

**PEACE CORPS
A CASE STUDY OF EFFECTIVE
PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS**

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes key lessons from the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) study of effective Peace Corps programs. We reviewed programs in nine Peace Corps posts—three in each region: Africa; Inter-America and Pacific; and Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia. Chosen in consultation with regional management, the posts selected were Niger, Malawi, Mauritania, Panama, Paraguay, Honduras, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Philippines. The purpose of the study was to document how these nine posts have built and implemented programs that Peace Corps considers to be of high quality.

This report summarizes our principal findings from the nine case studies and a tenth report that reviews how three posts – Honduras, Panama, and Paraguay – work with Volunteer Counterparts. All of the reports from this study are available on the OIG homepage on the intranet.

I. JOB ONE WAS GOAL ONE

The posts in this study placed a priority on developing substantive primary assignments for their Volunteers. The staff understood that, for Volunteers to accomplish Peace Corps' second and third goals, they needed to place Volunteers in an environment conducive to the pursuit of goal one. Volunteers in productive primary assignments are more likely to integrate into their communities, learn the language and culture, develop partnerships with people and organizations and, thereby, produce visible results. It is through these partnerships that the Volunteers learn about the culture of their communities and teach people about the United States. This positive experience is the basis upon which the Volunteers will bring the world back to the United States.

Goal one is about the job. Goals two and three will not occur without goal one. I believe that Volunteers want to make a contribution. We owe every Volunteer a good job and, in turn, they owe Peace Corps responsible behavior and achievement.

-- Country Director, Ukraine

Volunteers were successful in meeting agency and project goals because their primary assignments had the following characteristics:

- Work assignments were clear to the Volunteers, the people in their local communities, their host organizations, and their peers, colleagues, and counterparts.
- Assignments entailed concrete tasks, for which the Volunteers had the requisite skills, either before or after training.
- Volunteers were paired with counterparts or host organizations that are committed to and involved in the work of the Volunteers.
- Assignments required a significant commitment of time by the Volunteer.

Clear Assignments

Staff at these posts understood the importance of clarity about the Volunteer's purpose in the community. Some assignments were more readily understood and accepted by community members. Most importantly, counterparts, supervisors, and community members perceived a need that the Volunteer's work assignment could meet.

The most obvious examples of this are the Peace Corps staples of teaching English, math, computer literacy, and science. Volunteers in Georgia, the Philippines, Ukraine, Malawi, Mauritania, and Paraguay teach English, computer literacy, environmental science, and health. Education Volunteers are effective because their assignments are structured, their roles are clear, and education is valued by their communities. They have classes to teach, they are placed in a school setting, they work on a regular schedule, and usually have appreciative colleagues and supervisors. Volunteers appreciate their teaching assignments because teaching is a skill that is respected by the community.

Concrete Tasks

The posts in this study were realistic about the skill levels of their Trainees and the time required to train new Volunteers. The 9 to 12 weeks allotted to pre-service training (PST) fill up quickly with cross-cultural lessons, language training, and safety and security competencies. Knowing that most Volunteers will not arrive in country with the necessary technical skills for their assignments, program staff designed projects with two principles in mind: first, they developed project goals that translated into concrete tasks; and second, the skill sets needed to complete these tasks could be learned during PST and subsequently taught to others.

The benefits of this approach are significant. Volunteers are more effective when they have feasible tasks. Volunteers want to be productive and contribute to the quality of life in their communities, but they find it hard to do so when left to figure out how project goals translate into concrete tasks. Designing projects around clear and feasible activities results in higher Volunteer satisfaction with their Peace Corps experience because their work has tangible outcomes and they transfer useful skills to people.

The beekeeping project in Paraguay (see box below) and the water/sanitation project in Honduras were especially effective in identifying goals that meet country needs, encompassing concrete and feasible tasks, and requiring skills that are easily learned and taught to others. The water and sanitation project is, according to the Volunteers, "the most productive and worthwhile of the Peace Corps projects in Honduras . . . [because] we are in constant demand." The Volunteers build and maintain water systems, thereby meeting an important need of rural communities. Volunteers do not have to look for work, rather, communities seek them out. Volunteers are rewarded with an enormous sense of accomplishment during their two years of service.

