Peace Corps
Office of Inspector General

Albanian Traditional Dancers

Flag of Albania

Final Program Evaluation Report: Peace Corps/Albania

August 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) performed an evaluation of the Peace Corps program in Albania; the field work was conducted December 1 – 18, 2007. The Office of Inspector General focused its evaluation on the Peace Corps/Albania program for fiscal years 2007 and 2006.

Peace Corps's program in Albania began in 1992. In 1997, the Volunteers were evacuated due to a major crisis in Albania. Peace Corps returned to Albania in 2003. During fiscal year 2007, 67 Volunteers worked in three project areas: (1) English education, (2) health education, and (3) community and organization development.

The OIG evaluation identified the following opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the Peace Corps program in Albania:

- Establish quality control procedures to better assure that Volunteers are assigned to clear, workable roles, and better monitor Volunteer "secondary" activities.
- Establish a system to formally evaluate individual trainers.
- Explore ways to increase Volunteers' sense of staff support. Specific issues where Volunteers expressed concern about insufficient staff support related to:
  - "homestay" policies,
  - reporting of "incidents"; and
  - replacement of cell phones.
- Perform consolidation tests of the Emergency Action Plan (EAP).
- Determine the feasibility of an additional medical facility.
- Assess the adequacy of per diem rates for staff travel outside of Tirana.

The evaluation also disclosed that the post's site selection system and documentation was comprehensive and had potential merit for other Peace Corps posts. Even so, the OIG believes this well-designed and documented system needs to be supplemented with more effective control procedures to preclude situations where Volunteers arrive at their sites without clear, workable roles.

The OIG makes 14 recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Peace Corps program in Albania. Three of these recommendations have potential relevance at a Peace Corps-wide level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY i

INTRODUCTION 1

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY 3

RESULTS OF PROGRAM EVALUATION 4

- PROGRAMMING 5
- TRAINING 7
- VOLUNTEER SUPPORT 9
- SAFETY AND SECURITY 12
- PERFORMANCE RESULTS REPORTED FOR ALBANIA 17

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS 21

APPENDIX A: GENERAL SCHEMATIC OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER SERVICE TECHNICAL ASSIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PLACEMENT

APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT

APPENDIX C: OIG COMMENTS

APPENDIX D: PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

INTRODUCTION

Peace Corps's program in Albania began in 1992. In 1997, the Volunteers were evacuated due to a major crisis in Albania. Peace Corps returned to Albania in 2003. During fiscal year 2007, 67 Volunteers worked in three project areas: (1) English education, (2) health education, and (3) community and organization development.

Peace Corps projects are intended to assist Albania's developmental needs. Volunteers serve under a formal agreement between the United States and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania.

PC/Albania assigns Volunteers throughout Albania, except for a few northern regions. Historically, Volunteers have been placed in most of the cities that served at larger regional centers, as well as in some smaller villages and towns. The project plan anticipates that that the majority of Volunteer placements will move out of larger regional centers to smaller communities.

English Education

When the Peace Corps post in Albania re-opened in 2003, Volunteers were placed in middle schools throughout the country to teach English. The current English Education project plan was initiated in 2004 and revised in 2007. At the time of our visit, 30 Volunteers were assigned to the English Education project.

The project plan discusses the rationale for the English Education project. The plan notes Albanians' eagerness to learn English or improve their English skills to take advantage of the cultural, political, and economic opportunities available to English speakers. Increasing the number of English-speaking Albanians is related to an important goal of the Albanian government—namely, to enter the European Union. The project plan cites an extreme shortage of local English teachers and notes that many teachers of English are not university-trained or trained in English at all.

The Peace Corps has identified a number of local and international partners to this project. They include the Albanian Ministry of Education and Sciences, the English Language Teachers Association, and the British Council.

Volunteers are assigned to Albanian communities with two goals: (1) expanding English learning opportunities, and (2) helping Albanian teachers increase their skills. The project plan envisions placing the majority of Volunteers in smaller villages and towns in middle and high school levels, where needs are greatest. A smaller number of Volunteers are intended to work in larger towns and cities at teacher preparation colleges.

Health Education

The Peace Corps initiated the Health Education project in Albania in 2003. At the time of our visit, 13 Volunteers were assigned to this project.

Because of recognized health education needs in Albania, the Peace Corps has identified several collaborators for this project, including the Albanian Ministries of Health and Education and Science, World Learning, the Albanian Red Cross, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Statistics show that a relatively high percentage of deaths and illnesses in Albania are caused by factors related to lifestyles. These factors include smoking, alcohol abuse, poor road safety, use of illegal drugs, and unsafe water. The number of HIV/AIDS cases has increased in recent years, but is not prevalent.

This Peace Corps project is designed to have Volunteers work closely with health education professionals/community health workers and teachers at health centers (Offices of Primary Health Care), UNICEF/MOH Friendly Youth Centers (*Quo Vadis?)*, and health non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the community. Intended beneficiaries included health educators, professionals, community health workers, teachers, students, and families.

Community and Organization Development

The Peace Corps initiated the Community and Organization Development in Albania in 2004. The project plan was revised in 2007 to better identify Volunteers' work and efforts. At the time of our visit, 24 Volunteers were assigned to this project.

The Peace Corps has identified agencies and organizations that are addressing community needs in Albania through financial support, training or outreach activities. These include the U.S. Agency for International Development, the International City Managers Association, World Vision, the United Nations Development Program, the Carter Center, and others.

In 2005, the Peace Corps explored the developmental need for community organization and development in two roundtable discussions. Representatives of local governments and NGOs that were either currently serving or had in the past served as host agencies participated in these two roundtable discussions. Albanian stakeholders shared their opinions on developmental needs, such as institutional development of local agencies, greater understanding by municipalities of the decentralization process, improved of public services management, and development of citizens' groups.

In 2006, two meetings were organized with national stakeholders. In the first meeting, the goals and objectives of working with local governments were discussed; local governments were identified as the most appropriate potential placement for Volunteers. In the second meeting, the goals and objectives of working with Albanian business organizations were discussed; business development agencies (e.g., business associations, chambers of commerce) were identified as potential placements for Volunteers.

In April 2006, the Peace Corps established a formal collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth, and Sports regarding culture preservation, tourism development, and youth development. In addition, the Peace Corps has worked toward a more effective collaboration with the Ministry of Interior. Other stakeholders the Peace Corps has identified include the Association of Albanian Municipalities, the Association of Albanian Communes, and the Albanian Partners in Micro Financing.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The OIG performed its evaluation of the Peace Corps program in Albania November 2007 - February 2008; the field work was conducted December 1 – 18, 2007. We focused our evaluation on the Peace Corps/Albania program for fiscal years 2007 and 2006.

Our assessment criteria are derived from the following sources: the Peace Corps Manual, Indicators of a High Performance Post, the Overseas Financial Management Handbook, guidance from the Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research, the Annual Survey of Peace Corps Volunteers, and Technical Guidelines, MS 270 documents, and Health and Safety of the Volunteer from the Office of Medical Services. We also review compliance against other federal regulations and applicable agency policies and initiatives.

At the end of our review, we briefed the country director and other staff responsible concerning their respective program and oversight responsibilities. At headquarters, we conducted a general briefing for the regional staff. We also briefed the Office of Medical Services, the Office of Special Services, the Office of Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security, the Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research, and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer on findings pertaining to their respective areas of responsibility.

Our recommendations are based on information gathered from four sources: (1) staff and Volunteer interviews, (2) document analysis, (3) Peace Corps survey data, and (4) direct observation.

To determine how well Volunteers activities compared with what was planned and how much time was directed toward secondary activities, we first reviewed project plans and assignment descriptions. We then reviewed project status reports, surveys of Volunteers, and other relevant documents. Also, we interviewed Volunteers assigned to all three projects and observed selected sites. Lastly, we discussed, with both Volunteers and Peace Corps staff in Albania and Washington, why and how Volunteers get involved in "secondary" activities.

To determine whether and how performance information for Albania was incorporated into the Peace Corps processes pursuant to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), we reviewed the agency's processes for collection and reporting data. We identified the sources of the Albania-specific performance information and assessed whether these sources would likely produce reliable and appropriate performance information.

This is the first time that we have included the GPRA processes and preparation of the Performance and Accountability Report (PAR) in a post evaluation. Because of the significance of the GPRA processes, we plan to include them in our future evaluations, although the specific approach we follow may change. While we recognize that the scope of GPRA processes and the preparation of the PAR have a Peace Corps-wide focus, our post evaluations offer a unique opportunity to consider how well the Peace Corps-wide performance reflects individual countries.

To determine the effectiveness of processes and practices for assuring program effectiveness, we reviewed all three projects. We used a risk-based approach[1] to review important aspects of post operations such as planning, training, site selection, safety and security, monitoring and evaluation, and selected administrative areas. We identified and reviewed pertinent policies, analyzed relevant reports and supporting documentation, interviewed Peace Corps officials in Washington and Albania, as well as Volunteers, and physically observed conditions in Albania. We identified and discussed processes and practices that appeared successful as well as those that appeared to need improvement, and looked for the underlying causes.

The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the following:

1. Has the post developed and implemented programs intended to increase the capacity of host country communities to meet their own technical needs?
2. Has the post developed programs to promote cross-cultural understanding?
3. Does training (e.g., pre-service training, in-service training) provide Volunteers the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively integrate into the community and perform their jobs?
4. Has the post provided adequate support (i.e., safety and security, medical) and oversight to Volunteers?
5. How adequately does the post support the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) planning and reporting Peace Corp performance?

In Washington, we interviewed Peace Corps staff responsible for establishing, overseeing and providing technical support to the Peace Corps program in Albania. In Albania, we interviewed the country director and program officials, and interviewed a sample of Volunteers and observed their work sites and housing.

Our evaluation was performed in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, dated January 2005, issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency and the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

RESULTS OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Our evaluation identified the following opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the Peace Corps program in Albania:

- Establish quality control procedures to better assure that Volunteers are assigned to clear, workable roles, and better monitor Volunteer "secondary" activities.

[1] The risk-based approach decides prioritization of potential issues based on the likelihood of not achieving management objectives, and the impact is the objectives are not achieved.

- Establish a system to formally evaluate individual trainers.

- Explore ways to increase Volunteers' sense of staff support. Specific issues where Volunteers expressed concern about insufficient staff support related to:
  - "homestay" policies,
  - reporting of "incidents"; and
  - replacement of cell phones.

- Perform consolidation tests of the Emergency Action Plan (EAP).

- Determine the feasibility of an additional medical facility.

- Increase the per diem rate for staff travel outside of Tirana.

Also, we concluded that the post's site selection system and documentation was comprehensive and had potential merit to other Peace Corps posts. Even so, as indicated previously, we believe this well-designed and documented system needs to be supplemented with more effective control procedures to preclude situations where Volunteers arrive at their sites without clear, workable roles.

