



2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Report

Voice of the Volunteer



Voice of the Volunteer

Motivations to Serve and Perceptions about Sites

Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning



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Introduction

From June 9 to August 15, 2014, the Peace Corps conducted its “Annual Volunteer Survey,”¹ the 19th survey of currently serving Volunteers. Peace Corps Volunteers serve abroad for two years and, in 2014, they worked directly with communities in 68 countries to build local capacity in six project sectors.² Since 1975, the Peace Corps’ Volunteer surveys have been a unique source of information about Volunteer experiences and opinions. The survey results provide additional information about the status of Peace Corps operations to the agency, Congress, researchers, the media, and the general public. This year’s results are based on responses from 5,344 Volunteers (91.3% response rate).

About this Report

This publication focuses primarily on two topics: 1) Volunteer motivation for joining the Peace Corps, as it influences the service experience; and, 2) Volunteer perception of the sites where they lived and worked, as it informs the agency’s site development efforts in host countries around the world. The concluding section of the report points to a few potential operational implications of the survey findings. Motivation to serve and Volunteer site perception are two components of the full range of topics covered in the “2014 Annual Volunteer Survey.” Complete survey results summarizing all quantitative responses and the survey methodology are available in the “2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Global Tabular Report” that is published at peacecorps.gov/open.

Key Findings

- Altruism, pragmatism, and a sense of adventure were three major factors explaining why Volunteers serving in 2014 joined the Peace Corps. In contrast to the 1970s, when the majority of Volunteers identified adventure or travel as the main reason for joining the Peace Corps, the majority of Volunteers in 2014 identified helping others.
- Overall, Volunteers were moderately satisfied with their sites. Nearly six in ten (59%) felt satisfied, but more than one in five (23%) felt dissatisfied with the sites where they lived and worked.
- Volunteer site perception primarily consists of two broad areas: 1) community demand for the Volunteer, as manifested in the perceived availability of quality work; and, 2) Volunteer comfort level, as manifested in the perceived degree of community integration, perceived safety risks, and the health-related lifestyle choices they make.
- Volunteer site perception was not associated with a number of potentially relevant conditions, including housing adequacy, distance to other Volunteers, time spent with host families, and ongoing support functions provided by the Peace Corps, such as medical or administrative support.

¹ The “Annual Volunteer Survey” is commonly referred to as the AVS within the agency.

² Peace Corps Volunteers are given a primary assignment in one of six sectors: Agriculture, Community Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth in Development.



Peace Corps Mission and Goals

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship through community-based development and cross-cultural exchange.³ The agency's three goals are:

1. Building Local Capacity: Advance local development by strengthening the capacity of local communities and individuals through the service of trained Volunteers.
2. Sharing America with the World: Promote a better understanding of Americans through Volunteers who live and work within local communities.
3. Bringing the World Back Home: Increase Americans' awareness and knowledge of other cultures and global issues through Volunteers who share their Peace Corps experiences and continue to serve upon their return.

Method

The 2014 survey was conducted online using an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire distributed to Volunteers through their posts. All Volunteers in the two-year program who had served for one month or longer at the time of the survey administration were invited to participate. The findings presented in this report are based on responses from Volunteers who chose to participate and completed the online questionnaire. As in all public opinion surveys, these responses represent personal opinions, interpretations, and points of view that may not be directly measurable or observable. Survey respondents reflected the Peace Corps Volunteers' overall composition by gender, age, geographic location, and length of service.

Data for this publication were analyzed using a specialized software package for statistical analysis. Loglinear analysis was conducted to examine, test, and estimate relationships among categorical variables related to Volunteer perception of their sites; factor⁴ and cluster⁵ analyses were used to identify natural groupings of data based on the underlying relationships; and multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis was applied to understand the degree of dissimilarity between satisfaction measures. All findings discussed in this report are statistically significant ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Year-to-year comparisons presented in this report are based on data from recurring cross-sectional surveys (with different respondents each year) rather than longitudinal surveys (same respondents each year).

³ The Peace Corps. "Strategic Plan FY 2014–2018 and Annual Performance Plan FY 2016," 2015. http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/policies/pc_strategic_plan_2014-2018.pdf (accessed May 6, 2015).

⁴ Principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation.

⁵ K-means algorithm.



Why the Peace Corps?

Since 1961, when President John F. Kennedy signed an executive order establishing the Peace Corps, nearly 220,000 Americans have chosen to become Peace Corps Volunteers to serve in developing countries around the world⁶. In his public service announcement inviting Americans to join the Peace Corps, President Barack Obama said, “Today our world is smaller and more interconnected than ever before. And it presents us with an extraordinary opportunity: to connect with people in some of the most remote corners of the globe, and show them that America is paying attention, that we care, and that we are here to help.”⁷ In recent decades, helping others has been the primary reason why Volunteers have chosen to serve overseas. In 2014, more than two in three respondents considered the opportunity to help others very important (68%, Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Reasons Why Volunteers Joined the Peace Corps



This chart is based on responses to the question: “How important were the following factors in accepting your Peace Corps invitation?” It includes respondents who provided answers for all nine reasons.

Base: n = 5,292.

Factor analysis was applied to summarize the reasons Volunteers decided to join the Peace Corps. Nine potential reasons investigated in the survey centered around three factors: altruism, pragmatism, and a sense of adventure (Table 1.1). These factors have remained consistent since 1976,⁸ when they were first identified based on the Volunteer survey results.

⁶ As of May 2015, Peace Corps Volunteers have served in 140 host countries.

⁷ The Peace Corps. “President Obama Encourages Americans to Serve.” 2014. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/today/obama/> (accessed May 6, 2015).

⁸ The Peace Corps. “The Volunteers Speak Again: the Second Annual Survey of Peace Corps Volunteers,” 1977.



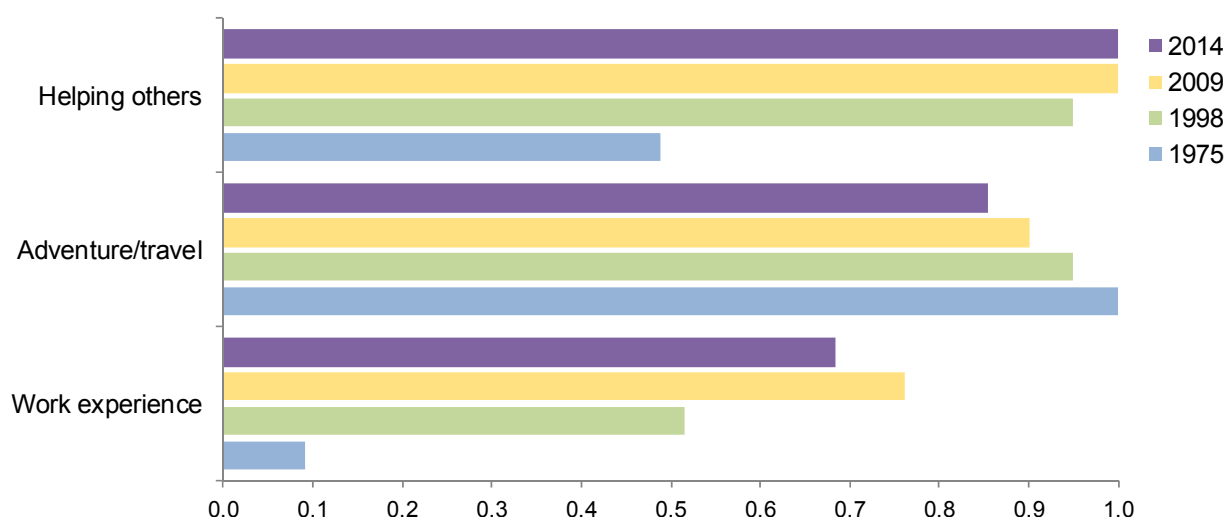
Table 1.1. Major Components of the Three Motivational Factors to Join the Peace Corps

Altruism
<i>Opportunity to serve my country</i>
<i>Opportunity to help others</i>
Pragmatism
<i>Gaining work experience</i>
<i>Challenging U.S. job market</i>
<i>Gaining international experience</i>
<i>Learning a new language or enhancing foreign language skills</i>
Sense of adventure
<i>Exposure to a different culture</i>
<i>Personal growth</i>
<i>Adventure/travel</i>

In order to identify a smaller number of underlying factors, principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was applied to nine possible reasons why respondents accepted their Peace Corps invitation (45 percent of variance explained). Three motivational factors resulting from this analysis are presented in the table above that lists variables with the highest loading coefficients for each factor.

