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The Peace Corps: Current Issues

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Summary

Founded in 1961, the Peace Corps has sought to meet its legislative mandate of promoting world peace and friendship by sending American volunteers to serve at the grassroots level in villages and towns in all corners of the globe. As of end September 2015, about 6,919 volunteers were serving in 63 nations.

In 2016, the 114th Congress will consider the President's annual funding request for the Peace Corps, changes to the Peace Corps authorization legislation, and related issues.

On December 18, 2015, the President signed into law H.R. 2029 (P.L. 114-113), the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2016, providing the Peace Corps with $410 million in FY2016, matching the Administration request and an 8% increase over the FY2015 level.

On February 9, 2016, the Administration submitted its FY2017 budget request, providing $410 million for the Peace Corps, the same level as in FY2016.

The last Peace Corps funding authorization (P.L. 106-30), approved in 1999, covered the years FY2000 to FY2003. On November 21, 2011, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 was signed into law (P.L. 112-57). It put into place a number of safeguards to address and reduce the incidence of volunteer rape and sexual abuse.

A comprehensive assessment of Peace Corps operations was published in June 2010. It made 64 recommendations supporting a six-point strategy that was adopted by the agency and has guided agency actions since then. In March 2014, the Peace Corps published its strategic plan for the years FY2014 through FY2018. It contains strategic objectives and performance goals associated with them that will also guide the agency in the next few years.

Current issues include the extent to which there is available funding for Peace Corps expansion, whether volunteers are able to function in a safe and secure environment, volunteer access to abortion, and other issues.

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Recent Developments

On February 9, 2016, the Administration submitted its FY2017 budget request to Congress, including $410 million for the Peace Corps, the same level as in FY2016.

On December 18, 2015, the President signed into law H.R. 2029 (P.L. 114-113), the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2016, providing the Peace Corps with $410 million in FY2016, matching the Administration request and $30.5 million, an 8% increase, over the FY2015 level.

Introduction

Generally viewed positively by the public and widely supported in Congress, the Peace Corps is the U.S. agency that provides volunteer skills internationally. In 2016, the 114th Congress will consider the President's FY2017 funding request for the Peace Corps, changes to the Peace Corps authorization legislation, and related issues. This report will be up. ed as events warrant.

Background

Founded in 1961, the Peace Corps sends American volunteers to serve at the grassroots level in villages and towns across the globe to meet its three-point legislative mandate of promoting world peace and friendship by improving the lives of those they serve, helping others understand American culture, and sharing their experience with Americans back home. To date, nearly 220,000 Peace Corps volunteers have served in 141 countries. As of the end of September 2015, 6,919 volunteers were serving in 63 nations.[1] Carrie Hessler-Radelet is the current Director of the Peace Corps.

In addition to its basic two-year tour of duty, the Peace Corps introduced in 1996 an initiative called Peace Corps Response (formerly Crisis Corps). Drawing on former volunteers and expanded in 2012 to include those who have never been Peace Corps volunteers, this program provides short-term (usually three to six months) emergency, humanitarian, and development assistance at the community level with nongovernmental relief and development organizations.[2] More than 2,500 Peace Corps Response volunteers have served in 70 countries, including post-tsunami Thailand and Sri Lanka and post-earthquake Haiti. At the end of FY2015, there were 263 Peace Corps Response volunteers in 31 countries.

Congressional Actions

FY2017 Appropriations

On February 9, 2016, the Administration issued its FY2017 budget request, proposing $410 million for the Peace Corps, the same level as in FY2016. According to the Peace Corps, the request level would support an overall level of 7,700 volunteers.

[1] Supporting Peace Corps operations are about 1,110 U.S. direct hire staff, 187 of whom are overseas, and about 2,935 locally hired employees at overseas locations (data as of September 2015 provided by Peace Corps).

[2] In Peace Corps parlance, volunteers are never "former" volunteers, but always "returned" volunteers, as even at completion of overseas service, they are still responsible for achieving the Third Goal of sharing their experience with Americans back home. This report refers to any volunteers no longer the direct responsibility of the Peace Corps as either former volunteers or returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs).

FY2016 Appropriations

On February 2, 2015, the Administration issued its FY2016 budget request, proposing $410 million for the Peace Corps, $30.5 million more than the FY2015 level, an 8% increase. According to the Peace Corps, the request level would support an additional 450 volunteers and an overall level of about 7,500 volunteers. On December 18, 2015, the President signed into law H.R. 2029 (P.L. 114-113), the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2016, providing the Peace Corps with $410 million in FY2016, matching the Administration request and $30.5 million, an 8% increase, over the FY2015 level.

Authorization Legislation

Despite repeated efforts during the past decade, Congress has not enacted a new Peace Corps funding authorization. The last such Peace Corps authorization (P.L. 106-30), approved in 1999, covered the years FY2000 to FY2003. Appropriations bills, however, routinely waive the requirement of authorization of appropriations for foreign aid programs, as the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (P.L. 114-113, Division K, §7022) did in the case of FY2016 unauthorized foreign aid program appropriations, including those for Peace Corps.

The last time both House and Senate took action to authorize funding levels for the Peace Corps was in 2011. Neither bill, S. 1426 or H.R. 2583, saw floor action. In 2011, Congress also took a number of steps to address Peace Corps volunteer safety and security concerns in authorization measures. The Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-57, S. 1280) was signed into law on November 21, 2011. This bill is discussed in the "Safety and Security" section below. No major Peace Corps funding or program authorization legislation was enacted from 2012 to 2015.

In June 2013 and January 2014, the Senate and House, respectively, approved legislation (S. 230) authorizing the Peace Corps Commemorative Foundation to establish a work in Washington, DC, commemorating the mission of the Peace Corps. The President signed it into law (P.L. 113-78) on January 24, 2014. A design competition is currently underway.

On May 6, 2014, the Peace Corps Equity Act of 2014 was introduced by Representative Lowey in the House (H.R. 4578) and by Senator Shaheen in the Senate (S. 2291). It sought to amend the Peace Corps Act to apply the same abortion restrictions to volunteer health care insurance as currently apply to federal employee health plans, allowing for exceptions in the case of rape, incest, or endangerment to the life of the mother. While it did not achieve passage in the 113th Congress, the FY2015 and FY2016 appropriations contain a provision that accomplishes the same end for those fiscal years. See "Volunteer Access to Abortion" below for further discussion.

