



## **Executive Order 13985**

# **Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government**

## **Peace Corps Equity Action Plans**

**[Final / Non-Deliberative]**

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# PEACE CORPS EQUITY ACTION PLANS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Peace Corps, working by invitation of host country governments, is a service opportunity for Americans to work in partnership with local communities around the world to meet their stated needs. Volunteers live and work side-by-side with local community members for 27 months in our traditional model, with shorter and more targeted service through our Peace Corps Response and Virtual Service pilot options. Equity is at the heart of our mission and goals. The Peace Corps Act (Public Law 87-293), signed September 22, 1961, established a Volunteer Service Agency to promote world peace and friendship by pursuing three equal goals that have not changed throughout its 60-year history: 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. Building on 60 years of experience, Peace Corps orients and trains its Volunteers to work in six sectors, including Agriculture, Community Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth Development.

## SUMMARY OF ACTION PLANS:

The diversity of Peace Corps' staff and Volunteer populations have increased and as the Agency has advanced its ICDEIA strategy, yet barriers to full and equitable participation and gaps in inclusion have become more clear and evident throughout its systems. The primary barriers to full and equitable participation relate to training, support mechanisms, policies, and other resources that were originally designed in a way that met the needs of the Agency's majority and dominant population of staff and Volunteers and have not been fully adjusted to equitably meet the unique needs of the historically underserved groups defined in Executive Order 13985.

Peace Corps' Equity Action Plans focus on four main areas: Volunteer Recruitment & Retention, Equitable Overseas Post Operations, Stakeholder Engagement, and Equitable Agency Procurement and Contracting.

### **Volunteer Recruitment & Retention**

When we increase diversity to reflect the US and host country populations, we not only bring the talent from all communities to the world, but we also have a unique opportunity to dispel myths and stereotypes about the US in a person to person manner, in all corners of the world. By doing this we ensure equitable opportunities for all Americans to take part in our mission of achieving world peace and friendship, ultimately serving the greater society.

Peace Corps' call to serve has historically been answered by a diverse set of US citizens, though disproportionately from groups with some level of privilege. However, the call to serve has increasingly been answered by those from underrepresented groups. For example, related to race and ethnicity, our most recent data show that thirty-three percent of U.S. staff and thirty-five percent of Volunteers self-identify as a person of color (Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American or Alaskan Native, Black or African American, Hispanic and Two or More Races) (as compared to 18% in 2009). Despite this progress over the last 12 years, there is work to do to diversify both the Volunteer and staff base.

Efforts to diversify staff will be focused in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Executive Order future deliverables, however the following actions are focused on applicants for service and Volunteers. These actions aim to increase Peace Corps' understanding of and support offered to underserved communities in order to: (1) develop more equitable recruitment and retention processes and systems, (2) reduce barriers to service, and (3) increase the percentage of Volunteers from underserved communities who both enter on duty (EOD) and formally close out their service (COS). Ultimately, the goal is to have a Volunteer corps that is more representative of the U.S. population.

While we have highlighted matters of race and class, current agency data provides an incomplete picture of underserved populations regarding intersectionality with other identities named in executive orders (i.e. ethnicity, religion, income, wealth, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability). We approach this work acknowledging the definition of "underserved" may change as data improves and demographic trends shift.

### **Equitable Overseas Post Operations**

While many offices and overseas posts have implemented equity practices to address and remove barriers for applicants, Volunteers, and direct-hire staff who come from historically underrepresented and underserved populations, these efforts are uneven across the Agency and limited accountability mechanisms exist to ensure equity efforts continue in a consistent, effective and appropriate way. This Action Plan aims to systemically address structural barriers in Peace Corps' policies, processes and procedures organization-wide. Specifically, it is designed to standardize, integrate, and measure equitable and inclusive processes across Peace Corps' core business practices to help ensure a more representative and diverse applicant and Volunteer service population.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The Peace Corps will prioritize improving stakeholder engagement with underserved populations in the U.S. in our programs and policies aimed at achieving our "*Third Goal*:" "To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans." Peace Corps will ensure that Third Goal outreach is equitable by capitalizing on the input from individuals from these communities when it develops programs, content and information delivery. Peace Corps is focusing on communities who have Title I eligible schools whose student population generally come from communities that frequently experience numerous intersecting factors that contribute to the underserved status of these populations. Peace Corps will also improve its ability to track Third Goal outreach to support accountability for execution of its plans through new data collection and management processes. Additionally, Peace Corps will strengthen its longstanding engagement with HBCUs and formalize its relationship with Native American and Alaska Natives communities through the first ever Tribal Nations consultation and Tribal Nations Action Plan.

