

FOR THE NEW DIRECTOR

An open letter to the new Peace Corps Director, Aaron S. Williams

by Kevin F. F. Quigley

Dear Director Williams:

Congratulations on your appointment as the 18th Director of the Peace Corps.

Like many in the Peace Corps community, I am pleased that you are an individual who understands the Peace Corps and its community, knows development and exchange, and has a set of skills and experiences that can help re-invigorate the Peace Corps.

I also suspect that each and every one of the 195,000 of us who have been volunteers and the 30,000 who have been staff believe that we have perfect advice for you and that you should heed it. Since many have offered myriad suggestions in other places, I will use this space to offer just four:

1. **Revitalize the culture.** When it started, the Peace Corps was perhaps one of the most innovative government programs in the 20th century, and the agency and its work was widely known and admired around the world. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. While recognizing that the world in 2009 is vastly different from the world in 1961, a major challenge will be to revitalize the culture at the Peace Corps so that it once again has a willingness to innovate and develop new approaches and programs that truly advance its timeless mission of making a more peaceful and prosperous world. This will be difficult to do and progress hard to measure, but without revitalizing the culture, success in reinvigorating the Peace Corps will be elusive.

2. **Focus more on countries that matter.** Each individual matters, but not all countries matter equally. For too long, the Peace Corps has not been in countries that are essential to our long-term national interests and was in far too many countries that are only modestly related to our core national interests.

Many newly important countries would resist a traditional Peace Corps program, so it will be critical for you to find ways that enable Peace Corps to work in and with those countries that matter. For example, if one of our long-term international objectives is to better understand Islam, the Peace Corps must find ways to be in many more Muslim countries. Without focusing more on countries that matter, it is unlikely that the Congress will continue to appropriate growing sums to the Peace Corps, especially in what is likely to be a very difficult fiscal environment for the next decade or longer.

3. **Embrace partnerships.** For too long, the Peace Corps has seemingly isolated itself from natural allies in the service and development communities, at least at the strategic level. Lots of ad hoc partnerships take place in the field, but they rarely get to scale or are sustained because they tend to be one-off partnerships. In the early days, Peace Corps was innovative and best of class in many of its core functions: recruitment, training, and programming. I'm afraid that is no longer the case. The agency has a great deal it can learn from a variety of world class organizations—here and abroad, including those in the non-profit, corporate and university communities. To effectively learn, the Peace Corps should develop a small number of strategic alliances designed to truly enhance its capacity and therefore its increase its impact. I know that you have great experience in developing these kinds of partnerships.

4. **Invest in the Third Goal.** Ever since it was established, the Peace Corps has had the same three goals that have stood the test of time remarkably well. For perfectly understandable reasons, the agency devoted the preponderance

of its resources to Goals One and Two through recruiting, training and supporting volunteers. This left scant resources for the Goal Three. Sargent Shriver and the other founders of the Peace Corps keenly understood that Peace Corps's long-term success depended on bringing the world back home in meaningful ways. That requires resources, most of all time, which they did not have. Greater investment in the Third Goal will help raise Peace Corp's profile in the United States, assist in recruiting efforts and strengthen needed political support. These investments would be especially timely in the lead up to the 50th Anniversary and looking forward to the next 50 years. Strategic investments in the Third Goal could be the most singular and long-lasting contributions of your new Peace Corps service.

All of us in the Peace Corps community wish you every success as you take up your responsibilities. With a President, who might be considered the first "Peace Corps President" given that his family connections span the globe, the Peace Corps stands poised at the edge of a new future. The country, our community, and indeed the world want a better and bolder Peace Corps. We sincerely hope you achieve it. And NPCA and others in the community stand ready to assist in that noble effort.

Director Williams, thanks for listening!

Kevin F. F. Quigley

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