

The Peace Corps Welcomes You to Liberia



**A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS
April 2016**

Map of Liberia



WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps Liberia Invitee:

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Peace Corps/Liberia. We congratulate you on your decision to commit the next 27 months to assist the Liberian people in pursuing their educational development aspirations. You are to be commended for having successfully completed the rigorous Peace Corps selection process through which you will become a member of the sixth training class, also referred to as LR-6, to serve in Liberia since the Peace Corps returned to Liberia after the Civil War in 2008.

The information contained in this welcome book represents a general outline of life as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Liberia. The nature of development work is such that the living conditions and work environments can change often, though every effort is made to keep this welcome book as a current and accurate representation of the reality of life in Liberia.

From 1962–90, Peace Corps and the government of Liberia had a 28-year history of cooperation, during which more than 3,800 Volunteers served throughout the country. Peace Corps/Liberia re-opened at the invitation of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to meet the needs of the education system that suffered considerably during the devastating civil war from 1990–2003.

Liberia offers a unique opportunity for a challenging and rewarding tour of service. Some of you may be placed in towns and villages with relatively good access to electricity, internet, and phone while others may live in communities in which these and other conveniences are not available. Wherever you serve, you will contribute meaningfully to the positive development of people in a community while gaining experience, knowledge, and a broadened understanding and perspective that will enrich your life through your Peace Corps service.

As a Volunteer, you can be an agent of positive and enduring change if you possess an open mind and a sincere interest in working with and helping others to succeed. You will assist Liberians at the community level to achieve their development aspirations through your energy, motivation, creativity, and genuine desire to make a contribution. You will work with a local counterpart or supervisor, which will require you to adapt to new and different modes of interpersonal relations. In a developmental context, attitudinal and organizational change can be challenging and, in the end, the fulfillment and satisfaction of having contributed to improved opportunities for those with whom you will live and work, will be a worthy reward.

Twelve weeks of pre-service training will provide you with a comprehensive orientation to your future work assignment, approaches, tools, and strategies to effectively serve in Liberia. You will likewise receive crucial information about staying healthy and safe, and living in a Liberian household will be an integral part of your pre-service training.

As a result of serving as a Peace Corps/Liberia Volunteer, you will grow in knowledge, self-confidence, and cultural appreciation to share with loved ones back in the United States for the rest of your life. We expect that this journey upon which you have begun will be life-changing and always have a special place in your memories.

We look forward to your arrival!

Kevin W. Fleming, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Lesotho, 2002–04
Country Director, Peace Corps/Liberia

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CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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

PEACE CORPS/LIBERIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Liberia

Liberia has a remarkable history with the Peace Corps. Between 1962–90, when more than 3,800 Volunteers served in Liberia, Volunteers served in multiple facets of Liberia’s development efforts with an emphasis on education, agriculture, rural development, and health education. Although the program closed in 1990 due to internal conflict, the Peace Corps is still fondly remembered and well-loved in Liberia; most people over the age of 30 benefitted from a Peace Corps Volunteer in their community at some point.

The Peace Corps re-entered Liberia in 2008 with a group of 12 Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs), who serve on short-term assignments around the world.

In 2010, Peace Corps/Liberia began the transition to a full Peace Corps program with arrival of the first group of two-year Volunteers who worked within the secondary education project, teaching English, science, and math. Peace Corps/Liberia continues to receive both Volunteers and PCRVs to complement the development needs and aspirations of the country.

In October 2014, Peace Corps/Liberia was suspended due to the outbreak of Ebola. Volunteers returned in June 2015.

Peace Corps Programming in Liberia

As a result of the civil war, it is reported that 80 percent of the country’s schools were destroyed. The war also led to the flight of well-trained teachers, and erratic compensation for those who remained. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE), approximately 65 percent of teachers have no teacher training background. The MoE has a long-term goal to train current and future generations of teachers and to support the government’s efforts to maintain quality services in the classroom. Through both classroom teaching and strengthening the capacity of teachers, the Peace Corps provides support through its programming.

Peace Corps Volunteers

Volunteers are placed at government junior or senior secondary-level schools where they have an opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of Liberian youth by providing them with educational instruction and opportunities for extracurricular activities. All Volunteers are trained in the communicative-approach teaching methodology. Volunteers are challenged to implement this interactive methodology in their classrooms and to link lessons to practical applications based on their students’ interests, needs, and daily lives.

In addition to the primary teaching assignment, Volunteers engage in activities that include creating after-school tutoring and clubs, organizing sports teams, supporting parent-teacher associations, teacher training, promoting life skills and facilitating peer mentoring, and organizing libraries. Some Volunteers undertake such secondary activities in a variety of other areas based on local needs and personal skills, such as establishing model gardens, conducting health and hygiene education, and every Volunteer is encouraged to conduct malaria prevention activities in their school and/or community.

Many Volunteers work alongside Liberian volunteers from the National Youth Service Program, a Liberian government program modeled on the Peace Corps, helping to transfer skills and promote teaching best practices. Additionally, Volunteers encourage their school administrators to create management plans to guide the school toward more conducive learning environments for students.

Peace Corps Response Volunteers

The assignments of PCRVs continue to focus on education, but instead of being student-focused like the two-year Volunteers, they are teacher-focused.

Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) were established in the 1960s to produce teachers prepared for the conditions and needs of schools and students outside of the more populated urban areas. After a closure for 15 years due to the war, the institutes have been re-established. PCRVs teach pedagogy to future teachers at the RTTIs and work with administration to strengthen the institutions' ability to prepare future teachers.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: LIBERIA AT A GLANCE

History

Liberia, the oldest independent republic in Africa, lies 300 miles north of the equator. Portuguese explorers established contacts with Liberia as early as 1461 and named the area Grain Coast. In 1663, the British installed trading posts on the Grain Coast, but the Dutch destroyed these posts a year later. There were no further reports of settlements by foreigners along the Grain Coast until the arrival of freed slaves in the early 1800s.

Liberia, “Land of the free,” was founded by free African Americans and freed slaves who arrived from the United States beginning in 1820. An initial group of 86 immigrants, who came to be called Americo-Liberians, established a settlement in Christopolis (now Monrovia, named after U.S. President James Monroe) on February 6, 1820.

Thousands of freed American slaves and free African Americans arrived during the following years. The drive to resettle freed slaves in Africa was promoted by the American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization of white clergymen, abolitionists, and slave owners. Between 1821–67, the ACS resettled some 10,000 African Americans and several thousand Africans from interdicted slave ships; it governed the Commonwealth of Liberia until it declared independence as the Republic of Liberia on July 26, 1847.

The Americo-Liberian settlers periodically encountered stiff and sometimes violent opposition from indigenous Africans, who were excluded from citizenship in the new republic until 1904. British and French colonial expansionists encroached upon Liberia, taking over much of its territory. Politically, the country was a one-party system ruled by the True Whig Party. Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who was born and raised in America, was Liberia’s first president. The government and constitution were modelled after the United States’ and Americo-Liberians monopolized political power and restricted the voting rights of the indigenous population. The True Whig Party dominated all sectors of Liberia, from independence in 1847 until April 12, 1980, when indigenous Liberian Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe (from the Krahn ethnic group) seized power in a coup d’état. Doe’s forces executed President William R. Tolbert and several government officials, mostly of Americo-Liberian descent.

After the October 1985 elections, characterized by widespread fraud, Doe consolidated his control. The period after the elections saw increased human rights abuses, corruption, and ethnic tensions. The standard of living further deteriorated.

On December 24, 1989, a small band of rebels led by Doe’s former procurement chief, Charles Taylor, invaded Liberia from Cote d’Ivoire. Taylor and his National Patriotic Front rebels rapidly gained the support of many Liberians and reached the outskirts of Monrovia within six months.

From 1990–96, one of Africa’s bloodiest civil wars ensued, ultimately claiming the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and displacing a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened in 1990 and succeeded in preventing Taylor from capturing Monrovia. An Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was formed in The Gambia under the auspices of ECOWAS in October 1990. After more than a dozen peace accords and declining military power, Taylor finally agreed to the formation of a five-person transitional government, followed by special elections on July 19, 1997. Taylor and his National Patriotic Party emerged victorious. Taylor won the election by a large majority, primarily because Liberians feared a return to war had Taylor lost.

For the next six years, the Taylor government did not improve the lives of Liberians. Unemployment and illiteracy stood above 75 percent, and little investment was made in the country's infrastructure. Liberia is still recovering from the war; pipe-borne water and electricity are generally unavailable to most of the population, and schools, hospitals, roads, and infrastructure remain derelict. By 2003, armed groups, largely representing factions that fought Taylor during Liberia's previous civil war (1990–96), challenged Taylor.