### **Equitable Agency Procurement and Contracting**

The Peace Corps will improve equity through data-driven and evidence-based decision making that will better assess and address barriers to government contracting and procurement opportunities that are faced by people of color and other underserved populations. Peace Corps will focus on improving opportunities for small disadvantaged businesses (SDB), women-owned, and historically underutilized business zones (HUBZone) small businesses.

## **SUMMARY OF EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Peace Corps is engaging its Agency Equity Council (AEC), Field Advisory Board, executive leadership, and other critical stakeholders in ongoing Intercultural Competence, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (ICDEIA) briefings and training. This work, focused in 5 principal areas, contributes to refining our approach to the equity assessment and to developing a clear and sustainable enterprise-wide ICDEIA practice system and resources:

### **Developing ICDEIA Practice**

- **Leadership and Employee Engagement**
  - ICDEIA has been fully integrated as a key strategy into the Agency Strategic Plan process;
  - The Office of ICDEIA, which is led by the Chief Diversity Officer, was established and will include five new full-time positions to support the work of the office;
  - The Chief Diversity Officer has been added as a voting member on the Senior Policy Committee (SPC);
  - An ICDEIA lens has been embedded into key decision making structures;
  - The Office of Civil Rights and Diversity (OCRD) has begun outreach to other Federal government agencies to expand Peace Corps' recruitment and outreach pipeline (discussed in more detail in Advancing Civil Rights later in the report).
  
- **Assessments/Measurements and Data**
  - Data collection from a new equity-focused section in overseas Posts' annual Integrated Planning and Budget System (IPBS) was completed. This IPBS data was collected in an operational survey across 13 different Post-level business functions (e.g. post management, Volunteer support, personnel management, general services and facilities) and is currently being analyzed and synthesized to share with stakeholders on emerging and best practices for equity;
  - The Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS) Equity assessment continues to focus on assessing, synthesizing, and analyzing the racial/ethnic diversity data in its 2009-2020 Volunteer pool, from pre-application lead to completion of service;
  - The Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning (OSIRP) integrated ICDEIA questions in surveys for stakeholders to ensure customized equity measures of progress and is collecting an Agency-wide data set to enhance the management and use of diversity data;
  - OSIRP and VRS are collaborating to review existing data to pinpoint the systems or points in the Volunteer Life Cycle perceived as not inclusive so that appropriate interventions may be instituted.
  
- **Strategic Alignment**
  - Enterprise-wide ICDEIA practice is being developed in line with the Agency's Strategic Plan, which includes feedback from major stakeholders (Agency Equity Council, Field Advisory Board, Employee Resource Groups, Annual All Volunteer Survey, 2020 Survey of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Peace Corps Community recommendations to Diversity Task Force). In addition, forty focus group sessions were conducted with domestic and overseas staff to elicit input on the Agency's ICDEIA strategy;

- Through Agency’s Messaging Alignment Project (MAP), the Agency is auditing key communications messages and messengers to better understand and align the topline messages that departments use to communicate Peace Corps and the Volunteer service experience. After the audit, the MAP will then develop and provide practical written guidance on how to refine, realign, and remove outdated language to ensure that the Peace Corps’ topline messages are consistent from Volunteer recruitment to close of service, and that, moving forward, they are analyzed with an ICDEIA lens.
  
- **Training and Capacity Building**
  - Five new full-time positions have been added to the Agency Chief Diversity Officer’s office to perform ICDEIA work and ensure horizontal and vertical alignment and integration of the Agency’s ICDEIA strategy with training and operational requests and practices;
  - The Chief Diversity Officer is conducting an assessment of other internal and external DEIA trainings utilized by units throughout the Agency and the federal government in order to identify successful DEIA training programs that can be utilized on an Agency-wide scale for staff and/or Volunteers;
  - A new module for the Agency’s Supervisory Training is being developed by the Office of Staff Learning and Development (OSLD) and will launch in FY22. The training will be mandatory for all new supervisors;
  - All Country Directors in the Africa Region completed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) training and debrief in June 2021, including work with the Chief Diversity Officer, to assess the possibility of Agency-wide use. The Office of Staging and Pre-Departure conducted the IDI training and debrief for approximately 60 Agency staff members in August 2021 and Senior Staff will be next. This inventory allows individuals to assess growth areas and training needs, and assists departments in understanding overall team needs.
  