Volunteers in Paraguay assigned to the beekeeping project claimed they had the best project, because:

- Their training focuses on a set of concrete skills that are easy to learn and easy to teach.
- They pass on skills that people can use to generate additional income.
- They gain great satisfaction from teaching women to keep bees, because the income gives the women independence and confidence.
- There are health benefits if people substitute honey for sugar in their diet.
- Their project has a strong multiplier effect in that they can train a few people who are then able to teach others.

Counterparts and Host Organizations are Committed and Involved

PC/Panama’s strategy to assure productive assignments for Volunteers is to work through local organizations, shifting from a community-based placement strategy to a partner organization-based strategy. One of the program managers explained:

When I arrived, Volunteers were placed in good communities – friendly, a good environment, but they were not productive. They were feeling that their abilities were not fully used. So, we decided to change that situation. I started to say that productivity was the key to happiness. So I began to find specific jobs for the Volunteers, partnering them with cooperatives in their sites.

PC/Panama no longer depends on Volunteers performing community needs assessments to develop substantive work assignments. Instead, the Associate Peace Corps Directors (APCDs) identify organizations with ongoing projects that Volunteers can help implement and locate the Volunteers in villages in which the organizations are implementing these projects. The sustainable agriculture project exemplifies this approach. As described in the Panama report:

The post partners with *Proyecto de Reforestation con Especies Nativas* (PRORENA), an NGO that works on restoring the diverse native forest that used to cover extensive areas of Panama and to demonstrate that large-scale ecological restoration in the tropics is technically feasible, socially attractive, and financially viable. While PRORENA’s target population is the small farmer, the placement of the agriculture Volunteers is driven by the work needs of the partnering agency.

A Significant Commitment of Time

Volunteers sign up for two years of service with the anticipation that they will have work for which they are trained. “The toughest job you will ever love” is a real expectation of the Volunteers and they are ready to meet high standards of performance—their own and those of the Peace Corps. The Volunteers told us that when this expectation of work is not met, they feel undervalued and doubt the importance of their time in the country.

Having no work for the Volunteers is unfair, and it demonstrates that the Volunteer's sacrifice is not valued.

Regional Manager, Philippines

An assignment that requires the Volunteer to invest significant time in work that is valued by the community helps the Volunteer to integrate into his or her local community and, as a consequence, be valued and protected by them. This is the agency's "acceptance" model for assuring Volunteer safety and security—its first priority and responsibility. We found the "acceptance" model working in these posts because Volunteers were implementing projects the community had requested and with which members of the community were involved.

Fully employed Volunteers are also able to demonstrate an important facet of American work culture. The counterparts told us that it was through working with the Volunteers that they witnessed American qualities of punctuality, hard work, and persistence. This can only occur in an assignment that provides significant and regular work-centered interactions among the Volunteers, their colleagues, and community members.

II. COUNTRY DIRECTORS HAD EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

A second defining characteristic of our high-performing posts was the quality of leadership exhibited by the country directors. Managing a Peace Corps post requires an arsenal of management, administrative, program, and people skills, as well as personal qualities of patience, negotiation, diplomacy, listening, endurance, and passion. The country directors in our study exuded these qualities.

Mission, Vision, and Values of PC/Panama

Mission

We work in partnership with others to promote sustainable solutions in the areas of health, sanitation, agriculture, environment, and small business as we promote the dignity of people and their capacity to improve their own lives.

Vision

We will be recognized as a development leader and partner of choice committed to eradicating poverty, promoting social justice, and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Values

Professionalism • Teamwork • Accountability •
Trust Transparency • Diversity • Effective
Communication • Respect for Cultural Differences

Volunteers and staff, in turn, respond to country directors who motivated them by being mission-focused and articulating a clear vision of what he or she wanted the post, staff, and Volunteers to accomplish. The most explicit case was Panama. To keep the Volunteers and staff focused on the mission, vision, and values of the post, the country director hung a poster, reproduced in the box to the left, immediately inside the front door of the office. The posters make clear to the Volunteers, staff, and partner agencies that PC/Panama is committed to being a partner in development.

