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Peace Corps

Strategic Plan
FY 2014 – 2018

Mission

To promote world peace and friendship through community-based development and cross-cultural understanding

Since its establishment in 1961, the Peace Corps has been guided by a mission of world peace and friendship. The agency exemplifies the best of the American spirit by making it possible for Americans to volunteer their time to advance development and build cross-cultural understanding around the world. Through this unique approach to development, the Peace Corps is making a difference in the overseas communities it serves, in the lives of its Volunteers, and back home in the United States.

The Peace Corps advances its mission through the work of the Volunteers, both during and after their term of service. Instead of providing monetary assistance to countries, the agency sends Volunteers to share their skills and experience living and working alongside local individuals and communities. This day-to-day interaction provides Volunteers with a unique perspective and the opportunity to partner with local communities to address their development challenges and to strengthen mutual understanding. When Volunteers complete their term of service, they return from their country of service with a new set of skills, a deep knowledge about different cultures, and long-lasting relationships. Returned Volunteers continue their service by promoting awareness of other cultures and global issues with friends, family, and the American public and by demonstrating a sustained commitment to volunteerism and public service.

Plan Overview

The FY 2014-2018 Strategic Plan includes the agency's long-range goals and objectives designed to make progress on the Peace Corps mission.

The plan utilizes the following components to create a framework for accomplishing agency goals and improving performance:

Core Values shape and guide how the agency makes decisions.

Strategic Goals reflect the broad, long-term outcomes the agency works toward to achieve the Peace Corps mission of world peace and friendship.

Strategic Objectives break down the high-level strategic goals to express the specific focus areas the agency will prioritize in order to make progress on the strategic goals.

Strategies and Activities include the specific actions the agency is planning to take to meet agency goals and objectives.

Core Values

The Peace Corps FY 2014-2018 Strategic Plan reflects the core values that shape and guide decisions at all levels in the agency:

Safe, Healthy, and Productive Service: The Peace Corps works to provide a safe, healthy, and productive service opportunity for every Volunteer.

Quality and Impact: The Peace Corps prioritizes quality improvements to strengthen its programs while maintaining a meaningful global presence.

Commitment to National Service: The Peace Corps seeks to expand opportunities for Americans to serve their country in the cause of peace.

Diversity and Inclusion: The Peace Corps actively supports a culture of inclusion that builds on the strengths of the diversity of the American public and of the countries in which we serve.

Data-informed Decisions: The Peace Corps uses high-quality data and evidence to focus resources on agency priorities, inform performance improvements both in the field and at headquarters, and promote institutional learning.

Innovation: The Peace Corps utilizes innovative approaches and technology to solve both persistent and emerging operational challenges and to advance local development.

*“The United States will join with our allies to eradicate such extreme poverty in the next two decades by connecting more people to the global economy; by empowering women; by giving our young and brightest minds new **opportunities to serve**, and helping communities to feed, and power, and educate themselves; by saving the world’s children from preventable deaths; and by realizing the promise of an AIDS-free generation, which is within our reach.”*

*President Barack Obama
2013 State of the Union Address*

Strategic Goals

The Peace Corps Act (1961) articulates three core goals to contribute to the Peace Corps mission of world peace and friendship:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

These three core goals continue to undergird Peace Corps' approach to development and serve as the foundation for the three strategic goals in the Strategic Plan:

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*

Strategic Objectives

The 11 strategic objectives identified in this plan constitute the roadmap for advancing the Peace Corps mission and strategic goals. Strategic objectives serve as the primary unit of analysis for assessing how the agency is performing and are measured through specific, time-bound performance goals identified in the Annual Performance Plan. The table below indicates the strategic goals that each strategic objective supports.

