



## 2016 Global Counterpart Survey Summary Report

---



### ***About the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning (OSIRP)***

OSIRP advances evidence-based management at the Peace Corps by guiding agency strategic planning; monitoring and evaluating agency-level performance and programs; conducting research to generate new insights in the fields of international development, cultural exchange, and Volunteer service; enhancing the stewardship and governance of agency data; and helping to shape agency engagement on high-level, governmentwide initiatives.

## Introduction

In 2016, the Peace Corps launched the second globally representative survey of its local counterparts.<sup>1</sup> These individuals work side by side with Volunteers in their host communities and are essential to the agency's mission to advance world peace and friendship through community-based development and cross-cultural understanding. This report outlines the major findings from the 2016 survey, drawing some comparisons with those from 2015.

The findings in this report are based on very robust opinion data. For several years, the Peace Corps has used various research approaches in an attempt to better understand and demonstrate how counterparts perceive the work and value of Peace Corps Volunteers. None of these prior approaches, however, had the power to deliver reliable global estimates. The decision to design the 2015 survey as a simple random sample, combined with an innovative question structure to avoid positivity bias among respondents, significantly increased data quality. The successful random sample methodology was repeated in 2016. This means that **the figures in this report are generalizable to the entire Peace Corps counterpart population—approximately 5,500 individuals—with a high degree of confidence.**<sup>2</sup>

As in 2015, the addition of these data to the full range of perspectives gathered from Volunteers—through the Annual Volunteer Survey (AVS) and Volunteer Reporting Tool (VRT)—and from host country staff—through the Host Country Staff Survey (HCSS)—comprises one of the most comprehensive lenses through which to view agency impact currently available.

## Summary of Findings

The 2016 Global Counterpart Survey (GCS) results are highly consistent with those of 2015. This is to be expected. A key benefit of random selection is that, given the replication of a well-designed questionnaire and a stable population, wide variation in responses over a short period of time is unusual, even when interviewing different individuals. As in 2015, these data provide reliable evidence that the Peace Corps is having a positive effect on both Goal One and Goal Two. Counterparts described a structured relationship with Volunteers characterized by frequent communication focused on project work.

What specifically did Peace Corps counterparts say in 2016 about their work with Volunteers?

- Eighty-six percent of counterparts reported an increase in local capacity as a result of Volunteers' work. As in 2015, counterparts cited Volunteers' most important contribution as helping to improve the day-to-day work skills of others, followed closely by inspiring others and suggesting new ways to meet goals.
- At least nine in 10 counterparts learned something new about the United States or Americans through their work with Volunteers. What they learned most about—by a considerable margin again this year—was Americans' approach to work. Fewer indicated they were learning about American values than was the case in 2015.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2015 and 2016 surveys built on the first-ever global survey of agency counterparts, fielded in 2014 as an attempted census. Counterparts are the individuals assigned to Volunteers to serve as their primary work partners.

<sup>2</sup> Margin of error = +/- 4.7 percent at a 95-percent confidence level, +/- 3.9 percent at a 90-percent confidence level. See Appendix A for detailed methodology. See Appendix B for sample characteristics.

- Counterparts again felt that Volunteers entered their service with a strong understanding of their work goals and were well-prepared to complete their day-to-day tasks. They continued to judge Volunteers as less well-prepared to speak the local language.
- When asked what the Peace Corps could do to have a greater impact in their community, counterparts continued to place less emphasis on increasing Volunteers' specific technical capacity and more on widening their community involvement. In the broadest terms, counterparts believed that the most effective way to improve Peace Corps impact is to focus on two components of Volunteers' service: greater Volunteer integration into the community and better Peace Corps-community alignment on desired outcomes.

## Counterparts and Volunteers

The Peace Corps invests considerable resources in identifying, vetting, preparing, and training counterparts to work with Volunteers. According to the agency's 2015 Training Status Report data, the Peace Corps provided 53,000 hours of formal training to an estimated 3,650 counterparts across 53 posts during pre-service training (PST). Many more hours of counterpart training were provided after PST. Given this investment, it is important to know which of these individuals continued to work with the Peace Corps once trainees were sworn in as Volunteers and entered the community. Eighty-four percent of 2016 GCS respondents were the counterpart-of-record. Posts needed to ask Volunteers to identify who their current primary work partner was in fewer than two in 10 cases in order to include them in the survey. This is consistent with AVS findings that most Volunteers continue to work in some way with the counterpart initially assigned to them.