The country directors conveyed a respect for staff and Volunteers by adopting a participatory style of management. They invited staff to help make decisions and viewed Volunteers as important sources of information about what worked and why. Some had formal mechanisms for providing feedback between Volunteers and staff, giving Volunteers a means to influence decisions.

In Malawi, for example, the staff attributed their ability to build strong programs and grow professionally to the country director's leadership and management skills. The country director supported them in constructive ways and, by taking a participatory approach to decision making, created an empowering work environment. They linked transparent management processes, such as the budget process, to their sense of teamwork, positive staff morale, and effective and efficient use of resources and time. The staff valued the country director's ability as "a great listener who trusts the staff to manage and do their jobs."

In Ukraine, the leadership of the country director made possible a significant reorganization of the post, undertaken to strengthen the quality of Volunteer assignments and Volunteer support. Position descriptions for program staff changed and Volunteer feedback, through the Volunteer Advisory Committee, became a public and integral part of staff performance reviews. With effective leadership skills, the country director was able to sell the reorganization as a vehicle for staff to be more effective, efficient, and satisfied with their work.

This post works well because we are always trying to do things better. [The country director] created an atmosphere that facilitates innovation. We collectively come to decisions to make changes. We have more chances to succeed when more people are involved. He also gives us the space to admit when things did not go very well and figure out new steps.

-- A staff member in Ukraine

Leadership is not only about vision. Leadership that sets expectations and holds staff and Volunteers accountable gets results. In Niger, the Volunteers need to speak French and as well as a local language to be effective. After determining that pre-service language training was inadequate and that Volunteers were not striving to achieve competency, the country director decided that Volunteers would be held back from going to their sites until they achieved at least a rating of intermediate low. Staff and Volunteers met the country director's challenge. The country director observed:

The big jump in attainment of at least "intermediate low" level of proficiency (our objective), from the 20 - 30% range in 2001 and earlier to the 80 - 90% range ... can be attributed primarily to a new policy implemented for the 2002 PST; we decided (and so informed the trainees from the beginning) that those who failed to attain this level would be sworn in but held back from going to their posts for additional intensive language training. After the first two PSTs in which this

policy was implemented (and our seriousness of purpose was recognized in Volunteer folklore), we have had a 95% or better success rate.

III. HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND COMMITTED STAFF

The program, training, and administrative staff at all nine posts were exceptional in the professional qualifications they brought to the Peace Corps, their commitment to the mission of the agency, and their extraordinary efforts to support the Volunteers.

The technical expertise and professional experience of the program staff trumped longevity of tenure with Peace Corps in determining the quality of programs. The staff in Panama, for example, were relatively new in tenure, as were many of the staff in Georgia. Of greater significance were their educational qualifications, technical knowledge, and professional experience that made them good resources for the Volunteers. Volunteers benefit from the extensive contacts that staff have with government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and they value staff with the experience and skills to nurture relationships with host organizations and solve problems that arise with counterparts.

Equally significant was the exceptional commitment of time and of physical and emotional energy that staff gave to Peace Corps and the Volunteers, sometimes at the expense of their personal lives. Many of the host country national staff shared a belief that, by working for Peace Corps and helping the Volunteers, they were helping their countries develop (see box below). The staff demonstrate this commitment through their willingness to work long hours and the extent of their availability to Volunteers, sometimes on a twenty-four hour basis. The Peace Corps is more than a job for them. It was clear in this study that seeking staff with strong technical qualifications, good contacts in the government and NGO community, and a passion for Peace Corps is the basis of a high performing post.

The commitment of the host country national staff of PC/Georgia is rooted in a belief that, by working for the Peace Corps, they are contributing to the development of Georgia. Many of the host country national staff had worked for a government ministry or an international organization prior to joining the Peace Corps; they contrasted the rural focus of the Peace Corps and the willingness of Volunteers to live in rural and remote areas to the more urban and macro focus of governments and international organizations. The Peace Corps, in their minds, was filling a vital development niche.

