PEACE CORPS

Office *of* Inspector General

FINAL REPORT

Evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga

IG-27-01-E

November 5, 2026

PEACE CORPS

Office of Inspector General

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Background

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a program evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga with a scope from April 2022 through March 2026. There are two project sectors in Tonga: Environment and Education. When we started our work, 29 Volunteers were serving in Tonga, with 19 full-time staff at post.

Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation were to determine:

- Whether Volunteers met project objectives.
- To what extent the post met site management standards.
- Whether the post's Volunteer safety and security program complied with agency requirements and was effective.
- Whether the post's Volunteer health program complied with agency requirements and was effective.

Evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga

November 5, 2026

What We Found

While Peace Corps/Tonga's support of Volunteer health needs was strong, the post did not meet agency requirements in 3 of the 4 areas we evaluated. We encountered new leadership at the post who have been working to address longstanding deficiencies. This report highlights significant issues where leadership can focus its attention to ensure Peace Corps/Tonga sufficiently supports Volunteer safety, security, and success, while also building on its strong health program.

Volunteer Project Objectives

Some Education and Environment Volunteers were not meeting their project objectives. We also found that the Peace Corps/Tonga Environment project's poor design impacted the post's support and training for its Volunteers.

Site Management

The post did not meet site management standards. Specifically, we found that Volunteer homes failed to meet agency criteria. Also, the post did not maintain site history documentation, develop a site management manual, or have adequate housing criteria.

Safety and Security Program

The posts' Volunteer safety and security program did not comply with certain key agency requirements. Specifically, the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) did not sufficiently tailor the standardized agency safety and security training to address specific host-country risks. In addition, some emergency action planning requirements were not met.

Volunteer Health Program

The post's Volunteer health program largely complied with agency requirements. We found that the post provided Volunteers with the required pre-service health training, documented its emergency planning requirements, and provided effective healthcare to Volunteers throughout their service.

What We Recommend

This report contains 16 recommendations: 4 focused on project objectives, 9 associated with the post's site management practices, and 3 regarding Volunteer safety and security. For the full list of recommendations, see page 23 of this report.

About this Report

What We Reviewed

We conducted a program evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga (also referred to as "the post") with a scope from April 2022 through March 2026 to determine if Volunteers met their project objectives; verify that the post complied with agency standards for site management and Volunteer health, safety, and security; and assess the post's effectiveness in its safety and security program and health program.

This report is organized by the following topics:



Why We Conducted This Review

Country program evaluations are a key tool for conducting independent oversight of Peace Corps operations and programs. OIG considers multiple risk factors when selecting posts for a country program evaluation. We selected Peace Corps/Tonga because of its location in the Indo-Pacific and our understanding of the operational challenges in that geographic area.

How We Conducted This Review

We measured the post's compliance against Peace Corps and post-specific standards and guidelines for project objectives; site management; Volunteer safety and security; and Volunteer health. We performed fieldwork in Tonga from August 1 to August 21, 2025, where we visited 16 Volunteer sites across 3 islands. At each site, we conducted in-person observations, housing inspections, and interviews. We also spoke with 11 post staff and 13 Peace Corps/Washington staff.

Throughout the review, our evaluation team experienced effective communication with post leadership, staff, and Volunteers. We greatly appreciate the Volunteers, post and Peace Corps/Washington staff, and other stakeholders we worked with for their assistance and cooperation during this evaluation.

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Tonga Snapshot

The Kingdom of Tonga is an archipelago – a chain – of 172 islands in the South Pacific Ocean with a population of approximately 104,000 people. There are five main island groups within the archipelago: Tongatapu, Ha'apai,‘Eua, Vava'u, and Ongo Niua.

Tonga is governed under a constitutional monarchy with a single-chamber legislature in which the king has significant authority, including the power to dissolve parliament, appoint judges, and approve constitutional amendments. The current king of Tonga, King Tupou VI, has reigned since 2012. Notably, Tonga is the only country in the South Pacific that was never colonized by a foreign power.

Tonga is among the world’s most susceptible countries to natural disasters. It faces significant risk of cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and droughts. [1]

Table 1: Overview of Tonga

Overview of Tonga	
Population	104,175*
Official Languages	Tongan, English
Economy	Gross Domestic Product Per Capita: $4,933 Unemployment: 2.3%
Average Life Expectancy	71
Human Development Index**	Ranked 92 of 193 countries and territories Classification: “High”

**As of 2024*

***The United Nations Development Programme publishes an annual index that provides a composite measure of three basic dimensions of human development: health, education, and income. Countries are ranked from “very high human development” to “low human development.”*

[1] In January 2020, the Office of Volunteer Safety and Security (OVSS) conducted a 5-year risk assessment for Peace Corps/Tonga and identified tropical cyclones and earthquakes as high-level threats. OVSS indicated that another 5-year risk assessment for Peace Corps/Tonga is overdue, which is projected to be completed in 2027.

Peace Corps/Tonga Background

Since Peace Corps/Tonga was established in 1967, approximately 1,700 Volunteers have served at the post. As of March 17, 2025, 29 Volunteers were serving in Tonga across four islands, working in either the Education or Environment sectors (see Figure 1).

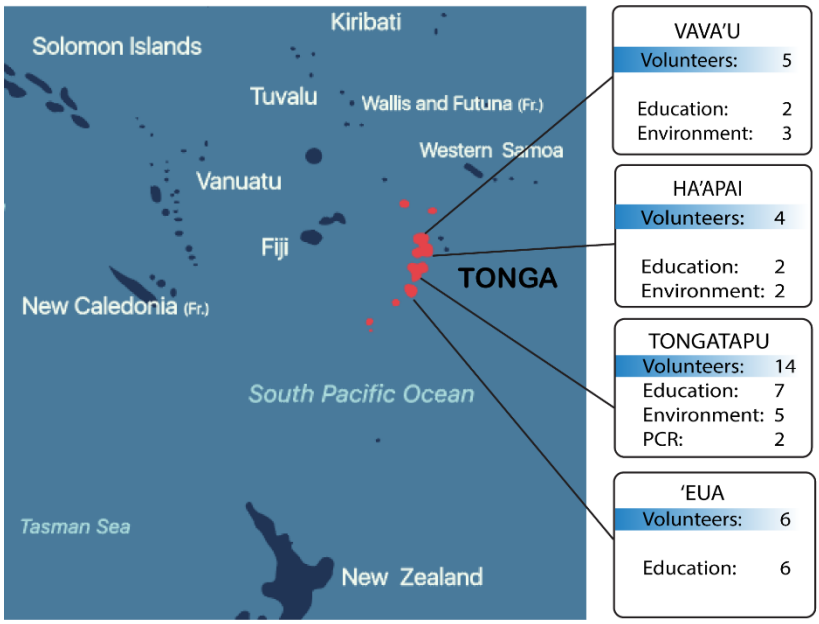


Figure 1: Map of Tonga with Volunteer Locations

The two Peace Corps/Tonga project sectors focus on the following:

Education Volunteers work with local teachers to improve their overall teaching skills and English proficiency. Volunteers also teach English to students in a classroom setting and create opportunities for youths to practice the English language outside of the classroom.

Environment Volunteers engage with community members to design and develop educational resources on environmental awareness. They also help facilitate community-level environmental risk assessments, co-facilitate education activities, and develop emergency action plans that contribute to their sites' disaster and emergency preparedness.

Table 2: Overview of Peace Corps/Tonga

Overview of Peace Corps/Tonga	
Dates of Operation	1967-present
Volunteers (all time)	Approximately 1,700
Volunteers at post*	29
Project Sectors	Education; Environment
Post Staffing Positions**	2 USDHs (1 Vacancy) 17 PSCs (1 Vacancy)
Budget	FY 2025: $1,358,001

* As of March 2025

** United States direct hire (USDH); personal services contractor (PSC) as of August 2025

Volunteer Inputs at the Post

At the time of our visit to the post, Peace Corps/Tonga had two primary Volunteer cohorts in service: Group 85 (G85) and Group 86 (G86). The seven G85 Volunteers who arrived in June 2023 served in the Education project. Of the 19 G86 Volunteers who arrived in June 2024, 9 served in the Education

project and 10 served in the Environment project. One Education Volunteer from the prior G84 cohort remained at the post. There were also two Peace Corps Response Volunteers at post during our visit.

Staffing and Leadership at the Post

When we visited Peace Corps/Tonga in August 2025, the post had 19 staff, including 2 USDHs and 17 locally employed staff (or personal services contractors). Peace Corps/Tonga's USDH staff, who are responsible for leading and overseeing post operations, consisted of a Country Director (CD) and a Director of Management Operations (DMO). The Director of Programming and Training (DPT) role was vacant at the time of our visit.

The current CD—who was at the post during our review—arrived in Tonga in early December 2024 and began working to address the significant pre-existing challenges at the post. The prior CD served in Tonga from May 2022 through November 2024, and then subsequently served at a different post.

