

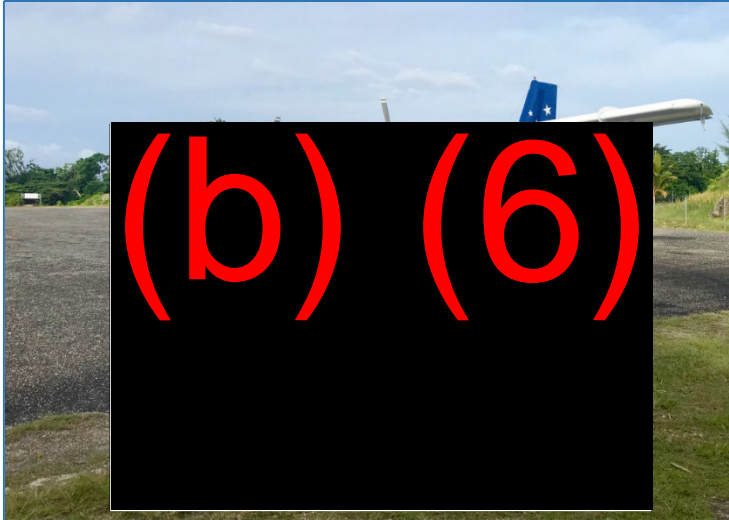


**Solomon Islands
Re-entry Assessment Report
July 14-August 4, 2019**



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(b) (6), Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, Safety and Security Lead
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Submitted August 26, 2019



2 LOCAL NEWS

PM wants peace corps back here

PRIME Minister Manasseh Sogavare has expressed his desire to see the re-establishment of the US Peace Corps Volunteer Programme here.

Sogavare yesterday met with senior US Officials in Honiara to discuss possible areas where the volunteer programme will be reinstated in what is regarded as one of the most peaceful nations in the world.

The Peace Corps operation in Solomon Islands was suspended in 2000 during the height of the ethnic tension.

During their active presence here, the Peace Corps Programme have successfully encouraged US volunteers at the grassroots level serving community living, serving in areas including education, health, sanitation, agriculture and community development.

"We need you back into our country," Sogavare told the visiting US officials headed by Maura Fulton.

"The programme will provide a re-employment opportunity to local people, cultural relations between our two countries" he said.

The purpose of their visit to Honiara this week is to introduce and brief the Solomon Islands Government of their mission to conduct a New Country Re-entry Assessment regarding the re-opening of a Peace Corps Office in Honiara.

The team will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the social, political and security situations in Solomon Islands as well as considering medical, administrative and programmatic concerns to determine the feasibility of re-opening a Peace Corps programme in Solomon Islands.

Team leader Maura Fulton said volunteers will be deployed to rural communities around the country to engage with people and to support their social development issues such as health and education.

The team has been scheduled to meet with a number of government ministers and senior officials during their stay which concludes on August 12.

Currently, nearly 7,000 Peace Corps volunteers are working in 56 countries to bring clean water to communities, teach children, protect the environment, help start new businesses and disease prevention.

Since 1961, more than 152,000 Americans have joined the Peace Corps, serving in 141 nations.



Prime Minister Sogavare with the visiting Peace Corps officials at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

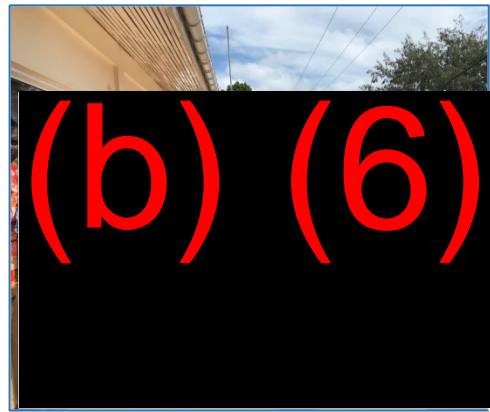
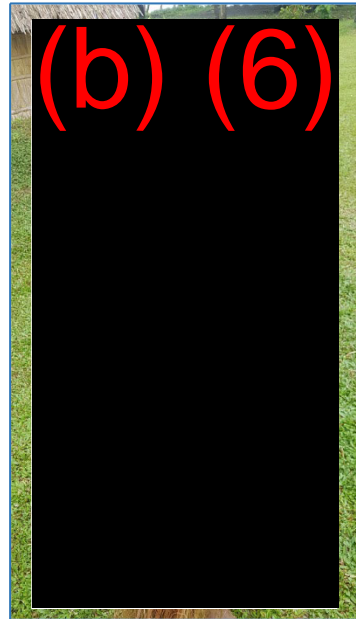
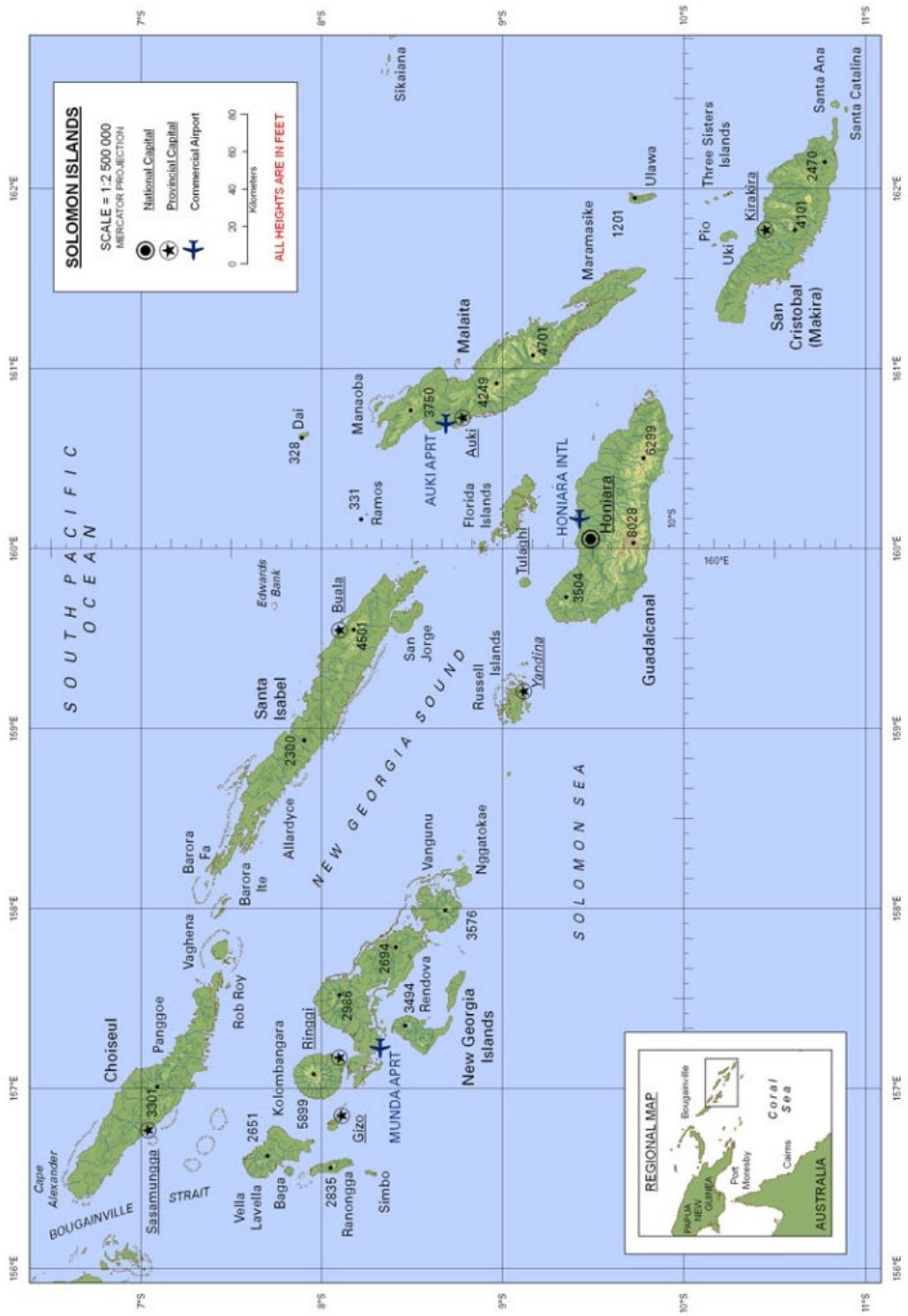


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Map of Solomon Islands



I. Executive Summary

Overview

The 2018 Country Portfolio Review included a comprehensive New Country Entry Tool that analyzed over 46 internal and external data points to help determine the feasibility of establishing or re-establishing programs in a number of countries. Solomon Islands’ overall potential rating indicated that it was a promising country to consider. In addition, in February 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Government of Solomon Islands issued a formal invitation to Peace Corps to reestablish a program in the country. In her response, Director Jody K. Olsen acknowledged the invitation with plans to send an assessment team to determine the feasibility of reopening a program. In addition, Director Olsen and IAP Regional Director Huger met twice with Robert Sisilo, Solomon Islands Ambassador to the U.S. and Canada and Permanent Representative to the United Nations who expressed his support for a return of the Peace Corps. [See Appendix A.1 Invitation and Appendix A.2 Invitation Response.](#)

The IAP Region assembled a five-member assessment team to conduct a comprehensive assessment from July 14-August 4, 2019. The team was comprised of experienced staff members from the IAP Region, Office of Safety and Security, and Office of the Director with functional expertise in the areas of safety and security, medical, management and operations, and programming and training, as well as prior experience in the Pacific Region and/or in working in or supporting conflicted-affected environments.

The team spent several months preparing for the in-country assessment by reviewing historical files, conducting research, and interviewing headquarters staff, past PC/Solomon Islands staff, and colleagues in various sectors. They worked closely with the U.S. Embassy in Papua New Guinea to assemble a rich schedule of meetings and site visits. The extensive preparation period proved essential to a productive and successful visit.

On the ground, the assessment team was welcomed openly and enthusiastically by the Government of Solomon Islands at all levels from the Prime Minister to the provincial level assemblies. The team enjoyed support in equal measure from other development partners, non-governmental organizations, international volunteer organizations, service providers and vendors, former Peace Corps staff, and community members who were taught by Peace Corps Volunteers. The team found that the country offers an enabling environment in which Volunteers can have meaningful work and serve safely with the necessary medical care and logistical support. Volunteers will be able to provide technical assistance in the areas of greatest expressed need from the country, and for which the agency can recruit talent, namely education and youth development.

“We need you.”

- Hon. Manasseh Sogovare,
Prime Minister

“Peace Corps really had a lasting impact on people and communities in Solomon Islands.”

- John Muria, Attorney General and former student of a Peace Corps Volunteer

The team believes the assessment trip yielded sufficient information to enable Peace Corps to make an informed decision regarding re-entry into Solomon Islands. The team recommends that the Director reestablish a Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands and, upon Congressional Notification, direct the IAP Region and General Counsel to renegotiate the 1998 bilateral country agreement in consultation with the Department of State. The additional key recommendations at the end of this section and the more detailed recommendations found in the body of the report will serve as a foundation for a successful re-entry. [See Appendix A.3 Press Coverage for media stories of the assessment team’s visit.](#)

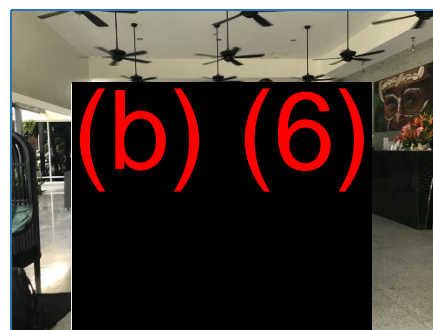
Purpose and Scope of the Assessment

The purpose of the assessment was to conduct a comprehensive review of the social, political, and security situation in the country, as well as medical, administrative, and programmatic matters to determine the feasibility of re-opening a Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands. The team made every effort to remain objective throughout the assessment and to gather and present comprehensive findings in order to make initial recommendations to the Director and senior leadership.

Team Members

The IAP Region assembled a qualified and experienced team to conduct the assessment. The team has experience in their functional areas, at Peace Corps headquarters and in the field/the Pacific Region, and has worked in or supported staff and Volunteers in conflict-affected environments. Team members are listed below and their biographies can be found in [Appendix A.4 Team Bios](#).

- (b) (6), Senior Advisor to the Director, Team Lead, Programming and Training Lead
- (b) (6), Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer, Safety and Security Lead
- (b) (6), Regional Security Advisor, Safety and Security
- (b) (6), Medical Officer – Epidemiology, Medical Lead
- (b) (6), Roving Director of Management and Operations, Administrative Lead



Methodology

The team used the NCE Assessment Guidelines¹ attached to MS340 as a reference and guide to ensure the report contains as much useful information as necessary for informed decision-making. The IAP Region guided the focus of the assessment and the team ensured collaboration with other key headquarters offices. The safety and security team followed the procedures in Safety and Security Instruction 201 as required by the Office of Safety and Security and the medical lead used standard evaluation forms required by the Office of Health Services. The administrative lead worked closely with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer to collect comprehensive information and the programming and training lead's assessment was informed by guidance and practices from the Office of Programming and Training Support and the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection.

Pre-Trip Planning

In the months leading up to the in-country trip, the team held a series of weekly team meetings to agree on the purpose, objectives, team member roles, and approach for the assessment as well as to conduct and share research. The team thoroughly reviewed internal historical files on Solomon Islands and other key documents including past new country entry assessment reports, current policies and guidelines, and many other internal documents. They gathered pertinent country background information on Solomon Islands and reports as well as information on U.S. government presence in the country. The team also had meetings and calls with colleagues from other USG agencies (Department of State, USAID, Millennium Challenge Corporation), the Ambassador of Solomon Islands to the U.S. Robert Sisilo, and some NGOs and others engaged in the country or region.

¹ The team recommends updating these guidelines to be more current and comprehensive and to provide better procedures, checklists, and templates so that all such assessments are consistent in scope and quality.

In-Country Schedule and Contacts

The control officers from the U.S. Embassy Port Moresby and the consular staff in Honiara put together a rich schedule of meetings and site visits for the team that covered three provinces: Guadalcanal, Western, and Malaita. Planning and coordination with the control officers in the few months prior to the team's arrival proved essential for the team in making the most of their time in-country. The team met and engaged with countless contacts from all levels of the government, NGOs, development partners, medical professionals, service providers, and community members.

The first stop was a two-day visit to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, to meet Ambassador Catherine Ebert-Gray and her country team for in-briefings. Ambassador Ebert-Gray is an enthusiastic supporter of Peace Corps' return. The team was then on the ground in Solomon Islands for 17 days, mostly based out of the capital city of Honiara (b) (6) was on the ground for 10 days). The team attended many meetings and site visits together and then split up according to specific needs of each component for others. They met with individuals and entities from: Solomon Islands government at the national provincial level; development partners from Australia, New Zealand, and the United Nations; NGOs, international volunteer organizations from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea; religious organizations, medical providers, security companies; private companies/vendors; and American citizens and RPCVs. A highlight of the trip was meeting seven former Peace Corps staff members. *See Appendix A.5 In-Country Schedule for the detailed schedule of meetings and site visits designed by the Embassy control officers. See Appendix A.6 Key Contacts for a comprehensive list of people consulted during the assessment. See Attachment EXEC.1 Meeting/Site Visit Notes for detailed notes of general and high level meetings conducted.*

Area of Assessment

The in-country assessment covered three provinces: Guadalcanal, Western, and Malaita.