- **Stakeholder Engagement**
  - The Office of the Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services (3GL) and the Acting Director continue to meet quarterly with the President and CEO of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) to discuss ways to leverage each organization’s opportunity to expand the impact of more than 240,000 Americans who have served in 142 countries since the Peace Corps was established in 1961;
  - Following Peace Corps’ participation in the April 14, 2021, first-ever Tribal Nations Consultation, VRS has ensured that all Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) are correctly listed on the Connect with a Recruiter page on the Peace Corps’ website. As part of the Agency’s Tribal Nations Action Plan, there is a TCU engagement strategy where VRS and the Office of Strategic Partnerships and Intragovernmental Affairs (SPIGA) met with White House Special Assistant Libby Washburn for feedback on the strategy;
  - VRS and SPIGA have scheduled a meeting with the President of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) to discuss guidance on how to best work with TCUs.

## U.S. PEACE CORPS EQUITY ACTION PLAN: VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

### THE BARRIER

People from historically underserved communities have served at lower rates than those from communities not faced with systemic inequities. The impact of historic and systemic racial and class inequities are the core challenge to advancing equity within recruitment and retention for Peace Corps service. For example, there are persistent disparities when comparing application and retention rates of White volunteers in comparison to Black/African American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native volunteers (Source: comparing available Peace Corps Entry on Duty (EOD), Close of Service (COS), and Early Termination (ET) data for the 2-year program in comparison to Census 2030 projections for the US population overall).

Further, this core challenge creates a reinforcing feedback loop in which individuals from privileged and/or majority White communities serve at higher rates and those individuals from historically underserved communities ask questions such as, “Is Peace Corps an option for me?”

- **Student Loan and Medical Debt:** Interested Americans find it more difficult to answer the call to serve if they have financial obligations that would make living on a Peace Corps stipend untenable, such as private student loans and medical debt. For example, Black and African American college graduates owe an average of \$25,000 more in student loan debt than White college graduates. (Source: [Student Loan Debt by Race](#)). Peace Corps provides *Federal* student loan deferral, housing, and transportation; however, aspiring volunteers must account for the loss of potential earnings during their service as well as the potential employment gap post service.
- **Access and Completion of Formal Degrees:** Overall, US Citizens who identify as Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Native American and Alaska Natives, or two or more races are significantly less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree than White and Asian US citizens. (Source [NCES Indicator 27: Educational Attainment, Figure 27.3](#)). While having a 4-year college degree is not a requirement for service, most Host Countries request Volunteers with a 4-year degree.
- **Expenses Related to Entering Service:** Aspiring volunteers may incur costs when completing their medical clearance, and purchasing items required by service. While in service, Volunteers are encouraged to live on their living stipend alone, which covers key living essentials but for additional supplies that can be impactful to service or emergencies (i.e. computer repair, an unexpected trip back home due to family needs), Volunteers typically rely on their personal or family funds. This presents a problem for volunteers of underserved populations who are less likely to have discretionary personal funds, or family to financially support them. [Note: the typical White family has eight times the wealth of the typical Black family, and five times the wealth of the typical Hispanic family (Source: [Disparities in Wealth by Race and Ethnicity in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances](#))].

As noted earlier, while we have primarily highlighted race and socio-economic class above, we recognize the intersectional systems related to gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age, etc. and as the data indicates we will continue to integrate actions to address the needs of those communities.