On June 4, 2003, in Accra, Ghana, ECOWAS facilitated peace talks among the government of Liberia, civil society, and the rebel groups. In July 2003, a cease-fire was signed that all sides failed to respect; bitter fighting reached downtown Monrovia in July and August of 2003, creating a massive humanitarian disaster.

On August 11, 2003, under intense international pressure, President Taylor resigned and departed into exile in Nigeria. This move paved the way for the deployment by ECOWAS of what became a 3,600-strong peacekeeping mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). On August 18, 2003, leaders signed a comprehensive peace agreement that laid the framework for constructing a two-year National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). The United Nations took over security in Liberia in October 2003, subsuming ECOMIL into the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a force that grew to over 12,000 troops and 1,148 police officers.

Government

The October 11, 2005, presidential and legislative elections and the subsequent November 8, 2005, presidential run-off were the most free, fair, and peaceful elections in Liberia's history. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf defeated international soccer star George Weah to become Africa's first democratically elected female president. She was inaugurated in January 2006.

The political situation has remained stable since the 2005 elections. The government of Liberia has made positive strides aimed at political stability and economic recovery, and the U.N. peacekeeping presence is gradually phasing out. Taylor was convicted for war crimes at The Hague and recently began serving a 50-year sentence in the United Kingdom. Some Liberians continue to support Taylor.

The next presidential election will be in October 2017.

Economy

In the 1970s and '80s, iron mining accounted for more than half of Liberia's export earnings.

The 1990–2003 civil war had a devastating effect on the country's economy. Major businesses were destroyed or heavily damaged, and most foreign investors and businesses left the country. Iron ore production stopped completely. The United Nations banned timber and diamond exports from Liberia.

Currently, Liberia's revenues come primarily from export of rubber, diamonds, iron ore, and timber, and from its maritime registry program. Liberia has the second-largest maritime registry in the world. Oil was discovered off the coast and exportation is expected to begin soon.

People and Culture

There are 17 ethnic groups that make up Liberia's indigenous population. The Kpelle in central and western Liberia is the largest ethnic group. Americo-Liberians make up only an estimated 5 percent of the population.

There also are sizable numbers of Lebanese, Indians, and other West African nationals who comprise part of Liberia's business community. The Liberian constitution restricts citizenship to only people of "negro" descent, and land ownership is restricted to citizens.

Liberia was traditionally noted for its academic institutions, iron ore mining, logs, and rubber. Political upheavals beginning in the 1980s, and the 14-year civil war largely destroyed Liberia's economy and brought a steep decline in living standards.

Environment

Just 300 miles north of the equator, Liberia has a relatively long coastline of 350 miles. From the lagoons and mangrove swamps of the coastal plains, the land rises evenly along its length in belts parallel to the coast, from rolling hills, through a broader region of plateaus and low mountain ranges, and into the foothills of the Guinea Highlands. Just beyond these 4,500-foot peaks originate the headwaters of the Niger River. Half of the country is covered by tropical rain forest.

Liberia is directly in the path of seasonal winds. From May through November, the prevailing monsoon winds drop most of the nearly 200 inches of rain received annually in the capital city of Monrovia. From December through April, the red dust-laden *Harmattan* winds originating over the Sahara Desert prevail. The transition periods between seasons are punctuated by violent thunderstorms and sudden torrential downpours. Monrovia is the wettest capital city in the world.

Temperatures average 81 degrees Fahrenheit, and humidity averages 82 percent, with little variation over the course of the year. Precautions must be taken against mildew and rust caused by the heat, constant humidity, and the corrosive salt air of the coast.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Liberia and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf the internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experience. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Liberia

[State.gov](#)

The Department of State's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Country X and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

[Gpo.gov/libraries/public/](#)

The U.S. Government Publishing Office publishes country studies intermittently.

[lweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html](#)

The Library of Congress provides historical and sociological data on numerous countries.

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

[Data.un.org](#)

United Nations site with links to data from U.N. member countries

[Wikipedia.org](#)

Search for Country X to find encyclopedia-type information. Note: As Wikipedia content is user-generated, information may be biased and/or not verified.

[Worldbank.org](#)

The World Bank Group's mission is to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world. It is a development bank that provides loans, policy advice, technical assistance, and knowledge-sharing services to developing countries to reduce poverty. This site contains a lot of information and resources regarding development.

[Data.worldbank.org/country](#)

Provides information on development indicators on countries, including population, gender, financial, and education, and climate change statistics.

<http://monrovia.usembassy.gov>

The official website of the United States Embassy in Liberia has information on programs, policy, and consular affairs.

[www.countrywatch.com](#): On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Liberia to how to convert from the dollar to the Liberia currency. Just click on Liberia and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations: Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

www.state.gov: The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Liberia and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp: This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

www.worldinformation.com: This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

www.rpcv.org

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the "Friends of" groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Liberia site:

www.fol.org

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

This site, hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers, is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

www.peacecorpswriters.org

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Liberia

UN.org/News/

The United Nations news service provides coverage of its member states and information about the international peacekeeping organization's actions and positions.

VOAnews.com

Voice of America, the U.S. government's multimedia broadcaster, features coverage of news around the world.

International Development Sites About Liberia

http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/countries/liberia/

The official website of the United States Agency for International Development, with details on its many programs in Liberia

Recommended Books

Books about the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. "All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s." Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

- Rice, Gerald T. "The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps." Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
- Stossel, Scott. "Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver." Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
- Meisler, Stanley. "When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years." Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2011.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

- Dirlam, Sharon. "Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place." Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
- Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. "Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience." Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
- Erdman, Sarah. "Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village." New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
- Hessler, Peter. "River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze." New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
- Kennedy, Geraldine ed. "From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps." Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
- Thomsen, Moritz. "Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle." Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

Books About Liberia

Travel

- Greene, Graham. "Journey Without Maps." New York, N.Y.: Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Greene, Barbara. "Too Late to Turn Back." New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1991.

Fiction

- Gay, John. "Red Dust on Green Leaves." Northridge, Calif.: New World African Press, 2002.
- Neff, Heather. "Accident of Birth." New York, N.Y.: Harlem Moon, 2004.
- Banks, Russell. "The Darling." New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial, 2005.
- Sankawulo, Wilton (Liberian). "The Rain and the Night." Accra, Ghana: Sedco Publishing, 1997.
- Moore, Bai T. (Liberian). "Murder in the Cassawa Patch." Monrovia, Liberia: Ducor Publishing House, 1968.

Nonfiction

- Sirleaf, Ellen Johnson. "This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life by Africa's First Woman President." New York, N.Y.: Harper, 2009.
- Powers, William. "Blue Clay People." New York, N.Y.: Bloomsbury, 2006.
- Huffman, Alan. "Mississippi in Africa." New York, N.Y.: Gotham, 2005.
- Johnson, Charles S. "Bitter Canaan." Edison, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1930, 1987.
- Tyler McGraw, Marie. "An African Republic." Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press 2007.
- Schuster, Lynda. "The Final Days of Dr. Doe." New York, N.Y.: Atlantic Monthly Press 1992.

Ornithology

- Gatter, Wulf. "Birds of Liberia." New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Borrow, Nik and Demey, Ron. "Birds of Western Africa." Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005, 2004.
- Sinclair, Ian and Ryan, Peter. "Birds of Africa, South of the Sahara." Cape Town, South Africa: Random House Struik, 2008.

Children's Books

- Aardema, Verna. "Koi and the Kola Nuts." New York, N.Y.: Aladdin, 2003.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Mail may be sent to:

[your name]
Peace Corps Volunteer
P.O. Box 707
Monrovia, Liberia

Letter mail may be received at the above post office box number. Parcels may also be sent, but delivery is not reliable. If parcels are sent, it is recommended to keep the tracking number for reference. Items have been pilfered from parcels. Mail typically arrives in the capital in three to five weeks, but may take months or never arrive at all. Please keep in mind that mail delivery is nearly nonexistent outside of Monrovia, so Volunteers should not count on receiving a lot of mail. Volunteers will not travel to Monrovia often, so picking up packages and other mail is sporadic. Only mail that is sent the post office box is duty-free based on our country agreement. Should you use alternate addresses or use other vendors such as Federal Express or DHL, you should expect long delays and to pay duty fees.

Phone

All phone calls are made by cellphones as all of the landlines were destroyed during the war. The cellphones in Liberia are not “locked” into a particular provider, as they are in the United States. They use SIM cards, so if you bring a phone with you, please be sure it is multisystem and is “unlocked.” Otherwise, you may purchase a phone upon arrival.