S5. How was this counterpart identified?	Sample Member
N	399
Counterpart assigned to Volunteer	84%
Other contact suggested by Volunteer	13%
Other (Please Specify How Contacted Here)	4%

Counterparts are evenly split between men and women, making them a more gender-balanced population than Volunteers. A majority are between the ages of 26 and 40, with a sizeable minority between the ages of 41 and 55, making it likely that counterparts are older than the Volunteers with whom they work. Just over one-third of counterparts know English well enough to have been interviewed for the survey in that language.

S6. What is the counterpart's gender?	Sample Member	S7. What is the counterpart's approximate age?	Sample Member	S4. In which language was this survey administered?	Sample Member
N	399	N	399	N	399
Male	51%	25 or younger	4%	English	35%
Female	49%	26-40	60%	French	8%
		41-55	30%	Spanish	20%
		56 or older	7%	Other (Please Specify Language Here)	37%

On average, counterparts have worked with Peace Corps Volunteers for just over three years—about four months less than the average for counterparts in 2015. Still, this means that many have worked with more than one generation of Volunteers. Once again this year, counterparts indicated that they interacted with Volunteers on work-related tasks for an average of 16 days per month. These data suggest a structured relationship between counterpart and Volunteer, in which both parties communicated frequently in service of a common goal.

How common is that goal? Almost 90 percent of counterparts say that Volunteers had a “very good” or “perfect” understanding of the needs of their community.

Q5. Overall, how well do you think the Volunteers you have worked with understand the needs of your community?	Global Random Sample 2015	Global Random Sample 2016
N	392	396
Do Not Understand At All	0%	0%
Do Not Understand Very Well	14%	11%
Understand Very Well	59%	66%
Understand Perfectly	27%	23%

In addition, a review of open-ended responses for suggested improvements shows an interest in maximizing the positive exchanges taking place between Volunteers and counterparts—a finding consistent with 2015 GCS data.

Two major themes emerged from the qualitative data in 2015: (1) a call for *more* communication between Volunteers and counterparts; and (2) the extension of the structure that exists in the counterpart-Volunteer relationship to other members of the community who are not current beneficiaries of Volunteers’ primary projects. These themes were clearly still present in 2016. However, looking more deeply into the open-ended comments made by counterparts this year, multiple sub-themes emerged:

- Volunteers need better language skills.
- Volunteers should arrive with increased intercultural competence.
- Effective Volunteers are proactive Volunteers who seek collaborative opportunities outside of the counterpart relationship alone.
- Counterparts want better access to resources (particularly IT resources).
- Volunteer service should be extended and/or consecutive Volunteers should serve at the same site.

While these recommendations are not inconsistent with those from 2015, the two larger themes of “integration” and “alignment” may provide a more accurate framework for an analysis of this year’s GCS responses. A number of counterpart quotations from the 2016 GCS have been included throughout this report to further clarify these concepts of integration and alignment.

## Using Rankings to Measure our Impact

Since the agency began conducting systematic research on counterpart sentiment—centrally managed by headquarters since 2008 and at individual posts well before that—there have been concerns about positivity bias: a concern among some that counterparts will simply “tell us what we want to hear.” There are various methods for reducing positivity bias in surveys, but one recommended method for measuring the relative importance of different concepts—particularly across multiple countries or cultures—is known as a “MaxDiff,” or “best-worst scaling,” approach.

When this method is used by survey specialists, respondents create a discriminating ranking of items by choosing their top and bottom choices from a list, then repeating the top and bottom ranking on the remaining items from the list until all items have been evaluated. These rankings can then be calculated into “MaxDiff scores,” scaled from -100 to 100, that show the relative importance of each item. On this scale, a positive number shows that respondents tended to rank the item as a “top choice,” and a negative score shows that respondents tended to rank the item as a “bottom choice.” This type of question prevents respondents from simply ranking everything at the top, thereby forcing prioritization and reducing positivity bias. In combining these rankings with the qualitative suggestions for improvement, a more complete picture of counterpart perception of our work toward achieving Goal One and Goal Two begins to emerge.