Relationship between Strategic Goals and Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives	Strategic Goal 1: <i>Building Local Capacity</i>	Strategic Goal 2: <i>Sharing America with the World</i>	Strategic Goal 3: <i>Bringing the World Back Home</i>
1. Volunteer Well-Being	X	X	X
2. Service Opportunity of Choice	X		
3. Development Impact	X	X	
4. Cross-Cultural Understanding	X	X	X
5. Continuation of Service			X
6. Diversity and Inclusion	X	X	X
7. Site Development	X	X	
8. Train-Up	X	X	
9. High-Performing Learning Organization	X	X	X
10. Global Community of Practice	X	X	X
11. Measurement for Results	X	X	X

1. Volunteer Well-Being: *Enhance the safety, security, and health of Volunteers through rigorous prevention and response systems and high-quality medical and mental health services (Supports Strategic Goal One, Two, and Three)*

Rationale: The Peace Corps advances its mission through the work of the Volunteers, who are the most important strategic asset of the agency. Volunteers dedicate two years or more of their lives to serving their country in local communities where the healthcare infrastructure and security environments often differ from that of the United States. Further, Volunteers may experience a range of emotions as they address the complexities of development work and encounter unique stressors associated with living and working in local communities. Attention to the well-being of Volunteers and supporting their resiliency allows them to focus on their assignment and helps to ensure that they return home safely and in good health. Volunteer well-being is the shared responsibility of staff and Volunteers.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Periodically evaluate individual experiences with healthcare and safety and security support
- Define and implement post-specific safety and security standards and monitor compliance
- Train all staff on methods for mentoring, developing, and supporting Volunteers
- Study the effects of Volunteer health and safety on Volunteers' productivity at work
- Integrate Volunteer support across all offices and functions at headquarters and posts
- Enhance mental health support
- Establish a data management system to track critical safety and security recommendations by posts and headquarters offices

External Factors: Volunteers encounter a broad range of social and environmental conditions during their service. As a result, safety, security, and medical risks are an inherent part of Volunteer service.

2. Service Opportunity of Choice: *Position the Peace Corps as the top choice for talented Americans interested in service by reaching a new generation of potential Volunteers and streamlining the application process (Supports Strategic Goal One)*

Rationale: Ensuring the quantity and quality of applications for Volunteer service is a top priority in order to provide development assistance responsive to local community needs through the work of skilled Volunteers.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress toward this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Modify business processes and the application platform to allow individuals to apply to specific countries, sectors, and/or departure months to improve transparency and to better account for applicant preferences
- Establish quarterly application deadlines to pool and rank candidates and select the most qualified and competitive individuals for service
- Reduce the length and complexity of the Volunteer application form and process
- Conduct market research to better understand the goals, preferences, and key motivators and demotivators of our core prospects (18 to 26 year-olds), future prospects (15 to 17 year-olds), and their primary influencers (such as family and friends)
- Gather periodic feedback from in-process applicants, providing direct customer feedback throughout the application process to identify opportunities for improvement
- Invest in a national public relations and marketing campaign to build awareness of the Peace Corps among our core prospects
- Pilot and evaluate recruitment and selection models, including the increased use of low-cost, high-impact campus-based recruiters; the expansion of field-based recruiters; and the utilization of returned Peace Corps Volunteers in recruitment
- Identify new staffing models to fully leverage the efficiency gains of the new DOVE application processing system
- Utilize the Peace Corps Response program to fill requests for highly-skilled and experienced Volunteers
- Fully implement the Volunteer Core Expectations assessment and applicant rating tools to close the feedback loop between applicant assessment and Volunteer success and assess Volunteer quality

External Factors: The Peace Corps must be a viable and attractive service opportunity in an environment in which talented Americans have an increasingly wide array of service opportunities from which to choose.

3. *Development Impact: Advance community-based development by strengthening the capacity of local individuals and communities, focusing on highly-effective technical interventions, and leveraging strategic partnerships (Supports Strategic Goal One and Two)*

Rationale: The Peace Corps delivers development assistance to interested host countries through the work of Volunteers. In conducting their work, Volunteers utilize effective technical interventions to share their skills and experience with local individuals and communities and work collaboratively to strengthen local capacity to address development challenges. In addition, the Peace Corps partners with other U.S. government, non-governmental, and private sector development partners to leverage resources, knowledge, and skills to expand the reach of programs and to enhance Volunteers' impact.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Complete the revisions of project frameworks to focus Volunteer activity on highly-effective technical interventions
- Fully implement standardized technical training to ensure Volunteers have the skills required to meet community needs
- Periodically monitor community need through Project Advisory Committees to ensure project activities appropriately address local development challenges
- Expand counterpart training opportunities to provide counterparts and community members with tools for working effectively with Volunteers and to strengthen the capacity of host country individuals and communities
- Engage with agency strategic partners to provide Volunteers with technical training, tools, and mentoring

External Factors: The Peace Corps is not the only development actor in the communities in which Volunteers serve. Measuring the precise impact of Volunteers in a complex development space is challenging.