Summary of Findings

Overview

The assessment team found a permissive environment and favorable conditions for the reestablishment of a Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands. In February 2019, the government of Solomon Islands issued a formal invitation to Peace Corps after a 19-year absence. From the Prime Minister and national and provincial government ministries to service providers, local community members, and former Peace Corps staff, the team was warmly welcomed and strongly encouraged to bring Volunteers back to the “Hapi Isles.” Peace Corps has had a lasting impact in the country and our absence is noticeable, particularly in the education sector.

Several major International Volunteer Organizations operate safely and successfully in the country (AVI, VSA, JICA, KOICA) and have been able to mitigate risks and challenges associated with safety, transportation, health care support, and communication. Peace Corps can fill a niche best by addressing the Government of Solomon Islands’ expressed needs, beginning in education and youth development. The Solomon Islands is covered by the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and has a consular agent in Honiara. The State Department, MCC, NOAA, and possibly others are looking to establish a presence in Solomon Islands; it is an exciting time for Peace Corps to be part of a wider USG investment in the country. There is overwhelming support and enthusiasm for the reestablishment of a Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands.

Safety and Security

The safety and security team conducted an in-depth risk assessment and found no major impediments to re-establishing a Peace Corps program. The safety and security issues identified, such as natural disasters and underdeveloped infrastructure, are similar in nature to challenges that have been successfully mitigated in other Pacific posts. Following years of international security assistance, it appears that the political environment is relatively stable and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force is now capable of maintaining order. Mitigation measures will be recommended concerning water transportation safety, establishing redundant communications in rural areas, identifying secure Volunteer housing, and implementing a strong safety and security training program that addresses threats specific to Solomon Islands. Several more remote geographic areas will require further assessment and shouldn’t be considered for the initial input of Volunteers.

Medical

The detailed evaluation of medical facilities yielded several positives and some challenges. Health care is not to U.S. or Western standards, including in the capital of Honiara. There are no private hospitals and the only public hospital in the capital is old, unsanitary, routinely runs out of supplies, and lacks capabilities more than basic labs, x-rays and stabilization of patients prior to evacuation. All expatriates are medevac’d to Brisbane for any care more than routine outpatient conditions or minor injuries. Despite these hurdles, there are some positives to be noted: there are reliable pharmacies that can procure safe Australian or New Zealand-sourced medications; there is a state-of-the-art eye care center; inter-island aeromedical evacuation is fairly robust, as is the ambulance service in Honiara; and there is a small network of well-trained specialist providers recommended by expatriate physicians who could assist the PCMO. Regional medical centers in the provinces could probably safely treat simple infectious disease problems such as dehydration from diarrhea or uncomplicated malaria. To compensate for the shortcomings of local care, Post will need two strongly trained PCMOs with a well-equipped health unit and a budget dedicated to both commercial air for routine medical needs and air ambulance for emergency evacuation. Medical accommodations may not be a realistic possibility until local health care infrastructure improves.

Administrative

The current operating environment in Solomon Islands has all the core elements needed to run a Peace Corps program. The administrative assessment found adequate utilities, communications, and transportation services. However, the country is prone to temporary systems failures and challenges related to locating mechanical parts. The real estate market is highly priced relatively to other Pacific Posts, especially in the premium areas of Honiara. Solomon Islands currently relies solely on satellite for international voice and data communications. The planned Coral Seas fiber optic submarine cable is currently under construction and will greatly increase capacity and reduce costs for internet service in 2020. The power company is investing in solar and hydro power sources to alleviate some dependence on diesel fuel and to reduce costs. Peace Corps' reputation and expressed support from local service providers will allow for strong business relationships to support core operations.

Programming and Training

The programming assessment yielded a clear need for technical assistance in a number of sectors, most notably in education and youth development. Solomon Islands has a very high birth rate and the task of providing universal access and completion for basic education is a difficult undertaking. The 'youth bulge' has other associated challenges, namely, a high number of drop-outs and out-of-school youth as well as increasing unemployment rates amongst those under 35. Under the Education Strategic Framework (2016-2030), the Ministry of Education and Human Resources has a clear objective to ensure that all youth achieve literacy and numeracy; this is recognized as the most important area where further progress is required. The team found that literacy is one of the most requested areas for Peace Corps assistance and school site placement at the primary and junior secondary level would provide Volunteers with a structured environment. Other expressed needs included teacher capacity-building, enhanced learning resources and libraries, and engagement with out-of-school youth. Availability of secure housing will be the biggest challenge in identifying site placements.



Summary of Key Recommendations

The assessment team recommends that the Director:

1. Reestablish a Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands and, upon Congressional Notification, direct the **IAP Region** and **General Counsel** to renegotiate the 1998 bilateral country agreement in consultation with the Department of State.

*Given concurrence on the recommendation to reestablish a program in Solomon Islands, the assessment team recommends that the **Office of Global Operations (OGO)** and the **Inter-America and Pacific Region (IAP Region)**:*

2. Collaborate with the Office of Safety and Security (OSS) to establish a strong safety and security program that addresses challenges specific to Solomon Islands including natural disasters, transportation safety, communications, underdeveloped infrastructure, and secure Volunteer housing.
3. Collaborate with the Office of Health Services (OHS) to establish a strong, well equipped health unit that can manage all routine and urgent care needs and can safely stabilize more severely ill or critical patients for aeromedical evacuation to Australia.
4. Collaborate with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) to ensure financial resources are reserved to initiate start-up expenses in FY2020 and build for incremental growth in FY2021, FY2022, and FY2023 as the Post graduates to an optimal trainee input of 40.
5. Collaborate with the Office of Programming and Training Support (OPATS) and Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS) to design a literacy education project with a focus on in and out of school youth and plan for a trainee input of 10-20 in Q2 FY2021 and a second input of 20 in Q1 FY2022 with initial placements in Guadalcanal and Western Provinces.

See the relevant sections of the report for more detailed recommendations under each Key Recommendation.

II. Country Analysis

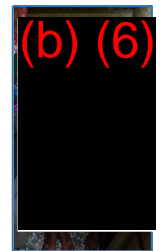
Peace Corps History

Peace Corps operated a program in Solomon Islands from 1971-2000, supporting the service of approximately 744 Peace Corps Volunteers. The original country agreement between the United States and the Government of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was signed on February 9, 1972. The most recent country agreement between the United States and the Solomon Islands was signed on November 6, 1998. [See Appendix A.7 Country Agreement.](#)

The Peace Corps program was suspended in 2000 due to the ongoing political situation and armed ethnic tension. While the conflict did not affect all provinces of Solomon Islands, the capital of Honiara was unstable and the ability to travel safely in and out of the country was not guaranteed. At that time, a decision was made to remove the Volunteers and maintain the Peace Corps office in Honiara with a skeleton staff in order to facilitate the return of Peace Corps if conditions improved. For a few years after the Volunteers' departure, the office was staffed by two host country nationals, each working on a part-time basis. In 2015 Peace Corps sent an assessment team to explore the possibility of opening a small program with short-term Peace Corps Response Volunteers but that did not materialize. In February 2019, the Government of Solomon Islands sent a formal invitation to Peace Corps to reopen a program. [See Appendix A.8 Briefing Paper for additional background on Pacific Island Posts that was shared with key contacts in country.](#)

History

Inhabitation of Solomon Islands began 6,000 years ago when a Neolithic Southeast Asian population arrived, settling tribal villages and surviving by hunting, fishing, and growing crops. Polynesians likely arrived around 1500 AD, absorbing or conquering the indigenous population and raiding neighboring island groups. The Spaniard Alvaro de Mendana attempted European settlement of the Solomon Islands in 1568 with the search for King Solomon's gold. But the islands were hostile to foreigners and Mendana died of malaria. Spanish interest ended in the early 1600s and, apart from some trading and missionary work, the islands were largely forgotten until the mid-19th century.



In 1893, European colonization of the South Pacific led to the Solomon Islands becoming a British protectorate. The British introduced their political, legal, and justice systems into the local government system. In 1942, during World War II, the islands were invaded by the Japanese and they established a base on the island of Guadalcanal. American forces countered the invasion and severe fighting followed on both land and sea. By the end of 1943, the Allies were in command of the entire Solomon chain. The Battle of Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands was a critical turning-point for Allied forces in the Pacific theater of World War II. The war eventually claimed 7,000 Americans and 39,000 Japanese from air, sea, and land battles as well as starvation and disease. Many Solomon Islanders helped the allied forces, especially as coast watchers or scouts, and received military decorations and honors. Peace Corps founder John F. Kennedy's "[encounter](#) with a Japanese destroyer on the night of August 1, 1943, may be the most famous small-craft engagement in naval history." In the post-war period there was great economic upheaval. The previous capital had been destroyed so a new center of government was established around the wharves and ports around the American-built Henderson Airfield. The new period of self-government focused on the development of the economy and investments in education and health. In July 1978 the Solomon Islands achieved independence from the British government.

The outbreak of violent conflict in the Solomon Islands in 1999 resulted in massive destruction of key industries and infrastructure, the breakdown of law and order, and the displacement of more than 30,000 people out of a population of 523,000. Many of the root causes of the conflict including poverty, disenfranchised youth, and a lack of basic social services remained unresolved. In addition, the unrest caused massive destruction of public buildings in the education system which had already suffered from overcrowded classrooms and deteriorating facilities, thus resulting in growing obstacles to deliver adequate education to children and youth. Solomon Islands is recovering from a severe economic downturn as a result of conflict, making it one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world. The Australian Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has helped restore law and order, rebuild the state, and restore development partnerships.

Geography and Climate

The Solomon Islands archipelago lies northeast of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean. It is the second largest nation in the Melanesian chain and consist of 10,639 square miles of land over approximately 310,000 square miles of ocean. There are almost 1,000 islands in the Solomon Islands, including the six main islands of New Georgia, Choiseul, Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita, and San Cristóbal, characterized by a rugged and mountainous landscape of volcanic origin. These islands are forested with an abundance of rivers and streams and many of the coastal areas are surrounded by fringing reefs and lagoons. Between and beyond the bigger islands are hundreds of smaller volcanic islands and low lying coral atolls. The country is located within the 'Ring of Fire' and is extremely vulnerable to the effects and impacts of earthquakes and tsunamis. The world's largest raised coral atoll is East Rennell. The climate of Solomon Islands is equatorial, tempered by the surrounding ocean. Rainfall is often heavy especially in the interior near the mountains and on the windward sides of the large islands. Coastal areas of the main islands sheltered from the prevailing wind get less rain and, therefore, are drier. Honiara, the capital, is situated on Guadalcanal, in a rain shadow cast by a high mountain range.

Government

Solomon Islands has a unicameral parliamentary democracy with the British monarch as Head of State, represented by a local governor general. A prime minister is the head of the executive, a speaker of the house heads parliament, and a chief justice is the highest legal officer. There is no limit to the term a person can serve as prime minister. The speaker is voted for a five-year term, while the chief justice remains in office until retirement unless he or she has proven unable to carry out his or her constitutional duties. The fifty-member parliament is elected every four years. General elections are held every four years and every Solomon Islander over the age of 18 is eligible to vote. There were no reported major incidents as Solomon Islanders went to the polls for the most recent election on April 3, 2019. There was high voter turnout and the elections were peaceful. More than 1,600 security forces were present in polling stations throughout the country and more than 200 Defense Force personnel from Australia and New Zealand were also on the ground to help with logistics. The country has no standing army or navy.

Economy

The GDP of the Solomon Islands is \$1.1 billion total and \$1,927 per capita. The economy has recovered from a period of civil conflict that ended in 2003 but significant challenges remain. Increased private sector investment is needed to accelerate economic growth and improve livelihoods. Solomon Islands' main trading partners are China, the European Union, India, Malaysia, Australia, and Singapore. The main exports are wood, palm oil, and fish. The main imports from Australia, China, New Zealand, and Singapore include fuel, machinery, equipment, and vehicles.

The labor force engaged exclusively in wage-earning activities is estimated to be only 14%. Most Solomon Islanders are self-employed and most are rural villagers who depend on subsistence agriculture for sustenance. Therefore, agriculture and fishing are the mainstays of village life. Any surplus food or fish is bartered or sold at the markets. In the Solomon Islands, 85% of land is managed under customary tenure, meaning that local clans and members of clan groups have control over it.

Beginning in the early 1990s, small-scale industries were encouraged, resulting in goods that are sold mostly in the local area at retail and wholesale stores. Examples of these locally-produced products are beer, furniture, and noodles. Otherwise, agricultural products have been the main commodities for sale. The tourism industry has only been recently encouraged. The Solomon Islands has beautiful scenery, including lagoons, lakes, fauna, and flora. The government has encouraged controlled tourism to attract Australians, Japanese, Americans, and others.

People and Culture

Solomon Islands has a population of approximately 642,000 dispersed over nine provinces. The population distribution is 95% Melanesian with the rest consisting of Polynesians, Micronesians, and small pockets of Chinese and Europeans. The annual population growth rate is about 2.8%, one of the highest in the world. The urban population is growing at 5% more than twice the overall rate of population growth. Approximately 80% of the population lives in rural areas and is dependent on a combination of subsistence farming and informal employment for its livelihood. Only those with paid employment are found in the capital of Honiara as well as in provincial centers of Auki, Gizo, Buala, Kira Kira, and Lata. The Solomon Islands population is young with 39% under the age of 15. Women bear an average of 4.8 children and the average life expectancy for women is 62 and for men is 61.

English is the official language but Pijin Inglis is the lingua franca in much of the country. There are over 100 indigenous languages and dialects spoken in Solomon Islands. Education levels are improving but fewer than one in five adults are literate. Solomon Islanders are about 96% Christian, primarily Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventist, Baha'i, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The rest practice Islam or Hinduism and some areas still practice ancestor worship and animism. Solomon Islanders are quite spiritual and follow their faith visibly and whole-heartedly and are disappointed by those who do not profess to one.

The social system in the Solomon Islands is complex with both matrilineal and patrilineal societies. There is generally a great power imbalance but women are the dependable social and economic backbone. Traditional leadership includes both inherited leadership through a chiefly system and competitive leadership through sometimes called the "big man" system. There is a traditional "wantok" social safety net (one-talk; those who speak the same tribal language and who come from the same village) which is a traditional support system of the church and family.

Communication and Transportation

There are two mobile telephone networks operating in the Solomon Islands; Our Telekom and BMobile Vodafone. Coverage is good around Honiara but is limited in some remote areas. Top-up credits are available almost in every outlet and along streets in major cities and towns. Reception is sometimes unreliable and in most cases not accessible in remote areas. Internet access is widely available in Honiara but tends to be slow and very expensive. Outside Honiara, it is limited to the main population centers in some provinces.

Air transport from Honiara to Gizo or Auki is operated by Solomon Airlines using a Dash8 and Twin Otter aircrafts on a daily basis. Sea transport from Honiara to Gizo or Auki are by way of ships owned by private companies. Accommodation in vessels is not often comfortable in economy class but some offer comfortable cabins and first class rooms at much higher costs.

Road conditions are poor with only about 10km of sealed road built by the Japanese government. Most roads are flooded during the rainy season which is a result of poor drainage system. Bus and taxis are used for public transport in Honiara. In Auki, taxis are used in town but pickup trucks are used mostly by locals coming and leaving for their homes. Gizo does not have bus service; only taxis. Public transport on land is not properly regulated and not all have air-conditioning. Most buses are 15 seater vehicles which are not usually comfortable. Most taxis are air-conditioned and radio controlled and can be called 24/7.

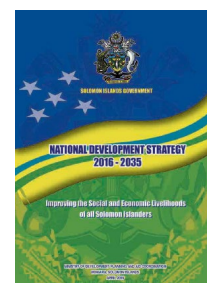
Development Challenges

Development outcomes in Solomon Islands are behind the rest of the region. Solomon Islands ranked 152 out of 189 countries on the 2018 United Nations Human Development Index. Gross Domestic Product per capita is among the lowest in the Pacific at around US\$2,100. Solomon Islands is recovering from a severe economic downturn as a result of the tensions almost 20 years ago, making it one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world. The Australian Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which ended in 2017, helped restore law and order, rebuild the state, and restore development partnerships. However, the country is challenged with government capacity constraints and weak public sector management.

