

BELIZE
VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION (VAD)

Health



Since 1961.

Program: Health

Job Title: Health Resource Volunteer

Dates of Service: *Sept 5, 2015 – Sept 8, 2017

Staging Dates: *June 23, 2015

Pre-Service Training

(in Belize): *June 24 – Sept 3, 2015

*dates subject to change

This document is intended to give an overview of the project you are invited to work on in the Peace Corps. For more detailed information about Belize and living there, please read the Welcome Book via the link included with your invitation, and check out the related Web sites referenced in the Welcome Book.

For further information about serving as a Health Resource Volunteer in Belize, call the Country Desk Officer for Post at Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C., (9AM to 5PM, EST):

Toll-free: 1-855-855-1961, press 1, then extension 2509;
or directly at (202) 692- 2509;
or via email at belizedesk@peacecorps.gov



A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAMMING & TRAINING TEAM

Dear Future Health Volunteer,

Congratulations! This is your official invitation and assignment description to serve in Belize. Should you decide to accept this invitation you will embark on a transformative life experience as a Peace Corps Community Health Resource Volunteer. Arriving in Belize to join the new Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) will allow you to work side by side with an array of local community health partners and have a chance to make a positive contribution towards improving the wellbeing of the Belizean people.

We are extremely pleased to share that you will be the third group of trainees to join the RFHP project. The RFHP was developed in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health through the Health Education and Community Participation Bureau (HECOPAB). During its first two years of implementation, our collaboration with Belizean health partners has been growing.

Your service in Belize is a unique opportunity for you to gain hands-on experience in furthering and implementing rural community health activities. You may observe salient health issues in the villages in which you will serve and will address these issues through the use of your self-motivation, pro-activeness, and creativity to develop and implement health activities. At the end of your two years of service, your efforts will have contributed to diminishing adverse health outcomes in your communities.

As a Volunteer you will gain a rich understanding of local Belizean culture, language, and traditions. You will be able to share your American culture with your new host family and friends, as well as participate in Belizean holidays and traditions. Your pre-service training (PST) will be intensive and challenging, as you will undergo technical, language, medical, cultural, and safety and security sessions in a classroom-type environment designed to prepare you for an exciting assignment.

Becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer inherently means that you will experience many rewards and challenges. You must come prepared to work hard and be resilient. Your determination, optimistic outlook, willingness to engage others, perseverance, patience, and commitment to growth will go a long way in making your two years in Belize among the most meaningful of your life. We encourage you to read this VAD very carefully and hope it will begin to address the many questions you may have regarding Volunteer service in Belize.

Congratulations on your invitation and we hope to see you in Peace Corps Belize,

Dr. Franelda Gutierrez
PC/Belize Health Program Manager

PEACE CORPS BELIZE HISTORY

Belize is a small country in Central America of roughly 356,000 people and is slightly smaller than the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Peace Corps arrived in what was then British Honduras in 1962. In 2012 Peace Corps celebrated its 50th anniversary of continuous service in Belize, and over the past five decades more than 1,900 Volunteers have served in Belize. Currently there are approximately 35 Volunteers serving in Belize.

Early Volunteers worked primarily as classroom teachers, but more recent Volunteers have worked as teacher trainers, health educators, rural community development workers, and youth organizers. Throughout this time, there has been close cooperation and friendship between Volunteers and the people with whom they have worked.

In 2013, Peace Corps launched a new project, the Rural Family Health Project, with the Ministry of Health. Volunteers work alongside Community Health Workers in rural communities to collaborate on the planning, coordination and implementation of health promotion, education and training in the community they live and work.

YOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

The Rural Family Health Project (RFHP) supports the Belizean Ministry of Health's (MOH) priority areas of Maternal, Neo-natal, and Child Health (MNCH) and Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (CNCDS). The purpose of the RFHP is to support Belizean rural families in adopting positive behaviors to improve and maintain their health.

The MNCH objective is to promote and strengthen a safe motherhood initiative towards having a healthy mother, family and newborn. MNCH conditions associated with infectious diseases and lack of access to basic health services has the greatest impact on children and women of reproductive age.

CNCDS are a serious concern for MOH health officials, as hypertension and diabetes continue to rank high among the major causes of morbidity and mortality in the country. The CNCDS portion of the RFHP emphasizes behavior change and individual empowerment through carefully designed activities that focus on increasing positive changes in everyday lives.

Primarily, you will find yourself working directly with community health workers (CHWs). A CHW is a community member that may or may not be a skilled health professional but possesses basic health training. They are responsible for outreach to villagers in their communities to raise awareness about the need for preventing diseases affecting individuals, families and the community. You may also find yourself assisting an array of village health stakeholders in the development of village health committees and plans aimed at promoting and maintaining health practices, knowledge, and attitudes to impact positively on the health status and quality of life of villages.

Sample health activities you may be involved in include:

- Training rural CHWs in health related topics through the dissemination of health information.
- Assisting primary school teachers and principals to disseminate public health information through engagement with village schools.