4. Cross-Cultural Understanding: *Build a deeper mutual understanding of other cultures by developing long-lasting connections between American and host country individuals and communities (Supports Strategic Goal One, Two, and Three)*

Rationale: Volunteers advance cultural understanding by living and working in local communities and by sharing their experiences with family, friends, and the American public during their service as well as upon their return to the United States. Their work is enriched and expanded when American and host country individuals and communities have meaningful conversations, develop strong relationships, and sustain their interactions.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Encourage currently-serving and returned Volunteers to leverage new technology, including social media, to facilitate communication between Americans and local individuals and communities
- Train Volunteers on managing cultural differences during their service
- Redesign the Coverdell World Wise Schools - Correspondence Match program to allow Volunteers to independently identify their own matches prior to departure and expand educator access to information based on their curriculum needs
- Assess cross-cultural effectiveness at different points during Volunteer service
- Expand the redesigned Coverdell World Wise Schools - Speakers Match program

External Factors: The world is inter-connected today in ways far different from when the Peace Corps was founded in 1961. There are new opportunities to utilize modern communication tools and technologies to better connect Americans and people in the countries where Volunteers serve both during and after a Volunteer's service.

5. Continuation of Service: *Fully engage returned Volunteers in advancing the mission by fostering a vibrant alumni network and providing opportunities for them to share their experiences and promote volunteerism and public service (Supports Strategic Goal Three)*

Rationale: Over 210,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers since 1961 – a significant “domestic dividend” of skilled and dedicated individuals who continue serving the American public and the overseas communities where they lived and worked long after they return home. The Peace Corps provides opportunities for returned Volunteers (RPCVs) to continue advancing the Peace Corps mission, including encouraging them to share their experiences with family, friends, and the public; build and maintain connections between American and host country individuals and communities; and, recruit the next generation of Volunteers. Additionally, a significant number of RPCVs continue their service as international development or foreign policy specialists. The agency prepares RPCVs to continue their service academically and professionally by aiding in the transition back to the United States.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Establish a “Third Goal” and RPCV engagement strategy, similar to a college alumni model
- Obtain a waiver from OMB on contacting RPCVs or have interested RPCVs sign a request to participate in Peace Corps surveys
- Develop more effective methods for contacting RPCVs, including improving the quality of RPCV contact information
- Develop an RPCV survey to gather regular feedback from returned Volunteers, track their professional and academic progress, and develop tools to help them continue their service in their profession
- Actively promote agency-sponsored “Third Goal” activities, including Peace Corps Week and Coverdell World Wise Schools, to RPCVs and RPCV groups
- Establish a competitive internship program where exceptional RPCVs compete for year-long positions within the agency and its strategic partners
- Provide career services to returned Volunteers, including resume-writing, career fairs, and an online job portal

External Factors: Restrictions on contacting the American public through the Paperwork Reduction Act constrain the agency’s ability to regularly communicate with the RPCV population.

6. Diversity and Inclusion: *Actively recruit, support, and retain a diverse workforce and Volunteer corps and build an inclusive culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness (Supports Strategic Goal One, Two, and Three)*

Rationale: Volunteers serve as cultural ambassadors in the local communities where they live and work. To promote a better understanding of America, it is critical that Volunteers fully represent the rich diversity of the United States' population. In addition, since many staff are drawn from the pool of returned Volunteers, the diversity of the Volunteer corps contributes to building a more diverse workforce. To harness the unique perspectives of a diverse workforce and Volunteer corps, the agency will foster an inclusive organizational culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Develop a marketing and communications strategy to increase the diversity of the Peace Corps Volunteer and staff applicant pools
- Collaborate with local and regional groups aligned with under-represented populations to increase applications
- Develop a system for field staff to recommend returned Peace Corps Volunteers to serve as recruiters for under-represented populations
- Monitor applicant drop-out rates by race/ethnicity, sex, age, and other demographic elements to identify potential barriers
- Develop change agents to build an inclusive culture at all levels
- Support Employee Resource Groups to help recruit, retain, and support staff
- Provide tools and training to staff to increase their awareness and engage them in preventing the types of discrimination and harassment issues that can occur within a multicultural environment
- Identify and mitigate economic barriers to Volunteer service

External Factors: As the Peace Corps primarily attracts recent college graduates, efforts to increase the diversity of the Volunteer population are dependent on the diversity of individuals completing an undergraduate degree. Similarly, staff diversity is influenced by the diversity of both the Volunteer population and the U.S. Civilian Labor Force. Additionally, the lack of a commercial student loan deferment option makes it difficult for those with commercial student loan debt to serve.

