

MS 664 Staff Learning and Development

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Responsible Office: Office of Management/Office of Staff Learning and Development

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1.0 Authority

The Peace Corps Act and Sections 503 and 704(b) of the Foreign Service Act.

2.0 Purpose

This Manual Section sets out the policies for staff learning and development. It also establishes the process by which specific mandated or required trainings for staff are identified, communicated, and documented when accomplished, as well as the advising of all Peace Corps staff of the relevance and importance of a culture of staff learning and professional development to the achievement of the Peace Corps mission. Peace Corps staff are required to complete task-specific training, Agency Required Training, and Federally Mandated Training necessary to perform their jobs.

3.0 Policy

- (a) Peace Corps promotes a strategically trained and professionally developed workforce that will further the agency's capabilities towards becoming a high performing learning organization.
- (b) The immediate supervisor must approve in advance proposed learning and development activity and the amount of time it will entail.
- (c) In addition to paying the normal compensation and benefits to staff, the Peace Corps may agree to pay additional expenses, including:
 - (1) Registration fees;
 - (2) Library or laboratory services;
 - (3) Reproduction of documents;
 - (4) The purchase or rental of learning resources (i.e. books and electronic media);
 - (5) Travel and transportation expenses directly related to the learning and development activity for the staff member; and
 - (6) The cost of other related services.
- (d) All learning and development opportunities will be considered by the Supervisor, while factoring their annual budget and staffing needs in their determination to approve or deny an opportunity.

4.0 Applicability

This policy is applicable to all Peace Corps Staff as defined in section 5.0(1) under Definitions.

5.0 Definitions

- (a) ***Agency-Required Training*** is required Agency or Office-specific training of Peace Corps staff in order to achieve agency goals and objectives.

- (b) **Conference**, for the purposes of this manual section, means a formal gathering of professionals on a given subject, topic, or profession whose primary intent is to discuss work information, negotiate solutions to work problems and make decisions dealing with organizational matter, concerns or the status of the profession, and scientific or technical developments.
- (c) **Continued Service Agreement (CSA)** means a formal agreement between the Peace Corps and the staff member that, as a condition of approval for development activities, requires the staff member to remain with the Peace Corps for a specified length of time.
- (d) **Development** means a longer-term process designed to prepare staff to gain key professional competencies that may or may not be needed for their present career field. Development activities may include any combination of learning events, structured on-the-job learning experiences, coaching, mentoring, rotations, and/or participation in work assignments that expose the staff member to new situations and responsibilities.
- (e) **Federally-Mandated Training** is required government-wide training for all or specific groups of staff. These types of trainings are mandated through Executive Orders, Government-wide Directives, and Federal statute or regulation. These trainings can be accessed on the [Staff Learning and Development Resource Center](#).

As such, in some cases the Office of Staff Learning and Development may have minimal authority in determining course content, structure, or completion timeframes.

- (f) **Learning** means the act or process of acquiring knowledge, skills, or competencies.
- (g) **Learning Strategy** means the use of information from a Needs Assessment to identify staff learning and development needs and priorities for Peace Corps Strategic Plans. The Learning Strategy is set forth to support Agency goals by improving organizational performance.
- (h) **Learning Management System (LMS)** means a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of educational courses and training programs. OSLD is the business owner of the Peace Corps LMS.
- (i) **Learning Officer** is an office representative, designated by an Office Director, who coordinates the development, delivery, and reporting of learning activities, within their office, in partnership with the Office of Staff Learning and Development.
- (j) **Mandatory Training Course Owners** means the individual(s), with assistance from other offices, who own a specific Federally-Mandated or Agency-Required Training and manage the training's development, maintenance, reporting, and response to Peace Corps Staff's content-related questions.
- (k) **Needs Assessment** means a systematic, planned process to identify existing and foreseeable organizational learning and development needs.
- (l) **Office Director** means, for the purposes of this Manual Section, an A Delegate.