## Goal One: Capacity Development

The GCS draws on the agency’s previous research on counterpart sentiment,<sup>3</sup> in which counterparts cited a variety of activities and concepts when asked about Volunteers’ impact. Some of these activities and concepts were consistent with the agency’s mission, such as developing skills within their community, and some were not, such as directly financing projects and increasing their own prestige. Five of the most commonly cited indicators of impact from this previous research were included in the GCS survey questions and presented to respondents for selection as their Volunteers’ areas of largest or smallest impact. The following table shows the order in which counterparts ranked the five indicators in 2016—a pattern repeated from the 2015 survey.

---

<sup>3</sup> That research included the agency’s Host Country Impact Studies (accessible online at [www.peacecorps.gov/about/open-government/reports](http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open-government/reports)), early pilot counterpart surveys, and the first Global Counterpart Survey conducted in 2014, which utilized a census approach.

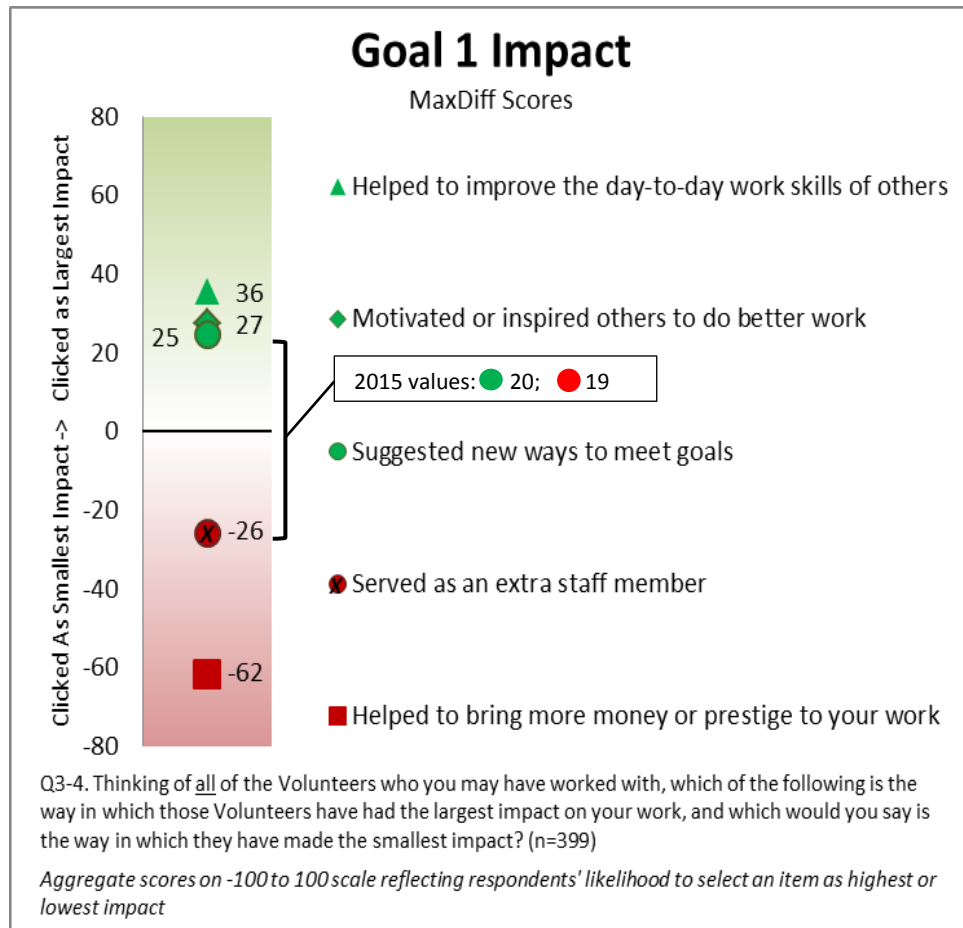


Goal One Impact	
<i>Thinking of all of the Volunteers who you may have worked with, which of the following is the way in which those Volunteers have had the largest impact on your work, and which would you say is the way in which they have made the smallest impact?</i>	Overall Rank by Counterparts
Questionnaire Item	
Helped to improve the day-to-day work skills of others	1
Motivated or inspired others to do better work	2
Suggested new ways to meet goals	3
Served as an extra staff member	4
Helped to bring more money or prestige to your work	5