7. Site Development: *Establish an environment conducive to Volunteer success through an integrated approach to developing effective projects, identifying work sites, and successfully collaborating with local partners (Supports Strategic Goal One and Two)*

Rationale: Before a Volunteer arrives in their country of service, the Peace Corps works to ensure that he or she will have meaningful work opportunities that meet the development needs of the community and that there are local partners interested in working alongside the Volunteer. The agency also verifies that each work site can support Volunteers' safety, security, and medical and mental health needs. This foundation allows Volunteers to focus on building relationships and strengthening local capacity when they arrive in the community.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Develop and implement post-specific site development criteria, policies, and procedures and standardize specific criteria agency-wide where appropriate
- Improve the staff to Volunteer ratio to provide more staff capacity for site development and to meet Volunteer support requirements
- Identify, prepare, and train host families, host agencies, and counterparts on how to live and work effectively with Volunteers, including setting expectations for the role of the Volunteer
- Establish well-defined and meaningful work opportunities for Volunteers by selecting sites with well-documented need
- Assign Volunteers to sites where there is a good match between the Volunteers' skills and experience and the needs of local communities
- Utilize Project Advisory Committees to regularly monitor projects to ensure they address local development needs

External Factors: Each host country, and individual community, provides unique infrastructure and cultural challenges that limit the agency's ability to apply common site development standards uniformly across all posts.

8. Train-Up: Develop a highly-effective Volunteer corps through a continuum of learning throughout service *(Supports Strategic Goal One and Two)*

Rationale: High-quality training is central to the success of Volunteers. The majority of Volunteers are recent college graduates with limited professional experience. The Peace Corps invests in technical training to ensure that Volunteers have necessary skills to draw upon, contribute to, and support local capacity-building efforts. Training also focuses on building Volunteers' language skills and cultural acuity to provide them with tools to be successful in their technical work and to facilitate cultural integration and understanding. Providing a continuum of learning throughout service ensures that Volunteers receive the tools and support they need at key milestones throughout their service.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Evaluate and refine the training materials developed through the Focus-In/Train-Up strategy
- Develop and implement a global Volunteer continuum of learning strategy for the six project sectors that emphasizes self-directed learning, utilizes coaching and mentoring, fosters communities of practice, and includes individual learning plans for Volunteers
- Establish terminal learning objectives and measure Volunteer's progress towards achieving them throughout service, including at the end of pre-service training and close-of-service
- Develop formal certificates and exam processes to document the training received by Volunteers and the expertise and proficiency levels achieved

External Factors: An increase in required training content, including critical safety and security training, reduces the amount of time that can be spent on technical and language training. Additionally, trainers at many posts are temporary hires, and the retention of these trainers year-to-year is challenging.

9. High-Performing Learning Organization: *Cultivate a high-performing learning organization by investing in professional development for staff, improving staff retention, and strengthening institutional memory (Supports Strategic Goal One, Two, and Three)*

Rationale: The Peace Corps' unique law limiting the vast majority of U.S.-based and American overseas staff to five-year appointments encourages a constant influx of fresh ideas and innovation. It also produces significant human capital and knowledge management challenges. At the same time, host country national staff often serve longer than American staff and have very different professional development needs. To successfully advance the Peace Corps mission, the agency must be a high-performing learning organization that invests in staff development, retains employees to the fullest extent of the law, and draws from a strong institutional memory to learn from its past and circulate best practices.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Implement a continuum of professional development for all staff
- Review and standardize the on-boarding process for all staff, including office/post-based orientation and training beyond new employee orientation
- Develop a mentoring and coaching program for host country national staff that focuses on effective strategies for working with Volunteers and advancing in their careers
- Increase funding for all staff to participate in training
- Encourage cross-training to provide coverage and continuity when vacancies occur
- Establish a pool of trained staff with clearances who are poised to fill vacancies if overseas staff in critical positions leave unexpectedly
- Modify policy to require the development of transition documents during the staff off-boarding process
- Improve the off-boarding process by collaborating with federal government employers to place staff with non-competitive eligibility
- Develop a strategy for improving the retention of training staff
- Experiment with providing year-round employment opportunities for temporary host country national staff in high-turnover positions
- Improve the efficiency of common tasks by developing a repository of standard operating procedures and templates for standard post operations