The country has a narrow economic base and a small market size. Aside from being far from major markets, the country also has a limited transport infrastructure. Most of its population is dispersed in the rural areas that largely depend on subsistence agriculture. The urban areas have higher poverty and unemployment rates and weaker traditional safety nets. Solomon Islands is starting to experience the catastrophic effects of climate change. Five of its uninhabited islands have disappeared due to the rising sea level and large swathes of land in six inhabited islands have been inundated.

National Development Strategy 2016-2035

Solomon Islands' National Development Strategy (NDS) sets out a long-term development strategy and priority development objectives for long-term recovery and reform. The National Vision is "Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders." The National Mission is to "create a peaceful, harmonious and progressive Solomon Islands led by ethical, accountable, respected and credible leadership that enhances and protects people's culture, social, economic and spiritual well-being." Five key long term NDS objectives have been identified on which development should focus from 2016-2035.



- One: Sustained and inclusive economic growth.
- Two: Poverty alleviated across the whole of the Solomon Islands, basic needs addressed and food security improved; benefits of development more equitably distributed.
- Three: All Solomon Islanders have access to quality social services, including education and health.
- Four: Resilient and environmentally sustainable development with effective disaster risk management, response, and recovery.
- Five: Unified nation with stable and effective government and public order.

The Solomon Islands government believes that the achievement of the objectives and strategies of the NDS will require the concerted actions of the private sector, NGOs, faith-based organizations and key development partners. With the support and investment of other countries, the infrastructure in Solomon Islands is slowly improving. [See Attachment EXEC.2: National Development Strategy, 2016-2035.](#)

U.S.-Solomon Island Relations and Development Assistance



The U.S. and Solomon Islands established diplomatic relations following Solomon Islands' independence in 1978 from the United Kingdom. The U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby covers Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu and the U.S. Ambassador is Catherine Ebert-Gray. The U.S. maintains a Consular Agency in Honiara to provide consular services that is represented by one U.S. local hire and one locally employed staff member. There are plans to expand to an Embassy in Solomon Islands with a bigger office, one U.S. direct hire, and five locally employed staff.

According to the Integrated Country Strategy, the Mission's overarching goals are inclusive growth through the promotion of market-based economics and strengthened rule of law in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands. The Mission seeks to create more opportunities for U.S. business, protect U.S. citizens, and enhance regional security. Public diplomacy efforts articulate U.S. interests and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The Mission also seeks to mitigate the growing influence of China, encourage positive democratic development and effective government institutions, and help the countries tackle emerging health problems.

The Embassy's priorities for Solomon Islands are economic growth, good governance, and security. Through industry licensing fees and government economic assistance, the U.S. has paid nearly \$6 million to Solomon Islands for bountiful tuna fishing through the U.S.-Pacific Islands Multilateral Tuna Fisheries Treaty. Other U.S. agencies present at the Mission in Port Moresby include USAID, CDC, and DOD. Through PEPFAR, USAID and CDC focuses on HIV prevention and control and capacity building of the Department of Health personnel. They offer expertise to the health community on polio, TB, and cancer. USAID's portfolio also includes climate change adaptation initiatives, management of land and water, and electricity.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation is exploring opportunities in the Solomon Islands with the objective to promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and strengthen institutions through time-limited grants that complement other U.S. aid programs. The Department of Defense has a number of exercises and training in the region and supports the Golden West UXO training facility for South Pacific Islands on Guadalcanal. [See Attachment EXEC.3: U.S. Embassy Briefing.](#)



Other Development Partners

In November 2018 the Joint Solomon Islands Government – Development Partners Dialogue produced a report containing profiles of each major development partner’s objectives, key implementing partners, planning cycles, and key contacts. The report maps each development partner’s projects to the five objectives in the National Development Strategy (NDS). The development partners currently supporting the government of the Solomon Islands include: Asian Development Bank, Australian High Commission/Australian Aid, European Union, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), New Zealand High Commission The Pacific Community, Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Women, World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank. [See Attachment EXEC.4: Profiles of Development Partners in Solomon Islands.](#)

Civil Society Organizations

Development Services Exchange (DSE) produces a “Green Pages” for the use of organizations and individuals interested in the work of civil society in Solomon Islands. Civil society includes a wide range of organizations and structures: local and international non-government organizations (NGOs); community based organizations; churches; faith-based organizations; trusts; and special interest groups, such as sporting groups. [See Attachment EXEC.5: The Green Pages: Directory of Civil Society Organizations in Solomon Islands.](#)

International Volunteer Organizations (IVO)

The main organizations currently working in Solomon Islands include:

IVO	# Volunteers	Geographic Placements
Australian Volunteer Program	13	Central, Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Malaita
New Zealand Volunteers in Service Abroad	17	Guadalcanal, Isabel, Western
World Friends Korea	18	Guadalcanal, Malaita, Western
Japan Overseas Volunteer Corps	39	Central, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira, Temotu, Western

This group holds a quarterly coordination meeting and is keen to welcome back Peace Corps. There are also a handful of United Nations Volunteers and Taiwanese Volunteers, plus volunteers working through churches. [See Attachment EXEC.6: IVO Resources.](#)



III. Safety and Security Assessment

Overview

The safety and security team conducted an in-depth risk assessment and found no major impediments to re-establishing a Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands. The majority of the assessment was completed in the capital, Honiara, on the island of Guadalcanal. Additional visits were made to Gizo, capital of Western Province, and Auki, capital of Malaita Province. The risk assessment focused on the prevalence of crime and violence, risk of natural disasters, transportation safety, reliability of communications, and general threats that could affect Volunteers or Peace Corps operations. The team found that the safety and security risks and the associated potential impacts in Solomon Islands are similar in nature to challenges that are successfully mitigated in other Pacific Posts where Volunteers serve.

See Attachment S&S.1 Meeting/Site Visit Notes for detailed notes of key people and facilities visited. For additional background information, see Attachment S&S.2 RSO Security Assessment, Attachment S&S.3 RSIPF Security Brief, and Attachment S&S.4 NCIS Security Brief. See Appendix A.6 Key Contacts for a list of contact information for the people and facilities mentioned in the risk assessment.

Findings and Observations

Safety and Security Instruction (SSI) 201 requires all new country entry risk assessments to follow *Procedures for Conducting a Risk Assessment* and complete a report using a standardized format. The comprehensive risk assessment can be found in [Appendix B.1 S&S Risk Assessment](#). This was reviewed and approved by the Office of Safety and Security (OSS). The document, which can be pulled out as a stand-alone document for OSS, presents a thorough description of the safety and security environment and it documents findings and observations from the assessment. Below is a summary of the overall risk rating for each individual hazard and threat reviewed during the assessment. The recommendations below are pulled directly from the assessment. Rather than duplicating the content in this section, please refer to the full document in its entirety as it was submitted to the OSS per SSI 201.

THREAT	RISK LEVEL
As identified in the Threat Outline	Very Low, Low, Medium, High
ROAD TRANSPORTATION	MEDIUM
SEA TRANSPORTATION	HIGH
OVERALL CRIME	MEDIUM
TERRORISM	VERY LOW
WAR/CONFLICT	LOW
CIVIL UNREST	MEDIUM
UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (UXO)	MEDIUM
NATURAL DISASTERS: EARTHQUAKES/Tsunami	HIGH
NATURAL DISASTERS: TROPICAL CYCLONES/STORMS	MEDIUM
NATURAL DISASTERS: FLOODS	MEDIUM
NATURAL DISASTERS: DROUGHT	LOW
NATURAL DISASTERS: VOLCANOES	LOW
ENVIRONMENTAL/TECHNOLOGICAL HAZARDS	VERY LOW
MARINE HAZARDS	LOW

Key Recommendations

2. Collaborate with the **Office of Safety and Security (OSS)** to establish a strong safety and security program that addresses challenges specific to Solomon Islands including natural disasters, transportation safety, communications, underdeveloped infrastructure, and secure Volunteer housing.

In order to mitigate risks and threats identified in the risk assessment, Post must:

2.1 Communications:

- Identify primary, secondary and, where possible, tertiary methods of communication with each Volunteer site. Strategies should specifically address potential loss of cell phone and internet networks following natural disasters.
- Issue SIM cards from both *Our Telecom* and *BMobile* networks to Volunteers in the four provinces covered by both in order to reduce the probability of losing communication when one network is down.
- Issue a satellite phone to Volunteers with limited or no access to mobile networks. Train these Volunteers how to use the satellite phone and have regular designated times for checking in with the office using both sending and receiving functions.

2.2 Ground Transportation:

- Identify transportation modes that are approved for Volunteer travel and ensure that they are captured in the *Post Transportation Policy*.
- Train Volunteers on distinguishing between safe and unsafe vehicles and drivers.
- Prohibit travel for staff and Volunteers outside of Honiara and provincial centers after dark.
- Prohibit Volunteers from operating or riding on motorcycles due to the high risk of accidents and serious injury.
- Thoroughly assess transportation options during the site selection process for all proposed sites and ensure there is reasonable access to approved transportation.
- Provide bicycle helmets that meet *US Consumer Product Safety Commission* standards or equivalent and other safety equipment to Volunteers that choose to have a bicycle.
- Restrict Volunteers from riding bicycles in Honiara.

2.3 Sea Transportation:

- Identify inter-island vessels that are approved for Volunteer travel and ensure that this information is captured in the *Post Transportation Policy*.
- Train Volunteers to distinguish between safe and unsafe vessels and boat operators.
- Clearly articulate in detail all safety protocols for Volunteers traveling in small boats in the *Post Transportation Policy*.
- Provide all Volunteers with a comprehensive water and boating safety training class and issue each a Type One, US Coast Guard approved life jacket.
- Provide Volunteers and staff with a marine safety kit that includes a personal locator beacon, flares, a spare outboard engine sparkplug, and basic tools for small boat travel.
- Prohibit small boat travel after dark.

2.4 Crime:

- Train Volunteers on mitigation strategies for staying safe in high theft areas and assist Volunteers with developing language skills and cultural understanding to significantly decrease the risk and impact of security incidents.
- Identify high risk locations and advise Volunteers accordingly. In addition, identify hotels and public transportation options with appropriate security standards for Volunteer use.
- Prioritize homestays and host family models for housing in the site identification process to increase integration and reduce the risk of burglary.
- Limit or avoid Volunteer placements in the capital and conduct training events outside the city, when possible.
- Advise Volunteers to avoid traveling through the back streets of the Point Cruz area, Chinatown, the Kukum area, Burns Creek/Lungga River (East Honiara), White River (West Honiara), the Borderline/Kombito Market, Henderson and any settlement.
- Since the practice of *creeping* female Volunteers is likely to occur in Solomon Islands, brief Volunteers on what to expect and develop strategies to manage it.
- Prioritize having Volunteers live in homestays to mitigate *creeping* activity.
- Arrange for Volunteer training at the *Seif Ples Domestic Violence Referral Center* in Honiara to increase awareness of the issues of gender based violence and develop strategies on how to respond when it occurs in Volunteers' communities.

2.5 War/Conflict: :

- Avoid selecting sites in areas with a history of unresolved land disputes or active logging or mining operations.
- Restrict Volunteer placements in the Shortland Islands or Choiseul Province during the first year of Post operations due to instability and potential conflict in neighboring Bougainville Province. Once a program is established in Western Province, the border area will need further assessment before Volunteer placements are considered.

2.6 Civil Unrest:

- When elections are approaching, restrict Volunteer placements or remove Volunteers located in areas of known civil unrest during previous elections.
- Develop an election specific preparedness and response plan that is part of the *Emergency Action Plan*.

2.7 Unexploded Ordnance (UXO):

- Consult with experts at the *Hell's Point Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Training Center* to avoid placements in areas of known concentration of UXO.
- Arrange a Pre-Service Training session for new Volunteers with the *RSIPF* team at *Hell's Point EOD Training Center* to increase awareness and train Volunteers on steps to take if they find UXO.

2.8 Earthquake/Tsunami:

- Establish systems to mitigate and respond to the risk of earthquakes and tsunami. This includes: identifying coastal areas vulnerable to tsunami during the site development process, selecting structurally sound housing and consolidation points capable of withstanding a strong earthquake, and developing an earthquake/tsunami response plan in the *Emergency Action Plan*.

- Train Volunteers on earthquake/tsunami preparedness and response procedures. Rather than wait for instructions from the government or the Peace Corps office, Volunteers must be prepared to immediately move inland and uphill when a strong earthquake is felt.
- Arrange for staff and Volunteers to receive tsunami warnings directly from the *Pacific Tsunami Warning Center* and train them on how to respond.

2.9 Cyclones/Storms:

- Establish systems to mitigate and respond to the risk of cyclones and strong storms. This includes: identifying and avoiding areas vulnerable to storm surge and flooding during the site development process, selecting structurally sound housing and consolidation points, Volunteer training, a cyclone response plan in the *Emergency Action Plan*, and close monitoring of the weather by Post staff.
- Train staff and Volunteers on monitoring weather forecasting websites for Solomon Islands.

2.10 Floods:

- Establish systems to mitigate and respond to the risk of flooding. This includes: identifying flood-prone areas and upstream logging operations during the site development process, selecting housing and consolidation points in safe areas, training Volunteers on flood preparedness and response, writing a flood response plan in the *Emergency Action Plan*, and close monitoring of the weather by Post staff.

2.11 LGBTQ Volunteers:

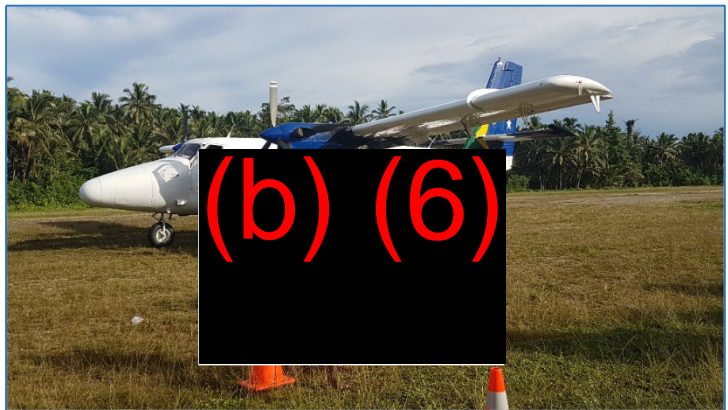
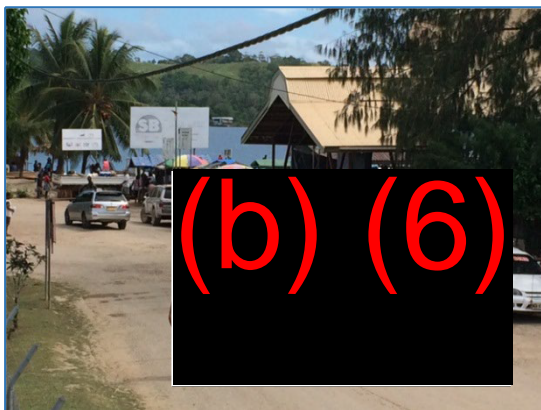
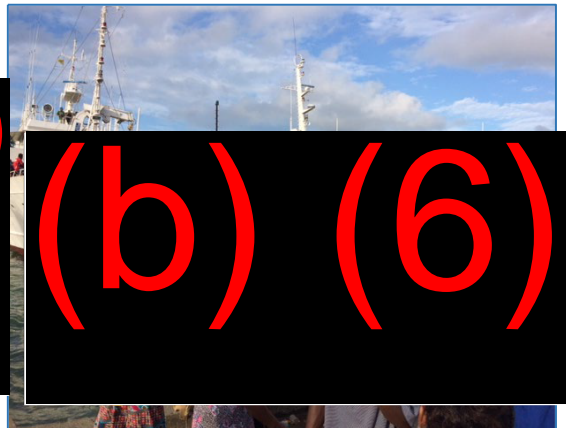
- Train Volunteers on issues that are faced by the LGBTQ community in Solomon Islands and equip them with the language and skills to safely navigate situations that may come up around their orientation.
- Advise gay and lesbian Volunteers to avoid public displays of affection and to be careful with whom they speak openly about their sexual orientation.
- Train host family members and counterparts on the possibility of a Volunteer that identifies as LGBTQ in their community and provide clear expectations to be supportive.
- Support an active Volunteer *Gender and Diversity Committee*.