## **THE ACTION**

For the Peace Corps to recruit and retain individuals from historically underserved communities the Agency will first need to conduct an up-to-date data-based analysis centered on the experiences and perspectives of historically underserved communities and the barriers they face on their path to service. This includes actions to:

- Update ICDEIA competencies in staff job descriptions and staff performance measures / learning;
- Conduct research into public perception of and barriers to the Peace Corps;
- Update data systems in the application process to reflect equity priorities;
- Conduct a review of financial barriers to service;
- Update recruitment strategy to focus on underserved communities;
- Conduct and establish processes for an annual Volunteer Barrier Analysis (in process);
- Identify of barriers during service (Office of Global Operations);
- Update the selection and placement process, per PG 1.7;
- Update terminology in Peace Corps data systems to reflect equity priorities and align recruitment data systems with updated posts requests.

## **TRACKING PROGRESS**

*Short-term (2-4 years) Indicators:*

- Annual Volunteer Barrier Analysis completed;
- Establish accountability subcommittee within the Agency Equity Council to ensure cross-unit collaboration in support of Volunteer Recruitment and Retention equity goals;
- Review how Demographic data is collected within the Volunteer Delivery System; relevant data dashboards updated;
- Data systems aligned across the Agency;
- Barriers to service identified and addressed.

*Mid-term (5-8 years) indicators:*

- Establish a Volunteer corps that reflects the projected US 2030 population census so that VRS is meeting its mission to recruit and place qualified individuals who represent the diversity of the United States to serve in overseas programs to meet the needs of Peace Corps' host countries.
- *[Note: VRS plans to develop additional ways to track progress]*

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

In order to maintain accountability, this action plan aligns with the work of the Agency's FY 22-26 Strategic Plan and President Biden's Executive Orders. Within the Agency Strategic Plan, there are multiple offices that are focused on the success of Volunteer recruitment and retention efforts, and reducing the financial barriers to service. The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection will update performance plans to support the actions needed to reduce these barriers. Additionally, VRS will work with the AEC to support the Agency strategic plan's performance goals to integrate equity into core business practices. The Agency will remain accountable internally through updates at All-Agency Town Halls to share progress on this work and solicit feedback from staff members, as well as by working with Peace Corps' Office of Civil Rights and Diversity to assess the current state of Volunteer recruitment and retention, collaborate on opportunities for improvement, and to track progress and ensure we are held accountable to these actions. Peace Corps is committed to equity practice and will take next steps to memorialize into policy. Externally, we will work with the Office of Communication and



Office of External Affairs to survey the public for suggestions and input, and communicate via our social media channels changes/updates created from the comments submitted.

## **U.S. PEACE CORPS EQUITY ACTION PLAN: EMBEDDING EQUITY IN OVERSEAS POST OPERATIONS**

### **THE BARRIER**

As Volunteer diversity has increased, core systems have not been fully adjusted to accommodate for the different needs of underserved populations. While the Peace Corps has had similar retention rates across diverse staff employment and Volunteer service, the Agency is intentionally analyzing feedback about the unique challenges faced by historically underserved groups in order to eliminate barriers to full participation across its core operations and also address any trust deficit that has evolved from the perspective of said groups.

The Peace Corps has received substantive feedback on the impact of these barriers on historically underserved communities from major stakeholder groups. For example, in the 2019 annual All Volunteer Survey<sup>1</sup>, 43% of all Volunteers and 69% of the Black/African-American Volunteers surveyed reported an inclusivity gap within Peace Corps when it comes to race and ethnicity. Additionally, in the 47 recommendation letters received from Peace Corps community stakeholders and sent to the Diversity Task Force<sup>2</sup>, “diversity” and “Black” were named in 65% of the documents analyzed, were the most frequently used words to describe Agency challenges, and included recommendations for the Agency related to the experience of Black Volunteers and staff, anti-racism policy, and interracial interactions at posts. In addition, of all Volunteers surveyed 38% reported inclusivity gaps related to socio-economic status, 28% related to disabilities, and 24% and 23% related to gender expression and sexual orientation, respectively.

The elimination of these barriers calls for strengthening support for historically underserved groups throughout the continuum of the staff and Volunteer experience. Peace Corps’ representation of the U.S. abroad has been historically and predominately aligned with the image of the majority and dominant populations. However, with increased diversity representation, strengthened, equitable support of historically underserved staff and Volunteers, and intentional exploration of critiques of international development<sup>3</sup>, the Agency has the unique opportunity not only to remove barriers to full participation for its historically underserved staff and Volunteers, but also to apply an intentional focus on equity and inclusion efforts that center on and empower Host Country National staff and the host communities its Volunteers serve in 60+ countries around the globe.