The two major cellular networks are Lonestar MTN and Cellcom GSM. Both carriers work in most towns and villages, but in some sites only one network. A few sites have no signal. Phone usage is prepaid and purchased on “scratch cards” containing codes redeemed for credit. A simple, robust phone is inexpensive, and money will be provided for one when you arrive in-country. Smartphones are much more expensive in Liberia than they are in the States. Peace Corps/Liberia has a “friends and family” plan that provides free calls between Cellcom phones within the Peace Corps family. Calling the United States from Liberia is very inexpensive. From your cellphone, you can call the U.S. for five cents a minute.

Peace Corps/Liberia will provide one satellite phone to each security warden for a clustered group of Volunteers. It is for emergency communications and Peace Corps business only.

Internet

Internet access is limited throughout Liberia, though a few internet cafés are opening in Monrovia and a few of the major towns around the country. However, if you have your own laptop or smartphone, a solution that may be of interest is the use of a data SIM card. Several cellphone companies offer internet service through cellphone technology. You can purchase a data SIM card and it calls a nearby cellphone tower for service. It is slow, but works in most towns. The data SIM card is currently available, but there is a monthly fee charge. The data SIM card uses the regular phone cards which are sold for \$5 each; when the phone card is finished, the data card will go off. If you have a newer laptop that requires the more sophisticated “smartcard,” you may need to buy a compatible cellphone that can attach to your computer or you may wish to bring a separate data card reading device.

There are computers available for Volunteers in the Peace Corps office in Monrovia, the nation’s capital, but trips to Monrovia are infrequent.

Housing and Site Location

Volunteers are assigned to work at the community level. Volunteer housing is provided by the host country; the Ministry of Education collaborates with local school authorities, community leaders, and partner organizations to secure housing. The majority of Volunteers serve without electricity and running water; few Volunteer houses have these. Some Volunteers invest in small generators for electricity. Water will be from nearby pumps and will have to be carried to your house.

Most Volunteers are assigned to schools in rural towns. Your workplace will be within walking distance of your home, and could be up to a 30-minute walk. Dependent on community need, Peace Corps/Liberia makes every effort to cluster Volunteers within reasonable distances of each other to promote collaborative efforts, maximize safety and security, and minimize isolation. Some Volunteers might be placed in the same community or in the same school.

You must be prepared to accept the living conditions to which you are assigned as you will be living under the same conditions as the people with and for whom you work. Peace Corps/Liberia inspects all potential housing and surrounding communities to ensure it meets set standards for health and safety.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Liberian dollars that is sufficient to live at the level of the local people. The allowance covers food, housing, household supplies, clothing, transportation to and from work, utilities, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses. Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to live at a level that is comparable with that of their host country counterparts. The Peace Corps discourages Volunteers from supplementing their living allowance with funds from home.

Volunteers will receive a settling-in allowance to purchase the basics they need, such as bedding, dishes, etc. The price of purchasing a local cellphone has been incorporated as well.

The banking system in Liberia is rebuilding from the long period of war. There are not a lot of bank branches up-country, and in some areas there are no ATM machines. The banks intend to open them over time, so this may happen during your tenure in Liberia. Until then, you will likely have to travel some distance to banking facilities in another town.

Liberia is a cash economy, and credit cards are not accepted. There are a few retailers in Monrovia who will cash a U.S. personal check for a fee. You may bring traveler's checks, but there are only a couple of places that take them. In villages and towns, most daily transactions use Liberian dollars. Banks only distribute in U.S. currency, but money changers are ubiquitous and offer competitive rates.

Food and Diet

In Liberia, rice is the staple food. Other starches include plantains and variations of pounded cassava called fufu and dumboy.

The typical meal is a sauce called "soup" or "gravy" poured over rice. They can be thick, spicy stews of vegetables with meat and/or fish, or a broth with meat and vegetables. Meat may be beef ("cow meat"), chicken, or "country meat" (which is usually game). Fish may be fresh, dried, or smoked. Peanuts are another good source of protein. There are not a lot of vegetarians in Liberia, so most cooked dishes will have meat in them. If you have the ability to remove the meat and eat the rest of the dish, then you will have more dietary choices. Strict vegetarians and vegans will be challenged.

Hot peppers are cooked into the soup, added whole, or made into a pepper sauce or soup.

Pineapples, bananas, papaya, coconuts, and mangos are seasonal. Out of season, fruits may be unavailable and unevenly distributed across the nation. It can be challenging to eat a well-balanced meal during some seasons and the variety of foods may be limited.

Volunteers may add more dietary variety by cooking for themselves. The availability of foods depends on the region, the season, and the size of the town or village, but foods like lentils, peanuts, and bananas are common. Packaged and canned foods may also be available, especially in bigger towns. Most types of food are available in large grocery stores in the capital, but Volunteers should not expect a large variety in their diet.

Transportation

Transportation is a challenge in Liberia. Though roughly the size of Tennessee, it can take more than two days to travel across the country. Most roads are not paved, so travel is slow, and some roads become impassible during the rainy season.

Volunteers will most often travel around the country in shared-ride “bush taxis,” which are most often Nissan sedans packed with six passengers (four in the back, two in the front passenger seat). Taxi vans and buses are also occasional options. As most of these vehicles are old and beaten by rough conditions, breakdowns are common.

Vehicles from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF) traverse the country and sometimes are good options, based on relationships and friendships you may cultivate. Volunteers should avoid using U.N. peacekeeper military transportation, unless it is an extreme emergency, to avoid any appearance of an association between the military and the Peace Corps.

Volunteers transiting around the capital will most often use shared-ride style taxis during the day. At night, however, this practice is discouraged in favor of chartering rides through a list of trusted taxi drivers that will be provided.

If Volunteers wish to purchase a bicycle, helmets will be provided and Volunteers will be instructed on the bicycle safety policy. Volunteers must wear helmets when riding bicycles.

When roads are impassible to taxis, certain Volunteer sites have been approved for motorcycling riding. Volunteers living in those sites who have received training and wear Peace Corps-issued helmets are permitted to ride only as passengers on motorcycles. This is a heavily restricted practice.

Geography and Climate

From the lagoons and mangrove swamps of coastal plains, the Liberian topography rises evenly in belts parallel to the coast. Rolling hills transition to a broader region of plateaus as well as low mountain ranges leading into the foothills of the Guinea Highlands. Half of Liberia is covered by tropical rain forest.

Temperatures average 81 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity averages 82 percent, with variation according to season and elevation. The coast is hot and humid and Volunteers will rarely wear more than one layer of clothing. Volunteers in the more mountainous interior may at times wear sweatshirts and sleep with blankets. Regardless of location, Volunteers should be aware that heat, humidity, and salt air can cause clothes to mildew and electronics to corrode.

Liberian climate is dominated by two seasons. The dry season lasts from November to April is characterized by hot, dry, and dusty winds that originate in the Sahara Desert. From May to October, the

humid rainy season prevails, dropping as much as 200 inches of precipitation. These heavy rains make Monrovia the wettest capital in the world.

Social Activities

In Liberian villages and towns, personal relationships are forged more by time spent with each other than by doing any particular activities. Friends, neighbors, and street sellers will invite you to sit with them as you walk by, and spending a few minutes with people goes a long way toward earning trust and respect. Ignoring people or greeting them with less than a handshake is rude. This slower, more social pace of life can be a difficult adjustment for Westerners accustomed to reaching destinations quickly.

In Liberian society, people keep their friendships with members of the same sex; it is considered strange to have close friendships with members of the opposite sex. Volunteers seeking such friendships will find themselves inadvertently conveying unintended signals.

Male Volunteers will likely spend time with their male friends at street kiosks, local football games, or video clubs (which are small theaters for watching projected movies and video games). Female Volunteers will likely spend time with female friends in their homes or at the market. Religious functions, having a drink at a restaurant or bar, or going to nightclubs are also common Liberian social activities. The next nearest Volunteer could be a several-hour taxi ride away.

All that said, Peace Corps/Liberia does work to model non-traditional gender roles for both men and women, and the staff can provide guidance on how this can be done without jeopardizing safety or treading upon local customs and mores.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

While the heat and humidity might make casual attire preferable, there are certain dress standards that must be respected. As Volunteers are professionals, a professional demeanor and appearance is expected. Appropriate dress, both on and off the job, is required.

Being neat and cleanly dressed in a culturally appropriate manner is a sign of respect and pride. Worn, dirty, or ripped clothing is unacceptable. While clothes may have quite a bit of wear and tear due to rough washing, transportation, and manual labor, great care should be taken to be neat, clean, and presentable.

