

Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021) on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

Equity Action Plan Summary

Peace Corps

The mission of the Peace Corps is to provide a service opportunity for motivated changemakers to immerse themselves in a community abroad, working side by side with local leaders to tackle pressing challenges. 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.

Delivering equity through Peace Corps

The Peace Corps delivers on its mission through its volunteers. The Peace Corps' call to serve has historically been answered by a diverse set of U.S. citizens, though there are disproportionately fewer volunteers from underserved communities. The Peace Corps' mission of world peace and friendship, and its approach to achieving this mission, requires a diverse Corps to model how individuals from diverse backgrounds can unite to address important and challenging goals.

New strategies to advance equity

- **Expand opportunities for members of underserved communities to serve in the Corps**

Peace Corps stipends cover basic living expenses and aspiring volunteers are expected to cover additional expenses through personal or family funds (including the cost of obtaining a medical clearance or an unexpected trip home). Aspiring Volunteers from underserved communities may have less access to discretionary personal or family funds to support them. 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. Interested Americans from underserved communities may also 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 student loan debt. To address these barriers, the Peace Corps will conduct a review of financial barriers to service to inform planning efforts; update its recruitment strategy to focus on underserved communities; identify any equity barriers that may occur during service; and update terminology in Peace Corps data systems to reflect equity priorities and align recruitment data systems with updated posts requests.

- **Embed equity in overseas post operations**

As Volunteer diversity has increased, core systems have not been fully adjusted to accommodate 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 LGBTQI+ individuals who may face legal discrimination in some countries of service; Volunteers of color shouldering the burdens of colonialist history, expectations, and legacy power structures; all gender identities negotiating often fixed or nuanced gender roles that are often binary and culturally expected; physical environments and lack of regulatory protections or cultural viewpoints related to people with

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disabilities that make accessibility a challenge; and religious minorities impacted by historical conflicts around religion within any given country-context. To begin to address these barriers to equitable volunteering, the Peace Corps will implement equity councils to foster inclusive cultures, including the development of equity benchmarks in core business processes; conducting and analyzing feedback from internal and external stakeholders and reporting findings; and addressing the challenge of advancing equity in the unique cultural contexts across overseas operations.

● **Enhance stakeholder engagement**

The Peace Corps was founded on the belief that lasting bridges of understanding and friendship can be built between individuals from vastly different backgrounds and yield tangible, lasting benefits. However, Peace Corps messaging about its intent and impact may not have effectively reached underserved communities. If the Peace Corps does not understand the reluctance or concerns underserved communities have about the volunteer experience, it will be difficult to address apprehensions in credible, authentic ways. In response to this barrier, the Peace Corps will design and implement a data and stakeholder-informed strategy to reach underserved communities, focusing specifically on Title I eligible schools, which serve a diverse range of American communities, including communities of color, communities in rural areas, and communities adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. The Peace Corps will continue to deepen its commitment and support of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), with plans to be designated as a formal partner as part of the HBCU Partners Act. Additionally, the recently established Peace Corps Tribal Nations Action Plan will ensure regular and meaningful consultation between the Peace Corps and Tribal Nations around agency programming and policies that may have Tribal implications.

● **Integrate equity into agency procurement and contracting**

The Peace Corps has an opportunity to improve equity through data-driven decision-making that will better assess and address barriers to contracting

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and procurement opportunities that are faced by small disadvantaged businesses. The Peace Corps has exceeded its small disadvantaged business statutory minimum of 5 percent of the total value of the agency's contracts over the last three years. However, the agency has experienced challenges meeting its statutorily minimal goal of 3 percent of the total value of the agency's contacts to Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZone), which has been less than 1 percent. A key barrier preventing more contracts from being awarded to HUBZone contractors is the lack of awareness within the agency on the certified HUBZone program and contractor capabilities and guidance on how to reach goals. To address this barrier, the Peace Corps will work with contracting professionals to perform market research to increase its use of small disadvantaged businesses and HUBZone programs and include best practice contact language to allow small disadvantaged businesses and HUBZone businesses to better compete for and enter into contracts with the agency. Guidance will be provided to non-procurement staff on the certified HUBZone program, and HUBZone vendor capabilities and vendor outreach will be conducted to provide visibility around available procurement opportunities.

● **Invest in resources to help advance civil rights**

Advancing equity rests on the presumption of equal opportunities and protection under the law. As noted in the Executive Order, government programs are designed to serve all eligible individuals. To meet this objective and to enhance compliance with existing civil rights laws, agencies were obligated to address the operational status and level of institutional resources available to offices or divisions within the agency that are responsible for advancing civil rights or whose mandates specifically include serving underrepresented or disadvantaged communities. To meet this mandate, Peace Corps will leverage recent hires in the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity to identify and address barriers limiting employment opportunities for members of a particular group based on their sex, race, ethnicity, or disability status.

Building on Peace Corps' progress

This equity action plan builds on Peace Corps' progress delivering on equity and racial justice in the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration.


- **Developing an Intercultural Competence, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Practice**

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. An equity and diversity lens has been embedded into key decision-making structures. The Office of Civil Rights and Diversity has begun outreach to other Federal government agencies to expand Peace Corps' recruitment and outreach pipeline.

- **Enhancing equity measures and equitable data**

Data is currently being analyzed from a new equity-focused section in overseas Posts' annual Integrated Planning and Budget System. This data was collected in an operational survey across 13 different Post-level business functions (for example, post management, Volunteer support, personnel management) and will inform best practices for equity. The Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Equity assessment continues to focus on assessing, synthesizing, and analyzing the race and ethnicity diversity data in its Volunteer pool, from pre-application lead to completion of service. The Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning integrated diversity and equity 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.

Building on Peace Corps' progress



● **Building in-country equity capacity**

All Country Directors in the Africa Region completed the Intercultural Development Inventory training and debriefed 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 training and debriefed 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.