

**Ecuador**

**VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION**

**Community Health**



Since 1961.

**Program:** Community Health Program

**Job Title:** Health Extension AA 155

**Dates of Service:** August 4, 2016 – August 3, 2018

**Staging Dates:** May 17, 2016  
**(in the USA)**

**Pre-Service Training**  
**(in Ecuador):** May 18, 2016 (arrival) – August 3, 2016 (swear-in)

\*dates subject to change

AA155 = 3439BR



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 Ecuador 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 Community Health Volunteer in Ecuador call the Country Desk Officer for Ecuador at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C.,

(9AM to 5PM, EST):

Toll-free: 1-855-855-1961, press 1, then extension 2525;

or directly at (202) 692- 2525

or via email at [ecuadordesks@peacecorps.gov](mailto:ecuadordesks@peacecorps.gov)

## A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAM MANAGER

I am excited to learn that you have accepted your invitation to become a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Ecuador. Congratulations for your decision to serve in one of the most amazing places in the world!

Ecuador is a beautiful and extremely diverse country with amazing landscapes and breathtaking nature, our country has eight active volcanos, four different regions including the Galapagos Islands and a vast and rich culture.

However, despite its beauty, our country also faces socio-economic challenges. These challenges have influenced people's lives and decisions in very deep ways. In many parts of Ecuador, poverty and migration have major impacts on people's lives. Due to socio-economic determinant factors, Ecuador is the leading country in Latin America with teenager pregnancy as well as escalating rates of diabetes and hypertension and increasing cases of diarrhea in children under five.

Peace Corps, through the work of Volunteers in the Community Health Program (CH), is assisting local communities to promote healthier life styles to improve livelihoods and quality of life. Volunteers are working in many exciting areas including promotion of healthy habits such as good nutrition practices, gardening, hand washing and sexual and reproductive education.

The decision to serve as a PCV in Ecuador will have a lasting positive impact on your life and on those of your community.

Once again congratulations. I look forward to meeting you and working together here in Ecuador.

Rebecca Carofilis  
Program Manager  
Community Health Program  
Peace Corps Ecuador

## PEACE CORPS ECUADOR HISTORY

The first group of Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Ecuador on August 7, 1962. Since then, more than 6,000 Volunteers have served in the country in almost every imaginable capacity, from working on organic family gardens to teaching in preschool centers and universities. Today our four programs focus on public health, teaching English as a foreign language, youth and families at risk and natural resource conservation.

From 1996 through 2014, almost 400 Volunteers have worked together with their counterparts in the Community Health Program. In this period of time, they have trained more than 14,000 mothers (representing 24,244 children less than 5 years of age), 2,742 teachers, 258 community leaders, 8,456 students, and members of 31 non-governmental organizations.

You are being invited to join the Peace Corps Ecuador team, to work together with your fellow Volunteers to address Ecuador's critical health issues. By strengthening the capacities of Ecuadorian Health Promoters, you will help create a cadre of trained and capable individuals whose efforts will be far-reaching and sustainable.

## YOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

As a CH PCV you will be actively involved in working in the three goals of Peace Corps Ecuador's CH project framework:

- 1. Food Security and Nutrition Education:** Community members will increase availability of healthy foods via gardens and will improve their nutritional intake to prevent malnutrition and reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases.
- 2. Hygiene and Household Water Treatment:** Community members will practice good hygiene and safe water consumption to reduce gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases.
- 3. Sexual and Reproductive Health:** Community members will adopt practices to reduce risky sexual behaviors and protect themselves and others from STIs and HIV transmission.

Specific tasks you might be expected to carry out under these goals include training members of your community members, health promoters and youth in nutrition, food security, gardening, promotion of exercises, healthy habits, hand washing, sexual and reproductive health, HIV mitigation etc.

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 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

Most Volunteers find time for additional activities or projects both inside and outside of the scope of their formal assignment. Secondary projects within the scope of the Community Health project are encouraged, such as teaching healthy habits in English, cultural exchanges, sports, and exercise clubs, participating in medical brigades, initiating community banks, etc.

