



2015 Global Counterpart Survey Summary Report



About the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning

It is the mission of OSIRP to advance 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 2015, the Peace Corps launched the first globally representative survey of its local counterparts.¹ These individuals work side by side with Volunteers in their host communities and are essential to advancing the agency mission to advance world peace and friendship through community-based development and cross-cultural understanding. The results of this survey are remarkable for two reasons.

First, these are very robust opinion data. For several years, the Peace Corps has used various research approaches in an attempt to better understand and demonstrate broadly how counterparts perceive the work and value of 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 positive bias among respondents, significantly increased data quality. 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.**²

Second, 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 host country staff—through the Host Country Staff Survey (HCSS)—comprises the most comprehensive lens through which to view agency impact in recent memory.

Summary of Findings

These data provide reliable evidence that the Peace Corps is having a positive effect on Goal One and Goal Two. Counterparts describe a structured relationship with Volunteers, characterized by frequent, though not daily, communication focused on project work.

What specifically do Peace Corps counterparts say about their work with Volunteers?

- Eighty-three percent of counterparts reported an increase in local capacity as a result of Volunteers' work. According to counterparts, Volunteers' most important contribution is helping to improve the day-to-day work skills of others, followed closely by inspiring others and suggesting new ways to meet goals.
- Nine in ten counterparts learned something new about the United States or Americans through their work with Volunteers. What they learned most about, by a considerable margin, was Americans' approach to work, followed by American values and diversity.
- Counterparts felt Volunteers enter their service with a strong understanding of their work goals. They indicated that, while Volunteers were also well-prepared to complete their work tasks and make friends easily, they were significantly less prepared to speak the local language.
- When asked what the Peace Corps could do to have a greater impact in their community, counterparts placed less emphasis on increasing Volunteers' technical capacity and more on increasing their level of cultural integration in the communities where they serve.

¹ The 2015 survey builds 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.

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

Counterparts and Volunteers

The Peace Corps invests considerable resources in identifying, preparing, and—in some cases—training counterparts to work with Volunteers. It is therefore important to know which of these individuals continue to work with Volunteers once they enter the community. Although the survey design assumed that respondents may not necessarily be the counterparts formally assigned to Volunteers, about eight in 10 were. Posts needed to ask Volunteers to identify who their current primary work partner was in only about two in 10 cases in order to include them in the survey.

S5. How was this counterpart identified?	Sample Member
N	397
Counterpart assigned to Volunteer	81%
Other contact suggested by Volunteer	18%
Other (Please Specify How Contacted Here)	1%

Counterparts are more evenly split between men and women than are 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. About one-third of them know English well enough to have been interviewed for the survey in that language.

S6. What is the counterpart's gender?	Sample Member
N	397
Male	52%
Female	48%

S7. What is the counterpart's approximate age?	Sample Member
N	397
25 or younger	5%
26–40	55%
41–55	33%
56 or older	8%

S4. In which language was this survey administered?	Sample Member
N	397
English	33%
French	9%
Spanish	23%
Other (Please Specify Language Here)	36%

On average, counterparts have worked with Volunteers for three and a half years, meaning that many have worked with more than one generation of Peace Corps Volunteers. They interacted with

Volunteers on work-related tasks an average of 16 days per month, with half working more than 19 days per month with a Volunteer.

These data suggest a structured relationship between counterpart and Volunteer, in which both parties communicate frequently, though not daily, in service of a common goal. A review of open-ended responses to a request for suggested improvements, however, paints a more nuanced picture. Two common themes emerge from the qualitative data: 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. For instance, one counterpart suggested that their Volunteer should be "teaching English to government [employees] in their free time."

Using Rankings to Measure our Impact

Counterparts are partners of the Peace Corps and, as such, have opinions about the agency's effectiveness. They also have multiple incentives to respond positively when asked to express their opinion of Peace Corps Volunteers and the work they do. 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 reducing positivity bias.

Goal One: Capacity Development

Previous research on counterparts³ showed that they cite a variety of activities and concepts when asked about Volunteers' impact. Some of these activities and concepts are consistent with the agency's mission, such as developing skills within their community, and some are not, such as direct financing or increased prestige. In examining Volunteers' Goal One impact in the 2015 survey, five of the most commonly cited proofs of impact as determined through previous research were presented to survey respondents for selection as their Volunteers' areas of largest or smallest impact. The following table shows the order in which counterparts ranked the five ways a Volunteer can impact their work.