- Assisting MOH implement key health education and promotion activities designed to help families adopt positive behaviors and practices that contribute to the health of pregnant women, fathers, children, and their families.
- Promoting the prevention of childhood illnesses by improving the quality of health information about child care and immunizations to reduce child mortality in rural communities.
- Assisting CHWs design activities to improve infant and young child nutrition through health education and promotion.
- Assisting CHWs, health workers, and schools to promote healthy lifestyles, improved nutrition, and raise awareness of risk factors associated with NCDs.
- Promoting healthy eating practices with CHWs, village leaders, and school teachers to contribute to the prevention and onset of CNCDS.
- Ensuring health activities take into consideration a community's health profile to promote individuals and community physical activities to foster physical and mental wellbeing and social connectedness in rural communities.
- Training members of village councils in public health related topics and activities.
- Assisting in the establishment of village health committees.

About 40% of Belize's population is Catholic and other religious groups are well represented. Churches play an important role in the education of Belize's children and youth population, as 90% of the elementary schools are run by religious denominations. Therefore, in theory, this has an implication for reproductive health education, especially when working with youth and primary schools. Health Resource Volunteers are expected to work in close collaboration with school principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders.

One of the exciting parts of your professional work is to participate in the Peace Corps monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (MRE) process. All Volunteers receive training on the Peace Corps MRE tracking and reporting system. Each Volunteer regularly reports MRE information and this information is summarized to describe overall progress of the project. This important MRE system helps Peace Corps improve its programming and training; and report its accomplishments. The opportunity to learn and practice professional monitoring and evaluation skills are some of the many valued benefits of Peace Corps service.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDARY/ COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Over the course of two years you may decide to undertake a community service activity in addition to your primary health project duties. Some examples of common secondary community service activities Volunteers have conducted include art and music classes, environmental education, home and school gardens, and leadership trainings.

The current project encourages a youth component that includes developing community service activities such as sports, environmental and GLOW (Girls Leading our World) camps, drama and theater classes, life skills, and employability skills. Other activities, such as teaching English as a second language to community health workers, or coaching village sports teams, are activities that past Volunteers have become involved in and enjoyed. Your volunteerism and involvement may help strengthen community respect and acceptance of you as well and is encouraged as you move through your Peace Corps service.



WORKING CONDITIONS

Our staff is committed to support trainees in meeting all training and program competencies. But we also expect you to come prepared to work as a development professional and to make the necessary personal adjustments to adapt to new cultural and work realities. Peace Corps service is a job. We maintain high standards of professionalism among trainees and Volunteers, and it is fully expected that trainees review, understand, and commit to Volunteer Core Expectations.

Available Resources: The level and availability of resources or services will depend greatly on your village but also on the professional relationships you develop with your community health worker and other health leaders.

Though all assigned health partners are expected to provide you with the basic tools, guidance, and support to undertake your work, you must be ready to be proactive and get out into your village, especially in the early months of your service, and introduce and explain your role as a Peace Corps Health Volunteer. You will have minimal material resources available at your site and will need to rely on your creativity, initiative, and flexibility to get the job done.

We encourage you to research Belize prior to arrival, and you may like to review the following websites and/or documents:

Peace Corps Belize Website: This website will provide you with additional program and post specific information. <http://belize.peacecorps.gov>

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): UNDP Belize supports capacity development, human development, advocacy, and coordination, for the achievement of MDGs and of human development, at a national and local level. <http://www.bz.undp.org/belize/en/home.html>

Belize Scorecard and Outlook Report 2010: A look at an effective assessment of the status of the Millennium Development Goals (MGD), and the types of planning programs and resources needed to achieve these goals to ensure the MDG targets are reached by 2015. http://www.bz.undp.org/content/belize/en/home/library/mdg/publication_13/

The Belize Ministry of Health: This website will introduce you to the Belizean Ministry of Health and some of its programs and initiatives. <http://health.gov.bz/www/>

HECOPAB: This website is found under the Ministry of Health and the direct link sends you to the Health Education and Community Participation Bureau (HECOPAB) <http://health.gov.bz/www/units/hecopab>

IT Equipment: Volunteers have found a laptop computer and a digital camera to be useful during their service. Volunteers have found that this equipment facilitates their personal, as well as professional, work because rural villages have limited computer resources. Peace Corps recommends Volunteers to properly insure any equipment brought into Belize. Please refer to the Belize *Welcome Book* for additional information (<http://www.peacecorps.gov/welcomebooks/BZWB535.pdf>).

Location of Job: As a Volunteer in Belize you will live and work in a village with a population that can range up to approximately 3,500.

Most CHWs work out of their home, so you may not have a dedicated space for work or will share space with others at a community center. Some sites have small clinics where you may be afforded working space. Some Volunteers will have the opportunity to travel with mobile clinics to neighboring communities. All of this is determined by the village where you are placed.

Working Hours: Your structured work hours will depend greatly on the work hours your CHW maintains, along with other local health partner schedules. You may find your work pattern will need to adapt to the available time of your health partners or community members. Occasionally, activities occur during evenings and weekends due to your work partners' availability.

Volunteers know that beyond their primary health duties, community service activities and ongoing village integration are essential to ensure a successful Volunteer experience.