As shown in the graph of MaxDiff scores below, the three items most closely associated with some element of capacity development in host communities cluster at the top of the rankings. The most direct expression of capacity development among the items (“helped to improve the day-to-day work skills of others”) is the way in which counterparts feel the Volunteers with whom they have worked have made the largest impact. This was followed closely by the Volunteers’ efforts to inspire better work and to innovate. In total, 86 percent of counterparts selected one of these three items as the single largest impact of Volunteers.

One measureable difference with the 2015 rankings is the relative distance between the third- and fourth-ranked items. Compared with counterparts in 2015, the 2016 GCS respondents said that Volunteers suggested new ways to meet goals more frequently and served as an extra staff member less frequently. This indicates that there may have been a slight increase in the perception among counterparts that Volunteers’ impact is more consistent with the Peace Corps’ stated Goal One work of increasing local capacity, rather than simply supplying labor.





These data provide continued evidence that counterparts see advances in Goal One as a result of working with Volunteers. On the other hand, when asked what they would recommend to increase the Peace Corps' impact, slightly more counterparts than last year had suggestions for improvement. Although an even higher percentage of GCS respondents than last year indicated that Volunteers understood the needs of their community in structured responses, qualitative comments such as the following painted a slightly different picture:

*"PCVs should be further trained at site after PST. The two-week community assessment/integration period was too short for them to learn about their communities. They need to learn more about their site and community."*

*"Before elaboration of projects, they [Volunteers] need to conduct an analysis and evaluation of the current situation and community needs assessment, being in a position to work with the community people at all levels, i.e., poor, middle class, etc."*

