benefit more from a generalist Volunteer than more established or better funded partner organizations that are often found in larger cities. Additionally, Volunteers living in urban areas often decide to live with other Volunteers to combine their living allowance to pay the more expensive rent. Eleven Volunteers in urban areas were living with other Volunteers. These Volunteers face additional challenges learning the local language as they can frequently speak English with other Volunteers instead of practicing the local language. Furthermore, having numerous urban Volunteers can become an attraction for Volunteers in smaller communities to make frequent visits to urban areas to socialize with other Volunteers and enjoy their city accommodations. When Volunteers spend a considerable amount of time with other Volunteers they tend to socialize less with host country nationals. And, the opportunity to further the Peace Corps' Goals

two and three are minimized.¹⁰ Comments from these Volunteers located in urban sites demonstrate some of their experiences:

“There are so many well-established organizations in Chisinau - we don't need to waste resources here. COD should be in smaller villages and communities.”

“I live in Chisinau so you can't just approach a school to do civic education.”

“Today talking to the [Peace Corps] driver was the first time I've spoken Romanian in a couple months.”

“A lot of PCVs come to Chisinau on weekends and they want places to crash. [We] get Volunteers staying here all the time. Chisinau is fantastic. It doesn't feel like I've left the United States.”

“Some of the young PCVs are still in party mode and go into the capital or my site and get drunk.”

At the time of the evaluation post leadership had already expressed interest in reducing the number of urban placements with the next trainee input group arriving in June 2013.

We recommend:

- 2. That the country director establish specific criteria for placing Volunteers in urban sites.**
- 3. That the country director, in coordination with the regional director, define the circumstances under which Volunteers are permitted to share living accommodations.**

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 concluded that the training program in Moldova is effective at helping Volunteers prepare for service and be productive at their sites. The post benefits from experienced language training instructors that have been working with Peace Corps for many years. Additionally, because Volunteer site announcements are done in the fourth week of PST, the staff can tailor the training to specific site placements for the remaining six to eight weeks of PST. The staff also conduct needs assessments to determine the content of technical and language in-service trainings (IST), enabling them to develop more targeted training sessions.

The post has continued to strengthen its training program and is incorporating the new FITU training sessions into all their training events. Staff and Volunteers have found the sessions to be

¹⁰ The Peace Corps' mission has three goals: 1) Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women 2) Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served. 3) Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

beneficial but have struggled to fit them into a tightly packed training schedule that includes important Moldova-specific training sessions. To aid the post in conducting more of the FITU-mandated sessions, the post was able to obtain funds from Peace Corps Headquarters to hold an additional week of training for the 2012 EE Volunteers. The post is also considering adding a mid-service training that would incorporate additional FITU training sessions that it did not have time for during PST.

Even though the 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 language, cross-cultural, safety and security, medical/health, and technical training portions of PST, as well as the ISTs that occur throughout a Volunteer's service. During PST the majority of classes are community-based in small groups with some classes held at a training center with all Volunteers.

The post also provided a project design and management (PDM) workshop, behavior change conference for HE Volunteers, and an all-Volunteer conference for COD and SED Volunteers, which were well-received by Volunteers. The Volunteers stated that the PDM training was effective for them and their counterparts. The focus of the training was appropriately placed on developing strong community projects and not just focused on obtaining grant funds. HE Volunteers and their counterparts participated in the behavior change conference that was funded through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Volunteers in the COD and SED projects participated in an all-Volunteer conference to discuss challenges and build upon each other's experiences.

Volunteers appreciated the training design and format that was used to deliver training events. Volunteers in the EE and HE sectors commented that the practice school helped them apply the concepts they had learned during PST and get direct feedback before they moved to site.¹¹ COD and SED Volunteers also received focused technical training for two weeks during their PST Phase III, which occurs after they have been at their sites for two months. Volunteers in the COD and SED sectors also found the use of open space technology during training to be valuable because it helped make the sessions more engaging.¹²

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

¹¹ The post extended PST for EE and HE Volunteers to accommodate for practice school. Volunteers get firsthand experience teaching in a Moldovan classroom with students and are joined by their site counterparts for the final week.

¹² Open space technology is an approach for facilitating meetings that focus on a specific purpose but the meeting starts without a formal agenda. The agenda is instead determined by the participants at the beginning of the meeting.

Table 1: Training Events

Training Provided to All Volunteers		
PST		
Language IST		
Technical IST		
PDM		
Project Specific Training		
EE	HE	SED/COD
Practice School	Practice School	Phase III PST
	Behavior Change Conference	All Volunteer Conference

Source: PC/Moldova

Table 2: Volunteer Perceptions of Training Effectiveness

Training	Percent of Volunteers Who Rated Training Favorably	Average Rating
PST:		
Local language ^a	100%	4.5
Cross-Cultural ^b	88%	3.4
Safety and Security ^a	96%	4.1
Medical/Health ^a	92%	3.8
Technical ^a	96%	3.7
SED/COD Phase III PST ^c	85%	3.6
Language IST ^a	84%	3.6
Technical IST ^d	78%	3.4
PDM ^a	100%	4.2
SED/COD All Volunteer Conference ^c	100%	4.4
HE Behavior Change Conference ^f	100%	3.6

Source: OIG interviews.

^aN = 25, ^bN = 24, ^cN = 13, ^dN = 9, ^eN = 14, ^fN = 5 (Volunteers interviewed were at different points in their service and had not yet participated in all the training sessions)

Although training was effective, the evaluation uncovered some areas that require management attention, particularly related to the use of language proficiency interviews and establishing a trainee assessment tool.

The post was not utilizing the results from language proficiency interviews.