-- excerpt from Georgia report

Good Volunteers give two years, but good staff give much more. The choice of staff is critical to a high-performing program. More than their technical skill, they need a sincere commitment to the purpose of grass roots development to sustain themselves physically and emotionally in what is often a demanding position.

IV. THE VOLUNTEERS WERE PARTNERS IN THE POST'S MISSION

Volunteers in each of our nine posts participated actively in many aspects of program, training, and policy development, giving them a sense of being part of Peace Corps. The country director and staff took seriously the views and experiences of the Volunteers and included them in planning, policy making, site selection and development, and in some posts in the selection of new staff and in staff performance appraisals. Volunteers at some posts had *formal* mechanisms for giving feedback to staff and the country director on many aspects of programming, training, and administration.

According to the country director in the Philippines, "Listening to Volunteers is how programs are built in the Peace Corps. When there is a policy change, we try to get the Volunteers' feedback and let them make their case. Not only do you learn, but the Volunteers will understand staff's reasons and needs." To capitalize on the perspectives and experiences of the Volunteers on a regular basis, PC/Philippines established a Volunteer Forum, which according to staff, was effective because: (1) key staff attended; (2) the Volunteers who attended were truly interested, demonstrated by the requirement that Volunteers spent their travel allowances to participate, and (3) the staff responded immediately to Volunteers' questions and issues. The results of the Volunteer Forum were remarkable. Staff members told us that after just one or two sessions of the Volunteer Forum, the attitude of Volunteers began to change.

PC/Georgia included the Volunteers as a partner in the staff hiring process. In Georgia, the post polled all of the Volunteers for questions to ask the candidates, and Volunteers' appraisals are factored into the final decisions. Therefore, not only do the Volunteers buy into the decision, but they offer crucial feedback to staff on how each of the candidates interacted with the Volunteers.

In Panama, the Volunteers assisted with the preliminary identification of new sites. Because Volunteers do not travel in Peace Corps vehicles and do not arrive in a village with an aura of officialdom, they gathered information that was qualitatively different from that collected by a staff member. Through their informal, and sometimes repeated, interaction with people in the community, they felt they could gauge a community's commitment to working with and supporting a Volunteer. The country director and staff found the Volunteers' input to be extremely valuable.

V. SYSTEMATIZED PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES

The posts in this study have invested considerable effort and time in systematizing their processes and developing organizational structures that are transparent and logical. Clear procedures and policies helped posts to minimize the potential disruptions caused by the short tenure of U.S. direct hire staff and to maintain quality control through documentation, monitoring, and evaluation.

With 370 Volunteers, PC/Ukraine depends on its “systems” and organizational structure to meet the post’s mission of excellence in Volunteer programming, training, support, and safety. The country director emphasized the need for open communication and collaboration among staff based on trust, clearly defined duties and responsibilities, and professionalism as a code of conduct. The staff talk about their systems and organizational structure as a safety net whereby, if “it falls apart in one place, it will not fall apart somewhere else.” In practical terms, the backup systems built into the new structure and the strong collaboration among staff ensure that Volunteers receive rapid responses to their requests and concerns, even when that Volunteer’s program manager is away.

Many of the posts rely on guidelines and checklists to ensure the quality of their operations and to build an institutional memory of Peace Corps’ work in their countries. In Honduras, the post has a well-developed set of tools for site selection and development, including a Volunteer Placement Assessment, Site Description Form, a Master Site Roster, and a Community Development Notebook. These tools assist staff through the detailed procedures of identifying and developing sites for Volunteers.

The staff of PC/Georgia have also developed detailed documents to guide the selection of sites, counterparts, and host families. The documents and procedures ensure that staff ask the necessary questions and relay important information to counterparts and families. The checklists for site development include selection criteria that are specific, clear, and objective to assist staff in determining the readiness of schools and NGOs to host a Volunteer. Having clear criteria also keeps the process transparent. Host organizations are given a handbook that lists the selection criteria along with instructions on how to apply for a Volunteer. At the end of a cycle of training or site selection, the staff evaluate the process to determine what worked well and what needs to change. They revise their procedures and documents to reflect what they learned.