PROGRAMMING

Volunteers spent extensive time on secondary activities.

We found that Peace Volunteers assigned to Albania often performed activities that were significantly different from the project plan and their assignment descriptions. Specifically, Volunteers spent significant time on secondary activities, rather than their primary assignments.

Although definitions of "secondary" activities vary, this condition raises a question as to whether their primary assignments were well conceived and designed to keep Volunteers fully engaged in their communities.

In many cases, Volunteers sought out additional activities which they viewed as useful to the country and where they could make contributions. Although PC/Albania had processes in place designed to place Volunteers in clear and meaningful roles from the start, further improvements could minimize instances where Volunteers arrive at their assignment only to encounter difficult, if not impossible, barriers to their planned assignment. In our interviews with Volunteers, we found the following:

- The seven English Education Volunteers whom we interviewed indicated that the activities that they performed were often significantly different than that described in the project plan and the Volunteer Assignment Description. These differences occurred for various reasons, including lack of a substantive or meaningful role, and/or impossible co-teaching arrangements. Volunteers found alternative activities, including working in a tourism shop, organizing a debate club, and book and food collections.

- The four Health Education Volunteers whom we interviewed indicated that the activities that they performed were often significantly different than what was planned. These differences occurred for various reasons, including lack of support, receptivity, knowledge and/or interest at the local office where they were to be assigned. Instead of performing the activities they anticipated, Volunteers, on their own initiative, became involved in other activities, such as writing grant proposals, assisting an anti-trafficking initiative, and English tutoring.

- The eight Community and Organization Development Volunteers whom we interviewed indicated that the activities that they performed were often significantly different than they originally envisioned (based on the project plan and the description of duties provided). According to the Volunteers whom we interviewed, the reasons for these differences included the non-availability of the intended supervisor, an impossibly disruptive office environment, and a primary assignment which had "no chance of success." The Volunteers found a range of alternative activities, including teaching English outside of the school system, assisting a Roma community, and teaching office skills.

The Volunteers whom we interviewed generally expressed the view that they were performing worthwhile activities and were meeting needs of Albania, but they also expressed frustration with how they became involved in these activities.

Recent surveys completed by the Office of Strategic Information Research and Planning (OSIRP) provide the following information regarding PC/Albania Volunteers "secondary" activities:

> 2006 Biennial Survey of PC/Albania Volunteers: 11 of 30 respondents answered that they spent 20 hours a week or less on their "primary assignment," whereas 14 of the 30 answered that they spent up to 10 hours a week on "secondary activities."
>
> 2007 Close of Service (COS) Survey of Volunteers in Albania: 87% of Volunteers answered they had been engaged in "secondary activities," with almost half responding they had been involved in four or more secondary activities.

The term "secondary activities" has been used inconsistently.

Volunteers we interviewed had differing meanings for the same term. An activity considered "secondary" to some Volunteers was viewed as "primary" by others. For example, one Volunteer assigned to the English Education project saw teaching in two schools as primary, but tutoring six hours a week outside the schools as "secondary." Another Volunteer who taught English in the school, and offered private classes outside the school, did not consider any of her work as "secondary."

Headquarters staff acknowledged that the term "secondary activity" has historically been used in different ways. They noted that originally the use of the term "primary assignment" was intended to refer to activities related to the first of Peace Corps' three goals and "secondary activities" initially referred to those activities related to the second and third

goals. According to one staff member, the term "primary" is now used to refer to "capacity building" in any one of four areas—individuals, communities, organizational strengthening, and community development. Activities outside of these four areas would be viewed as "other than primary."

EMA region staff stated that they have begun to "downplay" the use of the term "secondary activities" due to confusion over its meaning and use. An EMA regional staff member provided the "schematic" (See Appendix A) as a preferable conceptual framework to refer to Volunteer activities. This schematic is not incorporated into Peace Corps policy, but we were told that it has been used informally for several years by some field staff in training sessions to advise Volunteers about their assignment.

Despite the inconsistency in definition, the Peace Corps has continued to use the term "secondary activities." We believe that the continued use of the same term with differing definitions creates confusion and cannot be useful to management in making and evaluating Volunteer assignments or measuring Peace Corps work.

The purpose, nature, and approach of Volunteer activities in Albania have often differed significantly from the project plans and assignment descriptions. The reasons for these differences vary, and the Volunteers often believe they are still addressing developmental needs. We respect the Volunteers' views that they are meeting legitimate developmental needs. However, the question remains as to whether Albania's needs could be even more effectively met, at least in some cases, by improved planning and assignment of Volunteers.

We recommend:

1. That the country director develop and implement quality controls regarding Volunteer site placement (e.g., site selection, counterpart availability, housing, safety and security, etc.) and mutually review them with Volunteers before and while conducting their assignments.

2. That OSIRP take the lead among relevant Peace Corps offices to standardize the use of the term secondary assignment or secondary activities.

TRAINING

Evaluating trainers could lead to improved training.

We interviewed 19 Volunteers regarding their Peace Corps pre-service and in-service training. Most Volunteers in our sample provided positive comments on their language and cross-cultural training but they were less satisfied with their technical training. Two Volunteers offered a suggestion that more time be spent in the community to practice language skills would be helpful. One Volunteer stated that cultural training was "too

theoretical" and another thought the cultural issues of smaller towns should have been covered.

Survey responses for PC/Albania on training corroborate the feedback we received regarding training. For example:

- In the 2006 biennial survey, Volunteers rated the following aspects of PST as "adequate" or higher—97% for dealing with cultural differences, 87% for dealing with adjustment issues, 83% for maintaining physical health, and 80% for language training.
- In the 2006 biennial survey, Volunteers rated the following aspects of IST as "adequate" or higher—89% for managing cultural differences, 88% for dealing with adjustment issues, and 84% for language training.
- In the April-June 2007 Close of Service (COS) survey, on a of "not at all effective" to "very effective" (1-5) Volunteers provided the following ratings for PST--managing cultural differences (4.2), dealing with adjustment (3.4), language (3.5), and personal safety and security (4.3).

In both of these surveys, Volunteers rated training on technical aspects and working with institutions as slightly lower than other areas.

PC/Albania used a number of ways to evaluate the effectiveness of PST and other training activities. For example, during PST sessions, the post used a weekly, brief evaluation to assess the concerns, progress, and adjustment of Trainees. The weekly evaluation was used for planning and modifying training and consisted of open-ended questions. At the end of PST, the post used an evaluation form with both open-ended and objective (yes-no and rating scales) questions. In addition, about 5-6 months after PST, a post-PST evaluation was administered. PC/Albania also evaluated the IST sessions.

PC/Albania appeared to have a useful process in place to evaluate the effectiveness of PST and IST. Also, with certain exceptions, there was evidence that Volunteers viewed the effectiveness of this training positively. Although further refinements in training may be warranted, we believe the continuation of the processes already in use to evaluate and improve training should be sufficient. Thus, we are not making a recommendation to revise the overall process for evaluation of training.

Five Volunteers we interviewed were critical of PST instructors. For example, the Volunteers stated that the trainers were too theoretical, lacked effective presentation and/or communication skills, or did not tailor sessions to the background of the Volunteers. A couple of Volunteers suggested that more trainers should be either Albanian or former Volunteers who had served in Albania.

In our discussions with the Training Officer, we found that PC/Albania did not have a systematic, formal evaluation of individual trainers.

PCM section 743.19 states:

> All PSCs will be evaluated by the Country Director, or another Peace Corps employee designated by the Country Director, during and at the completion of their in-country work. A copy of the evaluation should be maintained by the Country Director with copies forwarded to the Regional Training Officers or Programming and Training Advisors, Program Officers or Director of Medical Services, as appropriate depending upon the nature of the contracted services.

We recommend:

3. That the country director routinely evaluate the performance of all trainers.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Surveys showed that Volunteers were satisfied with support received.

In the most recent biennial and COS surveys, PC/Albania Volunteers' responses suggested a generally satisfactory view of Peace Corps staff support regarding administration, safety and security, and project feedback. However, a number of the Volunteers we interviewed raised concerns about support from Peace Corps staff, most notably in regard to problems with the "homestay" policy discussed below.

In the 2006 biennial survey, PC/Albania Volunteers responded as follows regarding the level of satisfaction with staff support:

Area of Support	"Adequately" or higher
Language learning	83%
Administrative	97%
Medical	90%
Emotional	93%
Safety/security	90%
Project feedback	97%
Technical	97%
Site selection	83%
Job assignment	87%

In the 2007 COS survey, Volunteers' relevant responses presented a somewhat differing perception of the effectiveness of support received from staff. For three of five key post staff, all Volunteers responded that the support was adequate or better. However, for the other two staff, only about 70% considered their support as adequate or better.

The Volunteers interviewed by the OIG offered a range of views on how they felt about the staff support. Overall, the Volunteers offered more positive than negative impressions. However, a few were very critical and negative about the quality of support received. A few stated that they did not ask and did not expect (nor want) much in the way of support. In addition, a couple stated that the quality of support received from Albania staff was better than that received from the U.S. staff.

The issue of alleged inadequate staff support surfaced in a November 2007 meeting of the Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC); the country director was in attendance. The VAC had heard from "several" Volunteers about an apparent lack of support related to housing, safety and security, site placement and organization placement. Some Volunteers stated that instead of receiving support, they were "forced to defend themselves." Also, a Volunteer in attendance stated that post staff did not "follow up" to see if the situation persisted or was even resolved. Minutes of the November 2007 meeting show that the country director expressed a strong interest in the Volunteer concerns. In fact, he stated that PC/Albania signed up for Zoomerang services (a provider of online surveys) to provide anonymous surveys.

We recommend:

4. That the country director continue to coordinate with the VAC and address Volunteer perceptions of staff support.

Many Volunteers did not complete homestays.

PC/Albania requires that arriving Volunteers initially live with local families with the purpose of becoming integrated into the local community. The intent is to have Volunteers become familiar with the culture in which they will be living before they move to independent living. Since 2005, PC/Albania's policy on homestays has been as follows:

(1) An initial homestay for Trainees during the 12 weeks of pre-service training, and

(2) A second homestay, for 4.5 months, at the place of the Volunteer's assignment. After the Trainee has been sworn in as a Volunteer, he or she completes an additional 4.5 months homestay at the place of the Volunteer's assignment.

Some Volunteers have encountered significant problems during the second homestay. The greater incidence of problems in homestays at their places of assignment appeared to be related to inadequate vetting and monitoring of homes.

Because of the many problems encountered, a significant percentage of Volunteers in 2006 and 2007 had their homestay periods truncated. For the Volunteer group who arrived in 2006, over 40% did not complete the second homestay. For the 38 Volunteers who arrived in 2007 and were placed in homestays, 14 (35%) moved out of their host families prematurely. Of the 14, three moved to independent housing without prior approval. The other 11 moved to another host family or to independent living situations. According to

Peace Corps staff, the reasons for moving included incompatibility with host families, changes in host family situations, and medical and safety concerns.