2.12 Volunteer Housing:

- Set resources aside in the Post budget for housing upgrades and construction if needed to meet Post's safety and security housing criteria prior to occupancy.
- Closely inspect and assess individual housing to ensure each house meets Post's safety and security criteria prior to occupancy.

2.13 Physical Security:

- Work with the Embassy RSO and PCSSO to ensure any qualifying office space conforms to the physical security requirements for US Government facilities abroad at a high threat Post, per *12-FAH-5*.
- Work with the Embassy RSO and PCSSO to ensure that USDH staff residences conform to the requirements of *12 FAH-6 H-137* for a high threat Post. Any required physical security upgrades must be completed prior to occupancy.
- Work with the Embassy RSO and PCSSO to closely screen local contract guard services and select the company that best meets the goal of ensuring the security of the Peace Corps office, staff and USDH residences.



IV. Medical Assessment

Overview

The focus of the medical assessment was to determine whether conditions will allow Peace Corps medical staff to comply with technical guidelines and provide adequate health and medical support for Volunteers. The medical assessment addressed: regional historic health issues (endemic, infectious, communicable, environmental diseases and illnesses); availability of local medical facilities, providers, and pharmacies; emergency transportation services; services of Embassy medical unit; and staffing needs.

Solomon Islands is a poor island nation with limited health care capacity. Solomon Islands' Human Development Index value for 2017 was 0.546, which put the country in the low human development category at 152 out of 189 countries and territories. Solomon Islands faces a "triple burden" of disease: communicable diseases, such as malaria and dengue; increasing rates of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes; and the effects of climate change, which cause frequent floods and droughts. According to the latest WHO data published in 2018 life expectancy in Solomon Islands is 69.7 years for males and 72.7 for females. Total life expectancy is 71.1 years which gives Solomon Islands a World Life Expectancy ranking of 112. The top 10 causes of premature death in 2018 were ischemic heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lower respiratory infection, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, breast cancer, road injuries, hypertension, and cervical cancer.

Solomon Islands has an equatorial climate typical of tropical regions and is hot and humid all year round. The islands have an average temperature of about 27 degrees Celsius (80F) with only very small changes from season to season. There are two distinct seasons – a wet season from November to April and a dry season from May to October. The average rainfall is approximately 95-120" however it can vary from west to east across the archipelago and can also depend on the island's topography and elevation. Tropical cyclones are unusual with only 22 recorded in total. There are adequate nutritional resources including fresh fish, chicken, vegetables, and tropical fruits in the local markets, and Honiara has several shops that import food from New Zealand and Australia (Bulk Shop, Panatina Deli). However, host nation nutrition remains a challenge with 8% wasting and 33% stunting in under five year olds and rising rates of overweight and obesity in male and female adults leading to rising rates of diabetes, hypertension and complications of these diseases such as retinopathy and amputations. *See Attachment MED.1 Meeting/Site Visit Notes for detailed notes of key people and facilities visited. For more comprehensive background information, see Attachment MED.2 MOH Epidemiologic Update, Attachment MED.3 WHO Diabetes Country Profile, and Attachment MED.4 WHO Snapshot Solomon Islands 2015. See Appendix A.6 Key Contacts for a list of contact information for the medical providers and facilities mentioned below.*

Findings and Observations

Infections and Health Risks to Volunteers

Vector-borne diseases

Malaria is common with ~75,000 cases a year across all islands. The most cases in the first quarter of 2019 were in Malaita and Guadalcanal Provinces and in the capital of Honiara. *Plasmodium falciparum* is the predominant species (60% of cases) and is chloroquine resistant. All Volunteers at all sites will require bednets, insect repellants, and malaria prophylaxis with Malarone, Mefloquine or Doxycycline during service. Co-Artem standby self-treatment at site is also required. *Plasmodium vivax* also occurs (40% of cases) therefore presumptive antirelapse therapy (PART) with tafenoquine or primaquine will be recommended for all Volunteers at close of service.

Arboviruses also pose a significant threat. Solomon Islands experienced a dengue outbreak in 2016 of Type 3 and Type 1 with over 10,000 cases. The Taiwanese built a dengue laboratory with PCR technology at National Referral Hospital to support this outbreak but it is currently closed and only used for public health emergencies like outbreaks and cannot be counted on as a source of laboratory support. All four types are in circulation. Dengue NS-1 rapid diagnostic tests are available for purchase at many local pharmacies, so the Health Unit should be stocked with tests. In addition there is high risk for Zika virus and Chikungunya. Yellow Fever is not endemic, vaccine is not required.

Japanese Encephalitis, while described in nearby Papua New Guinea, is not a threat in Solomon Islands. A vaccine is not currently recommended for Volunteers.

Scrub Typhus has been described in an outbreak as recently as 2014 in Western Province near Munda and on Rendova Island. Volunteers will need to use repellants if traveling into areas of brush where mites live.

Rabies is not described in dogs or terrestrial animals in Solomon Islands. There is no veterinary vaccination program, however. The gov.uk website describes it as a “no risk” country for rabies. CDC does not offer guidance for vaccination on its traveler website. Shoreland Travax and Nathnac sites state there is no terrestrial rabies, but cases may be endemic in bats however. Rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) is not available in country and would require medevac to Brisbane. Due to lack of public health surveillance and RIG it is probably best to require all Volunteers be vaccinated for rabies, this was also a recommendation of a local general practitioner during provider visits. Pharmacies do not routinely import rabies vaccine into Solomon Islands due to cost but it should be able to be ordered from Australia for procurement.

Soil transmitted Helminths occur in high prevalence in Honiara and low prevalence in most of the provinces, children are mostly afflicted. Food and water hygiene and wearing of footwear are to be encouraged.

Food and Water Borne Illnesses

Approximately 15% of the population does not have access to an improved water source and open defecation occurs in 50% of the population. Tap water in the capital is not adequately chlorinated and water in the provinces often comes from rainwater. All Volunteers will require access to a water filter, or must boil or add chlorine tablets to water supplies. Bacterial gastroenteritis should be anticipated at high rates and PCMOs should be comfortable with management of severe dehydration. Though resource constrained, regional hospitals in Gizo and Auki are equipped to stabilize Volunteers overnight with this condition. Cholera has not occurred in Solomon Islands. Typhoid fever has not occurred in Solomon Islands but has in nearby Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Vanuatu. Typhoid vaccine is recommended for all Volunteers. Hepatitis A is not well described in public health records but is thought to be endemic so vaccine is recommended for all Volunteers.

Communicable Diseases

HIV is extremely rare, the national referral hospital has 20 registered people living with HIV in the entire country. Prevalence based on seropositivity results is estimated to be about 0.003% or 18 cases overall, the incidence is 1-4 new cases annually. Donated blood is screened for HIV at the national Referral Hospital blood bank using Elisa, but due to intermittent availability of reagents at main hospital lab, the blood supply is not considered safe. HIV screened negative blood in Honiara might be considered only in a life threatening situation where delay until after medevac is not feasible, but generally should be avoided. Facilities offering ART include the National Referral Hospital (NRH), Helena Goldie Hospital, Gizo Hospital, Kilu’ufi Hospital and Lata Hospital. Significant risk exists for **Hepatitis B** ($\geq 8\%$ of the population),

vaccination of all Volunteers is required. Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin is not available and would require medevac to Australia. While all blood is screened for Hepatitis B and all labs visited had testing available, please see concerns about blood safety above. **Hepatitis C** is not well studied, 1 paper from 1999 showed a prevalence of 0.2% in a serosurvey, blood is screened for Hepatitis C, please see concerns about blood safety above.

Tuberculosis incidence is 76/100,000 population. This places Solomon Islands in the Moderate Incidence category per TG645. Most hospital laboratories have Xpert TB molecular testing capability for rapid diagnosis. Volunteers will need pre-service, mid-service, and close of service TB screening with PPD, Interferon Gamma release assay is not available in Solomon Islands. MDR tuberculosis occurs rarely but is a concern for the Ministry of Health and they remain vigilant for new cases.

KILUFI DISTRICT HOSPITAL MALAITA							
BED	STATE	AT midnight		ON 05/06/2019			
WARD	ADULTS	CHILDREN 5-12 YEARS	CHILDREN 4-1 YEAR	BABIES	NEW BORN BABIES	RELATIVES	EMPTY BEDS
MATERNITY	16	-	-	10	4	2	11
FEMALE	14	-	-	-	-	14	14
MALE	15	-	-	-	-	15	8
CHILDREN W/D	18	8	-	5	-	18	4
OUTPATIENT	2	-	-	-	-	2	4
ISOLATION	8	-	-	-	-	-	11
TOTAL							

Leprosy is rare and has an incidence of about 15-20 cases a year, an eradication program is ongoing. Volunteers would be at low risk to acquire this disease, placement in host families with members afflicted by Leprosy should be avoided.

Sexually transmitted Infections are common, particularly gonorrhea. Nucleic acid amplification test for gonorrhea and chlamydia is not available in Solomon Islands. Culture on Thayer-martin with swab for gonorrhea is available. Prenatal rates of positive syphilis testing range from 3-10%. Yaws is endemic in the Western Province, particularly on Rendova island and eradication programs are ongoing. Recommend the Peace Corps medical unit keep ceftriaxone and azithromycin in stock at all times as well as provide condoms to all Volunteers.

Measles vaccination rates decline from 90% to <60% in 2019 and the Ministry of Health is attempting to increase vaccination rates. All Volunteers should arrive fully vaccinated.

Influenza occurs year-round due to the tropical location. WHO recommends Northern Hemisphere formulation, however Southern Hemisphere vaccine procured through Australia or New Zealand is most commonly found. Hyperchem pharmacy in Honiara can procure vaccine from Australia with a safe cold chain. U.S. direct hires could purchase influenza vaccine locally at Honiara pharmacies and get reimbursed per TG. Due to lack of Embassy in Honiara, it is recommended to use this procurement source rather than PLS. All Volunteers should be vaccinated annually.

Environmental Hazards

Transportation and Risk for Motor Vehicle Accident

Solomon Islands has adopted a national road safety strategy, but it is not funded. There is a national motorcycle helmet law that is enforced and applies to riders and passengers and requires international standards for helmets and wearing of chin straps. The government reported 11 road traffic fatalities in 2013. WHO estimates road traffic fatalities to be 108 (95% CI 96–120) and rate per 100 000 population to be 19.2 *See Attachment MED.5 WHO Western Pacific Road Traffic Safety Data*. Most road travel is in the capital of Honiara and drivers are often constrained from speeding by the high volume of traffic. Most taxis have safety belts. *See the safety and security section for more information.*

Sexual Assault

Sexual harassment, especially from intoxicated males, will likely be an issue as will witnessed domestic violence. The Royal Solomon Police Force does have a trained sexual assault unit to investigate aggravated assaults. There is a woman's shelter set up by an NGO to provide services to domestic violence victims but they do not have a trauma-informed psychologist or therapist on staff. *See the safety and security section for more information.*

Marine Hazards

Ciguatera is not highly endemic, there are only a few cases reported per year, but this may be due to underreporting. Areas suspected to have ciguatera poisoning in the Solomon Islands include Santa Cruz, Rennell and Bellona, indispensable reefs, and Ontong Java and Wagina island. Fish species considered ciguatoxic include red emperor, red snapper, roundfaced batfish, barracuda, and blue lined sea-bream. Volunteers should be encouraged to avoid consuming these species of fish. Salt water crocodiles inhabit the estuaries of many islands of Western, Guadalcanal, and Malaita Provinces. Between April and August 2018, 822 people (472 men and 350 women) were interviewed in 234 villages in seven provinces in Solomon Islands. A total of 225 crocodile attacks on people were recorded. Of these attacks, 83 were fatal (37 percent), including 31 on children. Over the past 10 years, on average, five people per year have been killed by saltwater crocodiles in Solomon Islands. Volunteers will need training on avoidance measures of crocodile habitat. *See Attachment MED.6 Human Crocodile Conflict in Solomon Islands.* Risk from potentially deadly Australian box jellyfish exists throughout the year, but especially during the rainy season. Travelers wading, launching boats, or fishing are especially at risk. Risk from coral, stonefish, and sea urchin envenomations exists.

Poisonous Snakes

There is only one case report of fatal snakebite in the medical literature from *Salomonelaps par*. Snake bite may be more common in the provinces and not reported. McCoy's Reptiles of Solomon Islands describes only three species of Solomon Islands terrestrial elapid (coral) snake. These include *Loveridgelaps elapoides* (Solomons small-eyed snake which is black and white banded), *Parapitocalamus hedigeri* (Hediger's coral snake which is only in Bougainville, PNG and is about 30 cm long), and the *Salomonelaps par* (Solomons coral snake which averages 75 cm in length and has a large color and pattern variation, often deep red to dark brown, with darker transverse bands sometimes present). Generally coral snakes only bite when handled and are more a threat to children than adults. There is no national serpentarium or local anti-venin production. Consultation with a snake bite expert in the U.S. or Australia prior to the arrival of Volunteers and a medical action plan for bite management is recommended.

Diving Injuries

Scuba diving is a popular hobby in the Solomon Islands. A two-tank dive with gear rental costs about \$150. There are PADI certified dive shops in Gizo and Honiara. There is a hyperbaric chamber in Honiara manned by nine volunteers with oversight from a Divers Alert Network physician (+1-919-684-9111 <https://www.diversalertnetwork.org/contact>). There are about 0-2 diving accidents annually requiring recompression treatment, usually tourists who are dehydrated from flying, drinking alcohol, and trying to do too many dives in one day. If Volunteers choose to go diving, suggest they sign a waiver and be required to purchase DAN insurance which costs \$120 annually or less if purchased per dive and covers all treatment and evacuation costs.

Air Quality

Air quality is fairly good in Solomon Islands, urbanization and motor vehicle traffic is not high outside the capital, and there is little industry. The most common contaminant is smoke from burning vegetation from

agriculture or cooking fires. Volcanic eruptions either from Solomon Islands or from nearby countries are a possibility and may temporarily worsen air quality or cause ash fall and contaminate water sources. Particulate matter from these sources may exacerbate asthma.

Alcohol and Illegal Drugs

Alcohol consumption is common, mostly beer or the local brew kwaso, which is illegal to produce and is fermented from a number of different plants. Males consume 12 liters and females 5 liters equivalent of pure alcohol annually on average and 70% of male and 35% of female drinkers binge drink. [See Attachment MED.7 WHO Alcohol Data 2016](#). Alcohol use leads to domestic violence and can lead to assaults in areas of Honiara where there are illegal Kwaso markets like Burns Creek and White River. Betel nut chewing is also common due to its psychoactive euphoric effect. Betel nut is legal and commonly sold everywhere. Betel nut may cause oral cancer and addiction and Volunteers should have training on its risks at PST. Marijuana is freely available in Solomon Islands as well, but drugs such as heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine are not widely used due to the high cost (Devaney, M. L.; Reid, G.; Baldwin, S. ; Crofts, N.; Power, R. (2006), Illicit drug use and responses in six Pacific Island countries. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 25: 387-390).