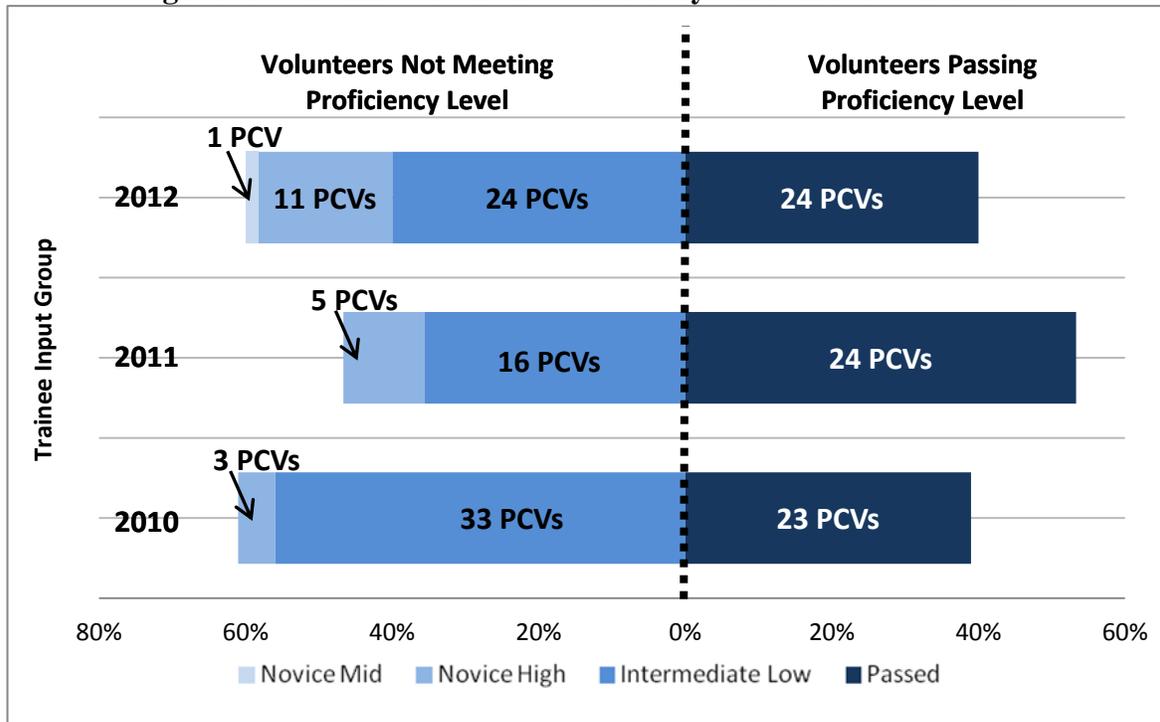
The Peace Corps Act states that Volunteers will not be assigned to their sites “unless at the time of such assignment [the Volunteer] possesses such reasonable proficiency as his assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he is assigned.” Additionally, the post’s *Welcome Book for Volunteers* explains the importance of language training:

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. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer.

The post tests a trainee’s language skills by administering a language proficiency interview. There are four levels in the proficiency scale: superior, advanced, intermediate, and novice. Each level also has sublevels: high, mid, and low. The minimum language proficiency levels for Moldova Volunteers were established as “intermediate mid” in Romanian and “intermediate low” in Russian.

During the evaluation we discovered that all trainees were officially sworn-in as Volunteers regardless of their language proficiency level. At the conclusion of PST, trainees learning Russian were meeting the minimum proficiency level while some of those learning Romanian were not. As demonstrated by the following chart, between 47 and 61 percent of trainees in each input learning Romanian were not meeting the language proficiency level and some were still at the novice level at the end of PST.

Figure 1: Trainees’ Romanian Proficiency Level at the End of PST



Staff provided all Volunteers the same language support and resources regardless of their language proficiency levels. At the end of PST, all Volunteers prepared language learning plans and were encouraged to obtain a language tutor to further improve their language skills at site. Staff reported that if a community partner complained about a Volunteer’s poor language skills than the post would provide extra language support for the Volunteer.

Volunteers reported that language was one their greatest challenges to integrating into their communities. By not using the results from the language proficiency interview in a meaningful way the post may not be identifying Volunteers who need additional support with their language learning. Volunteers who struggle in acquiring the local language may be less integrated into

their communities, which could impact their work productivity and increase their vulnerability to crime.

We recommend:

- 4. That the post define how language proficiency interview results are to be used for swearing-in decisions, and define a course of action for trainees who fail to meet minimum language proficiency requirements by the end of pre-service training.**

The post's trainee assessment tool did not incorporate available data sources and was time consuming to use.

The *Peace Corps Programming and Training Guidance: Training Design and Evaluation* encourages posts to assess and evaluate training to determine whether trainees and Volunteers have gained the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their Volunteer assignments. The guidance lists multiple pieces of information that can be used, including: data from learning assessments, feedback from trainees, and trainer observations.

The post quickly designed and used a trainee assessment tool for PST in June 2012 but the tool did not evaluate trainees on all their learning competencies, and required a significant amount of time to use. Components of the tool were administered weekly and incorporated trainee self-assessments and feedback from various staff members including: language training instructors, project managers, and the DPT. However, the tool did not include results from the language proficiency interviews or the test results from the safety and security training questionnaire.¹³ Additionally, the assessment tool did not incorporate any feedback from the Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs) or the trainees on their acquisition of health concepts to serve safely as a Volunteer. As a result, staff stopped using the tool.

Without a comprehensive assessment tool that takes advantage of the full range of available data, staff may be unable to identify areas where trainees need to learn additional skills. Also, without an assessment tool, staff is more susceptible to changing the training program based on how the latest training group felt about its training rather than on the demonstrated results of the program. At the time of the evaluation, the post had plans to revise the trainee assessment tool before the next trainee input in June 2013.