We identified instances where Volunteers had been placed in awkward, stressful, and/or potential dangerous situations; Volunteers cited the following situations:

- One Volunteer had to leave his home after just one night because of a dispute over the amount to be paid to the homeowner.
- A female Volunteer was joined in her bed by an elderly woman.
- Another Volunteer complained that the only thing she received for her evening meal, served very late, was two bananas.
- Two female Volunteers faced unwanted advances from host fathers. One Volunteer alleged that she was pursued, after leaving the home.

In response to the last two situations, the Peace Corps staff actively pursued new living arrangements. However, both Volunteers stated that the support received from staff was very poor. According to the Volunteers, staff challenged the accuracy of the Volunteers' statements, became accusatory toward the Volunteers, and did not offer useful follow-up to determine how they were coping after these incidents.

One avenue of potential support that was not made available to the two female Volunteers who had been traumatized was the offer for counseling services by the Office of Special Services (OSS) at Peace Corps Headquarters. The OSS is a resource that could provide counseling on a confidential basis to Volunteers if Peace Corps staff provides a referral.

Also, subsequent to our work in Albania, the Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC) completed a Volunteer survey with 26 respondents, and issued a report in January 2008. The VAC's conclusion was:

> The first six months at site is critical to a volunteer's professional and personal integration into a community. The stress and confinement in a SHF (second host family) retards this integration for many volunteers. Peace Corps should move toward a policy that secures hybrid-housing situations for volunteers after PST, whereby volunteers live in a house or apartment that is more or less their own. Their attachment to a 'sponsor family' will eliminate much unnecessary stress for the PCV while continuing to allow for cross-cultural sharing. At sites where hybrid housing is not available, staff should verify that SHFs comply with Peace Corps requirements, and that the volunteers' needs are being addressed. While the culture of family is still very important in Albania, today's PC volunteers can effectively integrate without sharing quarters for an additional 4.5 months after PST.

In response to the VAC survey, the country director reiterated the benefits of the homestay policy, but also acknowledged that the homestay policy had led to problems. The country director identified three possible options—(1) having Volunteers move into independent housing after the PST period, but align them with a family, (2) reduce the time of the second homestay to 2 months, and (3) obtain additional resources, e.g., to allow increased payments

to home families, and/or add a staff member to assist in vetting and oversight of host family situations.

In our opinion, despite the post's rationale for homestays, the problems associated with the homestay policy may outweigh the benefits. As such, a revision of this policy is clearly needed.

We recommend:

5. That the country director increase the vetting and monitoring of homestays and address problematic situations in a timely and resolute manner.
6. That the country director address Volunteers homestay concerns in a timely and resolute manner. Actions may include the Volunteer's removal from the homestay and telephonic counseling with the Office of Special Services.
7. That the country director revise or terminate the policy requiring Volunteers to spend an additional 4.5 months in a second host family after PST.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

The Peace Corps places a high priority on the safety and security of Volunteers. According to the 2006 biennial survey and the 2007 COS survey, Volunteers generally feel safe in Albania. The Volunteers whom we interviewed also told us that they felt safe. In the 2006 biennial survey, 90% of the Volunteers responded that they were generally secure and felt safe where they lived and worked. In concert with the 2007 COS survey, 93% responded that they felt safe where they lived and worked. The Volunteers we interviewed also felt safe at both home and work; however, a few expressed safety concerns when they travel.

Some Volunteer safety and security incidents may not be reported.

PC/Albania follows an established system for reporting safety and security incidents and reported only a relatively small number of safety and security incidents for calendar years 2006 and 2007. In 2006, 10 incidents were reported, eight involved theft or burglary, and two assaults. In 2007, 15 incidents were reported, eight involving theft or burglary, five sexual or physical assault, and two intimidation.

The Safety and Security Coordinator, in consultation with the country director, decides which situations constitute reportable "incidents." According to agency protocols, the following three examples should have been reported to the appropriate headquarters office:

- In 2007, a female Volunteer reported that young men shouted "Die! Die!" at her. The Safety and Security Coordinator (SSC) determined that the men's shouts were likely in Italian (meaning "Come on!"), and downgraded the incident.

- In 2007, a female Volunteer verbally reported the inappropriate sexual behavior (masturbation in the seat next to her) of a male on public transportation. But the SSC decided not to formally report the incident.

- In 2006, an *attempted* theft of a bicycle was not reported because an *actual* theft did not occur.

Although aware of reporting requirements, Volunteers make judgments about which situations should be reported. For example, female Volunteers told us that they were often the subject of lewd comments or "cat calls" when in public, but that they decided that they were not threatened and did not report the incident. We became aware of a couple of incidents that went beyond verbal comments, and the Volunteers handled the situation on their own and chose not to report the incident. Further, three Volunteers we interviewed told us they would not report incidents because they fear the reports would be handled inappropriately, or lead to the Volunteer being "blamed" by staff.

The importance of having Volunteers properly report safety and security incidents is well recognized in agency and post Peace Corps policies. Although the extent of non-reporting of incidents appears minor, potentially important information is lost when incidents occur but are not reported.

We recommend:

8. That the country director remind Volunteers of the importance of reporting all safety incidents, as required, so that the post has an accurate picture of the safety and security realities.

The post's policy on replacing cell phones could be detrimental to Volunteers' security.

PC/Albania has a policy of paying for and providing Volunteers with cell phones. In 2007, the post changed its policy and required Volunteers to pay for any replacements of lost or broken cell phones provided to the Volunteer by the post. Prior to the change in policy in 2007, lost or stolen cell phones were replaced at the expense of the Peace Corps.

All Volunteers we interviewed relied on their cell phones. Volunteer access to land line phones varied but was generally limited. The responses in our interviews are consistent with responses in recent Peace Corps surveys; the 2006 biennial survey reported that 100% of PC/Albania Volunteers responded that cell phones were the most effective communication method and 66% said they never had trouble with poor reception.

In view of the importance of cell phone communication, we asked staff why they revised the policy to require that replacement of cell phones would become the personal responsibility of the Volunteers. We were advised verbally that a number of Volunteers had lost cell

phones and that some Volunteers had lost "a half a dozen" cell phones. However, when we requested substantiation of these losses, we were not provided any documented instances.

In an e-mail to us after we returned from Albania, the country director clarified that replacement of stolen cell phones will be treated differently than replacement of lost or broken phones. The country director expressed concern that Volunteers may lose phones and then claim they were stolen. According to the country director, the decision of who pays for the replacement of phones will be determined in accordance with guidelines in PCM section 235, Volunteer/Trainee Losses of Property and Cash, which states that lost personal property will be replaced "only if doing so will further the goals and service of the Agency." The guidance further states that the lost item may be replaced if it is "essential to the health, welfare or continued service" of the Volunteer.

The post's policy of routinely rejecting requests for replacement of lost or stolen cell phones may not be in concert with the guidance in PCM section 235, and raises a potential security risk for Volunteers, who rely heavily on cell phones.

We recommend:

9. That the country director adopt a policy for replacing cell phones that is consistent with PCM section 235.

The post did not conduct a consolidation test of its Emergency Action Plan in 2007.

Peace Corps Manual section 270.7.0 requires that each post test its EAP annually. These tests are to include, at a minimum, the adequacy and reliability of the in-country communication network and the process for the course of action to be taken by Volunteers at each potential stage of an emergency. PC/Albania had not fully complied with this important testing requirement.

The EAP provides detailed procedures that will be used by the post, Peace Corps headquarters, and Volunteers in response to emergency situations. The EAP was revised in June 2007, and according to a Peace Corps compliance report, the revision incorporated the Country Desk Unit's comments and lessons from EAP tests. A copy of the revised EAP was provided to, among others, the Regional Security Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tirana. EAP training was provided to staff and Volunteers during March - June 2007.

The post has recently tested various channels, chains, and means of communication such as wardens, Peace Corps staff, cell phones, and e-mails. However, a consolidation test had not been performed, as had been planned for the fourth quarter of fiscal 2007. The country director advised us that a consolidation test was not completed for two reasons: (1) the costs of travel and (2) concern for Volunteer schedules. However, he advised us that the consolidation test is planned for fiscal year 2008, although no specific date had been identified at the time we visited the post.

All the Volunteers that we interviewed said that they were familiar with the EAP and with their responsibilities under the EAP. Most also said they recalled recently participating a communication test of the EAP. During these communication tests, Volunteers said they were able to be in communication with the Peace Corps office in Tirana in short periods of time, usually within a few hours but always within a day.

We recommend:

10. That the country director complete an EAP consolidation test at the earliest practical date in Fiscal Year 2008.

Volunteer use of an additional medical facility needs to be explored.

PCM section 262.5.1 states the following:

> V/Ts will receive all necessary medical care and services primarily through or under the direction of, the PCMO at post and through local health care providers in country, as necessary. Prior authorizations from the PCMO is required (except in emergencies) for all medical and dental care not provided directly by the PCMO (or, where available, by the APCMO).

PC/Albania's Medical Officer issues the PC/Albania Emergency Medevac Handbook, which is periodically updated. That handbook lists the names of ambulance services, hospitals and clinics, and other medical facilities in Albania, which have been approved by the Peace Corps Medical Officer.

Volunteers whom we interviewed expressed concern about the limited availability of high-quality medical facilities in Albania.. A few Volunteers told us about a medical facility in southern Albania, near the city of Gjirokaster ("the Greek Hospital"), that was not listed in the PC/Albania Emergency Medevac Handbook. In recent years, approximately 10 Volunteers have been assigned in the Gjirokaster area.

The Greek Hospital is a venture of the Albanian and Greek Armies; however, the Albanian staff is domestic. This facility has 38 beds and two ambulances. We were advised that the hospital is available 24 hours a day, and that it provides medical services free of charge.

The Medical Officer also advised us he was aware of Greek Hospital but said that he had not yet explored it.

The Greek Hospital represents a potential source of medical care for Volunteers, especially those in the area near Gjirokaster. Under these circumstances, we believe the availability of the Greek Hospital for Volunteers' medical needs should be explored.

We recommend :

11. That the country director direct the Medical Officer to determine the viability of the Greek Hospital for the medical care of Volunteers, and, if the hospital is an appropriate facility, communicate its availability to Volunteers.

The 2007 reduction in per diem rates for staff members on travel outside of Tirana was not justified before being implemented, and has resulted in staff morale issues.

Overseas Financial Management Handbook section 57.5 states that "CDs should establish…rates which reflect reasonable costs of travel."

As with other federal agencies, in accordance with travel regulations, Peace Corps staff receives per diem allowances for travel outside of their duty station. For all staff in Albania, the duty station is Tirana, the capital city. In October 2005, PC/Albania raised the per diem rate for travel outside of Tirana to an amount equivalent to about $25 daily. However, in August 2007, the country director approved a reduction in this rate to an equivalent of about $16 daily—a 36% reduction.