Health Care Resources

Prehospital Care

St. John Ambulance is a charity organization operating in different countries which teach and provide first aid and emergency medical services, and are primarily staffed by volunteers. The associations are overseen by the international Order of St. John and its priories (national branches) which is overseen by Queen Elizabeth. [See Attachment MED.8 St. John Ambulance Annual Report](#). St. John's Ambulance Company runs all pre-hospital care in the capital and is contracted by the National Referral Hospital to provide care. All medical emergencies nationally call 111 for assistance. The direct number for the ambulance company is +677 7136000 which goes to dispatch which is manned 24/7. The current manager is an Australian expatriate Doug Keston, who ran St. John Ambulance in Papua New Guinea for 20 years. Doug is deeply committed to improving EMS services in Solomon Islands and St. John conducts EMT and first aid training year-round. He has a network of contacts including Helicopter Support, the operations manager at Solomon Air, the board-certified emergency medicine specialist, the internal medicine specialist etc. He coordinates all medevacs for expats including air ambulance companies and four receiving hospitals in Brisbane. He has his own network of air ambulance and hospitals but could work with us to coordinate with AKESOCARE and Wesley Hospital in Brisbane (or one of the other three) if that is our preferred hub.

St. John currently has two 2018 Mercedes Benz ambulances donated from the 2018 Commonwealth Games that are fully equipped with state of the art equipment including Stryker gurneys, stair chairs for building extraction, a full range of airway kits, oxygen, lifepak 12 for monitoring and defibrillation, nitrous oxide for sedation, and portable ventilators. St. John replaces equipment like gauze airways etc. from Australia. St. John donated a portable ventilator to the NRH ED to have that additional capacity since there is no ICU in Honiara. St. John has assisted Dr. Sale in NRH ED in stabilizing patients with portable ventilator support prior to medevac. Ambulance service only covers Honiara and some ways out of town on sealed roads. The NRH has 1 Mercedes on site plus a land cruiser ambulance that can carry an attendant and 1 patient and can go off road out of town further, it is kept at NRH but requisitioned by St. John who fit it out with their own equipment for out of town rescues. Doug is working on fitting out a Suzuki 4x4 to carry patients on logging roads even further out of town that the Toyota is too big for. St. John is currently headquartered out of Doug's house in West Kolaridge, but is moving near the airport to a RAMSI building donated for the new St. John Headquarters which will have training classrooms and host ambulance

operations as well as the hyperbaric chamber which is planned to move there as current site lacks patient privacy. St. John is a strong resource to get Volunteers medevaced expeditiously and to provide help with stabilization prior to medevac.

Helicopter support is located at the airport and has Two Bell 222 multi-engine helicopters, One Bell UH1B and Four AS350 Helicopters and a Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander plane. All aircraft are operated and maintained by Australian crew and can reach any island in less than two hours. Medevacs are limited by Visual Flight Rule conditions and daytime flights only. David Pearce is the operations manager at Solomon Airlines, he can assist with commercial medevacs from the provinces both urgent and non-urgent. *See the safety and security section for more information.*



Hospital Facilities

There are no private hospitals in Solomon Islands. Hospital based care in the public hospitals does not meet U.S. standards and will be limited to minor things like fluid resuscitation or for stabilization of more severe conditions prior to evacuation to Brisbane, Australia. The National Referral Hospital (NRH or “number 9”) is a 350 bed facility in Honiara and was built in 1958. Dr. John Hue is the medical superintendent, he is an Ophthalmologist. Taiwan built an Obstetrical and Antenatal ward in 2013 and New Zealand built the Fred Hollows Eye institute across from the emergency room in 2015 that provides state of the art eye care, but other than that the original structure remains. Care is not to U.S. standards. There are no ICU or step down beds in all of Solomon Islands. The NRH has about 30 MDs in a few specialties including Pathology, Radiology, Ophthalmology, Internal Medicine, Orthopedics, General Surgery, Anesthesiology, Pediatrics and Obstetrics. There are no other specialists.

The ED is run by a very competent ED trained physician Dr. Trina Sale, multiple Australian medical providers commented on her proficiency. In addition, there is one other ED trained MD and eight residents covering. There is a triage room that is often occupied and not well stocked. St. John often arrives with expatriates and coordinates with Dr. Sale to clear the triage room and provides equipment for her to work with like IV fluids, meds, chest tubes, battery powered infusion pumps, airways, etc.

There are three ORs; two are used and one is for emergencies. Due to age of facility, lack of supplies, and low infection control standards, surgery and invasive procedures should be avoided unless it is a life-threatening disease requiring emergent surgery for stabilization, and discussion with OHS first is required. In this situation doing the bare minimum is recommended.

Radiology is limited to plain films, and ultrasound. The ultrasound machine can do abdominal, transvaginal and echocardiograms. All studies are taken digitally and read in PACS. There is one radiologist. A CT is planned but hospital has not broken ground on facility yet. There is no MRI available; all advanced imaging studies will require medevac.

The laboratory has modern machines and is calibrated by a certification agency in New Zealand. Studies are limited to CBC, gram stain, chemistry, and serology for Hepatitis, HIV and other blood borne pathogens and type and screen for transfusions. The blood bank has about 50 units in the freezer. Blood is screened for Hepatitis B, C, and HIV with Elisa. Blood supply should not be considered safe for routine use, but in life threatening emergencies might be considered after discussion with OHS if coupled with Post-exposure HIV treatment for 28 days given low rates of HIV in country. There is one pathologist but pathology is not reliable and things like pap smears, and biopsies should be done as medevac to Australia. There is a modern six drawer refrigerated morgue. There is an onsite pharmacy but stock and source of meds is questionable.

Wards are 1950s concrete block construction and are open bay with no privacy and there is no air conditioning, wall oxygen, suction and supplies are limited, nursing staff speak English. There is a male ward, female ward, pediatric ward, and post-partum/antepartum. Toilets are shared for the ward and are filthy, infection control is poor. Like surgery, this is not an option for routine care, even for simple overnight rehydration but might be an option for severely ill undergoing stabilization while awaiting medevac, especially if attended by PCMO. Hospital has been compelled to place expatriates in nicer Obstetrical ward in past. There are three private rooms that are small 3x3 meters, un-air-conditioned and usually occupied.

Ophthalmology can do slit lamp, retinal exams, laser treatment of detached retinas and intraocular pressure monitoring and computed tomography. It would be feasible to have ophthalmology accommodations in the future in Solomon Islands due to high quality of eye care available. Plans are underway for St. John to build a private 10 bed expatriate hospital in West Kolaridge with one ICU bed, the NRH also plans to build a VIP ward for expatriates, and both are not currently a reality however. [See Appendix C.1 Facility Evaluation National Referral Hospital.](#)

Gizo hospital is a modern 86 bed facility (including ED) built in 2012. It is staffed by four registrars (PGY3-5 residents) and rotating residents and medical student from Australia. It is 1½ hours by plane or helicopter from the capital. It has an ambulance that is not functioning and has fast boats that can go to most nearby islands in less than an hour and retrieve patients. It has a 10 bed ED with triage bed, med cart and crash cart as well as monitor and defibrillator. There is a small lab with CBC, chemistry, serology, urine dip stick and gram stain capabilities and a malaria lab that can do smears. The morgue is not refrigerated and should be avoided. Psychiatric patients are managed in the town jail. There is a digital radiology capability with plain films and trans-abdominal and vaginal ultrasound available. There are two ORs, a minor room and a main OR and a recovery room. There is endoscopy capability. Unfortunately there is no surgeon nor anesthesiologist so surgery is only performed a few times a year when visitors come. There are four wards, male, female, pediatric and Obstetrical. There is one isolation room. The pharmacy is limited but is the only one on island. Overall this is a nicer facility than in Honiara but limited by lack of specialists and providers. This would be a good place to perform hydration for gastroenteritis, suture small lacerations, or treat simple malaria overnight before bringing a Volunteer to capital. [See Appendix C.2 Facility Evaluation Gizo Hospital.](#)

Auki hospital is a 130-bed facility on Malaita. It was built in 1967. It has several two bed rooms that could be used for Volunteer stabilization. There is a Land Cruiser ambulance on site and is two km from the airfield. Medevac is <1 hour to capital. The ED has a triage room and crash cart, cardiac monitoring and defibrillator. There is one surgeon and one anesthetist. Invasive procedures should be avoided due to lack of infection control standards and concerns about safety of blood supply. There is capacity for plain films and ultrasound. The lab is basic to include CBC, chemistry, and stool and urinalysis. Malaria RDTs are available. Like Gizo, but older, Auki hospital could treat minor illness overnight or perform stabilization prior to evacuation to capital. [See Appendix C.3 Facility Evaluation Auki Hospital.](#)

Embassy Health Units

The Embassy health unit in Port Moresby is staffed by two nurses and has some region-specific vaccinations available for U.S. Direct Hires only. All U.S. Direct Hires requiring hospitalization are medevaced to Singapore. It has telemedicine capability with the RMO MD in Singapore. It is two hours by plane and does not represent an increase in capacity. Point of Care testing is available for influenza, malaria, and dengue. Department of State (DoS) has a program where they can contract healthcare via International SOS; Peace Corps U.S. Direct Hires would have to apply for a waiver for this program. If Peace Corps helped find a good clinic in Solomon Islands they would pay the provider.

The Australian High Commission health unit is located in The Heritage Park Hotel in Honiara. It is staffed by a primary care MD, a nurse, and a receptionist. The clinic is to western standards is air conditioned, has WiFi, an exam room, a triage room, a small pharmacy, and includes a crash cart and a full ventilator. In addition to basic services there is a visiting physical therapist and a psychologist who are not High Commission employees but trusted providers and perform adjunct services at the clinic. The AHC clinic does care for other expatriates from other embassies and can bill for services but would need to get permission from the high commissioner first. This might be a good option for U.S. Direct Hire care. It also may be a well-trained physician who can be a resource for the PCMO.

Dental Provider

There are two trusted providers per the Australian High Commission but the Seventh Day Adventist clinic is moving and could not be contacted. Honiara Dental is located right in the middle of Honiara, sees a mix of expatriates and locals, and is accessible by minibus and taxi. There are two private exam rooms and a waiting area. The office is old and a little shabby, but the equipment is a mix of old and new. One of the chairs is currently not working. Dental line water is made on site with a distiller. There is a 2017 benchtop autoclave and all hand pieces are soaked in detergent and then autoclaved after all cases. Infection control warnings were posted. Lidocaine was in individual syringes and supplies come from New Zealand. Bite wings are available but not panorex, an apron was in the office and sample x-rays were clear. Images are shot on film and developed in a glove box in the office. The office can also take impressions and make false teeth. Overall this is a basic dental clinic, but per Australian High Commission they could be relied on for simple repairs and fillings but likely crowns or more advanced dental procedures would need to medevac to Australia. Would probably prefer extractions not be done here due to lack of oral surgery backup. [See Appendix C.4 Consultant Evaluation Honiara Dental Clinic.](#)

Other Providers

Dr. Dunstone Aleziru at the international Health Clinic in White River has been in practice for 11 years and worked in American Samoa ED from 2013-18. He has a certificate from James Cook University in Australia in Public Health and post-graduate certificates in Public Health and Occupational Health from University of Otago in NZ as well as an online certificate in Aviation medicine from New Zealand. He can do fitness

to fly examinations. He was very knowledgeable and uses Up to Date and can do a range of primary care skills. He is highly recommended by several Australian providers and has lots of experience treating ex-pats. He would be an ideal PCMO candidate and is looking for opportunities. His clinic was clean and well stocked and private, it would also be an acceptable back-up for the PCMO as well if he is not hired as a PCMO. [See Appendix C.5 Consultant Evaluation Dunstone.](#)

Dr. Fletcher Kakai at International Health Clinic in Panatina is the primary care provider to JICA and KOICA volunteers and has six years of experience in his current clinic. He has two exam rooms, a triage room, a dentist and a pharmacy, and lab that can do basic CBC, chemistry and some RDTs like Malaria and Dengue. He can perform ECG and Ultrasound and will have digital x-ray capability by end of year. He is well regarded by most expatriates and Australian providers and has experience treating ex-pats. He has significant GYN experience and a process to send PAP smears to Australia for cytology. He is not interested in leaving his clinic but could be a good back up provider, GYN provider, or dental provider (although team could not inspect his dental suite since there was a patient present) and could probably provide U.S. Direct Hire care via an ISOS contract as well. His lab may also be a reliable alternate source for Peace Corps testing. [See Appendix C.6 Consultant Evaluation Kakai.](#)

Dr. Anthony Cimata at Family Medical Clinic in Town Ground Plaza is a young provider who graduated from residency two years ago. He is working locum tenens and is looking for employment. His English was not as good as Dr. Dunstone or Dr. Fletcher and he has far less clinical experience, mostly treating chronic diseases. He does use Up to Date and electronic references online. He has worked with Australian and German ex-pats and has medevac experience from remote areas during his residency in PNG. Family medical clinic was basic they also had a nebulizer and two exam rooms and can do malaria smears on site. They send labs to Vanmed labs. There were a lot of mosquitoes in the waiting room. This was far behind the other two clinics visited in quality and cleanliness. Dr. Cimata might be a PCMO candidate but would need further vetting, he was far behind the other two GP providers in knowledge and experience. [See Appendix C.7 Consultant Evaluation Cimata.](#)

Laboratory Support

There are three options for labs in Honiara; the National Referral Hospital, Vanmed labs, and International Health Clinic. The majority of labs available in the country are similar from institution to institution and include just basics (Complete Blood Count, Basic Chemistry, Serology for blood borne pathogens, RDTs for Dengue and Malaria, gram stain and malaria smear, urine dipstick). Probably the most reliable lab for quality would be NRH, it has evaluations annually and is working on accreditation from New Zealand. It may suffer from lack of reagents and slower turnaround time due to high demand, however. Vanmed labs appears to be user friendly with fast turnaround time but the Australian High Commission med unit had concerns about the quality control process and the owner never responded to my query about how they QA their machines. Vanmed can also mailout some expanded endocrinology labs like thyroid function to Fiji. International Health clinic can also do basic labs, quality control was not assessed, but it is contracted by International SOS, further assessment of this can be performed in the future. Many pharmacies in Honiara can perform Malaria and Dengue RDTs. The provincial hospitals can perform CBC and basic chemistry and malaria assessment should be considered reliable. [See Appendix C.8 Vanmed Lab Tests Pricing.](#)

Behavioral Health

Psychiatric care in the public sector is embryonic in Solomon Islands with limited providers who are understaffed and overwhelmed. There are no private practice providers. There is one adjunct part time psychologist at the Australian High Commission. There are no reliable providers in country, medications

are limited to a few kinds of antidepressants. Talk therapy for adjustment could be supported by the RMHO or COU. More serious mental health issues will need medevac to home of Record or Washington DC. Accommodations are not recommended.

Pharmaceutical Supplies

There are at least three pharmacies that can supply medications sourced in Australia, New Zealand and from Europe. U.S. brand feminine hygiene products are difficult to obtain in Solomon Islands, but Hyperchem had the largest selection. Most major classes of medications are available in Honiara. Oral contraceptives are usually generic but specific brands could be special ordered from Australia. Psychiatric medications are limited to a few SSIRs or older medications but may be able to be special ordered, this was yet another reason to avoid mental health accommodations. Controlled substances like narcotics and benzodiazepines are difficult to import due to a cumbersome permitting process so most pharmacies don't do it but could do it if prompted. Seeking a waiver on limited supplies of controlled substance importation in the country agreement may be worthwhile to avoid delays from PLS. Hyperchem next to Central Market was the best vendor; they can provide all anti-malarials and provide vaccines from Australia via cold chain and would be a preferred provider over PLS for vaccines if cost competitive. They also stock multiple kinds of sunscreen, repellants, wheelchairs, crutches and orthopedic braces. Le pharmacy and City pharmacy in the Hyundai mall were also reasonable and best practice would be to use multiple providers. All pharmacies can invoice and accept EFT.



