

MS 341 Operational Status of Overseas Posts PROCEDURES

Effective Date: September 5, 2024

Responsible Office: Office of Global Operations (OGO)

1.0 Introduction

These Procedures focus on the roles, responsibilities, and actions relevant to decision-making, staffing, and operational changes in a Post being considered for Suspension or Closure. For Posts in Interim or Full Operating Status, any other policies pertaining to Post operations and V/T management prevail over this Manual Section. When a Post is experiencing an Emergency Event and V/Ts remain in service, MS 460 *Managing Overseas Emergencies* policies and procedures prevail over this Manual Section. The reopening of a Post following Closure is more fully addressed in MS 340 *Opening a Post*.

2.0 Headquarters Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Headquarters Response Team

- (a) When assessments called for in Section 6.2 of MS 341 are being planned or conducted, the relevant Regional Director shall consider formation of a Headquarters Response Team (HQRT) in accordance with MS 460 *Managing Overseas Emergencies*.
- (b) When the Director makes a preliminary decision to Suspend or Close a Post (*see Sections 5 and 6 below*):
 1. HQRT membership should be broadened to enhance coordination of the assessments called for in MS 341 and in providing administrative, financial, and logistical support and guidance to the Post. For example, consideration should be given to adding the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and the Office of Management (OM) to the HQRT.
 2. The HQRT must consult with the Office of Congressional Relations before developing a timeline for sequencing of notifications and action steps.
 3. The Regional Director shall keep the Associate Director of the Office of Global Operations (AD/OGO) apprised of the HQRT's discussions and recommendations regarding the Post's operational status.
- (c) If the HQRT cannot reach consensus on a course of action, the AD/OGO shall work with the HQRT to seek consensus. If consensus still cannot be reached, a Decision Memo outlining the varying points of view shall be presented to the Director.

2.2 Office of Global Operations

The Office of Global Operations:

- (a) Serves as the lead office for tracking the operational status of Posts.
- (b) Is responsible for submitting a Decision Memo to the Director regarding the Suspension or Closure of a Post.
- (c) Notifies other Headquarters offices of Suspension and Closure decisions, including the Office of Inspector General, once authorized by the Director.
- (d) Supports the Region in securing necessary administrative and financial support to effectively oversee Suspension or Closure processes.

- (e) Convenes and chairs a HQRT when circumstances leading to the Suspension or Closure of one or more Posts affect more than one Region.
- (f) Considers the Region's recommendations for the delay or cancellation of invitations for Invitees and Peace Corps Response Volunteers and makes a determination regarding such actions after consultation with the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS). Ensures the VRS and Office of the Director are notified promptly when invitations are delayed or cancelled.

2.3 Region

The relevant Region:

- (a) Serves as the HQ lead and primary point of contact (POC) for communication with the relevant Post.
- (b) Promptly informs the AD/OGO when conditions at a Post indicate Suspension or Closure may be appropriate.
- (c) Provides guidance and support to a Post as staffing and operational plans are developed, finalized, and implemented in connection with a Post's Suspension or Closure.
- (d) Consults with the OHR, OCFO, and OGC before submitting staffing and operational plans to the AD/OGO relevant to the Suspension or Closure of a Post.
- (e) Considers whether conditions at a Post necessitate the delay, cancellation or reinitiation of invitations for Invitees or Peace Corps Response Volunteers. Prior to submitting recommendations to the AD/OGO for the delay or cancellation of invitations, consults with the Country Director and VRS.
- (f) Coordinates and leads HQRT meetings pertaining to the conduct of assessments called for in Section 6.2, MS 341, or to the Suspension or Closure of a Post.
- (g) Leads in the creation of relevant Talking Points, in consultation with subject-matter experts and the Office of Communications, and, after review by OGC and other offices as warranted, clears Talking Points for distribution.
- (h) Leads After-Action Reviews following the Suspension or Closure of a Post and presents a final report to the AD/OGO.
- (i) Prepares drafts of Decision Memos and other supporting documents (timelines, Congressional Notification, etc.) for the AD/OGO.

2.4 Office of General Counsel

The Office of General Counsel (OGC):

- (a) Provides legal review and advice to Posts and responsible Headquarters offices on any actions to be taken related to the Suspension or Closure of a Post, such as Decision Memos, Congressional Notifications, Talking Points and communication, staff reduction plans, and cancellation of leases and termination of strategic partnership agreements.