Although the three main motivational factors have not changed since 1976, there has been a clear shift in the relative importance of their major components (Figure 1.2). In 2014, Volunteers emphasized helping others (a major component of altruism) to a greater degree than adventure or travel (a major component of a sense of adventure) or work experience (a major component of pragmatism) in their decision to join the Peace Corps than in previous decades.

Figure 1.2. Selected Reasons Why Volunteers Joined the Peace Corps: 2014, 2009, 1998, and 1975



This chart shows the distribution of responses to the question: “How important were the following factors in accepting your Peace Corps invitation?” The three items above were consistently included in the 2014, 2009, 1998, and 1975 questionnaires (years were chosen based on data availability). Responses were rescaled from 0 to 1 using a relative prevalence of selected reasons (1 = highest percentage of respondents in a given year; 0 = lowest percentage of respondents in a given year).

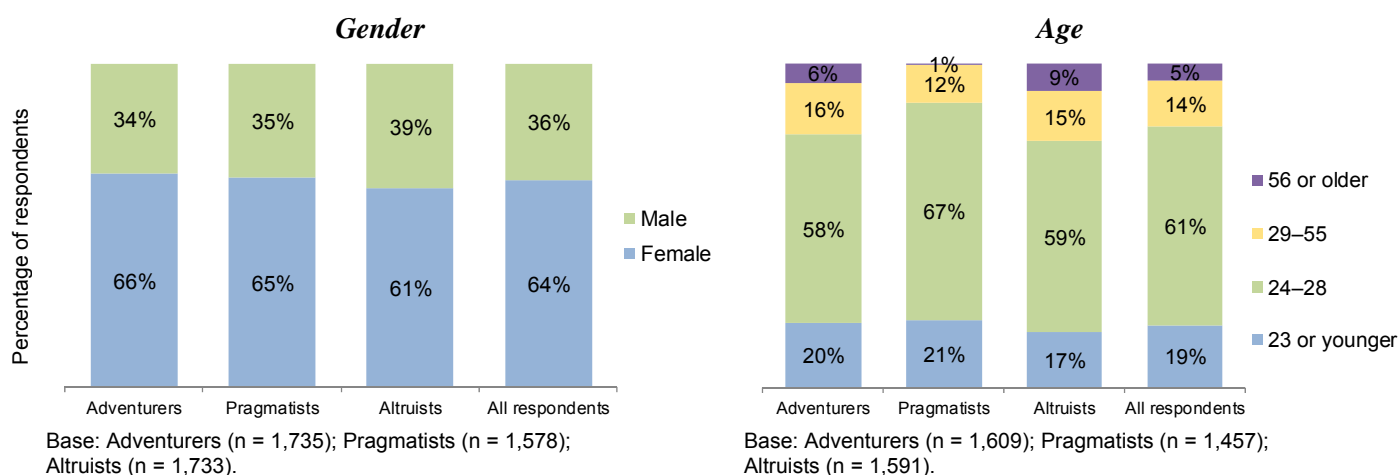
Base: 2014 (n = 5,337); 2009 (n = 873); 1998 (n = 3,387); 1975 (n = 3,466).



Based on how each respondent scored on each of the three motivational factors, he/she was categorized as an altruist, pragmatist, or adventurer. For example, if a respondent's calculated altruism score was higher than his/her pragmatism score and higher than his/her adventure score, that respondent was placed in the altruist group. Thus, belonging to a motivational group reflects the dominant factor behind the respondents' decision to join the Peace Corps, not the only factor. In 2014, altruists, pragmatists, and adventurers each comprised approximately one-third of the total number of Volunteer respondents.

Although demographic characteristics did not vary greatly among motivational groups, there was a slightly higher proportion of males among altruists and a higher proportion of individuals between 24 and 28 years of age among those who joined the Peace Corps primarily for pragmatic reasons (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3. Volunteer Demographics by Motivational Group



This chart shows the distribution of responses to the questions: "What is your gender?" and "What is your age?" within each motivational group and for all respondents.

While respondents in the three motivational groups had relatively similar demographic profiles, they did view several aspects of their Peace Corps service differently. Specifically, respondents differed on how they perceived their stress levels throughout the Volunteer lifecycle; their success in building personal support networks; their effectiveness in the implementation of the three Peace Corps goals; and, their propensity to promote the Peace Corps.

Volunteer Lifecycle

During the two years of Peace Corps service, Volunteers experience different stages of adjustment to a new culture, their site, work, and environment. The average perceived stress level of Volunteers during these stages reflects the emotional ups and downs associated with different periods in Peace Corps service—from the initial culture shock of arriving in a new country and continuous adaptations at their sites to the preparations Volunteers need to make as they approach the end of service.

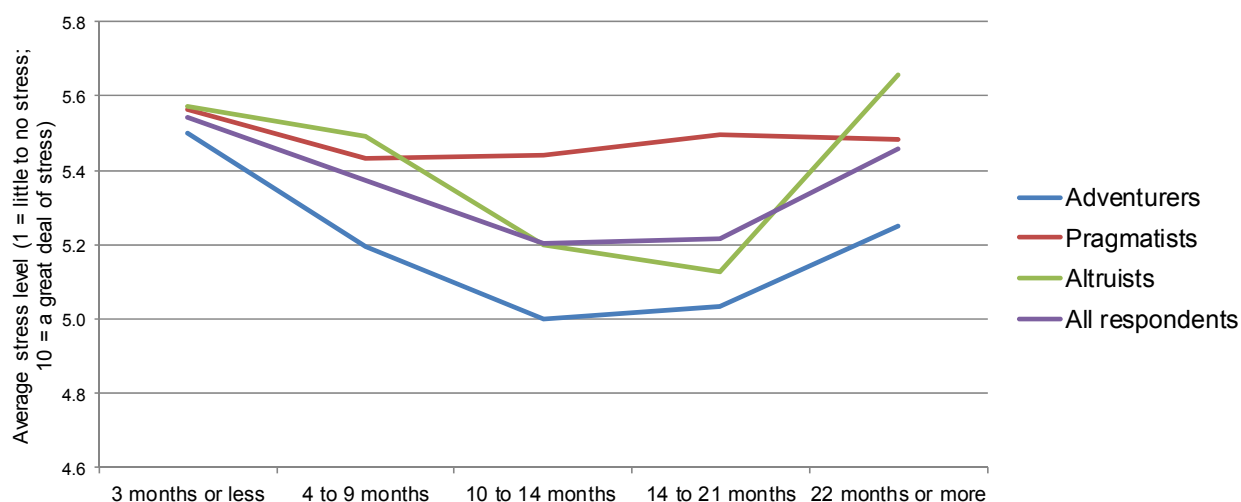
In 2014, adventurers reported a greater decrease in their stress levels after arriving in their country of service than either altruists or pragmatists, and the adventurers maintained a significantly lower stress level throughout their service (Figure 1.4).



Pragmatists' stress profile remained essentially unchanged during their two-year service, though their perceived stress levels were higher, on average, than those of Volunteers in the other two motivational groups. A continuously high perceived stress level suggests that neither personal adjustments by the Volunteer nor Peace Corps support mitigated pragmatists' concerns.

Unlike pragmatists, altruists underwent the most pronounced stress fluctuations among the three groups, with higher average perceived stress levels than those of the other groups both at the beginning and end of their service. Notably, altruists had higher stress levels when they were leaving the Peace Corps than at the beginning of their service.

Figure 1.4. Average Stress Level of Volunteers by Length of Service and Motivational Group



The chart shows the distribution of responses to the question: "How would you rate your average level of stress during the last 30 days?" in an enlarged view.

Base: Adventurers (n = 1,755); Pragmatists (n = 1,621); Altruists (n = 1,730).