We assessed that many of the challenges highlighted in this evaluation report are the result of critical shortfalls in the management and oversight by prior post leadership. Current USDH staff are working to address these challenges. For example:

- One former DPT served in Tonga from June 2017 to October 2023. According to staff, instead of providing them with the tools and training required to appropriately perform their roles, the former DPT would instead assume the staff's responsibilities themselves. As a result, staff said they lacked the requisite knowledge to perform essential tasks such as delivering training or identifying Volunteer housing and sites.
- The subsequent DPT worked at the post from February 2024 to June 2025. Similarly, staff reported that the DPT undertook their duties as opposed to training and advising them on how to fulfill their responsibilities. Post staff also said the DPT struggled due to the previous CD's lack of support, which was important given that it was the DPT's first overseas staff experience.
- The current DPT was hired by the current CD and arrived at the post in December 2025. The current DPT is working with the current CD to address the post's performance challenges.
- The DMO who was at the post during the time of our site visit departed from Peace Corps/Tonga in February 2026 and is currently the DMO at a different Peace Corps post. The Peace Corps/Tonga DMO position was vacant as of August 2026, and, in the interim, the role had been fulfilled by temporary duty assignments from Peace Corps/Washington.

Agency Notification About Weak USDH Leadership at Post

The Peace Corps Act directs our office to inform the Peace Corps Director of noted concerns regarding the performance of agency representatives overseas for appropriate action. [2] Accordingly, the Inspector General sent a July 2026 referral to agency management detailing concerning deficiencies with the prior CD's management and oversight of the post. Our work uncovered significant operational shortcomings that weakened Volunteer safety, security, healthcare, and support functions at Peace Corps/Tonga. The Peace Corps has clear policies and procedures governing these functions, and the USDH staff who lead the post are responsible for ensuring agency guidance is appropriately followed

[2] Section 8E(d)(2) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. § 2507e(d)(2)).

and implemented. The agency responded to the Inspector General's letter in August 2026, citing several actions to address the concerns raised.

Staffing Challenges at the Post Made Worse by Competing Demands

Post performance deficiencies highlighted in this report are also the result of significant staffing challenges, many of which were compounded by competing and new demands placed on the post. Several Peace Corps/Washington staff described Peace Corps/Tonga staff as "stretched to the limit" and "pushed to the extreme" to accommodate these obligations. For example:

- Peace Corps/Washington approved the launch of an Environment project in Peace Corps/Tonga in April 2023 without a designated Environment staff. In addition to this, the agency indicated that all three USDH staff were new to their assignments and had no experience standing up a new project. Subsequently, the project was spearheaded by the Education Program Manager (PM), Education Program and Training Specialist (PTS), and Education Programming and Training Assistant (PTA). Before the first Environment Volunteers arrived in June 2024, sadly, the PTA passed away. Neither the PM nor PTS for Education had experience in managing an Environment project. The post onboarded its first Environment project staff member, a PTS, in February 2025—8 months after the first cohort's arrival. The new Environment PTS had no prior Peace Corps experience and told us they did not receive adequate training to conduct their responsibilities upon onboarding. As of August 2026, the post did not have an Environment PM. In addition, the agency reported that the post planned for a first cohort of five environment Volunteers. The agency indicated that Peace Corps/Washington regional leadership asked the former CD to accept an additional 5 for a total of 10 Volunteers.
- In early 2023, the post supported the establishment of the U.S. Embassy in Tonga, which officially opened in May 2023. Staff also spent 3 weeks coordinating with the State Department for the Secretary of State's visit in September 2023. Additionally, the post hosted the Peace Corps Chief of Operations in the same month.
- Despite having little experience with environmental projects, the post supported the Blue Pacific Youth Initiative from May through October 2024. Staff also coordinated visits with the Peace Corps Director in August 2024, and the Regional Director for the Inter-American and Pacific Region [3] in October 2024.

Blue Pacific Youth Initiative

The Peace Corps launched the Blue Pacific Youth Initiative in 2023 with the financial support of USAID. Through this initiative, post staff and Volunteers led activities in collaboration with Pacific organizations to strengthen many youth environmental activities that already existed in the Pacific.

[3] The Peace Corps reorganized in April 2026. Peace Corps/Tonga was moved from the Inter-America and Pacific region operational unit, which was eliminated as part of the reorganization, to the "Indo-Pacific and Caribbean" Geographical Unit. At the time we interviewed staff and reviewed agency documentation, this re-organization had not been completed.

Volunteer Project Objectives

Volunteers' success in meeting their project objectives depends on the strength of the post's project design, staff support, and Volunteer technical training. Peace Corps/Tonga's Education and Environment sectors both had weaknesses in many of these areas. While G85 Volunteers generally met project objectives, G86 Volunteers had mixed results. Specifically, G86 Volunteers, which included the first cohort of the Environment sector, struggled to understand their role in their community. We found that the G86 Environment Volunteers' challenges stemmed from rushed planning and implementation of the Environment project by both the post and Peace Corps/Washington's leadership. Subsequent weaknesses included inadequacies in project design, staff support, and technical training.

To What Extent Did Volunteers Meet Project Objectives?

To answer this question, we conducted interviews with Volunteers and post staff to assess their perspectives on the extent to which Volunteers achieved their project objectives. We also issued a survey to all post staff and Volunteers to better understand the challenges Volunteers face in achieving their project objectives.

As the agency takes steps to address its Volunteer shortage, [4] it is important for the agency to better support the Peace Corps/Tonga Environment project, as the post has recently experienced greater success in meeting the Volunteer fill rate [5] for the Environment project compared to the Education project (see Table 3).

Table 3: Peace Corps/Tonga Trainee Fill Rate by Year

Cohort Arrival Date	Project Sectors	Volunteers Requested	Volunteers Received	Fill Rate
June 2023 (Group 85)	Education	15	9	60%
June 2024 (Group 86)	Education	20	9	45%
	Environment	10	10	100%
June 2025 (Group 87)	Education	20	6	30%
	Environment	10	8	80%

Source: Peace Corps Enter-On-Duty Data

[4] Prior to the global evacuation of Volunteers in March 2020, more than 7,000 Volunteers were serving abroad. Following the 2022 Volunteer return to service, the Peace Corps has experienced substantial challenges in recruiting and retaining Volunteers. We conducted an evaluation of the Volunteer Delivery System to assess the challenges the Peace Corps has recently faced in recruiting, selecting, and placing Volunteers: Evaluation of the Peace Corps' Volunteer Delivery System (IG-25-03-E)

[5] Fill rates reflect the number of Invitees as a percentage of the total Volunteer Request for each country. Fill rate is calculated at two points: at the time of Volunteer invitation, and at the time of Volunteer entry-on-duty, both of which have decreased.

Volunteer Project Objectives

Group 85 Volunteers Generally Achieved Their Project Objectives, However, Group 86 Volunteers Did Not

G85 was comprised of solely Education Volunteers, and they told us they generally met all their project objectives. However, some Education Volunteers and Environment Volunteers from G86 did not meet all of their objectives. Project objectives convey the most significant results from Volunteer activities and are intended to contribute to achieving project goals. Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteers in the Education sector have four project objectives, and Volunteers in the Environment sector have three project objectives. We spoke with both G85 and G86 Volunteers as well as post staff to gather their perspectives on project objective accomplishments (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Tonga Staff and Volunteers' Perception on Meeting their Project Objectives

Education Project Objective	G85	G86	Staff
(1) Increase the capacity of teachers to use general and/or English teaching skills	100% (2/2)	100% (5/5)	50% (2/4)
(2) Increase the English proficiency of English teachers (as measured through use of classroom procedural English)	100% (2/2)	80% (4/5)	50% (2/4)
(3) Increase achievement of students in English	100% (2/2)	80% (4/5)	100% (4/4)
(4) Increase the ability of community members to support students' access to learning	100% (2/2)	40% (2/5)	33% (1/3)
Environment Project Objective		**G86**	**Staff**
(1) Increase community members' knowledge and appreciation of the environment and awareness of environmental issues		78% (7/9)	100% (4/4)
(2) Strengthen community members' capacity to assess emerging environmental risk/impacts, then plan and implement nature-based actions to adapt and increase resilience		44% (4/9)	0% (0/3)
(3) Strengthen community members' capacity to implement elements of disaster risk management to increase resilience		44% (4/9)	33% (1/3)

Source: Volunteer and Staff Interviews

Many Volunteers said that the post did not train them for their project work. Staff described issues with preparing for pre-service training (PST), citing an overall lack of programming support due to the post's rushed development and implementation of the Environment project.

Rushed Environment Project Planning Led to Inadequate Training and Support for Group 86 Environment and Education Volunteers

We found that Peace Corps/Washington and the post rushed the project review [6] for the post's Environment project, which is a critical planning process for designing new projects. According to the agency's Project Review Guide, posts should complete a project review approximately 15 months before the first Trainees arrive. Per the Project Review Guide, planning for and initiating the review

[6] The project review includes four phases: planning, desk review, field review, and analysis. The purpose of a project review is to identify project strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through a participatory process that gathers stakeholder insights and perspectives.

process far in advance makes it possible for the post to design the project, identify and prepare sites and partners, and design training based on the new project. However, Peace Corps/Tonga only completed its project review 9 months before the first cohort of Environment Trainees arrived at the post, 6 months short of the agency's recommended timeframe. Because the review was rushed, the Environment project was poorly implemented, resulting in inadequate project design, training, and support for the G86 Education and Environment Volunteers.