The post's reduction of staff per diem rates by 36% did not directly impact Volunteers. However, we believe that the reduction in per diem rates in August 2007 may have an important negative influence that might be hard to discern—namely, staff decisions to reduce the frequency or length of site visits.

While in Albania, the administrative officer explained the rationale for the reduction in per diem. She stated that Peace Corps "guidance" was that per diem rates for Peace Corps staff should be "no more than two-thirds" of the applicable State Department per diem rates.

In discussing this issue with officials in Headquarters, we were unable to confirm the existence of the "guidance" relating to the two-thirds determination. Secondly, the State Department per diem rates for Albania had not been updated since 1992.

The administrative officer was unable to provide supporting documentation for the reduction in per diem rates to $16 and show that the amount was sufficient for the staff meal expenses. The administrative officer did state that one or two staff members had occasionally presented restaurant bills as support that the reduced rate was too low but that she remained unconvinced. The administrative officer also confirmed that there was negative feedback from a few staff members. The country director acknowledged that a reduction in per diem rates had created morale problems. Staff members also expressed their concern on this issue, directly and indirectly, during our visit.

We recommend:

12. That the country director reevaluate and update the per diem rates for travel (outside of Tirana) to reflect reasonable travel costs, in accordance with OFMH.

PERFORMANCE RESULTS REPORTED FOR ALBANIA

As required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), and related Office of Management and Budget guidance, the Peace Corps prepares strategic and annual performance plans, and reports results annually in its Performance and Accountability Report (PAR). Our analysis of available performance information showed that, with little exception, Peace Corps/Albania achieved performance goals commensurate with agency-wide goals for 2007. However, we believe that performance planning and reporting under GPRA could be improved by (1) re-assessment of the appropriateness and number of performance measures and goals used, and (2) enhancing the reliability of certain quantifiable information reported.

At the time of our evaluation, the Peace Corps was operating under a Strategic Performance Plan for the period of Fiscal Year 2003-2008 and an Annual Performance Plan for Fiscal Year 2007. The Peace Corps PAR for Fiscal Year 2007 was issued on November 15, 2007. The PAR provides performance information, Peace Corps-wide. Performance information for individual countries, such as Albania, is not displayed separately in the PAR; however, using available records and documents, we compared Albania's performance to the Peace Corps-wide performance.

The 2007 PAR stated that the Peace Corps was above established targets for five of eight performance goals and 24 of 33 performance indicators. Our assessment concluded that four of the eight performance goals are most relevant at the Peace Corps-wide level and that the four remaining performance goals are relevant at the individual country level. These four goals and actual results are presented in the table below.

Goal description (source)	2007 Goal	*2007 Actual – Agency Wide	**2007 Actual - Albania
Increase percentage of respondents reporting effectiveness of transferring knowledge/skills to host communities as adequate to exceptional (COS surveys)	81%	86%	78%
Increase percentage of respondents who felt adequately to exceptionally satisfied with healthcare (biennial survey)	81%	92%	90% (2006 biennial) 64% (2007 COS)
Increase percentage of respondents in who felt usually or very safe at their homes most of time (biennial survey)	87%	85%	100% (2006 biennial) 92% (2007 COS)
Maintain 12-month Volunteer resignation rate	<10%	8.8%	6.6% (2006) 5.0% (2007)

Of the 33 performance indicators, we concluded that nine could be meaningfully related to individual countries. For six of the nine indicators that are relevant at the country level, the sources of performance reporting is based on surveys of Volunteers to obtain their views on matters such as their own safety and health, understanding of the culture, and readiness for the challenges they face. The views of Volunteers on these matters are important; however, we believe the performance information would be more meaningful if corroborative data from independent sources could be incorporated. For example, in addition to Volunteers' views on training and support related to safety and security, a corroborative measure might be the number of crimes against Volunteers or the number of safety incidents reported. Also, Volunteers' views on support for medical issues could be corroborated with the number of vaccinations given or injuries and illnesses treated

The table below shows the results of these six performance indicators for 2007.

Description of Indicator (source)	2007 Goal	*2007 Actual – Agency Wide	**2007 Actual - Albania
1. % of respondents who felt *adequately* to *exceptionally* prepared for challenges (COS survey)	90%	92%	93%
2. % of respondents who viewed safety/security training (PST) *adequate-very effective* (biennial survey)	85%	96%	94% (2006 biennial) 100% (2007 COS)
3. % of respondents in who felt *somewhat* to *completely* satisfied with support related to safety/security (biennial survey)	85%	90%	90% (2006 biennial) N/A (2007 COS)
4. % of respondents who considered training (IST) to manage cultural differences adequate to very effective (COS survey)	90%	93%	71%
5. % of who felt training (PST) on mental/emotional health was *adequate* to *very effective* (biennial survey)	96%	95%	87% (2006 biennial) 93% (2007 COS)
6. Increase the extent Volunteers report they have helped host country nationals better understand the USA (COS survey)	91%	95%	100%

*Peace Corps-wide actual performance reporting for 2007 intended to be based on biennial surveys could not use that source since that type of survey was last conducted in 2006, and the next one was not due until 2008. In lieu of biennial surveys, the 2007 Close-of Service (COS) Surveys were used to develop the 2007 PAR.
**Peace Corps-Albanian actual performance reporting from the sources indicated.

The remaining three indicators are:

1. Number of community-initiated, Volunteer-led, Partnership Program projects,
2. Individuals assisted by Volunteers, and
3. Service providers trained by Volunteers.

According to the PAR for FY 2007, the Peace Corps had 429 Partnership Program Projects, worldwide. This number was lower than the target of 465 projects. Only one of the 429 projects was in Albania; a separate target for the country was not set.

According to the PAR for FY 2007, the Peace Corps Volunteers assisted 2,403,458 individuals, world-wide. This exceeded the target of 2,176,000 for this indicator. The 2,403,458 individuals assisted included 13,082 in Albania. A separate target for PC/Albania was not set.

According to the FY 2007 PAR, the Peace Corps trained 114, 300 service providers, world-wide. This was below the target of 155,565. The 114,300 service providers trained included 1,240 in Albania. A separate target for PC/Albania was not set.

Information on individuals assisted, and service providers trained, is gathered by Volunteers, summarized by field staff, and sent to headquarters. The accuracy of information for these two performance indicators is dependent on the training and supervision Volunteers receive to perform the collection task, and how well the information is summarized by Peace Corps staffs in country. We believe that without proper training, the fairly general term "assisted" may be interpreted differently among the Volunteers and those collecting and processing data. A few Volunteers and headquarters staff suggested that the information would not withstand a rigorous audit; however, the scope of our evaluation did not include an audit of the accuracy of information on these two indicators.

One example of why we considered statistics on individuals assisted to be suspect is that the FY 2007 PC/Albania Community and Organization Development project status report included an example of a mass media event related to a visit from the President Bush. The report included a statement that the "estimated number of individuals reached was ***1,000,000,000***" (emphasis added). We recognize that this particular statistic is not incorporated into the PAR, nor did we conclude that this instance was representative of Volunteers' reporting. However, this demonstrates the range and variance of interpretations that can occur in collecting performance information when terms are not well defined.

At the time of our evaluation, two separate initiatives were underway to improve the approach to collection and reporting of information on (1) individuals assisted, and (2) service providers trained. One is Peace Corps-wide, and the other at Peace Corps/Albania.

The Peace Corps-wide Volunteer Reports Management Tool is intended to provide field staff and Volunteers with the ability to more efficiently and effectively manage periodic Volunteer reports. This initiative was undertaken because, globally, staff in the field read and summarize over 300,000 pages of information in Volunteer reports each year. It has been estimated that each Peace Corps post spends an average of over 120 hours (some posts up to 500 hours) of staff time each year to complete reports. This Peace Corps-wide initiative is expected to save thousands of hours of staff time, provide information on a more timely and effective basis, and provide Peace Corps-Headquarters with a "clearer picture of Volunteers' accomplishments and participant outcomes." Separately from the agency-wide initiative, PC/Albania was in the process of designing its own tool with similar purposes and intended benefits.

Both of these initiatives were well-intentioned and aimed at improving the efficiency of data collection from Volunteers. Benefits may very well ensue if and when one or both these initiatives are fully in place. Yet, despite these projected benefits, there will continue to be challenges to assuring that reported information is subject to validation and verification. To

be useful, reported information must have integrity. In addition, the cost of collecting and reporting this performance information needs to be measured against the intended benefit to management.

The Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning (OSIRP) leads the agency-wide performance measurement efforts, and coordinates and provides evaluation and measurement guidance for all agency offices. In January and February 2008, OSIRP was establishing an evaluation and measurement unit. This unit will be responsible for agency-level (cross-functional) evaluations for the Peace Corps. The evaluations carried out by this new unit should facilitate efforts to articulate the impact of the work of Peace Corps and assist in devising better approaches to performance planning and reporting.

We recommend:

13. That OSIRP revise the performance goals and indicators in the Strategic Performance Plan for 2009-2014 to provide a more complete and reliable presentation of Peace Corps performance.

14. That the Center for Field Research and Assistance, the EMA regional director, and the country director (in implementing the revised processes for reporting information of individuals assisted and service providers trained) assure that performance information reported (1) is useful to management, (2) is subject to verification and validation, and (3) considers both costs and benefits.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

1. That the country director develop and implement quality controls regarding Volunteer site placement (e.g., site selection, counterpart availability, housing, safety and security, etc.) and mutually review them with Volunteers before and while conducting their assignments.

2. That OSIRP take the lead among relevant Peace Corps offices to standardize the use of the term secondary assignment or secondary activities.

3. That the country director routinely evaluate the performance of all trainers.

4. That the country director continue to coordinate with the VAC and address Volunteer perceptions of staff support.

5. That the country director increase the vetting and monitoring of homestays and address problematic situations in a timely and resolute manner.

6. That the country director address Volunteers homestay concerns in a timely and resolute manner. Actions may include the Volunteer's removal from the homestay and telephonic counseling with the Office of Special Services.

7. That the country director revise or terminate the policy requiring Volunteers to spend an additional 4.5 months in a second host family after PST.

8. That the country director remind Volunteers of the importance of reporting all safety incidents, as required, so that the post has an accurate picture of the safety and security realities.

9. That the country director adopt a policy for replacing cell phones that is consistent with PCM section 235.

10. That the country director complete an EAP consolidation test at the earliest practical date in Fiscal Year 2008.

11. That the country director direct the Medical Officer to determine the viability of the Greek Hospital for the medical care of Volunteers, and, if the hospital is an appropriate facility, communicate its availability to Volunteers.