External Factors: The law that generally limits staff to five-year appointments produces significant transaction costs and creates challenges to building a high-performing learning organization.

10. Global Community of Practice: *Enable seamless communication and collaboration for all Volunteers and staff by modernizing and integrating information technology systems and leveraging the innovation of Volunteers and staff in the field (Supports Strategic Goal One, Two, and Three)*

Rationale: Information technology (IT) is changing rapidly; often, Volunteers in the field and their local partners are using more modern technology than the Peace Corps can support. At the same time, the agency maintains several legacy applications to manage information at headquarters and overseas posts that do not fully meet the evolving needs of the Peace Corps. The confluence of these factors causes inefficiencies in how Volunteers and staff communicate and collaborate, inhibiting the agency's ability to advance its mission. A global community of practice, supported by a flexible IT system and invigorated by field-based experimentation and problem solving, will leverage modern technology to break down barriers to communication and collaboration.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

Modernize and integrate IT systems

- Complete the Platform Modernization project to modernize and integrate legacy applications and improve access to quality data
- Modernize the Peace Corps Intranet to improve information sharing among staff
- Create a consolidated Volunteer, RPCV, and staff contact database to improve data quality and access to contact information
- Establish a clearly-defined, transparent risk assessment strategy related to the utilization of new technologies
- Provide guidance, training, and access to staff on new methods of communication commonly used by Volunteers, such as social media, in order to facilitate communication and collaboration
- Design flexible systems and processes to be compatible with evolving technology (e.g. mobile devices)

Leverage the innovation of Volunteers and staff in the field

- Leverage Volunteer-driven solutions emerging from the Peace Corps Innovation Challenge to improve how the agency uses technology to deliver on its mission
- Encourage Volunteer and staff collaboration across projects and posts through electronic means
- Fully implement a knowledge sharing platform for Volunteers, staff, and returned Volunteers to store, categorize, search, and analyze project and administrative content and identify promising practices

External Factors: A major IT challenge for the Peace Corps is to utilize rapidly evolving technology, such as mobile technology, to increase communication and collaboration among Volunteers, posts, and headquarters while maintaining operational stability, security, and reliability in a complex operational and regulatory environment.

11. Measurement for Results: Advance the agency's ability to measure progress, improve performance, and demonstrate impact through integrated monitoring, reporting, and evaluation practices (Supports Strategic Goal One, Two, and Three)

Rationale: Monitoring, reporting, and evaluation practices are conducted at all levels within the agency. A coherent, integrated approach that combines training, regular reviews of ongoing programs, the collection of baseline data, and well-documented pilots will provide staff with rigorous, high-quality data. That data can then be used to inform decision-making at both the program and agency level, identify promising practices, foster transparency, and advance performance improvement.

Strategies and Activities: The agency will advance progress on this strategic objective through the following strategies and activities:

- Develop an agency-wide evaluation agenda each fiscal year to lay out the priorities for further exploring major management and performance challenges
- Fully implement the agency-wide Evaluation Framework to provide guidance to posts and headquarters offices on monitoring, reporting, and evaluation practices, including piloting and experimentation parameters
- Provide monitoring, reporting, and evaluation training to Volunteers, overseas staff, and counterparts
- Develop the analytical skills of headquarters and overseas staff responsible for data analysis by modifying the requirements for key positions when recruiting for new positions or backfilling positions and by providing targeted training on analytical competencies
- Collect or construct baseline data prior to new country and new community entries and at the point of project turnover to assess Volunteer impact

External Factors: The federal government and international development community have expanded their emphasis on the use of research and evaluation in decision making – supported by recent Executive Orders, the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, and directives from the Office of Management and Budget. Further, during a time of fiscal challenges, federal agencies are expected to clearly demonstrate the impact of their programs.