You may find work opportunities in schools training teachers and principals in public health related topics and activities or promoting student physical activities to foster physical and mental wellbeing and social connectedness in their communities. When not working, you are expected to spend most of your time with your host family, youth, neighbors, and leaders in your village getting to know them, learning about their customs and culture, and sharing information about your culture.

Cultural Attitudes and Customs in the Workplace: For success in your job, personal relationships are key to gaining your colleagues' trust and enhancing work relationships. You should make it a priority to spend time establishing positive relationships with your colleagues.

Belize is a remarkably diverse society: Mestizos constitute about 53% of the population, Creoles 25%, Mayas 10%, Garifuna 7%, and others 5%, including Chinese, Taiwanese, East Indian, and Mennonite populations. While English is the official language, Spanish is becoming more widely spoken as the Mestizo population increases. People in Mayan communities primarily speak Mayan Mopan and Q'eqchi. Garifuna people are facing an issue of their dialect dying as the people are now speaking primarily Creole. Mennonite settlements in Cayo and Orange Walk speak Low German. Creole is the language most common to all ethnic groups in Belize.

Belizeans are religious and observe various denominations. About 40% of Belize's population is Catholic and other religious groups are well represented. Churches play an important role in the education of Belize's children and youth population, as 90% of the elementary schools are run by religious denominations. Therefore, in theory, this has an implication for reproductive health education, especially when working with youth and primary schools. Health Resource Volunteers are expected to work in close collaboration with school principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders.

You and work partners may experience challenges from conservative religious groups and have to be careful they receive approval of school management to work in schools. Your relationship with your health work partners will be helpful in navigating any cultural challenges you may face.

Belizean society remains a mixture of Caribbean, Spanish, and indigenous Mayan traditions. A typical Belizean family is based on a strong extended unit; kinship ties are strong. Belizeans are friendly and enjoy chatting, the outdoors, dancing, and watching and playing basketball, softball, and soccer. Family and social events are also very common.

It is important to note that in rural Belize, traditional customs and beliefs are held dear. The pace of life and work is slower than that to which most Americans are accustomed. It may also expose you to methods of disciplining children that are different from what you are accustomed to in the United States. For many Volunteers, the constant personal questions, lack of privacy, high number of tourists, being perceived as “rich” foreigners”, and the need to be constantly aware of social factors, can be difficult.

As in most Caribbean and Latin American countries, Belizean culture sometimes does not allow women to exercise the same freedom to which American women are accustomed. Failure to adapt to this reality may put the effectiveness of female Volunteers in question and can even affect personal safety. During PST, Peace Corps training staff will provide tools to help Volunteers navigate these challenging situations.

Rural villages offer few outlets for entertainment. Belizeans tend to relax by visiting and talking with family, friends, and neighbors. Volunteers should expect regular and unannounced visits from neighbors and in particular from children. An invitation for a Volunteer to a Belizean home is often considered an honor. Your participation in village social events and/or sports will further integrate you into community life.

You must recognize that successfully adjusting to life in a new culture requires a positive attitude, patience, diplomacy, flexibility, and acceptance. By choosing to accept this assignment, you are choosing to accommodate yourself to the norms of Belize and should not enter into this experience expecting Belizeans to accommodate you. It is not uncommon for Volunteers to so fully immerse themselves in the Belizean experience that upon return to the U.S. they experience reverse culture shock. Volunteers who invest their time and skills in their village establish their credibility.

Dress Code: Belize is a socially conservative country and personal appearance is important as a development professional. Belizeans take pride in their personal appearance and tend to place great importance on the way they dress. As a Health Volunteer you must understand that professional dress and appearance is a necessity when it comes to earning the respect and trust with Belizean communities and with health work partners.

Great importance is attached to neatness and proper dress in Belize, and you must dress appropriately both on and off the job in order to respect host country attitudes towards personal appearance. You are required to act and dress according to locally accepted cultural norms at all times, including when you are at the Peace Corps office.

Tattoos & Piercing: You must understand that in Belize certain “looks” can be associated with criminal gangs, drugs, and criminal activity; and such associations are detrimental to a Volunteer’s image and could jeopardize personal safety and security. Invitees must be cognizant that having multiple and visible tattoos can carry a heavy stigma. If you have single or multiple tattoos you must not openly display them. Multiple tattooed or pierced health Volunteers may be perceived as less professional.

Multiple body piercing may also have a negative connotation and may impact your ability to integrate into a rural village. Male health Volunteers are not permitted to wear any type of visible body piercings, and women should only wear earrings in their ears. While serving as a Volunteer, males are not permitted to wear long hair (hair below the bottom of the ear); no ponytails or buns are allowed for men. Please consult with your placement officer if you have any questions regarding tattoos and body piercing.

Clothing: In a health clinic (or center) work setting tank tops, ragged, dirty jeans, summer shorts, mini-skirts, and flip flops are not permitted. Women are expected to wear bras and avoid thin materials through which underwear may be visible. How a health Volunteer presents him/herself will greatly affect their activities and ability to work successfully as a Peace Corps. Inappropriate dress is something that can set a Volunteer unnecessarily apart from his or her community.

