

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

ARMENIA



*A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS*

June 2015





A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps Invitee,

On behalf of the Peace Corps/Armenia staff, congratulations on your invitation to serve in Armenia!

We strongly recommend that you read this welcome book carefully. Volunteers and staff have worked hard on its content and it contains updated and accurate information about Volunteer service and living conditions in Armenia. It will likely not answer every question you have. Therefore, we encourage you to reach out to current Volunteers through social media and other means. Keep in mind that individual Volunteer experiences vary greatly even within a small and homogeneous country like Armenia.

During pre-service training (PST), you will stay with a host family. After PST, at your permanent site, you will be assigned to live with a host family for at least three months. The benefits of living with a host family include immersion into Armenian life, language, and culture; improved safety and security; community integration; and having a place to call home. At the end of three months we will encourage, but not require, you to stay with your assigned family or another host family that you have identified. Many of you will maintain a close bond with your host family throughout your service and even after it.

Armenia is a country of contrasts. It is a relatively newly formed state having regained independence after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Yet it is also an ancient society that can be traced back to more than 2,500 years ago. While Armenians are very proud of their nation and of their heritage, many emigrate because of the lack of paid employment in the country.

We are committed to preparing you for both the opportunities and challenges ahead. While there are great needs in the assignment areas of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and community and youth development (CYD), there are challenges and even impediments to success that will test you and the counterparts with whom you work. Sometimes, they may even test your resolve and commitment to service. We will discuss these challenges and opportunities with you during your PST.

PST is a time for assessment on both your part and ours. The Peace Corps is committed to supporting Volunteers in having a positive and productive influence in their host communities. To be sworn in as Volunteers, trainees must successfully complete language, cross-cultural, technical, safety and security, and health training demonstrating the required language proficiency level and ability to meet the Core Expectations of the Peace Corps and serve with professionalism. To this end, we strongly encourage you to work on language acquisition and prepare for your technical assignment before you leave the U.S.

The Peace Corps experience is not for everyone. If, after reading through these materials, you decide that the Peace Corps is not for you, this is OK. It is better that you make this decision now and withdraw yourself from consideration in order to make a position open for someone who is committed and ready.

The Peace Corps/Armenia staff is certainly committed to supporting you in achieving a rewarding and productive experience, maintaining your health and safety, and integrating successfully within your host community. As is sometimes said, Peace Corps service is what you make of it. We are looking forward to welcoming you to the country and to supporting you during your service.

Terri Gureno, Director of Management and Operations
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Peace Corps/Armenia

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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 responsively 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/ARMENIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Armenia

The Peace Corps program in Armenia began in 1992. Since then, over 800 Volunteers have served in the country. During the first years, conditions were very difficult, with no electricity or heat. The country was reeling from the aftermath of a devastating 1988 earthquake, the breakup of the Soviet Union, and a war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave.

Today, conditions have significantly improved. There is regular electricity throughout the country and Yerevan, the capital, is a modern city with a European atmosphere with a variety of restaurants, cafes, jazz clubs, and Internet cafes and new hotels and restaurants have been built near Lake Sevan, Gyumri, and other regional cities. Still, rural poverty is pervasive, and the loss of hope for a prosperous future among some Armenians forces them to emigrate to other countries for employment.

After years of Soviet rule, Peace Corps Volunteers were the first Americans many Armenians had ever met. Living with the people in their communities, Volunteers have brought hope of a better future, and many have formed lifelong friendships with Armenian counterparts, friends, and neighbors. There are currently 65 Volunteers serving in villages and towns throughout the country. The Peace Corps is well established in Armenia and has a strong reputation for effective grassroots development work.

Peace Corps Programming in Armenia

Peace Corps/Armenia has two projects: teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and community and youth development (CYD).

Volunteers in the TEFL project have been teaching English at village and town secondary schools, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning since 1992. All TEFL Volunteers co-teach classes with Armenian counterpart teachers. The TEFL project has two goals: (1) to improve teacher effectiveness in the classroom through consciously forming communities of practice with their TEFL counterparts, and (2) to improve student academic performance and success in life.

CYD Volunteers work with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions, and youth centers to empower community organizations and youth to build and sustain a strong civil society. Peace Corps Volunteers work in communities throughout the country to accomplish two goals: (1) to increase the capacity and professionalism of organizations and staff and (2) to implement programs that lead to positive youth development.

In addition to their primary assignments, Volunteers carry out small-scale projects in youth development, such as camps (Girls Leading Our World [GLOW], Teaching Our Boys Excellence [TOBE]), spelling bees, writing contests, sports tournaments, and other after-school and summer community development activities. Volunteers conduct health and environmental workshops, develop grant proposals for community development projects, and organize other youth development activities.

In addition to project-specific activities, Volunteers collaborate with each other and community members in other sectors. Volunteers integrate cross-sector priorities (Gender Equality, Disabilities, Volunteerism, Technology for Development, Youth as Resources) into their activities. Volunteers also help Armenian communities gain access to, and make effective use of, information technologies and reach out to empower girls and boys through education, community involvement, and exposure to new ideas and approaches to proactively manage their quality of life.

Please note that monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (MRE) is an integral part of your service, and essential for documenting your work and measuring the progress you achieve throughout your service. As a Volunteer, you are expected to submit periodical reports accompanied with quality data through the Peace Corps' data collection tools, which will be used to analyze Peace Corps/Armenia's overall activities and achievements, as well as for future planning purposes. Also, at the end of your service, you will have actual results and data reflecting your personal achievements!