Additionally, community outreach activities will give you the opportunity to draw on your unique personal talents, skills and interests to serve the needs of your community. For example, you may promote and participate in sports or arts activities, provide trainings in service learning, volunteerism and leadership, tutoring children in other subjects, etc. Your programming staff is a prime resource to help identify and guide you with starting potential projects.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

### Available Resources:

Volunteers are assigned to communities which may lack basic resources and infrastructure. Thus your creativity in using locally available materials and information will be a key factor in your success as a volunteer. During Pre-Service Training, your Program Manager (PM) and the Program and Training Specialist (PTS) will provide you with resources such as manuals, technical documents, and contacts, that address the issues within the Community Health project goals. You will find that the Peace Corps staff, fellow Volunteers, and members of your community (youth, parents, and teachers) will also have resources that they use to address the same challenges. As a Volunteer you are encouraged to utilize the resources available in or near your community. These include your counterpart, local schools, community organizations, and NGOs. You also have your fellow Volunteers and their combined experience with counterparts.

### Location of Job:

Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to sites throughout the country in a wide variety of geographical and climatic settings ranging from the Coastal lowlands to the Andean highlands, to the Amazon Basin. Community Health Volunteers are placed in small rural communities as well as in large towns or even small cities. While you may be the only volunteer in your particular community, there will usually be others no more than one to two hours away. Most sites have basic infrastructure services, i.e. water, electricity (although daily outages of several hours are very common) and bus transportation (once a day from rural sites and 2-3 times per day for more urban communities).

Since your site is not yet determined, you should bring clothing appropriate for both tropical and cool climates. Though certainly not as developed as U.S. cities, Volunteers in urban sites generally have access to internet, markets or supermarkets, telephones and, of course, basic amenities like running water, light, and sewage.

### **Working Hours:**

The role of a Peace Corps Volunteer is to participate in the community activities in a lifestyle similar to an Ecuadorian. Being a volunteer is a 24-hours a day, seven-days a week job. The specific hours that you put in with your counterpart, community, or agency will vary greatly depending on your individual assignment. Often activities with community groups will be scheduled for weekends or evenings when they are able to attend.

While you are not working, you are expected to spend most time with youth, neighbors and counterparts in your community, getting to know them, learning about their customs and culture, and sharing information about your culture. Please keep in mind that you are a role model and a permanent representative of your country; you will be always on duty.

Also, bear in mind that your counterpart(s) probably have significant demands on their time outside their main job, including major family responsibilities and second jobs. You will therefore need to be understanding and flexible and accommodate your schedule to work with them.

### **Cultural Attitudes and Customs in the Workplace:**

Ecuador is a very diverse country. Culture will greatly vary from one region to another. In general you will find a somewhat formal structure in relationships, beginning with a handshake greeting on every encounter with a colleague and a more hierarchical and bureaucratic structure in most work environments. For many Volunteers, your workplace will be the broader community and the structure will depend on you. **To succeed in your job, relationships are key.**

You will find that as you gain your colleagues' trust, your working relationships will also be enhanced. You should make it a priority to spend time establishing positive relationships with your colleagues and community members. Volunteers who do not devote time and energy to this effort often become very frustrated. There is a delicate balance between initiating your project's activities, and gaining your counterparts' trust for more involved projects. Many Volunteers have found it helpful to start some initial activities in their communities to demonstrate their capacities as a way to gain trust. Volunteers who focus on building strong relationships from the beginning soon realize that this is a key factor to their work's success.

Volunteers as development workers hold a place of respect in all communities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will be afforded this as well. However, with respect comes a great deal of responsibility. You will be seen as a role model in your work place and in the larger community. As such it will be important to model good personal values, attitudes, and habits. Promoting the adoption of positive attitudes and values is one of the goals of working with youth. For example, if you are working in a school you should model the professional behavior that you are trying to inspire in the students.

This aspect of living in a "fish bowl" 24/7 has stresses and rewards. You are constantly visible, and the topic of community conversation. Unlike a teacher in the States, you cannot go home

to an anonymous living situation. On the other hand, you will never again probably be so well known.