Inadequate Project Design

According to the Peace Corps Guide for Project Design, [7] posts are required to develop a logical project framework for each project, along with a project implementation plan, and a programming and training bridge. While the post completed these design components for the Peace Corps/Tonga Environment project, Peace Corps/Washington and post staff described these components as "vague," not "tailored for the Tonga environment," and specifically referred to the programming and training bridge as being complex and difficult to understand, particularly for new programming staff.

Peace Corps Guide to Project Design Elements

Logical project framework: consists of a logic model and a monitoring and evaluation plan:

- The logic model outlines the project's goal, objectives, Volunteer activities and their outputs, expected outcomes, assumptions, and external factors that may affect the project's implementation and effectiveness.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan provides guidance on how to report on Volunteer activities and how to routinely track and collect Volunteer activity data.

Project implementation plan: documents essential project inputs (Volunteers, partners, and sites) and strategies.

Programming and training bridge: helps establish and clarify the connections between the activities included in the projects' logical project framework, the competencies needed to ensure Volunteers are prepared to carry out those activities, and the process tasks associated with implementation of each project activity.

Another example of the post's insufficient project design was its failure to complete an Environment project memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Tongan Government. The project implementation plan called for an agreement with Tonga's Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change, and Communications to provide host country support for Volunteer training and site identification. However, as of January 28, 2026, the post had not yet completed an MOU.

Based on our assessment, we recommend the following:

1. **The Director of Programming and Training revises where necessary, the Logical Project Framework and the Implementation Plan for the post's Environment project.**

2. **The Country Director establishes an Environment project memorandum of understanding with appropriate government partners.**

[7] A guide that presents a step-by-step process for designing a Peace Corps project.

Volunteer Project Objectives

Inadequate Project Support for Volunteers

Prior to our arrival at the post, we issued a survey to all Peace Corps/Tonga staff and Volunteers to better understand the challenges Volunteers face in achieving their project objectives. According to our survey results, 48 percent (12/25) of the Volunteers who responded said they found the programming team to be slightly or not at all supportive. Specifically, Volunteers reported concerns of negligence among the programming staff with respect to project support. One Volunteer said, "I think some of the programming staff are not interested in doing the job they have to full capacity." Some staff also acknowledged that programming staff did not adequately support Volunteers. Post leadership said Volunteers also reported that programming staff do not listen to them.



Figure 2: Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteer at site.

During our interviews with Volunteers, we heard that the programming staff were struggling to respond to the demands of the newly established Environment project. Peace Corps/Washington staff described the programming staff who were managing the new Environment project as being "stretched to the limit" and "pushed to the extreme."

As a result of the post's inadequate support, Volunteers reported that they have lost their trust in the programming staff. One staff member acknowledged that the Volunteers have become discouraged and do not bother to speak to staff. The programming team has the responsibility to support Volunteers in achieving their project objectives throughout their service. Based on our assessment, we recommend that:

3. **The Country Director and the Programming Team develop and implement a plan that improves Volunteer support for meeting project objectives.**

Inadequate Technical Training for Volunteers

Post staff indicated that the Environment and Education projects did not have fully developed Continuum of Learning and Assessments [8] or Learning and Development Plans. [9] These documents are critical agency standards for the development and content of technical training that prepares Volunteers to be effective in service as development professionals and ambassadors of world peace and friendship. Post staff also indicated that the training for the Environment Volunteers had not been developed by the time the first cohort arrived.

[8] The Continuum of Learning and Assessments outlines learning experiences and assessments that cover all core and project-specific technical competencies over the course of a Volunteer's service.

[9] A Learning and Development Plan outlines the expectations and requirements for learning and assessment of Trainees/Volunteers.

Volunteer Project Objectives

All five of the G86 Education Volunteers we interviewed reported that their training was inadequate for their success at site. For example, the training did not adequately cover how to create a teaching curriculum or practical teaching concepts, including co-teaching and classroom management.

The Environment Volunteers reported that their technical training was inadequate in the following ways:

- No context on how to navigate Tongan culture within the communities as it pertains to the Environment sector;
- No examples of viable and relevant projects that could be executed at site;
- No tools on assessing community needs, and the specific environmental needs of each island; and,
- Insufficient project-related language training.

The Environment Volunteers expressed a need for more training on how to effectively collaborate with schools and write grants, as these responsibilities are either currently part of their roles or were expected by their communities.

By not ensuring Volunteers are adequately trained, the post failed to meet one of the fundamental purposes of the Peace Corps Act: to support interested nations in addressing their needs for "skilled manpower." Based on our assessment, we recommend that:

4. **The Director of Programming and Training ensures the Training Manager develops a Continuum of Learning and Assessment and Learning Development Plan to align with the Logical Project Frameworks for the Education and Environment projects.**



Figure 3: Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteer at site.

Site Management

We found that the post failed to meet critical site management standards for Volunteer safety and security in a variety of areas. Specifically, post leadership did not manage staff responsibilities for site management, and the post did not have any site history documentation in the Volunteer Information Database Application (VIDA). Moreover, the post failed to adequately identify and prepare sites and homes for its Environment Volunteers. Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteers also told us that the post programming team site visits were unhelpful.

Additionally, we found that the Volunteer homes we inspected failed to meet critical safety and security housing standards. The SSM did not review the safety and security incidents before placing Volunteers at site. Our review also revealed that the post did not document Volunteer safety and security concerns as required by agency policy.

To What Extent Did the Post Meet Site Management Standards?

We answered this objective by assessing the post's compliance with housing criteria by visiting 16 Volunteers across 3 islands to observe their housing. Additionally, we examined a sample of Volunteers' site history documentation in VIDA and conducted interviews with post and Peace Corps/Washington staff.

The post's support in keeping Volunteers healthy, safe, and secure at their sites—where they live and work—is a critical feature of a successful Volunteer experience. Effective Volunteer support is not possible without appropriate and effective site management.

The Post Failed to Meet Critical Site Management Requirements

The post did not adequately develop or execute its site management responsibilities as required under the agency's site management standards. These standards require that posts have a site management strategy to include developing and maintaining a post-specific site management manual and ensuring staff involved in site management understand their roles and responsibilities, such as properly maintaining site history documentation; identifying and preparing sites for Volunteer placement; and visiting Volunteers at site.

The Site Management Process

According to the agency's site management guidance, effective site management is one of the most critical features of a safe and successful Volunteer service. It forms the basis for meeting host country-identified priorities through Volunteer service and provides important risk mitigation for safety, security, and medical considerations. Simply stated, a site is where a Volunteer lives and works. Peace Corps Volunteers who have a well-defined site, counterpart, and work assignment, coupled with adequate ongoing support, are much more likely to integrate into their communities and develop the relationships that are necessary for a safe and productive Peace Corps service.

Post Leadership Did Not Manage Staff Responsibilities for Site Management and Did Not Have a Site Management Manual

We found the post did not have a site management manual and post leadership had not been managing the post staff's site management responsibilities. The agency's site management standards require every post to have a site management manual, which must document the post's site management strategy, processes, and

roles and responsibilities of the staff involved. The requirements call for the CD and DPT to clarify roles and expectations for communication across units, and to confirm each participant's engagement in the site management process.

For example, former post leadership developed the Environment project in Tonga without any key Environment programming staff to lead the site identification and development process. Instead, a single programming staff member, who had no prior training or experience with the Environment project, managed the site selections and preparation for the Volunteers in both project sectors. The site management process, specifically site identification and preparation, is one of the most resource-intensive and complex undertakings for posts and should involve multiple staff. [10] When the post's new Environment project PTS arrived in February 2025, their role in the site management process for the next group of Environment Volunteers was not clearly explained by post leadership.

The Post Had No Site History Documentation in VIDA

We found that the post did not have any site history documentation in VIDA. Safety and Security Instruction 401 requires each post to maintain its site history documentation in VIDA, which staff use to make informed site management decisions. Site history documentation is comprised of programming, safety and security, and medical information about past, current, and future Volunteer sites. The intent is to capture security and other information that could affect future Volunteer placements. Poor site history documentation increases the risk of Volunteers being placed at unsafe sites.

We took a sample of 20 Volunteer sites and searched in VIDA for the following documentation: site survey form, site selection criteria checklist, and housing criteria checklist. [11] We did not find any of the forms. We requested additional site history documentation from the post to see if the documentation had been completed and stored as hard copies instead of being uploaded into VIDA. In response to our request, the post provided only a handful of documents, including incomplete housing criteria checklists.

According to staff, the PTA maintained the post's site history documentation, a critical responsibility within the site management process, because the information is used to inform ongoing site management decisions. After the PTA unexpectedly passed away in 2024, prior post leadership did not reallocate this responsibility to other staff. As a result, during our review of site history documentation, post staff could not locate or provide critical site history documentation. One staff said, "There was no follow-up from leadership about the files […] neither of them [former CD and former DPT] seemed to care."