Several posts have developed marketing strategies to prospective host organizations and communities that assured the demand for Volunteers was greater than the supply. PC/Georgia worked with the Ministry of Education and international non-governmental organizations to advertise throughout the country. The higher number of applications than the number of Volunteers allowed the post to select the best host organizations. A rigorous application process helped staff to determine which sites would work hard to support the Volunteers.

The applications require schools and NGOs to invest a demanding, but reasonable, amount of time and thought. The burden is on the school or NGO to think about their goals and explain how a partnership with a Peace Corps Volunteer would help them achieve those goals.

excerpt from Georgia report

In Niger, the post broadcasted information about Volunteers’ projects over the national radio station and issued a brochure in the three primary languages of the country called,

“What’s Peace Corps?” to radio and television stations, the NGOs, and international organizations. The brochure explains the mission of the Peace Corps, its history in Niger, and describes Volunteers’ projects. It is an effective and inexpensive tool for building support for what the Peace Corps is doing.

VI. PREPARING VOLUNTEERS FOR SERVICE

Most Volunteers do not arrive in country with the technical and language skills required to undertake their work assignments and to integrate into their communities. The 9 to 12 weeks of pre-service training lay the groundwork for the Volunteer’s service. Based on the experiences of our nine posts and the reflections of the Volunteers whom we met, effective training has the following characteristics:

Technical Skills

Volunteers want and appreciate technical training that is practical, experiential, and realistic. They were best prepared when PST placed them in situations that resembled their sites and armed them with the skills to carry out their assignments with confidence. Examples of this included: (a) education Trainees who practiced in real classrooms; (b) NGO Trainees who interned in NGOs during PST; (c) Trainees who practiced community mobilization assignments; and (d) agriculture Trainees who were taught by local farmers.

In Mauritania, the Volunteers linked their productivity to the applied learning that occurred during technical training at PST. The model school for the education Volunteers and the hands-on training that the agro-forestry volunteers received gave the Volunteers the needed skills and tools to perform their work assignments with a high level of confidence. PC/Malawi’s education PST includes five weeks of practice teaching in a rural school.

“Peace Corps provided me the foundation I need to get work done.”

-- *Volunteer in Mauritania*

Most of these posts included host organization staff, the Volunteers’ supervisors or counterparts, in training events to promote their sense of partnership in the work of the Volunteers. Most of the posts invited supervisors and counterparts to attend a workshop during PST and some invited them again to IST.

Many of the posts in this study used community-based training to provide the Trainees with practical, hands-on experience, especially in community entry skills. In Malawi and the Philippines, the Trainees carry out community entry and mobilization exercises. PC/Philippines had learned that language and community integration skills were necessary precursors to achieving project goals and, hence, emphasized these skills during PST. In Malawi, the staff capitalize on the use of homestay families to help Trainees learn vital language, cultural, and survival skills (see box below).

PC/Paraguay helped the Trainees acquire practical skills by incorporating the entire staff at the training center and people in the community into the training curriculum. For example, the gardeners teach classes on gardening techniques and the cleaning staff teach a soap making class. In the process, the Trainees have an opportunity to practice speaking the local language of Guaraní.

Hands on technical training. . .

Specific hands-on creation of these techniques during weekly sessions is coupled by Self-Directed Learning time for practice with home stay families. Each Trainee is expected to dig gardens, build mud stoves, plant vetiver grass, build compost, etc. during time spent with family. Host families are chosen with this in mind.

PC/Malawi PSR, Environment, 2005

In Ukraine, the Youth and Community Development Trainees implemented a small community project. Each cluster of Trainees received \$50. They conducted a community mapping exercise to identify a need, recruited relevant organizations, and designed and executed the project. The Trainees had to persuade their organizations to make a contribution of 25%, get organizations that are normally competitors to work together, and get the community to implement the project. In Georgia, the NGO Trainees were placed with Georgian NGOs in their training community to learn how organizations function.

