

Malawi

VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

Community Health and HIV and AIDS



Since 1961.

Country: Malawi

Program: Community Health and HIV and AIDS

Job Title: Health Volunteer, Community Health Advisor,
Health Extension Volunteer, NGO Advising
Volunteer

Staging Dates: February 28, 2016 to March 1, 2016*

(in the USA)

Pre-Service Training: March 02, 2016 to May 03, 2016*

(in Malawi)

Dates of Service: May 4, 2016 – May 03, 2018*

*dates subject to change

AA162 = 3361BR

AA155 = 3360BR

AA145 = 3359BR

AA154 = 3362BR



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 Malawi 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 Volunteer in Malawi, call the Country Desk Officer for Malawi at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., (9AM to 5PM, EST):

Toll-free: 1-855-855-1961, press 1, then extension 1822;

or directly at (202) 692-1822;

or via email at Malawi@peacecorps.gov

A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAM MANAGER

Dear Prospective Peace Corps Volunteer,

If you decide to join us and be part of this exciting program in Malawi, you will not be disappointed! You are being offered an opportunity to contribute to one of Africa's most critical development needs: working with your local counterparts to prevent communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS and malaria. These are some of the leading causes of mortality and morbidity in Malawi. Although the HIV/AIDS epidemic has taken a significant toll on Malawian communities, the current Malawi government's approach and support from multilateral donors including the United States Government, through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), gives rise to hope. In the current climate, Peace Corps Volunteers apply evidence based interventions along with creative approaches and promising partnerships to create a platform for meaningful action. Just think, you will play a crucial role in building the capacity of your colleagues and community to tackle HIV/AIDS and some of the most pressing health challenges facing Malawian communities today.

Think hard before you commit to this great endeavor. Peace Corps service requires a special type of commitment. I can only say that being a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Malawi will draw on all your reserves of patience, inner strength, and humility. You must be willing to give of yourself in ways you never expected. Working in an environment where HIV/AIDS has a name and face demands resilience, the ability to find joy in hardship, and the determination to envision the long-term impact of your efforts.

If you are prepared to work hard, think creatively, live sensitively, and to help others make things happen, welcome aboard!

Sincerely,

Cornelius T. Msanyama
Associate Peace Corps Director/Health

PEACE CORPS/MALAWI HISTORY

The Health Project that provides one of the most challenging and exciting work environments in Peace Corps/Malawi. This program supports the Government of Malawi's strategic priorities and commitment to reduce the burden of disease, increase self-sufficiency, and enhance the quality of life for all Malawians.

Peace Corps/Malawi Volunteers have been working successfully in the Health Sector since the early 1960s. Historically, the Health Sector had four projects. In order to focus our efforts and increase our impact, Peace Corps/Malawi streamlined these Health Projects into the Community Health and HIV/AIDS Program. The underpinning of the Community Health and HIV/AIDS Program is that success is based on building human capacity. As a result, one area of increasing importance for the Health Project is Volunteers supporting building of the capacity of the local community.

The three goals of Peace Corps/Malawi's Community Health and HIV/AIDS Plan are:

- To work with communities to reduce HIV transmission and mitigate its impact in the communities we serve.
- To encourage community members (especially mothers and children) to improve their health status by adopting health-seeking behaviors.
- To promote healthy lifestyles/behavior among youth.

The Community Health and HIV/AIDS Project are dynamic and evolving. This means that while Peace Corps/Malawi has established goals and objectives, the success of the project relies on Volunteers' ability to remain flexible to respond to the needs and interests of their communities.

YOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

The Malawi Ministry of Health engages Peace Corps Health Volunteers to work in several areas:

1. To promote evidence-based behavior change approaches in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, including malaria.
2. To develop and implement community-based interventions that promotes positive behavior change in order to improve the quality of life for community members, including: mothers and children, girls, and service providers. Peace Corps Volunteers also work with community leaders, such as health officers, teachers, village health committee members, parents, and traditional leaders.

3. To collaborate with educators, schools, and health officials in the integration of HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment education and basic health promotion practices in school curriculum and extra-curricular student activities.

While serving as a Health Volunteer, you will have a defined scope of work. However, your specific work will depend on your skills, expectations, educational background, the needs of the government of Malawi, and the needs of your community. A flexible approach to your work will be essential to your success.