We recommend:

- 5. That the director of programming and training ensure the post develops and implements a comprehensive and usable trainee assessment tool.**

¹³ The questionnaire is administered by the SSC during training to assess Volunteers' knowledge of safety and security information.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Our country program evaluation attempts to answer the question, “Has the post provided adequate support and oversight to Volunteers?” To determine this, we assessed numerous factors, including staff-Volunteer communications; project and status report feedback; 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 solid Volunteer support structure. Volunteers feel well supported by all staff and believe the staff is responsive to the issues they raise. Post staff is prepared to support Volunteers during emergencies and has adequately responded to crimes committed against Volunteers. Staff also provided strong support through comprehensive site visits and weekly newsletters. Volunteers and staff acknowledge the value of various Volunteer-led committees that provided additional support to Volunteers on a variety of topics. In reviewing staff-Volunteer communications, Volunteer performance report feedback, site visits, Peace Corps Volunteer Leaders (PCVL) program, Volunteer committees, Volunteer allowances, whereabouts reporting policy, Volunteer alcohol consumption, crime incident response, and most elements of emergency preparation, OIG found no significant areas of concern that would necessitate action by the post.

Staff-Volunteer Communications. The evaluation determined that there was good, open communication between Volunteers and staff. Staff regularly sought Volunteer feedback and was generally aware of Volunteer needs and concerns. Volunteers interviewed mentioned that staff was responsive to the issues they raise. Some of the feedback mechanisms used to gather Volunteer input includes training evaluations and the Volunteer advisory committee.¹⁴

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 also appreciated the weekly newsletter sent by the post and the staff’s open door policy when they are in Chisinau. Additionally, the post established a Volunteer support group that includes staff from the various units that meet to discuss and advise the post’s leadership on staff responses to Volunteer issues.

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

¹⁴ The Volunteer Advisory Committee is a small group of elected Volunteer representatives that discuss issues with Peace Corps staff and help develop solutions.

Table 4: Volunteer Perception of Effectiveness of Staff Support¹⁵

Support Area	Percent of Volunteers Rating “Average Support” or Better	Average Rating for Support
Leadership	100%	4.6
Programming & Training	97%	4.3
Safety and Security	100%	4.7
Medical	96%	4.3
Administrative	77%	3.5

Source: OIG interviews.

Volunteer Performance Report Feedback. Staff provides feedback to Volunteers’ performance reports. Volunteers who had submitted their reports considered the staff’s VRF feedback helpful with 93 percent (13 of 14) of interviewed Volunteers rating the feedback quality as average or better (3.8 average).¹⁶ However, some Volunteers mentioned that the feedback provided was more focused on their reporting of data instead of on the activities they had accomplished.

Site Visits. The staff conducts thorough, comprehensive site visits that may include observations of the Volunteer’s work, conversations with counterparts, and visits to host families. Before site visits occur, programming staff work with the Volunteers to plan the visit to ensure it meets their needs. All 25 Volunteers interviewed stated that they had received an adequate number of site visits, and they all rated the effectiveness of the visits as “average” or better (4.2 average). After the site visit both the staff and Volunteers document what occurred and provide feedback.

PCVL Program. Although the program recently started in 2012, it is off to strong start. Third-year Volunteers apply to serve as PCVLs while continuing to work in a primary assignment. The PCVLs assist staff during trainings and with other programmatic tasks and also provide support to other Volunteers throughout their service. While the PCVLs assumed these additional support responsibilities, they still fulfilled their duties in their primary assignments. Some PCVL were so actively involved in their primary assignments they elected to remain at their original sites for their third year rather than move to Chisinau.

Volunteer Committees. The post has a number of active committees in which Volunteers provide support to each other. The following table summarizes these committees.

¹⁵ 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 by averaging the scores of the SSC. Medical was derived from the PCMOs’ scores. Administrative was derived from the DMO’s score.

¹⁶ At the time of the evaluation fieldwork not all Volunteers had been required to submit their VRF.

Table 3: Volunteer Committees

Committee Name	Description
Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC)	Elected Volunteer representatives discuss issues with Peace Corps staff and help develop solutions.
SPA Advisory Board	Volunteers form part of the post's small grants committee and review proposals and make funding recommendations.
Mentoring Program	Currently serving Volunteers contact trainees before they arrive in Moldova and serve as mentors through PST to facilitate integration into Moldova.
Peer Support Network (PSN)	Volunteers are trained as peer mentors and provide in-country support system to other Volunteers after PST.
Gender Workgroup (Rainbow Trout)	Volunteers who identify within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and questioning population conduct diversity training and various activities with gender support groups in Moldova.
Moldova TiP	Volunteers support Trafficking in Persons (TiP) programs safely and effectively by linking resources with more remote rural Volunteer communities.
Volunteer Information Committee (VIC)	Volunteers collaborate and share information through an online information-sharing platform called Dova Lounge.

Source: PC/Moldova

Interviewed Volunteers commented that they appreciate the support provided by these committees. Volunteers specifically mentioned the Volunteer Information Committee's work on Dova Lounge as quite useful and that it was good to have the PSN. The staff is currently working with the VAC to establish a charter that is intended to address some concerns raised by staff and Volunteers regarding the VAC's tone and focus on issues.

Volunteer Allowances. Most interviewed Volunteers were satisfied with the adequacy and timeliness of their settling-in and living allowances. The post conducts annual surveys to assess the adequacy of Volunteer allowances and makes adjustments as necessary.¹⁷ Although several Volunteers stated that the allowances required them to adjust their spending, most reported that they were still able to purchase necessities and pay their host family for living expenses.