Peace Corps Policy and Administration

Comprehensive Assessment

In June 2010, the Peace Corps submitted to Congress a "comprehensive agency assessment" in response to a directive included in the FY2010 State, Foreign Operations appropriations (P.L. 111-117, Division F).[3] As requested by the conferees (H.Rept. 111-366), the 204-page document

[3] The report can be found at http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/opengov/PC_Comprehensive_Agency_Assessment.pdf.

specifically addressed a range of issues of concern to Congress regarding Peace Corps operations and procedures. While the report was thorough in its treatment of these issues, it should be noted that some points on which Congress had expressed an interest in recent years were not requested to be substantively addressed in the report. The report did not address such issues as safety and security, deferment of student loans, utilization of information technology, mechanisms for soliciting volunteer views, the adequacy and impact of post-service benefits, and the accomplishments and plans of the Peace Corps Response Program.

The assessment report's 64 recommendations were a blueprint for change in the agency. As a result of the assessment team's findings, the Peace Corps adopted a strategy that has guided its operations since 2010. Some key elements of this reform program are noted below.

Country selection. The Peace Corps moved to rationalize its selection of host countries by establishing clear criteria for entry. In part, this effort sought to address congressional concerns that the selection of Peace Corps host countries may not sufficiently reflect U.S. interests. From 2002 to 2010, the Peace Corps received letters of request or inquiry from 27 countries where there was no current program. How the agency determined whether to establish a program had not been a transparent and well-documented process, leading some to conclude that it was not a rational process. The assessment team found that certain essential conditions had always been applied to the question of country entry—the extent of host country commitment, the safety and security of volunteers, and the level of resources available to the Peace Corps. Other key considerations had included compatibility of country objectives with those of Peace Corps, presence of potential projects, cost effectiveness, and congruence with U.S. national interests.

The assessment team recommended that the Peace Corps conduct a formal annual portfolio review that would look not just at applicant countries but at all existing programs and apply specific criteria to judge where the agency should operate. In addition to existing criteria, the team recommended that two new criteria be introduced into deliberations on country entry and termination—a measure of the level of development, such as the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Index, and a measure of potential volunteer impact. Since 2010, portfolio reviews have become an annual practice, informing the agency's strategic planning and budget guidance to country posts for the next year. These reviews helped lead to decisions to increase volunteer numbers in Africa and close programs in Antigua/Barbuda, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Romania, St. Kitts/Nevis, Suriname, Honduras, and Turkmenistan in FY2013. The agency closed the Palau program in FY2014, opened a new program in Kosovo, and reopened its program in Mali. It plans to open programs in Burma, Comoros, and Timor-Leste in FY2015. Currently, there are 22 outstanding country requests for new programs.

Volunteer skill composition: generalists. In its new strategy, the Peace Corps chose to recognize and make the best use of one of its most notable characteristics—a volunteer force composed largely of generalists. In 2010, as for much of its history, about 85% of volunteers were recent college graduates and 84% under the age of 30. While some have argued that the Peace Corps should alter its composition to meet the increasing needs of developing countries for educated specialists, the assessment team determined, with some exceptions noted below, to accept demographic reality and the constraints of career paths in the United States that would likely limit the number of older specialists available to it. Instead, the team recommended steps be taken to strengthen the quality of the volunteer force available by improving its technical, language, and cultural training. It called for hiring full-time training staff at country posts and providing more training time to volunteers. In response, the Peace Corps increased pre-service training by about one week in FY2011 compared to FY2009.

Volunteer project focus. The new strategy suggested that, in order to maximize the effectiveness of the large pool of generalists recruited by the Peace Corps, it would be best to focus on a more

limited range of project areas. In the period leading up to the report, volunteers were assigned to one of six broad technical sectors—education, health, agriculture, environment, youth development, and business/IT. Within those sectors, volunteers worked in 50 different technical programs, from which 211 different project plans had been developed, perhaps meeting specific needs in a developing country, but for each of which volunteers in that project had to be trained. The assessment team argued that by focusing more on what volunteers do best, what communities most want, and what volunteers can best be trained to do, the agency could maximize the capacity of volunteers and the impact they may have. The recommendation, therefore, was that Peace Corps management assess and determine a more narrow framework of work assignments and strengthen technical training in those areas—a so-called Focus in/Train up strategy. However, the assessment did not suggest which technical sectors or program areas should be eliminated or maintained. After the report was issued, an agency workshop proposed reducing the number of projects from 211 to 60. The agency was reportedly on track to reduce the number to 161 by FY2014.[4] The Peace Corps has identified 57 project activity areas within the six technical sectors on which to concentrate resources and identify performance indicators by which to judge results. It has developed 126 volunteer training packages based on best practices along with guidance to field staff on implementing effective training.

Volunteer skill composition: specialists. The assessment addressed the exception to the rule of use of generalists. Both to meet needs of countries that might require greater expertise and experience and to best attract and utilize those volunteer applicants that possess a higher level of skills than the norm, the assessment team recommended that some innovations be made in Peace Corps programs. Meeting report recommendations, the Peace Corps Response Program more than doubled in size and was opened to highly qualified individuals without previous Peace Corps experience. The Response Program has maintained its current flexible time commitments (i.e., less than the usual 27 months for regular volunteers) and is being used in both regular Peace Corps countries as well as in countries where there is no standard Peace Corps presence. Under the Response Program, a Global Health Services Partnership was established to recruit physicians and nurses as adjunct faculty in medical and schools in developing countries—the first such volunteers were posted to Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda in July 2013.

Volunteer recruitment. As part of the strategy's support for efforts to better meet developing country volunteer needs and attract the best volunteer candidates, the agency has sought to improve its recruitment and placement process and strengthen diversity outreach. A new online application platform was launched in 2012, and a new medical review management system was established to facilitate medical clearance. A new, simpler application form was introduced in 2014.

"Third goal." The strategy called for efforts to more fully and effectively address the so-called "third goal," the legislative mandate that Peace Corps volunteers "help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans" (Peace Corps Act, P.L. 87-293, §2). This objective has always received less attention and funding (less than 0.5% of the FY2015 budget) than the other two goals of assisting development and promoting understanding of Americans to the people served, both aspects which focus on the agency's work abroad. In 2010, the "third goal" was singled out by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in its report on the Peace Corps Improvement and Expansion Act (S. 1382, and incorporated into S. 2971) as an area that had not received enough priority. "Third goal" activities include efforts by volunteers and former volunteers, sometimes forming country member groups, to convey their experiences

[4] USAID Inspector General, *Statement on the Peace Corps' Management and Performance Challenges*, November 27, 2013, p. 140.

through blogs, public talks, community service in the United States, and charitable fundraising. Most prominent among agency-sponsored activities is the Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools program, which connects volunteers with school classrooms throughout the United States. The assessment report recommendations included increasing funding for these purposes; establishing an intern program that would place exceptional volunteers in international NGOs, business, and U.S. agencies; and developing an agency-wide strategy to achieve "third goal" objectives.