The Post Failed to Properly Prepare Environment Volunteer Sites

The post also failed to adequately identify and prepare sites before Volunteer placements. The Global Site Management Guidance requires posts to identify and prepare sites for Volunteer placement to

[10] Site identification and preparation includes initial engagement with host country partners at the national level and engagement with organizations at the local level. Identifying and preparing a site for a Volunteer includes identifying a local partner organization, a counterpart/supervisor to collaborate with, and safe housing where a Volunteer can live.
[11] These documents have now been added to VIDA as various dropdowns and fields.

ensure that every Volunteer has a local partner organization, is placed at a site in a safe home and with an appropriate counterpart.

Volunteers had mixed perspectives on the appropriateness of their site placements based on their service sector. More than half of the Education Volunteers (4/7) we interviewed found their sites to be appropriate based on their project assignments. However, Environment Volunteers were critical of their site placements, as 56 percent (5/9) said their sites were not appropriate for their project assignments.

We heard from Environment Volunteers that their communities were not ready for them when they arrived at site or had been misinformed about the work they could provide. For example, one Volunteer said that post staff never met with the Volunteer's counterpart before arriving to site. When the Volunteer was placed at the site, the counterpart believed the Volunteer was an engineer and was expected to build a seawall.

One Environment Volunteer disclosed that staff expected the Volunteer to live with a family until the Volunteer was able to find independent housing. However, when the Volunteer arrived at site, a completely different family came to pick up the Volunteer. Another Environment Volunteer indicated that the community wasn't ready for their arrival, recalling that the home's construction was incomplete and that the community was installing a sink on the day the Volunteer moved in. One post staff member stated that the previous CD would approve Environment Volunteer site placements before housing had been secured, describing the approach as "appalling."

The post also arranged for Environment Volunteers to live with their counterparts. While Peace Corps/Washington staff said they could not recall an agency-wide policy that prohibits posts from placing Volunteers to live with their counterpart, considering their role in collaborating with Volunteers on project activities, sharing living arrangements with a colleague can create challenges or discomfort. For example, one Volunteer described the situation as "sharing a house with their boss."

Volunteer Site Visits Were Unhelpful

Half of the Volunteers we interviewed reported that site visits from the programming team were not helpful or substantive. According to the agency's Tri-Regional Site Management Standards and Guidelines, the PM or senior programming staff must conduct one of the two site visits during each Volunteer's service. The agency considers site visits to be important for staff to understand the Volunteer's experience with their host family and community and to provide guidance and support when needed. However, one Volunteer described how a programming staff member scheduled a site visit "about 5 times" but never showed up. Another Volunteer described the same programming staff's visit as just "check[ing] the box" with "no real substance."

Site Management

We determined that post staff did not adequately manage staff responsibilities, document site histories, prepare Volunteer homes and sites, or execute effective Volunteer site visits because it did not have a site management manual and staff lacked adequate training. Staff expressed confusion about the structure and responsibilities within the programming team, including uncertainty with who oversaw Environment Volunteer housing. Many staff members reported that they had never been trained to assess housing or complete site management tasks, despite being assigned those duties.



Figure 4: Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteer at site.

The CD reported that the post had begun drafting a post-specific site management manual. Based on our assessment, we recommend the following:

5. **The Director of Programming and Training oversee development of a site management manual, which includes, but not limited to, site history documentation maintenance in the Volunteer Information Database Application for all active and prospective sites; Volunteer sites visits; and site identification and preparation in accordance with Manual Section 270 and the Global Site Management Guidance.**

6. **The Director of Programming and Training trains staff on the new site management manual.**

7. **The Country Director and the Director of Programming and Training oversee the implementation of the post's site management manual.**

Volunteer Homes Failed to Meet Essential Health, Safety, and Security Criteria

We inspected 16 Volunteers' homes against the agency's housing criteria and identified deficiencies with 94 percent (15/16) of them. Specifically, we found low compliance with window and door requirements, which are critical for ensuring the security of Volunteers in their homes (see Figure 5). Appropriate housing is a critical site management requirement that supports a safe Volunteer experience.

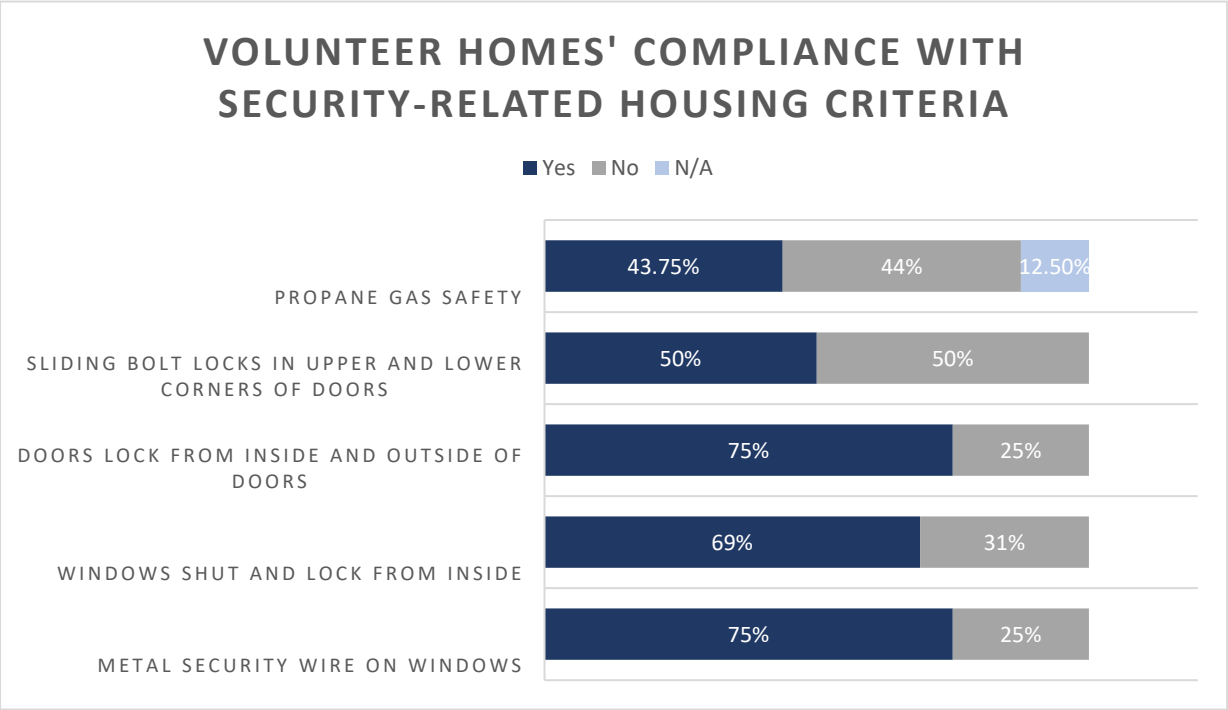


Figure 5: Rates of compliance of 16 Volunteer Homes with Security-Related Housing Criteria

We found that 44 percent (7 /16) of the Volunteers' kitchens were not compliant with the agency's propane gas standards. [12] Six of the houses had propane gas tanks placed within 1.5 meters (approximately 5 feet) from the stove. Per agency policy at the time, when adequate ventilation and placement of tank at least five feet from stove is not possible, Volunteers must conduct monthly testing of cooking/gas equipment for potential leaks and are provided gas detectors. However, the seven Volunteers who had propane gas tanks closer than 1.5 meters from the stove and without adequate ventilation in their kitchens, reported that they were not trained to conduct monthly testing.

Per Manual Section (MS) 270 Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security, "Each post must ensure that Volunteer sites, housing, and work assignments are appropriate and meet all Peace Corps and post established criteria." We determined that staff failed to effectively assess and approve homes for Volunteer placement because they lacked adequate post-specific housing criteria and training. Many staff reported that they had never been trained to assess Volunteer housing.

We found that post's housing criteria checklist omitted several required agency criteria, including requirements pertaining to:

- The location and type of Volunteer housing within the community;
- Door and lock requirements; and
- Kitchen safety (for example, propane gas tank placement, pests, fire extinguishing methods).

[12] We assess propane gas safety due to the unfortunate gas tank-related death of a Volunteer in 2019 at another post: Management Advisory Report: Peace Corps/Ghana Gas Tank Cooking Safety (IG-20-02-SR)

Post staff also informed us that mosquito netting is required in Volunteer homes per the post's housing criteria checklist; however, this requirement did not appear in the housing criteria checklist we received and reviewed. This omission is significant because during our site visits and interviews, four Volunteers reported contracting dengue before our arrival in Tonga, which the post's Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) identified as one of the greatest health risks Volunteers face in Tonga.

Placing Volunteers in homes that did not meet agency standards increased their exposure to health and safety risks. The CD reported that the post has made progress on a housing criteria checklist. Based on our assessment, we recommend that:

8. **The Country Director develops post-specific housing criteria as required and strongly consider the necessity of mosquito netting as a mitigation measure.**

9. **The Country Director takes corrective action to ensure that all current Volunteer housing meets post housing criteria.**

10. **The Country Director ensures that staff are annually trained on assessing homes as required by Safety and Security Instruction 410 and can demonstrate the knowledge of assessing homes.**

Volunteer Homes That Needed Immediate Attention

We determined that six of the homes we inspected posed immediate health and safety risks to the Volunteers and warranted immediate attention:

- One house was prone to flooding, and the Volunteer had been evacuated three times because of the flooding.
- One house's ceiling was being held together by tape, resulting in pigeon feces and debris falling from the roof to the ceiling into the Volunteer's kitchen (see Figure 6).
- One home had a front door that did not close and lock properly.
- Three homes had gas stoves that were either enclosed in a cupboard or covered by a blanket.