In general, most Volunteers wear “professional casual” clothing when working. For example, living in a village, your day-to-day dress may be slightly more casual, but should still reflect cultural norms and professionalism. In particular, when you visit health centers or when holding health workshops, you will be expected to dress in professional casual clothing.

Belizean men and women would not generally be seen in shorts or flip flops in a professional setting, with the occasional exception of coastal communities and in very casual settings, such as sports events. As a rural Volunteer you are strongly encouraged to observe your health co-workers and Belizean friends for the proper dress code within their village. Living with a village host family will provide you with the proper guidance. For field activities and around the house you may wear casual dress.

Safety and Security Considerations: Belize is considered a high-crime country in Central America. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Belize has an average of over 40 homicides per 100,000 residents. Violent crime has risen steadily in Belize over the past several years, especially in Belize City. In 2012 Belize recorded 145 murders, setting a new record for homicides in the country. In 2013, Belize saw a reduction in homicides to 100. The majority of crimes in Belize are burglaries and thefts. Overall, corruption, human smuggling and trafficking, the drug trade, money laundering, and organized gang activity remain significant criminal problems.

Living and working as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Belize means that you will have to follow strict security guidelines. There are some parts of Belize that are “off-limits” to Volunteer placement and travel. There are also special travel limitations to where the Volunteers can travel in the region. For international travel you need approval of the Country Director, and for in-country travel, you will need approval from your Program Manager. Locally, you will live with a host family for your entire service which will help navigate you through safety and security considerations at the village level.

Incidents of theft and burglary are easily avoided through awareness and good safety practices. Volunteers must adhere to Post’s safety and security policies and accept responsibility for their safety and must continually behave in ways that will ensure their safety. This means that you must take ACTIVE efforts to make sure you do not become a victim of crime.

Health Considerations: Most Peace Corps Volunteers enjoy good health during their service; however, should a Volunteer sustain an injury or acquire an illness, Peace Corps Belize will make certain that you have access to one of the local healthcare facilities. The most common

health conditions among Volunteers are gastrointestinal illnesses, skin infections, upper respiratory including allergies, and dental issues. These conditions are also prevalent within the local population. Belize is a tropical country therefore please be aware that exposure to tropical diseases like dengue fever, malaria, typhoid, and hepatitis is possible, as well as being infected with intestinal parasites. Please know Peace Corps Belize will provide you with all the necessary medical information, supplies, training, and immunization during your service so as to ensure your optimal well-being while in country.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Host Family Program: As a Volunteer, you are required to live with a Belizean host family for the entire 27 month tour. You will live with a CBT host family beginning in pre-service training (PST) and thereafter in their final site placement.

The primary goals of the host family program are for you to:

- Enhance your knowledge of Belizean culture, customs, and traditions.
- Enhance your knowledge of one of five Belizean languages.
- Actively participate in village life and as a member of your village where you live and work;
- Enhance your personal safety net to assist you to serve safely in your village.

Living in a host family means you must be ready to make personal life style changes, but it also has many advantages:

- You will get to know local Belizeans from a completely different perspective and gain a deeper insight when you live with them. You will learn a lot about the people, their culture, beliefs, hobbies and cuisine, and insights.
- You will grasp the local language much faster, as you have to communicate with members of your host family in the local language during your daily interactions with them.
- Your host family will provide you advice on safety and look out for you. They know which areas of your village you should avoid and which behavior might get you in trouble. Knowing you will be living with a host family may ease any immediate concerns from your immediate family members back home if this is the first time you are living abroad.
- Your host family will help answer your initial questions upon arrive in your village.
- You will become a member of your host family; they will introduce you to other Belizeans to help you establish many useful connections. If you are fortunate, you will always have a family away from home and friends for a lifetime.

Through appropriate community integration you will progressively earn the respect and trust of your host family and community members. To promote the Peace Corps safety paradigm you will be placed in a community that meets health and safety and security criteria.

You will be provided with modest accommodations. You will have your own room, a bed, chair, and a table to work on. Though each home will vary in accommodations, you will be able to share common living areas with your family. In some villages, there is no electricity available or running water so you may have to adapt to alternative means of preparing and keeping food. You must be prepared to leave behind a lifestyle and many of your modern amenities back home.

You are required to live with host families for the duration of their service. No Volunteer will be permitted to live in independent housing. You will be placed in modest host family settings as defined by Post's 27 month homestay program. You must understand that living with a host family will require an open mind, cultural sensitivity, patience and great flexibility.

Vegetarian: Vegetarians must be prepared to make some adaptations and encounter some challenges. The concept is foreign in remote villages. Vegans may find considerable challenges in meeting dietary needs and will need to be adaptable and find ways to supplement the local diet without offending family and community members.

During Pre-Service Training home stay, your meals will most likely be prepared for you as you will be knee deep in technical and language training. After you arrive at your permanent site you will have more flexibility to make alternative meal arrangements with your host family.