Since the report was published, the agency established an Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services. It has encouraged greater participation by volunteers and former volunteers; in 2013, hundreds of returned volunteers spoke at schools in their communities. The number of schools participating in third goal activities rose by nearly 200% between FY2009 and FY2013.[5]

Management and operations. In addition to policy decisions encompassed by the report, the assessment called for strengthening of Peace Corps management and operations. It recommended updating the agency's strategic plan to include the new strategies in the assessment report and a wide range of improvements to the planning and budgeting process, staffing, evaluation and oversight, recruitment procedures, training, and provision of health care to volunteers. Since the report was issued, a new monitoring and evaluation policy for the whole agency has been developed, including agency-wide standard indicators to allow reporting on common results across projects and countries. Efforts are being made to build new partnerships with international organizations, U.S. government agencies, and others. In September 2012, the Peace Corps established its first global partnership with a corporation, Mondelez (formerly Kraft Foods), to support agriculture and community development. In an effort to strengthen volunteer medical care, new Regional Medical Officers were hired and a Quality Improvement Council was established. To increase staff effectiveness, Peace Corps instituted a reorganization of country desk positions, a results-oriented performance appraisal program, and a revision of tour lengths to five years from the original 30 months. A number of changes have also been made to safety and security operations (discussed under "Safety and Security" below).

Congressional reaction to the assessment report and strategy. In its report accompanying the FY2011 State, Foreign Operations Appropriations (S.Rept. 111-237), the Senate Appropriations Committee noted support for several of the assessment report's recommendations, including incorporating U.S. national interests and budget considerations into new criteria for volunteer placement, focusing resources on key areas, and attracting a wider diversity of highly skilled volunteers by establishing new technical programs through an expanded Peace Corps Response Program. The Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-57) amended the Peace Corps Act to add a section requiring annual portfolio reviews and monitoring and evaluation processes such as those that came out of the assessment.

Strategic Plan: FY2014-FY2018

In March 2014, the Peace Corps issued its strategic plan for the period FY2014 through FY2018.[6] The plan poses 11 strategic objectives meant to further the agency's three long-standing legislative goals of improving the lives of those they serve, helping others understand American culture, and sharing their experience with Americans back home. In many ways, the objectives are a continuation of reform efforts established in the comprehensive assessment exercise. For instance, under the objective of making Peace Corps the "service opportunity of choice" for

[5] Peace Corps, *Performance and Accountability Report FY2013*, p. 55.

[6] Published in its FY2015 Congressional Budget Justification document. Available at http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open/documents/.

Americans, the agency addresses recruitment challenges by proposing to fully meet post requests for volunteers, increase applications to the Peace Corps, and reduce the time it takes to go from application to acceptance. The objective of "train up" continues efforts to improve training, especially language and technical training.

The plan also introduces some new elements of emphasis in agency management. The objective of "advancing community-based development outcomes" commits Peace Corps to strengthen and document the connection between volunteer projects and developmental gains. Under the objective of "site development," the agency promises to focus on the sometimes neglected importance of establishing worthwhile projects and a work environment appropriate for volunteers. "Measurement for results" denotes an agency effort to ascertain levels of progress and performance through improved monitoring and evaluation practices, including collection of high-quality data. Each new objective has associated with it several performance goals with identified measures of progress in achieving them, the results of which will be published in the years to come.

Let Girls Learn

On March 3, 2015, President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama announced a collaboration with the Peace Corps on a Let Girls Learn initiative, which seeks to expand access to education for girls internationally. The Peace Corps will train volunteers and community leaders in support of girls' education. It will establish a new Peace Corps Let Girls Learn Fund to help support volunteer activities in this sphere. The agency will also recruit and place at least an additional 650 volunteers to work on the initiative. These efforts will first target 11 countries: Albania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Georgia, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, Togo, and Uganda.

Issues

Budget and Expansion

In 1985, Congress made it the policy of the United States to maintain "consistent with programmatic and fiscal considerations," a Peace Corps volunteer level of at least 10,000 individuals.[7] Such numbers had not been reached since the 1960s, and, although the objective has been reiterated by three Presidents since 1985—Clinton (1998), Bush (2002), and Obama (2010)—Congress has not provided the necessary funding.

Although there appears to be broad support for the agency, when considering proposed funding increases, Congress has had to weigh whether sufficient funds were available vis-à-vis other foreign aid priorities to warrant appropriating the amounts sought for the Peace Corps. Despite a 2002 expansion initiative by President Bush to double its size to about 14,000 volunteers within five years, the Peace Corps saw only a 16% increase in volunteer numbers between 2002 and 2009. In early 2010, the Obama Administration proposed a more modest objective of a 9,400-volunteer force by 2012 and 11,000 by 2016. Annual incremental funding increases and a significant congressional bump-up in FY2010 funding helped lead to an FY2010 volunteer level of 8,655, a 13% increase from the previous year and the highest level since 1970. At end of September 2011, volunteer numbers reached 9,095.

[7] Peace Corps Act (P.L. 87-293), as amended, Section 2(b). The section was added by Section 1102(a) of the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-83).

Table 1. Peace Corps Budget: FY2006-FY2017 Request

Fiscal Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 req.
Request ($ mil.)	345.0	336.7	333.5	343.5	373.4	446.2	439.6	374.5	378.8	380.0	410.0	410.0
Appropriation ($ mil.)	319.9	319.7	330.8	340.0	400.0	374.3	375.0	356.0	379.0	379.5	410.0	—
Total Volunteers	7,749	8,079	7,876	7,671	8,655	9,095	8,073	7,209	6,818	6,919	—	—

Sources: Peace Corps and CRS.

Notes: Figures reflect across-the-board rescissions and supplemental appropriations; they do not count transfers. Total volunteers are number at end of the fiscal year. Volunteer numbers include those funded by both Peace Corps appropriations as well as transfers from other agencies, such as the State Department President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). In FY2015, 767 volunteers were funded by PEPFAR with a transfer of $24.2 million, an amount not included in the table.