Customs and cultural beliefs are closely guarded, and thus hard to change. An important component of your work will be to get to know local beliefs and customs, including gender roles, and work within those realities to promote behavior change. The Peace Corps in Ecuador utilizes a gender sensitive approach in our development work to promote the participation of men, women, boys, and girls in all our activities, in accordance with their culturally determined roles. This will enhance the sustainable outcome of any activity undertaken.

You will find that the roles of men and women, and particularly the attitudes toward women, are different than what you may be accustomed to in the United States. To be successful, it will be important to live within and respect the local cultural attitudes and customs. This does not imply taking on all characteristics of a culture but means being respectful of local leaders, institutions, and customs. As you learn more about your community's customs you will find them more open towards working with you.

Your counterparts and other local contacts are resources to assist you with this process. You will learn more during your pre-service training that will prepare you to know and work within Ecuadorian culture. You should be prepared to adapt to most local cultural norms during the initial 3-9 months of service, and gradually adopt a lifestyle that enables you to be more yourself while still respecting key customs.

### **Dress Code:**

Neat and modest, sums up the dress code requirements in Ecuador. You are seen as a professional, and your dress must reflect this. Keep it comfortable, dean cut and simple. Much more than in the United States, the way you dress in Ecuador is very important. Proper dress can help you establish your credibility as a professional, and it reflects your respect for the local customs and expectations of the people with whom you live and work. Ecuadorians dress very neatly and take great pride in looking nice in public and at social affairs. Inappropriate dress, like inappropriate behavior, is something that can set a volunteer unnecessarily apart from his or her community.

In general, the best guideline is to dress as Ecuadorian teachers do. Ecuadorians dress professionally casual: neat, clean, and ironed. It is suggested that you bring casual professional attire for all venues when you are working. More than half of Ecuadorian teachers are female. They wear knee length skirts or nice slacks to work. Very often teachers ride bicycles and/or walk to their schools, but they almost always look neat and proper. Teachers are considered professionals in their community and their dress reflects this.

Please consider the importance of dress when packing. Appropriate attire can include cotton pants (nice khakis are appropriate), neat blue-jeans (dark and not bleached out, or ripped) are acceptable but can be hot in this weather, nice cotton shirts and/or blouses (not T-shirts). Female Volunteers may choose to wear more cotton skirts (not mini length) or Capri pants more than they would in the States due to the heat.



Neither shorts nor faded t-shirts are appropriate for male or female Volunteers in the workplace. Dresses or shirts that are tight or spaghetti-strap tank tops are also not appropriate work attire.

Flip flops are NOT appropriate for work, and should only be worn inside the home. Shorts and tennis shoes are acceptable sportswear but are not considered appropriate for work. During training, you will be expected to observe these same guidelines for dress.

## TRAINING FOR YOUR JOB

We expect you to be professional and there are definite goals and competencies that you must achieve before you can be sworn in as a volunteer. These goals include attaining a minimum standard ability in the Spanish language, demonstrated technical knowledge, and your proven ability to live and work within the framework of the local culture and Peace Corps policies.

The majority of your training will take place in a community setting to better prepare you for your future life and work. You will find that standard of living in the training community is higher than where you will be assigned. During the training period of approximately 11 weeks, you will live with an Ecuadorian family and are expected to take full advantage of this opportunity to immerse yourself into the language and culture. Orientation to your job assignment, your role as a development worker, your specific site, technical conditions, personal health care, safety & security, and general information about Ecuador will all be part of your training. All of these aspects will involve your input and cooperation in order to provide you with the best possible understanding of the country prior to your entry of service into your community.

During training Peace Corps staff will evaluate your performance and commitment to Peace Corps and the people of Ecuador. Your host-family and Peace Corps staff look to support you during this transition period and will provide you with constant feedback and constructive criticism during training in order to best prepare you for your Peace Corps service.

Be aware that if you do not prove to be competent in the areas of emotional maturity, social sensitivity and motivation, you may not be recommended to qualify as a Peace Corps Volunteer and could be asked to leave country.