Whereabouts Policy Reporting. Although post has a whereabouts system in place, many Volunteers were not reporting to post staff as required. Moldova requires Volunteers to report their whereabouts when they stay overnight anywhere other than their assigned site. Volunteers report their whereabouts by contacting the guards at the post headquarters in Chisinau. Despite this, only 60 percent of Volunteers interviewed (15 of 25) report their whereabouts "always" or "most of the time." Volunteers were aware that the new post leadership has placed a greater emphasis on the whereabouts reporting policy and acknowledged they needed to be more diligent in reporting their whereabouts.

¹⁷ Post are required to conduct an annual survey to ensure that all Volunteers receive adequate allowances to obtain goods and services need to safely serve as Volunteers.

Volunteer Alcohol Consumption. Moldovan families typically produce homemade wine and spirits and they are readily available in the homes of Volunteer host families. Alcohol consumption is part of Moldovan daily life. Headquarters staff expressed concerns to OIG that alcohol abuse may be impacting Volunteer health safety, or program effectiveness, and asked OIG to assess whether the post was providing adequate training and support to Volunteers on this issue.

We determined that post staff was aware of Volunteers' alcohol consumption and had established adequate training and support systems for Volunteers. The range of issues related to alcohol consumption and its abuse are presented during training sessions from both a cross-cultural context and a health and safety perspective. Volunteers acknowledged that the post provided them with extensive support and training on this topic during PST and they could not identify any additional support the post could provide. Volunteers understood they need to take a responsible approach to alcohol consumption. The post staff reported having adequate resources at their disposal to address alcohol-related issues when they occur.

Crime Incident Response. The post has adequately responded to crimes committed against Volunteers, and post staff have received sexual assault training. Six Volunteers we interviewed stated that they had been victims of a crime. When asked how the post staff responded to the incidents, all six Volunteers rated the staff's response as "very well", the highest rating possible. At the time of the evaluation, the staff online sexual assault response training had been completed by almost all staff members who were required to take it (16 of 17).¹⁸ The post also encouraged all staff members to complete the online training, and at the time of the evaluation nine additional staff members had also completed it. We reviewed files and interviewed staff who had responded to recent sexual assault incidents and concluded that the post staff's response was appropriate as they offered the Volunteers various forms of support.

Emergency Preparedness. The post demonstrated that it has taken several important steps to prepare for emergencies. Staff members have developed relationships with security personnel at the U.S. Embassy and the safety and security coordinator (SSC) is working to further relationships with local law enforcement. Safety and security criteria were incorporated into site development to ensure that Volunteers are not placed in homes that would expose them to an unnecessary level of risk. The post has developed a medical evacuation plan that follows the agency's recommended format. Additionally, the post has a functioning duty officer system and is prepared to respond to Volunteers' requests for assistance.

The evaluation did however uncover a few areas of emergency preparedness and Volunteer safety and security that require management attention, particularly related to consolidation points, SLFs, housing checks, and smoke/carbon monoxide detectors.

¹⁸ The training is required for: country directors, directors of programming and training, directors of management operations, safety and security coordinators, associate Peace Corps project managers, programming and training specialists, training managers, Peace Corps medical officers, and any other staff who may function as a duty officer or first responder.

Volunteers were unable to identify their consolidation points.

The safety and security *Standard Operating Procedure: EAP Testing and Training* requires the SSC to “ensure that all Volunteers are familiar with the name and location of their respective consolidation point.” As part of the post’s EAP, Volunteers are assigned to a consolidation point where they would report to in the event of an emergency.

Although Volunteers received a copy of the EAP and participated in EAP training during PST, 52 percent (13 of 25) of interviewed Volunteers could not correctly identify the location of their consolidation point. Additionally, even though a warden’s training occurred in November 2012, two of the five wardens interviewed were unable to identify their consolidation points.¹⁹

The evaluation revealed that the post was not taking advantage of opportunities to verify that Volunteers know their consolidation point location. The post did not test Volunteers on their knowledge of consolidation points, and the section of the SLF that included information about a Volunteer’s consolidation point was not routinely reviewed by Peace Corps staff to ensure it had been completed accurately by the Volunteer. If Volunteers and security wardens are uncertain of their EAP consolidation points, they could put themselves and others at risk should consolidation be necessary during an emergency.

We recommend:

- 6. That the safety security coordinator ensure that all Volunteers are familiar with their consolidation points.**

Site locator forms were not adequately completed by Volunteers.

According to the Peace Corps’ safety and security *Standard Operating Procedure: Site Locator Forms*, the purpose of SLFs is “to ensure that accurate communication and logistical information is collected, stored, and readily available to all staff with an active role in the support of Volunteers during crises.” Additionally, the standard operating procedure requires the SSC to coordinate with appropriate staff to ensure that SLFs are reviewed during site visits and a system is in place to review and improve maps to Volunteer residences. As part of Moldova’s EAP, each Volunteer is required to provide their SLF to the SSC within two weeks of arriving at their site. The submitted SLF must include alternate forms of communication and a map with directions to the Volunteer’s site.

We found that sixty-four percent (16 of 25) of the SLFs were missing important contact information that may be needed in an emergency or had inadequate directions and maps to locate the Volunteer’s house.

¹⁹ The Moldova EAP identifies Volunteers as regional wardens that may be called upon to assist post staff in responding to emergencies.

Although SLFs are being submitted to post staff, they were not routinely checked by the SSC or by staff. Post staff reported that they may use the information in SLFs to locate Volunteers in case of an emergency. Incomplete SLFs could pose a safety risk to Volunteers if they cannot be contacted or located during an emergency.

We recommend:

- 7. That the post implement a mechanism to ensure that site locator forms contain all necessary information.**
- 8. That the safety and security coordinator work with appropriate staff to ensure that site locator information is reviewed during site visits and updated, as necessary.**

Some Volunteers living with host families did not have locks on their rooms.