2.5 Office of Congressional Relations

The Office of Congressional Relations (OCR):

- (a) Develops the Peace Corps' legislative strategy, coordinates activities related to all legislative issues and interests, and serves as the official liaison between the Peace Corps Director and Members of Congress and congressional staff (*see* MS 131), including on matters covered under this Manual Section.
- (b) Once the Director has made the preliminary decision to Suspend or Close a Post, as further described in Sections 5 and 6 below, OCR initiates the Congressional consultation and notification process required by law regarding Suspension or Closure of an overseas office or country program.

- (c) Works with OGC, OGO, the relevant Region, OCFO, and other offices as needed to draft the relevant Congressional Notification as required by law.
- (d) Clears the Congressional Notification through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- (e) Sends the Congressional Notification to the appropriate Congressional committees (as defined in 22 USC 2509(k)(3)) and manages and coordinates agency responses to all inquiries, briefing requests, or other concerns from Congress to the Congressional Notification.
- (f) Upon resolution or other disposition of any questions, briefing requests, or concerns raised by Congress, and following the end of the 15-day period for Congressional notification, informs relevant agency offices that the Congressional Notification has cleared and the actions described in the Congressional Notification may proceed.

2.6 Office of Safety and Security

The Office of Safety and Security (OSS):

- (a) Conducts assessments as called for in MS 341, Section 6.2.
- (b) Provides analysis of ongoing threats and makes recommendations to the Region on actions and steps to mitigate threats.

2.7 Office of Health Services

The Office of Health Services (OHS):

- (a) Conducts assessments as called for in MS 341, Section 6.2.
- (b) Provides analysis and recommendations pertaining to V/T health risks and the Post's healthcare capabilities.
- (c) Following the Director's decision to close a Post, ensures PCMOs have sufficient support to adhere to policies and procedures related to medical records, disposition of medical supplies and equipment, and other health unit processes.

2.8 Office of Chief Financial Officer

The Office of Chief Financial Officer (OCFO):

- (a) Advises and supports the Region and Post on financial and administrative matters and personnel matters related to locally employed staff (LES).
- (b) Through the OCFO/ Acquisition and Contract Management (ACM), reviews and advises the Region and Post on any contractual actions to be taken by a Post, such as personnel actions of LES, leases, supplies, and service contracts.

2.9 Office of Management

The Office of Management (OM):

- (a) Ensures appropriate support to the Post and Region regarding disposition of Post's vehicles, supplies, equipment, and other property.

2.10 Office of Communications

The Office of Communications:

- (a) Coordinates press and public information, including internal communications to all Peace Corps staff.
- (b) Supports the Region in finalizing Talking Points and distributes or posts Talking Points once they are cleared by the Region.
- (c) Coordinates media responses with the Public Affairs Office at the U.S. Embassy, as the situation warrants.

2.11 Office of Human Resources

The Office of Human Resources (OHR):

- (a) Advises the relevant Region and oversees and authorizes personnel matters related to the hiring, reassignment, and termination of overseas U.S. Direct Hires (USDH).
- (b) Ensures compliance with federal labor laws and regulations.
- (c) Provides OHR Employee and Labor Relations support.
- (d) (Manages HR data and accuracy of HR data systems.

2.12 Office of the Chief Information Officer

The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO):

- (a) Advises the Post on the disposition of information systems, including telecommunications and computer equipment.
- (b) Ensures Post's records management, retention, and disposition meet the legal requirements of the Federal Records Act and other applicable laws and regulations.

3.0 Post Roles and Responsibilities

The Country Director is responsible for:

- (a) Timely notification of the Region and Chief of Mission whenever significant in-country issues may disrupt Post operations.
- (b) Informing Staff, Volunteers, Chief of Mission, and host country partners of the Director's final decision to Suspend or Close the Post and the associated timelines for such actions, once authorized by the Regional Director to notify those parties and to disclose such information.
- (c) Ensuring Post staff adherence to agency policies, procedures and all applicable laws and regulations.
- (d) Identifying staffing, operational plans, technical assistance, and legal guidance necessary for the Post's smooth transition to Suspension or Closure, consulting with the Region and OGC as such activities are formulated and implemented.
- (e) Presenting to the Region and Chief of Mission recommendations for correspondence to host country government officials related to changes in the Post's operational status and, if the Post is closing, recommendations for closing ceremonies and official representation at planned events.
- (f) Notifying the Region and the U.S. Embassy of relevant media inquiries and coordinating in-country media responses through the U.S. Embassy and the Peace Corps Office of Communications.
- (g) As conditions permit during the Closure of the Post, submitting a report to Region that outlines the history and accomplishments of Volunteers during the years in which the Post was operational.