Between FY2011 and FY2014, Peace Corps appropriations retreated and the volunteer level dropped to 6,818, a 25% decline. The FY2016 budget marks the first significant rise in the Peace Corps budget since FY2011, an 8% increase. According to the FY2016 budget request, that increase should bring a volunteer level of 7,500.The Peace Corps FY2014 to FY2018 strategic plan calls for a 10,000 volunteer level by FY2018.

Volunteers, Programming, and Support

A continual concern for Congress over the years has been Peace Corps management, including how the Peace Corps addresses the make-up of the volunteer force, programming of volunteer project assignments, and support of volunteers in implementing those projects. This concern is particularly acute in the context of expansion efforts, as it was used as an argument by Congress for not meeting the George W. Bush Administration's funding requests that would enable doubling the size of the agency. Congress responded similarly to Obama Administration expansion plans. The 2009 House Appropriations Committee report on the FY2010 State, Foreign Operations appropriations (H.Rept. 111-187) asked the Peace Corps to review its management practices in order to accommodate larger numbers of volunteers, and the Senate's Peace Corps Improvement and Expansion Act of 2009 (S. 1382) similarly aimed to ensure that the Peace Corps was prepared to deal with the whole range of management issues such an expansion would entail. As noted above, the FY2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-117, Division F) required the Peace Corps to submit a report assessing its operational model and proposing a strategy for reform. Peace Corps has implemented those reforms since 2010.

The Volunteer Force

The volunteer force *is* the Peace Corps. Aspects of its composition have been a focus of interest in Congress over the years.[8] In FY2015, 63% of volunteers were women, 28% were minorities, 94% were single, and the average age was 28.[9]

[8] Data in this section are drawn from the Peace Corps *Fact Sheet* and CRS communications with Peace Corps.

[9] In FY2015, Peace Corps volunteers were 7% African American, 5% Asian or Pacific Islander, 13% Hispanic/Latino (continued...)

In the past several years, Peace Corps made an objective of increasing the number of volunteers aged 50 and older, which, some would argue, might lead to a more specialized work-experienced volunteer force. However, the proportion of volunteers aged 50 or over appears to have changed in a positive direction only slightly. In FY2015, 7% of volunteers were 50 or older, compared with 5% in FY2008 (the number of older *applicants* represented 5% of applicants in FY2015).

Volunteers work in a range of sectors—in FY2015, 37% in education, 24% in health and HIV/AIDS, 10% in the environment, 10% in youth, 8% in community economic development, 6% in agriculture, and 4% in Peace Corps Response activities. Given the depth of development needs in the region, it is not surprising that 45% of volunteers work in sub-Saharan Africa. Another 26% work in Latin American and the Caribbean, 16% in Asia and the Pacific, 10% in East Europe and Central Asia, and 3% in the Middle East and North Africa.

According to the June 2010 assessment report, 85% of volunteers were recent college graduates with little professional experience. The Peace Corps, while adept at recruiting generalists and providing them with sufficient training to carry out useful assignments in these fields, has not emphasized the provision of highly skilled professionals, such as doctors, agronomists, or engineers, which, many argue, more accurately reflects the current needs of developing countries and which the agency might be under greater pressure to supply if it intends to expand volunteer numbers.[10] Weighed against this view is the belief that the Peace Corps is an agency of public diplomacy as much as it is a development organization, and personal interaction and demonstration of U.S. values is as important as providing specialized technical expertise.

As noted earlier, the 2010 assessment team recommended that the Peace Corps accept the demographic features that have long characterized the volunteer force and, while embracing the use of generalists, seek to strengthen their capabilities through better training and more focused sector activities. At the same time, the team recommended continued efforts to utilize experienced and skilled volunteers through innovative approaches. In particular, it suggested that the Peace Corps Response Program be used as a platform for new, more flexible, programs that may accommodate different types of volunteers. The new Global Health Services Partnership providing doctors and nurses is one result.

Whatever the skill sets and demographic characteristics sought by the agency, it is the recruitment of volunteers with appropriate skills and willingness to live in unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable conditions that is essential to the overall mission of the Peace Corps. A substantial spike in applicants and those expressing interest in applying since September 11, 2001, made it easier for the Peace Corps to meet its recruitment goals. In FY2009, 15,386 applied to be volunteers compared with 8,897 in FY2001. More recently, however, application volume declined. In FY2011, 12,206 applied to be volunteers, and in FY2013, 10,131. Following a significant change in the application process in 2014—introduction of a shorter form and applicant ability to choose their country and sector of service—the number of applications rose to a 22-year record high of 17,336 and 22,956 in FY2015, the highest level since 1975.

(...continued)

origin, 5% two or more races, and less than 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native.

[10] One exception was its Mexico program, launched in 2004, where the Peace Corps was able to provide specialized technical volunteers offering skills in water and environmental engineering.

Programming and Support

The Peace Corps has been criticized in the past for providing inadequate programming and support of volunteers. This view was reflected in a 1990 Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation.[11] It noted that some volunteers had little or nothing to do or had spent six or more months developing their own assignments, without benefit of site visits by Peace Corps staff. The GAO attributed the programming problem to a failure of planning, evaluation, and monitoring systems. Since then, the Peace Corps has addressed these weaknesses with systematic approaches to project development, annual project reviews, and increased opportunities for site visits and volunteer feedback. While most volunteers do rate their overall experience highly, volunteer anecdotal accounts suggest some degree of poor programming and staff support still occur. The 2015 volunteer survey found that 17% of volunteers did not think they had enough to do at their work site, and 23% were dissatisfied with support received from Peace Corps staff in site selection and preparation. Recurrent problems identified in Inspector General country program evaluations are site development, volunteer training, and coordination with country ministries and project partners.[12] One sign of volunteer dissatisfaction—the cohort resignation rate—has improved in recent years, with 15.6% of those who entered service in FY2011 resigning prior to completing their term, representing a steady annual decrease from the FY2005 cohort level of 27.6%.[13]

The 2010 assessment report discussed but did not thoroughly explore causes of volunteer dissatisfaction and resignation, noting that 97 recommendations to reduce it had been made in previous studies since 1969, many of which had been adopted. It also did not address questions regarding the quality of volunteer assignments. However, the report did offer possible avenues that might help correct these concerns, such as improving volunteer and staff training, developing initiatives to better utilize skilled and experienced volunteers, encouraging third-year extensions, and strengthening program evaluation and oversight. The agency has adopted reforms in all these areas.[14]

Safety and Security

The safety and security of volunteers has long been a prime concern of the Peace Corps. Because of where they live and work, Peace Corps volunteers appear to many Americans to be especially vulnerable to crime. The threat of anti-American terrorism in the years following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, has increased that perception. Fears were further raised in 2003 when the *Dayton (Ohio) Daily News* ran a series of reports suggesting that the Peace Corps was failing in its obligation to provide adequate security; a congressional hearing was held and

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[11] *Peace Corps: Meeting the Challenges of the 1990s*, May 1990, NSIAD-90-122.