Long hair, long beards, earrings, nose rings, and shorts are considered inappropriate for men. While there is no restriction in place, please be aware that these might attract unwanted attention and one might have to work harder to prove professionalism. Shorts are normally worn by boys or students rather than men. Shorts are appropriate sporting events or around the house and yard; otherwise, pants or jeans.

Skirts that are above the knee, exposing the stomach or lower back, backless dresses, spaghetti-strap tops, and shorts (outside of sporting activities) are considered inappropriate for women. If shorts are worn for exercise, they should be knee-length. Pants are acceptable for women (outside the classroom), although most women will wear skirts or dresses. Dresses and skirts should cover the knees, even when sitting. Inappropriate dress could attract unwanted attention.

As Education Volunteers, be advised that the Ministry of Education has established a dress code for teachers, and that teachers/school administrators should be properly and modestly attired at all times, especially in the school environment, observing personal hygiene.

Male teachers have to wear pants that reach their shoes, which should be in good conditions; short hair, no plaiting hair or earrings on campus; no T-shirts with slogans or sleeveless shirts. Female teachers

should wear skirts that reach below the knees; no sleeveless or tight shirts; no clothing that is revealing; and should not wear excessive jewelry in class, including no ankle chains or toe rings or nose rings.

Visible tattoos and body piercings may attract unwanted attention and commentary.

Wearing flip-flops outside of one's home, especially while teaching, is not acceptable and is considered unprofessional and disrespectful. Washable sandals and closed-toe shoes are best.

If you are unsure about how to dress in a certain situation, it is better to be over-dressed. Ask Liberian friends, counterparts, or staff members for advice.

Ultimately, it is important to understand that your dress and every move are noticed by the community. It is essential to be perceived as a professional, and appearance and behavior directly influence that opinion.

Smoking in public is actually against the law, which includes in taxis, outside schools, shops, and generally outdoors, and is generally frowned upon. If you are unable to abstain from smoking during service, this will be a very challenging country for you.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps approach to safety is contained in the "Safety and Security In Depth" section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Liberia Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Liberia. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. Volunteers and their families are encouraged to read the safety and security information at peacecorps.gov/safety.

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and Volunteer safety. There is a section titled "Safety and Security in Depth." Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts' safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

Rewards and Frustrations

Your greatest reward will be basking in the wonderful reputation of being a Peace Corps Volunteer in Liberia. Your predecessors have created a legacy that will help you as you work, live, and travel in Liberia. Liberians genuinely love Volunteers. Anyone over the age of 30 likely had a "Peace Corps" teacher. You will find that younger Liberians may not be as familiar with Peace Corps as their parents, so you may have to explain it to them.

As a foreigner, there will be a perception that you are wealthy, and people may ask you for money and favors. These may range from small requests to borrow items up to paying for a college education. You should be honest and tell people you are not in a position to help someone financially. Gifting or loaning

money misrepresents your purpose for being there and reinforces suspicions that you have money, which directly jeopardizes the safety of you and all other Volunteers.

The infrastructure of the country was destroyed by the war, so you will need patience. Simple tasks take longer, like getting a taxi to run a quick errand. Transportation is a huge challenge, with the difficult roads and shortage of public transportation.

The daily life of a Volunteer is often compared to living in a “fishbowl”; everyone will be curious and interested in all of your activities. You will need to manage all of the attention you receive, be it welcome or unwelcome. You will need to be sensitive to the fact that you represent Peace Corps 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You will need to consider your actions so the Volunteers who come after you will benefit from the same excellent Peace Corps reputation that you will enjoy.

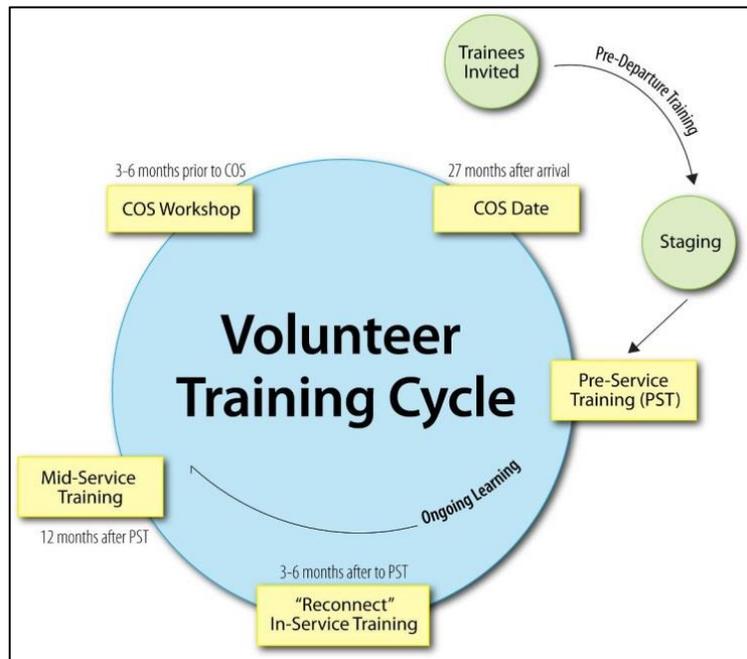
PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Training

Pre-service training (PST) ensures that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform your job. Peace Corps training incorporates widely accepted principles of adult learning and is structured around the experiential learning cycle. Peace Corps provides a training continuum throughout your two years of service to help build and improve your language and cross-cultural skills, on-going language learning, develop and adapt your teaching and other technical skills, address issues concerning health and personal safety, and share experiences and lessons learned with other Volunteers, Peace Corps staff members, and Liberian colleagues. PST is conducted in Liberia by Peace Corps/Liberia staff.

PST affords the opportunity for trainees to develop and test their own resources. As a trainee, you will play an active role in self-education. You will be asked to prepare for an experience in which you will often have to take the initiative and accept responsibility for decisions. The success of your learning will be enhanced by your own effort to take responsibility for your learning and through sharing experiences with others.

PST will last for 12 weeks. Training sessions will be held Monday through Friday and half-day Saturdays. During PST, great emphasis is placed on developing and practicing skills needed for community integration and success in the classroom.



Trainees will arrive in Liberia, have a brief orientation, and then be placed in a local community with a host family for the duration of PST.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Liberia by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Liberia experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Liberia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Liberian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Technical training during PST will focus on teaching math and science in the host-country context. You will learn the communicative teaching methodology used by Peace Corps and how to use it in your teaching assignment in a Liberian school. During PST, you will have technical sessions and a teaching practicum experience. Technical topics may include the following: Liberian education system (formal and informal), teaching methodology, classroom management skills, training of trainers/teachers, lesson plan and curriculum development, and practical youth development and community entry skills. You will participate in demonstration lessons conducted by local teachers and/or currently serving Volunteers and some practice team teaching in classes with local students.

Language Training

As a Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

English is spoken in Liberia, but most Liberians communicate in the dialect of Liberian English. There are also 15 local languages throughout Liberia. Volunteers will learn Liberian English and the basics of a local language based on the location of their site.

Cross-Cultural Training

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Liberia. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Liberia, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. Training will cover topics such as the concept of time, power and hierarchy, gender roles, communication styles, and the concept of self and relationships. Because adjusting to a new culture can be very challenging, you will participate in resiliency training which provides a framework and tools to help with adjustment issues.

The host family experience provides a unique context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Liberia. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Successful sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence Volunteers build by living in, and respectfully integrating into, the Liberia community and culture. Integration into the community not only facilitates good working relationships, but it fosters language learning and cross-cultural acceptance and trust, which help ensure your health, safety, and security.

The PST host family will be invaluable as you learn to navigate within a new culture and language. Cultural knowledge will be infused into all components of PST, but there will also be stand-alone cultural sessions to help you learn about Liberia, your host country.

Health Training

During PST, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and treatment of medical illnesses found in Liberia. You will be expected to practice preventive health and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. Health education topics will nutrition, food and water preparation, emotional health, alcohol awareness, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and common illnesses, domestic and intimate partner violence, emergencies, and medical policies in Liberia.

Additional training will be provided to help manage your mental health while living in a post-conflict and post-epidemic country that is now rebuilding every aspect of the country.

Safety and Security Training

During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace Corps' emergency response and support systems.

Additional topics will include transportation options, safe travel, the emergency action plan, and safety and security issues in Monrovia, including mandated curfews and no-go zones and clubs.

Volunteers wishing to ride a bicycle will also receive safety training and helmets, per the bicycle policy.