Building Support Networks

Having good personal connections with fellow Volunteers, counterparts, host country nationals, local friends, and U.S. family and friends strengthens the ability of Volunteers to succeed in advancing the Peace Corps mission of world peace and friendship. Personal and professional networks also provide support in times of need and better equip Volunteers to meet the challenges of the sometimes difficult environments in which they serve.

The strength of Volunteers' networks was defined based on the number of good relationships they had with fellow Volunteers, counterparts and community partners, host country individuals, local friends, and friends or family in the United States (Table 1.2). More than half of participating Volunteers reported medium-strength support networks (58%), and more than one in five Volunteers (22%) had strong support networks.

Table 1.2. Personal Networks of Volunteers

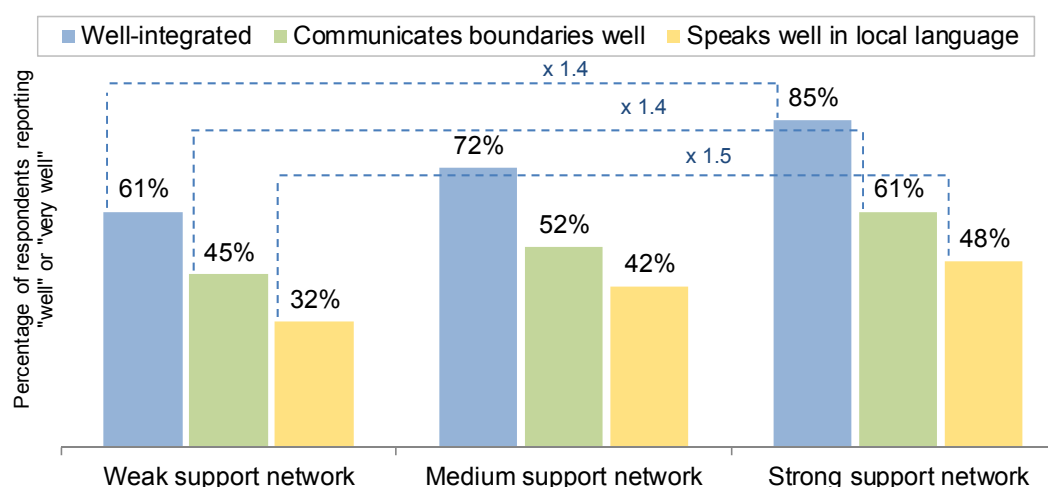
Network strength	Percentage of respondents
<i>Weak support network (at least one good relationship or none)</i>	20%
<i>Medium support network (at least two or three good relationships)</i>	58%
<i>Strong support network (at least four or five good relationships)</i>	22%

The chart shows a distribution of the calculated number of relationships based on responses to the questions: “How personally rewarding do you find your (experience with other Volunteers; work with counterparts/community partners; experience with other host country individuals)?” and “Which of the following activities do you do to help manage stress? (spend time with friends; contact friends or family in the United States).”

Base: n = 5,344.

The stronger the personal networks of Volunteers, the more integrated into their local communities they felt (Figure 1.5). The strength of personal networks was also closely associated with other intercultural abilities, such as perceived language proficiency and the perceived capacity to communicate personal boundaries.⁹ This suggests that when Volunteers build stronger collaborative networks, they may also strengthen their intercultural competence, in turn allowing them to navigate many of the challenges they will encounter during their two years of service. At the same time, better intercultural competence may contribute to building support networks successfully.

Figure 1.5. Perceived Intercultural Competencies by Strength of Personal Network



This chart shows the distribution of responses to the questions: “How integrated into your community do you feel?”; “How well can you communicate your personal boundaries in the situations that make you feel uncomfortable?”; and, “How well can you communicate in the language used by most local people in your community?” Numbers above the dotted lines (in the format $x N$) quantify the difference between respective percentages. For example, the percentage of respondents who felt well-integrated among those with strong support networks (85%) is 1.4 times or 40 percent higher than the percentage of respondents who felt well-integrated among those with weak support networks (61%).

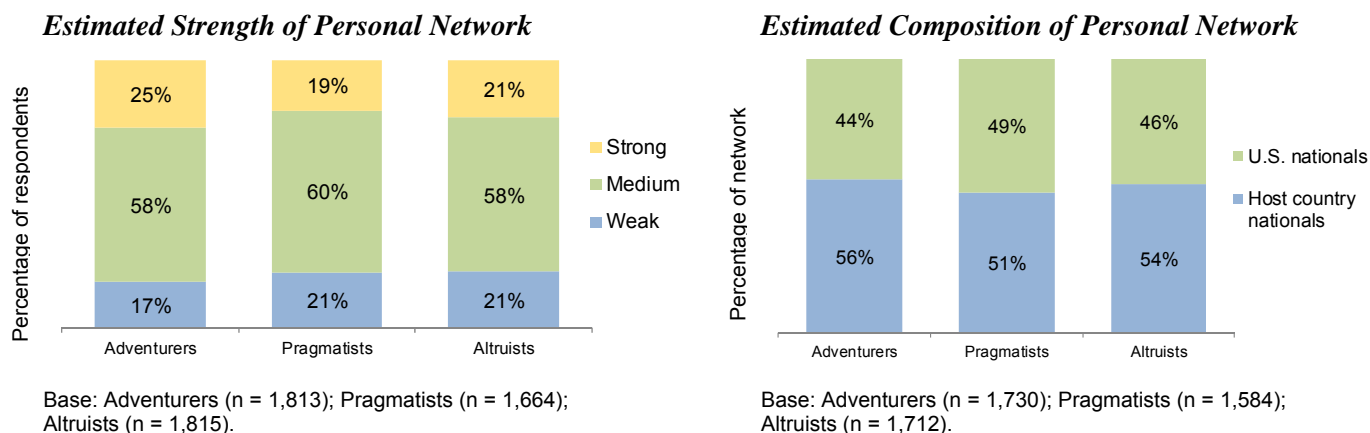
Base: Well-integrated (n = 5,318); Communicates boundaries well (n = 5,314); Speaks well in local language (n = 5,329).

⁹ To check if a personality type contributes to respondents’ ability to build personal support networks, a proxy for active personality was derived. Respondents with active personality were those who indicated that they get involved in additional projects, work, or studying in order to manage stress. Although respondents with active personality types reported stronger support networks, such respondents were proportionally equally represented among all three motivational groups.



Adventurers led among motivational groups in terms of the estimated number of good personal connections, with a smaller proportion of the group reporting weak networks and a larger proportion reporting strong networks (Figure 1.6). The estimated composition of networks differed slightly among the three motivational groups as well. Adventurers (56%) and altruists (54%) had a slightly higher proportion of host country nationals in their personal networks than pragmatists (51%). Both the estimated strength and composition of their personal networks place adventurers at the forefront of promoting a better understanding of Americans within local communities (Goal Two).

Figure 1.6. Strength and Composition of Volunteer Support Networks by Motivational Group



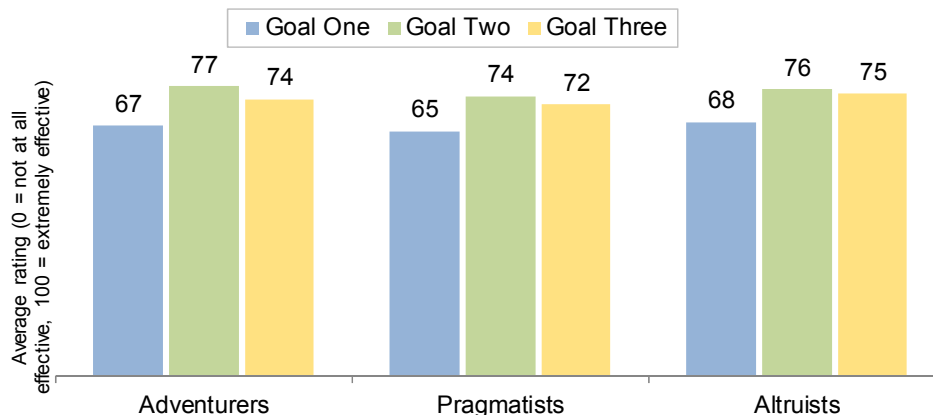
This chart shows the distribution of respondents with strong, medium, and weak personal support networks (left) and the estimated composition of their networks (right).