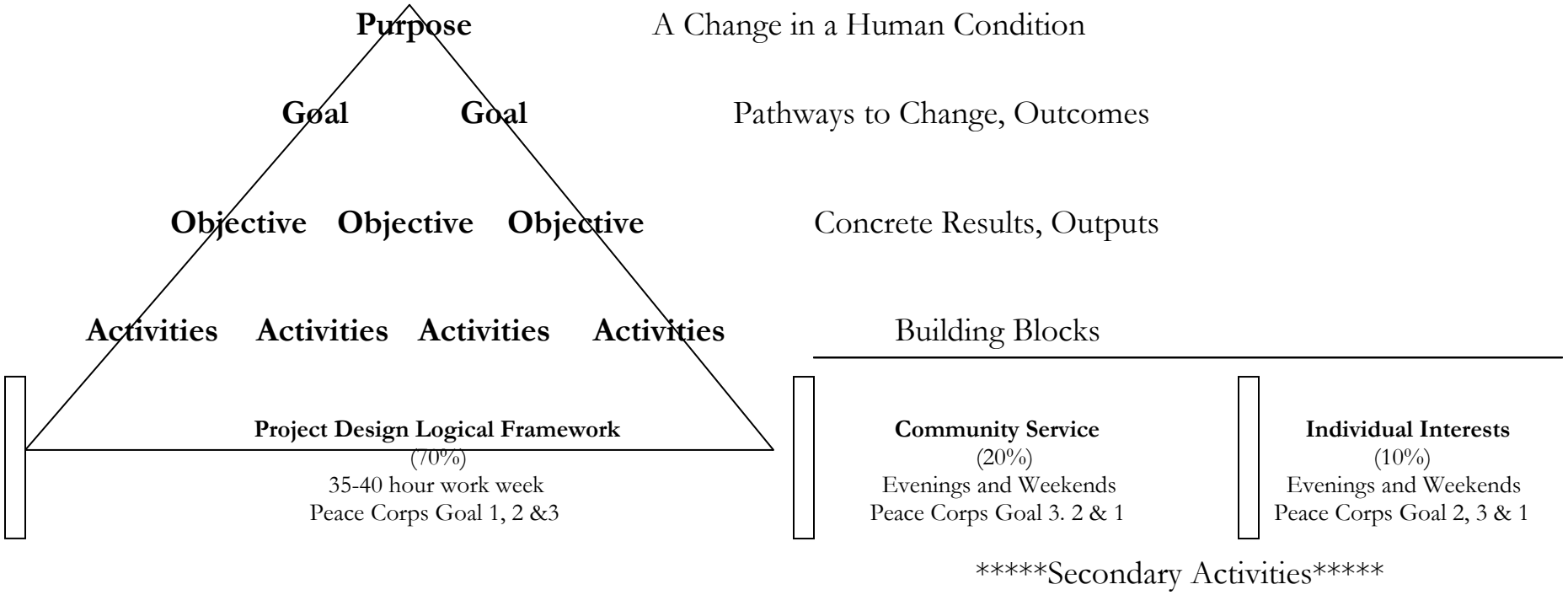
12. That the country director reevaluate and update the per diem rates for travel (outside of Tirana) to reflect reasonable travel costs, in accordance with OFMH.

13. That OSIRP revise the performance goals and indicators in the Strategic Performance Plan for 2009-2014 to provide a more complete and reliable presentation of Peace Corps performance.

14. That the Center for Field Research and Assistance, the EMA regional director, and the country director (in implementing the revised processes for reporting information of individuals assisted and service providers trained) assure that performance information reported (1) is useful to management, (2) is subject to verification and validation, and (3) considers both costs and benefits.

APPENDIX A

General Schematic of Peace Corps Volunteer Service Technical Assignment & Community Placement



This schematic describes the overall activities of a Peace Corps Volunteer during a two year period of service. Activities include first and foremost engagement through a predetermined work assignment to provide assistance to a particular sector in a country's development plan. In addition, a Volunteer is expected to participate in community service, or "secondary activities," as would any other member of the community in which they live, e.g., environmental clean-up, youth clubs, cultural fairs, etc. Finally, a Volunteer is also expected to engage in additional "secondary activities" that are more focused on the Volunteers' own personal interests, i.e., sports, art, music, etc.

APPENDIX B

MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT

Peace Corps

To: **Kathy Buller, Inspector General**

From: **Jay Katzen, Regional Director, Europe, Mediterranean and Asia Region**

Date: **July 11, 2008**

Re: **EMA Region Response to a Preliminary Program Evaluation Report of Peace Corps/Albania**

The EMA Region appreciates the feedback and recommendations that the Inspector General's Office has provided regarding its Preliminary Program Evaluation Report for Peace Corps/Albania (May 2008).

Some of the recommendations contained in the report are directed to the Peace Corps Office of Strategic Information, Research and Planning (OSIRP) and would require action by that office. Responses to those recommendations are included in this overall response for completeness, but those responses have been prepared by OSIRP personnel.

Do not hesitate to contact the EMA Region if you or your staff have any questions, or require additional clarification or information.

Attachment:

EMA Region Response to OIG Preliminary Program Evaluation Report for PC/Albania

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

During the period December 1-18, 2007, an Expert Consultant from the Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General conducted an evaluation of the Peace Corps program in Albania. The evaluator met with Peace Corps staff and Volunteers; reviewed program documents and reports; reviewed periodic Volunteer survey instruments; and observed Peace Corps staff and Volunteers at work. The resulting Preliminary OIG Report identified 14 Recommendations intended to improve the effectiveness of the Peace Corps program in Albania.

The EMA Region is happy to respond to those recommendations.

Recommendations and Responses

1. That the country director develop and implement quality controls regarding Volunteer site placement (e.g., site selection, counterpart availability, housing, safety and security, etc.) and mutually review them with Volunteers before and while conducting their assignments.

Disposition-Concur: The EMA Region and Peace Corps Albania value effective assignments and site placements. PC/Albania consistently shares the process with all stakeholders in an effort to keep open communication lines.

Explanation:

a) **Site selection:** PC/Albania has had site placement materials in place since 2003 and has updated them every year through 2008. The Programming and Training Officer, on behalf of the Country Director, evaluates the materials with her staff on a yearly basis.

b) PC/Albania Volunteer assignments in Community and Organization Development, Health, and TEFL are, by nature, not defined in every detail by the Peace Corps staff or by the applicable Albanian Ministries and local officials. The staff does their best to identify realistic site placements with meaningful work assignments. Staff identify those sites and agencies that have already demonstrated or show the best promise of offering projects, support and understanding of the Peace Corps development philosophy. The combination of Volunteer talents, motivation, personality and site identification and staff support are what make a good PCV assignment and site placement. The Region does not concur in the evaluator's view that PC/Albania places Volunteers in assignments that offer "no chance of success." (p. 6 of OIG Preliminary Report 2008)

c) PC/Albania has many forms and processes that contribute to the assignments. (See Appendix.)

d) Peace Corps trainees are informed about the entire process of site identification and assignment through a variety of means, including formal presentations by staff (see Appendix), site placement packets with site-specific information, personal interviews, and individual discussions with trainees.

e) **Counterpart availability:** PC/Albania identifies more than one counterpart at each site who is qualified and agrees to work with the Volunteers. PC/Albania conducts a two-day Counterpart Conference prior to Swearing-In to provide an orientation and facilitate counterparts: meeting the trainees; learning the process of PCV assignments and site placements; understanding the Peace Corps philosophy; planning with the trainees for the initial 3-6 months; and forming a professional relationship with Peace Corps staff and the assigned PCTs.

f) **Supervision**: Of course, Peace Corps does not supervise Volunteers' counterparts or supervisors, or control the day-to-day activities at each PCV site. However, PC/Albania staff members regularly work closely with Host Country supervisors and counterparts, and, in particular, whenever a change in counterparts or supervisors occurs.

g) **Housing safety and security:** See Appendix for forms, checklists and materials that PC/Albania uses for housing selection. This process is shared with counterparts and trainees.

Time line:
The Country Director will review current site placement materials in September 2008 to assure continued quality and effectiveness. "Quality" will be assessed with Volunteers using criteria in Appendix 1.1 (*Site Development Process Guidelines*) to gauge the usefulness of the materials to staff, Volunteers and other stakeholders.

2. That OSIRP take the lead among relevant Peace Corps offices to standardize the use of the term "secondary assignment" or "secondary activities."

(Response provided by OSIRP)

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) Background Information Source: **PC/Information Collection & Exchange Manual 0052 "*Above and Beyond - Secondary activities for Peace Corps Volunteers*"**

This Headquarters PC publication described the agency's development philosophy towards secondary activities by PCVs. Volunteers undertake secondary activities for many sound and valuable reasons, but ultimately such activities have long been demonstrated to be an effective means for Peace Corps Volunteers to become integrated

and contributing members of their communities, and not simply be viewed as expatriate workers providing technical services in a primary job.

WHAT IS A SECONDARY ACTIVITY?

A secondary activity is just about anything you as a Volunteer might do to benefit the community that is not part of your primary assignment. It is secondary to the primary assignment, not necessarily secondary in importance either to you or to the community you serve. Secondary activities can share the objectives and methodologies of Peace Corps projects and many of the same characteristics, without following the same formal procedures. A village cleanup campaign, for example, may get underway without a structured needs assessment or a feasibility study, simply because a Volunteer and her neighbor start talking about the garbage outside their houses and decide to do something about it.

In the more than [45] years since the Peace Corps was established, PCVs have organized an amazing range of such "secondary" activities. To give a few examples, they have promoted environmental awareness through drama, established piggeries, equipped language laboratories, taught women how to make milk from soybeans, built latrines, organized libraries, and taught children to play new sports.

WHY DO PCVs UNDERTAKE SECONDARY ACTIVITIES?

PCVs are expected to become involved in community activities as party of their PCV service, and in addition to their primary job assignments, for a variety of reasons. They do so because of lulls in project tasks, bureaucratic delays, or simply because they want more direct involvement with people in their communities. They may have free time, or see community needs they think they can help with; they may be asked to undertake a specific activity by community residents, or may have skills and interests they wish to pursue for their own pleasure.

For example:

- In the Dominican Republic, a Volunteer had her students paint a world map on the school wall after she discovered that very little material existed to teach them geography.
- Missing the community fairs she had enjoyed growing up in Iowa, a PCV organized one in her village in Mauritania to foster community spirit.
- A PCV in Jamaica who had played in a band back home turned his hobby into a profitable business for five young men, whom he trained to build and play drums.

Sometimes a PC staff member may suggest that a PCV continue with an activity started by a previous PCV. In the case of Paraguay's summer health camps, a secondary activity begun years ago by a group of Education Volunteers is now an ongoing part of the country's Peace Corps program.

Time line:

OSIRP will document the definition of these terms as part of the taxonomy definitions under the auspices of the Peace Corps Data Governance Board. These definitions are expected to be in place by September 30, 2008.