³ Research included the agency's Host Country Impact Studies, accessible [here](#), early pilot counterpart surveys, and the first worldwide survey conducted in 2014 (utilizing a census approach).

Goal One Impact	
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?	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 the Peace Corps’ mission as expressed in Goal One—those that describe some element of capacity development in host communities—cluster at the top of the rankings. “Helped to improve the day-to-day work skills of others,” the most direct expression of capacity development among the items, was the way in which Volunteers had the largest impact on counterparts’ work, followed closely by inspiring better work and suggesting innovation. In total, 83 percent of counterparts selected one of these three items as the single largest impact of Volunteers.



These data provide evidence that counterparts see advances in Goal One as a result of working with Volunteers, which is also evidenced by counterparts' open-ended responses. When asked what they would recommend to increase the Peace Corps' impact, 6 percent made no suggestion. As one counterpart commented, "I don't have any suggestions. The Volunteer did a great job."

The most frequent type of recommendation (22 percent of counterparts) relating broadly to Goal One was for focusing increased effort and soliciting increased community input into what the Peace Corps refers to as "site development." Specific suggestions included investing more time for community needs assessments, identifying multiple counterparts earlier in service, and better matching Volunteer skills and personalities with site requirements. In the words of one respondent: "Counterparts should have more of a say in the Volunteer assignment process."

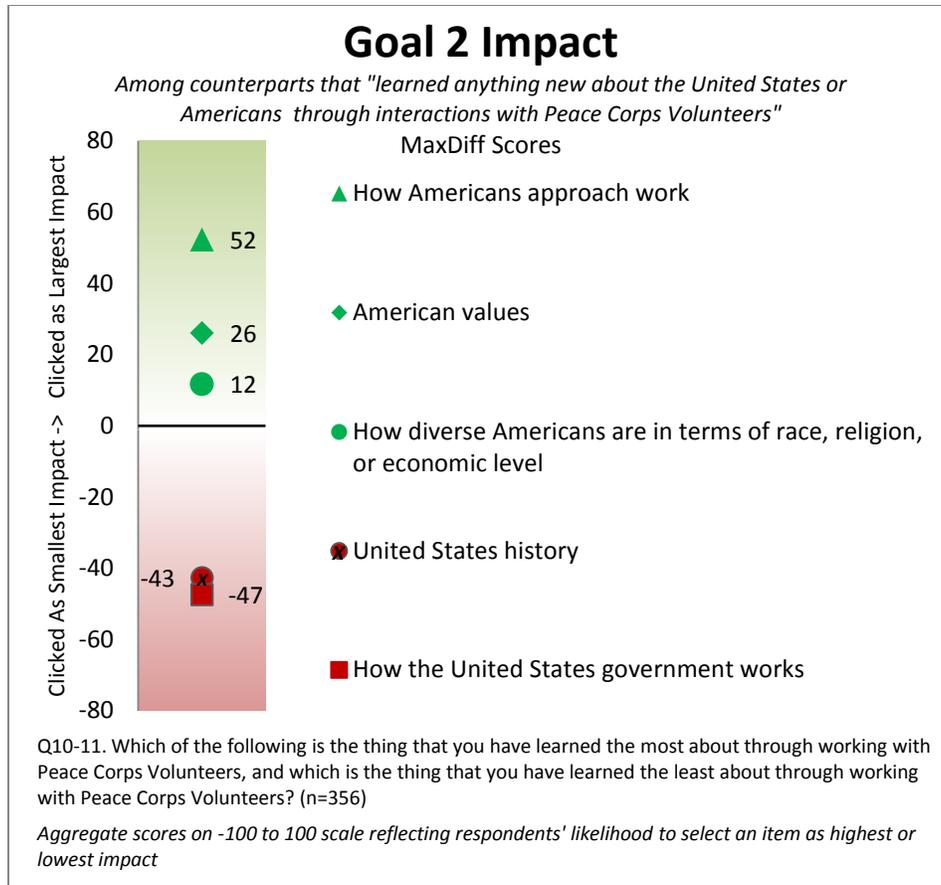
Goal Two: Understanding of Americans

While there may still be some positivity bias in responding to a direct yes/no question about increased understanding of Americans, it is likely that *any* new exposure to Americans will increase that understanding to some degree. Indeed, 90 percent of counterparts reported that they learned something new about the United States or Americans through their interaction with Peace Corps Volunteers when asked directly.