Furthermore, barriers are often culturally bound and determined by the historical context within the country of service, for example: LGBTQI+ individuals may face legal discrimination in some countries of service; Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) individuals may be shouldering the burdens of colonialist history, expectations, and legacy power structures; all

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 was the last year the survey was administered prior to the COVID-19 related global suspension of operations.

<sup>2</sup> A task force formed in September 2020 to review and respond to letters received from stakeholder groups calling on the Agency to speak out publicly against social injustice and address Agency barriers to inclusion and equity for historically underserved groups.

<sup>3</sup> Topics that include the decolonization of international aid and white saviorism.

gender identities are negotiating often fixed and/or nuanced gender roles that are often binary and culturally expected; physical environments and lack of regulatory protections and/or cultural viewpoints related to people with disabilities make accessibility a challenge; and religious minorities are impacted by historical conflicts around religion within any given country-context.

## **THE ACTION**

In order to address and remove barriers to full and equitable participation faced by historically underrepresented staff and Volunteers, the Peace Corps will execute the following actions: build on the Agency's Emerging Equity Practices Survey<sup>4</sup> (EEPS) and continue to assess which key core business and operational areas to prioritize in order to eliminate and reduce barriers; develop endorsed benchmarks, resources, and accountability mechanisms to measure equity across key core business practices; develop an equity practice evaluation and accountability tool; implement formation of equity councils in all Peace Corps overseas posts and through the HQ Agency Equity Council (AEC); and develop and incorporate a set of parallel and complementary ICDEIA questions into the Agency's core staff and Volunteer surveys to provide a holistic measurement and evidence of the impact of equity efforts across the Agency.

Peace Corps overseas posts and HQ offices are intentionally instituting equity practices to remove barriers for historically underserved populations in innovative ways, these efforts are uneven and there are limited accountability mechanisms in place to ensure equity efforts continue in a consistent, effective, and appropriate way. The following core business areas will be initially prioritized: post and office management through the creation of equity councils that will conduct post equity audits and foster enabling ICDEIA cultures at post and HQ; Volunteer training and support through improved and expanded staff and partner ICDEIA training; personnel management through including ICDEIA competencies in staff hiring and performance evaluation; and general services and facilities through accessibility analysis of posts.

Each post's engagement in the integrating equity into core business operations will ensure that the barriers noted above can be mitigated and addressed in a culturally effective and appropriate manner. Furthermore, building it into operations ensures that as cultural expectations shift, business practices also adjust to those shifts.

## **TRACKING PROGRESS**

*Short-term (2-4 years) indicators:*

- Assess emerging equity practices at overseas posts and HQ offices by measuring the developing contextual implementation of equity benchmarks that measure equity levels in core business processes resources;
- Collect and analyze feedback from posts and HQ offices on the effectiveness of these benchmarks; gain insight into the effectiveness of equity councils as a viable mechanism for the implementation of promising ICDEIA practices at overseas posts and through the AEC;
- Collect feedback from posts and offices on the usefulness of equity council guidance and technical assistance;

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<sup>4</sup> A global survey in which all 60+ Peace Corps posts were asked to report on current and/or potential equity practices and interventions across core business areas to help HQ leadership identify promising practices to develop future equity benchmark guidance.

- Identify refinements needed to address the diversity and unique cultural contexts across overseas operations;
- Collect and analyze feedback from survey stakeholders, posts, and HQ offices on the usefulness and effectiveness of ICDEIA related questions in core surveys.

*Mid-term (5-8 years) indicators:*

- Conduct annual equity audits at posts and at HQ and report findings in annual budgeting process;
- Analyze, stratify/disaggregate, and share long-term trends in stakeholder responses to ICDEIA questions in core Agency surveys.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The Office of ICDEIA, the Office of Global Operations, and the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning will hold primary responsibility for ensuring the execution of these actions. For accountability purposes, the Peace Corps has integrated the above plans into its FY 2022-2026 strategic plan (Performance Goal 2.4) and will conduct quarterly reviews and report outs on progress of these actions for senior Agency leaders. Additionally, the Peace Corps will hold regular virtual town halls (for both internal and external stakeholders) to share progress on this work and gather feedback. The Peace Corps will ensure policies reflect the equity work established to memorialize these efforts into a policy requirement. The Office of Civil Rights and Diversity (OCRD) will work with regional directors to coordinate regular internal assessments, on at least a quarterly basis, to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the Equity Action Plan and monitor Agency progress in implementing EO 13985.