3. That the country director routinely evaluates the performance of all trainers.

Disposition-Concur: PC/Albania maintains high standards for training and training staff. The post continues to seek opportunities for constructive feedback on their performance from Trainees, Volunteers and other staff members. (There apparently was some misunderstanding about this well-established process; the OIG evaluator never asked the PC/Albania Training Manager about PC/Albania's training evaluation system, whether or when it was put in place, or how it functioned.)

Explanation:

a) **PST Feedback**: The PC/Albania Programming and Training Officer and the Training Manager have long had mechanisms in place to capture the feedback of trainees and volunteers during PST, using weekly and final evaluation tools.

b) **Evaluation of LCFs**: In March 2007, the Language Coordinator instituted an assessment process for the Language and Cultural Facilitators. This process (see Appendix 3.1 for assessment form – *Language Teachers' Evaluation*) includes several components:

- Give trainees the assessment form in Week 8.
- Trainees filled out the form on all of their teachers.
- The assessment report is compiled Week 9.
- The information collected in Weeks 10 -11 and is used to discuss the language teachers' performance during the PST.

The Teachers' evaluation form is one of several tools the Language Coordinator uses. Other forms of assessment include: observation of their classes; daily discussions with teachers; soliciting direct feedback from trainees; evaluating contributions the teachers make in materials development; evaluating trainers' innovations and improvements; monitoring the pedagogical techniques they apply in their classes; observing and encouraging how they share information within the team; and assessing trainers' communications with their teammates, etc.

c) **Evaluation of Technical Coordinators**: PC/Albania has changed its evaluation form for PST Question 11 to include specific opportunity for feedback about technical coordinators for Health Education, TEFL and Community and Organization Development. These coordinators are all Albanians who are hired as temporary staff just for PST (see Question 10, Appendix 3.2 for the applicable evaluation form). The OIG evaluator's criticism on p. 8 that more trainers be either Albanians or former Volunteers

who have served in Albania is an interesting one. In fact *all* of the PST trainers *are* Albanian, except for a few specific sessions conducted by the PTO, CD, PCMO or AO who are American officials. PC/Albania has used current or recent PCVs in previous PSTs, and, in the 2008 PST, the post used a significant number of current Volunteers to bridge the gap between theory and practice. PC/Albania has included a place on the assessment form for Volunteers to provide additional feedback about trainers in Question 11, form 3.2.

d) **Guest speakers**: PC/Albania regularly explains to local guest speakers, the Peace Corps's training approach and philosophy. However, it is understood that being a local technical expert in the field (e.g., in Health or other subject areas) does not mean that person is also an expert in training. PC/Albania understands well the trade-offs between training techniques and a practitioner's valuable expertise about current practice and the subject matter being presented. Knowing this, PC/Albania works with these limitations and uses guest speakers precisely because they do have the expertise and because they represent the realities of the particular sector in Albania. At times, these guest speakers will be Trainees' future counterparts or supervisors, or other Albania officials with direct responsibilities in the sectors where PCVs work.

PC/Albania does not have a budget to pay for guest speakers at its training sessions. Speakers typically speak without any compensation, although occasionally they may be provided a small honorarium or a meal with Trainees. The post accepts the trade-offs in using guest speakers – obtaining key local expertise *versus* using someone with well-developed training skills, but lacking the day-to-day realities of working in that sector.

e) **Use of Professional Trainers**: It is important to recognize that the availability of highly-qualified trainers at any training site is limited, whether in Albania or elsewhere. Indeed, the shortage of well-trained, skilled manpower is one of the very reasons that Peace Corps was created. PC/Albania recognizes that it cannot always hire people who are professional trainers/facilitators. This challenge has previously been reported in the post's TSR.

Training staff for the PST, including Technical Coordinators, are all hired on a temporary basis. The post seeks qualified temporary staff members who know the local context; who have useful contacts in the training site; who can facilitate community linkages for Trainees so that they get meaningful exposure to the local setting; and who can also communicate and coordinate with PC Program Managers as well as subject matter experts to present training topics. This is challenging, but Technical Coordinators are hired to *coordinate* training -- not necessarily to deliver it. Depending on the specific situation, there are times when Technical Coordinators do conduct training sessions; in such cases, further facilitation skills training may be needed and is provided.

f) **Training Evaluation of Staff**: The Country Director or his designate formally evaluates "training" as part of the Annual Performance Review for all full time staff who perform training duties as part of their job descriptions. These include the: Training

Manager, Programming and Training Officer, Safety and Security Officer, Medical Officer, Program Managers, Assistant Program Managers, and Language Coordinator.

g) **Safety and Security Training**: In October 2006, the SSC instituted a biannual Safety and Security survey as an assessment tool for the training process. (See Appendix 3.3 for *Safety and Security Questionnaire* and Appendix 3.4 for *Safety and Security Survey Evaluation Summary 06*)

Time Line:

a) In September 2008 PC/Albania will administer the final PST evaluation form for the 2008 PST. This will include solicitation of feedback for Albanian PSC technical trainers and coordinators. The PTO will report the findings to the Country Director. (See form 3.2 in Appendix.)

b) For 2008-09 training events, including IST, MSC, Language Refresher and COS sessions, PC/Albania will incorporate in the overall assessment a section on trainer feedback. The Programming and Training Officer and Training Manager will design the forms and will monitor the implementation. The PTO will report findings to the Country Director.

c) The Language and Cultural Coordinator and the Training Manager will report all relevant feedback reported on current PST evaluations for individual trainers to the Program and Training Officer who will communicate with the Country Director by August 2008.

4. That the country director continue to coordinate with the VAC and address Volunteer perceptions of staff support.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) The EMA Region ensures that 100% of its posts have organized Volunteer Advisory Committees. Since the post re-opened in 2003, PC/Albania has provided funding in its Ops–Plan for Volunteer committees. The Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC) was one of the first entities established at post and is a valuable representative mechanism that gathers, analyzes, prioritizes and funnels Volunteer concerns and recommendations to the PC Staff.

b) The Albanian VAC meets a minimum of 4 times per year, once per quarter, unless additional meetings are requested by the Country Director or the VAC.

c) In 2007-2008, in addition to its regular meetings and policy reviews, the VAC:

- Conducted a PCV survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the second PCV Homestays with host families;
- Reviewed the Post Welcome Book which is sent out to each new training group and recommended changes and improvements;
- Made a presentation during PST about the role of VAC and opportunities for PCV service;
- Added a new position specifically to address PCV Safety and Security topics; and
- Collected anonymous Safety and Security incident surveys to capture data on unreported Safety and Security incidents.

Time Line:

Starting with the VAC meeting in January 2008, the Country Director requested that the VAC comment on staff support of PCVs. Since that meeting the VAC has conveyed perceptions of staff support both positive and negative, and provided examples. This activity is now a regular part of the VAC agenda.

5. That the country director increase the vetting and monitoring of homestays and address problematic situations in a timely and resolute manner.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) PC/Albania understands that the OIG Preliminary Report refers to the "homestay" period that occurred after Swearing In, when new Volunteers spent 4.5 months with host families at their permanent sites.

b) PC/Albania revised its PCV Housing Policy in March 2008. The post's Housing Policy no longer requires homestays after Swearing-In. Such Homestays are now optional; no one in PC/Albania Group 11 (the 2008 PST intake) chose this option. During PST staff members carefully laid out the pros and cons of Homestays and other permanent PCV housing options. This review included a comparison of the benefits of continued language and cultural immersion after PST, compared to the PST Homestays when PC/Albania could provide direct daily support and immediate response to any problems. For example, during PST, the post engaged a Homestay team of two full time PSCs who were in constant contact with the Trainees, host families, local officials and community members. All problems were adequately resolved and no Trainees encountered situations that caused them to leave their homestay families.

c) For those Volunteers who choose this housing option in the future, PC/Albania staff will attempt to resolve any homestay issues in a timely fashion. Understanding the Albanian culture, mores, society, economy, and domestic concerns, PC/Albania will continue to help its Volunteers make informed housing choices after PST.

d) The Programming staff and the Country Director will continue to monitor PCV housing selection and provide support.

e) PC/Albania does not concur in the evaluator's characterization of two homestay incidents (p. 11 of the OIG Preliminary Report):

> "Two female Volunteers faced unwanted advances from host fathers. One Volunteer alleged that she was pursued, after leaving the home.
>
> "In response to the last two situations, the Peace Corps staff actively pursued new living arrangements. However, both Volunteers stated that the support received from staff was very poor. According to the Volunteers, staff challenged the accuracy of the Volunteers' statements, became accusatory toward the Volunteers, and did not offer useful follow-up to determine how they were coping after these incidents.
>
> "One avenue of potential support that was not made available to the two female Volunteers who had been traumatized was the offer for counseling services by the Office of Special Services (OSS) at Peace Corps Headquarters. The OSS is a resource that could provide counseling on a confidential basis to Volunteers if Peace Corps staff provides a referral."

Explanation:

In each of these incidents the post immediately offered to move the Volunteers to a different housing situation; as with each post in the EMA Region, PC/Albania puts the safety and security of its Volunteers first and provides prompt support to its PCVs. Post is not aware of the assertion that the PCV was pursued after leaving the home. To the contrary, the PCV wrote the following to the post Safety and Security Coordinator on September 6, 2007:

> "The next morning I called Chris Wrona-Giallongo [the PTO] again and told her what happened and that I was prepared to talk to my host dad, but I was unable to because he wasn't home and I went to bed and I told her what happened with him entering my room without my permission again. I don't know what was happening on the Peace Corps end, but Chris had talked to Hill [the CD] and decided that it was best that I leave my house and Berat until new housing arrangements could be made or have someone talk to my host dad.
>
> "Peace Corps called my host father and told him what happened was inappropriate, and to my knowledge, he never acknowledged what happened. I am now in independent housing and met with my host mother briefly although it was in the presence of my mother, my site mate, and our safety and security officer. I have not talked to my host mom about the details of what happened nor have I confronted my host father. Hope this is complete enough. Let me know.

> "Thanks Rudi [the SSC] for all of your help, I really appreciate it. This was a difficult incident and you have been really supportive of me, thank you." (see Appendix 5.1 for the Incident Report).

This incident was reported to PC/Albania by phone on August 28, 2007, immediately after it happened. Since that time staff members have been in frequent communication with the Volunteer. She submitted the incident report above on September 6. The post continued to support her in dealing with this incident even after she moved to independent housing. The PCV's report contains no allegations or inference that PC/Albania failed to provide a prompt response or adequate support. Nor does the report offer any suggestion that the Volunteer "was pursued" after leaving her host family's house.