MS 270.6.4 “Housing Standards” requires staff to inspect all housing prior to the Volunteer’s arrival to ensure it meets the post’s housing criteria. Because Volunteers in Moldova live with host families during their first three months at site, one of the post-specific housing requirements is that Volunteers have a lock on the door to their room.

During the evaluation the only Volunteer housing deficiency observed was that some Volunteers’ rooms did not have locking doors. Forty-seven percent (9 of 19) of the houses we visited did not have a lock on the Volunteer’s room.^{20 21} These nine Volunteers had been at their sites between six and 18 months and this deficiency had not been corrected even though the housing checklist reflected the missing locks.

The post did not have a standard process to ensure that housing deficiencies identified during staff housing inspections were addressed before the Volunteer arrived at site. Addressing housing deficiencies is an important element of Volunteer safety. During our review we learned of two crime incidents that occurred within the host family’s house where the Volunteer was able to contact post after locking themselves in their room. There is a potential security risk for Volunteers if housing deficiencies are not corrected.

We recommend:

- 9. That the country director establish a system to verify that identified housing deficiencies are corrected before the Volunteer arrives at site.**

²⁰ Additionally, one interview did not occur at the Volunteer’s residence and when Volunteers lived with other Volunteers in the same house their housing check was only counted once in our analysis to avoid double-counting.

²¹ This requirement does not apply for Volunteers that live alone in an apartment without a host family.

The post staff used inconsistent housing checklists.

MS 270.6.4 “Housing Standards” requires the post to establish minimum housing standards. Although the post established housing standards, they were documented in two different versions of the housing checklist that were inconsistent.

Post staff had different preferences for which version of the housing checklist they used. Some programming staff preferred to use a version that gathered additional information on host families because they used this information to make site placement decisions. In contrast, the SSC preferred that all staff use the housing checklist provided in the EAP, Appendix B. However, there was no policy in place that mandated the use of either housing checklist. Regardless of what checklist was used, neither one clearly identified which housing elements were necessary to meet the post’s minimum housing standards, as they both included optional and mandatory housing elements.

Volunteers could be put at risk if they are placed in housing that does not meet the post’s minimum housing standards. Staff may not notice a potential risk for Volunteers if the housing checklist does not identify required housing elements in clear terminology.

We recommend:

- 10. That the country director ensure that the housing checklist clearly identifies the required elements and that all staff use the appropriate housing checklist(s).**

Some Volunteers did not have functioning smoke/carbon monoxide detectors.

In Volunteer homes there are potential sources of fires from heaters, furnaces, irons, and gas stoves. Additionally, heating in most Moldovan homes is provided through a gas broiler or a ceramic stove that may release carbon monoxide. As noted in Moldova’s *Volunteer Safety and Security Handbook*, every Volunteer and trainee was provided with a smoke/carbon monoxide detector, and Volunteers were responsible for testing the detectors monthly and reporting any faults immediately to the Peace Corps.

Although detectors were provided to Volunteers, twenty-nine percent (6 of 21) of the Volunteers visited did not have functioning detectors.²² The detector’s batteries lasted about a year and had not been replaced by the Volunteers when they stopped working. The post provided replacement batteries to Volunteers upon request, but there was no routine effort initiated by the post to provide new batteries after a year when they expected them to stop functioning.

²² Six Volunteers interviewed lived with other Volunteers in the same house so their housing check was only counted once in our analysis to avoid double-counting. Additionally, one Volunteer interview was not conducted at the Volunteer’s residence and one Volunteer’s detector was inaccessible for testing.

These carbon monoxide/detectors help keep Volunteers and their host families safe, and it is important that they are properly maintained. During our review we learned of an incident where the Volunteer's carbon monoxide/smoke detector alarm alerted the host family to a fire caused by a faulty electrical outlet. If the detector had not been working, the fire could have caused more damage or harmed the residents. Volunteers are exposing themselves to greater danger by not having fully functioning smoke/carbon monoxide detectors.

We recommend:

- 11. That the country director establish a process to ensure that Volunteers replace the smoke/carbon monoxide detector batteries each year.**

OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of OIG is to prevent and detect fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement and to promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency in government. In February 1989, the Peace Corps OIG was established under the Inspector General Act of 1978 and is an independent entity within the Peace Corps. The Inspector General is under the general supervision of the Peace Corps Director and reports both to the Director and Congress.

The Evaluation Unit within the Peace Corps OIG 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.

OIG Evaluation Unit announced its intent to conduct an evaluation of PC/Moldova on December 5, 2013. For post evaluations, we use the following researchable questions to guide our work:

- To what extent has post developed and implemented programs to increase host country communities' capacity?
- Does training prepare Volunteers for Peace Corps service?
- Has the post provided adequate support and oversight to Volunteers?
- Are post resources and agency support effectively aligned with the post's mission and agency priorities?

A team of two evaluators conducted the preliminary research portion of the evaluation December 19, 2012 to February 8, 2013. This research included a review of agency documents provided by headquarters and post staff; interviews with management staff representing the EMA region, the office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS), the Office of Safety and Security (SS), the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS), and the Office of Peace Corps Response (PCR); and inquiries to the Office of Health Services (formerly known as Volunteer Support), the Office of Global Health and HIV, the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Partnerships, and the Office of Private Sector Initiatives.²³

In-country fieldwork occurred from February 11 to March 1, 2013, and included interviews with post senior staff in charge of programming, training, and support; the U.S. deputy chief of mission; the embassy regional security officer; and host country government ministry officials. In addition, we interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 25 Volunteers (24 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. The evidence, findings, and recommendations provided in this report have been reviewed by agency stakeholders affected by this review.

²³ In 2013 the Office of Volunteer Support became the Office of Health Services.