Evaluating Learning and Qualifying for Service

The PST experience provides an opportunity not only for the Peace Corps to assess a trainee's competence, but for trainees to re-evaluate their commitment to serve for 27 months to improve the quality of life of the people with whom Volunteers live and work and, in doing so, develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes while adapting existing ones.

Progress in one's own learning is a dialogue between you and the training staff. All of the training staff—including the training manager, and the language, technical, medical, safety and security, and cross-cultural trainers—will work with you toward the highest possible competencies by providing you with feedback on learning objective performance throughout training. After reviewing and observing your performance, the country director makes the final decision on whether you have qualified to serve as a Volunteer in the host country.

Upon successful completion of training, trainees who qualify for Peace Corps service are required by law to swear or affirm an oath of loyalty to the United States; it cannot be waived under any circumstances. The text of the oath is provided below. If you have any questions about the wording or meaning of the oath, consult a staff member during training.

I, (your name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. (So help me God).

Additional Trainings during Volunteer Service

The Peace Corps' training system provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training (Reconnect):** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **Mid-service training** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.

You are expected to improve your knowledge and skills in the areas of technical, language, cross-cultural, diversity, health, and safety throughout your service as a Volunteer. Training staff provide learning objectives during the 27-month continuum to help guide Volunteers throughout service. The manner in which you do this may be formal, through tutoring or workshops organized by the host government or in-country staff, or informally, through conversations and reading. Your learning will continue after you become a Volunteer, formally and through in-service training opportunities, specialized language or technical workshops, and a close-of-service workshop to help you evaluate your service and prepare for your return to the United States.

YOUR HEALTH CARE IN LIBERIA

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. Peace Corps in Liberia maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in Liberia at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Liberia, you will be transported to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility. If the Office of Health Services (OHS) determines that the care is not optimal for your condition at the regional facility, you will be transported to the United States.

Health Issues in Liberia

Liberia is a country with scant to nonexistent health-care resources outside the capitol, and extremely limited resources in Monrovia. This requires a strong emphasis on preventive care.

Both plasmodium falciparum malaria and plasmodium vivax malaria are rampant in Liberia. Volunteers are required to take malaria prophylaxis, weekly mefloquine, daily doxycycline, or daily malorone, to lessen the risk of contracting this potentially deadly disease. Other recommended prevention strategies include mosquito nets and insect repellent containing DEET. The Peace Corps medical officer provides all necessary items for prevention and treatment.

The Peace Corps/Liberia staff have been actively monitoring the Ebola outbreak in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, and the State Department. Once in Liberia, Volunteers will be trained on Ebola awareness and prevention during PST. Additional precautions will be taken in housing and transportation, and Volunteers will work only in communities where there are no known active cases of Ebola.

Additional vector-borne diseases are filariasis, typhus, leishmaniasis, and Lassa fever. Tuberculosis, meningitis, typhoid, and cholera, as well as a variety of bacterial and parasitic diarrheal diseases, are also endemic, mandating that proper water and food safety measures be taken on a daily basis. A water filter will be provided to ensure safe drinking water. Bacterial and fungal skin diseases are easily contracted in a tropical climate, and heatstroke and sunburn are also of concern.

A health manual specific for Liberia will be provided with up-to-date information on each disease and how to prevent it, but it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with these diseases before your arrival.

Helping You Stay Healthy

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Liberia, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, during this time, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at mid-service and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Liberia will consult with the Office of Health Services

in Washington, D.C., or a regional medical officer. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Liberia, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Liberia is to take the following preventive measures:

- Take your prescribed malaria chemoprophylaxis
- Use your mosquito net
- Follow proper food preparation and water decontamination recommendations
- Follow all other avoidance techniques for malaria, food/water borne diseases, and other health ailments that will be discussed with you soon after your arrival

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Liberia during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

Women’s Health Information

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Liberia will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you. Many female Volunteers take menstrual cups (The Diva Cup, The Keeper, The Moon Cup, etc.) to avoid potential problems with availability or disposal of feminine hygiene products.

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer chooses to remain in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps medical standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

The Peace Corps follows the 2012 U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines for screening PAP smears, which recommend women aged 21–29 receive screening PAPs every three years and women aged 30–65 receive screening PAPs every five years. As such, most Volunteers will not receive a PAP during their service, but can use Peace Corps supplied health insurance after service to have an exam.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office. Items that can be purchased locally, like band aids, will be expected to be purchased on your own.

Medical Kit Contents

First Aid Handbook	Decongestant
Ace bandages	Dental floss
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Gloves
Adhesive tape	Hydrocortisone cream
Antacid tablets	Ibuprofen
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Insect repellent
Antibiotic ointment	Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Antifungal cream	Lip balm
Antihistamine	Oral rehydration salts
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner	Scissors
Band-Aids	Sore throat lozenges
Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)	Sterile eye drops
Butterfly closures	Sterile gauze pads
Calagel anti-itch gel	Sunscreen
Condoms	Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Cough lozenges	Tweezers

Note: a multivitamin may be provided during service if you feel unable to maintain a nutritious diet. It will not be provided during training. Other than calcium, supplements will not be provided during service. If you have a preferred multivitamin or over-the-counter brand medication, you should bring it along or make arrangements to have it sent in care packages as generics are used and may change during your service.

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Health Services (OHS). Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Health Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, bring a copy of your immunization record to your pre-departure orientation. If you purchase any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service that are not listed as requirement in your Medical Applicant Portal, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment. Volunteers must be willing to get all required vaccinations unless there is a documented medical contraindication. Failure to accept required vaccination is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John’s wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements. Medications supplied may be generic or equivalent to your current medications.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs (of the current prescription) with you. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps Office of Health Services strongly discourages Volunteers from wearing contact lenses while overseas unless there is a true medical indication documented by your ophthalmologist. Contact lenses, particularly extended use soft contacts, are associated with a variety of eye infections and other inflammatory problems. One of the most serious of these problems is infectious keratitis which can lead to severe cornea damage which could result in permanent blindness requiring corneal transplantation. These risks of permanent eye damage are exacerbated in the Peace Corps environment where the Volunteer’s ability to properly clean the lenses is compromised due to limited access to sterile water as well as decreased effectiveness of cleaning solutions due to prolonged storage in unsatisfactory conditions. In addition, when bacterial eye infections occur, assessment and treatment within hours by a competent ophthalmologist is indicated. This is virtually impossible in the Peace Corps setting. If you feel that you simply must be able to use your contacts occasionally, please consider using single use, daily disposable lenses which do not require cleaning.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health-care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health-care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

Ensuring the safety and security of Volunteers is Peace Corps' highest priority. Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without a serious safety and security incident. Together, the Peace Corps and Volunteers can reduce risk, but cannot truly eliminate all risk.

Beyond knowing that the Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. The Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. The Peace Corps depends on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice—in this case to help manage the risk and impact of burglary—follows:

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work.
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria.
- The Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country counterparts or other community leaders in your new community.
- The Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise.
- You lock your doors and windows.
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live.
- You get to know your neighbors.
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you.
- You don't change residences before being authorized by the Peace Corps.
- You communicate your concerns to Peace Corps staff.

This welcome book contains sections on Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle, Peace Corps Training, Your Health Care, and Safety and Security, all of which include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the training and tools they need to function in the safest way possible and prepare for the unexpected, teaching you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Liberia, there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the United States, particularly those that are irreplaceable or have sentimental value
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the States
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Liberia, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Liberia learn to do the following:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Be careful and conscientious about using electronics (phones, cameras, laptops, iPods, etc.) in public or leaving them unattended
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime occurs in Liberia. You can reduce the risks by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Liberia of which you should be aware:

- Unsafe transportation in taxis, minibuses, trucks, and motorbikes (Peace Corps/Liberia allows specific sites to use motorbikes)
- Pickpockets at taxi stations and know what the transportation prices should be beforehand.
- Scams and team robbery in taxis and be careful how you dress (not too revealing or too much jewelry)
- In discos and nightclubs in Monrovia and other big cities you find more criminals, particularly the off-limits areas.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Liberia may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Liberia will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing

arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also support and assist Volunteers who choose to make a formal complaint with local law enforcement. It is very important that a Volunteer reports an incident when it occurs. The reasons for this include obtaining medical care and emotional support, enabling Peace Corps staff to assess the situation to determine if there is an ongoing safety and security concern, protecting peer Volunteers and preserving the right to file a complaint. Should a Volunteer decide later in the process to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not preserved at the time of the incident.

Office of Victim Advocacy

The Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) is a resource to Volunteers who are victims of crime, including sexual assault and stalking. Victim advocates are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help Volunteers understand their emotional, medical, and legal options so they may make informed decisions to meet their specific needs. The OVA provides a compassionate, coordinated, and supportive response to Volunteers who wish to access Peace Corps support services.