## **PEACE CORPS EQUITY ACTION PLAN: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

### **THE BARRIER**

The Peace Corps' mission of world peace and friendship, and its approach to achieving this mission, serves as a model for how individuals from diverse backgrounds can unite to address important and challenging goals. Success in meeting this mission is dependent on equitable participation from all segments of society. The Third Goal of the Peace Corps, to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans, serves as an important, concrete demonstration of how bridges can be built between individuals from vastly different backgrounds and is a tangible demonstration of how the Peace Corps experience can have substantial benefits for individuals and communities here in the United States. Individuals that have access to intercultural exchange, even second hand, are able to achieve greater global competence with an expanded set of opportunities in a globally competitive world.

Third Goal materials and programming have likely not reached many underserved populations in the United States due to an inadequate understanding of domestic audiences and insufficient tracking of existing outreach. The Peace Corps is well-versed in locally-based, participatory models of engaging communities in the countries where Volunteers serve; however this has not historically been the case with outreach to domestic audiences. Establishing processes to solicit and capture stakeholder input from marginalized groups as part of the domestic engagement efforts will be critical. Stakeholder engagement can be further enhanced by intentional, consistent engagement with communities that have been historically underrepresented in the Peace Corps.

## **THE ACTION**

The Peace Corps intends to prioritize improving stakeholder engagement with underserved populations to ensure that Third Goal outreach is equitable and to demonstrate that the Peace Corps is relevant to all Americans. The Agency intends to establish a set of replicable and sustainable pathways to gather input from underserved populations that also recognizes the scale of this challenge. The majority of pathways will involve working with intermediaries who represent the populations for whom the Peace Corps is seeking input. This includes working with formal, and informal, community-based partners and connecting with educators that work with youth in underserved communities.

The Agency will also improve its ability to track outreach activities so that a data and stakeholder-informed strategy can be developed to more effectively reach underserved populations with Third Goal materials and programming. Because there are numerous intersecting factors that contribute to populations being underserved, the Agency will focus on communities containing Title I eligible schools, an identifier which includes a wide and diverse range of American communities, including socio-economic class, racial and ethnic diversity, persons who live in rural areas and communities adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

The Peace Corps has prioritized these actions as effective outreach must be informed by the values, priorities and needs of the intended target populations. Outreach that does not center the perspectives of the individuals and communities with whom we seek to engage will result in plans and activities that only further the sense of disillusionment experienced by these populations.

In addition to the Third Goal activities, Peace Corps is ensuring there is meaningful stakeholder engagement with underserved populations. Two examples include our work with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Nations. Peace Corps will continue to deepen its commitment and support of HBCUs, with plans to be designated as a formal partner as part of the HBCU Partners Act. This reinforces the Agency's decision to deepen our activities with HBCUs beyond volunteer recruitment to include broader opportunities and stronger stakeholder support. The recently established Peace Corps Tribal Nations Action Plan articulates a process to ensure regular and meaningful consultation between the Peace Corps and Tribal Nations around agency programming and/or policies that may have tribal implications. Guided by the directives of the Presidential Memorandum (PM) on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships, and the guidance of Tribal Leaders, this plan of action centers on four key components, including having a lead Peace Corps office, regular dialogue with Tribal Nations, Program Outreach, and regular updates on the progress and status of Peace Corps' Action plan.