Aeromedical Evacuation

Aeromedical evacuation would be the cornerstone of Volunteer management for all invasive procedures, surgery, specialty consults, colposcopy/gynecology procedures, and advanced dental cases. Townsville Australia is the closest major city with a western hospital (1130 miles 2h 30min). However, there are no direct commercial flights and many conditions moved by air ambulance here are moved on to Brisbane as there is only a small regional hospital with limited services. Multiple Australian providers felt Brisbane (1320 miles 3 hours) is probably a better option as it is only 30 min longer in the air. The Bangkok hub is not a reasonable option for emergencies as all flights pass through Brisbane which already has high level care, or through Port Moresby and Hong Kong which is more than 16 hours journey. There are nine commercial flights a week from Honiara to Brisbane. Solomon Air flies Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday afternoons. Virgin Australia flies Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Nauru air flies Sunday and Wednesday afternoon. Note there are no commercial flights on Mondays. In addition Air Niugini and Qantas fly through Port Moresby with a stopover for about seven hours and Solomon Air and Air Vanuatu fly through Port Vila with an overnight stop for 20 hours.

There are four hospitals in Brisbane. Wesley has a concierge medicine department and may be friendlier for non-AUS citizens. Jill Carty from COU conducted an assessment of this facility and states it has the majority of specialists and high level care and is willing to do a contract with us. Wesley also provides guest housing on site and assists in getting patients to appointments when on the ground. Royal Brisbane is the public hospital, this may be a requirement for contagious diseases or fevers of unknown origin prior to moving to a private hospital per government policy. St. Andrews and Queen Elizabeth II hospital are also options. Air ambulance providers may suggest a facility based on its expertise (i.e. cardiac care or urology may be better at one center of excellence than at others).

OHS has determined that Australia offers under special circumstances a “[Special Purpose](#)” which is an exemption granted by operation of law to certain non-citizens in Australia to whom standard visa and immigration clearance arrangements do not apply. It effectively exempts certain persons from the normal processes for entry into Australia. These include members of the Royal Family and the members of the royal party, guests of government, SOFA (United States Military) forces members including civilian component members, Asia Pacific forces members, Commonwealth forces members, foreign armed forces dependents, foreign naval forces members, airline positioning crew members and airline crew members, eligible transit passengers, persons visiting Macquarie Island, eligible children born in Australia and Indonesian traditional fishermen visiting the Territory of Ashmore and Cartier Islands. A Special Purpose visa grants the recipient a “prescribed status” to enter and stay in Australia for as long as they have this type of status. To receive a Special Purpose visa the person must be an official guest of the Australian Government or be declared by the Minister. *See Attachment MED.9 Special Purpose Visas.*

[Medical Accommodations](#)

Volunteer accommodations would not be permitted at Post entry due to the extreme lack of specialty providers; would only advocate adding ophthalmology at a later date.

[Health Unit and Medical Staffing](#)

Due to the lack of adequate hospitals a robust health unit will be absolutely essential. The facility should be outfitted per TG200 and be air conditioned with a backup generator and have a reception area and waiting room, at least two exam rooms (which can double as PCMO office), a triage room/sickbay (per TG220) that can accommodate stabilization and minor procedures like suturing, a basic lab and phlebotomy area, well stocked pharmacy, refrigeration for medications and vaccines with data-logger, two toilets, dedicated fax, medical supplies storage and secure area for records storage. Due to lack of hospital facilities, two PCMOs will be mandatory to assure ongoing coverage in the event of accompanied medevacs or sickbay management of ill volunteers requiring observation. The first PCMO should be a US citizen or third country national with extensive experience as a PCMO. Of the local physicians interviewed, Dr. Dunstone Aleziru, would be a strong candidate.

[Summary](#)

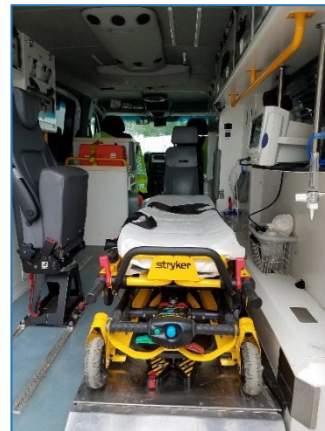
Solomon Islands is a poor island nation with a very limited healthcare infrastructure. It is not dissimilar to other poor nations where Peace Corps currently operates like Liberia, Comoros, or Timor Leste. It does have some above average assets such as in country evacuation capabilities, eye care, a few strong preferred providers experienced in managing expatriates in constrained settings, and pharmacy resources that are better than other Peace Corps posts. More resources are expected in the future. Volunteer health care is going to be dependent on having a very healthy cohort at staging, providing excellent education around health care at PST to avoid delays in accessing care, outstanding PCMOs, sufficient manpower to supervise medevacs and continue Volunteer care at post, a sick bay that can stabilize Volunteers awaiting air ambulance, and a sufficient budget to subsidize both commercial flights to Australia and health care resources in Australia.

Key Recommendations

3. Collaborate with the **Office of Health Services (OHS)** to establish a strong, well equipped health unit that can manage all routine and urgent care needs and can safely stabilize more severely ill or critical patients for aeromedical evacuation to Australia.
 - 3.1 Have a strong program to protect Volunteers from Malaria to include bednets, repellants, screened lodging when applicable, cellphone applications to increase antimalarial adherence, RDT and self-treatment at site, robust education programs at PST, Malaria-experienced providers, and a network of regional hospitals with trusted providers in the provinces who can diagnose and manage Malaria. Ensure medical assessment is an integral part of all site assessments to understand local epidemiology of Malaria.
 - 3.2 Vaccinate all Volunteers against Rabies despite low prevalence due to lack of good public health data, medical infrastructure, and availability of Rabies Immunoglobulin. Provide vaccination against endemic diseases such as Hepatitis A &B, influenza, and measles.
 - 3.3 Provide Volunteers on-site access to potable water using such devices as water filters or iodine tablets.
 - 3.4 Work with safety and security staff for recommendations on transportation policy for land, air, and sea travel with particular focus on boating safety, nighttime travel, and helmet use. Also coordinate a comprehensive sexual assault policy to address country specific cultural values and practices that could increase risk for sexual assault.
 - 3.5 Develop a dedicated PST training on special risks unique to Solomon Islands to include salt water crocodiles and venomous animals such as jellyfish, fish, and snakes and methods to avoid injury.
 - 3.6 Develop a policy on scuba diving during leisure time to include mandatory diving insurance.
 - 3.7 Use St. John Ambulance as a resource to coordinate all in country and outgoing aeromedical evacuations. Work closely to develop medical action plans that include this resource. Coordinate pre-hospital care with St. John and Dr. Trina Sale, preferred ED provider at NRH to have resources available for sick Volunteers on arrival to ED.
 - 3.8 Develop a robust health unit with full ACLS capabilities, capacity to stabilize at least one Volunteer with interventions like volume replacement, pain control, and antibiotics, and a 24-hour holding capability while awaiting aeromedical evacuation. Consider having a portable ventilator available as a backup resource for NRH providers in the case of emergency.
 - 3.9 Seek permission from Australian High Commissioner to access High Commission medical unit for U.S. Direct Hire health care needs and investigate payment methods for this service. Investigate DOS waiver program to access International SOS care as an option in the setting of no Embassy Health Unit. Use the network of the High Commission medical officer to validate trusted providers.
 - 3.10 Do not perform invasive procedures such as surgery, endoscopy, etc. at any hospital in Solomon Islands unless failure to do so will result in loss of life or permanent severe injury. Only consider

such procedures after thorough discussion with RMO or OHS and assurance from air ambulance vendor that timely medevac to Brisbane is not feasible.

- 3.11 Have adequate human resources to ensure accompanied medevac to Brisbane for at least one week.
- 3.12 Do not perform advanced dental procedures such as root canal, molar extraction, crowns etc. in Honiara, only basic restoration and fillings are recommended. More advanced dental problems should be managed in Brisbane or Home of Record.
- 3.13 Medical and mental health accommodations are to be avoided. Ophthalmology accommodations may be acceptable in the future, however.
- 3.14 Purchase only Australian, New Zealand, U.S. or EU sourced pharmaceuticals, avoid generics from China and India, and use vetted pharmacies in Honiara as trusted sources of medication. Consider Hyperchem as primary vaccine purveyor.
- 3.15 Develop MoU with one or more Australian hospital in Brisbane to ensure timely access to care, workarounds for medical visa requirement and a point of contact to assist RMO or OHS with patient management and access to medical records and providers.
- 3.16 Request from the Australian Ambassador, Special Purpose visas for Volunteers and PCMOs/Medical Assistants serving in identified South Pacific IAP and EMA countries.
- 3.17 Ensure Health Unit is staffed with two PCMOs and at least one is a highly experienced as a PCMO at another Post.



V. Administrative Assessment

Overview

The focus of the administrative portion of the assessment was to determine sufficient elements of 1) banking, transportation, communication, staffing and other foundational support such as housing for USDH hire and a main office were of sufficient strength to support the core operations; 2) Post is able to support a quality programming, training, medical and security unit; 3) elements of support by the Solomon Island government are in place to support no costs VISAs, tax and duty free environment, and that privileges are extended for vehicles and driver permits; 4) that the cost basis of start-up and ongoing financial considerations are established to enable all aspects of support for an intake of 40 Volunteers at full strength is available by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). This assessment was directed to review these elements and explore conditions within the country by inspecting services and interviewing key stakeholders and organizations.

The business environment has a positive tone of cooperation and networking to assist with common challenges of procurements, maintenance and navigation. Historical elements of the prior Peace Corps program have an in-place reputation that will immediately assist our set-up capabilities and the establishment of business relationships. The items below will review the core components and key findings through an administrative lens and demonstrate a strong operational framework can be built to support core programs that will enable Volunteers to focus on an enriching service. *See Attachment ADMIN.1 Meeting/Site Visit Notes for detailed notes of key people and facilities visited. See Appendix A.6 Key Contacts for a list of contact information for the service providers and vendors mentioned below.*

Findings and Observations

Operating Costs

Full year operational costs will be similar to other Pacific Posts and likely be close to Vanuatu, with a complexity of navigating a large geographical span. Maintaining a main office and three USDH residences will be expensive due to high real estate leases, high electric costs, and high-priced internet. Some offsetting factors such as labor costs are low with a minimum wage set at 4 SDB per hour equal to .49 cents USD. Costs for staffing, included security guards at residences and the office, will be relatively low compared to other costs. The local compensation plan generated by the Embassy in Port Moresby is similar to Tonga.

The one-time costs will include expenses associated with setting up three USDH residences with security, selecting and setting up a permanent office with security, securing temporary office space, procuring medical and IT equipment, and building a vehicle fleet. This would most likely be spread over the first two years of operations subject to set-back approval. There will also be costs associated with the initial start-up team and TDY support to assist in the developing the programmatic frameworks and setting an operational foundation. Estimated costs are projected at full potential but may be less depending on security requirements and other specifications. Subject to initial approvals and timelines, start-up costs could begin in FY2020. *See Appendix D.1: Summary of Costs and for comprehensive estimated costs see Attachment ADMIN.2: Five Year Budget Projection and ADMIN.3: Detailed Operating Plan.*

ICASS Costs

Estimated ICASS costs per year assuming three USDHs should run parallel to Vanuatu as Port Moresby Embassy supports both Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands in a similar manner. Guard services are a separate line item for Post operations and are not currently included in ICASS. Vanuatu's ICASS costs are currently \$18,939 USD. *See Appendix D.2: ICASS Invoice by Agency FY2019.*

Exchange Rates

There are three common currencies that are used in the Solomon Islands; the Solomon Island Dollar (SBD), the Australian Dollar (AUD), and the United States Dollar (USD). The SBD has been consistent at close to 8 to 1 to the USD since the middle of 2015. The AUD in that same period has moved in a range from a 1 to 1.25 - 1.45. Using SBD should be the first choice for most transactions and leases. AUD may be requested from some of the Australian vendors or for larger equipment if needed. *See Appendix D.3: Currency Conversion.*

GST and Import Duties

Goods Sales Tax (GST) is 10% on locally manufactured goods and 15% on imported goods. Subject to a successful Country Agreement negotiation, Peace Corps is expected to be exempt from this tax. As there is no general services support from the U.S. Embassy, Peace Corps would be required to provide vendors and the Ports Authority with tax/duty waiver documentation. A tax-exempt letter would be required for Agency and personal vehicles for USDH staff. GST does not apply to drugs, medicines, or surgical goods. The need for tax and duty waivers was voiced multiple times with key ministry authorities.

Staffing and Local Talent

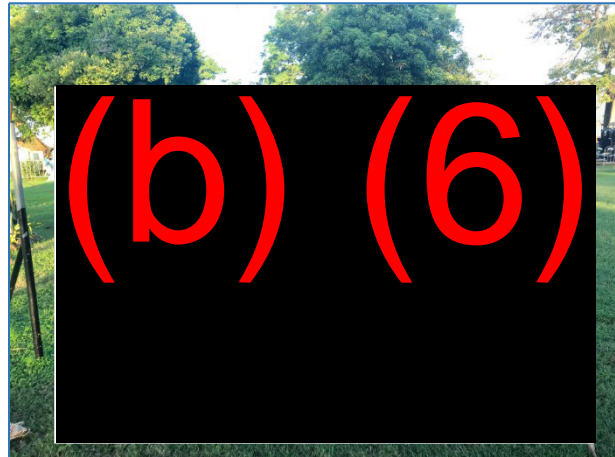
A proposed staffing plan includes three USDH and 22 local hire PSCs. Local talent exists and the team noted good possibilities for PCMO and ITS candidates. Start-up will require strong assistance from TDYs to set up the medical office, IT infrastructure, programming and training systems, and more.

General estimated staffing costs include:

- USDH Salary and Benefits - \$536,833
- Local Hire Personal Services Contracts - \$519,861

Sample annual contract costs inclusive of bonuses and benefits for local staff include:

- Program Manager at grade 10 - \$27,502
- Cashier at grade 8 - \$21,973
- Information Technology Specialist at grade 9 - \$23,794



See Appendix D.4: Draft Salary Chart and Appendix D.5: Draft Organizational Chart.

Volunteer Allowances

Living Allowance

The Australian Volunteer Service pays an equivalent of \$849 USD per month and the New Zealand VSA pays \$774 USD per month in living allowance. However, their placements are in the capital and in more urban areas placements than Peace Corps would likely use. Living allowances for Peace Corps Posts in the Pacific average \$433 USD in FY2020 with Vanuatu at \$486 USD and Samoa at the high of \$540 USD. An estimate for Solomon Islands is set at \$510 USD for budget projection purposes. Additional exploration in the outer islands could produce different tiers for living allowances.

Settling-In Allowance

Post is projected to begin with an initial \$300 USD equivalent settling-in allowance, similar to other Pacific Posts and in tune with Vanuatu's at \$289 USD. Critical items are easily available and reasonably priced such as mattresses, two burner stoves, and clothing. This will be more finely tuned as staff on the ground researches additional markets. Water safety items such as life jackets and beacons should be provided. Bicycles are not commonly used nor does the environment seem conducive to using bicycles as a mode of transportation.

Housing

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources typically provides housing or a housing supplement to teachers in what they call "tie housing" associated with the conditions of employment. In interactions with school officials and others, the team learned that housing may or may not be available for education Volunteers as housing is scarce. In preparing the estimated budget, a \$200 USD housing supplement was set for half the Volunteer population to ensure suitable housing is available. A housing supplement will address independent rent or a host family allowance.