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

As part of this post evaluation, interviews were conducted with 25 Volunteers, 15 staff members in-country, and 20 representatives from Peace Corps headquarters in Washington D.C., the U.S. Embassy in Moldova, and key ministry officials. 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). The analysis of these ratings provided a quantitative supplement to Volunteers’ comments, which were also analyzed. For the purposes of the data analysis, Volunteer ratings of “3” and above are considered favorable. In addition, 23 out of 25 Volunteer interviews occurred at the Volunteers’ homes, and we inspected 22 of these homes using post-defined site selection criteria.²⁴ 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 Moldova; the Volunteer sample was selected to reflect these demographics.

Table 5: Volunteer Demographic Data

Project	Percentage of Volunteers
SED	26%
COD	28%
EE	25%
HE	21%
Gender	Percentage of Volunteers
Female	55%
Male	45%
Age	Percentage of Volunteers
25 or younger	49%
26-29	26%
30-49	11%
50 and over	14%

Source: PC/Moldova Volunteer Roster.

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

²⁴ When Volunteers lived with other Volunteers in the same house their housing check was only counted once in our analysis to avoid double-counting. Additionally, one Volunteer interview was not conducted at the Volunteer’s residence.

At the time of our field visit, the post had 37 staff positions. The post also employs temporary staff/contractors to assist with PST. Given the time of our visit, these positions were not staffed. We interviewed 15 staff members.

Table 6: Interviews Conducted with PC/Moldova Staff Members

Position	Status	Interviewed
Country Director	USDH	X
Director of Programming and Training	USDH	X
Director of Management and Operations	USDH	X
Safety and Security Coordinator	PSC*	X
Peace Corps Medical Officer (2)	PSC	X
Medical Assistant	PSC	
Project Managers (4)	PSC	X
Project Specialists (Interviewed 2 of 4)	PSC	X
Training Manager	PSC	X
Community Integration Coordinator	PSC	X
Program and Training Assistant	PSC	
Budget and Finance Assistant	PSC	
Finance Assistant	PSC	
Administrative Assistant/Receptionist	PSC	
Cashier	FSN*	
IRC Coordinator/Back-Up Cashier	FSN	
IT Specialist/Back-Up Duty Officer	PSC	X
General Services Manager	PSC	
General Services Assistant	PSC	
Driver/Vehicle Maintenance Manager	PSC	
Driver/Property Maintenance Specialist	PSC	
Driver (3)	PSC	
Security Guards (4)	PSC	
Cleaners (2)	PSC	

Data as of February 2013. *PSC is personal services contractor; FSN is foreign service national.

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

Table 7: Interviews Conducted with PC/Headquarters Staff, Embassy Officials and Key Ministry Officials

Position	Organization
Regional Director	PC/headquarters/EMA region
Chief of Operations	PC/headquarters/EMA region
Chief of Programming and Training	PC/headquarters/EMA region
Country Desk Officer	PC/headquarters/EMA region
Chief Administrative Officer	PC/headquarters/EMA region
Regional Security Advisor	PC/headquarters/EMA region
PC Safety and Security Officer	PC/headquarters/SS

Placement Manager	PC/headquarters/VRS
Programming and Training Specialist (Small Enterprise Development)	PC/headquarters/OPATS
Programming and Training Specialist (Education)	PC/headquarters/OPATS
Programming Specialist	PC/headquarters/PCR
Recruitment and Placement Specialist	PC/headquarters/PCR
Deputy Chief of Mission	U.S. Embassy in Chisinau
Regional Security Officer	U.S. Embassy in Chisinau
Director, Marketing and International Relations Department	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry
Vice-Director General, Deputy Main State Sanitary Inspector	Ministry of Health
Head of Division, International Relations and Investments	Ministry of Regional Development and Construction
Adviser	Ministry of Education
Director for Pre-University Department	Ministry of Education
Director of the Department for Universities	Ministry of Education

Data as of February 2013.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

WE RECOMMEND:

1. That the safety security coordinator establish a process to ensure that safety and security incidents are properly documented in the post's site history files in a centralized location.
2. That the country director establish specific criteria for placing Volunteers in urban sites.
3. That the country director, in coordination with the regional director, define the circumstances under which Volunteers are permitted to share living accommodations.
4. That the post define how language proficiency interview results are to be used for swearing-in decisions, and define a course of action for trainees who fail to meet minimum language proficiency requirements by the end of pre-service training.
5. That the director of programming and training ensure the post develops and implements a comprehensive and usable trainee assessment tool.
6. That the safety security coordinator ensure that all Volunteers are familiar with their consolidation points.
7. That the post implement a mechanism to ensure that site locator forms contain all necessary information.
8. That the safety and security coordinator work with appropriate staff to ensure that site locator information is reviewed during site visits and updated, as necessary.
9. That the country director establish a system to verify that identified housing deficiencies are corrected before the Volunteer arrives at site.
10. That the country director ensure that the housing checklist clearly identifies the required elements and that all staff use the appropriate housing checklist(s).
11. That the country director establish a process to ensure that Volunteers replace the smoke/carbon monoxide detector batteries each year.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CD	Country Director
COD	Community and Organizational Development
DPT	Director of Programming and Operations
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
EE	English Education
EMA	Eastern Mediterranean Asia
FITU	Focus-In and Train-Up
HE	Health Education
IST	In-Service Training
MS	Manual Section
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PC	Peace Corps
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officer
PCR	Peace Corps Response
PCVL	Peace Corps Volunteer Leaders
PDM	Project Design and Management
PM	Program Manager
PST	Pre-service Training
SCC	Safety Security Coordinator
SED	Small Enterprise Development
SLF	Site Locator Form
SPA	Small Project Assistance
TM	Training Manager
VIDA	Volunteer Information Database Application

APPENDIX B: AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT



Since 1961.