Your potential site placements could include:

- Working with health centers, hospitals, or other health institutions to build the capacity of staff and local health workers, and/or strengthen health activities at your work site.
- Working at a health center to build the capacity of health professionals and community members on a range of health topics, including: HIV/AIDS transmission, malaria prevention, promotion of HIV Testing and Counseling services, life skills training, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) support groups, nutrition, water and sanitation. By learning about the use of local indigenous foods and gardens, you will also promote improved nutritional status for vulnerable community members including people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Assisting counterparts with the implementation of national health education and awareness programs developed by the Malawian Ministry of Health, including: HIV/AIDS, malaria, nutrition, and/or water and sanitation.
- Assisting with the implementation and coordination of community health projects planned by other United States Governmental (USG) agencies, international or local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community based organizations (CBO).

Regardless of your background, you will work closely with a counterpart to identify the needs and priorities of your community and to plan and implement activities together.

Volunteers posted to rural health centers are supervised by the Director-in-Charge of the health facility who reports to the District Health Officer (DHO), who manages the health institutions of the district. Volunteers posted to a CBO or NGO will focus on community health interventions and strengthening the organization's capacity alongside managers and extension agents.

Many of these jobs are not highly structured to allow for flexibility, so you will be required to develop a work plan to guide your activities. You will need creativity in developing and implementing sustainable HIV/AIDS related programs and other community development programs. You will also work to support local policies, initiatives, and priorities in an environment with formidable resource constraints.

Your counterpart will likely be a Health Surveillance Assistant (HSA) and you will work primarily in supporting the priority activities of the health centers, CBOs, and surrounding communities. Most job activities focus on building local capacity through training, mentoring, and support to improve the health status of community members. Job responsibilities may also involve working with other members of the health team, including extension workers from other sectors, to address other community health problems.

Most of your future Malawian counterparts have been trained in a health system that is oriented toward curative health care, rather than prevention. Modern concepts about preventive health care may be known, but not well implemented. Volunteers are expected to support activities at the local level, particularly by working with counterparts to develop effective interventions for behavior change.

Your counterpart(s) will likely speak limited English at best, and community members will likely not speak English at all. Since this language barrier will hinder efficient work, one of your key priorities during Pre-Service Training will be to build your local language skills.

As you get to know your site, you will begin to implement projects that you and your co-workers have identified together. These projects will be based on the results of your initial needs assessment to identify challenges and existing community resources and opportunities. Based on your findings, you will develop a plan with your counterpart/s to address key issues identified. This can be done through consultations between your Peace Corps program team, your host agency, your counterpart, and community members. You will also be expected to develop, implement, monitor and report on your work on a regular basis with support from your Malawi/Peace Corps colleagues.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDARY/ COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Although 80% of your work will be on your primary project, the Community Health and HIV/AIDS Project, you will have opportunities to become involved in secondary projects with members of your community. Secondary projects vary from forming girls' empowerment clubs/women's groups, initiating income-generating activities (IGAs), teaching health-related core subjects in schools, or improving structures at the local level. The secondary projects you take on will largely be determined by your initiative, skills, and interests, as well as the interests and needs of your community.

Malaria is also one of Peace Corps/Malawi's cross sector program priorities, as one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in Malawi with an estimated 6 million cases occurring annually, especially among children. As such, you will have the opportunity to get involved in the Stomp Out Malaria program.

Another priority area in Malawi is food security. You will see that there is a deliberate effort to integrate food security into your activities at site in your upcoming training. Potential projects include nutritional gardens, and nutrition promotion and awareness.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Available Resources:

You will find locally available resources in the communities in which you work. Some communities may be equipped with computers and photocopiers electricity, internet and good phone service, but others will not have these resources. Your best resource will be your creativity in using locally available materials and in employing innovative behavior change methods.

Location of Job:

Health Volunteers will be placed in towns or villages in one of the three regions of Malawi. Local health facilities are situated in local trading centers, which are encompassed by villages and serve a population of about 10,000 people or more. A typical health center has an out-patient department, a nutrition clinic, a clinic for young children (known as an "Under Five Clinic"), a maternity ward, a pharmacy, and a public health department. You will work alongside the public health department that provides community outreach activities such as initiating or strengthening village health committees. The staff generally includes a medical assistant (clinicians), nurse, midwives, environmental health officers, health surveillance assistants, and support staff.

Working Hours:

You will work a full day based on the standards of your organization or health center. A typical workday is usually from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays, but you may not have a strict work schedule. Work hours will vary depending on your projects and may include working in the evening or on weekends. Start and end times will depend on your community needs. You may find that your counterparts do not firmly observe standard business hours. As a development worker, you will be expected to set an example for others to follow.