USDH Residential and Office Property Leasing

Residential

The Embassy gave no specific guidelines regarding locations in Honiara for either office or residential space. Through interviews of locals and expats in Honiara, there are residential areas that would be best suited for our USDH staff. The Lengkiki, Tasahe, and a few areas in Panatina near the Woodford International School are typical areas where the majority of Australian, New Zealand, and British diplomats live. A typical expat residence is on a compound with other single or adjacent units in a complex ranging from 3 to 12 residences. These are typically family units of the Australian and New Zealand High Commission staff.

Each housing unit comes mostly furnished by the landlord, contains a generator provided by the landlord, and has security components such as fencing and lighting. Organizations combine together for security guard costs. In some situations, the guard services actually overlap and are supplemented with mobile patrol services. It was recommended and appears common to have a guard service for expat houses as there are occasional thefts. The compounds are safe, well protected, and have neighbors who look out for each other. This would be the ideal choice as it would bring significant savings to the Agency and would be turnkey options. The downside to these types of compounds designed for expats is the inflated cost and the security components that are designed to meet Australian diplomatic security requirements but may not necessarily meet all of the requirements of the U.S. Embassy. They often have equal or higher security than USDH houses in other Peace Corps Pacific countries.

The compounds would be a good choice for USDH housing. They ranged in price from \$40,000 to \$50,000 USD annually and availability was good but not high. There are other single-family home options in safe areas but they would require significant funding for furnishings, generators, perimeter security, and interior security. [See Appendix D.6: Residential Property.](#)

Office Space

Office space may be one the biggest challenges in this market. Conflicts related to land was a key element of the “tensions” in the early 2000s and remains a challenge today. Landowners are reluctant to sell or lease land for economic purposes which has limited growth in the outlying areas of Honiara. This, and high demand by Australian and Chinese businesses, causes highly inflated costs and availability. At first pass, the task of finding a suitable office was daunting, but after several inquiries while meeting with business owners and community leaders, a few potential sites began to surface. However, costs start from \$150 SBD per square meter.



Potential suitable leases may range from \$150,000 to \$200,000 USD annually. In this range expectations would include stable electrical and plumbing, a generator set, water tanks, and some level of security. [See Appendix D.7: Office Space.](#)



Estimated Space Requirements

- Approximately 8,000 useable square feet or 743 square meters.
- Secured parking for vehicles.
- Training and conference room space for up to 50.
- Private, sound-proof area for the Medical Unit.
- Potential secured areas for cashier, server, and pharmacy.
- Have or ability to have a back-up generator and water tank with pump.

Lease Terms

It is common practice to pay for the full year up front, but quarterly payments could be negotiated. Landlords will accept local currency (SBD) payments. It is recommended to have lease start dates to Q3 or Q4 to avoid any liquidity issues due to Continuing Resolutions.

Electric

Electricity is generated by diesel fuel which is expensive and subject to market fluctuations. Solomon Power has a solar and a hydro project that are expected to infuse 15% of generated power over the next two years and give some relief on costs. Currently, a typical office building of around 750 square meters costs \$5,000-\$7,000 USD per month. Expat resident housing tends to be around \$700 to \$1,000 USD a month. Solomon Power is the sole provider of electricity and is government owned. EFT payments are accepted.

Communications

Telekom is the largest communication company in the country and is actually the only provider of landlines in the Solomon Islands. It is owned by the Solomon Island government through ownership of the National Provident Fund. In 2010 the government opened competition in the market which opened opportunity for BMobile to begin operations in the country. BMobile typically only competes on a cell phone level but trying to grow its internet market. Internet bandwidth and cell service run on satellite communication at this time. Dedicated internet access can be purchased but also comes at a high cost of between \$3,000 to \$4,000 USD per month for an office. The Coral Sea cable will have a huge impact on service quality and cost in the coming year with its successful implementation. Both companies accept EFT payments. [See Appendix D.8: Coral Sea cable map.](#)

Water and Sewer

Solomon Water Authority is owned by the government of the Solomon Islands. They supply 65% of the population with fresh water which is sourced from 60% spring and 40% ground water. Most residences and commercial property also source their own water through rain catchment which acts as a back-up if there are any temporary issues with water lines. Most residences pay less than \$100 USD per month and organizations pay up to \$300 USD per month. They only accept cash or check payment at this time.

Payments

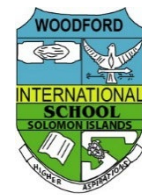
Solomon Islands is a large cash transactional country. Core vendors for utilities expressed openness to EFT transactions and payment by check in SBD. Nobody expressed interest in accepting credit card payments but believed it would be coming more available with the Coral Sea cable installation. Peace Corps would likely have a base relationship with BSP Bank as it has the largest distribution of ATMs for potential services for Volunteer payments and banking services. Post would likely need to use other banks for Volunteers in various locations and for potential redundant operations. Other international banks with a good reputation are Westpac, BRED, and ANZ, which all have a presence in the Solomon Islands.

Maintenance Issues

The biggest maintenance issue will be air conditioning units in both a residential and office settings, as is the case in most Peace Corps Posts. The best case is to have them landlord owned and serviced but service will be a key task for Post to ensure proper maintenance and replacement schedules. Air conditioning units are easily available on the market. Generator sets and vehicles are items that also require regular maintenance. Basic parts are available for routine service. Toyota has the largest presence in the market for utility vehicles, it would be advisable to use Toyota.

International Schools

The Woodford International School is based in Honiara and offers a primary year program designed for children up to age 12 and a middle school Cambridge curriculum after that. Sources on the ground had high acclaim for the primary school but had reservations about upper grades. Tuition, seat, levy (for international students) and application fees would run approximately \$11,000 to \$14,000 annually. [See Appendix D.9: Woodford International School.](#)



Airlines

Domestic

Solomon Airlines is based in Honiara and owned by the Government of the Solomon Islands since 1984. It is currently the sole domestic provider of airline services covering 24 destinations. Its international footprint includes direct flights from Brisbane-Australia, Nadi-Fiji, Port Vila-Vanuatu and Port Moresby-PNP. They have daily or weekly flights to all provinces. They keep one twin otter aircraft available for back up, charter, emergency, and medevac situations and indicated they typically do two medevac flights a week.

International

There are five international carriers that fly to and from Honiara International Airport. Air Niugini has flights to Nadi and Port Moresby, Fiji Airlines has flights to Nadi and Port Vila, Nauru Airlines has flight to Brisbane and Nauru and Virgin Australia flights to Brisbane. Solomon Airlines currently has regular flight schedule from Honiara to Brisbane and a weekly direct flight with service from Munda to Brisbane. [See Appendix D.10: Solomon Airlines Routes.](#)

Key Recommendations

4. Collaborate with the **Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)** to ensure financial resources are reserved to initiate start-up expenses in FY2020 and build for incremental growth in FY2021, FY2022, and FY2023 as the Post graduates to an optimal trainee input of 40.
 - 4.1 Update the 1998 bilateral agreement with the Office of General Counsel. Enlist support from Embassy Port Moresby Embassy support for the following:
 - Cost free multiple entry visas for Volunteer and overseas staff (USDH/PSC/ USDH dependents) for term of service.
 - Tax/duty free exempt status for Peace Corps official use for vehicles, equipment and supply items shipped in and inbound air freight (imports).
 - Duty free vehicle import for USDH staff personal vehicles and personal belongings.
 - No cost vehicle registration and license plate for official vehicles and the USDH Staff vehicles.
 - Driver privileges for USDH staff and dependent household of driving age.
 - GST/tax exempt duty-free products and services for official Peace Corps use.
 - 4.2 Obtain a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) for a provision of temporary quarters to support an office while a permanent office is located, negotiated, and submitted for set-back approval. This period is expected to last 12-18 months. This temporary office could be temporary space in the Consular Office located in Honiara or an extension of assistance of in-kind support from the Solomon Island Government. Either scenario would require Regional Security Office approval and assistance from the Embassy Port Moresby in ushering the wavier process through Diplomatic Security.
 - Space is required to have access limitations to only Peace Corps staff.
 - Basic office components of sufficient electric outlets, lighting, functioning climate control and restroom access.
 - Night and weekend access to the facility required.
 - Sufficient security provisions for staff and asset safety including multiple lock systems, overnight security and parameter controls.

4.3 Identify a seasoned start-up team to begin establishing a program and an office as permanent USDH staff are identified and selected. The TDY start-up team should include an experienced Country Director, an experienced Director of Programming and Training, and two experienced Directors of Management and Operations.

- Start-up USDH staff should have start-up experience and previous experience working with Pacific cultures.
- Permanent USDH overseas staff should be on the ground from the beginning in order to build relationships and see-through initial start-up phase.
- An additional TDY DMO(s) is required to assist with the high operational and contracting workloads related to PSC hiring and leasing. Initial staff orientation and training will be extremely demanding.
- Identify other HCN professionals in other Posts for mentoring and shadowing opportunities.

4.4 Leasing of the main office will be critical to begin the 12-18-month timeline of co-location waiver with the Regional Security Officer and the Department of State.

- Locate and negotiate an operationally suitable and security vetted Peace Corps office with sufficient space for projected staff and Volunteer factors for the first three years.
- Carefully vet space design to ensure each department has met provisions for a high-quality program.



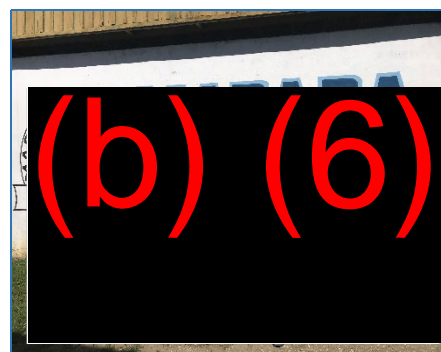
VI. Programming and Training Assessment

Overview

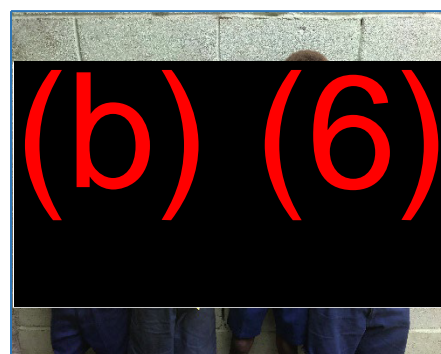
The focus of the programming and training assessment was to explore the needs and priorities of the country in the six main programming sectors in which Peace Corps works to find an alignment between the government's requests and the capabilities the Agency can provide. Development outcomes in Solomon Islands are behind the rest of the region and there is a great deal of assistance that the country needs and receives. The key to the programming and training assessment was to define Peace Corps' niche and determine the best possible area in which Volunteers can make a difference.

Solomon Islands has made significant gains in the last decade, however, major constraints to growth remain, including poor infrastructure, under-developed labor skills, high utility costs, and land tenure issues. Entrenched gender inequality constrains the opportunities available to women. Solomon Island communities need improved access to water, better sanitation and hygiene, enhanced agricultural practices, investment in early childhood and adult education, better literacy outcomes, and improved preparation for natural disasters and the impact of climate change, among other areas. Key contacts expressed an interest for assistance in any and all sectors Peace Corps can provide. The team listened for themes that rose to the top and directed the assessment accordingly. By far the biggest needs expressed were in the areas of education, especially literacy, and youth.

Many high-level ministry stakeholders and community members had been taught by or worked with a Peace Corps Volunteer. Most remembered the role that Peace Corps Volunteers played in education and expressed a desire to have Volunteers back in the classrooms and communities to educate youth and assist adult learners. According to historical PST files, the last groups of Volunteers to serve in Solomon Islands were assigned as secondary science/math teachers, rural training center educators, and rural community educators/community high school teachers.



The people with whom the team met all harkened back to the days that Peace Corps teachers made an impact in schools and communities in the provinces. Some mentioned a noticeable absence of Peace Corps' formal role in education and the informal role that Volunteers played in motivating and encouraging students and community members. It's important for a new country entry or re-entry to provide the first groups of Volunteers the most structured assignments and the greatest opportunity to succeed. As with other recent start-ups, beginning with the education sector makes good sense for the mostly generalist Volunteers. The need is great and the desire is strong amongst the Solomon Islanders for education Volunteers. *See Attachment P&T.1 Meeting/Site Visit Notes for detailed notes of key people met and facilities visited and for deeper context on the programming areas explored. See Appendix A.6 Key Contacts for a list of contact information for people met and schools/NGOs visited.*



Findings and Observations

Possible Programming Sectors

Of the five major objectives under the National Development Strategy, number three (“All Solomon Islanders have access to quality social services, including education and health”) seems to be the one to which Peace Corps could best contribute. There was overwhelming support of and encouragement for Peace Corps to return to the field of education, primarily in literacy (though English, math, science, vocational training, physical education, and coaching sports were also noted) as well as youth development. Therefore, the team primarily assessed the programming areas of education and youth. An education project would provide an anchor for Volunteers assigned to a school. There was less apparent structure for a youth development project, particularly in rural areas, but Volunteers could address the needs of in and out of school youth through the school to which they are assigned and through secondary/community projects.

Education

The vision of the Solomon Islands Education System is to ensure that all Solomon Islanders will develop as individuals and possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to earn a living and to live in harmony with others and their environment. Parents and members of the community develop a sense of ownership for their educational institutions.

The long-term goals for the Solomon Islands education system from 2016 to 2030 are:

- To provide equitable access to all girls and boys to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education by 2030 and to achieve full enrolment of all 5 year olds by 2030.
- To achieve full completion to quality and relevant basic education (primary and junior secondary) for all children in the Solomon Islands
- To extend equitable access and ensure quality and relevance of secondary education to deliver both work-related skills and transferable skills, including entrepreneurial and ICT skills to increase the number of youth who have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- To consolidate the establishment of a comprehensive, integrated system of Tertiary Education which provides quality education and relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- To strengthen multi stakeholder approaches to extend adult literacy and gradually introduce lifelong learning approaches to education and training
- To manage education resources in an efficient, effective and transparent manner so that it promotes access and quality goals

See Attachment P&T.2 Education Strategic Framework 2016-2030.

Youth

Solomon Islands is a youthful nation. The ‘definition of youth in Solomon Islands is ‘persons between the age of 15 years of age and 34 years of age’ inclusive and 70 percent of the total population in Solomon Islands is below 34 years of age. That number is steadily increasing and many key contacts mentioned the “youth bulge” as a primary concern for Solomon Islands.

The long-term goals under the Solomon Islands youth policy from 2017 to 2030 are:

- Create an appropriate institutional framework to facilitate the delivery of an integrated and mainstreamed agenda for youth development at the national and provincial levels.

- Guide effective delivery of national youth programs and services informed by ‘evidence based’ approaches.
- Mainstream youth development and empowerment into multi-sectoral policy and programming arrangements within government and other key stakeholders and institutions.
- Foster genuine participation of and partnership with young people in all aspects of national and provincial development.
- Ensure investments in youth are appropriate for their circumstances.
- Guide the development of sustained research, information, and knowledge management agenda on the situation of youths in country.
- Foster awareness and appreciation by youths of the Solomon Islands identity and culture.

See Attachment P&T.3 National Youth Policy 2017-2030.