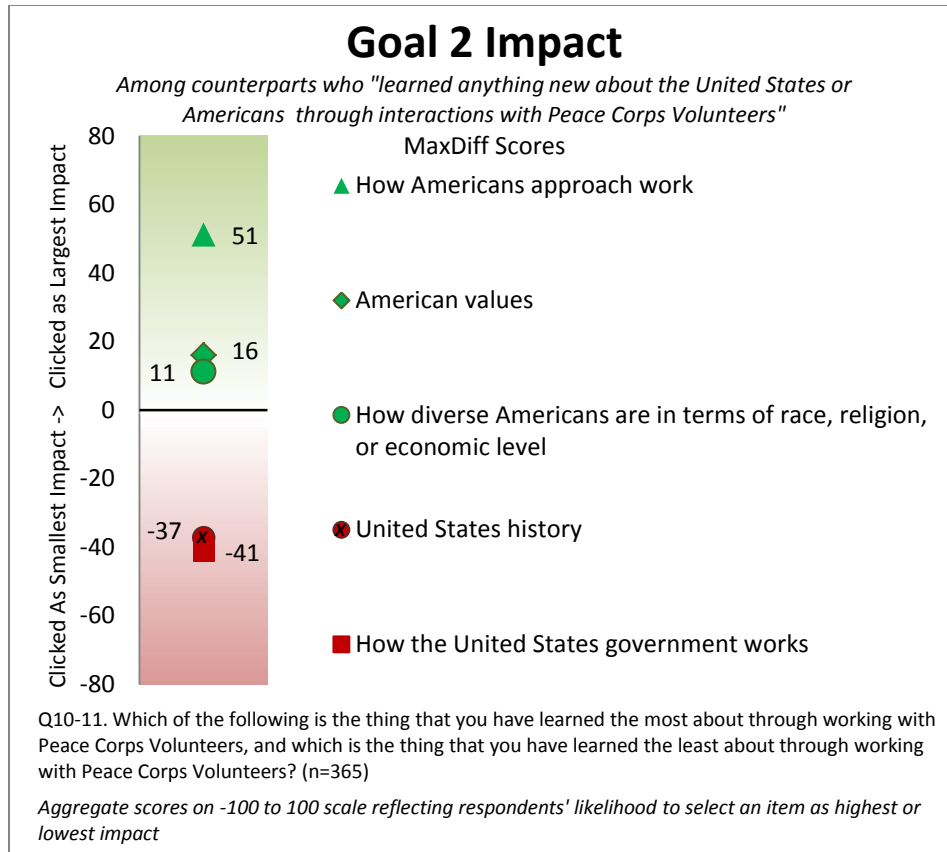
## Goal Two: Understanding of Americans

As in 2015, nine out of 10 counterparts (91%) in 2016 reported that they learned something new about the United States or Americans through their interaction with Peace Corps Volunteers when asked to respond to a direct “yes/no” question. While this question type does less to mitigate positivity bias than the “best-worst scaling” approach exhibited in the following graph, it is nonetheless likely that *any* new exposure to Americans would increase understanding to some degree.

Even more interesting, however, is what the counterparts reported having learned. When the “best-worst scaling” approach was used to measure counterpart sentiment related to Goal Two, the items most closely associated with this goal and the actual cross-cultural work of Volunteers rose to the top of the list:

Goal Two Impact	
<i>[If learned something new about the United States or Americans through interactions with Peace Corps Volunteers]:</i>  <b><i>Which of the following is the thing that you have learned the most about through working with Peace Corps Volunteers, and which is the thing that you have learned the least about through working with Peace Corps Volunteers?</i></b>	Overall Rank by Counterparts
Questionnaire Item	
How Americans approach work	1
American values	2
How diverse Americans are in terms of race, religion, or economic level	3
United States history	4
How the United States government works	5

These results are even more striking when viewed as MaxDiff scores, where the items on the list less closely associated with Goal Two work sink powerfully below 0, indicating that they were overwhelmingly selected as a bottom choice:



While the absolute ranking of these items was the same in 2015 and 2016, the numeric score associated with the second-ranked item (“American values”) was significantly lower in 2016. There is no data from this survey that can explain why counterparts would be learning less about American values this year than last year when so much else about the counterpart experience remained stable.

As in 2015, very few of the counterparts explicitly suggested that Volunteers needed to share more about America during their service. However, this small number was offset by the far larger number of counterparts who commented that Volunteers needed to integrate more and engage in greater cultural exchange.

*“Volunteers could make a greater impact in the community by taking the initiative and making the effort of bonding with community people, reaching out to locals and be interested in the culture and the people, to live like one and yet still hold on to their American culture and values.”*