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: ARMENIA AT A GLANCE

History

Although repeatedly invaded, conquered, and ruled by others, Armenia has preserved its national and cultural identity for more than 2,600 years. Armenians take great pride in the fact that for a few generations during the time of Pompeii and Julius Caesar, Armenia was powerful enough to challenge the Roman Empire. Its subsequent history was marked by struggles for independence and the domination of many foreign powers.

The foundations of Armenian civilization were laid in the sixth century B.C. on the ruins of the ancient kingdom of Urartu. In about 550 B.C., the area became a province of Persia's Achaemenian Empire. In 331 B.C., Armenia was overrun by Alexander the Great and, in 301 B.C., became part of the Seleucid Empire.

With Rome's conquest of the Seleucids in 190–189 B.C., Armenia was divided into two provinces: Greater Armenia and Sophene. The nation was reunified by King Tigranes II (95–55 B.C.) and reached the height of its power. In 66 B.C., however, Tigranes was forced to cede territory and form an alliance with Rome. Armenia subsequently became the focus of the Roman and Parthian-Persian rivalry that lasted until the third century.

By converting Arsacid King Tiridates III, the ruler of Parthia, to Christianity, St. Gregory the Illuminator brought about Armenia's permanent break from Persia and the East. Christianity became the official religion of the Armenian state in A.D. 301. In about 390, the country was divided into Byzantine Armenia and Persian Armenia.

The annexation of Armenia by the briefly revived Byzantine Empire in the 11th century was followed by invasions of the Seljuk Turks, who brought the country under Turkish domination in the last quarter of the 11th century. In the 13th century, Armenia, much of which was then part of Georgia, was overrun by the Mongols.

Beginning in the 16th century, Armenia was once more the object of contention between two hostile powers, the Ottoman Empire and Iran. This situation continued—with a brief interlude of Armenian independence from 1722–30—through the 18th century. During this time, the country became a trade link between Asia and Europe.

The advance of Russia into the Caucasus early in the 19th century inspired a renewal of Armenian culture. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 and the Treaty of San Stefano, the issue grew into the "Armenian question." But attempts to effect reforms resulted only in a series of Turkish massacres and forced exodus of the Armenian populace between 1894–1917.

Following their conquest by Russia in 1916, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan formed the Transcaucasian Alliance, which was dissolved after just a few months. A series of political upheavals, including the brief appearance of an independent Armenian republic in 1920, eventually led to the reunion of the three states as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, which was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922. In 1936, the new Soviet Constitution gave Armenia the status of a republic of the USSR.

In 1988, a massive earthquake leveled the northern cities of Leninakan (now Gyumri) and Spitak, killing about 25,000 people and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

Armenia became independent from the collapsing Soviet Union on September 21, 1991. In the years that followed, Armenia fought neighboring Azerbaijan for control of Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous region that was governed by Azerbaijan even though a majority of the region's population was Armenian. A cease-fire agreement was reached in 1994.

In the ensuing 20 years, the Minsk Group, which includes France, United States, and Russia, has attempted to broker a peace agreement between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The situation remains unresolved.

Government

The Republic of Armenia has an executive branch that includes a president, who is elected to a five-year term, and a prime minister, and a legislative branch comprised of a national assembly or parliament. Members of parliament are elected to four-year terms. The judicial branch includes a Supreme Court system, as well as regional and city courts.

Peace Corps/Armenia is currently collaborating with the ministries of Higher Education and Science, Sport and Youth Affairs, and Foreign Affairs.

Economy

Under the old Soviet central planning system, Armenia developed a modern industrial sector, supplying machine tools, textiles, and other manufactured goods to sister republics in exchange for raw materials and energy.

Following Soviet rule and after several years of double-digit economic growth, Armenia faced a severe economic recession in 2009, with GDP declining more than 14 percent, despite large loans from multilateral institutions. Sharp declines in the construction sector and workers' remittances, particularly from Russia, were the main reasons for the downturn. The economy began to recover in 2010 with 2.1 percent growth, and picked up to 4.6 percent growth in 2011, before slowing to 3.8 percent in 2012 and 3.5 percent in 2013.

Over the past two decades, Armenia has switched to small-scale agriculture and away from the large agro-industrial complexes of the Soviet era. It has managed to reduce poverty, slash inflation, stabilize its currency, and privatize most small- and medium-sized enterprises. Nevertheless, Armenia's geographic isolation, narrow export base, and pervasive monopolies in key business sectors have made it particularly vulnerable to the sharp deterioration in the global economy and the economic downturn in Russia.

The conflict with Azerbaijan over the ethnic Armenian-dominated region of Nagorno-Karabakh contributed to a severe economic decline in the early 1990s and Armenia's borders with Turkey remain closed. Armenia is particularly dependent on Russian commercial and governmental support and most key Armenian infrastructure is Russian-owned and/or managed, especially in the energy sector. The electricity distribution system was privatized in 2002 and bought by Russia's RAO-UES in 2005. Natural gas is primarily imported from Russia but a natural gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia was completed in December 2008, and gas deliveries expanded after the April 2010 completion of the Yerevan Thermal Power Plant.

Armenia's severe trade imbalance has been offset somewhat by international aid, remittances from Armenians working abroad, and direct foreign investment. Armenia joined the World Trade Organization in 2003.

The government made some improvements in tax and customs administration in recent years, but anti-corruption measures have been ineffective. Additionally, the economic downturn has led to a sharp drop in tax revenue and forced the government to accept large loan packages from Russia, the International Monetary Fund, and other international financial institutions.

