

Peace Corps/USAID: HIV/AIDS Prevention and Mitigation Initiative

One of the most serious worldwide threats to public health and development is the spread of HIV/AIDS. According to the [Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS](#), an estimated 42 million people are living with HIV/AIDS, with approximately 95 percent of the global total residing in the developing world. In FY 2000, Peace Corps¹ announced a five-year multi-faceted HIV/AIDS Prevention and Mitigation Initiative to strengthen the ability of local populations to combat the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. Under this Initiative, Peace Corps is intensifying its role in the global effort to fight HIV/AIDS through the extensive training of Volunteers and community members, the development of materials to be used for educational purposes, and through grants to community-sponsored projects that battle the virus.² To carry out this Initiative, Peace Corps partnered with the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), the [David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#), and the U.S. Agency for International Development ([USAID](#)).

What responsibilities do the partners have under this Initiative?

Partnering organizations agreed to fund specific objectives of the Initiative and worked with Peace Corps to determine how monies would be used. The Gates Foundation, which is dedicated to improving people's lives by sharing advances in health and learning with the global community, pledged \$500,000 to the Initiative. The Packard Foundation, which provides national and international grants to nonprofit organizations in a variety of program areas, including Children, Families, and Communities, pledged \$250,000 to the Initiative. USAID, an independent federal government agency that works to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives by supporting global economic growth, global health, democracy, and humanitarian assistance, granted \$1.5 million to the Initiative over a five-year period.

Peace Corps manages and administers the funds through its Integrated Planning and Budget System (IPBS). Peace Corps programming and training staff recommend specific activities for funding to Peace Corps management, who are responsible for ensuring that foundation funds are utilized in accordance with their partnership agreement. Once sponsored, in-country Peace Corps Volunteers and staff, along with their host-country stakeholders, conduct prevention, education, and skills-building training activities at the country and community level under the supervision of sub-regional programming and training coordinators. Field staffs arrange and supervise activity logistics themselves, with support as needed by local contractors or Washington headquarters-based technical specialists. Detailed field reports are compiled, analyzed for trends and lessons, and then placed in an annual report with a financial statement produced by the Peace Corps Office of Planning, Budget, and Finance.

¹ [Peace Corps](#) and its nearly 7,000 Volunteers serve in 76 countries around the world, providing assistance not only in HIV/AIDS education and prevention, but also in protecting the environment, teaching children, promoting health and nutrition, and starting small businesses. Since 1961, more than 165,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps.

² Activities undertaken through this Initiative have taken place in numerous African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) as well as in Armenia, Belize, Costa Rica, Honduras, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Romania, Samoa, and Ukraine.

How are the monies being used?

Foundation monies, in concert with federal support from USAID, focus on three Initiative objectives:

- *HIV/AIDS-related training and capacity building activities:* Workshops by specialized trainers are provided for Volunteers, community leaders, and health and education professionals.
- *HIV/AIDS training and education materials development:* Resource materials – some of which are in local African languages – are used by Volunteers, community members, and government officials to collaboratively prevent the spread of the virus, and to increase the ability of locals to care for those infected.
- *Individual small-scale community grants:* Individual communities shared in the cost of small-scale grant activities to encourage local responsibility and sustainability.

The Gates Foundation monies provided training and educational materials for community outreach efforts. Funds provided by the Packard Foundation focused on projects that engaged young people and included training directed toward youth, school counselors, youth community advocates, and decision-makers. USAID funds help to increase the capacity of nongovernmental organizations and community health workers to conduct effective HIV prevention and care programs; maximize resources by encouraging multi-sectoral collaboration; and develop integrated community-based activity planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

What specific activities have been supported by funds designated for this Initiative?

In 2001, foundation monies trained nearly 2,400 Volunteers as educators of HIV/AIDS prevention and care. In Africa, all Peace Corps Volunteers – even those involved in non-health sector work – are being trained as HIV/AIDS educators. A water and sanitation project in Kenya, for example, incorporated elements of HIV/AIDS education in its instructions.