- (m) **Peace Corps Staff** includes all US Direct Hires, Personal Services Contractors (PSCs), Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), Experts/Consultants, and Presidential Appointees.
- (n) **SF-182** is the “Request, Authorization, Agreement, and Certification for Training Form” which is used to document instances of external staff learning and development and collect agency wide data related to costs by office, topics and vendors.
- (o) **Skill** is the developed capacity to perform complex tasks related to work performance.
- (p) **Staff Learning Council** is a panel of Office Directors, established through the Staff Learning Council Charter, that set forth to review and endorse the Peace Corps learning strategy developed by OSLD which is tied to the agency’s strategic objectives. The Staff Learning Council’s activities include, but are not limited to:
- (1) supporting through their respective offices the Agency wide learning event calendar and the systematic use of LearningSpace across offices;
 - (2) endorsing and promoting the Agency learning strategy; and
 - (3) making final decisions on training course populations or content when an agreement cannot be resolved amongst 2 or more Agency offices and where not defined clearly in Federally mandated or Peace Corps training requirements (i.e. through Manual Sections, Safety and Security Instructions, Medical Technical Guidelines, etc.).
- (q) **Subject Matter Expert** means an individual with responsibility for particular required and/or mandatory training instances (e.g. the Office of the General Counsel is the Subject Matter Expert of the agency’s Ethics Program and its training requirements).
- (r) **System of Record (SOR)** means the authoritative system where content is stored, maintained, and updated (even if it resides in other systems).
- (s) **Task-Specific Training** means all training needed to acquire or enhance skills and competencies necessary to perform the tasks of a position currently filled. Task-specific training supplements education and experience already possessed by the staff member that meets personnel qualifications requirements for the position and is necessary to enable performance of specific tasks at the staff member’s current grade level or assignment.
- (t) **Training** is a planned and coordinated program of instruction in professional, technical, or other fields that is or will be related to a staff member’s job responsibilities. Training can be accomplished through a variety of approaches including, but not limited to:
- (1) traditional classroom training;
 - (2) online learning;
 - (3) cross training;

- (4) professional conferences;
- (5) seminars; and
- (6) workshops that are educational or instructional in nature.

(u) *Waiver* is an exemption from completing assigned training and/or repaying related costs.

6.0 Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Office of Staff Learning and Development

The Office of Staff Learning and Development (OSLD) shall, among other things:

- (a) Develop and oversee policies and procedures related to the implementation, administration, and monitoring of staff learning and development programs.
- (b) Authorize all Agency-Required Staff Training requirements by designating them as such.
- (c) Maintain a list and provide oversight of all Agency-Required Training and Federally-Mandated Training requirements.
- (d) Coordinate an agency-wide Learning Needs Assessment and Learning Strategy for Peace Corps Staff in conjunction with the Agency's Strategic Plan.
- (e) Review and evaluate Peace Corps workforce learning and development programs to determine effectiveness and the extent to which learning and development goals are being met.
- (f) Provide staff learning and development support and guidance to offices promoting Agency best practices.
- (g) Maintain the system for internal and external requirements for tracking, record keeping, and reporting staff learning and development, including, but not limited to Federally-Mandated or Agency-Required Training. (See MS 664 Procedures for additional guidance.)
- (h) Consult with Office Directors, supervisors, managers, and staff to continuously improve Peace Corps sponsored staff learning and development programs.
- (i) Report to supervisors on completion and non-completion by their staffs of all Agency-Required Training and Federally-Mandated Training requirements.
- (j) Maintain the Agency Learning Management System as the system of record for staff learning and provide all necessary training and guidance in its use.

6.2 Office Directors

The Office Directors within the agency have a responsibility for establishing goals, setting priorities, and identifying the learning needs of staff in their Office. Office Directors shall, among other things:

- (a) Ensure staff are provided equal opportunities for learning and development consistent with their potential and office needs.
- (b) Designate Administrative Officers (AOs), Directors of Management and Operations (DMOs), or other designated officials, to process SF-182 'Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training' requests for external learning and development, monitor the allocation of funds and learning and development received by their staff in accordance with identified needs and priorities, and reprogramming funds when their learning and development budget is depleted. (See MS 664 *Staff Learning and Development Procedures* regarding Training Administration.)
- (c) Designate a Learning Officer for their office to fulfill the duties listed in 6.7.
- (d) Ensure subject matter experts within their offices support development of Agency learning and development programs including, but not limited to Federally-Mandated or Agency-Required Training.
- (e) Review the effectiveness and relevancy of the Staff learning and development opportunities provided by their office.
- (f) Ensure Federally-Mandated and Agency-Required Training is completed by their staff to comply with standards set forth by each mandate or requirement.

6.3 Administrative Officer, or Other Designated Official

The AO, DMO or other designated official, is the liaison between the various offices to process external training requests. Specifically, AOs shall oversee the review and processing of SF-182s for staff within their budget authority. (See MS 664 Procedures for additional guidance.)

6.4 Supervisors

The immediate supervisor has the primary responsibility for considering reasonable opportunities for professional development training. This may require on-the-job training, formal course work, or a combination of the two. Specifically, Supervisors shall, among other things:

- (a) Stay informed of industry standards;
- (b) Identify the learning needs of their current staff;
- (c) Authorize staff for in-house, interagency or non-government learning and development opportunities as appropriate; and

- (d) Ensure their staff complete Federally-Mandated and Agency-Required Training to comply with standards set forth by each mandate or requirement.