Armenia will need to pursue additional economic reforms to regain economic growth and improve economic competitiveness and employment opportunities, especially given its economic isolation from two of its nearest neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

People and Culture

The last official census was conducted in 2011, (<http://armstat.am/en/>). The figures from the 2011 census indicate there are approximately 2.871 million people in Armenia, but given the high rates of emigration to Russia, Europe, and the United States, the actual population is probably much smaller. The capital city of Yerevan has a population of 1.4 million. The next largest cities are Gyumri and Vanadzor.

The country's ethnic composition is 95.9 percent Armenian, 1.7 percent Kurdish (including Yazidis), 1.6 percent Russian, 0.3 percent Ukrainian, 0.2 percent Assyrian, 0.1 percent Greek, and 0.2 percent other. Several Armenian enclaves exist in neighboring countries, the most important of which is Nagorno-Karabakh (also referred to as "Artsakh") in Azerbaijan, where the population is 90 percent Armenian. The official language is Armenian, although many people also speak Russian. The majority of the population is Armenian Apostolic Christian.

Armenia has a strong musical tradition. Many children take music lessons or attend music schools. If you have a small, portable musical instrument, it's recommended that you bring it with you. Additionally, if you read piano music, you may have opportunities to practice. Traditional Armenian instruments include the *doudouk*, a double-reed wooden flute; the *dehol*, a drum held under the arm; the *kemancha*, a stringed instrument played with a bow; and the *zourna*, another type of double-reed flute.

Armenians are extremely hospitable and welcoming to Americans. They are also strong and determined as they struggle to recover from the collapse of the Soviet Union and a dramatic drop in their standard of living, the war with Azerbaijan, and the disastrous 1988 earthquake.

Geography

The historical area known as Greater Armenia covers more than 260,000 square kilometers (104,000 square miles). The Republic of Armenia today constitutes only about 10 percent of that area, or 29,800 square kilometers (11,920 square miles). Slightly larger than Maryland, Armenia is the smallest of the former Soviet republics. Despite its small size, Armenia's highland location at the junction of various biogeographical regions has produced a variety of landscapes: semi-desert, steppe, forest, alpine meadow, and high-altitude tundra.



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Armenia and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although the Peace Corps tries to make sure all these links are active and current, the Peace Corps 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 experiences, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and please keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Armenia

<http://www.state.gov/>

The Department of State's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Under the Countries & Regions tab, click on the A–Z List of Countries and Other Areas to find Armenia 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.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5275.htm>

U.S. Department of State information on social and political history; go to the international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your travel safety.

<http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/government-printing-office.shtml>

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

<http://www.loc.gov/>

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

<https://data.un.org/>

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

www.usa.am/

U.S. Embassy to Armenia

<https://www.wikipedia.org/>

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

<http://www.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.

Government Websites

<http://www.president.am/en/>

Official site of the president of the Republic of Armenia

<http://www.gov.am/en/>

Official site of the government of Republic of Armenia

<http://www.gov.am/en/structure/>

Government ministries

<http://www.gov.am/en/structure/15/>

Official site of Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

<http://www.edu.am/index.php>

Official site of Ministry of Education

International Development Sites About Armenia

<http://armenia.usaid.gov/>

USAID Armenia

<http://undp.am/>

<http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home.html>

United Nations Development Programme

<http://www.unicef.org/armenia/>

UNICEF Armenia

<http://www.who.int/countries/arm/en/>

World Health Organization Armenia

<http://www.wvarmenia.am/>

World Vision Armenia

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Armenia

<http://www.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.

<http://www.voanews.com/> Voice of America, the U.S. government's multimedia broadcaster, features news from around the world.

<http://www.armenianow.com/>

Local news, global audience

<http://hetq.am/eng/>

Investigative journalism

<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/armenia.htm>

A collection of online newspapers

<http://civilnet.am/>

News platform with content in English

<http://www.road-to-armenia.com/>

“Road to Armenia: The Ancient Land in Words, Music, and Pictures”

<http://www.armenianchurch.org/index.jsp?&lng=en>

The Armenian Church: Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/travel/a-crash-course-in-armenian-history.html?_r=3&referrer:

“A Crash Course in the Armenian History:

[http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/16/the-armenian-genocide-the-guardian-briefing?CMP=fb_gu:](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/16/the-armenian-genocide-the-guardian-briefing?CMP=fb_gu)

“The Armenian Genocide,” The Guardian Briefing

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/remembering-the-armenian-genocide:>

“Remembering the Armenian Genocide,” New Yorker Magazine

http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/springtime_for_talaat_pasha –

Article written by an RPCV from Armenia

History, Culture, & Language Tutorials

http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Main_Page

An online encyclopedia about everything related to Armenia and Armenians with thousands of articles on travel, history, and a language tutorial

http://www.armeniapedia.org/index.php?title=Armenian_Lessons

Language lessons that will give you some idea about Eastern Armenian, its grammar and phonetics. More about the language than the real language.

<http://www.armenianhistory.info/>

History of Armenia: An interesting mix of myth, legend, and history since the “Great Flood”

<http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/index.php>

The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute

<http://www.armgate.com/>

ArmGate: A guide to a variety of resources

<http://www.learnarmenian.com/index.php>

Learn Armenian: Good, interactive online basic language lessons (free)

<http://www.avc-agbu.org/home.php>

Armenian Virtual College: Excellent courses on language (beginner through advanced), history, and culture (tuition required)

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

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 Armenia site:

friendsofarmeniaonline.org/

This site’s members are Armenia returned Peace Corps Volunteers. The mission is to support innovative, charitable projects in Armenia facilitated by Peace Corps Volunteers, foster community among its membership, and promote a better understanding among Americans of Armenia, its people, and culture.

<http://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.