Cultural Attitudes and Customs in the Workplace:

In Malawi, respect tends to come with age and experience. Younger Volunteers sometimes experience initial difficulties gaining respect from their supervisors, counterparts, and clients. Your professional appearance and work habits, along with the respect and deference you demonstrate for your Malawian counterparts, will go a long way toward gaining respect and credibility in the workplace. You will quickly notice different gender roles and norms in Malawi. Peace Corps/Malawi is working to mainstream gender equity activities in all of our programming as a cross-cutting theme. Volunteers are expected to incorporate gender in their day to day work at the community level.

Dress Code:

Although Malawi no longer has an official national dress code, attitudes towards dress are much more conservative than in the U.S. In America, dress is seen as an expression of personal identity. In Malawi, dress is a sign of your respect for those around you. Conforming to local dress norms during and after work will make you a much more effective development agent, and will ease your integration into your community. Because of this, shorts, clothes with holes in them, miniskirts or other clothes that reveal a lot of bare skin, and dirty clothes are unacceptable in Malawian communities.

Professional dress usually implies trousers and button-up shirts for men, and skirts or dresses that cover the knees for women. Slips are essential in Malawi for women. Even though community extension requires travel on a bicycle, long skirts are still worn by women at all times. Capris or yoga pants underneath skirts may make biking more comfortable. Professional dress in Lilongwe and some of the large towns is more formal (jacket and tie for men, dresses for women), especially for official functions than in rural towns and more remote communities.

TRAINING FOR YOUR JOB

During your first nine weeks in Malawi, you will participate in an integrated Pre-Service Training (PST). PC/Malawi provides Peace Corps trainees with realistic experiences in PST through our emphasis on Community-Based Training (CBT). During training, you will live with a host family in a real Malawian village in a designated community. Much of your success will depend on actively participating in household and community activities. We started conducting a combined PST with the Environment sector in 2011, so you will also be training with Environment trainees.

PST focuses on several essential areas to prepare you for service: language, technical, medical, cross-culture, and safety/security. Language, cross-culture, and technical sessions will take place in your village cluster, with both structured and self-directed learning activities. Language and technical trainers will be living within the village, and will provide coaching and feedback as you learn.

Technical training will focus on familiarizing you with government structures, policies, programs, and organizations working in the health sector in Malawi. You will also learn technical skills in disease prevention (including HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation, and malaria) and techniques for facilitating effective trainings and meetings. There will also be practical exercises to learn how to conduct community needs assessments and how to deliver interactive health prevention sessions.

Medical training sessions focus on preventive health strategies by teaching you how to take care of yourself to stay healthy. Peace Corps/Malawi expects that trainees and Volunteers assume primary responsibility for practicing a healthy lifestyle and avoiding preventable illnesses.

During PST, you will also receive a bicycle and bike tools and accessories, and you will be trained in how to operate your bicycle safely and to perform basic maintenance. After your completion of PST, you will return for In-Service Training (IST) at the 3-4 month and one-year milestones in your service to exchange ideas with your fellow PCVs and deepen your technical knowledge and skills.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Your host agency is responsible for identifying and sometimes providing your housing. Most Volunteer houses are constructed of bricks, concrete floors, and corrugated metal roofs. Electricity and running water are available in some places but varies from one site to another.



Electricity, when available, is 220 volt, 50 hertz (220v, 50 cycles). All Volunteers should expect to use hurricane lamps and candles, paraffin (kerosene) and Dover (wood) stoves for cooking/heating. In areas without running water, water is available from community taps and boreholes. Peace Corps will provide a water filter and other forms of water purification for your drinking water. All drinking water must be boiled and filtered. Peace Corps provides you with an initial settling in allowance so that you can purchase basic furniture such as a bed frame, two chairs and a work table.

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.

Before accepting this assignment you should give ample thought the potential frustrations you may face. Opportunities for recreation and standards of working and living may seem quite different—even limited—compared to what you are used to. Initially you may feel out of place or isolated because of language barriers or homesickness and loneliness. Alternatively, you may experience difficulties in adjusting to the culture, especially observing local cultures and customs, which may seem strange to you at first. Your work situation may also present challenges as you struggle to work effectively under a different system. Learning to live and work with those whose views differ from your own will demand tremendous sensitivity on your part. Working in an environment with limited resources will require a spirit of creativity and ingenuity.