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

Duty phone: 202.409.2704 (available 24/7, call or text)

Email: victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov

Crime Data for Liberia

Crime data and statistics for Liberia, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:

<http://files.peacecorps.gov/manuals/countrydata/liberia.pdf>.

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Volunteers are victims of serious crimes. Crimes that do occur abroad are investigated and prosecuted by local jurisdictional authorities. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to file a complaint with law enforcement, who will then determine whether to prosecute. If you decide to file a complaint, the Peace Corps will help through the process. The Peace Corps staff will ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Further, the Peace Corps will help you exercise your rights to the fullest extent possible under the laws of your host country.

The Peace Corps will train you on how to respond if you are the victim of a serious crime, including how to get to a safe location quickly and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify the Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps staff can provide assistance.

Volunteer Safety Support in Liberia

The Peace Corps approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service. The plan includes information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Liberia's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/L office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you

will do your part to ensure that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Liberia. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/L's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Liberia at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any safety and security incidents to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to current and future Volunteers.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship and to improve people’s lives in the communities where Volunteers serve. Instituting policies and practices to support a diverse and inclusive work and Volunteer environment is essential to achieving this mission.

Through inclusive recruitment and retention of staff and Volunteers, the Peace Corps seeks to reflect the rich diversity of the United States and bring diverse perspectives and solutions to development issues. Additionally, ensuring diversity among staff and Volunteers enriches interpersonal relations and communications for the staff work environment, the Volunteer experience, and the communities in which Volunteers serve.

The Peace Corps defines diversity as a “collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures. Diversity also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from and where they have lived and their differences of thought and life experiences.”

We define inclusion as a “culture that connects each [staff member and Volunteer] to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.” The Peace Corps promotes inclusion throughout the lifecycle of Volunteers and staff. When staff and Volunteers are able to share their rich diversity in an inclusive work environment, the Peace Corps mission is better fulfilled. More information about diversity and inclusion can be found in the Volunteer Handbook.

An inclusive agency is one that seeks input from everyone in an effort to find the best ideas and strategies possible to execute its objectives. When input is solicited, heard, and considered from a rich multitude of individuals the best course of action usually emerges. The Peace Corps seeks to improve its operations and effectiveness by ensuring that all voices and ideas are heard and that all Volunteers and staff feel welcome and appreciated. When each person’s voice is heard, the agency is stronger and the impact of Volunteers is strengthened.

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

Once Volunteers arrive at their sites, diversity and inclusion principles remain the same but take on a different shape, in which your host community may share a common culture and you—the Volunteer—are the outsider. You may be in the minority, if not the sole American like you, at your site. You will begin to notice diversity in perspectives, ethnicity, age, depth of conversation, and degree of support you may receive. For example, elders, youth, and middle-aged individuals all have unique points of views on topics you may discuss, from perspectives on work, new projects, and social engagements to the way community issues are addressed.

Peace Corps staff in your host country recognize the additional adjustment issues that come with living and working in new environments and will provide support and guidance to Volunteers. During pre-service training, a session will be held to discuss diversity and inclusion and how you can serve as an ally for your peers, honoring diversity, seeking inclusion, challenging prejudice and exclusion, exploring your own biases, and learning mechanisms to cope with these adjustment issues. The Peace Corps looks forward to having Volunteers from varied backgrounds that include a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, sexual orientations and gender identities. The agency expects you to work collaboratively to create an inclusive environment that transcends differences and finds common ground.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Outside of Liberia's capital, residents of rural communities might have had little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical U.S. behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Liberia are known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community where you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

As a Volunteer and representative of the United States, you are responsible not only for sharing the diversity of U.S. culture (to include your individual culture and the culture of other Americans) with your host country national counterparts, but also for learning from the diversity of your host country. An important aspect of this cultural exchange will be to demonstrate inclusiveness within your community in a sensitive manner. Additionally, you will share the responsibility of learning about the diversity of your fellow Volunteers and exploring how best to respect differences while serving as supportive allies as you go through this challenging new experience.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in your host country, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental, compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence they have in the United States; male Volunteers may be expected to not perform chores or other tasks ascribed to women; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead a diversity, inclusion, and sensitivity discussion during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support. This training covers how to adapt personal choices and behavior to be respectful of the host country culture, which can have a direct impact on how Volunteers are viewed and treated by their new communities. The Peace Corps emphasizes professional behavior and cross-cultural sensitivity among volunteers and within their communities to help integrate and be successful during service.

An ideal way to view the pursuit of cross-cultural adaptation and/or cultural integration is to recognize that everything done in your host country has both a specific reason for why it is done and an expected outcome. Trust that your host country counterparts are acting with positive intentions and work to mutually seek understanding and commonality. Language differences may add a communication barrier and lead to misunderstandings. Listen more than you speak and seek clarity. Remember that having the ability to laugh at yourself and at life's little surprises goes a long way—laughter is universal.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Gender Role Issues

Gender is a set of socially constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviors, and opportunities. Gender differs from sex, which refers specifically to biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. Gender roles and expectations are learned, change over time, and vary within and among cultures. Volunteers are trained in gender awareness as they approach their work in the host country. Gender roles in the United States may differ greatly from those in your country of service. It is important to absorb and to attempt to understand the cultural nuances of gender where you are. For example, in many cultures males are held in higher regard than females and females may manage the households. In some places, females are encouraged to attend school, while in other countries females are discouraged from engaging in such activities and instead work inside or outside of the home.

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them. They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

Female Volunteers who are single are often considered an oddity because most Liberian women, particularly in rural areas, are married, some with children, by the time they are in their 20s. Single women also face what in the U.S. would be considered inappropriate advances from male colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances. Gender roles have changed drastically over the years in the United States; it can be a challenge to adapt to a culture with more traditional roles and to know how to effectively set boundaries. Unwanted attention, and even harassment, can be one of the greatest frustrations as a female Volunteer.

Above and beyond traditional gender roles and possible harassment, is the possibility of sexual violence. The rate of sexual violence against women is high in Liberia. Rape was used as a weapon of war, and the government has launched campaigns to address this problem with the hope of reducing its occurrence. Domestic violence also occurs in this post-conflict country. According to police, most acts of sexual violence occur between people who know each other. Female Volunteers must exercise caution with their consumption of alcohol and going out in the evening unaccompanied. Volunteers will learn what is and is not acceptable in the Liberian culture, such as when it is and is not advisable to invite men into their homes. Often, female Volunteers must take an even more conservative approach than their Liberian friends and colleagues.

Strategies to deal with these issues are discussed in training, and the Peace Corps staff can offer help in resolving any problems.

Volunteers should report any concerns or incidents to the Peace Corps medical officer, programming staff, or country director immediately.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Volunteers of color sometimes, but not always, have a different Peace Corps experience than white Volunteers. Because of limited exposure, some foreign nationals will expect to see U.S. citizens who are white. Cultures of the world do not typically envision the States as a place of rich diversity with various culturally acceptable perspectives, personalities, and characteristics. Thus, a Volunteer of color may be questioned as about their U.S. citizenship.

In places where American stereotypes and/or caste system dynamics influence perception, Volunteers of color should be mindful of the reasons for these views without creating contentious environments. All too often, host country nationals are simply unaware of the diversity of the United States and require additional information and dialogue. Direct interactions with someone new or something different can take time to get used to, but those who take the time tend to be better off. Although host country nationals may assert that the United States is made up of predominately one race, we know that is not true. If a member of your community knows of compatriots living in the United States or of notable U.S. citizens of color, you can build on this knowledge as a point of reference for discussing diversity within the States.

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In African and Latin American countries, host country nationals may say “welcome

home” to African Americans or Hispanic Americans. Sometimes Volunteers expect to be “welcomed home” but are disappointed when they are not. More commonly, if a Volunteer is mistaken for a host-country national citizen, he or she is expected to behave as a male or female in that culture behaves, and to speak the local language fluently. Host country nationals are sometimes frustrated when the Volunteer does not speak the local language with ease. Conversely, some in the same country may call you a “sell out” because they feel the United States has not done enough to help with social issues. These instances can be turned into teachable moments for the Volunteer and the host country national, in which the Volunteer can ask questions surrounding perception and collaborate with respect to issues and projects at hand, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. All Volunteers, to include white Volunteers and those of color, should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture in your country of service. These issues may significantly affect how Volunteers interact with fellow Volunteers and host country nationals. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience in interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

African-American Volunteers may be treated according to local norms because it is assumed they are African. However, once an American accent is detected, Liberians realize the Volunteer is American rather than Liberian. African-American Volunteers may have a different experience in Liberia than in other West African countries due to the history of America and Liberia, and because Liberians understand more about the history of African Americans.