Language Training

In many of the countries in this study, the Volunteers had to learn a national or official language, but they worked and socialized in a second language used colloquially at their site. The posts met this challenge by completing site selection prior to the start of pre-service training and matching Trainees to their permanent sites within the first three weeks of training. This allowed the post to teach the Trainees the appropriate local language and sometimes to arrange a local site as part of community-based training, in which the language was spoken.

In the Philippines, where Volunteers were serving on 16 islands, training was conducted on five hub islands where host families speaking the requisite indigenous languages were available for community-based training. PC/Niger's approach, where Volunteers need French, the official language (many Trainees arrive without French), and at least one of two local languages, was to enforce Trainees' French language learning by teaching the local languages through the medium of French. In addition, the staff tracked Trainees' progress on a daily basis. The importance of language was reinforced by the message from the country director that Trainees who did not make adequate progress would be held back for additional training before being sent to their sites.

Community Integration

Our nine posts facilitated community integration by placing Volunteers in social structures that promoted it. Most often, new Volunteers lived with a host family for three to six or more months, with some Volunteers opting to remain with their host families throughout their service. In other cases, counterparts or supervisors reached out to the

Volunteer and included them in social and work environments that would assure their acceptance by the community.

The homestay concept is common in most posts as part of community-based PST. But it is less common once Volunteers go to their sites. In this study, we found that for Volunteers who were required (as in Georgia, Ukraine and the Philippines) to live with families or were at sites where living alone was not feasible, the homestay greatly facilitated the Volunteers' integration into the community—learning the language, being accepted, being protected in terms of safety and security, being healthy, and getting support for their primary and secondary projects.

The Volunteers readily acknowledged the benefits of the homestay experience. A Volunteer in the Philippines described living with a host family as “. . . absolutely required for community entry; it is a make or break experiences to do a good job.”

The Volunteers in Georgia found the opportunity to live with host families to be an overwhelmingly positive factor. They learned about Georgia, met people, and acquired a sense of belonging through their host family. The host family was first and foremost a “family” and a source of protection. Families take their responsibility to protect the Volunteers seriously. The family also provided physical survival in a country where conditions make it difficult to meet basic needs alone. The family was also engaged in cultural exchange, introducing Volunteers to the community and cultural events. Further, the family was a problem solver and a source of advice and guidance in avoiding political pitfalls or extricating oneself from awkward situations.

In other posts, such as PC/Niger, special ceremonies help new Volunteers to integrate into their communities (see box below). PC/Niger's site installation protocol is spelled out in great detail. An APCD has ultimate responsibility for the installation process, although in some cases, Volunteer leaders are the Peace Corps' representative in the installation process. The representative has numerous responsibilities. They have to make a detailed plan; assure that the Volunteer is well groomed, well dressed, and rehearsed on what will happen and what is expected of him/her; send telegrams to officials; check the Volunteer's housing; explain the goals of the Peace Corps and the agreement between the Peace Corps and the government of Niger at the installation ceremony; and solicit input from local people.

The installation of new Volunteers is an extremely important event. New Volunteers must be introduced to government counterparts, officials, and their villagers in a manner that is professional and culturally appropriate while educating one and all regarding Peace Corps' goals, the role of the Volunteer, and cross-cultural issues. In the absence of an effective installation, new Volunteers will have a significantly more difficult time settling in to their village and getting started on all aspects of their work.

-- excerpt from Niger report

PC/Paraguay begins its installation process by inviting counterparts to a one and one-half day retreat with the Volunteers during PST. Counterparts learn about the Peace Corps, the nature of the Volunteer's work, the project plan, and the role and responsibilities of APCDs, the community, and the counterpart. At the end of the retreat, the counterpart and Trainee go to the community together for five days for the counterpart to introduce the Trainee to the community. After the Volunteer has been at site for one month, the APCD, program assistant, and Volunteer Leader meet at the site to introduce officially the Volunteer to the community. This solidifies that there is an organization behind the Volunteer and gives the community an opportunity to ask questions.