## **TRACKING PROGRESS**

Progress toward established targets will be reported in quarterly internal meetings and in annual OMB reporting on the FY2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

*Near to mid-term (2 to 4 years) indicators:*

- Establish a set of replicable and sustainable pathways to gather input from underserved populations;

- Establish plans for Third Goal engagement that prioritize reaching communities with Title I eligible schools;
- Improve the Agency’s capacity to assess, track and report on Third Goal outreach to underserved communities;
- Develop processes for sharing programmatic updates and progress toward annual agency targets to relevant constituencies;
- Advance formalization of stakeholder engagement as articulated in the Tribal Nations Action Plan and HBCU Partners Act;

*Long-term (5 to 8 years) indicators:*

- Consistently executed processes to solicit input from underserved populations, including Tribal Nations, that help inform the development of outreach strategies, programming and materials development;
- Demonstrable increases in the number of communities with Title I eligible schools engaged with Third Goal resources;

**ACCOUNTIBILITY**

The Peace Corps has identified the Office of Strategic Partnerships and Intergovernmental Affairs (SPIGA) as the primary point of contact for coordinating activities related to the Peace Corps’ Tribal Nations Action Plan. The Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection is the lead office for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) engagement. The Office of the Third Goals and Returned Volunteer Services is accountable for meeting targets and outcomes related to Third Goal engagement with underserved populations. The Office of Civil Rights and Diversity will work collaboratively with the Director of Third Goal to create a sustainable proficiency by working together in building synergies, leveraging resources and capabilities, and using best practices to cultivate new types of relationships starting with federal agencies and minority serving organizations.

**PEACE CORPS EQUITY ACTION PLAN: INTEGRATE EQUITY INTO AGENCY PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING**

**THE BARRIER**

The Peace Corps has an opportunity to improve equity through data-driven decision making that will better assess and address barriers to contracting and procurement opportunities that are faced by people of color and other underserved populations. Peace Corps will focus on improving opportunities for small disadvantaged businesses (SDB) and historically underutilized business zones (HUBZone) small businesses.

The Peace Corps is responsible for contributing toward the achievement of the government-wide small business procurement goals with SDBs and HUBZone businesses. The Peace Corps has exceeded its SDB statutory minimum of 5% of total value of the agency’s contracts over the last three years (Fiscal Years (FY) 2019 16.61%, FY2020 9.49%, and FY2021 14.81%). The Peace Corps has experienced challenges meeting its statutorily minimal goal of 3% of the total value of the agency’s contacts to HUBZone, which has been historically less than 1%. A key barrier preventing more contracts from being awarded to HUBZone contractors is the lack of awareness and guidance on the certified HUBZone program and contractor capabilities.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) manages the government-wide SDB and HUBZone goals. To qualify as a SDB, a business must:

- Be at least 51% or more owned and controlled by one or more disadvantaged persons;
- Be a socially disadvantaged and economically disadvantaged person or persons;
- Be a small business, according to SBA's size standards;

To qualify for the HUBZone program, a business must:

- Be a small business according to SBA size standards;
- Be at least 51% owned and controlled by U.S. citizens, a Community Development Corporation, an agricultural cooperative, an Alaska Native corporation, a Native Hawaiian organization, or an Native American tribe;
- Have its principal office located in a HUBZone;
- Have at least 35% of its employees living in a HUBZone;

*Evidence that this barrier meaningfully impacts full and equal participations*

Peace Corps obligated \$51.6M in contract awards in Fiscal Year 2021, with the majority representing commercial supplies and services. While Peace Corps' contracting footprint is a small part of the Federal Government's buying power, the agency's efforts to increase contract actions awarded to underserved communities will contribute to the larger Federal response efforts.

## **THE ACTION**

The Peace Corps will review and analyze SDB and HUBZone data and adequately leverage data to increase contract opportunities for SDBs and certified HUBZone businesses.

The Peace Corps will improve standard operating procedures (SOPs) for contracting professionals on SBA, SDB and certified HUBZone small business programs and request contracting professionals perform market research to increase its use of SDB and HUBZone small businesses. SOPs will also include contract language best practices that will have significant impact on inclusion and access in contracting and procurement to allow SDBs and HUBZone businesses to better compete for and enter into contracts with our agency. Guidance will be provided to non-procurement staff on the certified HUBZone program and HUBZone vendor capabilities. Vendor outreach will be conducted to provide visibility around available procurement opportunities through sources sought, and virtual listening sessions. Office of Chief Financial Officer/Acquisition and Contracts Management will consult with and request the Office of Civil Rights support on SDB and HUBZone training and in preparation and conducting virtual listening sessions.

*Reasons for prioritizing the action:*

Procurement and Contracting was highlighted as an area of focus in Executive Order 13985. As stated above, Peace Corps has challenges in meeting its goals for HUBZone awards.