*“Integrate more with the community, do some action research.”*

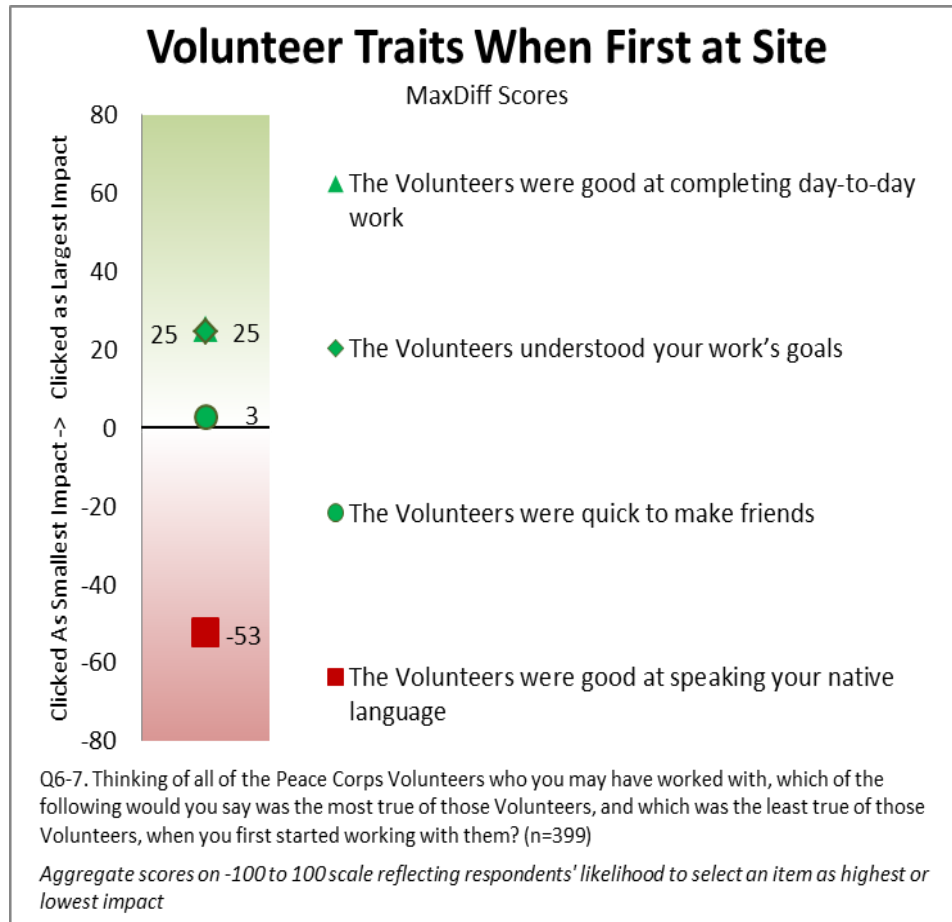
*“More interaction and discussion with the community and understand well the culture of the community.”*

## Volunteer Traits and the Question of Integration

In addition to Volunteers' impact, the 2016 Global Counterpart Survey also examined the traits that counterparts feel Volunteers exhibit through their work. As in 2015, the primacy of work is reflected in responses related to Goal Two (understanding Americans). In fact, work featured even more prominently than in 2015, when counterparts described Volunteers as quick to make friends more frequently than as completing their day-to-day work.

Volunteer Traits	
<i>Thinking of all of the Peace Corps Volunteers who you may have worked with, which of the following would you say was the most true of those Volunteers, and which was the least true of those Volunteers when you first started working with them?</i>	Overall Rank by Counterparts
Questionnaire Item	
The Volunteers were good at completing day-to-day work	1 (tied)
The Volunteers understood your work's goals	1 (tied)
The Volunteers were quick to make friends	3
The Volunteers were good at speaking your native language	4

The small but notable differences between the 2015 and 2016 rankings of Volunteer traits may provide a clue to the integration challenge mentioned above. Not only was work featured even more prominently in this year's rankings, but counterparts were also less likely than in 2015 to choose friendliness as one of the top two traits. This hypothesis can be further tested with 2017 data, since two years of data do not necessarily suggest a trend. Whether meaningful or not, any reduction in perceived friendliness was not enough to rank it below the low ranking accorded to Volunteers' language skills, which clearly remained at the bottom of the list.



The following quotes are examples from the approximately 10 percent of counterparts specifically calling for better language skills in Volunteers:

*"We wish the PCVs would have better knowledge of the local language. We are working with children, so it is very important that the PCV knows at least basic [lingua franca]."*

*"More training about language and culture. Their adaptation is slow. Some Volunteers are very young and immature, so that perhaps more training can help."*

There were many more counterparts who, while not specifically citing language, called for better or increased communication from their Volunteer. As noted in the previous section, improvements in technical competence tended to be expressed as a lack of alignment between Peace Corps activities and community needs, rather than a lack of training.

*"Teach Volunteers more the realities of the environment in which they work. Help them understand properly the cultural differences they will encounter while in the community."*

## Counterparts Want Still More Interaction!

In reviewing open-ended recommendations for improving the Peace Corps' work from the 2015 survey, increased access to and interaction with Volunteers was the most frequent suggestion by an overwhelming margin. This remains true in the 2016 survey as well, expressed by direct requests that Volunteers get out into the community more frequently.