VII. VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Strong technical, medical, administrative, and personal support for the Volunteers was the final characteristic of our nine posts. Many posts had systems in place to ensure that staff responded to Volunteers' emails and phone calls in a timely fashion (see box below). Site visits were sufficiently long to permit the staff member and Volunteer to get to know each other and for the staff member to meet counterparts, community members, and observe the Volunteer in their work environment.

A rule of PC/Ukraine is that staff must respond to all emails and phone calls from as many as 350 Volunteers within 24 hours. In the 2004 Global Survey, the effects of this rule are clear: almost 82% of the Volunteers rated communications with staff as excellent or good. Globally, only 66% of the Volunteers felt the same. This was echoed by the Volunteers, one of whom said, "I'm blown away by the support we get from PC/Ukraine." Other Volunteers described the support they perceive as "...over the top of my expectations."

PC/Malawi's senior staff believed that the most important aspect of Volunteer support was to design, develop and implement quality programs that place Volunteers in a safe, productive, and satisfying site within the project framework. This appeared to be working. The Volunteers were very positive about their experience and about the support they received from the staff.

In Paraguay, Volunteer support is enhanced by the strategic placement of Volunteers from different sectors in clusters. Most of the Volunteers are placed in what the post calls "nuclei," communities within relatively close proximity of one another. Volunteers in each nucleus collaborate on joint projects or assist on special projects, thereby taking advantage of their different skills. The clustering of Volunteers in geographically proximate areas eases the logistical challenges of site visits, but it also requires staff to collaborate with each other. A staff member visiting a nucleus of Volunteers may be called upon to provide technical assistance to whomever needs it.

Post Management

The quality of Volunteer support in our nine posts was positively affected by factors that are more readily classified as management than as support issues. For example, in Mauritania, Volunteers and staff recognized the professionalism of the staff and their collegiality and collaboration as a contributing factor to the quality of the Volunteers' work and experiences. In many of our posts, Volunteers' perceptions of the quality of support they received from staff were influenced by their perceptions of the fairness and reasonableness of policies and their enforcement.

The participation of APCDs in pre-service technical training enhanced the ability of staff to support the Volunteers at site. Their presence at PST allowed them to monitor the progress of the Trainees and participate in the weekly feedback, reporting, and assessment meetings. The Volunteers became familiar with the technical skills and knowledge of their APCDs and how the APCDs could support them at their sites. The APCDs were also able to build rapport with their Volunteers and develop a personal and professional relationship. The APCDs gained the confidence of the Volunteers. The APCDs knew the Trainees and could make informed decisions about site placements. The APCDs were available for PST, because they had finished selecting and preparing sites before the Trainees arrived in country.

For the Philippines, a critical condition was the fact that Volunteers served on different islands with different cultures and languages. To accommodate this, the post had just implemented a new training approach, using five hub islands, and the staff spent extensive time at the island training hubs. The training manager felt that this developed a positive collaboration between programming and training. The positive impact for the Trainees was seen in a low early termination rate—only five of the more than 80 Trainees in the group did not complete training.

Administrative Support

The significance of administrative support to the Volunteers cannot be underestimated. In every post, the staff and Volunteers considered the administrative systems and procedures to be effective, thorough, and transparent. Volunteers spoke of being free to do their work, because they could count on the Peace Corps office to get them their living allowances on time, respond to questions and requests in a timely fashion, assure them a safe and secure site and housing, and provide medical care when needed. The Volunteers spoke of this support as fundamental to their sense of satisfaction with their Peace Corps experience.

In the reorganization of staff in the Philippines, the country director established a Volunteer Support Unit to respond to administrative support issues raised by Volunteers. The Volunteers, when asked to identify what worked at post, mentioned the administrative unit first because the staff responded to their needs, requests, and questions. In Georgia, the administrative officer measured the quality of his unit's support for Volunteers in the fact that Volunteers were not particularly aware of what his

staff did. They took administrative support for granted because the staff did their jobs well.

CONCLUSION

The above represents a summary of what we found were the common elements to the nine high-performing posts that we analyzed. The case study report for each of the nine posts we visited is available on the OIG intranet homepage.