



## Peace Corps Reforms – Reducing Risks and Supporting Volunteers

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The health, safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers are the agency's highest priorities. The Peace Corps devotes significant resources to providing Volunteers with the training, guidance and support they need to remain healthy, safe and productive throughout their service.

### PEACE CORPS REFORMS

The Peace Corps has been working with nationally recognized experts to implement important reforms. The agency has established new policies and practices that reduce risks for Volunteers and ensure effective and compassionate support when crime occurs, including sexual assault. The agency has:

- Issued Peace Corps' [Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims](#), a set of core principles to ensure the agency provides timely and compassionate support to Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault.
- Created the Office of Victim Advocacy, a centralized resource to assist Volunteers following a crime. The Victim Advocates within the office ensure that each Volunteer is made aware of, and receives access to, services provided by the Peace Corps in cases of sexual assault, stalking and other crimes. The office is led by trained Victim Advocates who are available 24 hours a day. Following the initial response, the Office of Victim Advocacy continues to assist Volunteers as needed, including accompanying Volunteers to their country of service to attend meetings with law enforcement or during court proceedings, and assisting them with Federal Employees' Compensation Act applications and claims following completion of service.
- Fostered an agency-wide culture shift establishing a Volunteer-centered approach that underlies all reform efforts.
- Implemented a 24-hour anonymous hotline that provides crisis counseling and information about Peace Corps' sexual assault reporting and response procedures to Volunteers. The Sexual Assault Volunteer Education and Support (SAVES) Helpline is staffed by trained, external support specialists from the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the U.S., and is accessible to volunteers by phone, text or online chat.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, to collaborate and share resources on sexual assault risk reduction and response.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security to collaborate and share resources in the follow-up to crimes committed against Peace Corps Volunteers.
- Formed the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council, comprised of external subject-matter experts and former Volunteers. The Council reviews Peace Corps' sexual assault risk reduction and response training and policies and procedures to ensure they incorporate best practices, and provides a thorough evaluation of the agency's work.

- Launched a comprehensive Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program that incorporates more than 30 policy changes, extensive training for Volunteers and staff, and clearly defined procedures for mitigating and responding to sexual assault – all of which encourage Volunteers to report incidents to the agency and seek out support. The program was developed in collaboration with post staff and Volunteers worldwide, as well as nationally recognized experts, including recommendations from the Department of Justice; the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network; and the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council. To ensure the program’s effectiveness, it establishes greater cross-departmental coordination in responding to sexual assault as well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- Instituted a new policy that provides Volunteers who have been victims of sexual assault with the option to report the incident to Peace Corps through a Restricted Report or a Standard Report. Restricted Reporting limits the number of staff members with access to information about an assault to only those involved in providing support services requested by the Volunteer. It is designed to give Volunteers access to support services while protecting their privacy and confidentiality, and allows Peace Corps to provide support services to Volunteers who otherwise may not seek support. Standard Reporting provides Volunteers with the same support services along with the opportunity to initiate an official investigation, while maintaining confidentiality.
- Established a Sexual Assault Response Liaison (SARL) program at each Peace Corps post. SARLs are trained to directly assist Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault and accompany them through the in-country response process.

### **COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY POLICIES & TRAINING**

The Peace Corps coordinates a global health and safety and security strategy. At every post, a Volunteer safety system is in place to minimize risks and promote effective and safe service. To enhance health, safety and security for Volunteers, the agency has:

- Delivered new standardized, comprehensive training for Volunteers on sexual assault awareness and response protocols, risk-reduction strategies including bystander intervention, and options for reporting an incident. This training is delivered during pre-service training to all Peace Corps trainees at every Peace Corps post.
- Trained Volunteers on policies and procedures for bringing confidential communications and allegations to the attention of appropriate staff members.
- Trained overseas staff in how to respond appropriately when Volunteers bring allegations of wrongdoing to their attention. Peace Corps staff members must take appropriate measures to ensure Volunteers’ safety and confidentiality, and ensure all allegations are given serious consideration, including referral to the Office of the Inspector General as appropriate. Retaliation of any kind against Volunteers is expressly forbidden.
- Provided overseas staff with guidance on specific procedures to follow when Volunteers express concerns about their safety or any situation that may threaten the well-being of Volunteers.
- Developed and implemented standard operating procedures for overseas Safety and Security Coordinators, who are responsible for coordinating the safety and security programs that support Volunteers at each post.
- Revised notification procedures for serious incidents to ensure key staff members are immediately informed of major crimes against Volunteers, so they can respond appropriately.

- Improved the medical care provided to Volunteers by giving medical professionals at headquarters overall responsibility for hiring, credentialing and managing Peace Corps medical officers at each post; by providing those medical officers with enhanced guidance on how to handle serious medical issues; and by establishing the Health Care Quality Assurance Council to monitor and report on ongoing healthcare issues.
- Delivered training to Peace Corps Medical Officers on enhanced protocols for the clinical management of Volunteers who have been sexually assaulted based on current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and the National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations. If a Volunteer chooses to undergo a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam, the Peace Corps will offer the exam in accordance with host country laws.
- Reformed medical evacuation procedures so all Volunteers who are medically evacuated to Washington, D.C., are met at the airport by a Peace Corps representative and have a choice of providers for their health care. Medically evacuated Volunteers are encouraged to provide feedback to the agency on their experience to ensure the quality of the process.
- Hired a nurse case manager who specializes in sexual assault services to oversee the medical care provided to medically evacuated Volunteers following incidents of crime.

### **COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF FALLEN VOLUNTEERS**

The Peace Corps is committed to supporting the families of Volunteers who gave their lives in service to the ideals of the Peace Corps. The agency has:

- Formalized the practice of sending a Peace Corps staff member to be with the family of a deceased Volunteer within 24 hours of the notification of death, unless the family specifically requests otherwise. The designated staff member serves as the agency's primary liaison with the family.
- Partnered with the Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund to establish the Peace Corps Emergency Relief Fund, which provides monetary assistance to Peace Corps Volunteers and their families in the event of natural or man-made disasters, as well as uninsured personal crises.