[12] *Peace Corps, 2015 Annual Volunteer Survey Results*, p. 17, 26; Peace Corps Office of Inspector General, *Recurring Issues: OIG Post Audits and Evaluations Fiscal Years 2009-2011*, April 2012, p. 6.

[13] "A resignation is a decision made by the volunteer and trainee who no longer wish to continue in the Peace Corps." Assessment Report, pp. 171-172; Peace Corps, *FY2014 Early Termination Report*, February 2015. The resignation rate is a sub-set of the early termination rate and excludes termination of service factors such as medical separation and interrupted service due to evacuations. The cohort rate, as opposed to the annual rate, measures the behavior of volunteers who entered on duty during a specific fiscal year and who did or did not complete their entire term of service. Because it follows this cohort of volunteers to the end of service, the FY2011 results are only now available in the FY2014 report.

[14] See the Peace Corps *Performance and Accountability Report for Fiscal Year FY2013* for the multiple actions taken by the agency. Available at http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/policies/docs/.

legislation was approved by the House (H.R. 4060, June 2004) that sought to address this concern.[15]

In January 2010, the issue of safety and security received renewed public attention due to two reports on the ABC television newsmagazine *20/20*, one concerning the 2009 murder of volunteer Kate Puzey in Benin and the other addressing the rape of volunteers. The stories catalogued incidents illustrating failure of some Peace Corps staff to maintain whistleblower confidentiality, inaction in response to volunteer reports of threatening behavior, a lack of compassion for victims of crime, a tendency to blame the victim, and insensitivity to the parents of a crime victim. Following the *20/20* reports and a House hearing on the subject held on May 11, 2011, more rape victims came forward with stories further suggesting disregard for the victims and a possible institutional failure to offer adequate support. While expressing support for the Peace Corps mission, First Response Action, an organization representing volunteer victims, sought stronger actions to reduce assault incidents and better address the needs of victims where assaults occur. In 2011, several pieces of legislation were introduced in the House and Senate that sought to answer this call. On November 21, 2011, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 was signed into law (P.L. 112-57).

Peace Corps Inspector General Report

The concerns generated by the *20/20* reports and victims' accusations followed on the heels of a Peace Corps IG report on volunteer safety and security released in April 2010.[16] While noting that the Peace Corps had made significant changes in its safety and security program since 2002 and "maintained a much larger safety and security workforce than comparable international nongovernmental organizations," the IG "identified multiple areas where Peace Corps needed to improve," mostly including a lack of effective processes, standardized training, and skilled personnel to manage and implement discrete aspects of its safety and security programs. Perhaps most troubling, the IG found numerous instances between FY2004 and FY2009 of re-occurring evaluation findings, such as posts not thoroughly completing housing/site inspections, volunteers engaged in unsafe behaviors, various cities where volunteers were in locations considered unsafe, and inadequate emergency action plans, suggesting problems in safety and security program compliance over the long term.[17]

The IG report made 28 recommendations. Among these were that the Peace Corps Director should establish clear lines of authority to ensure that the Office of Safety and Security can manage the safety and security program; that the Director adequately track Safety and Security Officer recommendations to make sure they are being met; that the chief compliance officer establish a process to identify re-occurring problems and take steps to address them; that the role, number, and salaries for Safety and Security Coordinators be reviewed to ensure agency needs are met; that the Office of Safety and Security develop and implement a training program for Officers and Coordinators based on needed skills; that the Office of Safety and Security develop a comprehensive plan that includes the agency's safety and security strategy, risks, and policies to mitigate those risks; that volunteers be provided with a consolidated handbook on the basic principles of volunteer safety during the recruitment and staging process and be required to sign a code of conduct on basic security principles before departure; and that a formal agreement be

[15] "Casualties of Peace," *Dayton Daily News*, October 26-November 1, 2003.

[16] Peace Corps, Office of the Inspector General, *Final Audit Report: Peace Corps Volunteer Safety and Security Program*, IG-10-08-A, April 2010.

[17] Ibid., pp. i, 17.

reached with the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security clarifying roles of each agency.[18] As of July 2012, the Peace Corps had implemented all 28 of the IG's recommendations.

The Peace Corps Response to the *20/20* Stories and Victims' Charges

Following the television programs, the Peace Corps Director issued statements noting that the programs did not accurately reflect Peace Corps policy and practice regarding the safety and security of volunteers. The Peace Corps immediately issued a formal *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims*, which included, among other things, promises to treat victims of sexual assault with dignity and respect, to take appropriate steps to provide for their safety, to support volunteers in their recovery, and to work closely with them in decisions regarding continuation of service. The Director of the Peace Corps also offered apologies to the family and friends of the murder victim if the agency could have been more compassionate.[19]

In addition to noting its ongoing efforts to improve on its safety record and better serve volunteers, the Peace Corps pointed out that volunteers themselves in their annual survey had regularly reported feeling "usually safe" and "very safe" where they live and where they work, in 2010 respectively 87% and 91%.[20] The Peace Corps asserted that its operating procedures in response to sexual assault and training offered to volunteers had resulted in "a significant decline in the incidence of rape and major sexual assault among Volunteers over the past 14 years."[21] According to the Peace Corps, between 1997 and 2009 there was a 27% decline in the incidence of rape and attempted rape and a 34% decline in the incidence of major sexual assault.[22]

A statement issued by the Peace Corps claimed that there were procedures in place "to respond quickly and compassionately to Volunteers."[23] Further, the Peace Corps had taken a number of steps to improve its procedures in the months following the *20/20* reports. These are discussed below.

Processes to Address Safety and Security

The Peace Corps has always had in place various procedures and processes to address the issues of volunteer safety and security, but such efforts have been particularly pronounced in the past decade. Following a 2002 Government Accountability Office (GAO) finding that "Peace Corps efforts to ensure effective implementation of its safety and security policies have produced varying results," the Peace Corps launched numerous initiatives—including establishment of a stand-alone Safety and Security Office to direct and oversee all security programs, deployment of U.S. direct hire field-based safety and security officers and local hire safety and security personnel, and appointment at headquarters of regional desk officers and a chief compliance officer to monitor compliance with new security rules and procedures.[24] Nonetheless, GAO

[18] Ibid., pp. 49-51.