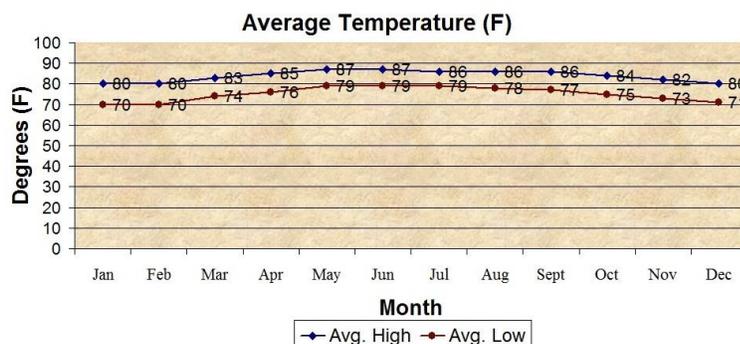
Sharing living space requires patience, resiliency, flexibility, and understanding. Volunteers must not lose sight of the fact that they are guests and that host families have opened their homes and lives to share their family and culture with you. Respect and adherence to host family rules and property is of the utmost importance.

We recognize that a Volunteer who lives in a host family setting is safer and has the opportunity for appropriate integration. Therefore, Peace Corps/Belize is committed to finding safe, modest, affordable, and convenient housing with reputable Belizeans. During PST you will be provided with several host family sessions to help you adjust to this change. Peace Corps staff will always be prepared to assist you as well. You must be prepared to make this lifestyle change.

If you are not prepared to make these personal lifestyle changes, please do not accept this invitation.

Belize Weather: Belize is typically hot and humid – day and night, year-round. Temperatures vary by only about 17°F between the coolest part of the year (December to March) and the hottest (May to September). Belize has distinct wet and dry seasons. The wet season runs from mid-May to November in the south and from mid-June to November in the north. November to February is a transitional period, with the year's coolest temperatures and a limited amount of rain. In the north and center of the country there is a dip in rainfall in August, between peaks in July and September. Belize is prone to hurricanes from June to November.

Trainees and Volunteers often work in sweltering conditions so please remember to bring one or several sturdy water bottles with you.



TRAINING FOR YOUR JOB

Pre-Service Training (PST): Peace Corps' health training is designed to include objectives within the core and project sector goals that meet the agency's Programming, Training and Evaluation (PTE) criteria. Peace Corps' training design follows a competency-based approach. The approach focuses on developing a set of identified knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a Volunteer needs to function successfully in daily living and working situations.

The training design focuses on what Volunteers do best; it helps Volunteers enhance their synergy with work partners; and clearly outline their role in meeting host country needs. Most of all, the design prepares Trainees for their project assignment work, as well as to integrate; and to navigate through cross cultural misunderstanding, live safely and healthily, while measuring their impact.

Your participation in training is the first step in a process that will enable you to assess your progress towards becoming a successful Volunteer and a time for staff to provide you with feedback and coaching so that you can fulfill your role as a development professional as fully as possible. We fully expect you to be successful and will provide with you with information, feedback, and training necessary to do your job before you begin working.

Your training class will be comprised of approximately 20 trainees and your 10.5 week pre-service training (PST) will take place in several phases. You will participate in one week of orientation at the Peace Corps office in the capital, then continue 8.5 weeks of Community based training (CBT), and return for another week of center based training. Your intensive training will consist of language, culture and integration, technical, personal health, and safety and security components. During PST, you will have opportunities to meet villagers and community leaders, and build lasting friendships. All trainees live with Belizean host families during their pre-service training.

You must remember that being invited as a trainee is not a guarantee to becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer. An array of Peace Corps training and project staff will provide the Country Director with a final recommendation to swear-in a trainee.

To qualify to be a health Peace Corps Volunteer in Belize, **you must:**

- Meet all technical, health, safety and security, language, and cross-cultural training competencies.
- Meet the language benchmark required.
- Demonstrate professional competence, commitment, motivation, emotional maturity, respect and empathy, ability to adjust, cultural awareness, and adaptation skills, and;
- Understand and adhere to Peace Corps/Belize policies, norms, and regulations and core expectations while in PST and during service as a Volunteer.

Technical Skills building: The health technical training continuum will include a coherent set of activities to help prepare trainees meet the needs of the Belizean health community under the RFHP project. Our health team will train you to optimize local resources, enhance synergy, and maximize your skill sets with the hope of achieving maximum impact at the village leave. During PST technical training you will be trained in the following:

- How to work as a health resource Volunteer working in the MCH and NCD sectors.
- How to motivate your community health workers, school teachers and other health stakeholders in rural villages.
- How to implement a Health project framework that is designed to maximize the skills of Volunteers.
- How to promote behavior change strategies within the MCH and NCD health sectors.
- How to report against all project goals and objectives through the Volunteer Reporting Form (VRF).

Technical training will support your work toward achieving goals that support host country priorities, complement a national health strategy, and outline Peace Corps' specific grassroots role in that strategy. You must be prepared to carry out project activities and report effectiveness in transferring knowledge and skills that help build partner capacity and contribute to host country health priorities.

Practicum: Practicum time will be provided for trainees to work on assignments related to technical sessions or health visits they have made and allow them to experience the context within which they will be working. Sessions will allow trainees to implement practice training sessions applying non-formal adult education techniques, use participatory learning methodologies, and utilize appropriate assessment and planning tools during CBT.