<https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/groups/230297280379744/>

Peace Corps/Armenia Facebook page

Recommended Books, Movies, and Videos

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, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. “The Bold Experiment: JFK’s Peace Corps.” Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. “Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver.” Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
4. Meisler, Stanley. “When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years.” Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

Books About Armenia

1. De Waal, Thomas. “Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War.” New York: New York University Press, 2003.
2. Marsden, Philip. “The Crossing Palace: A Journey Among the Armenians.” New York: Kodansha America, 1993.

3. Suny, Ronald Grigor. "Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History." Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
 4. Werfel, Franz. "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh".
 5. Margaret Ajemyan Anher. "The knock at the Door"
 6. Shafak, Elif "The Bastard of Istanbul"
 7. Balakyan Peter "The Black Dog of Fate"
 8. Toumani, Meline "There Was and There Was Not"
- [Introductory Books on the Armenian Genocide](#): Politics, Prose and Poetry

Movies

1. Ararat (2002): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0273435/>
2. Sunrise over Lake Van (2011): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2022539/>
3. SaroyanLand (2013): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2390562/>
4. 1915 (2015): <http://www.1915themovie.com/>

Video Documentaries

1. "Armenia the Land of Noah," A travel across Armenia, one of the most fascinating places
2. "My Armenia," Documentary about Armenian history, sites, and traditions
3. "From Ararat to Zion," About the influence of Armenian Church
4. Former U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, John Heffern, presents at TEDx Yerevan on archeological tourism in Armenia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQD_sQURQeg
5. "Digging into the Future," A journey in Armenia focusing on archeology: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaHfxrjLjCQ&feature=youtu>
6. Armenian geography and history in a nutshell: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sL4JK_bDo0A

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

[Haypost CJSC \(www.haypost.am\)](http://www.haypost.am) is the official national postal operator of the Republic of Armenia and provides postal, payment, and retail services. Haypost currently operates 900 postal offices across Armenia, from urban to the most remote rural regions.

At your pre-departure orientation (staging), you will be given a temporary mailing address to use during pre-service training. The Peace Corps suggests that you ask people to refrain from sending you packages while you are in training as there is a chance you will move to your permanent site before they arrive. You must pick up packages in person, which requires absence from training and paying duty and/or storage fees.

After you are sworn in as a Volunteer, it will be easy to receive packages at your site, and you won't have to pay duty fees for items sent through the U.S. Postal Service. Please note, however, that items sent to Volunteers via DHL, FedEx, UPS, etc., are not exempt from customs fees and you are required to pay a fee of 20 percent or more on the declared value of any sent items.

Do not send valuable items through the mail.

Telephones and Cellphone Service

International telephone service to the U.S. is available and is generally inexpensive. One carrier offers a calling rate to the U.S. at a fraction of a cent per minute. There have been major upgrades to fiber-optic lines, so the quality and reliability has increased considerably from previous years. Service through the three major carriers is available in most parts of the country, and many Volunteers use Internet calling services such as Skype or Yahoo Messenger to call the U.S.

Advise your family that in an emergency they should contact the Counseling and Outreach Unit in Washington, D.C., which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The toll-free number is 855.855.1961 ext. 1470. The direct number is 202.692.1470. This office will then immediately contact Peace Corps/Armenia.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Email and Internet access is widely available except for remote areas where there is no cellphone network coverage. Post staff recommends you bring your personal notebook computer, tablet, or iPad to use at work and for communication. All three cellphone carriers provide 3G network service, which you can use via locally available USB Internet modems to access the Internet where there is coverage. Those who have unlocked smartphones, iPads, or other mobile devices with 3G capabilities can purchase SIM cards to access the Internet on their device. The operators are [VivaCell](#), [Orange](#), and [BeeLine](#). Peace Corps/Armenia will provide you more information on your choices when you arrive in-country.

Regarding laptop operating systems, staff and Volunteers recommend Windows or Apple OS because of their compatibility with Peace Corps applications that you will be using to report on your work. Laptops are especially useful for TEFL Volunteers since they will participate in online training events as well as complete various TEFL-related assignments online.

Please also note that during your service you are expected to provide periodical reports about the progress that you are making at your site through the Volunteer Report Form (VRF), therefore please kindly make

sure that the computer devices that you will be bringing match with the minimum criteria that is shown in this link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/vrt/> , so you can successfully download and install the related software and submit timely reports.

Housing and Site Location

As mentioned in the welcome letter, during pre-service training, all trainees are required to live with host families. After PST, at your permanent site, you will be assigned to live with a host family again for three months. However, PCVs should expect to stay with a host family for their entire service, since not every community has independent housing options. The benefits of living with a host family include full immersion into Armenian life, language, and culture; community integration; and having a place to call home. Many PCVs choose to stay with their host families for their entire two-year service.

Being a respected and equal member of a family not only provides strong personal and professional rewards, it can ensure your safety and security as well. Host family accommodations vary depending on the community.

Some living arrangements may be apartments or separate detached houses; some may have European-style bathrooms, while others might use outhouses or “squat” toilets, which have no toilet seats to speak of and require deep-knee bends for proper use. Regardless of the situation, trainees and Volunteers live as the members of their community do.

Specific 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 a Volunteer’s arrival to ensure placement is appropriate and safe, and that housing and worksites are secure.

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; housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Armenian dram 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.

Costs to live with your host family will be part of your living allowance and will be discussed during your pre-service training. Living-allowance costs are reviewed annually. Volunteers are also reimbursed for continuing language study. Reimbursements to Volunteers are made monthly upon presentation of a completed tutor reimbursement form.

Volunteers are provided allowances for annual leave (vacation) expenses, which are included with the payment of the monthly living allowance.