*How actions are expected to result in reducing or eliminating the barrier to equitable outcomes:*

Guidance on the SDB and HUBZone small business programs and contract language best practices will work to increase Peace Corps' contracts with underserved populations.

## **TRACKING PROGRESS**

*Near to mid-term (2 to 4 years) indicators:*

- Continue to meet or exceed SDB goal and increase percentage of HUBZone small business procurements through actions described above. The office of the Chief Financial Officer, Acquisition and Contract Management (OCFO/ACM) will track the number of contracts awarded to SDB and HUBZone through FPDS-NG contract action reports.
- Complete improved SOPs for contracting professionals on SBA SDB and certified HUBZone small business programs
- Establish contract language best practices as well as procedures for inclusion of the contract language into new solicitations.

*Long-term (5 to 8 years) indicators:*

- Meet or exceed SDB and HUBZone small business goals through actions described above.
- OCFO/ACM will track the number of contracts awarded to SDB and HUBZone through FPDS-NG contract action reports.

## **ACCOUNTIBILITY**

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Acquisition and Contract Management will review indicators bi-annually to measure the agency's progress. External stakeholders have access to the agency's progress via sam.gov. The Office of Civil Rights and Diversity will coordinate with other federal agencies to schedule opportunities for the Peace Corps to provide information and briefs about its contracting prospects at events that are focused on assuring disadvantaged minority- and women-owned small businesses secure their fair share of federal contracting (taxpayer) dollars. The events will also serve as occasions for small businesses to showcase capabilities and create connections to potential teaming and joint venture partnerships.

## **PEACE CORPS EQUITY ACTION PLAN: ADVANCING CIVIL RIGHTS**

### **THE BARRIER**

The Peace Corps had not conducted an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) barrier analysis to uncover, examine and remove barriers to equal participation at all levels of its workforce due to staff shortages in the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity (OCRD) and insufficient funding for the barrier analysis process. A barrier is an agency policy, procedure, or practice that limits or tends to limit employment opportunities for members of a particular group based on their sex, race, ethnic background, or disability status.

### **THE ACTION**

The Director of the Peace Corps (1) filled the OCRD director position with a full-time permanent director after a period of rotating acting office directors; (2) approved three new positions in OCRD; (3) approved the recruitment actions that resulted in the hiring of experienced, highly qualified practitioners to fill the new EEO intake specialist, disability program manager, and diversity and inclusion specialist positions; and (4) approved the funding necessary to launch a full-scale Barrier Analysis project. EEOC facilitators provided training to the project team on conducting barrier analysis.

In January 2021, the Peace Corps completed the process of identifying possible barriers using a variety of sources (Barrier Analysis Step 1), including selection, promotion, recruitment, and retention data, Employee Viewpoint Survey results, workforce distribution data, and various reports and assessments; in June 2021, completed further inquiry to pinpoint actual barriers (Barrier Analysis Step 2) by interviewing HR staff and HR liaisons, interview panelists and hiring officials, and analyzing Step 1 data to extract themes and find clues; and in October 2021, identified three high priority barriers in recruitment and hiring procedures and practices.

### **TRACKING PROGRESS**

Updates and progress reports will be provided in quarterly internal meetings and in annual OMB reporting on the FY2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

*Near term (6 months -1 year) indicators:*

- Devise a plan to address and eliminate identified barriers. The plan shall include corresponding action items, responsible officials, accountability mechanisms, and target dates (Barrier Analysis Step 3);
- Track progress of barrier elimination (Barrier Analysis Step 4);
- Make adjustments to the plan as necessary (Barrier Analysis Step 4).

*Mid-term (2 to 4 years) indicators:*

- The identified barriers have been appropriately addressed and eliminated;
- Recruitment and hiring policies, procedures, and practices do not limit or tend to limit employment opportunities for any EEO group, and everyone has the equal opportunity to achieve their potential.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

To ensure accountability of recommendations coming from OCRD, the Peace Corps will designate key influencers who will support facilitating, informing, and advancing progress, and institutionalizing efforts. The designees will include the Director of the Peace Corps, Chief of Staff, Associate Directors and Senior Advisors, Office Heads, Employee Resource Group leaders, the Director of OCRD, Chief Diversity Officer and the Chief Human Capital Officer.