Effectiveness in Achieving Peace Corps Goals

Volunteers' perceived effectiveness in building local capacity (Goal One), sharing America with the world (Goal Two), and bringing the world back home (Goal Three) differed by motivational group. The Goal One rating was the highest among altruists (68 points), while adventurers led on the Goal Two rating (77 points, Figure 1.7). Pragmatists, however, felt the least effective, on average, in implementing all three Peace Corps goals. It should be noted that all three motivational groups perceived that they were most effective in implementing Goal Two.



Figure 1.7. Perceived Effectiveness by Motivational Group



This chart shows the average effectiveness ratings presented on a scale of 0 to 100. For Goals One and Two, effectiveness is measured as a combination of sentiments toward counterparts, groups with which Volunteers work closely, and members of host communities based on responses to the questions: “How effective are you in transferring knowledge and skills to help the following individuals or organizations to build their capacities?” and “How effective are you in promoting a better understanding of Americans among the following host country individuals or groups of individuals?” For Goal Three, effectiveness is based on responses to the question: “How effective are you in promoting a better understanding of host country nationals among Americans?”

Base: Adventurers (n = 1,813); Pragmatists (n = 1,664); Altruists (n = 1,815).

Who Promotes the Peace Corps?

The Net Promoter Score (NPS)¹⁰ is a measure commonly used in commercial market research that may have some relevance to the Peace Corps as the agency plans the expansion of its Volunteer base.¹¹ By applying the method to the Peace Corps, Volunteers can be divided into three categories based on their attitudes: promoters, passives, and detractors. The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. Overall, the estimated percentage of promoters (53%) among the 2014 respondents was five times greater than the percentage of detractors (10%), resulting in the overall NPS of 43 percent (Figure 1.8). Although this calculated score is high, it is lower than it was in 2009 (45%) or 1998 (65%).

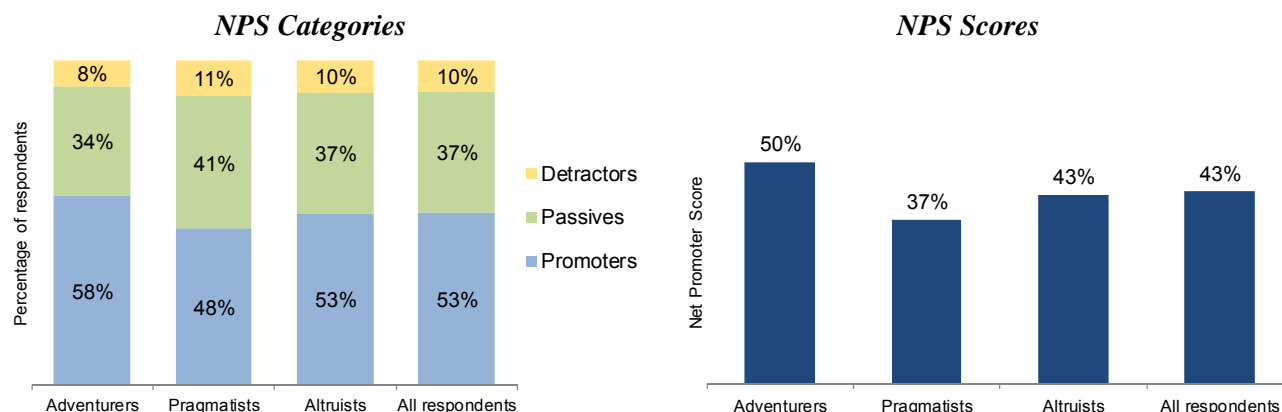
¹⁰ NPS quantifies customer loyalty and expresses customers' propensity to recommend a company rather than merely being satisfied with its products or services. According to the method, every company's customers can be divided into three categories: promoters, passives, and detractors. Promoters are loyal enthusiasts who will fuel future growth. In the Peace Corps context, promoters translate into satisfied Volunteers who would not only complete their service, but would also actively endorse the experience and encourage others to join the Peace Corps. Passives are satisfied but unenthusiastic. While satisfied with their experience in the Peace Corps, Volunteers in this category would not necessarily encourage their friends or family to serve. Detractors are unhappy and can damage the brand and impede growth. While in the field, detractors could negatively impact the experience of other Volunteers. In addition, they would discourage others from joining the Peace Corps.

¹¹ The Peace Corps. “Strategic Plan FY 2014–2018 and Annual Performance Plan FY 2016,” 2015. http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/policies/pc_strategic_plan_2014-2018.pdf (accessed May 6, 2015).



According to their NPS score, adventurers are the clear champions for the Peace Corps (Figure 1.8). It is noteworthy that, despite a clear shift from attracting adventurers to altruists in recent decades, adventurers are still the group reporting the most positive Peace Corps experience. Leveraging the success that the Peace Corps already has with enthusiastic adventurers, the agency could work to either further strengthen the support of altruists and pragmatists or focus its recruitment efforts on adventurers to foster continued program growth. Further investigation is needed to identify which strategy would best serve the agency's goals.

Figure 1.8. Net Promoter Categories and Scores by Motivational Group



This chart shows the distribution of Net Promoter Score groups (left) and the Net Promoter Score (right) of the three motivational groups, which are based on responses to the questions: “Today, would you still make the same decision to serve with the Peace Corps?”; “Would you recommend Peace Corps service to others you think are qualified?”; and, “Do you intend to complete your Peace Corps service?” The cumulative score was rescaled from 0 to 10. Respondents who had a cumulative score of 0 to 6 are detractors; those who had a score of 7 to 8 are passives; and those with scores of 9 to 10 are promoters.

Base: Adventurers (n = 1,801); Pragmatists (n = 1,657); Altruists (n = 1,804).

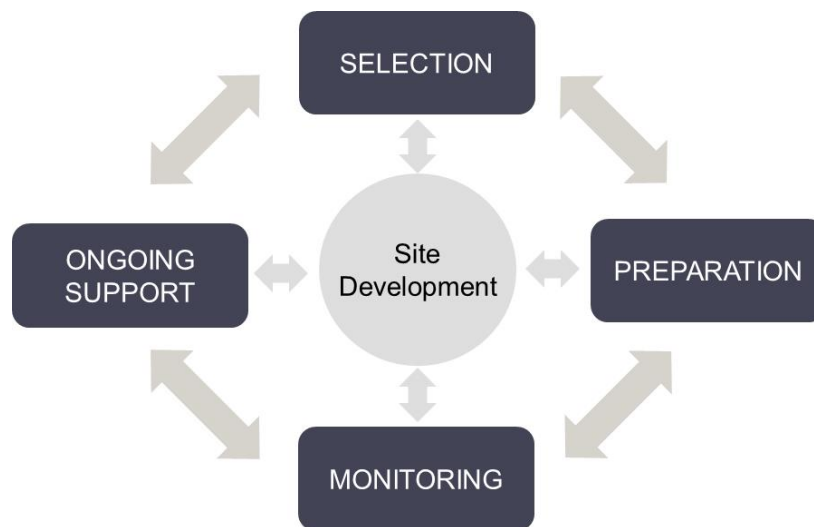
Key Takeaways

1. Altruism, pragmatism, and a sense of adventure were the three major factors explaining why Volunteers serving in 2014 joined the Peace Corps. In contrast to the 1970s, when the majority of Volunteers identified adventure or travel as their main reason for joining the Peace Corps, the majority of 2014 Volunteers identified helping others.
2. Altruists felt more effective than the other two groups in implementing Goal One (building local capacity), while adventurers felt more effective in implementing Goal Two (sharing America with the world).
3. Survey data suggest that helping Volunteers build collaborative networks should strengthen their intercultural competence and allow them to navigate many of the challenges they will encounter during their two-year service.
4. The estimated percentage of Volunteers who would actively promote the Peace Corps (53%) among respondents was five times greater than the percentage of those who would actively discourage people from serving (10%). The resulting overall Net Promoter Score of 43 percent in 2014 is relatively high, but lower than it was at some points during the previous decade.