[19] *Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams' Response to ABC News' 20/20*, January 14, 2011 and January 27, 2011.

[20] *Peace Corps 2010 Annual Volunteer Survey*, p. 25.

[21] *Peace Corps Fact Sheet: Sexual Assault Prevention and Response*, January 2011.

[22] *Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams' Response to ABC World News*, January 27, 2011. It should be noted, however, that the 2010 Annual Report on Volunteer Safety published in May 2012 shows a 64% increase in the rate of female rape per female volunteer years from the previous year, although the category of female major sexual assault fell by 7%.

[23] *Peace Corps Fact Sheet: Sexual Assault Prevention and Response*, January 2011.

[24] Government Accountability Office, *Peace Corps: Initiatives for Addressing Safety and Security Challenges Hold Promise, but Progress Should be Assessed*, GAO-02-818, July 2002, p. 2.

reported on March 24, 2004, that some "unevenness" in compliance with procedures mandated by headquarters likely remained.[25]

Peace Corps has taken additional steps to improve safety and security, most notably, in 2008, establishing a Sexual Assault Working Group to examine risk factors, analyze training, and adopt best practices to reduce risk and address victims' needs. In late 2010, the agency approved establishment of a victim's advocate position in response to suggestions from returned volunteers. The advocate supports volunteer victims of crime, from the crime through post-Peace Corps service, including helping them sort through the red tape to receive post-service health benefits. In February 2011, the Office of Safety and Security issued a document on *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Major Sexual Assault* that captures the policies and procedures in place to assist and respond to volunteer rape or major sexual assault. Peace Corps staff are expected to serve as advocates for the volunteer and ensure "that what happens next is in the Volunteer's best interest."[26] This includes ensuring a safe environment and emotional stability, providing medical care and counseling, and helping preserve a volunteer's right to prosecute. Since April 2012, over 350 staff abroad were trained on these protocols. Many of these efforts were strengthened or added to as a result of the 2011 Kate Puzey Volunteer Protection Act discussed below.[27]

In two November 2013 reports on the status of implementation of aspects of the Kate Puzey Act—specifically sexual assault training and the agency's sexual assault policy—the Peace Corps IG found that "many elements of the Peace Corps' sexual assault policy are in place, but full compliance with the Kate Puzey Act remains a work in progress." Sexual assault training conforming to existing best practices was being provided to all 27-month volunteers. Peace Corps management concurred with all the IG recommendations.[28] In its October 2015 report, the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council, made up of 19 outside experts on the subject and RPCVs, lauded the agency's commitment to Kate Puzey Act mandates.[29]

In 2015, the volunteer survey showed 92% and 96% felt "safe," or "very safe" where they live and work.[30]

In November 2015, the director of the Office of Victims Advocacy, Kellie Greene, was suspended without pay pending dismissal in March by Peace Corps, for reasons that, according to news reports, included creating a hostile work environment, micromanaging cases, and rebuking other staff members. Ms. Greene argued that her advocacy position was viewed as adversarial by Peace Corps staff. Supporters have circulated a petition calling for her reinstatement that has about 200 signatures of current and returned volunteers.[31] A replacement is being sought.

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[25] Testimony of Jess T. Ford, Director, International Affairs and Trade, General Accounting Office, before the Committee on International Relations, *Peace Corps: Status of Initiatives to Improve Volunteer Safety and Security*, GAO-04-600T, March 24, 2004.

[26] Peace Corps, Office of Safety and Security, *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Major Sexual Assault*, February 2011, p.12.

[27] *Progress in Implementation of the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011*, November 2012, on the Peace Corps website at http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/Progress_on_Implementation_of_Kate_Puzey_Act_Nov_2012.pdf.

[28] Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General, *Peace Corps Sexual Assault Risk-Reduction and Response Training*, November 2013, and *Peace Corps Volunteer Sexual Assault Policy*, November 2013.

[29] Peace Corps Sexual Assault Advisory Council, *Annual Report*, October 2015, under the heading "volunteer safety" at http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open/documents/ .

[30] Peace Corps, *2015 Annual Volunteer Survey*, p. 20, available under the heading "volunteer survey reports" at http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/open/documents/ .

[31] Lisa Rein, "Volunteers' Petition Seeks Reinstatement of Advocate," *Washington Post*, p. A13, January 12, 2016.

Legislation on Safety and Security

Congress responded to the safety and security issue by holding a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on May 11, 2011; a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on October 6, 2011; and by introducing several pieces of legislation amending the Peace Corps Act, most notably S. 1280, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011, reported on September 21, 2011, by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (S.Rept. 112-82), approved by the Senate on September 26, 2011, and by the House on November 1, 2011, and signed into law on November 21, 2011, as P.L. 112-57.

In addition, Congress considered a companion bill to S. 1280, H.R. 2337, ordered reported by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on September 21, 2011; Title X of H.R. 2583, the Foreign Relations Authorization for FY2012, reported on July 21, 2011, by the House Foreign Affairs Committee; and H.R. 2699, the Peace Corps Volunteer Service Improvement Act of 2011, reported by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on September 21, 2011.

The Kate Puzey Act (P.L. 112-57) pulls together most of the language on safety and security issues as is contained in these other bills. It specifies that volunteers receive sexual assault risk reduction and response training, including training tailored to the country of service covering safety plans in the event of an assault, medical treatments available, medevac procedures, and information on the legal process for pressing charges. Peace Corps applicants are to be provided with a historical analysis of crimes and risks in the proposed country of service. Trainees will be provided with contact information of the Inspector General for purposes of reporting violations of the sexual assault protocol and of the victims advocate. The bill requires that sexual assault protocols and guidelines be developed by the Peace Corps director and training be provided to staff regarding implementation of the protocol. Volunteers can request removal from a site, which would then be evaluated for its safety. Sexual response teams are established to respond to reports of sexual assault by volunteers. Alternative reporting systems are established that allow volunteer anonymity. A victims advocate position is established to assist sexually assaulted volunteers and facilitate access to available services. A Sexual Assault Advisory Council is established composed of returned volunteers and experts on sexual assault to review training and policy to ensure they conform to best practices. An annual survey is to be conducted regarding the effectiveness of Peace Corps programs and safety. A process is established to allow reports of incidents while protecting the confidentiality of volunteers. It is required that the Peace Corps and State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security agree to a memorandum of understanding on the duties and obligations of each with respect to protection of Peace Corps volunteers and staff. And, a report on safety and security is to be submitted annually to Congress.