If you are asked by the Peace Corps to travel for official, medical, or programmatic reasons, you will be reimbursed for transportation and lodging.

The Peace Corps helps Volunteers set up bank accounts in local currency and deposits all the allowances and other payments into these bank accounts. Volunteers can set up personal accounts in dollars if they choose.

Most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in Armenia with these allowances. Consistent with the philosophy that development and learning are most effectively achieved when people live and work together, it is important that Volunteers live at the same standard as the people whom they serve.

Nevertheless, many Volunteers bring extra money (in cash, traveler's checks, or credit cards) for vacations. Credit cards can be used in some restaurants, hotels, large stores in the capital, and are handy for travel outside the country. Credit cards, as well as regular bank ATM/debit cards, can be used at ATMs in Yerevan and other large cities around the country to obtain cash (in drams). Retail outfits in Armenia do not accept traveler's checks, so they aren't recommended for use in-country.

Food and Diet

Much of Armenian social life revolves around music, singing, dancing, and food. Typical meals include potatoes, pasta, rice, and meat. Bread also plays a key role with all the meals. Cheese is a big part of the diet.

Greens are very common in spring whereas a good variety of vegetables is typical for summer and fall. The best fresh vegetables and fruits are available during the summer. The apricots and tomatoes are of extremely high quality. During the long winter months, cabbage, beets, and potatoes are mainstays.

It is possible but difficult for vegetarians to maintain a meatless diet. The Middle Eastern influence in Armenia has brought vegetarian food, but this is more readily available in Yerevan and larger cities. Although your refusal to eat meat may seem strange to your host family, they are likely to respect your decision and accommodate your needs accordingly. You may want to prepare preserves during the summer and fall to avoid having to purchase other produce in the capital and pay higher prices. With a little planning, you should be able to maintain a healthy alternative diet.

Typical drinks are *tan* (made of yogurt, water, and salt), homemade fruit juices, Armenian and Georgian wine, and Armenian brandy and vodka. Armenians are noted for their endless toasts, but you should not feel compelled to drink a large quantity of alcohol just to appease your host. Armenians admire self-control, and most will respect your decision to drink moderately or not at all.

Transportation

Volunteers travel in the country in public buses, vans, or taxis. The Peace Corps prohibits all Volunteers from owning or driving vehicles of any type, including scooters, mopeds, and motorcycles. Volunteers must wear a helmet when biking. Violation of this policy will result in termination of your Volunteer service.

Geography and Climate

Armenia lies in the mountainous Caucasus region. The landlocked country is bordered by Turkey in the west, Iran in the south, Azerbaijan in the east, and Georgia in the north.

Because of its protected position and generally high elevation, Armenia's climate is mostly dry and continental, although there are regional variations, such as hot, dry summers in the Araks Valley and cooler, more humid summers in the elevated areas. Intense sunshine occurs for many days of the year, and the summer is long and hot (except at the highest elevations), with an average July temperature in Yerevan of 77 degrees Fahrenheit, which can reach as high as 108 F. Winters tend to be moderately

severe, with an average temperature in Yerevan of 26 F. Autumn is generally mild, sunny, and long, while spring is usually short and wet.

Social Activities

On weekends and in the evening, Armenians generally socialize with their families and friends. In summer months, in some of the larger cities throughout Armenia, sidewalk cafes appear on every corner and in every shady spot. Armenians enjoy relaxing at these cafes late into the evening.

In smaller towns and villages, activities tend to focus on spending time with extended family, neighbors, and friends. Socializing typically includes lots of coffee drinking.

Chess and backgammon (called *nardi*) are popular, and Armenian boys and girls play basketball, soccer, tennis, badminton, and pingpong. In addition to participating in these activities, Volunteers enjoy hiking and exploring local historical sites.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

In general, Armenians tend to be conservative in both dress and behavior. One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your identity and acting like a professional all at the same time. The Peace Corps will provide you with guidelines that will be helpful as you make this transition.

You will be serving as a representative of the Peace Corps and will be expected to dress and behave accordingly. While you may see people dressed in seemingly worn or shabby clothes, this is because of economics rather than by choice. The likelihood is that they are wearing their best clothes. A foreigner who wears ragged, unattended clothing is likely to be considered an affront. For men, professional dress calls for collared shirts, slacks, and occasionally suit jackets and ties. For women, professional dress calls for dresses or skirts (knee- or mid-calf length), modest blouses or tops, and dress slacks. Women should be prepared to occasionally wear suits or formal wear for presentations or other business-related events.

Volunteers need to continually strive to maintain neat and clean clothing and hair. This may be an ongoing challenge in some areas, as water may be rationed.

Since Armenia is fairly conservative when it comes to personal appearance, long hair and/or ponytails and certain hairstyles on men are considered unacceptable in professional settings. Facial piercings on both men and women and earrings on men are generally unacceptable in professional settings in Armenia. Throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union, tattoos have a negative connotation and historically have been associated with the mafia, prisoners, and prostitutes. Please be prepared to cover tattoos whenever possible. You will need to balance your personal expression and integration and acceptance into the community, with an understanding of the culture.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security 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 Peace Corps/Armenia Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These

procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Armenia. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her 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 families are encouraged to look at safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at peacecorps.gov/safety.

Information on these pages addresses Volunteer health and safety issues. 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

The living conditions of Peace Corps service affect Volunteers differently. Do you need a lot of privacy or very little? Are you oblivious to dirt or fairly sensitive? Nearly all Volunteers, at some point, find the conditions under which they live and work to be difficult or challenging. Most experience feelings of discouragement and futility—usually during the first year of service. Things that seemed clear become unclear. The direction to take seems obscured. You may often feel that you are not in control, and this can be frightening. When this happens, you may wonder whether you are really up to the job, whether you may have caused the problem, whether it is really possible to accomplish anything, or whether what you are doing is really worthwhile. You may feel fatigued, although you have been working no harder than usual. You may find yourself short-tempered or annoyed with yourself and others.