Asian-American Volunteers have expressed frustration that some Liberians will call them “Chinese” no matter how they explain their ethnic origins or status as Asian Americans. They may be teased by children and asked if they know kung-fu or karate. While in the capital, they might be confused with Chinese workers who are involved in different infrastructure projects.

Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Liberia’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Most cultures in Liberia consider homosexuality taboo, and certain sex acts are criminalized. Homosexuality certainly exists in Liberia, but there is no open homosexual community.

Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Liberia is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbrcpv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps’ LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at spectrum@peacecorps.gov.

For Ally Volunteers: Peace Corps staff intends to create open, inclusive, and accepting environments. As an agency, the Peace Corps encourages Volunteers to serve as allies to their LGBTQ colleagues in order to create a safe environment.

Many LGBTQ Volunteers have served successfully in Liberia and have very fond memories of their community and service. LGBTQ support groups may be available in your country of service, providing

a network to support the needs of the Peace Corps LGBTQA community. Peace Corps staff will work with Volunteers to provide them with locally informed perspectives.

Volunteers should not expect to freely discuss their sexual orientation with new friends and family; this can obviously be very difficult. Peace Corps staff as well as the peer support network will offer support as you navigate the culture.

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Health Services determined you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without additional medical support, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Liberia without a significant risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Liberia staff will work with disabled Volunteers to support them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

As a result of the protracted war, there are many amputees in Liberia, with a concentration in Monrovia. Many support themselves by begging, so a Volunteer with disabilities may receive more requests for assistance.

Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples

Before committing to Peace Corps service, couples should consider how different degrees of enthusiasm about Peace Corps service, adaptation to the physical and cultural environment, and homesickness will affect their lives. It can be helpful to recognize that your reactions to these issues will change throughout your service, and you may not always feel the same as your partner. You and your partner will have different jobs, different schedules, and difference societal pressures. One partner may learn the language faster than the other or have a more satisfying assignment. This can create competition and put different kinds of stress on each person. Anticipating how these pressures will affect you and your partner differently throughout your service can help you remain a source of support for each other. Making friends with other Volunteers is a critical part of fitting into the larger volunteer culture and can also be a good way to expand your support network.

While couples will live together during their service, they may live in separate towns during their pre-service training. This is a stressful time for most Volunteers, and it can be helpful to discuss in advance how you will deal with this potential separation. Your partner can be an important source of stability but can also add stress to your training experience. You may feel torn between traveling to visit your partner and focusing on your training, your host family, and friends you have made at your training site.

Couples often face pressure from host country nationals to change their roles to conform better with traditional Liberia relationships. Liberia men and women alike will often not understand American relationship dynamics and may be outwardly critical of relationships that do not adhere to traditional gender roles. It is also helpful to think about how pressures to conform to Liberia culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both.

Volunteer couples will receive a warm welcome in Liberia. Marriage is a respected institution. Even so, monogamy is rare in Liberian relationships. A male Volunteer in a couple may be pressured to find a Liberian girlfriend. This may come from men, who take pride in such pursuits, or women, who want to be the girlfriend. A female Volunteer in a couple may be approached by men even after it is clear she is in a serious relationship. Overall, as compared to single Volunteers, Volunteer couples receive far fewer sexual advances and marriage proposals.

Having children is a great source of pride in Liberian culture. For those who do not have children, it is also a great source of shame. People will be surprised if Volunteers are married and do not have children. Some may assume the woman is barren. They will find it hard to believe that the couple does not want children or are waiting until later to have them. Couples should be prepared for many direct questions on the topic. If a Volunteer does have children, people will love to see photos and hear all about them.

Liberia has very clear gender roles. Men work and socialize outside the home and bring home the majority of the family's money. Women tend to the home, raise the children, and may sell goods in the market. Volunteers, married or otherwise, tend to blur these lines. Male Volunteers may find themselves cooking or washing clothes frequently. Female Volunteers may engage in activities outside the house that are typically reserved for men (e.g. having a drink in public, riding a bicycle). These behaviors may be strange to Liberians, but they are met with amusement and appreciation for the Volunteers' participation or hard work.

Public displays of affection are rare in Liberia. People only infrequently hold hands and never openly kiss. In fact, it is unusual to see a couple together outside the home. If you do choose to engage in public displays of affection, you will not offend anyone but you will draw extra attention. Even a simple hug between Volunteers can be looked on with great curiosity.

Volunteer couples will have to work harder to be included in activities, both within their community and with other Volunteers. People will assume the couple has plans or that they are not interested in socializing. Additionally, people are less likely to pay a visit or call to check in on Volunteer couples. Volunteer couples can enjoy rich relationships the same as any Volunteer, but they will have to be proactive when developing and maintaining these new social ties.

As most Volunteers in Liberia are paired to share a single house, people in the community may feel less at ease inviting you to events. Those Volunteers have to make extra effort not to spend all of their time with their housemate, and should actively cultivate their own sets of friends and acquaintances. You should seek to have your own experience as a Volunteer.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Liberia is tolerant of diverse religions, therefore most Volunteers find Liberia welcoming of their religious preferences. Volunteers unaccustomed to practicing a religion may be challenged to explain their reluctance and invited to attend local events. Most Volunteers find ways to address these issues and feel quite at home in the religious diversity and tolerance of Liberia.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Varying Ages

In Liberian culture, people respect age as bringing wisdom and experience. Volunteers in their 20s sometimes find they have to make an extra effort to be accepted as professional colleagues. Older Volunteers, in contrast, are automatically accorded respect. In turn, older Volunteers might find that almost too much is expected of them because of their age; or conversely older Volunteers who are used to living independent lives may at first feel frustrated by the fact that younger Liberians want to do things for them.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in Liberia. They will often have access to individuals and insights that are not available to younger Volunteers. On the other hand, they will be in a distinct minority within the Volunteer population and could find themselves feeling isolated, looked up to, or ignored.

Older Volunteers are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps' program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for older trainees, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A 50+ individual may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some 50+ Volunteers may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

More than younger Volunteers, older Volunteers may have challenges in maintaining lifelong friendships and dealing with financial matters from afar. They may want to consider assigning power of attorney to someone in the States.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Liberia?

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag. Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for any extra weight or additional bags.

Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

What is the electric current in Liberia?

Liberia used to use 110 volt electricity, but that has changed and now 220 volt electricity is predominant. The wall sockets, however, have not changed, so the U.S.-style flat-pronged plugs are the norm. There are some European-style plugs with two pins, so Volunteers will see a variety. It may be useful to bring one plug adaptor set, or purchase them locally, if needed. Adapters are readily available in many shops in Liberia.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which will cover your expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Traveler's checks are not readily accepted in Liberia, but may be used in other countries should you plan to travel. Credit cards are not used in Liberia, but may be useful if you travel to other countries. You will need to exercise extra caution in safeguarding them should you choose to bring them, as identity theft and credit card fraud are a problem in West Africa. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Vacation leave, or any time away from site, may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work, or exceed two weeks. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave (contact your insurance company for information). Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items abroad. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Liberia do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking.

What should I bring as gifts for Liberia friends and my host family?

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away. If you choose to bring something, they should be inexpensive tokens of appreciation.

Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Volunteers may share housing with a fellow Volunteer. Some sites require up to a two-day drive to the capital.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The Counseling and Outreach Unit can be reached at 855.855.1961, select option 1, ext. 1470. After business hours, on weekends, and on holidays, the COU duty officer can be reached at the same number. For non-emergency questions, your family can contact your country desk staff through the main Peace Corps number: 855.855.1961.

How easy is it to call home from Liberia?

Cellphone service is widely available throughout Liberia. However, not all sites have great service. Calls to the U.S. are possible, though some Volunteers will not have service in their houses. It is five cents a minutes to call the U.S. from Liberia. Internet calls to the U.S. depend on the bandwidth available through the level of your Internet service, but may be difficult. You should not count on this being available.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

There are multi-system cellphones available for purchase in the United States, but they are "locked" to the frequency of a particular provider. To use that phone in Liberia, you would need to have it "unlocked," which may be difficult in the U.S. or in Liberia. You are encouraged to purchase a cellphone in Liberia (+/- \$40) and then to purchase the SIM card from a provider. Many Volunteers buy a pre-paid scratch-card and then add to their account as needed. If you do decide to bring your own phone, make sure it is a minimum 3G phone and unlocked so a local SIM will work. Liberia cell providers operate on a GSM network.