There may well be a number of circumstances that severely test your commitment to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Peace Corps staff will provide you with as much support as possible as you make the transition to life in Malawi. Your successful adjustment, however, will depend on your maturity, flexibility, patience, and resourcefulness. I believe you will discover—as do most Peace Corps Volunteers—that the rewards definitely outweigh the frustrations.

Vegetarians

The variety of food available at most sites is more limited than you are accustomed to in the United States. However, a variety of locally-grown fruits and vegetables are available seasonally, while staple foods such as cassava, rice, and grains are sold throughout the year. The traditional dish of Malawi is *nsima*, a thick porridge made from corn flour. *Nsima* is generally accompanied by cooked greens, beans, fresh-water or dry small fish, and, occasionally, meat. Imported goods and spices, while expensive, can be purchased in the major cities. Some Volunteers have noted that maintaining a vegetarian regime in Malawi is challenging due to the limited variety of vegetables. However, the rainy season offers a variety and abundance of natural/indigenous vegetables, making it feasible for motivated, knowledgeable vegetarians.

Diversity

The Peace Corps provides equal opportunity for all persons and recognizes that all individuals can contribute to the accomplishment of its mission. The Peace Corps seeks to attract a diverse Volunteer corps, representative of all Americans regardless of race, religion, or lifestyle.

Gay and lesbian Volunteers must know that Malawi is a very conservative society and that homosexuality is a crime for men and women. Expatriates in Malawi can be prosecuted under this law. Homosexuality is not likely tolerated with the general public and many Malawians are in denial that homosexuality exists in their culture. Thus, any display of homosexuality will be severely frowned upon and it is important to the Volunteer's success to exercise discretion. While physical contact among men and among women is not uncommon (you may see hand-holding in public), it is often of short duration and not sexual in nature. For newly arrived Volunteers, it is imperative to recognize this contact for what it is and not misinterpret its meaning. Peace Corps/Malawi has a Diversity Committee and a Volunteer Supporting Volunteer (VSV) Network, made up of current Volunteers, to support Volunteers of all backgrounds and Peace Corps staff members are trained in diversity issues for volunteer support.

You will derive deep satisfaction knowing that your contributions help improve the lives of Malawian, a nation that appreciates the impact Volunteers have contributed to its development. As a Volunteer living and working in Malawi, your technical assistance and willingness to share in the lives of Malawians are greatly appreciated. With that said, you need to be aware of the realities and be prepared to deal with them on a personal level. Depending on your placement, you may be the only foreigner in your town or district, and the only American at your work site. As such, you will be highly visible and you should be prepared to receive considerable scrutiny and attention. Organizational structure and procedures at your worksite may not function smoothly. Supervision and management systems that linger from the socialist era will be different from that to which you are accustomed.

Your ability to approach problems rationally, use a variety of sources for soliciting information and ideas, take risks, and analyze and learn from your mistakes, are all critical skills for dealing with day-to-day challenges in the workplace. Sharing these strategies with your co-workers may assist them in viewing Malawi's development priorities from another perspective and help them in tackling the long-term problems facing their society. Initiative, patience, and an enthusiastic attitude will serve you well.

COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

“Cool! You are going to Maui?!’ You may not get that one, but I did. Malawi truly lives up to its name of the warm Heart of Africa. The folks you will meet are ones you can never forget and truly make the time worthwhile. Just like anything in life there are low times and problems, but learn to laugh at them and yourself, and move on. You’ll share and teach a lot, but you will learn and gain so much more. Bring whatever you might miss no matter how ridiculous you think it might be – clown nose, books, paints. Whatever makes you happy and gives you that comfort of home. Training can get long, but the rest of the time flies, so don’t let it get to you. All in all, your Malawian experience is a time you’ll never forget and you will form friendships that you will keep for the rest of your life, with Malawians and with other Volunteers. As they say in Malawi, *chikondi chili mmanja* (love is in the hands) and truer words have never been spoken in the way people receive you. No surfing though—sorry, wrong M, but you will get over it.”

-Volunteer in Southern Region

“Go easy on yourself. It’s easy to get caught in your ideals and the genuine desire to be a development worker in Malawi, but there is no need to think that if you are not enacting large scale that you’re not doing your job. Simply being there for the people in your community means a lot, and putting forth a little effort to understand the language and culture means even more. So many people in my community are thrilled because I stop and greet them using the local language. It’s not the number of proposals you write, it’s not constructing buildings. There’s nothing wrong with pushing yourself, but always remember to give yourself credit for electing to give two years of your life to this country, so far away from family and friends and familiarity.”