There is no magical or easy method for overcoming these feelings but, fortunately, they are usually short-lived. Bear in mind that the frustration of “not getting anything done” usually derives from the realities of the country, not from your own inadequacies. It is often helpful to break up a problem into smaller units and work at it one step at a time. If you can step back and try to assess the problem afresh, you will feel more positive about the headway you have made and are making. Without a doubt, when you have completed your service, you will recall your time here with fondness, and you will be amazed by the personal change that has resulted from overcoming the challenges.



PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Armenia to your departure. Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within this continuum of learning and ensures that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform your job. Pre-service training is conducted in Armenia by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Peace Corps training incorporates widely accepted principles of adult learning and is structured around the experiential learning cycle. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas.

Integrating into the community is one of the core competencies you will strive to achieve both in PST and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the relationships you build by respectfully integrating into the host country community and culture.

You will be prepared for this through a homestay experience, which often requires trainees to live with host families during PST. Integration into the community fosters language and cross-cultural learning and ensures your health, safety, and security.

Pre-service training in Armenia is approximately 11 weeks long. Training takes place six days a week and will include some evening sessions. Adequate time is allowed for leisure activities and outings with your host family. You will receive instruction in the Eastern Armenian language, cross-cultural adaptation skills, Armenian history and culture, personal safety awareness, technical skills related to your project, and medical topics. You will also receive important information about the administrative side of the Peace Corps as it relates to Volunteer allowances, responsibilities, and office policies.

During training, you will live with an Armenian family in a village near the training site. This gives you the opportunity to practice your language skills and to develop cross-cultural understanding on a deeper level. Three meals a day will be provided by your host family. As mentioned earlier, host family accommodations vary. Regardless of the situation, you will live like the majority of the other members of your community.

During training, you will be evaluated on how well you adapt to the culture, learn the language, interact with Armenians, and your degree of professionalism. The Peace Corps staff will make every effort to provide the support necessary to ensure your successful completion of training. You must meet the minimum training requirements by the end of pre-service training to be sworn in as a Volunteer.

PST integrates four components: (1) Armenian language, (2) trainee health and safety awareness, (3) cross-cultural adaptation and community development skills, and (4) technical orientation. The training is based on competencies (learning objectives) in each of these areas. You need to achieve a level of competence in all four components before becoming a Volunteer. The Peace Corps will help you set your own learning goals within these competencies.

You will spend most of the training time learning the language and working on small community projects in your training community with a group of four or five other trainees. During PST, you will come to the

training center for one-day training sessions on community skills, in addition to having six or seven sessions involving medical and safety and security information.

After you arrive, you will be taken from the airport to a hotel outside of Yerevan. You will spend your first few days at the hotel before moving in with your PST host family. During this time you will attend sessions on safety, medical, and cultural issues and introductory language classes. It will also be a time for your first set of immunization shots and you will have a chance to meet Peace Corps staff.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Armenia 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, Armenia 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 social, economic, and political environment in Armenia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Armenian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities, report your progress, and serve as a productive member of your community.

You will be part of a diverse group of trainees with varied backgrounds. The technical component of training is designed to prepare you for the job you will do in your assigned site. It will provide you with information and tools that will enable you to apply what you already know to the Armenian context, and to develop skills in areas in which you need strengthening.

The goals for your pre-service training are to teach you about the issues that affect local government, civil society, and the education system in Armenia and facilitate a process by which you become skilled at working with organizations, schools, counterparts, and communities to identify that community's assets, challenges, and goals and to define and implement ways of achieving those goals.

Note for TEFL Invitees: Peace Corps/Armenia conducts standard TEFL training based on a standard curriculum comparable to the minimal global standards expected for internationally recognized TEFL certificate programs. Staff carries out assessments of learnings from the training content or collects "exhibits" representing the Volunteers' work during training sessions, evaluates them according to established rubrics, and records each trainee's results.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps 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, will help you integrate into your community, and can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. During PST you will learn the language with a language and cross-cultural facilitator in your village, three to four hours a day, five times a week, in groups of four to five trainees.

The language training will take 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 for you to reach 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 take a Language Proficiency

Interview (LPI) with the minimum level of novice high. You will also develop strategies to continue studying language during your service.

Pre Departure Virtual Language Training

For the first time this year, Peace Corps/Armenia is offering invitees an opportunity to learn language basics prior to your departure through the Peace Corps/Armenia Virtual Language Learning Program. The virtual language program is comprised of video lessons, exercise handouts, and Skype sessions with the online language instructor.

The course will start at the end of June and last six weeks. You can sign up for one or two Skype sessions per week. Though the virtual course is optional, arriving with survival speaking and knowledge of the alphabet will be extremely beneficial for you and will make your further learning of the language much easier.

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 Armenia. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Armenia, 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 Armenia. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Living with a host family is an integral part of training. It opens a window into the Armenian culture and way of life. Your family is also a great resource for acquiring the language. The host family will provide you with a room that will be for your use only, but you will be expected to spend as much time with your family as possible. You will eat your meals with your family with the exception of lunches on training days. Living conditions may be basic. Your life with the family will help you make the adjustment to living conditions in Armenia. The host family at your future worksite is likely to be similar to the one you live with during training.