4.0 Operational Status Report

The AD OGO shall maintain a Post Operational Status Report that is:

- (a) An accurate reflection of the Operational Status of Posts, including the date that the report was last revised.
- (b) Updated in a timely manner when the Operational Status of a Post changes, such as:
 - 1. The Director authorizes announcement of a decision regarding the Suspension or Closure of a Post; or
 - 2. V/Ts arrive in-country after a Post was in Interim Operational Status or Suspended.
- (c) Posted in a place and manner that is easily accessible to agency staff. (e.g., OGO's Workspace).

5.0 Suspension

5.1 Decision Process

- (a) The Director must authorize the Suspension of a Post.
- (b) The Director shall make a preliminary decision to suspend or reopen a suspended Post. The decision shall be documented in a preliminary Decision Memo that sets forth the criteria on which the decision was made, such as assessment findings and input from OGO, OSS, OHS, OCFO, OHR, and OM.
 - 1. The Region shall draft the Decision Memo and send it to the AD/OGO and OGC, OHS, and OSS for clearance.
 - 2. The AD/OGO shall submit the cleared Decision Memo to the Director.
- (c) Once the Director has made the preliminary decision to suspend or reopen a suspended Post, OCR shall initiate the Congressional consultation and notification process required by the Peace Corps Act (22 USC 2509(k)) and the Peace Corps' annual appropriations acts; work with OGO, the Region, and OGC to craft and clear the Congressional Notification based on the Decision Memo; and clear the Congressional Notification through OMB before submitting it to Congress.
- (d) Upon resolution or other disposition of any questions, briefing requests, or concerns raised by the appropriate Congressional committees (as defined in 22 USC 2509(k)(3)) and following the end of the 15-day period for Congressional notification, OCR shall inform relevant offices.
- (e) The Director's decision to suspend or reopen a suspended Post shall be subsequently finalized by signing the Decision Memo.
- (f) If Volunteers are in service at the time the Director makes the decision to suspend a Post, Volunteers' service will be closed per MS 281 *Completion of Service Date Advancement and Extension of Service* and MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*.

5.2 Notification

- (a) Once a Suspension decision is made, the Director, in consultation with the AD/OGO, the relevant Regional Director, and the Country Director, shall approve the timing, process and content of formal notification to:
 - 1. Post staff;
 - 2. The U.S. Ambassador and Department of State;
 - 3. Host country government and partners;
 - 4. V/Ts, applicants and invitees to the relevant Post; and
 - 5. The general public.
- (b) The AD/OGO shall ensure the Suspension decision is promptly communicated to all offices listed in Section 2 above, the Office of Inspector General, and VRS.

5.3 Reopening a Suspended Post

- (a) While a Post is in Suspended Status, the Region shall ensure close monitoring of conditions within the host country and work with other offices and the Post as needed and called for in MS 341.
- (b) At least monthly, the Regional Director shall update the AD/OGO on the status of conditions that led to the Suspension and on the appropriateness of the Post's staffing levels. The AD/OGO shall keep the Director apprised of the Post's status and operational considerations as the situation warrants.
- (c) The Director shall make the preliminary decision to reopen the Post and approve assignment of Volunteers to the Post after considering recommendations, assessment findings, and input from the Associate Directors for OGO, OSS, OHS, OCFO, OHR, and OM. (*See Section 6 below for Closure processes*).
 - 1. Authorization to reopen a Post in Suspended Status must be documented in a preliminary Decision Memo, setting forth the criteria on which the decision was made.
 - 2. The Region shall draft the Decision Memo and send it to the AD/OGO and OGC for review.
 - 3. Once the Decision Memo is cleared by the AD/OGO, OGC, OSS and OHS, the AD/OGO shall submit the Decision Memo to the Director.