Understanding Site Perception

To ensure that Peace Corps Volunteers can successfully perform their jobs and achieve results in the challenging environment of developing countries, the Peace Corps has developed a multidisciplinary process for site development. It consists of interdependent phases of site selection (including site identification), preparation, monitoring, and ongoing Volunteer support (Figure 2.1). Good site development is believed to be the foundation of a safe and productive Volunteer experience and is generally considered to be the result of the collective efforts of Peace Corps staff, Volunteers, and local partners.

Figure 2.1. Peace Corps Site Development Process



This chart shows schematically the Peace Corps site development process outlined in internal management documents.

The Peace Corps works with host country governments and local communities to select potential locations for Volunteer assignments, conducts site and housing assessments, as well as host community orientation. Post staff members form cross-functional teams (including programming and training, safety and security, medical, housing, and information technology specialists) and work together to establish a site environment conducive to Volunteer success. The Peace Corps' role in site selection and preparation also includes identifying work assignments, choosing appropriate work counterparts for Volunteers,¹² and preparing partner organizations for the arrival of a Volunteer.

Given the substantial resources the agency dedicates to site development, it is important to understand how the various components of the agency's process influence Volunteer perception.

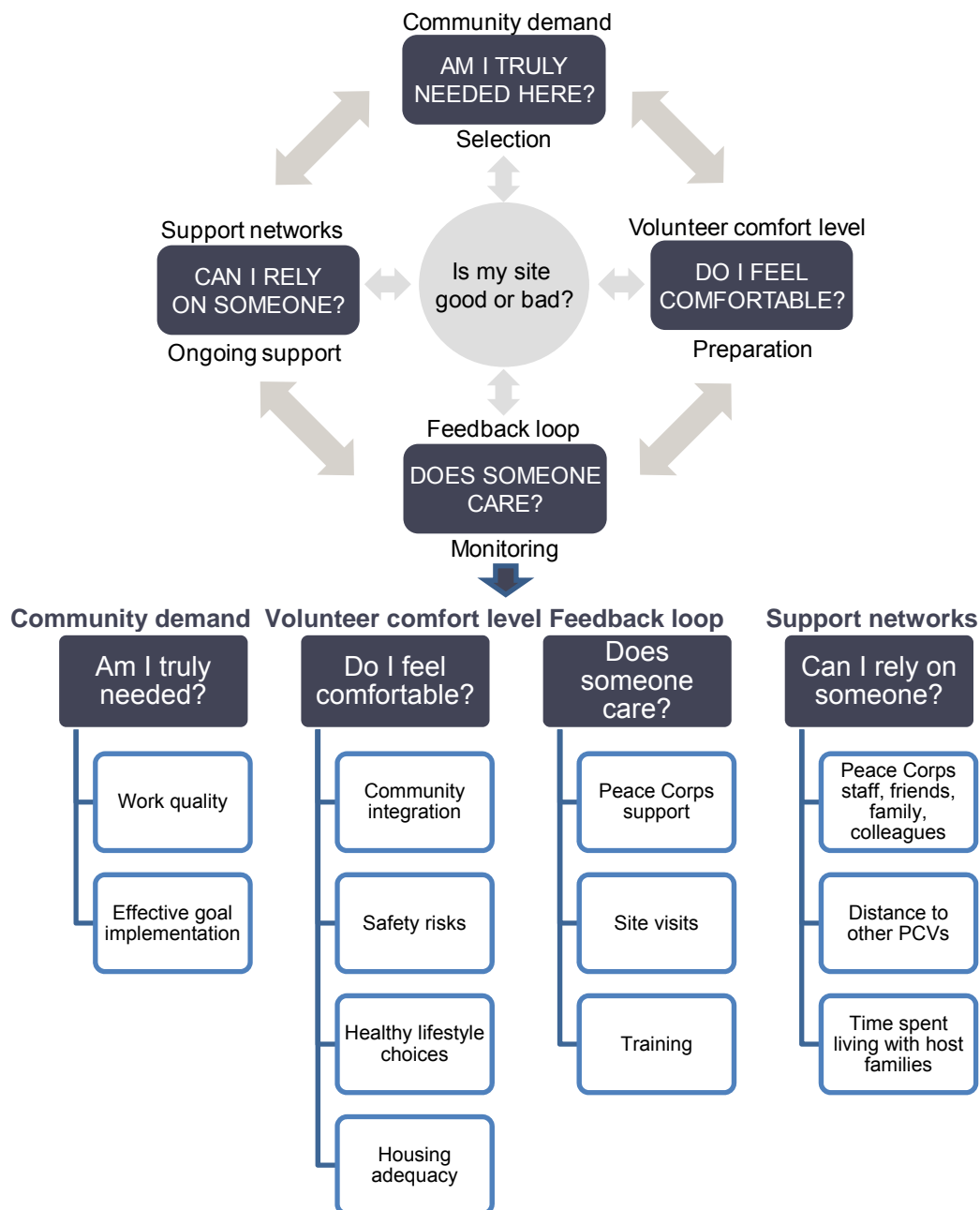
¹² At some Peace Corps posts, counterparts are assigned by the host country government or organization.



Theoretical Model of Volunteer Site Perception

The four major domains of the Peace Corps site development process—site selection, preparation, monitoring, and ongoing support—translate into the following four domains of Volunteer site perception: 1) community demand; 2) Volunteer comfort level; 3) feedback loop; and 4) support networks (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Volunteer Perception of Peace Corps Site Development Process: Theoretical Model



This chart shows a theoretical relationship among the potential components of Volunteer site perception based on qualitative interviews with Volunteers. This model was empirically tested using the survey data; most of the model components are primarily based on composite measures. As part of the model, the following potential outcomes were tested: (a) satisfaction with site selection and preparation support provided by in-country Peace Corps staff; and, (b) post-based termination rates in the first three months of service (not shown). In addition, an environmental factor (the locality's level of urbanization, not shown) was tested.

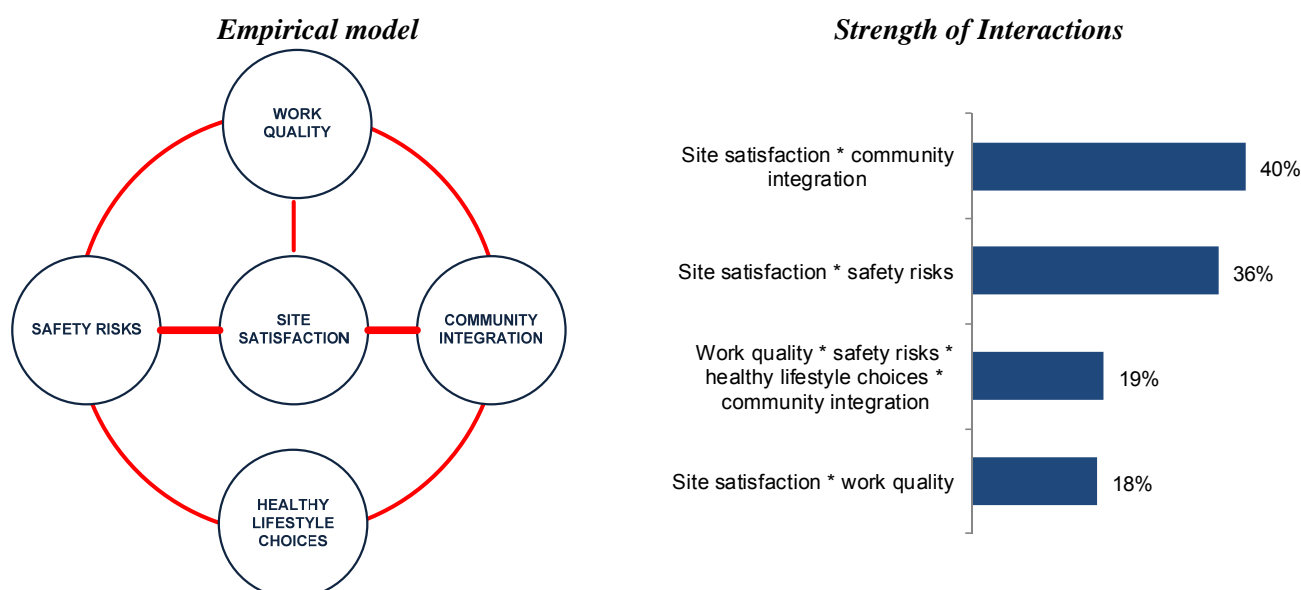
In order to examine all of the potential components of Volunteer site perception, possible interactions among them, and to determine if there are associations among the four domains of Volunteer site perception outlined in Figure 2.2, a loglinear analysis was chosen.¹³ As loglinear analysis does not differentiate between dependent and independent variables, it is the first step in testing relationships in cases where there are potential—but unclear—outcome measures. For the purposes of this report, Volunteer satisfaction with site selection and preparation support provided by in-country Peace Corps staff (a potential outcome measure) will be referred to as Volunteer site satisfaction.