Even more interesting, however, is what they reported having learned. When the "best-worst scaling" approach was again used to measure counterpart sentiment related to Goal Two, the items most closely associated with Goal Two and the actual cross-cultural work of the Volunteer 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>	
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?	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 there is overlap between the concepts of “approach to work” and “values,” and even “diversity” and “values,” the difference in scores between the first- and second-ranked items makes a great deal of sense considering that it is through completing work processes that counterparts and Volunteers have their most direct cultural interchange.

In reviewing the open-ended data from counterparts on their recommendations for improving operations, only 3 percent of counterparts explicitly recommended an increased emphasis on sharing American culture and values by the Volunteer (e.g., “Volunteers should introduce more cultural differences between America and China”). However, this small number belies the implicit suggestion of an increased emphasis on sharing America with the world in the far larger number of comments recommending greater cultural integration generally.

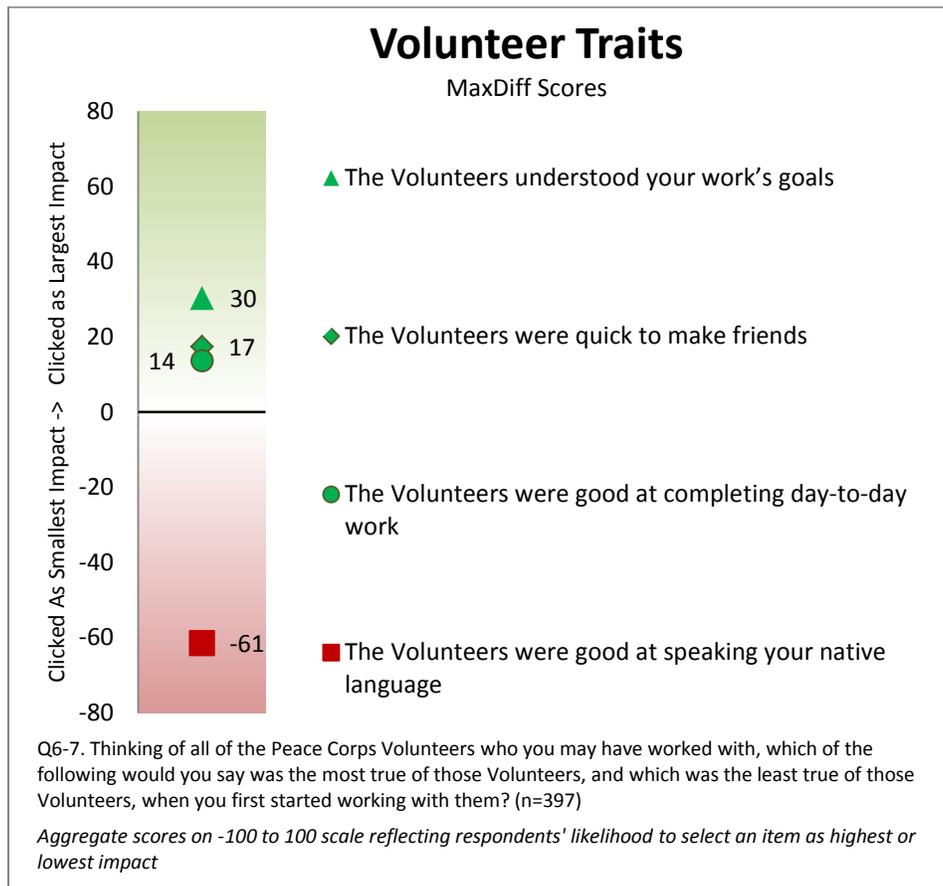
Volunteer Traits and the Question of Integration

In addition to Volunteer impact, the 2015 Global Counterpart Survey also investigated the traits that Volunteers exhibit through their work. Interestingly, the primacy of work seen in the counterpart ranking of Volunteer traits is reflected again in responses related to Goal Two (understanding Americans).

Counterparts felt that the “most true” statement regarding Volunteers, when they first began working together, was that they understood the goals of the counterparts’ work, followed by the opinion that they were “quick to make friends.”

