

TO: Carol Spahn, Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
1275 First St NE
Washington, DC 20002

FROM: 2022 Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council

DATE: June 24, 2022

SUBJECT: Memorandum Following May 2022 Summit

Dear Director Spahn:

The Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council (the "Council") respectfully submits this memorandum following a productive summit at Peace Corps Headquarters in May 2022. In this memo we summarize the Summit outcomes and recognize the progress that the Peace Corps has made toward addressing the recommendations in the Council's 2021 report.

In accordance with the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011, and as required by federal law, the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council will issue a 2022 Annual Report by December 30, 2022. Since its inception, the Council has worked to remain volunteer-centered and to work collaboratively with Peace Corps as the agency supports and strengthens its volunteer-centered Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program, guiding the program in a survivor-centric direction.

Sincerely,

2022 Council Members



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Introduction

In October 2021, the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee (SAAC) submitted their 2021 report and recommendations to Peace Corps. In January 2022, the Council welcomed returning and new members to begin work on this year's annual review of the Peace Corps' Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program (SARRR). This memorandum provides a summary of the outcomes from the May 2022 SAAC Summit and the Council's initial reactions to areas of focus for the 2022 review.

Reflecting on the Council's 2021 Report and Recommendations

The 2021 Council faced a unique mix of challenges. In addition to the limitations posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, high profile media articles published in April 2021 provided a critical view of the Peace Corps' efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence. This prompted Peace Corps leadership to request the 2021 Council to complete a full review of all past Council recommendations for improved sexual violence prevention and response made from 2015 to 2020.

During the 2021 Council's review, the pandemic limited information gathering and collaboration to a virtual environment. Additionally, the 2021 Council membership included only one returning member with existing Council knowledge, and the Council's 2021 annual report and recommendations were completed within a truncated timeframe. While ideal conditions would have allowed for a deeply collaborative process for developing recommendations, the feasibility of this was limited by a number of factors including the vast scope of the Peace Corps SARRR program, offices, and staff involved. In spite of the various obstacles, the SARRR Director and Specialist remained diligent in their efforts to connect the Council with relevant Peace Corps offices and staff to gather information as requested. As a result, the 2021 Council completed a review of over 90 prior recommendations and sent forward 26 recommendations for the Peace Corps to consider in the Council's final 2021 report.

The Council acknowledges the investment and dedication of the Peace Corps to support the Council to respond to their mandate. While all 2021 Council activities were virtual, there was concerted effort from the SARRR and the Peace Corps leadership, including the acting Director/Chief Executive Officer, to be part of multiple virtual meetings and respond to the Council's questions and facilitate discussion. The Peace Corps SARRR team coordinated numerous virtual meetings and connected Council members with Peace Corps staff to respond to questions and coordinate ongoing communication. This support continued in 2022 and as a result of these efforts, the Council was well prepared for the May summit. The time together allowed for rich discussion, productive and collaborative problem solving, and coordinated next steps to best respond to the Council's recommendations.

May 2022 SAAC Summit

From May 2-4, the 2022 Council and relevant Peace Corps offices convened for a Summit at Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The work of the 2021 Council laid the groundwork for the May 2022 Summit and allowed for meaningful discussions between the Council and the Peace Corps to review prior years' recommendations, focus on progress, and collaboratively engage in discussion around 2021 recommendations.

The Council used time with the Peace Corps offices and staff to ask questions about current Peace Corps systems, processes, policies, trainings, and ongoing action toward completing recommendations. The Council provided time for the Peace Corps to ask clarifying questions around recommendations and timelines from the 2021 report. The Council and the Peace Corps also used this time to discuss the few *partially-concur* and *non-concur* responses to Council recommendations and worked collaboratively with the Peace Corps to identify ways to meet the spirit of the recommendations, if not the specific language.

The May 2022 summit was instrumental as it allowed for direct discussion between the Council and the relevant Peace Corps staff, something which was not possible during the development of the 2021 report and recommendations.

Peace Corps Successes and Progress

At the close of the 2022 Summit, the Council felt there was more clarity for both the Peace Corps and the Council on 2021 recommendations and areas for continued work and focus in 2022. This open dialogue and collaborative effort between the Council and the Peace Corps toward reaching a shared goal has been an invaluable foundation for the Council as they provide continued support to the Peace Corps in implementing updated strategies for sexual assault prevention and response based upon best practices and Council recommendations.

The Council would like to recognize the continued dedication of the Peace Corps and the rapid progress the organization has made to undertake the Council's many recommendations over a short period of time, despite the various challenges of a shifting environment. The Council plans to utilize their 2022 Annual Report to expand on this progress made.

Exemplary Coordination and Support by Peace Corps SARRR

The Council would like to acknowledge the exemplary work of the SARRR Director and Specialist to support the Council's efforts, to check in with Council members to ensure they always have what they need, and for going above and beyond to see the program excel. The 2021 Council's virtual convening and review would not have been possible without the exceptional coordination and support of the SARRR Director and Specialist.

The Council thanks the SARRR Director and Specialist for the remarkable coordination and efforts to make the 2022 May Summit a rich, collaborative, and productive event.

Looking Forward: the Council's Plans and Intentions for 2022

The Council and Peace Corps are planning a second summit to take place in October 2022. This second summit will focus on in-depth discussions around areas of focus the 2022 Council sees as key to a stronger, more survivor-centered program. To this end, the 2022 Council is committed to providing a full report to the Peace Corps by December 30, 2022.

The Council plans to include the following in the 2022 Report:

- Emphasized priority areas of focus as Peace Corps implements updated strategies based on recommendations
- Further clarify the intent of the Council's 2021 Report timelines and outcomes
- Amended language to improve alignment between some previously stated recommendations and a better fit or culturally relevant adaptation.

For example, the Council's 2021 Report indicated the need for a specific training program to address an area for improvement. However, the Peace Corps later identified a more contextually appropriate program. In these instances, the Council would like to update the language to show that the Peace Corps has addressed the spirit of a recommendation in a way that meets, fulfills, or exceeds the intention of a recommendation.

The Council expects the 2022 Annual Report to include an increase in focused priority recommendations that support:

- The integration of a trauma-informed approach to their work, including improved training and accountability
- Ensuring Peace Corps SARRR prevention programming, communication and messaging, processes, policies, and response services strive to center the survivor.

In the 2022 Annual Report the Council will also address the role of the SARRR Program in supporting survivors while simultaneously documenting and reporting cases and the complexities of ensuring these align with the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011.

The Council looks forward to continued collaboration with the Peace Corps as the agency seeks to improve their response to sexual assault and broadens their approach to sexual assault prevention.