- (d) If the Director makes a preliminary decision to re-open a Suspended Post, OCR shall initiate the Congressional consultation and notification process as required by law; work with OGO, the Region, and OGC to craft and clear the Congressional Notification based on the Decision Memo; and clear the Congressional Notification through OMB before submitting it to Congress.
- (e) Upon resolution or other disposition of any questions, briefing requests or concerns raised by the appropriate Congressional committees (as defined in 22 USC 2509(k)(3)) and following the end of the 15-day period for Congressional notification, OCR shall inform relevant offices.
- (f) The Director's decision to re-open the Post shall be subsequently finalized by signing the Decision Memo.

6.0 Closure

6.1 Decision Process

- (a) The Director must authorize the Closure of a Post.
- (b) Because of the significant investment in a skilled local staff, host country partnerships, organizational systems, and approved leases, the decision to transition a Post from Suspended Status to Closed Status should not occur prior to the passage of 12 months from the date on which the Director suspended the Post, unless circumstances warrant otherwise.
- (c) The decision to close a Post is informed by one of the following situations:
 - 1. If a Post is in Suspended Status, conditions which led to the Post's Suspension have not and are not projected to improve sufficiently in the foreseeable future, as determined by the assessment processes outlined in MS 341.
 - 2. Sudden and catastrophic events, such as terrorism or the severing of diplomatic relations between the host country and U.S. Government; or
 - 3. Other operational determinations that call for a planned, phased closure of a Post.
- (d) The Region, in consultation with OGO, OGC, OSS, OHS, and other relevant offices, shall prepare a report for the Director with findings and recommendations. The report should include a description of the assessment process and findings; recommendations regarding future Post operations; and recommended timelines for the Closure process.
- (e) The report shall be cleared by the AD/OGO, OGC, OSS, and OHS before presentation to the Director.
- (f) If the report recommends the Closure of a Post, the report shall be accompanied by a preliminary Decision Memo that sets forth the criteria on which the recommendation is made.
 - 1. The Region shall draft the Decision Memo and send it to the AD/OGO and OGC for clearance.
 - 2. The AD/OGO shall submit the report and cleared Decision Memo to the Director.
- (g) If closing a Post is deemed to be appropriate, the Director shall make a preliminary decision, documented in a Decision Memo.
 - 1. Once the Director has made the preliminary decision to close a Post, OCR shall initiate the Congressional consultation and notification process required by law; work in a coordinated fashion with OGO, the Region, and OGC to craft and clear the Congressional Notification based on the Decision Memo; and clear the Congressional Notification through OMB before submitting it to Congress.
 - 2. Upon resolution or other disposition of any questions, briefing requests, or concerns raised by the appropriate Congressional committees (as defined in 22 USC 2509(k)(3)) and following the end of the 15-day period for Congressional notification, OCR shall inform relevant offices.
- (h) The Director's decision to close a Post shall be subsequently finalized by signing the Decision Memo.

6.2 Notification

- (a) Once a Closure decision is made, the Director, in consultation with the OGC, AD/OGO, Regional Director, and Country Director, shall approve the timing, process, and content of formal notification to:
 - 1. Post staff;
 - 2. U.S. Ambassador, Department of State; Office of Management and Budget; and National Security Council.
 - 3. Host country government and partners;
 - 4. V/Ts, applicants and Invitees to the relevant Post; and
 - 5. The general public.
- (b) The AD/OGO shall ensure the Closure decision is promptly communicated to all offices listed in Section 2, the Office of Inspector General, and the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection.

6.3 Closure Process

Once the Closure decision is final and notifications in Section 6.2 have been made, the Post shall proceed in handling the termination of all administrative activities by complying with policy, procedures and guidance contained in the following documents that are periodically updated by the issuing offices.