Instability, Terrorism, and Evacuations

The Peace Corps has been particularly concerned in recent years with threats of terrorism and civil strife and has responded by upgrading communications, testing emergency action plans, and other security measures. The Peace Corps addresses these larger security concerns, including natural disasters or civil unrest, through country-specific Emergency Action Plans (EAP) that are to be in place in each Peace Corps country. The plan, to be tested and revised annually, defines roles and responsibilities for staff and volunteers, explains standard policies and procedures, and lists emergency contact information for every volunteer in country.

Evacuations and closure of missions to ensure the well-being of volunteers have constrained the growth of the Peace Corps. Since 2000, volunteers have been evacuated from at least 17 countries. Most often, evacuations were due to cases of political instability and civil unrest. In April 2012, volunteers were withdrawn from Mali and the program suspended in response to the

political and security crisis in that country. It reopened in 2014, but was temporarily suspended again in November 2015. Niger has been similarly suspended since January 2011. Start-up of the new Peace Corps program in Tunisia continues to be delayed due to the attack on the U.S. Embassy in that country in September 2012 and ongoing political and security uncertainties. In 2014, programs were suspended in Kenya and Ukraine due to security concerns, and in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone due to the Ebola outbreak. Peace Corps Response volunteers are currently serving in Liberia. In March 2015, Peace Corps announced a temporary suspension of its Jordan program due to the "current regional environment."

Crime is another factor in agency evacuation decisions. The Peace Corps suspended its 117-volunteer program in Kazakhstan in mid-November 2011 "based on a number of operational considerations," according to an agency press release. Volunteer reports suggest that rapes and terrorist attacks may be the specific cause.[32] Due to concerns regarding the prevalence of drug and organized crime-related violence in Central America, the Peace Corps announced in December 2011 that it would send no new volunteers to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador while it conducted a review of its operations and the security environment in those locations. In the case of Honduras, serving volunteers were withdrawn on administrative leave and completed service while the review was ongoing. The review was completed in February 2012, and the program in Honduras was formally suspended in September 2012 and closed in FY2014. Peace Corps resumed sending new volunteers to Guatemala and El Salvador in 2013 at reduced levels. To address safety concerns in Guatemala and El Salvador, volunteer operations were consolidated in safer geographical areas, alternative volunteer transportation was devised, and training and support was enhanced. However, in January 2016, the El Salvador program was suspended due to an increase in violence in that country.

Despite the appeal of using Peace Corps volunteers to convey U.S. culture and values directly to the grassroots of Islamic countries, many of these countries of U.S. foreign policy interest might be considered unsafe for Americans over the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, according to the Peace Corps, about 17% of all volunteers are serving in 11 countries with Muslim populations of over 40%.[33] In FY2010, the Peace Corps launched a program in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world. In general, the Peace Corps has argued that the close interpersonal relationship between volunteers and members of their host country community helps to make them safe.

Volunteer Access to Abortion

Since 1979, the annual Peace Corps appropriations language has prohibited funds from being used to pay for abortions. The issue of volunteer access to abortion has received attention recently, because the Administration's budget requests for FY2014 and succeeding years included proposed language that would allow health insurance coverage for volunteers in cases of rape, incest, and when the mother's life is endangered.

The argument for paying for abortions under the above restricted circumstances is that private insurance offered to federal employees, including those administering the Peace Corps program, covers abortions in the case of rape, incest, and when the mother's life is endangered. Volunteers, however, are considered federal employees only for certain very narrowly defined purposes such as legal liability, baggage transport, and check cashing eligibility. Abortions therefore can be

[32] See Peace Corps Online, November 18, 2011, at http://peacecorpsonline.org/.

[33] Data as of May 2013 provided by Peace Corps.

excluded from volunteer health care although all other care—primary care, hospitalization, medical evacuation, all prescriptions including birth control and dental care needs—is provided directly by the Peace Corps either through its Medical Officer or insurance.[34]

Opponents of the proposal argue that its adoption would be an expansion of abortion services by the federal government.[35]

Authorization legislation reflecting the Administration's 2013 proposal that would have amended the Peace Corps Act to apply the same abortion restrictions to volunteer health care insurance as currently apply to federal employee health plans was introduced in both House and Senate in the 113th Congress—S. 813 (Lautenberg), H.R. 4578 (Lowey), and S. 2291 (Shaheen). No similar authorization has been introduced in the 114th Congress.

In June 2014, both House and Senate Appropriations Committees approved State, Foreign Operations appropriations bills for FY2015 that would allow exceptions to the prohibition on funding abortions in the case of rape, incest, or endangerment to the life of the mother. This provision was adopted in the final version of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (H.R. 83, P.L. 113-235, Division J). However, as appropriations language, the provision applied only to FY2015 funding. The provision is repeated in the FY2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113).

Volunteer Health Care

Periodically, concerns have been raised regarding the quality of health care provided volunteers during service as well as health care benefits offered RPCVs who have illnesses connected to their service.

The Peace Corps provides serving volunteers with comprehensive health care—routine care provided by a medical officer at each post and emergency care provided as deemed advisable, including medical evacuation to the United States. The agency has taken a number of steps in recent years to improve the quality of this care—providing direct communication between volunteers and medical professionals at headquarters, improving the supervision and hiring of medical officers, initiating electronic medical records, and strengthening malaria prevention and treatment efforts, among other moves. The 2014 Volunteer Survey found 78% of volunteers satisfied or very satisfied with medical support provided by the Peace Corps.[36]

One concern of serving volunteers has been the use of mefloquine, an anti-malarial medication that may incur serious side-effects. In March 2015, a former volunteer sued the Peace Corps for providing the drug without appropriate warnings. The Peace Corps disputes this point and further notes that its policy is to monitor closely for tolerance and to offer changes in medication if requested.[37]

RPCVs with maladies attributable to their Peace Corps service have long complained of inadequate support from Peace Corps and considerable frustration trying to obtain the health

[34] The Peace Corps' authorization language (P.L. 87-293, as amended, §5(e)) requires that Peace Corps provide health care to volunteers during service.

[35] Lisa Rein, "Peace Corps Volunteers Could Get Health Insurance Coverage for Abortions," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2013.