Empirical Model of Volunteer Site Perception

A saturated model of Volunteer site perception, which includes all variables in the theoretical model (Figure 2.2) and all interactions among them, was analyzed. The following interactions proved to be most important in forming Volunteer site perception (listed in the order of the strength of interaction):

- Site satisfaction and community integration
- Site satisfaction and safety risks
- Work quality, safety risks, healthy lifestyle choices, and community integration¹⁴
- Site satisfaction and work quality

Figure 2.3. Volunteer Perception of Peace Corps Site Development Process: Empirical Model



The chart on the left represents the following generating class based on the model selection loglinear analysis: site satisfaction + community integration + safety risks + work quality + healthy lifestyle choices + site satisfaction * community integration + site satisfaction * safety risks + work quality * safety risks * healthy lifestyle choices * community integration + site satisfaction * work quality. $N = 5,204$; $G^2 = 9.2$; $p = 0.68$. All main effects and interactions are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Connector lines represent interactions; the line width reflects the strength of interaction. The chart on the right shows the parameters of an unsaturated model based on general loglinear analysis. The parameters, or effects, are expressed as a percentage change in the odds of one variable due to a one-unit change in another variable. The effects are as follows: $\lambda^{\text{site satisfaction} * \text{community integration}} = 0.33$; $\lambda^{\text{site satisfaction} * \text{safety risks}} = 0.31$; $\lambda^{\text{work quality} * \text{safety risks} * \text{healthy lifestyle choices} * \text{community integration}} = 0.18$; and $\lambda^{\text{site satisfaction} * \text{work quality}} = 0.17$. These strong interactions show that the magnitude of change in site satisfaction cannot be meaningfully interpreted alone, without taking into consideration the interaction effects.

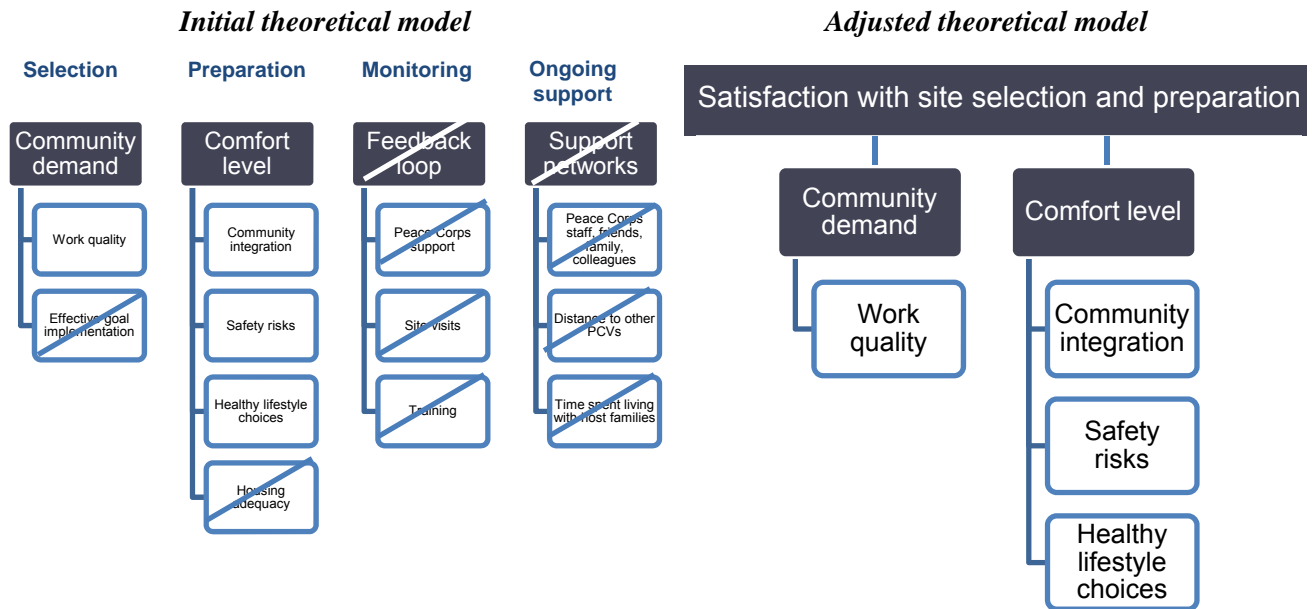
¹³ Loglinear models are useful for uncovering the potentially complex relationships between categorical variables summarized in multiway crosstabulations.

¹⁴ This is a four-way interaction.



Adjusting the theoretical model of Volunteer site perception based on the empirical results obtained demonstrates that Volunteer perception reflects only the site selection and preparation components of the Peace Corps site development process. Site monitoring and ongoing support do not shape Volunteer perceptions of their sites. Rather, site perceptions are based primarily on 1) community demand for the Volunteer, as manifested in the availability and quality of work;¹⁵ and, 2) Volunteer comfort level, as manifested in perceived community integration,¹⁶ safety risks,¹⁷ and the health-related lifestyle choices¹⁸ they make (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Volunteer Perception of Site Development Process: Adjusted Theoretical Model



This chart shows the process of adjusting the theoretical model of Volunteer site perception (left, also presented in Figure 2.2) based on the empirical results (right). The components of the theoretical model that did not hold in the model during statistical testing are crossed out in the initial model.

¹⁵ A composite measure of *work quality* is based on the questions: "To what extent do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements? a. Meaningful work was available for me when I arrived at site; b. Host country individuals with whom I would be working were prepared for my arrival in the community; c. I have enough work to do at my site; d. My skills are a good match to the work I do at site; e. My work is directly related to what my community needs" and "How satisfied are you with the following aspects of working with your Peace Corps-assigned counterpart? a. Accomplishing your project work."

¹⁶ *Community integration* is based on the question: "How integrated into your community do you feel?"

¹⁷ A composite measure of *safety risks* is based on the questions: "Have you used your 'RADAR' or personal security skills in the past 12 months?"; "Have you used Sexual Assault Awareness skills to mitigate unwanted sexual advances in the past 12 months?"; "Have you used Bystander Intervention skills in the past 12 months?"; "In the last 12 months, have you experienced insensitive comments, harassment, or discrimination toward you in your host country based on any of the following characteristics?"; and, "How safe do you feel in the following environments? c. When you travel in-country: transportation safety; d. When you travel in-country: personal security."

¹⁸ A composite measure of *healthy lifestyle choices* is based on the question: "During a typical month in your service, how many days do you engage in the following activities? a. Eat healthily; b. Drink alcoholic beverages; c. Exercise; d. Get enough sleep; and e. Smoke."

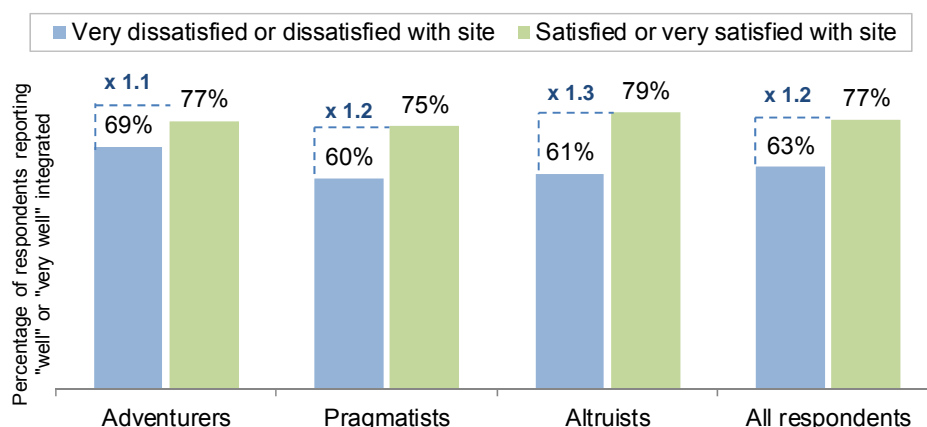


To understand how Volunteers form their perceptions, each component of the empirical model—namely, community integration, safety risks, work quality, and healthy lifestyle choices—will be examined in relation to site satisfaction. Nearly six in ten (59%) felt satisfied, while more than one in five (23%) felt dissatisfied with the sites where they lived and worked.

