

MS 461 Crimes against Volunteers and Trainees Procedures

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Responsible Office: Office of Safety and Security

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Attachments

Attachment A – Coordinated Agency Response Case Management System Procedures (CARS CMS)

1.0 Applicability and Definitions

1.1 Applicability

Being a victim of a crime can be a traumatic event that can be physically and psychologically devastating. These incidents can affect individuals differently; hence Peace Corps' response should be uniquely tailored to fit the needs of the individual Volunteer and the circumstances surrounding the incident. When a Volunteer reports an incident, Peace Corps staff has a responsibility to provide an effective, timely, compassionate response and to make every effort to identify opportunities that allow a Volunteer to safely complete their service.

Effective response requires that we provide for the Volunteer's safety, security, medical, advocacy, and emotional needs. In order to do this, staff must be well-informed of the local laws and investigative practices and be willing to advocate within the local systems on behalf of the Volunteer. Reports of sexual assault must be handled in accordance with MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault*. All other information about Volunteer incidents should be treated with discretion and shared only with those who have a need to know. All Peace Corps staff who are involved in responding to incidents must comply with the agency's confidentiality policies.

1.2 Definitions

The terms defined in MS 461 *Crimes Against Volunteers and Trainees*, have the same meanings when used in these procedures.

2.0 Minimum Standards in Response

- (a) While every crime is unique and may require a tailored response, there are specific actions that post should take in all cases. These actions include but may not be limited to:
 - (1) Unless the Volunteer verbally reports the incident, staff must establish positive voice contact with the Volunteer as soon as possible except where specified.

- (2) Any staff member that is made aware of an incident must report the incident to the SSM. If the Volunteer appears to be physically or emotionally distressed due to the incident, then the incident must also be reported to the PCMO.
 - (3) In accordance with the Consolidated Incident Reporting Guide (CIRG), post must document the incident in CIRS within 3 business days.
 - (4) Staff must inform the Volunteer of the option to report to law enforcement.
 - (5) If the Volunteer has elected to report to local law enforcement, the SSM or appropriate staff member should assist, and accompany if possible, the Volunteer in filing the police report.
 - (6) To the extent possible, staff should assist the Volunteer in managing the Volunteer's administrative needs associated with the security incident (e.g., letting Volunteer use PC phone to cancel credit cards, facilitate connections with embassy personnel for passport). See Attachment A – *Interacting with Volunteers who become Victims of Crime*, for more guidance.
 - (7) If a report is filed with law enforcement, the SSM must periodically check-in with law enforcement and provide updates to the Volunteer.
 - (8) If staff has concerns about the Volunteer's safety, the investigation or protecting evidence, contact the PCSO or Designated Security Specialist.
- (b) In addition to the minimum standards above, the following are additional steps to be taken for specific crimes.
- (1) Burglary (only cases where the Volunteer is present, cases of repeat burglaries, or the physical security of the home has been compromised.)
 - (i) Staff must ensure that Volunteer has a safe place to stay until an appropriate staff member or designee has inspected the Volunteer's home. The Volunteer should not return to the home until any needed repairs have been completed.
 - (ii) If concerns remain (e.g., a rash of burglaries at site), the SSM or designee should complete a Post Incident Assessment. Assessments may include but are not limited to: speaking with the Volunteer, speaking with counterparts or community leaders, reaching out to local authorities, and traveling to the Volunteer's site.
 - (iii) Staff must provide to the Volunteer OVA's contact information. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
 - (iv) The PCMO must check-in with the Volunteer via email or phone within 72 hours of receiving the incident report.
 - (2) Robbery and Aggravated Physical Assault

- (i) If the security incident occurs at the Volunteer's site then the SSM or designee must conduct a Post Incident Assessment within one week of the report. Assessments may include but are not limited to: speaking with the Volunteer, speaking with counterparts or community leaders, reaching out to local authorities, and traveling to the Volunteer's site.
- (ii) Staff must provide to the Volunteer OVA's contact information. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
- (iii) PCMO must check-in with the Volunteer via email or phone within 24 hours of receiving the incident report.

(3) Voyeurism and Creeping

- (i) If the incident occurs in site then staff must make arrangements to provide for the Volunteer's security until a Post Incident Assessment takes place. In most cases, this means moving the Volunteer to another house, homestay family, nearby community, or having a trusted individual stay with the Volunteer. Assessments may include but are not limited to: speaking with the Volunteer, speaking with counterparts or community leaders, and traveling to site.
- (ii) Staff must provide to the Volunteer OVA's contact information. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
- (iii) PCMO must check-in with the Volunteer via phone within 24 hours of receiving the incident report.