Your other great resource will be your language and cross-cultural facilitators, who will live in the same villages with you during PST and will be of great help for you in your cultural adjustment process.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and basic treatment of medical illnesses found in Armenia. 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 cover nutrition, food and water preparation, emotional health, alcohol awareness, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), common illnesses, domestic and intimate partner violence, emergencies, and medical policies in Armenia.

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 the Peace Corps' emergency response and support systems.

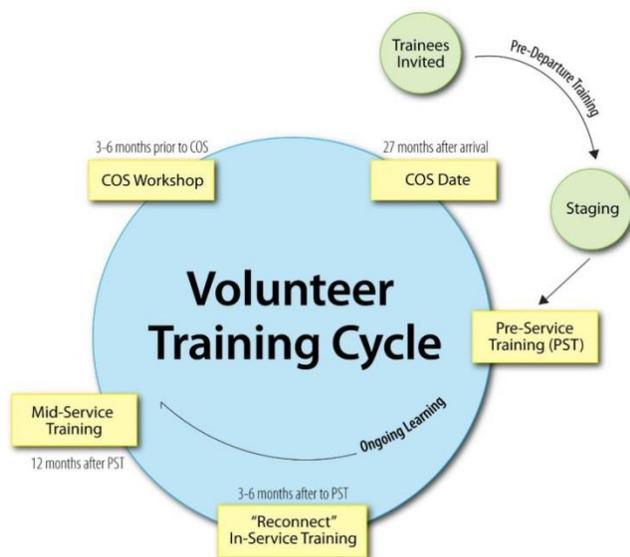
Volunteer training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Armenia. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout your service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training.

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:** 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.
- **Midservice 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.



YOUR HEALTH CARE IN ARMENIA

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Armenia maintains a clinic with two full-time medical officers who take care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in Armenia at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Armenia, 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 Armenia

Major health problems among Peace Corps Volunteers in Armenia are rare and are most often the result of their not taking proactive/preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems in Armenia are minor ones that are also found in the United States such as colds, diarrhea, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, STIs, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by living in Armenia because certain environmental factors raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illnesses and injuries.

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 Armenia, 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 midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officers in Armenia 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 Armenia, 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 Armenia is to take the following preventive measures:

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are 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 officers will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Armenia during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the most effective way to prevent infection with HIV and other STIs. 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 STIs. 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 officers can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officers.

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 officers know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

In the event of a critical medical condition which can't be resolved or treated in country, the Peace Corps Office of Health Services and the medical officers will coordinate evacuation either to a Volunteer's home of record or to a regional medevac country. If the condition is not resolved within 45 days, Volunteer will be medically separated from the service.

Women's Health Information

In the event you are unable to purchase feminine hygiene products on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Armenia will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a supply with you, because the Peace Corps medical office stocks only a limited number of 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.

If you are 40-plus female Volunteer, you must bring your mammography films with you, previously done in the States. The Peace Corps medical officer will organize your annual mammography screening in-country and will send them with your previous films to the Office of Health Services for a second opinion. Otherwise, it will be your responsibility to request them from the medical centers in the U.S.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps Medical Officers will provide you with a kit containing basic items to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

Medical Kit Contents

First Aid Handbook	Antifungal cream
Ace bandages	Antihistamine
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner
Adhesive tape	Band-Aids
Antacid tablets	Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Butterfly closures
Antibiotic ointment	Calagel anti-itch gel

Condoms
Cough lozenges
Decongestant
Dental floss
Gloves
Hydrocortisone cream
Ibuprofen
Insect repellent
Iodine tablets (for water purification)

Lip balm
Oral rehydration salts
Scissors
Sore throat lozenges
Sterile eye drops
Sterile gauze pads
Sunscreen
Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Tweezers

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 the risks.

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 homestay 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 Armenia 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 Armenia, 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 Armenia 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, crimes do occur in Armenia. 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 Armenia of which you should be aware:

Harassment: Volunteers have reported varying levels of harassment, such as having objects thrown at them by teenagers, being called derogatory names, and being subjected to overt sexual comments. Strategies for coping with street harassment will be discussed during pre-service training.

Thefts: Property theft, including pickpocketing in crowded public areas, such as markets or minibuses, should be anticipated based on the history of Peace Corps Volunteer incidents.

Traffic accidents: Using local transportation and crossing the street safely are the greatest safety risks in Armenia. Volunteers are restricted from traveling at night and discouraged when road conditions are bad, especially in the winter. Public transportation is usually by minivans, many of which are old and in poor condition. Seat belts in vans and buses are nonexistent. Pedestrians in cities have to be especially cautious; although crosswalks exist, they are not usually recognized by drivers.

Burglary: The homes of some Volunteers have been burglarized in the past, so you will need to take the same precautions you would take in the United States. The Peace Corps will advise you on home safety during training.

Border conflicts: Since the cease-fire agreement with Azerbaijan in 1994, large border incidents have been rare, but recent years have seen some significant incidents. The reports of incidents along the "line of contact" between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces have increased infrequency. The Peace Corps maintains a five-kilometer no travel zone for Volunteers and staff along the Armenia/Azerbaijan border and does not place Volunteers in the first-line villages along the Azeri border.

Alcohol abuse: Making toasts with alcohol is a prevalent social custom in Armenia. Male Volunteers, especially, may be pressured to drink at social gatherings and even during normal daily activities, such as community meetings. Strategies for avoiding drinking and drinking responsibly will be discussed during pre-service training.

Sexual assault: Volunteers have been targets of sexual assault in Armenia, which is often associated with cross-cultural differences in gender relations and alcohol consumption. Safety training provided by the Peace Corps is designed to teach Volunteers how to minimize their risk. Peace Corps/Armenia is committed to providing a compassionate and supportive response to all Volunteers who have been sexually assaulted.