Exposure to the Development Community: Lectures and facilitators from the Ministry of Health (MOH), and local non-governmental organizations working in-country will provide you an opportunity for technical exchange, networking, and increase opportunities for linkages and resource mobilization in your villages.

Skill-building in qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and data analysis to accompany or follow community health assessments will be shared. You will learn how to use key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and how to develop surveys to ensure your work meets the needs of your village. You will learn about monitoring, reporting, and evaluation and the tools needed to effectively use evaluation tools with your work partner.

Skill-building in use of community assessment tools and methods which are based on qualitative and quantitative community data collection methods. These will help you understand the needs of the community to guide your strategy to meet community health needs. Finally, you will learn about monitoring, reporting, and evaluation and the skills needed to effectively use evaluation tools with your work partner.

In-Service Training (IST): As part of Peace Corps continuing professional development, the training continuum offers various training opportunities for you and your work partner throughout your service.

You will return together for a one week "Reconnect" In-Service Training (IST) workshop, approximately three months after you are sworn in as a Volunteer. This training will also include one day of intensive language training. At this point in your service, you should have completed your community assessment with your work partner and have started your initial community integration efforts. You will have confronted culture shock and the realities of their commitment. You will discuss the result of your community/sector assessment, reinforce language learning as needed, and focus on skills applicable to your work assignments.

At your 12th month of service, you will come together once again with your work partner to participate in Mid-Service Training. This is often timed in conjunction with mid-service medical examinations. It is also an opportunity for you to receive continued feedback and guidance both from staff and from their peers, as well as to share your successes.

Finally, Close/Continuation of Service is the last training event on the continuum. This important event prepares you for your transition, re-entry and readjustment to the United States. You will reflect on the contributions you've made to the host country and also on how you can continue to achieve Peace Corps' Third Goal of: "[to help promote] a better understanding of other peoples on the part of American people" when you return to the U.S. It might also mean that you will be discussing options to continue your service in Belize.

Not only must you be able to do your job, but you must do it in a culturally appropriate manner. You will be supported, advised, counseled, and evaluated by both American and Belizean staff to guide your progress throughout your service.

Language: Belize has a rich and diverse ethnic, cultural, and language environment. While there are no specific language requirements for incoming trainees, you can expect to be trained in either Spanish or the Q'eqchi (Mayan) language since you will serve in either a Spanish or Q'eqchi village. The purpose of language training is to provide you with enough language skills to carry out project work confidently in your site, as well as to facilitate your integration into your community safely. You should be aware that any formal Spanish knowledge and training does not guarantee you will be placed in a Spanish speaking environment.

You should be prepared to:

- Accept the language selection made by PC staff based on where you will serve as a Volunteer.
- Understand the diversity in Belize sometimes means multiple languages are spoken in one village, and this can add to the complexity of language learning.
- Exemplify motivation, open-mindedness, cultural sensitivity, humility, patience and flexibility in your language acquisition process.
- Demonstrate your language learning progress throughout PST.
- Commit to completing assignments and tracking your own language learning.
- Demonstrate respect for the language you have been selected for.

Language Proficiency Interview (LPI): Peace Corps Belize has an established LPI program for all languages in which trainees are trained. Prior to the completion of your language training you will be required to take a Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) three times during PST. You will be required to successfully meet the benchmarks set to be sworn in as a Volunteer. Reaching the required level implies that you have reached the language level requirement to begin your two-year Volunteer tour.

You should not expect to gain fluency at the end of language training during PST. The onus is on you to take ownership of your language acquisition.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES & REWARDS

Please reference the Welcome Book for more detailed information regarding diversity and cross-cultural issues, and safety and security in the Peace Corps.

As a Volunteer many have gained satisfaction from helping to improve the lives of the Belizeans they serve, from experiencing and adapting to a new culture, and from learning local customs and languages. You will encounter unusual social and cultural situations that will require flexibility, patience, and a positive attitude. As you demonstrate interest and gain the trust of your village, you will often find that you are better able to enjoy village life, its customs, the people, and your role as a Volunteer.

You may experience a low level of interest, motivation, and participation from community members. This can be challenging and cause frustration. You must understand that sustainable grass roots development work takes time and they must be willing to celebrate the small changes and not be tempted to compare their work to that of other development organizations or Volunteers – as everyone's experience is different.

Gender Roles: Women's position in Belizean society follows a very traditional pattern, and Belizean women generally have specific roles, especially in rural and indigenous areas where they may work in the fields, run small businesses, and care for farm animals. Belizean men also have specific roles, and a "machismo" culture is very prevalent. These issues will be discussed at length during PST.

It is very common for women to receive stares, comments, or offers of dates, from men on the street and in other situations. Women from the U.S. are obvious targets because they stand out and have a reputation for being sexually liberal. Female Volunteers must learn to handle these situations. Volunteers have voiced complaints about the various forms of sexual harassment; however, some Belizeans may not share the same concept of sexual harassment.

Men can also face harassment, although usually it is less frequent. If a male Volunteer does not drink, smoke, or like to pursue women openly, they may get kidded or chided for not being manly enough. Male Volunteers will have to learn to handle these situations.