Peace Corps dedicated 50 Volunteers to eastern and southern Africa to focus exclusively on HIV/AIDS-related projects. Still more Volunteers were organized to work on HIV/AIDS projects through the Crisis Corps.³

To increase the sustainability of the Initiative, Peace Corps used foundation funds to engage their host country stakeholders in “train the trainer” activities. Stakeholders included community leaders, schoolteachers, small business owners, health center workers, NGO leaders, and union officials, among others.

Educational materials funded in part by foundation monies were distributed to local communities. Training tools – such as a *Life Skills Manual* focusing on HIV prevention measures, decision-making skills, and issues of communication and self-esteem – were

³ This Peace Corps program enables Returned Volunteers to serve overseas for a limited amount of time, usually three to six months.

distributed in English, French, and Swahili. Field staff in Benin and Tanzania commissioned the translations locally in French and Swahili, respectively. In-country resource centers received training and reference materials from private sector organizations – such as [Advocates for Youth](#), [UNAIDS](#), [Save the Children](#), and [Family Health International](#) – that contained information on HIV/AIDS, nongovernmental responses to the virus, treatment and counseling, and new technologies. Volunteers and their local counterparts used these materials to plan community activities.

Certain foundation monies were targeted for use as community grants to support local projects and to encourage sustainability and accountability in the fight against the virus. Communities submitted project ideas to Peace Corps Volunteer counterparts, and demonstrated their commitment and responsibility to the project by supplementing foundation funds with their own money, goods, and services.

How many people have taken part in activities supported under this Initiative?

More than 50,000 people worldwide benefited from foundation monies, technical assistance, and materials development in 2001. (The results of 2002 have not yet been fully documented.) Over 26,000 host country nationals and Volunteers were involved in training activities. More than 16,000 host country nationals and Volunteers used the educational materials and other resources globally. A dozen small community grant activities took place in Belize, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Mali, Mauritania, and Romania. Community projects varied from work on an AIDS resource center in Romania to conducting a women's health workshop in rural Mauritania. Over 9,700 locals were involved in the community grant activities – with the average small grant totaling \$3,449.

Peace Corps believes that this Initiative will have a profound cumulative effect in the future as larger numbers of Volunteers, health workers, counselors, and community leaders increase their own expertise and skill in HIV/AIDS education, and pass that knowledge on to others.

What has made this multi-sectoral partnership operate successfully?

What makes this Initiative successful is the understanding that the partnership is based on the grassroots development approach of Peace Corps. Private sector support allows Peace Corps to scale up efforts, strengthening and better preparing communities to deal with the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS. Foundation funds complement the Peace Corps' operating budget, enabling the expansion of current HIV/AIDS activities and improving the effectiveness of Volunteer efforts through the participation of their host-country counterparts.

The partners designated clear objectives that leveraged each other's strengths and advanced mutual goals from the start. Utilizing existing Peace Corps administrative processes and procedures – such as IPBS – streamlined management and administrative processes, saving time, effort, and resources.

What have been some of the challenges facing this Initiative?

Staffing a five-year initiative with rotating Volunteers on two-year assignments makes it financially and logistically challenging to conduct baseline surveys and assess long-term impact.

Short-term partnerships can sometimes create a longer-term demand for training, education materials, or community outreach in the field that may be difficult for Peace Corps to meet once the partnership has ended.

Will the Initiative extend beyond the original five-year time frame?

The Initiative will continue to build capacity in local communities to address social, economic, and health ramifications of the virus through 2005. At that time, future goals of the Initiative will be assessed by the Peace Corps Director's office. The HIV/AIDS Initiative is scheduled to undergo a status review in 2003.

Individual agreements between Peace Corps and partner organizations will conclude according to pre-arranged partnership timetables, which may or may not coincide with the lifespan of the HIV/AIDS Initiative. With the majority of Gates Foundation funds utilized in 2000 and 2001, Peace Corps and the Gates Foundation are in the process of discussing future collaboration. An interagency agreement between Peace Corps and USAID ensures ongoing support and assistance for Initiative goals during the entire five years.