- (a) Fiscal and Administrative
 - 1. Chapters 39 and 40, Overseas Financial Management Handbook (OCMH)
 - 2. Chapter 13.23, OCMH
 - 3. Sections on the Termination/Ending and Close-out of Contracts in the Leases, Supplies and/or Services, and Personal Services Contracts Chapters of the Overseas Contracting Handbook (OCH)
 - 4. Section 3.3, Vehicle Fleet Management Guide
 - 5. Sections 14 and 15, Personal Property Management Handbook
- (b) Personnel
 - 1. Host Country Residents
 - a. The Post should comply with the guidance contained in Personal Services Contract Chapter and information pertaining to Severance and Other Separation Pay for Host Country Residents in the OFMH.
 - b. The Region must consult with the OCFO/ACM and the OGC to determine appropriate actions to take for local staff (PSCs and/or FSNs).
 - 2. U.S Direct Hires (USDH)
 - a. The Region should consult with OHR to determine whether USDH staff at the affected Post are eligible for reassignment and determine which office will notify the USDH.
 - b. Subsequently, either OHR or the Region contacts each USDH staff to discuss reassignment options.
- (c) Records Management

The Post should review MS 892 Records Management to ensure policies are followed and request from records@peacecorps.gov “Records Management Standard Operating Procedures for Closing or Suspending Overseas Posts”.
- (d) Medical Supplies

The Post should adhere to:

 - 1. MS 734 Medical Supplies and Equipment
 - 2. Technical Guideline 395 Planned Health Unit Closure
 - 3. TG 390 Emergency Country Suspension

4. TG 240 Medical Supplies and Equipment

(e) IT Systems

The Post should adhere to the OCIO's document: Suspending/Closing a Post and Decommissioning CROs (*request from OCIO*).

7.0 Staffing and/or Operational Reductions

- (a) For Closures, or when directed by the Regional Director for Posts in Suspended Status, the CD shall draft and present to the Regional Director a staffing and operational reduction plan that:
 - 1. Takes into account the assessments and associated timelines that may be conducted in accordance with MS 341.
 - 2. Considers the skills and duties that are essential during the phasedown of Post operations.
 - 3. Identifies Non-Caretaker LE Staff, their titles, and the recommended timeline for their termination in accordance with local labor law.
 - 4. Identifies Caretaker LE Staff, their titles, the duties to be performed, and why those duties are essential.
 - 5. Explains the extent to which staff will regularly report to the workplace, or if not reporting to the workplace, how staff will perform their duties and communicate with supervisors; and
 - 6. Confirms appropriate supervisory controls.
- (b) Post leadership involved in developing staffing and operational reduction planning must not divulge plans or timelines until authorized to do so by the Regional Director.
- (c) The Region may revise the Post's staffing and operational plan proposal following consultations with the AD/OGO and OGC, and other relevant offices such as OSS, OHS, OHR, and OCFO as appropriate.
- (d) The Region shall submit the staffing and operational plan to the AD/OGO, who shall initiate the subsequent actions:
 - 1. The AD/OGO, in conjunction with OGC and OCR, shall assess whether Congressional Notification is legally required or would nevertheless be appropriate, considering the level of Congressional interest or other factors. Their findings shall be presented to the Director for consideration.
 - 2. The Director shall make the determination as to whether the level of staff reductions requires Congressional notification.
- (e) During Suspended or Closed Status, host country nationals may be given temporary assignments within the Peace Corps and U.S. Direct Hires may be under ordered departure, reassigned, or terminated.

8.0 Talking Points

- (a) The relevant Region takes the lead in drafting Talking Points, in consultation with the CD and with other subject-matter experts as the situation warrants. The template can be found in the Talking Points Library on the Peace Corps Intranet.
- (b) The Region obtains clearance from the AD/OGO before submitting a final draft of Talking Points to the Director of the Office of Communications.
- (c) The Office of Communications advises on the wording of the Talking Points so that information is appropriately communicated to external audiences.
- (d) The Regional Director or designee clears the final Talking Points.
- (e) Once the Talking Points are cleared:
 - 1. The Region shall send the cleared Talking Points to the CD, the Office of Communications, AD/OGO, AD/OSS, AD/OHS, AD/External Affairs, and the Agency Duty Officer at agencydutyofficer@peacecorps.gov.

2. The AD/OGO shall send the cleared Talking Points to the Director, Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, and other offices as appropriate.
3. The Office of Communications shall upload the Talking Points to the Talking Points Library so the document is accessible to staff, and publishes information on the Peace Corps external website as appropriate.

9.0 After-Action Review

- (a) Following the Closure of a Post, the Region shall conduct an After-Action Review in which the Country Director and offices listed in Section 2 are invited to participate.
- (b) Within two months of the Closure of a Post, the Regional Director shall provide the After-Action Review report to the AD/OGO and participating offices and file a copy in OGO's Workspace for future reference.