6.5 Peace Corps Staff

All eligible Peace Corps staff are encouraged to participate in learning activities to enhance performance of their official duties while developing their potential for advancement in subject matter areas related to their Office goals and objectives. Individual Peace Corps Staff shall, among other things:

- (a) Determine, in consultation with their supervisor, learning needs and certifications, including relevant technical, program, policy and procedural instructions.
- (b) Complete all Federally-Mandated and Agency-Required Training. Staff are responsible for notifying the supervisor if they are unable to complete the training within the specified timeframe. Failure by staff to complete all Federally-Mandated and Agency-Required Training may result in disciplinary action. ([Peace Corps' Federally-Mandated and Agency-Required Training List.](#))

6.6 Mandatory Training Course Owners

Mandatory Training Course Owners must:

- (a) Identify the training course target audience
- (b) Meet with the stakeholder offices to ensure training course content is accurate;
- (c) Notify those employees required to complete trainings and inform them of training due dates; and
- (d) Track the completion of in-person and online trainings.

6.7 Subject Matter Experts

Subject Matter Experts in respective offices ensure, in coordination with OSLD, that course content meets industry-specific best practice and mandatory and/or required training policy, statute, or regulation.

6.8 Learning Officers

As representatives of their respective offices, Learning Officers shall coordinate with OSLD in the following areas:

- (a) Advocating for office learning and development opportunities;
- (b) Providing input from their respective offices into the Agency-wide learning calendar;
- (c) Acting as main point-of-contact to OSLD; and

- (d) Maintaining all office learning and development data for their learning events in the agency Learning Management System.

7.0 Continued Service Requirements

7.1 Continued Service Agreement Requirement

A staff member approved for an external learning and development activity exceeding 80 hours in length, excluding Federally-mandated and/or Agency-required training, will be required to sign a “Continued Service Agreement” (CSA) as set out in Attachment A prior to participating in the program. The staff member’s direct supervisor is responsible for developing the CSA in accordance with this Manual Section and accompanying procedures. The supervisor may consult with OSLD in developing the staff member’s CSA. (See MS 664 Procedures for additional guidance on CSAs.)

Under the CSA, except as provided under section 7.3 and 7.4, a staff member approved for an external learning and development activity, agrees to continue in the service of or provide services to the Peace Corps for a period:

- (a) Equal to three times the length of the learning and development program.

The computation of the length of the program shall be based on the number of hours spent in class or with the instructor.

7.2 Reimbursement Amounts

- (a) When a staff member does not complete the continued service requirement, the staff member shall reimburse the Peace Corps for:
 - (1) Travel and per diem associated with the attendance at the learning and development event, not to exceed \$ 2,500 per event; and
 - (2) Conference or similar fees paid by the Peace Corps to a third party.
- (b) Such reimbursement amount will be pro-rated based on the percentage of the continued service period described the CSA that the staff member has not completed.

7.3 Exceptions to the Reimbursement Requirement

A staff member will not be required to reimburse the Peace Corps:

- (a) Where the staff member is involuntarily terminated during the continued service period;
- (b) A staff member transfers to another government agency, including the armed forces;
- (c) When the staff member’s NTE date occurs during the continued service period; or
- (d) To the extent that a waiver is granted pursuant to 7.4 below.

7.4 Waivers

The Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Associate Director under whom the staff member is managed or with the Chief of Staff and the Director of OSLD, may waive the obligation of a staff member to reimburse the Peace Corps in whole or in part whenever a waiver would be in the Peace Corps' interests, such as (but not limited to) when:

- (a) A staff member resigns because of personal illness or serious illness of a member of his or her immediate family;
- (b) A staff member is financially unable to make the required payments because of financial hardship; or
- (c) Requiring payment would be against equity or good conscience.

7.5 Payment

The Peace Corps may withhold monies otherwise due to the staff member to cover the cost of reimbursement to the Peace Corps for learning and development activities as described above in the event that the staff member fails to fulfill their continued service or to reimburse the Peace Corps for the costs set out in the CSA.

8.0 Procedures

Procedures implementing this Manual Section will be set forth in the MS 664 *Staff Learning and Development Procedures*, which will be developed by OSLD in consultation with OGC and must be approved by the Staff Learning Council.

The Senior Policy Committee (SPC) of the Peace Corps has chartered the Staff Learning Council to serve as a forum for decisions and discussion of learning strategy applicable to all Peace Corps staff as well as approval of certain related procedures. (See the Staff Learning Council Charter and By-Laws).

9.0 Effective Date

The effective date is the date of issuance.