MEMORANDUM

To: Kathy Buller, Inspector General

Through: Daljit K. Bains, Chief Compliance Officer

From: Kathy Rulon, Acting Regional Director, EMA *K. Rulon*
Janet Utecht, Country Director Moldova *J. Utecht*

Date: August 21, 2013

Subject: Agency Response to the Preliminary Program Evaluation Report of Peace Corps/Moldova, July 2013

cc: Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Acting Director
Stacy Rhodes, Chief of Staff
Joaquin Ferrao, Deputy Inspector General
Carlos Torres, Acting Associate Director of Global Operations
Daryl Sink, Acting Associate Director for Safety and Security
Hill Denham, Chief of Operations
Betsy Vegso, Chief of Programming and Training
Lien Galloway, Expert Senior Advisor to the General Counsel
Mark Wallis, Regional Security Advisor
Jason Kane, Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer
Shayla Summerhill, Country Desk Officer

Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the Inspector General for Peace Corps/Moldova as outlined in the Preliminary Report of the Evaluation sent to the Agency on July 11th, 2013.

The Region concurs with all 11 recommendations provided by the OIG in its Preliminary Audit Report: Peace Corps/Moldova. Post has addressed all 11 recommendations and provided supporting documentation for 10 of the 11 recommendations.

The Region will continue to work with Post to ensure closure of this recommendation by the date included within for the outstanding document submission.

Recommendation 1

That the safety security coordinator establishes a process to ensure that safety and security incidents are properly documented in the post's site history files in a centralized location.

Concur

Safety and Security Coordinator (SSC) updated the process for collecting and documenting Site History Information and included it in post's SSC Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Site History. It specifies the information that will be collected and where it will be stored electronically. It also has been updated to require that the SSC review the Site History information on a quarterly basis. This will be monitored by the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer.

Documents Submitted: Post SSC SOP on Site History

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed August 2013

Recommendation 2

That the country director establishes specific criteria for placing Volunteers in urban sites.

Concur

Post believes that site selection is critical to successful service, and has implemented a process for review and approval of all (urban and rural) sites for PCVs. Post considers this specific recommendation about "urban" sites to have two distinct dimensions: Chisinau and "other urban areas". The primary concerns with urban placements noted in the Evaluation are community integration and language proficiency.

As of the February submission of the Post FY 14/ 15 IPBS, the Post policy for Chisinau Volunteer placements is restricted to: high performing third or fourth year PCVs (they already demonstrated that they are well integrated and proficient in language, Peace Corps Response Volunteers, PCVs needing medical accommodation, transferees with extenuating circumstances, as well as for specific safety, security and/or programmatic reasons e.g. participants of the FY14 pilot program on same sex couple PCVs.

No FY13 first-year PCV assignments were made in Chisinau.

For "other urban areas", the site identification, peer-review, and clearance process requires Program Managers to articulate the rationale and benefit of placing a Volunteer in a prospective site. For semi-urban or county seats among the top 20 largest cities in Moldova, staff must explain the distinct link between the Volunteer job assignment to the Post strategic plan. Required responses address the opportunity for skills transfer, potential sustainability of efforts, and the target beneficiaries. The discussion is repeated three times for other staff feedback. The first review is in the initial site identification

presentation meeting followed by a PCT site matching meeting, and eventually at PCT suitability for service and site matching meeting. The Country Director will approve only upon completion of this process. A Site Identification Cover Sheet has been revised to more easily document and monitor this process.

Documents Submitted: FY13 Site Placement List; Site Identification Cover Sheet

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed June 2013

Recommendation 3

That the country director, in coordination with the regional director, defines the circumstances under which Volunteers are permitted to share living accommodations.

Concur

The CD has consulted with the Regional Director and both are in agreement that PCVs sharing housing is not a preferred arrangement. Currently 79% of PCVs in Moldova are living with a host family, 11% are living independently, and the rest (10%) share housing with another PCV (this includes one married couple). Post acknowledges that it is important to create and apply a policy that clearly states the exceptional criteria for shared housing that must be approved by the CD.

Historically temporary shared housing has been approved when a PCV leaves their host family due to a safety or security incident. This will be allowed for in the policy to be created.

The other reality Post faces is that independent housing options in certain markets are in limited supply and are often too large and costly for a single PCV to consider given our housing allowance.

While Post has discussed and considered a requirement for all PCVs to live with host families throughout their service, we believe that this would deter from Posts successful track record as demonstrated through the All Volunteer Survey (AVS) responses on Volunteer satisfaction and impact. The Country Director will create a policy in the PCV Manual that will define the circumstances under which Volunteers are permitted to share living accommodations.

Documents to be Submitted: Updated PCV manual section with Housing Policy to be updated to include criteria for PCV shared housing.

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed September 30, 2013

Recommendation 4

That the post define how language proficiency interview results are to be used for swearing-in decisions, and define a course of action for trainees who fail to meet minimum language proficiency requirements by the end of pre-service training.

Concur

Post revised the policy on LPI standards and follow-up included in the comprehensive Trainee assessment outlined in Recommendation 5. The revised policy calls for: a clear, well-defined continuous language learning plan for the first 90 days at site for any Trainees that fail to meet the minimum LPI requirement. The Community Integration Coordinator (CIC) will contact the PCVs one month after swearing in to evaluate compliance and progress, contact the PCV's tutor to confirm compliance and progress, and to adjust and/or reconfirm language learning plans. After 90 days, an LPI will be scheduled to determine if the PCV has achieved Post's standard for their project. If the PCV has not achieved the higher standard, a volunteer support committee comprised of the PCMOs, SSC, PMs, DMO, DPT, and CD will evaluate the PCV's overall progress including, but not limited to, progress on primary and secondary activities plus input and feedback from the primary partner. Depending on his/her progress, the PCV may be asked to satisfy a performance improvement plan or possibly be subjected to separation due to low performance.