*"The PCV can increase communication with other teachers in my school, other than just me, the counterpart."*

*"Volunteers need to make efforts to adapt to the local culture and mingle with people more often for more effectiveness."*

Alternatively, a counterpart with the opposite experience made the same point:

*"I have nothing to suggest, because our Volunteer gets involved in all activities in school and in the community."*

As in 2015, a significant number of counterparts asked for more time with Volunteers, either through increased contact in their daily work or by increasing the length of Volunteers' service. Most calls for extended service suggested a third year, though several called for fourth and even fifth years. In the 2016 GCS, there were also many counterparts who offered specific solutions to the challenge of sustaining projects when Volunteers can only make a limited time commitment.

*"PCV placement in communities should be consistent if they can't stay longer than two years."*

*"I would suggest that there must be a proper handover from one Volunteer to the other so that the new Volunteer knows where the previous one ended so that there is a smooth transition."*

*"When Volunteers initiate secondary projects, they need to be present during the completion and not leave behind incomplete projects."*

Finally, counterparts expressed a desire for increased resourcing, usually in the form of small grants and/or IT-related support.

*"Help Volunteers with grants. Volunteers have ideas for community development but need to be supported in how to get the grants for the community."*

*"We wanted to have new computers specifically for our English class, but [the Volunteer] told us that we already have an Internet club, thus there is no need for that. But I know other PCVs who did this program for other communities."*

*"We appreciate the books brought in by Volunteers. It would be more helpful for Volunteers to support schools with books that are aligned to the (national) curriculum and teaching syllabi."*

Some of these suggestions are not in the purview of the Peace Corps to provide, and some are. What is clear, however, is that counterparts desire greater alignment between the needs of their community and Peace Corps activities. If the agency is not in the position to create greater alignment through the service of the Volunteer, it might be able to bridge the gap

through other means, such as expectation-setting among all parties, as suggested by one counterpart:

*"I would suggest having a document with a detailed and clearly defined description of roles and responsibilities of all parties, such as PC [the Peace Corps], the PCV, and the hosting organization."<sup>4</sup>*

## Conclusion

When asked to rank various elements of their experience with Volunteers, counterparts rated work-related areas most highly, sometimes by a wide margin. Perhaps given that level of satisfaction, counterparts focused more attention on deeper cultural integration than on greater technical skills when asked what would increase the impact of Volunteers. Again this year, the Global Counterpart Survey demonstrates that counterparts are particularly sensitive to the importance of intercultural competence for the successful exchange of knowledge. While the counterparts did not specifically refer to "intercultural competence," their open-ended comments are replete with suggestions for Volunteers to meet more people, make more of an effort to understand their communities, and go beyond project goals to make quality connections with individuals—individuals who may be just as diverse as those in the cities and communities from which Volunteers come.

Finally, one of the longest comments in the survey, reproduced in its entirety below, is especially informative, covering many of the discrete issues raised by other counterparts.

*"To produce any impact at all, the Volunteer has to have the desire to do so. I've worked with two Volunteers previously, and they have taught me a wealth of things and methods, taught me how to generate community participation, what is a strategy, how to make it. It was hard at times, both for me and for them, to even understand what we are talking about because we are so different. But there was a great desire on both ends to make our organization sustainable and provide people with good care services. My last Volunteer expressed no interest at all in working with me, working with the organization. I took her visiting beneficiaries [sic], shared all the information I had about current projects and work we've done before, but I could see she did not want to get involved at all. She found some other interests in the community and now we almost don't see one another."*

This theme of the need for greater alignment—whether of skills, interests, or temperament—between Volunteers and their community or organization was expressed by a number of counterparts. The lack of a strong relationship between counterpart and Volunteer does not necessarily mean that one party is unmotivated. Rather, the comment highlights how misalignment can be just as frustrating for counterparts as it can be for Volunteers.

Comments such as these may seem contradictory to the overwhelmingly positive findings generated by counterparts' survey responses overall. This is not at all unusual in survey research, especially when respondents are asked about something they might improve, requiring them to think critically. Indeed, the depth and complexity of counterpart recommendations for program improvement may indicate a highly positive level of engagement that bodes well for the Peace Corps' program development.