[36] Peace Corps, *2014 Annual Volunteer Survey Results: Global Tabular Report*, p. 22.

[37] Joe Palazzolo, "Former Peace Corps Volunteer Sues Over Malaria Drug," *Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2015; Peace Corps, *Recommendations to the Peace Corps Director from the Post-Service Healthcare Task Force*, November 30, 2015, Appendix II, at http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/policies/docs/.

services for which they are eligible. Former volunteers with volunteer-related health problems are supposed to file claims under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) and work with the Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) to have those claims adjudicated. The Peace Corps itself is responsible for reimbursing DOL. The length and complexity of the established process, compounded by OWCP's perceived lack of understanding of volunteer service and the types of illnesses characteristic of work in developing nations, are particular concerns of affected RPCVs.[38]

To address these concerns, the Peace Corps in recent years has hired staff to assist volunteers with their claims and attempted to strengthen communication with DOL and shorten the claims process. In November 2015, a Healthcare Task Force, established by the Peace Corps, offered a proposed set of actions based on 28 recommendations previously made by GAO, Peace Corps, and nongovernment interest groups. Among other steps, the Task Force suggests that the Peace Corps seeks legislation to raise the ceiling on disability compensation, improves explanation of post-service health benefits to volunteers and RPCVs, and provides greater assistance to volunteers on post-service options regarding accessibility to insurance under the Affordable Care Act.[39]

The Five-Year Rule

The five-year rule is an issue long discussed in the Peace Corps community and periodically addressed by Congress. It is the subject of a 2012 report by the agency's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) that suggests Congress may again have a role to play.[40] And it is noted under the challenge, excessive personnel turnover, in the OIG's FY2015 annual statement of management and performance challenges as a continuing issue of concern.[41]

The five-year rule, which became law in August 1965 in an amendment to Section 7(a) of the Peace Corps Act (P.L. 87-293, as amended), limits most Peace Corps staff to five years' employment. The same amendment allows a one-year extension if personally approved by the Director. A subsequent amendment in 1985 permits 15% of U.S. direct hires a further extension of two and a half years, meaning that these individuals could be employed for a total of eight and a half years. In addition, staff can only leave the Peace Corps and be rehired after an amount of time equal to their preceding term of service has passed, in effect limiting a route around the rule. The five-year rule does not apply to personal service contractors or foreign nationals. Direct hire staff involved in the safety of volunteers, including the new victims advocate position, and the Inspector General and OIG staff are also exempt as a result of congressional action in the FY2004 appropriations (P.L. 108-199) and the 2011 Kate Puzey Volunteer Protection Act, respectively.

Implementation of the five-year rule is seen to have had both positive and negative effects on the performance of the Peace Corps. Positive aspects are to a large extent those associated with the

[38] GAO, *Returned Peace Corps Volunteers: Labor and Peace Corps Need Joint Approach to Monitor Access to and Quality of Health Care Benefits*, GAO-13-27, November 2012; GAO, *Workers' Compensation: Health Benefits Programs for Peace Corps Volunteers and for Employees of U.S. Agency for International Development Contractors*, GAO-16-28R, October 30, 2015.

[39] Peace Corps, *Recommendations to the Peace Corps Director from the Post-Service Healthcare Task Force*, November 30, 2015, at http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/policies/docs/.

[40] Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General, *Final Evaluation Report: Impacts of the Five-Year Rule on Operations of the Peace Corps*, IG-12-05-E, June 2012.

[41] Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General, *Semiannual Report to Congress, April 1 to September 30, 2015*, pp. 12-15.

original arguments in favor of the rule's adoption; they continue to have force. Negative aspects following adoption of the rule have driven the addition of limited extensions and exemptions to its application. But they continue to cause concern.

Positive features of the five-year rule possibly include that it

- creates a workforce generally perceived as vibrant, youthful, and energetic;
- because of high turnover, permits the hiring of more returned Peace Corps volunteers (53% of all direct hires between 2000 and 2010 were RPCVs and 78% of overseas leadership posts), whose recent experience in the field provides high-quality policy input;
- generates a flow of staff departing for other international agencies that increases the influence of the Peace Corps on foreign policy, a benefit originally suggested by Sargent Shriver;
- facilitates removal of poorly performing staff;
- provides a performance incentive for currently serving volunteers who might in the future want to obtain employment in the agency; and
- creates possible cost savings from not accruing long-term salary and benefit obligations.

Negative features of the five-year rule largely derive from the higher turnover and short tenure of staff. Instead of a turnover of 20% each year, implied by the five-year rule, the actual rate is much higher—25% to 33% each year since 2004 according to the OIG, quadruple that of the rest of the federal government. The average length of service is three years. These figures suggest that individuals are looking outside of the Peace Corps for more stable employment long before their term expires. The possible resulting negative impact includes

- poor institutional memory;
- frequent staffing vacancies;
- no long-term career incentives to encourage high performance;
- insufficient time for constantly departing staff to identify, develop, test, and implement innovative ideas;
- disincentive for management to invest in training and professional development;
- diminished management capacity, the rule being noted as a factor in multiple previous OIG and GAO reports focusing on volunteer support, contract, and financial management; and
- high staff recruitment costs—costs strictly attributable to five-year rule turnover estimated by the OIG to be between $12.6 million and $15.5 million in the period 2005 through 2009.

The 2012 OIG evaluation made five broad recommendations to the Peace Corps, including that the Director should carry out unspecified reforms, including legislative remedies, to reduce the rate of turnover and increase length of employment, and identify which core functions suffer from turnover and develop processes to retain those personnel.

Since OIG report publication, the Peace Corps has taken steps to mitigate the negative impacts of the five-year rule. It is offering five-year employment to new employees instead of the former two and half year term. It is trying to fully utilize existing legislative authority to provide an additional two and a half years on top of the five-year term for up to 15% of its staff—in 2010, only 10% of staff benefitted; now more than 14% benefit. It is also planning on utilizing authority

that allows an unlimited number of staff to continue for a year after their five-year term under "special circumstances." At the same time, the agency is also working to identify the causes of employee early resignation and the specific functions and positions where staff turnover is most harmful in order to best address the problem. According to the Peace Corps, legislative remedies may be sought if these and other efforts are insufficient. Regardless of these actions, the OIG says that as of September 2015, its recommendations on this issue remain open and not fully addressed by the Peace Corps with sufficient documentation.[42]

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[42] Ibid., p. 13.