Documents Submitted: PCV Language Improvement Plan; Sample Post Trainee Assessment Package.

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed August 2013

Recommendation 5

That the director of programming and training ensure the post develops and implements a comprehensive and usable trainee assessment tool.

Concur

Even though Post is not part of the pilot, Post is implementing the Trainee Assessment Package currently being piloted by the Office of Overseas Program and Training Support. The assessment tool successfully integrates feedback from the Trainee and all units at Post into the evaluation process. While the pilot assessment tool is organized around the Global Core training packages, Post is also using the tool to facilitate cross-functional staff input on PCT suitability for service. The completed assessment tool is reviewed with each PCT prior to swearing in.

Post is ready to further modify the assessment tool as needed based on the outcome of the pilot.

Documents Submitted: FY13 PST Trainee Assessment Package per project (4)

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed June 2013

Recommendation 6

That the safety security coordinator ensures that all Volunteers are familiar with their consolidation points.

Concur

Post conducted warden training and an EAP consolidation test in an immediate response to the briefing from the OIG evaluators at the conclusion of the evaluation. Post plans to conduct this test annually. In addition, the Site Visit checklists have been updated to include testing PCVs on their consolidation point with an additional layer to confirm PCV knowledge via PM/Med Unit site visits.

Documents Submitted: FY13 Consolidation Test Summary; Program and Medical Unit Site Visit Check List

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed August 2013

Recommendation 7

That the post implements a mechanism to ensure that site locator forms contain all necessary information.

Concur

Response to concurrence provided in recommendation 8.

Documents Submitted: Post SSC SOP on Site Locator Forms; Medical Site Visit Form

Recommendation 8

That the safety and security coordinator work with appropriate staff to ensure that site locator information is reviewed during site visits and updated, as necessary.

Concur

In consultation with our Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, the Site locator Form has been revised to include only necessary information and will be reviewed during site visits.

The SSC will collect Site Locator Forms (SLFs) from PCVs and review them for completion and clarity and save them in a shared file. It has been determined that the Post Medical Unit will take the lead on testing the accuracy of the information on the SLFs in their first year visit to all PCVs. The medical unit does not participate in site development and often are the first responders in emergencies. Therefore, the Medical

Staff will validate the reliability of the information on the SLFs during the first site visit made to every PCV early in their first year of service and will make recommendations for updates to the SSC as necessary. This process has been delineated and documented in Post's SSC SOP on Site Locator Forms.

Documents Submitted: Post SSC SOP on Site Locator Forms; Medical Site Visit Form

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed August 2013

Recommendation 9

That the country director establish a system to verify that identified housing deficiencies are corrected before the Volunteer arrives at site.

Concur

Per Recommendation 10 below Post has reviewed and modified the Housing Checklist to clearly distinguish between the required housing criteria from the informational "nice to know" elements found on the housing checklist. Now any deficiencies are quickly and easily identified.

These housing checklists are then reviewed at least twice prior to PCV arrival at site to verify that any deficiencies have been resolved. The first opportunity is during the cross-program/cross-functional review of all sites identified for PCV placement that occurs either just before or very early in PST. The Site Identification Check List is also reviewed with each Trainee in the final "readiness to serve" interview near the end of PST. This provides the opportunity for the PCT to confirm details on the selected housing option based on their site visit/stay during PST.

Documents Submitted: Completed FY13 Site Identification Cover Sheet; Housing Checklists.

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed August 2013

Recommendation 10

That the country director ensure that the housing checklist clearly identifies the required elements and that all staff use the appropriate housing checklist(s).

Concur

Post has modified the housing checklist with input from all programs to clearly identify and differentiate the required criteria from the informational elements. For all required criteria staff must collect this data and screen out any housing options that do not and cannot be made to comply. Informational elements are optional to assist in the matching process but do not disqualify the housing option if missing. Post has determined two (2)

cannot be made to comply. Informational elements are optional to assist in the matching process but do not disqualify the housing option if missing. Post has determined two (2) housing forms are still needed to evaluate two distinct housing options here in Moldova. Post requires Volunteers to reside with a host family for at least the first 90 days of service. The "Host Family Housing Checklist" is used to screen for viable host families. After 90 days, Volunteers may choose independent living. The "Independent Housing Checklist" is used to screen for viable independent housing options. The DPT will train the Programming staff on usage of the new checklist formats prior to the next round of site identification.

Documents Submitted: Host Family Housing Checklist; Independent Housing Checklist

Status and Timeline for Completion: Forms updated August 2013; Training to be completed in January 2014

Recommendation 11

That the country director establish a process to ensure that Volunteers replace the smoke/carbon monoxide detector batteries each year.

Concur

Post has modified the Programming and the Medical Site Visit forms to include a fire and carbon monoxide detector check and to record the date when the batteries were last replaced. Staff will travel with batteries to facilitate replacement as needed.

Post will also ensure that seasonal reminders are included in our regular communication vehicles to Volunteers late each fall for winter safety reminders. For example, in November Post will remind PCVs to prepare for the winter season by sending messages in our Weekly Highlights email and our monthly edition of the Grapevine newsletter. This reminder will include instructions for carbon monoxide detector battery replacement.

Documents Submitted: Program and Medical Site Visit Forms

Status and Timeline for Completion: Completed August 2013

APPENDIX C: OIG COMMENTS

Management concurred with all 11 recommendations. 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 11 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 D: 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 support was provided by Lead Evaluator Heather Robinson and additional assistance was provided by Jerry Black and Joyce Shores.



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 e-mail Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations Jim O’Keefe at jokeefe@peacecorps.gov or call 202.692.2904.

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