---

<sup>4</sup> Such documents do exist in the agency, but not all counterparts are necessarily aware of them.



Overall, comments from counterparts reflect the value they place on those skills that transcend the technical capacity of Volunteers. As one counterpart commented:

*"So far, I think our current Volunteer is doing an excellent job. ... If all Volunteers [had] her big heart and willingness to help, that would be great."*

## Appendix A

### Methodology

The 2016 Global Counterpart Survey opened on May 2 and closed on July 1, 2016, and was designed as a random sample survey. Since no global list of counterparts existed, a frame of currently serving Volunteers was developed based on administrative data. A total of 400 Volunteers were selected using a random number formula in Excel, based on the minimum requirement of 387 to represent a non-stratified population of approximately 5,500 with a confidence interval of 5 and a confidence level of 95 percent. The resulting margin of error is +/- 4.7 percent.

Logistics, resources, and the unknown rate of literacy and connectivity among counterparts made it necessary to conduct the survey through face-to-face or telephone interviews conducted by language-competent host country staff at Peace Corps posts. These staff were identified and trained in interview techniques, the structure of the instrument and the meaning of the questions, the implementation of MaxDiff questions, and correct procedures for data entry during and after the interview through a series of webinars delivered by the survey manager in the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning (OSIRP).

Posts were encouraged to expand the survey and conduct additional interviews with counterparts outside of the randomly selected sample. Sixteen posts conducted a total of 300 interviews outside the sample. Feedback from counterparts not randomly selected can be useful to posts but is not included in this report. For a comparison of Volunteer sample-to-population characteristics, see Appendix B.



Results have been weighted to the known population on the basis of the following characteristics: Volunteer location, work sector, age, ethnicity, and gender.

The questionnaire was developed by survey specialists in OSIRP, in close collaboration with the Regions and based on best practices in quantitative survey research and the experiences gained from two years of pilot testing. In addition to using MaxDiff questions, the survey focused on counterpart experiences with all the Volunteers they may have worked with, rather than current or individual Volunteers, in order to reduce positivity bias. The survey was translated into French and Spanish by professional translators at the Department of State, but translations into additional languages were completed by post staff prior to interviewing counterparts. See all three versions of the questionnaire [here](#).

The agency will investigate the feasibility of stratification in future surveys in order to be able to cross-tabulate results and report more granular estimates than the current global level. The estimated sample size required for the strata of greatest interest to the agency, based on the current Volunteer population, are as follows:

By region	N = 1,000
By sector	N = 1,500
By post	N = 5,000

## Appendix B

 			
<b>2016 Global Counterpart Survey</b> <i>Random Sample Volunteer Characteristics</i>			
A breakdown comparing the 399 Volunteers selected for the random sample to the entire population of eligible Volunteers whose counterparts could qualify to be interviewed is below.			
Subregion	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
Caribbean Basin	4.7%	5.8%	1.1%
East Asia	12.8%	10.8%	-2.0%
Europe & MENA	13.0%	13.3%	0.3%
Latin America	20.0%	18.5%	-1.5%
Pacific Islands	5.4%	6.0%	0.6%
Sub-Saharan Africa	44.0%	45.6%	1.6%
Sector	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
Agriculture	5.7%	4.8%	-0.9%
Education	42.2%	44.1%	1.9%
Environment	8.5%	9.3%	0.8%
Health	24.8%	22.6%	-2.2%
Community Economic Development	8.8%	7.0%	-1.8%
Youth in Development	10.0%	12.3%	2.3%
Age	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
Median	25.0	25.0	0.0
Mean	28.1	27.5	-0.6
Ethnicity	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.5%	4.8%	0.3%
Black or African American	7.0%	5.5%	-1.5%
Hispanic or Latino	10.7%	10.0%	-0.7%
Not specified	5.5%	5.5%	0.0%
Two or more races	4.2%	5.5%	1.3%
White	68.1%	68.7%	0.6%
Gender	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
Female	62.5%	63.9%	1.4%
Male	37.5%	36.1%	-1.4%