Community Integration

Survey data show that community integration is the variable most closely associated with site satisfaction (Figure 2.3). Overall, those who felt well-integrated into their community were 22 percent more likely to be satisfied with their sites (77% versus 63%, Figure 2.5). However, this difference was even more profound among altruists, the emerging type of Peace Corps Volunteer, who were 1.3 times or 30 percent more likely to be satisfied with their sites if they felt well-integrated.

Figure 2.5. Volunteers Who Felt Well-Integrated by Site Satisfaction and Motivational Group



This chart shows the distribution of responses to the questions: “How satisfied are you with site selection and preparation support provided by in-country Peace Corps staff?” and “How integrated into your community do you feel?” Numbers above the dotted lines (in the format x N) quantify the difference between respective percentages.

Base: Adventurers (n = 1,795); Pragmatists (n = 1,640); Altruists (n = 1,785).

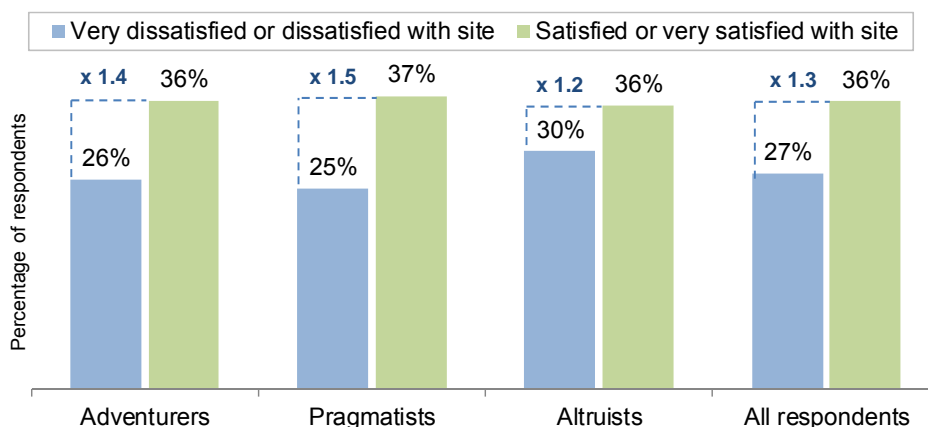
Notably, community integration was not closely associated with a number of potentially relevant conditions, including distance to other Volunteers and time Volunteers spent living with their host families.

Safety Risks

Volunteer exposure to safety risks has the second strongest interaction with site satisfaction. The lower the safety risk exposure, the higher the site satisfaction (Figure 2.6). As the chart below indicates, pragmatists were particularly sensitive to the safety environment in forming their site perceptions.



Figure 2.6. Volunteers with Low Risk Exposure by Site Satisfaction and Motivational Group



This chart shows the distribution of responses to the question: “How satisfied are you with site selection and preparation support provided by in-country Peace Corps staff?” and a composite measure of safety risk exposure. Numbers above the dotted lines (in the format x N) quantify the difference between respective percentages.

Base: Adventurers (n = 1,801); Pragmatists (n = 1,652); Altruists (n = 1,791).

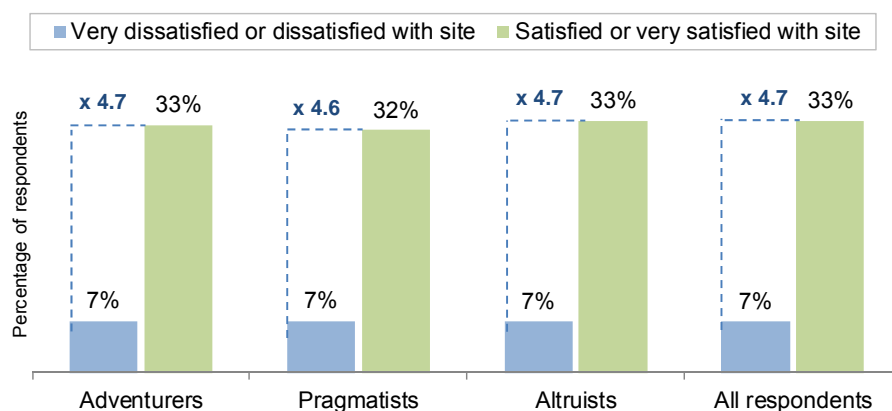
Work Quality

Coming from a culture that has a reputation for placing a high value on work, Peace Corps Volunteers may face unfamiliar work cultures and environments in developing countries. Given the potential cultural differences in the approach to work, preparing community partners for a productive collaboration with American volunteers and ensuring the availability of meaningful work is crucial for Peace Corps Volunteers to be and to feel that their service was successful.

In 2014, Volunteers who thought that they were able to engage in high-quality work were nearly five times more likely to be satisfied with their sites than those who perceived that they could only engage in low-quality work (Figure 2.7). Interestingly, the findings disprove the assumption that work quality would be more important for pragmatists than the other motivational groups. Having high-quality work is equally important to young Americans regardless of their motivation to join the Peace Corps. One 2014 respondent who perceived that the available work at site was of low quality and who was classified as an adventurer based on motivational factors remarked in survey comments: “Our work is very, very vague and not well-defined. This isn’t the 1960s anymore.”



Figure 2.7. Volunteers Reporting High Work Quality by Site Satisfaction and Motivational Group



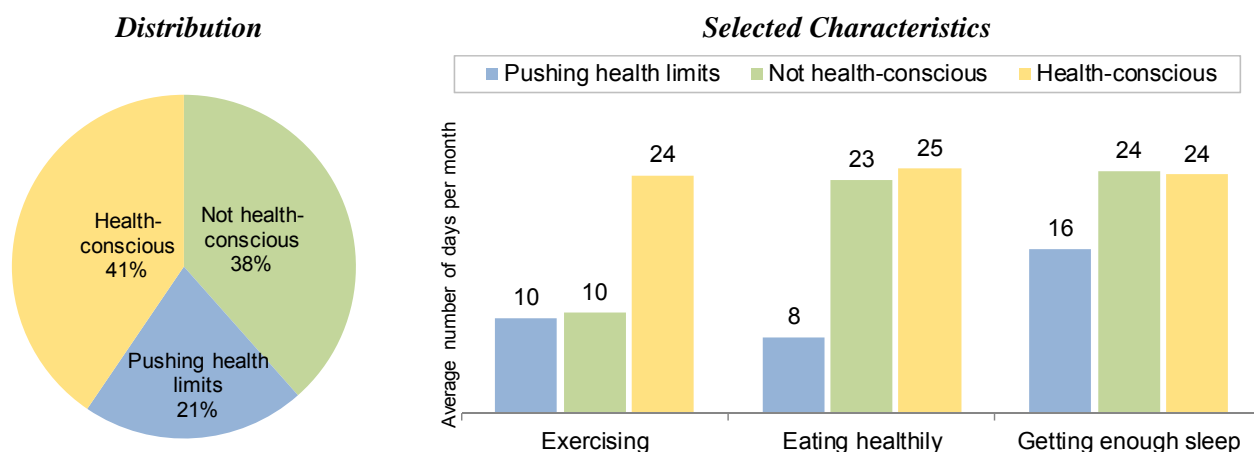
This chart shows the distribution of responses to the question: “How satisfied are you with site selection and preparation support provided by in-country Peace Corps staff?” and a composite measure of work quality. Numbers above the dotted lines (in the format x N) quantify the difference between respective percentages.