Partners

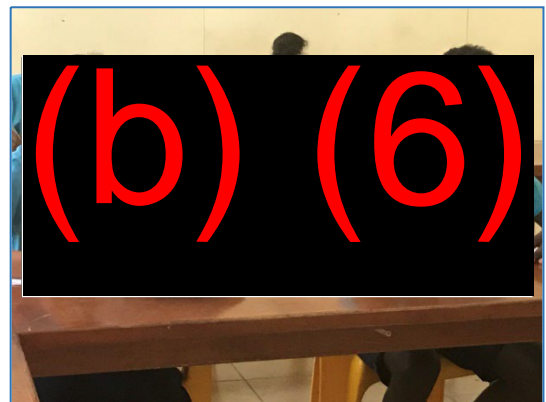
The Ministry of Education and Human Resources (MEHRD) would be an excellent first partner for Peace Corps. They have a solid roadmap for education priorities, as noted above, and clear ideas on how Peace Corps can contribute to their goals. Dr. Franco Rodie, Permanent Secretary, has deep experience in education and knows Peace Corps well. He worked with Volunteers and used to take part in ISTs as a trainer and resource. He suggested literacy, ICT, math and science, professional development and mentoring for teachers, and curriculum development. He is on the board of Resources for Education to Advance Development in Solomon Islands (READ SI) and works closely with Joyce Boykin. He would welcome a Volunteer placement with READ SI to assist with literacy programming and/or collaboration between Peace Corps and READ SI to enhance what they have been able to accomplish in training teachers.

“Our communities have missed out on a lot after Peace Corps left.”

- George Saeuavle,
Principal of Florence
Christian School

The Ministry of Women, Youth, and Family Affairs was described as one of the lesser functioning ministries and somewhat challenging to work with, though Dr. Cedric Alependava, Permanent Secretary, seemed open and encouraging of Peace Corps’ return. He also knew Peace Corps well and told stories of Volunteers with whom he worked. He mentioned as priority areas English education, literacy and numeracy, vocational training, and physical education. He mentioned the youth bulge and the challenge to meet the needs of this population, especially with adequate classrooms and education resources. He also cited the high drop-out rate and the desire for Volunteers to work with out of school youth.

READ SI is an NGO founded by American Joyce Boykin. The Prime Minister has praised the organization for its mission to battle the country’s high illiteracy rate by providing literacy classes and libraries to about 600 villages. He awarded READ SI \$2 billion sbd under a partnership program between the Solomon Islands Government and Taiwan. Ms. Boykin is a passionate and active educator and she has worked with Peace Corps in the past. She would be a great partner on a literacy project and has offered herself as a trainer. Her literacy training materials and books are endorsed by MEHRD and would be useful to Peace Corps Volunteers; Ms. Boykin believes generalist Volunteers could use her materials to teach and tutor literacy.

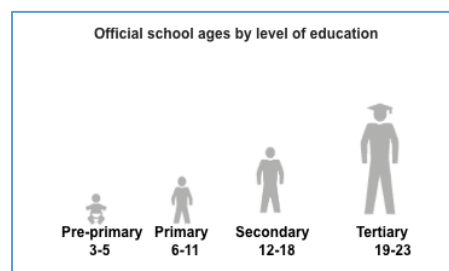


The Education System

The years of conflict during the tensions severely damaged and depleted the education system. In many parts of the country there was little or no access to educational facilities, as some schools were forced to contract or close. Some schools were burnt down and teachers and students fled the violence in conflict-affected areas. Following the restoration of order in 2003, the government set about rehabilitating and reforming the country's education system. With assistance from the governments of Australia and New Zealand, the government has been able to rehabilitate infrastructure, re-establish in-service training, and provide teaching materials to primary schools. Still, the needs are great. As a country made up of hundreds of inhabited islands, the challenge of attending school across the islands means around 20 percent of children are out of school. Uneven population distribution makes providing educational services difficult at best.

Grade Levels

There are six years of primary education and seven years of secondary. Education in the Solomon Islands is not compulsory and less than 60% of children enter primary school for a mandatory six-year period. Enrolment at secondary school is discouraging in a country where so many people remain at subsistence level. The gross rate is 32% for boys, but only 27% for girls. The curriculum is academic and takes seven years to fully complete.



The vast majority of the people are scattered in small villages among the islands. Many earn a subsistence living, where farming and fishing skills are passed down through generations. Therefore, rural training centers provide an excellent opportunity for many school drop outs to learn practical skills.

Enrolment

The primary sector has the highest Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) overall. This indicates that this sector has the capacity to accommodate all children in the primary population age from age 5 to 11. Honiara shows the highest GER for early childhood education (ECE), junior secondary education (JSS), and senior secondary education (SS).

Year	2016			2017		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
ECE	60%	59%	59%	63%	60%	61%
Primary	116%	118%	117%	117%	119%	118%
JSS	76%	74%	75%	75%	71%	73%
SS	34%	36%	35%	35%	36%	35%

Source: SIEMIS

Drop Out Rates

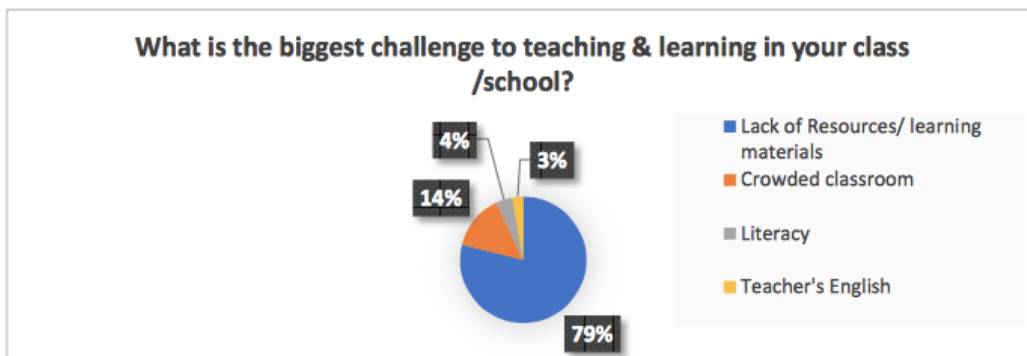
In 2016, students in grades nine and 11 both had dropout rates of more than 20 percent, while year 12 students had a dropout rate of 76 percent. These three grade levels also had the lowest promotion rates between all 12 years. Drop outs are a major area of concern for many of the key stakeholders the team met with, and youth unemployment was an additional, related concern. Peace Corps Volunteers could address the needs of out-of-school youth through secondary/community projects.

School Calendar

The school year in Solomon Islands runs from January through December. It is comprised of four 10-week terms, two one-week breaks, and one four-week break. There is a six-week break for the Christmas holiday. The ideal timing for Peace Corps Volunteers to enter service would be in January so they can settle into their sites and begin the new academic year. With start-up timing that would likely mean the first group of two-year Volunteers would begin PST in Q1 FY2022. So as not to delay the start of the program, the team recommends using a model that was successful in the launch of Peace Corps programs in Myanmar and Timor Leste; transfer a group of 10-20 experienced third year Volunteers in Q2 FY2021. Volunteers should have served in an education/literacy, ideally in a Pacific Post. They can undergo a reduced PST and start in the mid-term of the school year. [See Appendix E.1 School Calendar for dates for the 2019 school year.](#)

Resources

As in many other Peace Corps countries, teaching and learning resources are lacking. In Solomon Islands this was evident in visits to schools and classrooms outside of Honiara as well as in public schools within Honiara. At a recent World Teachers Day event in the country, teachers expressed that a lack of resources was one of the biggest challenges. Peace Corps Volunteers can help local schools develop teaching aids and bolster library collections. Many of the schools visited expressed a strong desire for Peace Corps Volunteers to help build library collections and help teachers make better use of resources.



Source: 2017 WTD, survey report.

School Fees

School fees are a barrier to education. Costs range from \$100 sbd for kindergarten to \$1500-3000 sbd for secondary school. There are also costs associated with uniforms and school supplies. Although education is free up until Form 3, schools never have enough resources for all the students so they charge fees for other things which go toward paying supplies, building classrooms, and other events. Sometimes the schools and communities try to do fundraising for these needs but the money usually comes from the pockets of parents.

Teacher Salaries and Housing

Teacher salaries generally range from \$1,100-1,800 sbd every two weeks. Teacher housing is a challenge. Some schools provide teacher housing tied to the school. One principal mentioned that the Education Authority provides a housing allowance for teachers and others stated that teachers stay in their own houses or stay with relatives. The school principals with whom the team met stated they would be able to secure housing if they hosted a Volunteer. Still, this will be one area in which the start-up team will need to pay particular attention, as housing seems to be a big challenge in general in many communities. When asked about homestay families, some key contacts who had worked with Peace Corps Volunteers in the past said they live with families during PST but stayed in teacher housing or other independent dwellings during their service.



Project Framework and Job Specific Request

Education Sector - Literacy

Less than 20 percent of the Solomon Island population can read. A priority initiative of MEHRD is to improve the capacity of teachers to use contemporary literacy strategies in their classroom. The intent is to have an increased number of teachers trained to use quality literacy practices, which will lead to improved student performance. MEHRD is working to have teachers across the country utilize the new curriculum and contemporary literacy and numeracy strategies. They state that *“The child will become the center of the teaching and learning experience and teachers will utilize class-based assessment to development improvement strategies.”*

It was beyond the scope of the assessment team to fully flesh out a project framework but there are good, current models in the Pacific from which to draw. If literacy is selected as the focus for the first project in Solomon Islands, as recommended, it could be modeled on Peace Corps Samoa’s Rural Primary School Literacy Project. [See Appendix E.2 Sample LPF](#). It will be important for the start-up team to further define this with MEHRD and other partners. The first group of third year transfer-extensions can play a pioneering role in helping staff to shape the project framework.

A Job Specific Request (JSR) might be modeled after Peace Corps Vanuatu’s JSR for their Literacy Education Facilitator position. This is another successful Pacific Island project that can be utilized to define a literacy project in Solomon Islands. [See Appendix E.3 Sample JSR](#).

Volunteer Recruitment

The team recommends starting with a model similar to that used in Timor Leste and Myanmar. The first group of Volunteers (10-20) could be third year transfer/extension Volunteers from other Pacific Posts who have the education and cultural experience to be successful. They would come in mid-year to launch the program fairly quickly and pave the way for the first full two-year cohort. This pioneer group will help to refine the project framework and make suggestions on appropriate training design and materials. The recruitment for this type of transfer Volunteer is more nimble and flexible and can be done by the Region outside of the lengthy VRS process.

It will be possible to place couples in this assignment provided there are two schools available in a site that are close to one another. Homosexuality is illegal so LGBTQ Volunteers will need to be informed about issues around serving safely in country and be trained on “the language and skills to safely navigate situations that may come up around their orientation” (as recommended by the safety and security team). The start-up team will want to communicate with staff in Pacific Posts such as Vanuatu to understand other issues around diversity that they may need to address. The assessment period was too short to adequately explore this in depth.

Potential Site Placements

The team recommends starting with a limited geographic area for the first couple of groups until the team understands some of the logistical concerns around travel and communications, as well as safety and security. Guadalcanal offers a number of possible community and school placements outside of Honiara that are accessible by road and/or by road and boat. The Western Province was friendly, easily accessible by plane, and with enough resources (including a good hospital) and would be a second logical province in which to start.



Other international volunteer organizations place their volunteers safely and successfully in the following provinces: Guadalcanal, Western, Central, Choiseul, Malaita, Isabel, Makira, and Temotu. Housing may be a challenge, as it seems to be broadly in the country. Several school principals mentioned a shortage of teacher housing but pledged to do all they can to identify suitable and safe housing were they to receive a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Pre-Service Training

The team was not able to assess in detail training sites but did explore or learn about several possibilities.

- On Guadalcanal there is a [Catholic mission](#) and rural training center at Visale, about 30 miles west of Honiara. Archbishop Cardon said this would be a suitable place to hold a training and there would likely be nearby host families who could host trainees.
- In the Western Province, there is a retreat center called Bethany that Archbishop Cardon also mentioned. Also in Gizo the Women’s Resource Center under the Western Province Council of Women has a large training room that they rent out.
- Peace Corps has used Rural Training Centers in the past for PSTs; this could be a possibility in either Guadalcanal or Western Province.

The IAP Region has in their files historical documents and reports on some of the last PSTs to be held in Solomon Islands in the 1990s. [See Appendix E.4 Sample PST Design](#) for a sample from a PST for 38 trainees in Group 53 in 1998-1999. The Region can also build on past Pijin language resources developed by Peace Corps (though a former LCF we met said that the language is dynamic and changes so updates will be warranted). One resource to consult might be RAMSI’s Toj Pijin guide. [See Attachment P&T.4 RAMSI Tok Pijin Guide.](#)

Key Recommendations

5. Collaborate with the Office of Programming and Training Support (OPATS) and Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS) to design a literacy education project with a focus on in and out of school youth and plan for a trainee input of 10-20 in Q2 FY2021 and a second input of 20 in Q1 FY2022 with initial placements in Guadalcanal and Western Provinces.
 - 5.1 Pursue a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. Utilize Dr. Franco Rodie, Permanent Secretary, as a primary point of contact to define and refine the scope of the partnership.
 - 5.2 Begin with a literacy project modeled after similar projects in Pacific Posts (e.g.: Samoa). Collaborate with Joyce Boykin of Resources for Education to Advance Development in Solomon Islands (READ SI).
 - 5.3 Consider placements at the primary and junior secondary level at both public/community schools as well as religious schools. Identify sites that have a host family available and/or “tie-housing” (staff/teacher housing tied to the Volunteer’s assignment at a school). Work with MEHRD to have housing be included as part of the host country contribution.
 - 5.4 Begin with an input of 10-20 transfer/extension Volunteers in Q2 FY2021. Volunteers should have served in an education/literacy, ideally in a Pacific Post. Recruitment would be finalized by November 2020. Volunteers would begin a six-week PST in mid-May 2021 and settle into their sites and communities for a few weeks before starting the school term in late July.
 - 5.5 Plan for a full Trainee Input of 20 in Q1 FY2022. JSRs would be due o/a September 11, 2020. Trainees would stage and then begin an 11-week PST in the first week of October 2021. Swear-in would be mid-December 2021 to allow Volunteers to settle into their sites and learn their communities before the school term begins in late January 2022.
 - 5.6 Begin with placements in Guadalcanal and Western Provinces. Avoid placing Volunteers in the center of Honiara. After the first two inputs, consider expanding to other provinces that have sufficient site placements and reliable and regular transportation and communication.
 - 5.7 Implement a full community-based training design for PST, placing trainees with host families to promote language acquisition and cultural integration. Consider holding an orientation week in/around Honiara and then holding PST in/around Gizo in the Western Province.
 - 5.8 Provide trainees with focused sessions on the history of the 1998-2003 tensions and how to identify any impacts of the conflict on their communities. Provide specific training on working in a conflict-affected environment.
 - 5.9 Hold In-Service Trainings (ISTs) during breaks in the school term. Consider holding regional ISTs if Volunteers are placed in different provinces.
 - 5.10 Tap into the the network of former Peace Corps staff to identify key P&T staff.

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- Attachment MED.7: WHO Alcohol Data 2016
- Attachment MED.8: St. John Ambulance Annual Report
- Attachment MED.9 Special Purpose Visas.

Attachment 4. Administrative Documents

- Attachment ADMIN.1: Meeting/Site Visit Notes
- Attachment ADMIN.2: Five Year Budget Projection
- Attachment ADMIN.3: Detailed Operating Plan

Attachment 5. Programming and Training Documents

- Attachment P&T.1: Meeting/Site Visit Notes
- Attachment P&T.2: Education Strategic Framework, 2016-2030
- Attachment P&T.3: National Youth Policy, 2017-2030
- Attachment P&T.4: RAMSI Tok Pijin Guide

Individual files are located in the Appendices and Attachments folders.

THE HAPI ISLES

“Peace Corps really had a lasting impact on people and communities in Solomon Islands.”

- John Muria,
Attorney General
and former student of
a Peace Corps
Volunteer