The more Volunteers work to build relationships in their community and gain the respect of community members, the more likely community members will step forward to protect them. Both men and women must be willing and able to make adjustments in their lifestyles in order to be effective development workers and to remain healthy and safe.

Diversity: Although most Volunteers report that they are well accepted into their communities, a few of them do encounter some cases of racism and skepticism when explaining to some Belizeans their African-American, Asian American, or Latino American origin. Any Volunteer who is not tall, white, blonde, and blue eyed may encounter some skepticism as to whether or not they are really Americans. This can be mildly annoying at best, but most PCVs don't find it irritating after they've been in-country a few months. Race or ethnicity does not affect your success or acceptance in your village.

Gay and lesbian Volunteers must exercise a good deal of discretion when it comes to their sexual identity. As in other Latin American countries, gay Volunteers should expect to encounter

intolerance, especially in remote communities. There are strong negative stereotypes of gay men in Belizean society. You will be provided with several cross-cultural sessions to help you adjust to these challenges during PST, and Peace Corps staff will always be prepared to assist you.

Alcohol Consumption: Volunteers must be mindful of their alcohol consumption and not over-consume to the extent that their social interactions are not professional. As Volunteers you must be mindful of how a gathering of other PCVs in a village can impact your reputation in the community if guests and friends drink or act irresponsibly. This is especially true in the small, rural villages where it is uncommon for women to drink. Please note that some host families may prohibit the consumption of alcohol in their homes.

Drug Use: Peace Corps/Belize has a zero tolerance for drug use. A Volunteer may not under any circumstance be involved with drugs or associated with those who have a reputation of dealing in illegal drugs. Volunteers do *not* have diplomatic immunity and will be subject to Belizean law and criminal judicial system.

If drug use and/or frequent substantial use of alcohol is something that is a part of your lifestyle and you are not prepared to stop or change, then please do not accept this invitation to serve in Belize.

Volunteer service is more than a job. It requires greater dedication and commitment to serve than do most other work environments. It is for confident, self-starting, resilient, concerned individuals who are interested in participating in the development of other countries and increasing human understanding across cultural barriers.

A key to satisfying work as a Volunteer is the ability to establish successful human relationships at all levels and to conform to the requirements set forth by Peace Corps/Belize. This requires patience, sensitivity, empathy, and a positive professional attitude. If you have the personal qualities needed to accept the challenge described above and can demonstrate them in 2 years of Volunteer service in Belize, you will have a rewarding, enriching, and lasting personal experience. At the same time you will contribute to Belize's development and leave a part of yourself and your culture behind.

CORE EXPECTATIONS

Core Expectations were created to clarify what the Peace Corps expects from its applicants, trainees, and Volunteers. Peace Corps/Belize would like you to carefully reflect on each Core Expectation as you contemplate whether or not to become a trainee and a Volunteer in Belize.

Core Expectations for Peace Corps trainees and Volunteers

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months.
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed.
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service.
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture.
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance.
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect.
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve.
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others.
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America.
10. Represent responsibly the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

Please note that agreeing to accept this invitation means you have agreed to abide by all rules and requirements placed on Volunteers. Below are examples of Volunteer policies you will be expected to follow:

Bicycles – All Volunteers are required to wear bicycle helmets at all times.

Driving – You will not be permitted to drive an automobile in-country during your service.

Whereabouts Reporting – You will be expected to report your whereabouts when you are away from your community. Time away from the community is limited to 3 nights per month.

Travel outside of Belize – Out of country (international) travel must be approved by the Country Director in advance.

There are no exceptions and failure to adhere to Peace Corps policies and regulations will result in administrative consequences including, and up to, separation from Peace Corps/Belize.

COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

Greetings class of 2015-2017!

You have taken the first step towards a life-changing journey by choosing to serve in Belize for the next two years. You can now prepare to face unexpected challenges, make indelible memories, and leave your traces in places unimagined.

In the wildest expectations of my placement, I had never imagined myself in Belize, let alone in the beautiful jungles of a Q'eqchi Mayan village near Guatemala. But only six months in and I'm already keeping tarantulas and scorpions for pets, I have semi-pro skills at feeding cows salt and molasses, I am bathing and washing in the river, I have eaten BBQ gibbon, stew armadillo, and caldo iguana, I can make a traditional bracelet in one seating, I can juggle 2 babies while making corn tortillas, and on many a flooded night, I start hiking at 3:15am to catch my 4am bus to town. Given time, you will invent your own ways of navigating the many nuances of your villages and at times, you will allow your creative genes to help you escape the worst of them. You will learn to slow your pace down to match the tempo of "Belizean time", bring a book to read while you wait an hour for colleagues to show up to meetings, and you might take a nap in the middle of a 6 hour church service.

Your experience at your site is what you'll make of it and most of your time, it will be of your own conscious volition to find creative and at times unconventional ways of meeting your community's needs. You'll have your share of frustrations, scorpion scares, and bouts of diarrhea. Much later into your service when your stomach is well adjusted, when you're brave enough to brace mosquitoes repellent-free, and when you learn the liberating effect of not having a cell phone, your initial frustrations will seem like trivial minor inconveniences.