Volunteer Traits	
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?	Overall Rank by Counterparts
Questionnaire Item	
The Volunteers understood your work’s goals	1
The Volunteers were quick to make friends	2
The Volunteers were good at completing day-to-day work	3
The Volunteers were good at speaking your native language	4

When comparing the MaxDiff scores for this exercise, the top-ranked value (“the Volunteers understood your work’s goals”) was about twice as likely to be selected as a top choice as the second-ranked value about friendliness. Volunteers’ language skills, however, ranked way down at the bottom of the list.



Counterparts Want *More!*

In reviewing open-ended recommendations for improving the Peace Corps' work, increased access to and interaction with Volunteers was cited in some form by over 43 percent of counterparts—the largest suggestion by an overwhelming margin.

Some counterparts asked for more time with Volunteers, either in the length of their service or their daily work (e.g., “The two-year term [is] short,” and, “She should come to the health center more often, at least three to four days per week”), but more frequently, they suggested greater integration through cultural engagement, often measured in qualitative terms. Fifteen percent of counterparts recommended this increase in *cultural* engagement specifically, more than any other single type of recommendation made in the survey (e.g., “Integrate with the community, not just the school staff,” “Talk to people more, and visit them,” “They should experience what the community is really like ... because a lot of times they are scared to engage, so they isolate themselves.”).

The open-ended responses also provided suggestions for how to increase integration. Nearly 11 percent of counterparts recommended that Volunteers should arrive with a better understanding of the culture and conditions in which they will be living and/or be sufficiently open-minded to be able to adapt quickly. For example, one counterpart suggested, “Sometimes it's difficult for them to understand rural life. They should have more training about what rural areas are like, so they can work better when they are faced with the reality of rural life.”

Conclusion

When asked to rank elements of their experience with Volunteers, counterparts rank those related to work most highly, sometimes by a wide margin. At the same time, they recommend deeper cultural integration more frequently than they do greater technical acuity when asked what would increase the impact of Volunteers. There were almost twice as many suggestions for what would be considered enhanced intercultural competence as there were for enhancements in specific areas of technical knowledge. While technical knowledge is clearly a critical factor in the Peace Corps' ability to deliver on its mission, this survey demonstrates that counterparts are particularly sensitive to the importance of intercultural competence for the successful exchange of that knowledge.

Appendix A

Methodology

The Global Counterpart Survey opened on May 4 and closed on July 3, 2015, and was designed as a random sample survey. Since no global list of counterparts existed, a frame of serving Volunteers was developed based on current administrative data. A total of 400 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 meaning of the questions, the implementation of MaxDiff questions, and correct procedures for data entry during or after the interview through a series of webinars delivered by the survey manager in the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning.

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 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 regions and based on best practices in quantitative survey research, experiences gained from two years of pilot testing, and the constraints previously mentioned. In addition to using MaxDiff questions, the survey focused on counterpart experiences with all 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



2015 Global Counterpart Survey
Random Sample Characteristics

A breakdown comparing the 397 random sample to the population of eligible Volunteers whose counterparts could qualify to be interviewed is below.

Subregion	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
Latin America	23.6%	24.2%	0.6%
Caribbean Basin	2.4%	2.5%	0.1%
Pacific Islands	4.6%	3.5%	-1.1%
East Asia	12.0%	12.6%	0.6%
Europe & MENA	12.6%	13.9%	1.3%
Sub Saharan Africa	44.8%	43.3%	-1.5%

Sector	All Eligible	Selected for Sample	Difference
Education	40.0%	39.0%	-1.0%
Health	25.2%	24.2%	-1.0%
Environment	10.0%	9.8%	-0.2%
Community Economic Development	10.7%	11.8%	1.1%
Youth in Development	10.5%	10.8%	0.4%
Agriculture	3.5%	4.3%	0.8%

Age	Pop	Sample	Difference
Median	25.00	25.00	0.00
Mean	28.07	27.53	-0.54

Ethnicity	Pop	Sample	Difference
White	60.5%	62.2%	1.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.0%	4.3%	0.3%
Hispanic	8.7%	6.8%	-1.9%
Black or African-American	6.2%	6.5%	0.4%
Two or more races	3.2%	3.3%	0.1%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.1%	0.0%	-0.1%
Missing	17.3%	16.9%	-0.4%

Gender	Pop	Sample	Difference
Female	63.4%	63.2%	-0.1%
Male	36.6%	36.8%	0.1%