(4) Intimate Partner Violence/Dating Violence

- (i) Staff must ensure that the Volunteer is at a location where the Volunteer can stay safe, and immediately notify the SSM and PCMO.
- (ii) SSM must immediately contact the PCSSO or Designated Security Specialist.
- (iii) PCMO must immediately notify OVA.

(5) Non-Sexual Assault Incidents of Volunteer on Volunteer/Staff on Volunteer

- (i) Staff must ensure that Volunteer is safe and take reasonable steps to keep the parties separate.
- (ii) Staff should not engage, contact, or notify the accused of the allegation.
- (iii) Staff should immediately notify the Office of Inspector of General (OIG) of the allegation according to MS 861.
- (iv) Staff should not, unless authorized by the agency or OIG, make any attempt to gather information or investigate the allegation.

Exceptions to the minimum standards protocols should be discussed with the PCSSO or Designated Security Specialist.

- (c) If an incident takes place during a medevac to Headquarters, staff must ensure that the Volunteer is safe. Responding Headquarters staff must immediately inform the Office of Victim Advocacy and the Designated Security Specialist for next steps.

3.0 Notifications

- (a) It is essential that Headquarters be notified about all incidents against Volunteers. In most cases notification will be made by submitting a report through the Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) no later than 3 business days after post first learns of the incident. Even if post has notified Headquarters by telephone or email a CIRS report must still be submitted as CIRS is the agency's official record of the incident.

Immediate notification must be made by telephone to the Peace Corps Duty Officer at (+1 202-692-1470) in the following situations:

- (1) Volunteer death;
 - (2) Volunteer kidnapping;
 - (3) Volunteer disappearance exceeding 48 hours
 - (4) Serious injuries resulting from a crime or vehicle accident;
 - (5) Any incident that may garner significant public or media attention or has the potential to affect relationships between the host country, Peace Corps or the U.S. Embassy; or
 - (6) When the Country Director requires immediate advice or assistance.
- (b) In cases of sexual assault, refer to MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault Procedures, Notification Flow Chart*.
 - (c) Except in cases of Restricted Reports of sexual assault, if the offender is a Volunteer or staff member (including contractor), post must notify the OIG using the OIG Reporting Hotline (+1 202-692-2915).
 - (d) If staff believes that a Volunteer has committed a crime, then the Country Director must immediately notify the OIG, the Regional Director and the Office of the General Counsel.
 - (e) The CD will immediately notify the RSO of serious crime incidents by email or phone and document the notification in CARS CMS. The documentation should include the name of the RSO and the date and time of the notification.

3.1 Third Party Reports (non-sexual assaults)

- (a) In cases where a third party discloses to post that a Volunteer is a victim of an incident, post will immediately contact the Volunteer to determine the safety status of the Volunteer and ascertain if the alleged incident did occur. If confirmed, post will follow the normal response procedures as outlined in this document.
- (b) If a third party makes a disclosure to Headquarters, the information will be transmitted to the post for the preceding follow-up action.
- (c) If the Volunteer denies that an incident occurred, post must report the allegation to the Country Director and the SSM. If the Country Director believes that an incident did in fact occur, then post must conduct a Post Incident Assessment.
- (d) Irrespective of whether the alleged victim to a crime confirms that an incident occurred, if the third party report of an incident indicates the perpetrator is a Volunteer, staff member, or contractor, allegations of the incident must be reported to the OIG as described in MS 861.

4.0 Coordinated Agency Response System (CARS)

- (a) In most circumstances, Post is equipped to respond to Volunteer victims of crime without Headquarters involvement. In some cases however, a coordinated effort between staff at Headquarters and post may be necessary through the Coordinated Agency Response System (CARS).
- (b) CARS is comprised of individuals from key offices (called the CARS Team), who collaborate on the management and response to crimes against Volunteers. CARS is intended as a mechanism for staff to seek collaborative input and assistance when navigating agency policies or procedures, as well as any challenges relating to Volunteer support.
 - (1) The CARS Team representatives from post may include any staff who have a specific role in supporting the Volunteer, including, but not limited to:
 - (i) Country Director;
 - (ii) Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO); and
 - (iii) SSM.
 - (2) The CARS Team representatives from Headquarters may include the following offices:
 - (i) Office of Safety and Security;
 - (ii) Office of Victim Advocacy;
 - (iii) Region;
 - (iv) Office of Health Services; and

(v) Office of the General Counsel.

In cases of sexual assaults that are the subject of restricted reporting under MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault*, only Designated Staff participate as members in the CARS Team .