## LIVING CONDITIONS

After Volunteers Swear-In, they are all required to live with a family in their community for the first six months at site. (This is in addition to the 11 weeks that Trainees live with a family during training.) The host family is chosen with the help of host country co-workers in the community prior to your arrival. Living with a family is the norm in Ecuador, even for adult professionals, until they are married and have a family of their own. Living with a family when you first arrive in your community will increase your safety, credibility and community acceptance. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to live with a family throughout their service. This is to help Volunteers better integrate into their communities and to develop a credible presence and safety net.

CH Volunteers are placed in rural and urban sites, if you are placed in a rural area the housing might be more rustic, whereas those assigned to large towns or small cities might expect to live in apartments or small more modern houses.

Most of the rustic houses will however be made of concrete with cement floor and wooden ceiling. Windows will be covered by glass and/or mesh. In most cases restrooms will be shared with the family and in some cases the restroom maybe located on the garden a few meters away from the house.

## 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.](#)

Volunteers often receive a warm welcome and are readily accepted into their communities. However, for many Volunteers, the constant answering of personal questions, the lack of privacy, and the need to be constantly aware of different social norms can be real challenges. Being a novelty in the community, you will often be the subject of considerable gossip. You are likely to become the local equivalent of the soap opera star.

You will confront additional challenges associated with facilitating change in a cultural setting where time is viewed differently than in the United States. You may also encounter many communities that are accustomed to receiving donations from financially well-off NGOs. It can be difficult to enter into these situations where you have no financial resources, but may be seen as a "rich foreigner." Your community education activities might not be seen as "valuable" as monetary donations or larger infrastructure projects; however, your work will allow many to understand and be involved in changes that will benefit them and their families.

A challenge that many Volunteers face during their first few months is acquiring sufficient Spanish language skills to feel comfortable in their work and social lives. The intensive language training during the first three months in country will provide the support you need to learn basic Spanish. However, you should challenge yourself to learn as much Spanish as possible during training. For some Volunteers, it is also important to learn some Kichwa depending on site placement. You might have a chance to sweat profusely in lower elevation cities. Although at first the heat can be a challenge, most Volunteers acclimate fairly quickly.

At some point in their service the majority of CH Volunteers are involved in health education in the classroom. Ecuador's education system has many challenges that you will face. Classrooms usually have 50-60 students who lack even basic textbooks. Students spend much of their time copying material from the board and learning material by rote memorization. Parental involvement in education is often low to non-existent.

Gender roles may also present a great challenge. In particular, the attitude toward women may be extremely challenging to female Volunteers. Emotional resiliency is extremely important to deal with "machismo". Diverse Volunteers may also face challenges related to varying attitudes in Ecuador regarding sexual orientation, race, age and religion. Peace Corps Ecuador has established support groups to help Volunteers and will also provide training and assistance in these areas.

To achieve rewards you will need to be patient, flexible, persistent, creative, and optimistic. Don't expect to transform a community or organization overnight. Focus on supporting individuals and community leaders. Help them gain the tools they need to improve their lives, help their families, and shape their communities. The Peace Corps experience is also not about "you" and your interests; it is about serving others and responding to their needs. Finally, Peace Corps is for confident, self-starting, concerned individuals who are interested in assisting in other countries and increasing human understanding across cultural barriers.

## COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

Dear Future Health Volunteer:

First take a deep breath, and next a congratulations!!! You have been officially invited to embark on an experience that will expand your reality and reveal things to you that you could probably never get through another experience. Serving in Ecuador, a country that is so incredibly diverse is a hard thing to summarize for you. The regions of Ecuador posse such dramatically different cultures and ways of life that; I can only really speak to you of my own experience living in a small coastal town in the province of Guayas.

I am a Community Health Volunteer. In my town, I have varied projects that I work on. I am teaching in one of the local schools a couple classes. I teach a sex education course in two of the local high schools. I participate in medical brigades with my local health clinic, or going out to far off communities that do not have access to the central health dinic and help with health promotion while the doctor process and assist patients. I also work with a group of twenty health promoters who are individuals who simply want to work for the betterment of their neighborhoods and communities. We meet monthly and do activities such as weight assessments of the kids and give talks or little mini health lessons to the mothers and kids in a variety of topics from nutrition to dengue prevention, to personal hygiene.