Of the Volunteers who arrived in 2006 and 2007, only one female PCV moved to independent housing after the unwanted advances from the host father. There was one "other sexual assault" incident involving a female Trainee who faced unwanted advances from her host father. In that incident, the Trainee declined the post's offer to move her to a different housing situation, with a different Host family, and in a different satellite training site. She indicated that she did not want to move because it was almost the end of the PST, and because she "did not want to hurt the Host Mother and Sisters." The staff of PC/Albania has regularly communicated with the Volunteer to provide support. (See Appendix 5.2 for Incident Report Follow up with headquarters *Re: Crime Incident Report: Other Sexual Assault -Albania 2007-05-16-15-54-14-Part 2.)*

Time Line:

In March 2008, Peace Corps/Albania sought and received the EMA Region's approval for a change in the housing policy. Homestays after Swearing-In are now optional for PCVs. PC/Albania continues to provide support for all PCVs regardless of their housing arrangements.

6. That the country director address Volunteers' homestay concerns in a timely and resolute manner. Actions may include the Volunteer's removal from the homestay and telephonic counseling with the Office of Special Services.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) The PC/Albania Housing Policy no longer requires homestays after Swearing in. Such Homestays are optional. No one in Group 11 (the 2008 intake) chose this option. For those Volunteers who choose the homestay housing option in the future, PC/Albania staff will attempt to resolve any homestay issues in a timely fashion. Understanding the

Albanian culture, mores, society, economy, and domestic concerns, PC/Albania will continue to help Volunteers make informed housing choices. PC/Albania will make every attempt to resolve any homestay issues in a timely fashion and seek help from OSS if needed.

b) The PC/Albania programming and medical staff and the Country Director will continue to monitor Volunteers' housing selection and support on a continuous basis.

Time Line:

In March, 2008, PC/Albania proposed, and the EMA Region approved, a change in the post's housing policy so that homestays after Swearing-In are optional.

7. That the country director revise or terminate the policy requiring Volunteers to spend an additional 4.5 months in a second host family after PST.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) In March, 2008, PC/Albania proposed, and the EMA Region approved, a change in the post's housing policy so that homestays after Swearing-In are optional.

b) The PC/Albania programming and medical staff and the Country Director will continue to monitor Volunteers' housing selection and support on a continuous basis.

c) See also recommendations #5 and #6.

Time Line:

In March, 2008, PC/Albania proposed, and the EMA Region approved, a change in the post's housing policy so that homestays after Swearing-In are optional.

8. That the country director remind Volunteers of the importance of reporting all safety incidents, as required, so that the post has an accurate picture of the safety and security realities.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) The PC/Albania Safety and Security Coordinator and the Country Director adhere diligently to the agency's established Crime Report protocol, which provides posts with an established list of reportable incidents, together with a description for every category

of incident. The post consults this catalogue of incident descriptions before categorizing and reporting any incident. The staff of PC/Albania do not independently decide which situations constitute "reportable incidents."

PC/Albania believes that one of the important benefits of reported incidents is that the post can use them as lessons learned or strategies for all the Volunteers. PC/Albania has consistently used reported incidents (anonymously) for training purposes and to provide PCVs with important statistical information about the risks of crime and violence. (See Appendix 8.1 for *PCSSO Report for PC Albania, April 08*.)

b) The OIG Preliminary Report noted a 2007 incident concerning a female Volunteer in Albania at whom some young men reportedly shouted "Die! Die!" The post's Safety and Security Coordinator did *not* downgrade the incident as suggested by the OIG evaluator, but reported the incident to Peace Corps HQ through the CIRF system (see CIRF Incident No. ID 2007-09-11-13-41-44). Following post's submission of the report, there was communication between post and the CIRF unit in headquarters about the proper categorization of the incident (see Appendix 8.2 for e-mail communication *Crime Incident Report Unknown - Albania 2007-09-11-13-41-44-Part 2*). PC/Albania does not understand the evaluator's assertion that the SSC determined that the shouts were likely in Italian (meaning "Come on!"), and has no knowledge of such a statement. Nor has the post been able to find reference to this asserted statement in any of the records that PC/Albania or HQ has about the incident.

c) In 2007, a female Volunteer verbally reported to PC/Albania that she witnessed the inappropriate sexual behavior (masturbation in the seat next to her) of a male on public transportation. The Volunteer got off the bus immediately. She did not think she was a target of this behavior, did not feel threatened, but was disgusted by the conduct of a man who evidently was mentally disturbed. These kinds of incidents are shared with the Volunteers in PST or other training sessions, or by other means of communication (See 8.4 for *PC Albania Personal Safety Guide 2009*).

Time Line:

a) In May 2008, the post initiated a Volunteer COS survey about Safety and Security incidents and staff support. The survey's purpose is to capture unreported incidents (if any), as well as recommendations for improving PC staff support. This survey is conducted with the help of the VAC, which collects the surveys from PCVs and then forwards them anonymously to post management for its consideration and appropriate follow-up.

b) PC/Albania plans to conduct an annual Safety and Security survey every spring to collect unreported incidents from first- and second-year Volunteers. (See 3.3 *Safety and Security Questionnaire* in Appendix.)

9. That the country director adopt a policy for replacing cell phones that is consistent with Peace Corps Manual Section 235.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) As part of PC/Albania's overall safety and security program, the post currently purchases a mobile phone and charger for each trainee. These phones remain Peace Corps property until the end of the PCV's service and must be maintained and used in accordance with the requirements and conditions in the post's cell phone policy.

Along with the mobile phone, Peace Corps gives each trainee an allowance for a local Vodafone card, to be used for emergency calls for health or safety and security. The card has a specified amount of phone-usage on it; trainees are expected to monitor their usage so that the card lasts the first month that they have their mobile phones. Each month thereafter through training and their Peace Corps Volunteer service, PC/Albania provides trainees and Volunteers with funds for a phone card to carry them through that month for emergency calls for health or safety and security. These funds are included in the PCTs'/PCVs' monthly Walk Around payments and Living Allowance deposits.

b) The current PC/Albania Volunteer Handbook 2008 states:

> **MAINTENANCE OF MOBILE PHONES**
>
> It is expected that trainees and Volunteers will safeguard their mobile phones to prevent loss or damage. The mobile phones issued come with a one month warranty. After the warranty period, if a mobile phone or charger is lost, damaged or stolen during the period of your service, you will be responsible for replacing or repairing it at your own expense if you choose to do so. PCVs who ET will be required to return their phones. PCVs who COS will have the option of keeping their phone or donating it to a phone bank maintained by another PCV. Please contact your VAC representative for the phone bank policy.

c) This policy was originally implemented at post because several Volunteers lost or damaged three or more phones during their term of service. Although PC/Albania does not have the original notes of these incidents, a staff member recalls that the VAC, along with the CD, felt that it was appropriate to implement this policy in order to make sure Volunteers took seriously their responsibility for the PC equipment (i.e., cell phones) that had been provided to them.

At the November 2007 VAC meeting for PC/Albania, the VAC asked if COS-ing PCVs could turn their phones into a Peace Corps phone bank. This phone bank could then be used to replace cell phones that PCVs lost, or which were damaged or stolen. In the January 2008 VAC meeting the VAC and the CD agreed to set-up such a Peace Corps

Phone Bank, which is coordinated by one of the VAC members. The VAC is currently developing recommendations on distributing the phones.

d) The OIG Preliminary Report suggests that PC/Albania review MS 235 and ensure that its mobile phone policy is consistent that Manual section. This recommendation implies that cell phones inherently fall under the definition found in MS 235, paragraph 3.4 (a): "The lost item is essential to the health, welfare, or continued service of the V/T". PC/Albania provides Ts/Vs with mobile phones for safety and security, as well as for work-related purposes. However, Volunteers in Albania are fortunate to have redundant communication systems available to them across the country, including land-line phones, and internet capabilities. Mobile phones provide a convenient method of communication with the Vs/Ts but this method in and of itself is not essential. PC/Albania considers itself to be in compliance with MS 235.

e) In addition, the evaluator's suggestion that the post automatically replace each cell phone whenever it is lost, damaged or stolen has obvious budgetary implications. PC/Corps Albania's cell phone program currently costs around $20,000 per year for the purchase of the phones, SIM cards and monthly usage allowances.

Time Line:

During the next PC/Albania VAC meeting in August 2008, the CD will discuss with the VAC whether the Phone Bank is an appropriate solution for replacing lost, stolen or damaged phones. Subject to available funds, the post will also consider whether it would be prudent to revise its cell phone policy to include a "no fault/no cost" replacement of one additional cell phone to any V/T.

10. That the country director complete an EAP consolidation test at the earliest practical date in Fiscal Year 2008.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) According to the agency's EAP testing guidelines (see Appendix 10.1 for *EAP Testing Guidelines*), and the reports of the assigned PCSSO (Appendix 8.1 for the *PCSSO Report for PC Albania, April 08*), PC/Albania is in compliance with the agency's EAP testing requirements. According to the Guidelines a consolidation test *may be* conducted in lieu of a communication test. Each post should conduct one test (either kind) at least once a year. PC/Albania post has been diligent in this regard, and has conducted more than one EAP test per year for the past several years:

- November 2003, Communication test with all Trainees
- April 2004, Communication test with all Trainees
- May 2005, Communication test with all Trainees

- September 2005, Communication test with all Volunteers
- January 2006, Communication test with all Volunteers
- May 2006, Communication test with all Trainees
- January 2007, Communication test with all Volunteers
- June 2007, Communication test with all Trainees
- April 2008, Communication test with PC Albania (Tirana) Staff
- May 2008, Communication test with all Trainees

b) PC/Albania planned an EAP Consolidation test for March 2008 but it was canceled because of the Albanian bank holiday and the fact that many PCVs would be traveling (See 10.2 email communication re: *Date of PC/Albania's Consolidation Test for FY8*.)

Time Line:

PC/Albania is planning to conduct three regional consolidation exercises during Q1 of FY09. Post Management considers these a lower cost and less disruptive alternative to a single countrywide test. These regional exercises will be expanded into a training opportunity for Volunteers by assigning Wardens, and senior staff participating in each drill, a safety-related topic that Volunteers will discuss when they reach their consolidation points.

11. That the country director direct the Medical Officer to determine the viability of the Greek Hospital for the medical care of Volunteers, and, if the hospital is an appropriate facility, communicate its availability to Volunteers.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) PC/Albania has determined that the so-called "Greek Hospital" in Gjirokaster is available and generally appropriate for the use of Volunteers located in Gjirokaster. These Volunteers are aware that they can use this facility in an emergency. The main concern that the post has with this facility is that most of the medical and administrative staff members at this hospital speak only Greek, and not Albanian or English. Thus PCVs and the post's PCMO staff would be seriously limited in communicating with medical personnel at the Greek Hospital. The hospital is definitely not an appropriate facility for Volunteers located outside of the immediate Gjirokaster area because it is too far away, and offers no significant advantages over the Albanian government's regional hospitals.

b) The Albanian government's regional hospital in Gjirokaster is also available to the Volunteers serving in that area in an emergency. This hospital is more conveniently located than the Greek Hospital, the staff speaks Albanian and some English and, although the facility is not as new as the Greek Hospital, the surgical suites have been

renovated in recent years. This hospital is also an acceptable medical facility for PCVs in an emergency.

c) Volunteers throughout Albania have been instructed to use the closest regional hospital in an emergency. There are 12 regional hospitals throughout Albania. Some are better than others, but in an emergency, Peace Corps has determined that any of them would be able to provide stabilization until the Peace Corps medical staff could arrange the appropriate intervention. In non-emergency situations, PC/Albania manages the health care of Volunteers through the Peace Corps Medical Office. PC/Albania has an adequate network of qualified medical specialists in Tirana that its uses for consultations requiring specialists. PC/Albania would not send Volunteers to Gjirokaster for consultations with specialists at the Greek Hospital.