Figure 6: *Le t*, Volunteer ceiling held together by tape, *Right*, displaying areas where pigeon droppings and debris have penetrated through the ceiling.

We communicated with post staff and requested that they immediately resolve these issues. The post reported that the housing concerns had been addressed and described what actions had been taken. Specifically, the post reported that they fixed the gas tank issues, repaired the ceiling in the kitchen, purchased additional sandbags for the flood-prone home, and installed mosquito netting and a lock on the door in the final home.

The Safety and Security Manager Did Not Review Safety and Security Incidents Before Placing Volunteers at Site

We found that the former SSM did not review the safety and security incidents recorded in the Security Incident Management System (SIMS) [13] before assigning Volunteers to their sites. According to MS 461, Crimes Against Volunteers and Trainee Procedures, the SSM must review safety and security incidents that have occurred at a site to determine if it is safe for future Volunteer placement.

The former SSM reported that he was not aware of the requirement to review safety and security incidents before placing a Volunteer at site. Instead, the former SSM indicated that they consulted with the local police before Volunteer placements. While the local authorities can provide information on criminal activity, they do not have access to the comprehensive data on safety and security incidents stored in SIMS or an understanding of the safety and security considerations that are specific to the Peace Corps service.



Figure 7: Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteer at site.

The former SSM's failure to review sites' safety and security records could result in Volunteers being placed in unsafe locations. The post welcomed a new SSM in December 2025. Based on our assessment, and consideration of the scope of responsibilities for an SSM, we recommend the following:

11. The Safety and Security Manager, in coordination with the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, reassess the safety of all current Volunteer sites that have not been reviewed for prior incidents.

[13] SIMS is a Peace Corps database that serves as a record of reported security incidents—such as theft, assault, stalking, and vehicular accidents—and services provided to Volunteers in response to those incidents.

12. The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager is trained to review historical safety and security incidents before assigning Volunteers to site.

The Post Did Not Document Safety and Security Concerns as Required

Two serious safety concerns that Volunteers disclosed during our site visits, which had also been reported to staff, were not documented in VIDA or SIMS. Per MS 270, "Volunteers' site history must capture security issues that could affect future Volunteer placements in particular areas. Information should include Volunteer concerns about a location […]" Additionally, SSI 401 directs post staff to coordinate with the SSM to document any issues or events that raise serious concerns as a security note in VIDA as a safety measure for future Volunteers.

After we spoke with post staff about the Volunteers' concerns, the post updated SIMS to include the two incidents. To ensure post staff properly document security issues and events, as required, we recommend the following:

13. The Country Director ensures all post staff understand their roles and responsibilities to document Volunteer concerns in site history documentation.

Safety and Security Program

While Volunteers and staff generally viewed the post's safety and security program as effective, we found it lacked compliance with key agency requirements within the Safety and Security Instruction (SSI) 602, Emergency Action Plan Testing Guidelines, and the 2025 Safety and Security Global Core Guide for Facilitators. Specifically, the post's Safety and Security training did not address post-specific security risks relevant to the Tongan culture. Additionally, the post did not consistently complete debriefings following emergency action planning. Finally, the post did not provide Volunteers with the required emergency action plan refresher training.

WAS THE SAFETY AND SECURITY PROGRAM COMPLIANT AND EFFECTIVE?

We answered this objective by assessing the post's compliance with and implementation of requirements regarding safety and security training; response to safety and security incidents; and emergency action planning. We issued a staff and Volunteer survey to gather perceptions of the post's Volunteer safety and security program. We also reviewed a sample of safety and security incidents recorded in SIMS, reviewed VIDA for the required emergency action planning documentation, and verified Volunteer training records. Finally, we interviewed Volunteers, and key embassy, Peace Corps/Washington, and post staff.

The Safety and Security Manager Did Not Sufficiently Tailor Safety and Security Training to address Relevant Risks

During the course of our review, we learned that the former SSM did not tailor the safety and security training for relevance to Tonga and its culture. Though most Volunteers reported that the safety and security training adequately prepared them to maintain their safety, many Volunteers said the training needed to address additional post-specific risks.

For example, one Volunteer reported that many female Volunteers were expected to serve as a *tou'a* and expressed concerns that the role could lead to some inappropriate behavior by local men. In Tongan culture, a *tou'a* is the person who is designated to prepare and serve the traditional kava drink to the people sitting in the kava circle. One Volunteer described the role as the Volunteers "bartend for the kava" and serve a bunch of "drunk" locals. This highlights the post-specific security risks of harassment that Tonga Volunteers indicated were not sufficiently covered in their safety and security training.

Tou'a History

During the ordination of a king, noble, or chief, a formal kava ceremony is performed by a *tou'a* from a specific lineage. It is that family's responsibility to serve the royal family, nobles, and chiefs and was esteemed as an important and sacred responsibility.

Kava is a drink made from the dry roots of the kava plant, a perennial shrub native to the South Pacific Islands, and has been part of Tongan formal ritual and social culture for more than 2,000 years.

According to Section 8A(c) of the Peace Corps Act, Volunteers must receive training that is specifically designed for their country of service, that includes cultural training related to gender relations and strategies for reducing risks. According to the agency's Safety and Security Global Core Guide for Facilitators, the agency provides posts with standardized safety and security training sessions. These sessions include a standard format and the facilitators delivering the content are encouraged to follow the sequence and method of the training's delivery to ensure all Trainees get the same information.

However, the format also allows flexibility for facilitators to update specific slides for post-specific content. The former SSM said he did not adjust the lesson plan to the Tongan culture and felt comfortable using the standard training as it was.

According to the current CD, female Volunteers are now prohibited from participating as a *tou'a* in kava ceremonies, following a safety and security incident with a Volunteer. The CD said the post is working on including this new policy in the Volunteer handbook. We applaud this new policy and also recommend that:

14. The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager adapts safety and security training in accordance with Section 8A(c) of the Peace Corps Act.

The Post Did Not Consistently Complete Emergency Action Plan After-Action Debriefings or Reports

The post did not meet some emergency planning requirements outlined in the agency's Emergency Action Plan (EAP) [14] Testing Guidelines. While the post met the annual EAP testing, activation, and training requirements, we found that the post did not complete EAP after-action reports [15] or debriefs for every required EAP activation, as outlined by SSI 602. [16] For example, in 2024 and 2025, the post activated their EAP in response to tsunami warnings but did not complete an after-action report for these activations.

According to SSI 602, posts are required to test their EAP at least once a year to prepare staff and Volunteers for a real emergency. Under some circumstances, an EAP activation can be used in lieu of a planned EAP test, provided that the post completes an after-action report. Additionally, posts are required to conduct a debrief for all staff and Volunteers who participate in any EAP test or activation. According to MS 270, the SSM is responsible for ensuring all required components of the Volunteer safety and security support system, including planning for emergencies, are operational and properly executed, and the CD is responsible for overseeing compliance with these requirements.

We found that the SSM was unaware of the requirement to complete after-action reports and debriefs for every EAP activation. The SSM's insufficient understanding of the EAP requirements and their significance was compounded by post USDH leadership's inadequate oversight to ensure these after-actions were fulfilled.

When after-action reports and debriefs are not completed, the post loses the opportunity to evaluate how well its EAP performed and the Volunteers' response to emergencies. Completing an after-action report and debrief could help staff gain lessons from each EAP activation such as identifying communication gaps, logistical challenges, or areas where Volunteer safety could be improved. This is particularly important for countries like Tonga, where natural disasters are frequent and EAP activations occur regularly. Learning from each EAP activation helps the post better prepare for future

[14] EAP test is an exercise that realistically tests a post's ability to react to the most common emergency situations at post.
[15] These reports are facilitated analysis of the response to an Emergency Event.
[16] The Peace Crops employs a five-stage system structure when responding to emergencies. The five stages of activations include:(1) Alert, (2) Standfast, (3) Consolidation, (4) Evacuation, and (5) All-Clear.

emergencies and adapt its response strategies accordingly. Based on our assessment, we recommend that:

15. **The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager receives training on the requirement of ensuring debriefs are held, after-action reports are completed, and the Emergency Action Plan is updated following Emergency Action Plan tests or activations, as required by Safety and Security Instruction 602.**

The Post Did Not Provide Required Emergency Action Plan Training for Volunteers

While the post provided Volunteers with the required EAP training during PST, staff did not provide the required EAP follow-up or refresher training. According to SSI 602, the post must provide Volunteers with initial EAP training during PST along with continuous refresher or follow-up trainings throughout their terms of service. The SSM did not provide additional EAP trainings because the SSM incorrectly assumed that the Volunteers' participation in EAP activations fulfilled the refresher training requirements. According to SSI 602, the post must conduct testing and training of their EAP at least once each year but in certain instances, an actual activation of an EAP can serve in lieu of training. SSI 602 does not specify that EAP activations can be used in lieu of Volunteer refresher or follow-up training. However, according to MS 270, the CD is ultimately responsible for ensuring that Volunteers and Trainees are trained in the post's EAP and in their individual EAP responsibilities.