Now in my free time, I play soccer with the kids in my barrio, help with a ton of English homework and hang out with my host family. There are always kids' birthday parties to attend, baptisms, or a bingo taking place. At times my life seems bizarre but one settles in to a routine and eventually life becomes life in a more familiar sense of the word. There a stressful times, there a sad times, there are quiet peaceful times, and there are joyful times. You come to realize this is more than a job- it is an all-encompassing experience. Your time will be what you make of it and your experience is yours to define, remember that.

Nobody in the Peace Corps has the same experience, but I remember a quote I heard a few years back that sums up my Peace Corps experience for me. "That is the beauty of travel, you meet people you couldn't invent, you see places you couldn't imagine and your world which was once so huge as to consume your whole life becomes a small grain in the course of time and the universe and you leave a changed person."



Community Health PCV, Omnibus 106

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Dear Future Health Volunteer:

Hello!! Congratulations and welcome to the Community Health Program, I'm an HIV/AIDS Volunteer who works at a Hospital that works with People living with HIV/AIDS.

I've been in Ecuador for a year now and my Spanish is in a bit of a plateau, but I still feel pretty confident about it. It's still best at work than anywhere else, but that's maybe because I am in "the zone" at work, and when I get home it's my time to rest.

However, I still live with a host family (grandma, mom, sister, cousin, uncle, and most of the time brother, sister-in-law, and a nephew and a new niece in the house), so I speak Spanish at home as well. I never thought this would happen, but I love it!

We have come to a point with each other to appreciate what we are, and what we aren't. They give me more space and paradoxically I spend more time with them. I have spent holidays & birthdays with them, been here when my new "niece" was born, eat almost every meal with them, work with my "mom" every day, and come home and lay in bed with the grandma and watch TV.

The food is outstanding, they are hilarious, and I am learning a lot about living in Ecuador by staying with them.

Honestly, I can't remember the last time I have been so content in my life. I feel my life is full of purpose, freedom, and great people. I learn something and give something every single day. As far as training goes, Peace Corps does as much as it can in such a narrow time - the best lessons come with time.

Community Health, Omnibus 106

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Dear future Volunteers,

Welcome to the Ecuador team, most of you have accepted this journey to celebrate a new stage of challenges in a new, and exciting manner, this will truly be an unbelievable experience with innumerable opportunities. I have served for two years as a rural health Volunteer working in HIV in the coast of Ecuador in a place surrounded by rice fields.

My experience has been anything but ordinary; filled with continuous challenges that have given me a better perspective into human life. Whether it has been the hot heat and humidity



of the coast, the “lovely” mosquito whispering in my ear as it’s about to bite, or the friendly kids on my street waiting for me to paint with, there has never been a dull moment. I have been working with youth for that past two years developing education and prevention programs around HIV, giving pre and post counseling for the HIV test, working with a group of people living with HIV, and training counterparts and community members through presentations and everyday interaction, creating a mutual exchange of ideas and thoughts.

Aside from the challenges of programming when there were only eight out of the twenty-six students that showed up or when community promises were not followed through, one of the best memories I will take with me have been through the one-on-one interactions. One of the extraordinary women I met left me profoundly obliged; I met Jessica after skipping with my family in her cyber cafe functioning in the living room of her house. There, I met her two lovely girls and her husband, she shared her story of moving and adapting from another town, having to make many sacrifices, a change in life style from the very privileged to lower middle class and becoming the sole provider of her family after her husband got sick. It was through these conversations that we helped empower each other, to support one another in seeing optimistically the wonders of our lives, the people we love, and the great relationships we make along the way. Unfortunately, her husband died a year after I was in site and she had fallen emotionally and spiritually, but I help her recognize the strength she held deep within, how she helped her children through school and kept her business running. One evening heading towards her house she mentioned: “you have made me feel alive, and given me hope to continue living and finding back the passion I’ve lost in my life.” She became an advocate to help other families dealing with dialysis patients, so they would have the support she lacked when her husband fell ill. This journey has truly been the best jigsaw puzzle I’ve worked to put together.

Best be this journey you have accepted.

Health Volunteer OMN 104