Expect nothing and allow yourself to be surprised; it might be your saving grace from disappointments or frustrations. Expectations often set limitations and there might be a number of times when you will have to lower them. Otherwise, you will be blown to smithereens by the kindness of the people of Belize and your experience will exceed whatever expectations you might have initially set—had I not told you not to.

While you are tying up loose ends on your side and getting in those last medical and dental forms, there are a lot of people who are eager for you to get here. You'll find that there's a lot of work to be done and relationships to be built that will make your time here productive and meaningful. Pack up your sense of humor, sense of adventure, and willingness to accept change and get ready for a life-changing and formative experience of a life.

Toj re oxib po! (see you),

Doreen Ndishabandi
PCV, San Benito Poite Village
2013-1015



Dear Future Belize PCVs,

Congratulations on being invited to serve in the beautiful and diverse country of Belize! It is crazy for me to think that over a year ago I was sitting in your shoes, reading these welcome letters from Peace Corps Volunteers already serving. I was so excited reading the advice they had to give, their stories, glancing through the packing list, and learning about the Rural Family Health Project. I could not wait to leave and get started.

I also remember when I first learned that I was going to be fulfilling my Peace Corps Service in Belize, I really did not know a whole lot about the country other than the fact that it is a popular port for cruise ships and has great scuba diving. But now after living in a rural Q'eqchi Mayan village for 6 months, I now know of the vastness and diversity of both the country and people of Belize. I did not know how delicious cacao is, or about Caldo (a chicken soup the Q'eqchi's make), about who the howler monkeys really are (children who climbed trees during Easter), of the ilonel (bush doctor who is also a match maker), how to make koxtals which are the weaved bags the men take to the farm when planting, that in Belize seven different languages are spoken, that I could actually like living without electricity, how to wash my clothes in the creek, and many many other things. I really am at awe by how much this little country has to offer.

Many times while making tortillas with the women in my family, I just think about what I thought my experience was going to be like before I actually departed the United States and in just this short time, it has far surpassed my expectations. The people here are warm, friendly, and for the most part pretty open to what you have to say. That's not to say that helping people change behavior in order to better their health is an easy job. It can actually be quite difficult and frustrating. But that one person who comes to you and says, "I've noticed you walk in the evenings for exercise and I want to join you. I want to learn more about how to live more healthy. How can I lose weight? How can I eat better?" will make all the hardships and frustrations worth it. Your relationships with the people you meet in your village are crucial. If you respect them, they will respect you. And if you gain their respect you can move mountains.

The project you are about to be a part of is very much needed in Belize. You are needed in Belize and that is why you were chosen to be here. There may be times when you might want to quit. That going back home may seem like the easiest choice, but keep at it and you will never regret the choice to be here, to stay here. You will learn so much as you teach. So get ready, pack your bags (you don't really need much), and hang on! This will be the ride of your lifetime. I promise you will not regret it.

Warmest wishes for the future,

Jessica Ferro
Health Volunteer
PCV Belize 2013-2015



Dear Prospective Volunteer,

First and foremost, congratulations to you for receiving your invitation to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer! Becoming a volunteer in Belize means that you will be working on the grassroots level alongside your Community Health Worker in order to strengthen the overall health and wellness of your community. Utilizing the tools set forth by the coordinators of the Rural Family Health Project, you will be focusing your time and efforts on health education, primarily illness prevention.

By the end of your first three months in your site, you will hear your name shouted from the mouths of eager kids wanting to play, have calluses on your hands from washing your clothes or helping your brother plow his vegetable field, and laugh alongside your host mom because you understood the joke in her native language. You will meet friends that you will forever cherish because only they can truly understand your hardships. No doubt, the days will come when you question your role and the impact you are having.

Each day is a new day and you will be challenged. You must come into this country with an open mind and an eagerness to keep trudging. This is an experience of a lifetime and I am grateful for both the good days and the hard days. You will not fully understand what I mean until you experience this life for yourself. Accept the challenge and join the team in rural Belize.

Audrey Bafford
Health PCV
San Carlos, Belize
2013-2015

The one thing I wish Americans knew about my country of service is.....

Quotes from your Fellow PCVs

The one thing that I wish Americans knew about Belize is how diverse the country is, both in physical geography and the culture of its citizens. In general, when Americans think of Belize, they think of huge resorts on white sandy beaches. And while there are plenty of resorts and lots of beautiful beaches, the Belize that I have experienced is many miles from the nearest beach and has mountains, jungles, and rivers. The people, too, are as diverse as the landscape: with Mayans, Garifuna, Kriols, Mestizos, and even the occasional Mennonite, one can hear as many as six or seven languages being spoken over vegetables at the market. I would wish that Americans could get to know Belize as far more than a luxury vacation spot, and see that the diversity of people and place is what truly makes Belize a beautiful country.

It's so beautiful. It's filled with beautiful diverse cultures, beautiful landscapes, the most beautiful trees I have ever seen, beautiful people, and beautiful simplicity.

That the power, influence, tenacity, and beauty of Belizeans is often found in the most isolated, unexpected, humble, but most generous places.

Belizeans are shy until they know you and once they know you they will do anything to help you.