Without ongoing training, Volunteers may react improperly to an emergency, creating a risk to the health and safety of the Volunteers. For example, four Volunteers we interviewed reported that they were uncertain about their consolidation point location. Consolidation points are designated meeting points that are pre-determined by post staff, which serve as a refuge point for Volunteer and Trainees when conditions at post present risks to Volunteers and Trainees and/or operations. An EAP follow-up or refresher training could allow staff to clarify consolidation points for Volunteers.

The post also did not provide timely training for Volunteers designated as "wardens," a key role in emergencies, such as when responding to natural disasters. Wardens are responsible for providing vital communication between the post and other Volunteers in the field before, during, and after an emergency. According to SSI 602, the roles and responsibilities of wardens must be covered during annual training. We found that some wardens did not receive the training until after an EAP activation had already occurred. As a result, during the EAP activation, some wardens were unaware of their responsibilities, potentially jeopardizing the safety of Volunteers and the effectiveness of the emergency response.

Based on our assessment, we recommend that:

16. **The Country Director works with the Safety and Security Manager to provide Volunteers Emergency Action Plan refresher training and timely warden training, as required by Safety and Security Instruction 602.**

Volunteer Health Program

We found that the post's Volunteer health program generally complied with agency requirements. During our review, we found that the post's health unit faced challenges under the two former Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMO), resulting in 35 recommendations from the Office of Health Services' (OHS) [17] health unit assessment, which have since been resolved. We also found that the post provided sufficient health training to Volunteers during PST, documented emergency planning requirements, and provided effective healthcare to Volunteers throughout their service.

WAS THE HEALTH PROGRAM COMPLIANT AND EFFECTIVE?

We answered this objective by assessing post's compliance and effective implementation of requirements regarding in-country healthcare provided to Volunteers, Volunteer health training, post's Medical Action Plan, and emergency action planning. We issued a staff and Volunteer survey to gather perceptions of post's Volunteer Health Program. We reviewed Volunteer training records and conducted interviews with Volunteers and staff at Peace Corps/Washington and the post.

The Post Addressed Office of Health Services Unit Assessment Recommendations

According to OHS, the former PCMOs demonstrated communication delays and impaired teamwork. OHS also observed the former PCMOs did not adequately meet the standards for clinical documentation of the Volunteers' care. One PCMO did not document their care, while the other PCMO's records were incomplete.

In 2023, Peace Corps OHS conducted a health unit assessment and identified operational deficiencies of Peace Corps/Tonga's health unit and issued 35 recommendations to address these deficiencies. For example, OHS found that the health unit did not have a private area for Volunteer consultations, as there was no partition between the reception and treatment areas. Moreover, the post had inadequate infection control practices with no sterilization equipment; had expired medications in its storage facility; and was missing personal protective equipment. By November of 2025, the post took corrective actions to close all 35 recommendations.

Volunteers Were Provided Sufficient Health Training During Pre-Service Training

Both Volunteers and staff reported that the PCMOs met key requirements to provide the sufficient health training to Volunteers during PST. We found that 88 percent (23/26) of Volunteers who responded to our survey felt that the training adequately prepared them to maintain their health. Some Volunteers we interviewed reported that the training was good, citing that staff went over mosquito nets, water filters, and sanitation. Other Volunteers, however, reported a gap in information based on what they started experiencing at site. Comprehensive health training is a major part of the Volunteer health support program in-country, and the post is required to provide health and wellness sessions to all Volunteers at PST.

[17] The Office of Health Services was renamed the Office of Volunteer Health in the agency's 2026 reorganization.

The Post Met Key Medical Emergency Planning Requirements

The post met key agency requirements for preparing to respond to Volunteer medical emergencies. For example, the post's medical action plan [18] included contact information for emergency medical transportation services like surface ambulances and domestic air ambulances. Additionally, post staff received training on MS 265 [19] procedures in 2023, 2024, and 2025. Although Tonga is geographically isolated and has limited transportation options, post staff expressed confidence in their ability to respond to emergencies.

The Post Met Key Requirements to Provide In-Country Healthcare to Volunteers

The post met key agency requirements to provide Volunteer and Trainees in-country healthcare. The post maintained medical coverage through permanent PCMOs, temporary duty (TDY) PCMOs, and a back-up medical provider from Tonga that could provide medical coverage to Volunteers in the case of a PCMO's absence. From December 2024 to June 2025, the post had six TDY PCMOs rotate through the post for 7 months. A permanent PCMO was onboarded with Peace Corps/Tonga in July 2025. This frequent turnover led to frustrations among some Volunteers who had to repeatedly explain their medical issues to each new TDY PCMO. However, of the Volunteers who reported that they had received care from a TDY PCMO, 81 percent (21/26) responded that they were satisfied with the physical healthcare the post provided. We also found that from 2023 through 2025, Volunteers had not issued any formal complaints with OHS regarding concerns related to their healthcare.



Figure 8: Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteer at Site.

[18] A plan that every post must develop, document, and regularly update to properly handle its Volunteers' potential urgent or emergent medical needs, which includes transportation and medical resources in country.

[19] Manual Section 265 Death of a Volunteer Procedures is a framework for post and Peace Corps/Washington staff to effectively respond to the death of a Volunteer.

Recommendations

We recommend:

1. The Director of Programming and Training revises where necessary, the Logical Project Framework and the Implementation Plan for the post's Environment project.
2. The Country Director establishes an Environment project memorandum of understanding with appropriate government partners.
3. The Country Director and the Programming Team develop and implement a plan that improves Volunteer support for meeting project objectives.
4. The Director of Programming and Training ensures the Training Manager develops a Continuum of Learning and Assessment and Learning Development Plan to align with the Logical Project Frameworks for the Education and Environment projects.
5. The Director of Programming and Training oversee development of a site management manual which includes, but is not limited to, site history documentation maintenance in the Volunteer Information Database Application for all active and prospective sites; Volunteer site visits; and site identification and preparation in accordance with Manual Section 270 and the Global Site Management Guidance.
6. The Director of Programming and Training trains staff on the new site management manual.
7. The Country Director and the Director of Programming and Training oversee the implementation of the post's site management manual.
8. The Country Director develops post-specific housing criteria as required and strongly consider the necessity of mosquito netting as a mitigation measure.
9. The Country Director takes corrective action to ensure that all current Volunteer housing meets post housing criteria.
10. The Country Director ensures that staff are annually trained on assessing homes as required by Safety and Security Instruction 410 and can demonstrate the knowledge of assessing homes.
11. The Safety and Security Manager, in coordination with the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, reassess the safety of all current Volunteer sites that have not been reviewed for prior incidents.
12. The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager is trained to review historical safety and security incidents before assigning Volunteers to site.
13. The Country Director ensures all post staff understand their roles and responsibilities to document Volunteer concerns in site history documentation.
14. The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager adapts safety and security training in accordance with Section 8A(c) of the Peace Corps Act.
15. The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager receives training on the requirement of ensuring debriefs are held, after-action reports are completed, and the Emergency Action Plan is updated following Emergency Action Plan tests or activations, as required by Safety and Security Instruction 602.
16. The Country Director works with the Safety and Security Manager to provide Volunteers Emergency Action Plan refresher training and timely warden training, as required by Safety and Security Instruction 602.

OIG Response to Agency Comments

We appreciate the Peace Corps' collaboration throughout this evaluation. In response to the preliminary report, the Peace Corps concurred with the report's 16 recommendations. Moreover, post has already addressed two of those recommendations. We reviewed evidence of completed corrective actions and closed recommendations 8 and 12. We will consider closing the remaining recommendations upon confirmation from the chief compliance and risk officer that appropriate corrective actions are documented and complete.

We wish to note that in closing recommendations, we are not certifying that we have reviewed their effects. For the full text of the agency's comments, see Appendix D.

Appendix A: Scope and Methodology

Scope

OIG conducted this evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga by addressing the following objectives:

1. Did Volunteers meet project objectives?
2. To what extent did the post meet site management standards?
3. Was the post's Volunteer safety and security program in compliance with agency requirements and effective?
4. Was the post's Volunteer health program in compliance with agency requirements and effective?

The scope of this evaluation extended to the post's programs, operations, and activities from April 1, 2022, through March 2026.

Methodology

Interviews and Inspections

We traveled to the post from July 31, 2025, through August 21, 2025, and visited 16 sites to inspect Volunteer housing.

We selected a sample from the 29 Volunteers at the post and interviewed 17 of them, balancing sector, island location, and Volunteer group number with logistical considerations for travel. We also interviewed 11 of 19 post staff regarding the post's compliance and effectiveness in Volunteer health and safety, and project activities. Following our fieldwork in Tonga, we conducted virtual follow-up interviews with selected post staff. We also conducted interviews with 12 selected Peace Corps/Washington staff. See appendix B for more detailed information.