Base: Adventurers (n = 1,801); Pragmatists (n = 1,652); Altruists (n = 1,791).

Healthy Lifestyle Choices

While not directly associated with site satisfaction based on the empirical model (Figure 2.3), Volunteer healthy lifestyle choices based on involvement in health-related activities nonetheless contributes to an understanding of Volunteer site perception. Based on the prevalence of health habits as illustrated by typical monthly activities, Volunteers formed three groups: health-conscious (41%), not health-conscious (38%), and pushing health limits (21%, Figure 2.8). The survey data demonstrated that health-oriented individuals were more likely to have a more positive experience at their sites, including better community integration, lower safety risks, and better work quality.

Figure 2.8. Healthy Lifestyle Choices Groups



Base: n = 5,276.

Pushing health limits (n = 1,110); Not health-conscious (n = 2,029); Health-conscious (n = 2,137).

This chart is based on responses to the question: “During a typical month in your service, how many days do you engage in the following activities? a. Eat healthily; b. Drink alcoholic beverages; c. Exercise; d. Get enough sleep; and, e. Smoke.” The groups were identified using k-means cluster analysis.



While the Peace Corps can create an enabling environment that fosters healthy lifestyle habits and can educate Volunteers about their importance, it is undoubtedly a Volunteer's personal choice as to whether or not to pursue such habits.

Understanding What is *Not* Important

Establishing associations among components of Volunteer site perception can help us to better understand how those perceptions are formed. In the long run, it should also aid in improving the site development process because the agency can target each of the identified elements and measure change in Volunteer perception in order to gauge the success of these efforts.

At the same time, an analysis of what is not important can also provide valuable insight into further understanding Volunteer site perception. For example, as the Volunteer perception model shows (Figure 2.4), site satisfaction was not associated with Peace Corps support. This is further illustrated by Figure 2.9, which shows that site satisfaction is the measure that is least associated with other measures of Volunteer satisfaction with Peace Corps support. This finding is not surprising because, although its impact is ongoing, site selection and preparation largely take place before Volunteers arrive at site, whereas the other satisfaction measures all reflect continuing support.

Figure 2.9. Associations between Measures of Satisfaction with Peace Corps Support



This chart presents results from the multidimensional scaling analysis (MDS) based on the following question: "How satisfied are you with the following types of support provided by in-country Peace Corps staff? a. Administrative/logistical; b. Emotional; c. Medical; d. Project-specific technical skills; e. Safety and security; and, f. Site selection/preparation." Simultaneous graphical representation of all association measures between pairs of values in a multi-dimensional space depicts relative similarity or dissimilarity between variables. If the two points are close together, they are highly associated relative to two points that are far apart.



Although researchers assumed that every variable in the theoretical model of Volunteer site perception would be significantly associated with Volunteer perception of their sites, the empirical model demonstrates that the following individual components are not relevant to Volunteer site perception:

- Distance to other PCVs (support networks)
- Effectiveness in Peace Corps goal implementation (community demand)
- Housing adequacy (personal comfort)
- Relationships with Peace Corps staff, family, friends, colleagues (support networks)
- Satisfaction with Peace Corps support (feedback loop)
- Site urbanization (environmental factor)
- Site visits (feedback loop)
- Termination rates during first three months of service (potential outcome)
- Time spent living with host families (support networks)
- Training effectiveness (feedback loop)

It is notable that two of the four domains of Volunteer perception presented in Figure 2.2—feedback loop and support networks (which reflect site monitoring and ongoing support, respectively)—proved to be irrelevant to understanding Volunteer perceptions regarding their sites.

Key Takeaways

1. Volunteer site perception is based primarily on: 1) community demand for the Volunteer, as manifested in the availability of quality work; and, 2) Volunteer comfort level, as manifested in the perceived level of community integration, perceived safety risks, and the health-related lifestyle choices they make.
2. Volunteer perception reflects only site selection and preparation components of the Peace Corps site development process. Site monitoring and ongoing support do not shape Volunteer perceptions of their sites.
3. Volunteer site perception was not associated with a number of potentially relevant conditions, including housing adequacy, distance to other Volunteers, time spent with host families, and ongoing support functions provided by the Peace Corps, such as medical or administrative support.



Building a Preemptive Peace Corps

Discussion: “This isn’t the 1960s anymore.”

Volunteer site perception undoubtedly represents only one aspect of the holistic picture of the Peace Corps site development process. However, analyzing this perception allows the agency to focus its efforts on very specific tasks, i.e., selecting sites with minimum safety risk, facilitating Volunteers’ integration in the communities where they live and work, ensuring the availability of meaningful work in response to a real community need, and enabling Volunteers to maintain healthy lifestyles.

A strong interaction between these specific components works in favor of those undertaking improvement initiatives: it means that if one component is improved, another aspect might be enhanced in the process. For example, improving a Volunteer’s community integration can produce better-quality work; meaningful work can motivate the Volunteer to make healthy lifestyle choices; and leading a healthier lifestyle can minimize safety risks.

Moving forward, it would be worth exploring whether a larger investment of resources in site development on the front end—through a more targeted, rigorous site selection and preparation process—may help reduce the investment needed to support Volunteers when something goes wrong during their service.

While the agency’s current policy reflects the notion that “the quality of a Volunteer’s site [...] and work assignment is a critical feature of a safe Volunteer experience,”¹⁹ the Peace Corps’ current resource allocation approach may be more reactive than preemptive, placing a greater emphasis on maintenance than on building foundational infrastructure. Supporting the health, safety, and security of Volunteers by “ensuring that Peace Corps staff respond effectively and compassionately when incidents occur” is critically important. Securing resources sufficient to strengthen site selection and preparation procedures, including work availability and risk assessment, is therefore essential.

Investments in site selection and preparation are especially important in light of a change in the motivational profile of the 21st century Volunteer. The shift from predominantly adventure-seeking Volunteers in the 1960s to the altruists of the 2010s, coupled with overall generational changes, calls for a flexible program adjustment. The Peace Corps is clearly attracting a new type of applicant. The new applicant, however, will not evolve into the Volunteer of yesteryear. While all Volunteers—past, present, and future—persist in the face of challenging living conditions in order to empower others and create a better world, the 21st century Volunteer focuses more than previous generations on having a positive impact on others’ lives.

The paradigm of Peace Corps service is shifting. Recognizing this shift and adapting to it, especially with the improving job market in the United States, will be a major focus of the Peace Corps over the next several years.

¹⁹ The Peace Corps. Peace Corps Manual, Section 270, “Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security,” 2015. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/policies/docs/manual/> (accessed May 6, 2015).



Concluding Note

The Peace Corps extends its sincere appreciation to all Volunteers for their service and for contributing their time and reflections to the 2014 “Annual Volunteer Survey.” Their participation in this research ensures that the Voice of the Volunteer is heard by the agency, Congress, other U.S. government agencies, and the general public.

Contact Information

For questions or comments regarding the survey findings, methodology, or data, please contact the Peace Corps Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning (OSIRP) at osirp@peacecorps.gov.

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About the Peace Corps

The Peace Corps traces its roots and mission to 1960, when then Senator John F. Kennedy challenged students at the University of Michigan to serve their country in the cause of peace by living and working in developing countries. From that inspiration grew an agency of the federal government devoted to world peace and friendship.

About the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning

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.

Other Publications in this Series

The survey findings presented in this report are based on the analysis of data reported in the “2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Global Tabular Report” available at peacecorps.gov/open. The “2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Global Tabular Report” contains detailed data tables summarizing all quantitative responses.

From Survey Comments

In the Voice of the Volunteer:

“Joining the Peace Corps has been one of the best decisions that I’ve made in life. My experience here has led to personal and professional growth.”

“If your priorities, goals, hopes, definitions of failure and success change throughout your service, this is a good thing. This is evidence of adaptability.”

“Be fantastically, amazingly, just silly persistent. Find motivated people, keep them, build a network.”

“I love my work and my experience as a volunteer! It is an incredibly rewarding assignment.”

“Love the Peace Corps, waited many years to join.”

“It’s been a good run.”

Responses from the 2014 Annual Volunteer Survey



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