-Volunteer in Northern Region

“Patience and an open mind is a must. Taking the time to observe, listen, learn, and develop relationships will pay off more than you can imagine. The projects and details matter much less in the end.”

-Volunteer in Central Region

“There is always more time. In knowing this, the processes of development are much slower. To keep from living frustrated and stressed out, one must realize that the watch does not run life. In fact, the majority of Malawians do not own a watch and the ones who do wear them for no purpose besides jewelry. You must be willing to be patient. Be comfortable about not having structure. The less you expect of American ideas of the work environment the more you'll be stress free.”

-Volunteer in Central Region

“Before I joined Peace Corps, I had never heard of Malawi. Now, I can't imagine life without it. Malawi is such an amazing country with such amazing people—the nicest people you will ever meet. I guarantee it. You are about to embark on a wonderful journey that will surely be difficult at times, but that will shape your life and teach you things you never knew you even had to learn. Remember to always keep a positive outlook, be able to laugh at yourself, ask for help when you need it, and leave your family and friends with great package ideas (like chewing gum and chocolate). You're going to have the time of your life, and the people you will meet, both Malawian and other Volunteers, will be the best you've met in your lifetime. Get psyched!”

-Volunteer in Central Region

“Our medical staff is excellent! Do not fill your bags full of First Aid and feminine hygiene supplies. I am sure by now you have heard of the various diseases/illnesses common to Africa and are worried about becoming a victim. The truth is, yes, there are many different illnesses in Africa; however, most if not all are very easily prevented. As long as you are willing to take the steps in prevention, there is no reason to worry about staying healthy in Malawi. Just as if you were in the States, you may get sick, but the medical staff is excellent and takes effective and immediate care of their Volunteers.”

-Volunteer in Southern Region

“Life is an emotional roller coaster and some days I am riding in the front car with my hands up and others I'm grasping onto the bar with my eyes screwed shut. Mail from home can make or break my day. Encourage your friends and family to write often. You will find replying to their letters as therapeutic as receiving them.”

-Volunteer in Northern Region

“Waking up at sunrise, sleeping at sunset, biking, reading, writing, and playing with kids on my front porch. And oh yeah, work. Women, you can run here! You can also wear trousers. So I say bring a few pairs of trousers and jeans, sweatpants, PJ pants. Also bring lots of fun little things to decorate your house with: maps, magazine clippings, and photos. They can be folded and put at the bottom of your suitcase. You will discover talents and hobbies you never knew you had, like baking, sewing, stargazing, language learning, etc.”

-Volunteer in Central Region

“Life in Malawi is a trip of ups, downs, and arounds. You may want to come and change the world, but know that the one most changed will be you. Bring dark clothes if you can. In Malawi there is dirt everywhere (and you do your own laundry). It is hot here. While tank tops are not appropriate in the work place, bring one or two—they’ll provide a bit of relief while hanging out at home. Patterns are good. Bring things that will make you happy and that are of good quality if you want clothes to last two years through rain, mud, and sun. Also bring a few things like your favorite chopsticks or a special lotion to use on those unhappy days. You will be happy you did.”

-Volunteer in Southern Region

“The first two months, although you have all the adrenaline of finally ‘living in Africa,’ are a bit difficult. Give your address to family and friends, and tell them to start writing before you leave because receiving letters during training is a source of great encouragement. Letters take 3-6 weeks to arrive. It is really fun to receive ‘bubbled envelopes’ with small chocolates or photos inside, and they arrive quicker than a box package. During training, you will be living with a Malawian family in villages, so don’t expect access to phone or email those first two months. DON’T WORRY! Though you make incredible friends here after training, you will have plenty of access to communication with those at home.”

-Volunteer in Northern Region



“While in Malawi, you will learn to laugh at yourself. Making mistakes is the best way to learn culture and language, so don't be afraid to try. Malawians love to laugh and you will provide reasons for them to laugh, so don't get hurt or upset—join them. Your adjustment to Malawi will be easier if you can do this.”

-Volunteer in Central Region

“A few words to you wonderful seniors who are about to join our Malawi Peace Corps family. It will be one of the most rewarding odysseys you'll ever take. Leaving your grandchildren will be difficult, but, believe me, there are hundreds of children waiting here for you!”

-Volunteer in Southern Region