Data Review and Analysis

We analyzed various data sources to evaluate aspects of staff and Volunteer performance and the post's safety and security and health programs. This included reviewing samples of site history documentation in VIDA and incident responses in SIMS to verify compliance with agency standards. To understand the post's health program operations, we reviewed its emergency planning documentation, medical action plans, Volunteer training records, and quality improvement records.

Survey

Between June 10 and June 25, 2025, we deployed a survey to all 48 staff and Volunteers in Tonga to assess post's compliance and effectiveness in the areas of Volunteer health and safety, project activities, Volunteer training and support, and post leadership. We received 44 total survey responses. Survey results were analyzed using descriptive analyses for fixed responses and qualitative coding for interview responses.

Appendix A: Scope and Methodology

Criteria

We reviewed the following policies, procedures, and guidance related to the post's program, operations, and activities:

- Peace Corps Act, 22 U.S.C. § 2501 *et seq.* (1961)
- Peace Corps Tri-Regional Site Management Standards and Guidelines (2025)
- Manual Section
    - MS 243 "Responding to Sexual Assault"
    - MS 261 "Medical Offices and Peace Corps Medical Officers"
    - MS 265 "Death of a Volunteer"
    - MS 270 "Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security"
    - MS 461 "Crimes Against Volunteers and Trainees"
- Safety and Security Instruction
    - SSI 602 "Emergency Action Plan Testing Guidelines"
- Medical Technical Guideline (TG)
    - TG 110 "Volunteer Health Program"
    - TG 204 "Health Care Facility and Consultant Assessments and Surveys, and Volunteer Site Visits"
    - TG 302 "Volunteer Concerns"
    - TG 310 "In-Country Health/medical and Safety Training"
    - TG 385 "Medical Action Plan"

Inspector General Standards

OIG conducted this evaluation in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020).

Appendix B: OIG Interviews

At the time we started our evaluation, there were 29 Volunteers at the post. Table 5 below provides demographic information for the post's Volunteers. We interviewed a stratified judgmental sample of 17 Volunteers which reflected these demographics.

Table 5: Volunteer Demographic Information

Project	Percentage of Volunteers
Education	66%
Environment	34%
Gender	**Percentage of Volunteers**
Female	55%
Male	45%
Age	**Percentage of Volunteers**
25 or younger	34%
26-29	34%
30-49	17%
50 and over	14%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding

At the time we started our evaluation, the post had 19 staff. Table 6 lists the post staff we interviewed.

Table 6: Post Staff Interviews

Position	Status
Country Director	USDH
Director of Management and Operations	USDH
Director of Programming and Training	USDH
Peace Corps Medical Officer	PSC
Medical Assistant	PSC
Program Manager	PSC
Program Sector Specialist (2)	PSC
Safety and Security Manager	PSC
Training Manager	PSC
Quality Assurance Specialist	PSC

**United States direct hire (USDH); personal services contractor (PSC)*

Appendix B: OIG Interviews

We interviewed key stakeholders, including diplomatic officials with the U.S. Embassy in Fiji and Peace Corps/Washington staff, as shown in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Stakeholder Interviews

Position	Organization
Ambassador	U.S. Embassy in Fiji
Regional Security Officer	U.S. Embassy in Fiji

Table 8: Peace Corps/Washington Staff Interviews

Position	Office
Chief Administrative Officer	Inter-America and Pacific Region*
Chief of Operations/Acting Regional Director	Inter-America and Pacific Region
Chief of Programming and Training	Inter-America and Pacific Region
Country Desk Officer	Inter-America and Pacific Region
Expert (Programming and Training)	Inter-America and Pacific Region
Regional Programming, Training, and Evaluation Advisor	Inter-America and Pacific Region
Regional Security Advisor	Inter-America and Pacific Region
Director	Office of Victims Advocacy
Program Specialist (Environment)	Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support*
Director	Office of Health Services*/Quality Improvement
Regional Medical Officer (2)	Office of Health Services
Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer	Office of Safety and Security*

**The office/region names have since changed following the Peace Corps' reorganization in April 2026.*

Appendix C: List of Acronyms

CD	Country Director
DMO	Director of Management Operations
DPT	Director of Programming and Training
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
MS	Manual Section
MOU	memorandum of understanding
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OVSS	Office of Volunteer Safety and Security
PCMO	Peace Corps Medical Officers
PST	pre-service training
PTS	Program and Training Specialist
PM	Program Manager
PTA	Programming and Training Assistant
SSI	Safety and Security Instruction
SSM	Safety and Security Manager
SIMS	Security Incident Management System
TDY	temporary duty
VIDA	Volunteer Information Database Application

Appendix D: Agency Response

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joaquin Ferrao, Inspector General

FROM: Richard E. Swarttz, Chief of Staff

CC: Kris Besch, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Alexis Fowler, General Counsel
Andrew T. Shepard, Special Assistant to the Acting Director
Karen Roberts, Deputy Chief of Staff and White House Liaison
Nancy Herbolsheimer, Associate Director, Department of Global Operations
Elizabeth Neason, Country Director, Peace Corps/Tonga
Christine Gottschalk, Deputy Director, Department of Global Operations
Kavita Pullapilly, Chief of Operations, Indo-Pacific & Caribbean
Dr. Wayne Quillin, Director, Office of Volunteer Health
Stefanie Generao, Chief, Quality Improvement, Office of Volunteer Health
David Fleisig, Director, Office of Volunteer Safety and Security
Matthew Cain, Director of Management and Operations, Peace Corps/Tonga
Nina Weisenhorn, Director of Programming and Training, Peace Corps/Tonga
Claire Lopez, Supervisory Country Desk Officer, Indo-Pacific & Caribbean
Temby Caprio, Chief Compliance and Risk Officer
Jennifer Piorkowski, Director, Executive Secretariat Unit
Nafisah Hankins, Compliance Officer Audit Liaison

DATE: October 30, 2026

RE: Agency Response to the *Evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga*

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this preliminary report from the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Enclosed please find the agency's response to the recommendations made by the inspector general as outlined in the OIG's *Evaluation of Peace Corps/Tonga* sent to the agency on September 3, 2026.

Recommendation 1

The Director of Programming and Training revises where necessary, the Logical Project Framework and the Implementation Plan for the post's Environment project.

Concur

Response: The director of programming and training (DPT) worked with the programming team on an initial update to the Logical Project Framework (LPF) of the environment project based on the necessary Peace Corps/Washington required transition. This was submitted and approved in August 2026. Further refinement and adaptations will be completed after the new program manager (PM), and programming and training specialist (PTS) are onboarded and can co-lead a participatory review and reflection with national and sub-national partners. Implementation planning details are all included in the rationale section of the updated LPF.

Documents Submitted:

- Logical Project Framework for Environment

Status and Timeline for Completion: March 2027

Recommendation 2

The Country Director establishes an Environment project memorandum of understanding with appropriate government partners.

Concur

Response: On March 4, 2026, the country director (CD) met with the new Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change & Communications (MEIDECC), the main partner ministry for the environment project. The CD discussed the fact that there was no memorandum of understanding (MOU) and said that a follow-up meeting to discuss will be planned after the new PM for the environmental resilience project is hired. The new PM started on September 21, and a Project Advisory Committee Pause and Reflect Workshop is being scheduled for January 2027, to review results of the first environment project Volunteers, Volunteer Group 88 (G88), who completed their service at the end of August 2026. In February, CD and program staff will follow up with the Prime Minister, Ministry Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and others as necessary to develop and sign the MOU.

Documents Submitted:

- Environment Project MOU

Status and Timeline for Completion: March 2027

Recommendation 3

The Country Director and the Programming Team develop and implement a plan that improves Volunteer support for meeting project objectives.

Concur

Response: Upon arrival, the new CD emphasized with staff that clear, consistent communication is critical to the success of Peace Corps/Tonga and implemented a number of measures to address the lack of communication among all staff, including weekly senior staff and bi-weekly all staff meetings. The CD started the Volunteer Service Improvement Committee (VSIC) in May 2025 which meets twice a year and has the express goal of improving Volunteer support by ensuring Volunteers have a voice at post. The CD also started the Peer Support Network (PSN) in April 2026 with the Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs). The post newsletter was started in September 2025, with assistance from Volunteers, and has continued to be published approximately every two months.

In addition, a Volunteer support meeting is held weekly to discuss Volunteer issues, concerns, complaints, safety and security, programming, medical challenges. It is an opportunity for post staff to coordinate cases and issues. By discussing issues with all parties, staff ensure that issues don't fall between the cracks and go unaddressed. Post utilizes a Volunteer Support Tracker to monitor the issue, assign staff to follow up, and ensure the issue is being handled in a timely manner and compliant with policies and processes.

Documents Submitted:

- Program Plan
- VSIC meetings schedule
- PSN overview and meeting agenda
- Post Newsletters (2)
- Tou'a Policy

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 4

The Director of Programming and Training ensures the Training Manager develops a Continuum of Learning and Assessment and Learning and Development Plan to align with the Logical Project Frameworks for the Education and Environment projects.