(c) Although representatives from the OIG will not be part of the CARS Team, the CARS Team should, in cases where the crime is suspected of having been committed by another Volunteer or a Peace Corps staff member (including a contractor), collaborate with OIG to ensure that Peace Corps staff are not taking actions that would compromise evidence or interfere with an OIG criminal or administrative investigation.

5.0 CARS Operations

(a) CARS coordination between Headquarters and post should be accomplished through conference calling.

(b) Any member of the CARS Team may request to schedule CARS conference call when enhanced coordination is necessary. This request should be made to OVA, OSS, or Regions for organizing CARS conference calls.

(c) In most situations the initial CARS conference call will be scheduled within 3-5 days after Headquarters is notified of the incident. CARS conference calls will normally try to accommodate both post and Headquarters business hours, however, some situations may require that one or both parties convene the call during non-business hours. Urgent situations may require CARS conference calls immediately and during non-business hours.

(d) When evaluating whether or not a Volunteer can safely remain at site or continue service at post and the Volunteer's wishes to continue service, the CARS Team will consider the following factors:

- (1) post's ability to continue to provide adequate support to the Volunteer;
- (2) the Volunteer's medical and mental health status as well as follow-up needs;
- (3) potential risks to the Volunteer who reported the incident and to other Volunteers;
- (4) Volunteer's participation in the management of their personal safety and security;
- (5) response of host country officials and host community members to the incident;
- (6) the programmatic impact of the incident; or
- (7) Other concerns that may arise throughout the process.

(e) Any CARS Team member who has concerns about a Volunteer's ability to continue service, for any reason, should convene a CARS conference call as soon as possible.

- (f) Only in unique and exceptional circumstances will a Volunteer be considered for a country transfer.
- (g) Follow-up CARS calls may be scheduled by any member when there are any significant updates or developments (i.e., legal, safety, mental health) regarding an incident.

6.0 CARS Case Management System (CMS)

All post and Headquarters staff communications, services, and follow-up provided to the Volunteer after an incident must be noted in the agency's CARS CMS; clinical documentation outside of that which is required by CARS CMS will not be entered into the CARS CMS system.

Attachment A

Interacting with Volunteers who become Victims of Crime

Being the victim of crime can have profound physical and psychological effects. The immediate aftermath of a crime can be particularly challenging, not only for the victim, but also for the individuals who are designated to support them. It is not uncommon for victims of crime to display a variety of physical and emotional reactions, which may in fact fluctuate quickly or be very different than expected. Reactions to crime may appear immediately or be delayed and will vary from individual to individual. Therefore it is extremely important that Peace Corps staff respond to Volunteers who become victims of crime with patience, confidence, and compassion, regardless of how severe the incident may be perceived.

One of the best ways to support a Volunteer who has become the victim of a crime is to avoid actions, comments, or questions that may cause a Volunteer to feel like the crime was their fault. While working with a Volunteer who has become the victim of crime, it is best to avoid "why" questions. These types of questions can make a victim feel like they are to blame. Do not make assumptions about a crime being "minor," "common," or simply "no big deal." Seek to understand how the Volunteer perceives the incident and reflect that sentiment in the discussion – failing to do so risks minimizing the victim's experience. In addition, telling a Volunteer that they should not have been doing something or chastising a Volunteer for behavior that occurred prior to the crime may discourage the Volunteer from reaching out for assistance. Staff can avoid this by allowing Volunteers to share what has happened to them in a comfortable place and time, by asking how staff can help them, and by offering to connect them with support services such as the Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) and the Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU). These actions can help create an environment of trust between the Volunteers and Peace Corps staff.

Here are additional tips in supporting a Volunteer who becomes a victim of a crime:

- Crime is never the Volunteer's fault. Don't let personal or cultural bias influence how you interact with the Volunteer. Listen and validate the Volunteer's experiences.
- Never assume the crime is "not a big deal." Each incident is unique and the Volunteer's reaction is unique.

- Allow the Volunteer to share what happened at their own pace and in their own manner.
- Do not require the Volunteer to write statements or reports of the incident.
- Understand that the Volunteer may not remember all the details of the incident or remember the incident in a linear timeline.
- Understand that the Volunteer may need staff to repeat information and options.
- Offer to connect the Volunteer with support services, such as the Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) or the Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU).
- Victims appreciate follow-up contact by the initial responder. Ask the Volunteer if they want you to check in with them and, if appropriate, the frequency of the check-in.
- Be patient and compassionate; try not to appear overprotective or patronizing of Volunteer.