Time Line:

In the fall of 2007, PC/Albania contacted the Greek Hospital to assess its use by Volunteers in an emergency. The hospital confirmed verbally that it would be willing to see Peace Corps Volunteers with medical emergencies. The Volunteers in Gjirokaster were notified that they could use either the Greek Hospital or the Albanian government Regional Hospital in an emergency. PC/Albania currently has four new Volunteers in Gjirokaster and has notified them of this medical possibility as well.

12. That the country director reevaluate and update the per diem rates for travel (outside of Tirana) to reflect reasonable travel costs, in accordance with OFMH.

Disposition: Concur

Explanation:

a) In October 2005, PC/Albania increased the Staff Per Diem from 1800 Lek to 2500 Lek. This change put the Peace Corps per diem in line with local rates paid by the U.S. Embassy. However, PC/Albania learned from staff that the rate was increased so that staff members could cover some of the expenses of buying coffee or meals for Volunteers, officials and counterparts. The Peace Corps OFMH Guidelines consider such expenses to be outside the scope of Peace Corps per diems.

b) PC/Albania subsequently conducted a survey and reviewed travel vouchers over several months to get an accurate sample of staff expenditures when traveling outside of Tirana. As a result of this survey, PC/Albania changed its local per diem rate to 1600 Lek in August 2007. This process was conducted in an open and transparent manner, and involved data gathering and discussions with all staff members. The new rate was applied equally to all staff members.

Time Line:

In June 2008 PC/Albania's Administrative team implemented a new Staff Per Diem Survey. The survey period runs from June 15 to August 15. The results will be analyzed to help post management determine whether an increase in staff travel per diem is warranted. If so, rates will be changed. The impact of any additional budgetary costs will be addressed either through a request for additional funds from PC headquarters, a reduction in travel, or a combination of these.

13. That OSIRP revise the performance goals and indicators in the Strategic Performance Plan for 2009-2014 to provide a more complete and reliable presentation of Peace Corps performance.

(Response completed by OSIRP)

Disposition: Do not concur

Explanation:

a) As provided to the OIG contacts for this program evaluation, the 2009-2014 Strategic Plan has not yet been issued, as the agency continues to formulate its contents. OSIRP therefore is not in a position to revise any of the material. In addition, the terms "complete" and "reliable" are value judgments on the part of the OIG reviewer. All of the performance indicators that the agency will use in the 2009-2014 Strategic Plan will have data source validation.

b) As it relates to the material contained in this particular section of the OIG Preliminary Report (pages 17-20) OSIRP had already initiated action on several of the items mentioned prior to the OIG Program Evaluation. OSIRP will also review and factor into its processes any of the material in this section that may be appropriate.

c) Other comments:

- OSIRP considers that it is inappropriate for OIG to take issue with the use of Volunteer Surveys to inform the performance indicators (page 18 of the Preliminary Report). These indicators and the related information have already been reviewed and approved by OMB. They will continue to be used for FY 2008.

- OSIRP also believes that the footnote to the table on page 18 is in error. Reporting on several of the indicators for FY 2007 did not require a figure since they were based on the Biannual Survey, which was not performed in FY 2007. OSIRP provided for the use of COS survey data merely to provide information to the public. The OIG should have referred to the footnote that is included in the agency's FY 2007 PAR.

14. That the Center for Field Research and Assistance, the EMA regional director, and the country director (in implementing the revised processes for reporting

information of individuals assisted and service providers trained assure that performance information reported (1) is useful to management, (2) is subject to verification and validation, and (3) considers both costs and benefits.

Disposition-Concur: The EMA Region and PC/Albania concur that reported performance information must be useful to management, subject to verification and validation, and must consider both costs and benefits.

Explanation:

a) **Use to Management**: Currently, the EMA Region and PC/Albania consider numerous sources of performance information useful for management decisions. As stated in the OIG Preliminary Report (p. 17), four of the Agency-wide goals relevant to posts are being reported on appropriately by PC/Albania. Six of the nine 2007 performance indicators related to posts are also being reported by PC Albania. Tools for such reports include the global Biennial PCV Survey, and the annual COS surveys. In addition, PC/Albania is a leader in developing PCV project-specific reporting tools that interface with the agency's new PCV Reporting Tool and Database pilot.

The data reported through these tools are analyzed and used for quality improvements by PC/Albania, the EMA Region's P&T Unit, the EMA Regional Director, and OSIRP. Where data indicate dissatisfaction on the part of Volunteers, PC/Albania and Regional staff revise and improve: project reviews; pre-departure information included in Welcome Books and Volunteer Handbooks; Pre-Service Training content; Volunteer support strategies including PCV assignments; site placements; site visits and PACs; mid-service training content; and individual Volunteer performance counseling.

For management decisions, PC/Albania, the EMA Region, the Center and OSIRP also use reporting tools such as the Integrated Planning and Budget System (IPBS) annual reports, Project Status Reports (PSRs) and Project Plans (PP). Data in these reports inform numerous post and Region management decisions on program expansion, geographic relocation, alignment to host-country development goals, fiscal impact on programming and training, and Volunteer support.

b) **Verification and Validation**: Regarding data collection on project performance indicators, the EMA Region and PC/Albania acknowledge, that "The views of Volunteers on these matters are important; however, the performance information would be more meaningful if corroborative data from independent sources could be incorporated." (see OIG Preliminary Report, p. 18.) Along with the agency's revised PCV Reporting Tool and Roll-up Database, the EMA Region is working with OSIRP on soliciting host-country national input on project indicators. PC/Albania will be one of the pilot posts for this effort in late FY08 or early FY09. Such Host Country data will assist in overall data verification and validation, particularly in meeting the new Agency Strategic Plan's goals on program results.

The introduction of the agency's PCV Reporting Tool and the solicitation of data from host country sources will also require Regionally supported staff development and Volunteer training to ensure data verification and validation. Formal PST training will be conducted with PCTs so they are aware of the systems and skills required for accurate data collection. PC/Albania staff will be trained in data collection and analysis techniques. Reports will be shared with partner agencies for their edification and verification.

c) **Costs and Benefits: T**he EMA Region and PC/Albania expect that the new PCV Reporting Tool and Roll-up Database will save the Agency considerable funds in staff time once it is operational (p. 19 of the OIG Preliminary Report). Staff will no longer need to spend long hours manually inputting data onto Excel charts. PC/Albania is already a leader in this efficient new system.

Time line:

As recommended by the OIG Preliminary Report, the EMA Region and PC/Albania will pay particular attention to the potential cost-savings expected from the new reporting tool. Having already established a baseline for the FY07 PSR submissions, the EMA Region will compare the time and cost of the FY08 PSRs. Likewise, in FY09 the Region will measure data collection costs in light of management benefits.

APPENDICES - SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

1.1 Site Development Process Guidelines
1.2 TEFL Brochure English-Albanian
1.3 TEFL 171 Request for PCV English
1.4 TEFL Host Agency Request English
1.5 Site Questionnaire TEFL School Survey
1.6 Site Questionnaire Community Survey
1.7 Site Assessment Checklist TEFL
1.8 Volunteer Assignment Approval
1.9 Site Assignment Packet TEFL
1.10 PCV Site Evaluation
1.11 Final PCV Site Report
1.12 Site Assignment Input Form
1.13 General Agreement Counterparts TEFL English

3.1 Language Teachers' Evaluation
3.2 Final Evaluation PST 11 (draft)
3.3. Safety and Security Questionnaire
3.4. Safety and Security Survey Evaluation Summary 06

5.1 Incident Report (Only upon request due to confidentiality)
5.2 RE Crime Incident Report Other Sexual Assault Albania 2007-05-16-15-54-14-Part2 (Only upon request due to confidentiality)

8.1 PCSSO Report for PC/Albania, April 08
8.2 Crime Incident Report Unknown - Albania 2007-09-11-13-14-44-Part 2
8.3 Annual Calendar of Safety & Security Training and Development Events
8.4 PC/Albania Personal Safety Guide

10.1 EAP Testing Guidelines
10.2 Date of PC/Albania's Consolidation Test for FY08

APPENDIX C

OIG COMMENTS

Management concurred with 13 of the 14 recommendations addressed to them; the Office of Strategic Information Research and Planning did not concur with recommendation number 13. We closed recommendation numbers 1, 4 – 8, 11, and 14. Recommendation numbers 2, 3, 9, 10, 12, and 13 remain open pending confirmation from the chief compliance officer that the following has been received:

- For recommendation number 2, a copy of an OSIRP memorandum stating the agency-wide standard definition of "secondary assignment."

- For recommendation number 3, a copy of the country director's plan to evaluate the performance of trainers.

- For recommendation number 9, a copy of a memorandum stating the post's new, PCM-compliant cell phone replacement policy.

- For recommendation number 10, evidence (e.g. the EAP report generated from VIDA) that the EAP consolidation test has been completed.

- For recommendation number 12, a copy of the country director's memorandum stating the outcome of the analysis of the post's "Staff Per Diem Survey."

- For recommendation number 13, a copy of the revised performance goals and indicators in the Strategic Performance Plan for 2009-2014 showing that performance goals and indicators are supported by more than one type of evidence.

  We have read the OSIRP's comments regarding OIG recommendation number 13. It is our position that the OIG has the authority and responsibility to review any agency program and issue recommendations for improvement.

In their response, management described actions they are taking or intend 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 region or post has taken these actions nor 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.

APPENDIX D

PROGRAM EVALUATION COMPLETION AND OIG CONTACT

OIG CONTACT	If you wish to comment on the quality or usefulness of this report to help us improve our products, please e-mail Shelley Elbert, Assistant Inspector General for Evaluations and Inspections, at selbert@peacecorps.gov, or call (202) 692-2904.
STAFF ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	Expert consultant Thomas F. O'Connor conducted the program evaluation.

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, ABUSE, AND MISMANAGEMENT

Fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in government affect everyone from Peace Corps Volunteers to agency employees to the general public. We actively solicit allegations of inefficient and wasteful practices, fraud, and abuse related to Peace Corps operations domestically or abroad. You can report allegations to us in several ways, and you may remain anonymous.

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