Concur

Response: In March 2026, post welcomed the regional programming and training advisor to Peace Corps/Tonga to provide a refresher training on Training Design and Assessment and to support the finalization of the Continuum of Learning and Assessment (CoLA) for G88. In April and May 2026, the DPT supported the training manager to finalize the CoLAs in conjunction with all units responsible for pre-service and in-service training (programming, safety & security, health, and the administrative unit). In June 2026, the training manager

worked with programming staff to use the CoLAs to develop Learning and Development Plans (LDPs) aligned to each project framework.

Documents Submitted:

- CoLA – Education
- CoLA – Environment
- LDP – Education
- LDP – Environment
- Regional programming and training advisor Scope of Work

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 5

The Director of Programming and Training oversees development of a site management manual, which includes, but is not limited to, site history documentation maintenance in the Volunteer Information Database Application for all active and prospective sites; Volunteer site visits, site identification and preparation, in accordance with Manual Section 270 and the Global Site Management Guidance.

Concur

Response: Throughout February and March 2026, the DPT worked closely with PM-Education and the quality assurance specialist (QAS) to facilitate a participatory and inclusive process for developing Peace Corps/Tonga's first *Site Management Manual*. On March 24, 2026, the DPT submitted the draft manual to the CD for review and subsequently addressed all comments and feedback. On April 7, the CD submitted the final manual to Peace Corps/Washington.

Documents Submitted:

- Site Management Manual

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 6

The Director of Programming and Training trains staff on the new site management manual.

Concur

Response: The DPT supported the PM-Education to lead the Site Manual development process as a participatory and inclusive approach. As a result, staff reported greater knowledge, understanding, and ownership of the site management manual. Additional training was provided in advance of key steps of the site management process—housing inspections (July 1, 2026) and

supervisor/counterpart orientations (July 22, 2026)—to review global requirements, review post's Site Management Manual, and train on how to complete tasks in Volunteer Information Database Application (VIDA). Per Peace Corps/Tonga's Site Management Manual, "Each year, the DPT will facilitate a process to review this manual and adjust processes as needed. The review process will include the Safety and Security Manager (SSM), Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMOs), Programming and Training teams, Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS), and CD. After the revised version is available, a "kick-off" meeting or orientation of the annual site management cycle will be arranged with relevant staff. During this time, the team will discuss the annual site management calendar with key dates and will clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations regarding the site management process." The annual review meeting is currently scheduled for October 9, 2026.

Documents Submitted:

- Site Management Manual
- Site management manual development meetings (3)
- G88 Housing Checks Training meeting invite
- Supervisor Counterpart Orientation Training meeting invite

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 7

The Country Director and the Director of Programming and Training oversee the implementation of the post's site management manual.

Concur

Response: From March 2026 through September 2026, the CD and DPT were actively engaged in supporting staff to implement key requirements of Peace Corps/Tonga's *Site Management Manual*. As a result, a review of VIDA will show:

- Peace Corps/Tonga staff are regularly adding Volunteer notes and site notes to VIDA based on conversations with Volunteers, conversations with partners, and site visits.
- Pre-service training (PST) housing and host family documentation was completed, and housing assignments were made prior to Trainees being sent to their host families.
- Peace Corps staff used VIDA to complete site survey information, housing inspection documentation (including photos), host family documentation (where applicable), supervisor/counterpart orientation documentation, and site contact information during site identification and preparation phases of site management.

Documents Submitted:

- *Site Management Manual*
- VIDA is updated for review of all active and prospective sites

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 8
The Country Director develops post-specific housing criteria as required and strongly considers the necessity of mosquito netting as a mitigation measure.

Concur
Response: The CD reviewed and updated the housing criteria checklist in March 2026 and directed programming staff to add mosquito screens to Volunteer windows in independent housing and in bedrooms of host family housing. In addition, the CD had staff add that no Volunteers may live with a supervisor or counterpart. In May, the SSM added that no Volunteer may live in a guest house. During Volunteer site visits by the SSM and during final housing inspections, staff check that gas tanks continue to meet housing criteria standards.

Documents Submitted:
- Housing Criteria Checklist

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 9
The Country Director takes corrective action to ensure that all current Volunteer housing meets post housing criteria.

Concur
Response: The new SSM, Peace Corps safety and security officer (PCSSO), and CD conducted site visits in April and May 2026 to confirm that all current Volunteer housing met standards. The CD and SSM conducted site visits to all future housing for the incoming G88 in July and August to ensure all housing met the criteria prior to swearing-in on August 28, 2026.

Documents Submitted:
- VIDA is updated for review of all active sites
- PCSSO Trip Report Excerpt – May 2026

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 10

The Country Director ensures that staff are annually trained on assessing homes as required by Safety and Security Instruction 410 and can demonstrate the knowledge of assessing homes.

Concur

Response: In May 2026, all staff involved in site selection met to review updated housing criteria and review changes. On July 1, 2026, housing training was conducted for the CD, SSM, QAS, PM-Education and PTS-Environment prior to final housing inspections and selections for G88 housing assignments. Housing training will be conducted by the SSM and CD for all programming and training staff including the new PTS-Education, PM-Environment, and PTS-Environment (ETA December 2026), PCMOs, and QAS prior to site development phase 2 which commences in early FY27 Q2.

Documents Submitted:

- Calendar invitation – G88 Housing Checks

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 11

The Safety and Security Manager, in coordination with the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, reassess the safety of all current Volunteer sites that have not been reviewed for prior incidents.

Concur

Response: During the PCSSO post visit in April/May 2026, the CD and PCSSO, worked with the new SSM to reassess all current Volunteer sites that were not reviewed for prior incidents.

Documents Submitted:

- VIDA is updated for review of all active sites

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 12

The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager is trained to review historical safety and security incidents before assigning Volunteers to site.

Concur

Response: The PCSSO trained the new SSM during their April/May 2026 post visit. Refresher training will be conducted prior to PST and site identification in 2027. Refresher trainings are standard practice and will continue.

Documents Submitted:

- PCSSO Trip Report – May 2026

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 13

The Country Director ensures all post staff understand their roles and responsibilities to document Volunteer concerns in site history documentation.

Concur

Response: New site management manual training was conducted and messaging around criticality of documentation in VIDA was emphasized. New onboarding training for newly-hired programming and training staff includes training on how and when to use VIDA. In addition, at every opportunity, the CD and DPT remind staff in the weekly Volunteer Support meeting that non-medical and non-SIMS reports communication with Volunteers must be recorded in VIDA. The CD also reminds PCMOs, SSM, admin staff, and QAS to record any non-medical issues Volunteers bring up related to areas such as programming, training, travel, policies, general Volunteer support, etc., and to document that they referred the Volunteers to the right person.

Documents Submitted:

- See VIDA for all active sites
- *Site Management Manual*

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 14

The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager adapts safety and security training in accordance with Section 8A(c) of the Peace Corps Act.

Concur

Response: A new SSM was hired in November 2025 and began her role in December 2025. The CD and PCSSO, during a post visit in April/May, worked with the new SSM to update and tailor all safety and security training sessions to reflect realities at post. In addition, Volunteers who were completing their service in August, participated in certain safety and security sessions, like the sessions on Interpersonal Relationships, Travel and Transportation, and Sexual Assault Awareness, to share the Volunteer experience. The Tou'a policy was updated in May, stating that female Volunteers are no longer allowed to serve as Tou'a. The new SSM shared with Volunteers how to explain this in a cross-culturally sensitive manner.

Documents Submitted:

- EAP Training Session
- Home Safety Training session
- Interpersonal Relationships Training session
- Transportation Training session
- Water Safety Training session
- Unwanted Attention Training session
- PST 88 Calendar of Training Events
- Tou'a policy

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 15

The Country Director ensures the Safety and Security Manager receives training on the requirement of ensuring debriefs are held, after-action reports are completed, and the Emergency Action Plan is updated following Emergency Action Plan tests or activations, as required by Safety and Security Instruction 602.

Concur

Response: The new SSM was trained in-person by the PCSSO and conducted an EAP training for all post staff during the PCSSO's visit in May 2026. The new SSM was also trained on after-action planning/meetings and documentation. The CD reviewed and coached the new SSM on completing the after-action meeting and report for the March tsunami warning. The new SSM conducted an earthquake drill on September 14, debriefed the exercise with staff, and wrote the after-action review.

Documents Submitted:

- After-action reports for tsunami warning in March 2026
- Earthquake drill September 2026 report

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

Recommendation 16

The Country Director works with the Safety and Security Manager to provide Volunteers Emergency Action Plan refresher training and timely warden training, as required by Safety and Security Instruction 602.

Concur

Response: The former SSM conducted warden training for G87 and refresher training for G86 in September 2025. The new SSM conducted EAP and warden training for G88 on August 24, 2026. EAP and warden refresher trainings were conducted for G87 at mid-service training (MST) on September 15.

Documents Submitted:

- New Warden Training Session for G88 2026 PST
- EAP Training Session for G88 2026 PST and EAP Quiz
- Warden Refresher Training Session for G87 at September MST
- EAP Refresher Training Session for G87 at September MST
- MST 87 Training Agenda
- PST 88 Calendar of Training Events (see Week 10 schedule)

Status and Timeline for Completion: October 2026

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