Will there be email and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?

If you have your own laptop, a solution that may be of interest is the use of a data card. Several cellphone companies offer internet service through cellphone technology. You can purchase a data card and it dials a nearby cellphone tower for service. It is slow, but works in most towns (but not between communities). The data card is currently available for \$40 and there is no monthly fee. If you have a newer laptop that requires a "smartcard" then you will need to buy a compatible cellphone that can attach to your computer or bring a separate data card reading device. Be aware that electricity is almost 100 percent generator-

based and many generators are not compliant with electronic equipment. For this reason, you should consider power protection with your laptop.

WELCOME LETTER FROM LIBERIA VOLUNTEER

Dear invitee,

Welcome to the Peace Corps/Liberia family! I know you are probably going through a mixed bag of emotions right now: excitement, fear of the unknown, impatience to finally start, and maybe even second thoughts. We all went through it. My advice for the next few months; spend time with family and friends, and enjoy American food. Looking through the suggested list of things to bring wouldn't be a bad idea, but don't stress it!

I'm jealous of you. You're about to embark on a grand adventure and my time in Liberia—for now—is coming to its close. Liberia is a great country to serve in. Liberians love Peace Corps Volunteers and are super-friendly welcoming people. I hate lumping a whole group of unique individuals like this, but you'll see that I speak the truth. The Peace Corps/Liberia staff are the best. Teaching in Liberia is a fulfilling job. The country is stunningly beautiful, though I do admit, some of its charms are an acquired taste.

I know I've painted a rosy picture thus far, but don't get me wrong, some days will be hard. Some days you will feel like you're wasting your time. Some days you will feel a deep gut-wrenching loneliness. Some days you will feel inadequate. Some days it will feel like Liberia is against you. And, oh, the diarrhea you will suffer through. However, those days will pass. There will be days when you feel on top of the world. You will overcome challenges and feel unstoppable. Fleetingly, you will feel completely fulfilled.

So let me see, my best advice: Have a sense of humor, laugh at yourself, laugh at the crazy situations in which you will find yourself, just laugh. Be open-minded and flexible. Liberia will teach you so much if you let it. Savor every moment, this is a unique chance to truly experience another culture.

Once again, welcome. Training is long, but you do learn important stuff and you'll survive it. Liberia is like wine (but not palm wine): It only gets better with time!

Sincerely, Luc

P.S. Post any questions you have on the Facebook group; we'd all be thrilled to help!

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Liberia and is based on their experiences. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You can always have things sent to you later. You obviously cannot bring everything here, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. Remember, you can get almost everything you need in Liberia. Clothing can easily be tailor-made from local fabrics. Second-hand clothing is also popular across Liberia and widely available. It's not necessary to bring a large amount of clothing.

General Information

Many things are available in Liberia for purchase on the local market, such as clothing, shoes, and toiletries. However, these items may be expensive and/or a different quality than you would like. If you are a unique size or prefer a particular brand, you should bring it with you. Any jewelry should be modest and of low value; anything considered extravagant may attract unwanted attention.

All Volunteers will be working in conjunction with government ministries, NGOs, and/or schools. It is important to dress neatly, professionally, and appropriately. More importantly, it is hot and humid. Light-colored cotton and other natural fabrics will be most comfortable; breathable, lightweight, and loose-fitting clothes that protect skin from the sun are best.

For bags, check two bags and bring a carry on: a large suitcase, a second backpacking pack or duffel bag, and a smaller backpack to take to school.

Peace Corps/Liberia will reimburse you if you are charged to check a second bag or anything allowed in the Volunteer Handbook (pg 34). Please get a receipt. Again, there is a 100-pound limit on checked baggage.

Clothing

- Underwear and bras (these wear out quickly, bring more than you think you need)
- Swimsuit
- Undershirts, tank tops, and lightweight T-shirts
- Clothes to lounge around in and/or sleep in (athletic shorts, yoga pants, leggings)
- T-shirts (can be found everywhere)
- Jeans (at least 2 pairs)
- Button-downs, polos, nice shirts
- 1 legitimate presentable outfit (for high-level meetings)
- Shorts (for women, should be knee-length or capris)
- Knee-length skirts (or longer) for teaching (no shorter than an inch above the knee)
- 2 pairs of nicer pants (for men)
- 1 sweatshirt, sweater, or jacket (for rainy season, travel, when it's cold at night)

Note: Don't forget to bring clothes you like for socializing outside your community, with other PCVs, and on vacation; you will regret it if you don't. You can also wear a larger variety of clothes in Monrovia. But do know that hand washing is hard on clothes and they'll wear out faster.

Shoes

- Durable sandals (e.g., Chacos, Tevas, Keens)

- Running shoes (if your shoe size is hard to find in the U.S., it will be hard to find here too)
- One pair of dress shoes that is still comfortable to walk in (ballet flats work well; bring one or two pairs in useful colors like black or gold/tan)

Travel Essentials

You will be traveling a lot for two years; here are things to make it easier!

- Backpacking backpack
- TSA-approved locks for baggage
- Packable sleeping pad (e.g., Therm-a-Rest or Big Agnes)
- Water bottle (consider one with a small mouth for bush taxi rides)

Travel Options (not essential)

- Money belt
- Travel pillow/stuffed animal
- Sleeping bag liner or travel sheets (e.g., DreamSack)

Electronics

Not required, but strongly recommended and might make your work/life easier

- Smartphone (unlocked; it's the best way to get internet at site)
- Portable speakers
- Laptop (an inexpensive one, as it's hard to get repairs; most PCVs bring one)
- External hard drive
- SD cards and USB sticks
- Camera, quality is your choice, same applies as with laptops
- Headlamp
- Solar chargers (fantastic, when they work; read reviews)
- Extra batteries or battery extenders for all your electronics
- Battery-powered hair clippers (for DIY haircuts)

Toiletries

Bring lots of these

- If you wear glasses, bring 2 pairs, consider prescription sunglasses as well (contacts are not recommended due to elevated rates of eye infections and contact solution is hard to find)
- Three-month supply of prescription medications, to last through pre-service training (Peace Corps will order for you during service); copy of prescriptions
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Lotion
- Brush/comb
- Deodorant (bring a lot)
- Baby wipes
- Toothpaste, toothbrush, and holder
- Razors/shaving cream
- Nail clippers, nail file
- Liquid hand sanitizer/hand wipes
- Facial soap
- Menstrual items (tampons can be found in Monrovia but not elsewhere; consider bringing a menstrual cup or other reusable option)
- Hair ties, bobby pins, headbands, etc.
- Haircutting scissors for DIY haircuts (hard to make it to Monrovia for haircuts)

Kitchen

- Favorite spices (hard to find here and expensive)
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman with can opener and corkscrew
- Knives (i.e., chef knife, bread knife, paring knife; pack in checked luggage)
- Non-stick pan
- Spatula, wooden spoon, tongs
- 2–7 plastic food containers
- Zip-top bags (of varying sizes)
- French press and coffee (if you drink normally)

Miscellaneous

- 1 towel (some people use *lappa*, colorful local fabric, instead of towels)
- 1 set of sheets (or 2 if you want one while the other is being washed)
- Re-useable shopping bag

School Supplies

Schools will have very few, if any, resources.

- Math/science textbooks that you really like
- World map, map of Africa, subject posters
- Office supplies: highlighters, markers, ruler, solar calculator, scissors (good ones), stickers
- Pocket dictionary, consider English as a second language version
- Crayons
- Coloring books
- Children's books (everyone will read them here, including your students, all other books you can get on an ereader)
- Flash cards (high-school students will use them): multiplication, division, addition, subtraction, science, sight words (kids will like them), letters (kids will like them)
- Games

What NOT to Bring

- White chalk (if you want colored or sidewalk chalk, bring it)
- Books (bring a few if you feel so inclined but you get an ereader during PST, save the weight)
- More than 1 jacket or hoodie

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items are relevant to everyone, and the list is not comprehensive.

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour phone number: 855.855.1961 ext. 1470).
- Give family and friends the Peace Corps [On the Home Front](#) handbook.

Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish service; if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service abroad, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

Voting

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

Personal Effects

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. Information about loan deferment is at peacecorps.gov/loans.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.

- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

Peace Corps headquarters toll-free number: 855.855.1961, press 1, then extension number (see below)

Peace Corps mailing address: Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street NW
Washington, DC 20526

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Country Desk Officer	ext. 2861 liberia@peacecorps.gov	202.692.2861
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWTSatoTravel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.544.1802
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865 staging@peacecorps.gov	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704