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 Armenia 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 Armenia will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers than at their sites, where “family”, friends, and colleagues look out for them. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch (the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat). Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. And always walk with a companion at night.

Volunteers are required to inform Peace Corps/Armenia of their whereabouts at all times. In the event of an emergency it is critical that Peace Corps is aware of the locations of Volunteers when they are away from their permanent sites. This policy is taken seriously and Volunteers are expected to comply.

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. Peace Corps Armenia has procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority 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 Armenia

Crime data and statistics for Armenia, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:
<http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/armenia>

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps 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 Armenia

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. Armenia's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Armenia office will assure that you are aware 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 Armenia. 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/Armenia'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 contact 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 Armenia at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decide 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 members recognize the additional adjustment issues that come with living and working in a wholly new environment 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 Armenia'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 Armenia 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 Peace Corps 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.

Armenia has a highly traditional, patriarchal culture. Among the challenges of living and working in Armenia is learning to cope effectively and constructively with the different status of women and men and the different standards of behavior to which they are held.

Female Volunteers may find that being a single woman living alone goes against the cultural norms of their community. Besides receiving unwanted and inappropriate attention from Armenian men, female Volunteers may also have to work harder than male Volunteers to gain the professional respect of colleagues in the workplace. In addition, female Volunteers may experience resentment from Armenian women over their “male-like” position of authority in the community. Finally, female Volunteers may need to keep a low social profile and practice discretion in public (e.g., not smoking in public or drinking in bars) to avoid developing an undesirable reputation.

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.

Volunteers of color may face challenges both inside and outside the Peace Corps community. Within the Volunteer corps, you may be the only minority trainee or Volunteer in a particular project. You may not be able to find minority role models among the Peace Corps/Armenia staff or might not receive the personal support you need from other Volunteers.

Once you move to your site, you are likely to work and live with individuals who have no experience or understanding of a non-Caucasian-American culture. Because of ignorance, stereotyped cultural perceptions, or the country's current or historical relations with other countries, you may encounter varying degrees of unwanted attention. You may not be perceived as being North American, or you may be viewed with suspicion, or you may be evaluated as less professionally competent than a white Volunteer. In any community in Armenia where you are not known, you will need to be prepared for staring, pointing, comments, or people asking to take a picture with or of you or wanting touch your hair. Finally, you should be prepared to hear derogatory terms and racial epithets that would be considered completely inappropriate in the United States today.

Volunteer Comments

“Be prepared for people to stare at you and to talk about you—many times right in front of you. Both of these things can become frustrating and annoying, but remember to be yourself and to be confident. Do not feel as though you must try to adjust your look somehow in order to ‘blend in.’ As an African-American female, my natural hair is much different than that of many of my community members, and I sometimes overhear comments about my hair—positive and negative. At one point, I considered whether or not I should begin straightening my hair. However, I concluded that I may very well be the only black person they may ever interact with, and I must present my true self. My hair has come to serve as a conversation starter and a platform which to show my community that, in America, racial and cultural differences exist, are normal, and I embrace them.”

“Be prepared to explain who you are and why you look a little different from what they know of Americans from TV and movies. Armenians will ask and wonder. Don't take offense at it. Don't feel you have to explain who you are to everyone who asks. Try to make it an educational opportunity for those who matter to you.”

“The best advice given to me is ‘expect the worst, hope for the best.’ With that said, I am an Asian American. When I got to my training village, people kept asking me if I was Chinese and doing the eye thing. To be honest, at first, it bothered me, but after the first month, I realized they weren't insulting me, they were just honestly curious. They wanted to know my heritage. After a while, people knew my background and if someone new asked me if I was Chinese, someone else that knew me would explain that I was half Korean and half American. Patience will take you a long way and, if you don't have it, you will learn to get some and if you already have some, it will be tried. It's all about your mindset.”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Armenia's traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Homosexuality remains a taboo topic in parts of the society and there are no antidiscrimination laws that apply to sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. 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 Armenia 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 LGBTQA Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbpcv.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 Armenia and have very fond memories of their community and service. LGBTQA 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.

LGBTQ Volunteers will likely have to practice discretion. Although sexual and gender minorities certainly exist in Armenia, homosexuality may be considered immoral by some people. Your basic civil liberties may be ignored, and you may be hassled in bars or in the streets.

You may serve for two years without meeting another LGBTQ Volunteer or Armenian. Most LGBTQ Armenians probably have migrated to larger cities, while many Peace Corps Volunteers are posted in rural sites. Relationships with host country nationals can happen, but as with all cross-cultural relationships, they are not likely to be easy. Lesbians will have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex (as do all women; wearing an "engagement ring" may help). Gay men must deal with machismo: talk of conquests, girl watching, dirty jokes, etc.

The Peace Corps is committed to providing support for all Volunteers regardless of sexual orientation.

Volunteer Comments

"Being a LGBT volunteer in Armenia is rather like being in the closet in the '90s in the United States. The general Armenian views on LGBT issues remain further behind on acceptance and tolerance. To come out is to invite cultural shame, and can lead to work and social relations breaking down. There are some organizations in the capital city who are working to improve the situation, but this will have little impact on your town or village. Though, for the ignorance and intolerance of Armenia, you'll find that your fellow PCVs will be very supportive, and that you won't be alone in this country. My suggestion, make your closet comfortable because you risk your service by being out. But worry not: Homosexuality/bisexuality is off the radar; you'll see straight Armenian men walk arm-in-arm and kiss each other on the cheek, which is common and culturally normal. As a reminder, you're here with the understanding that you will do what you must do to integrate and, frankly, this is one of them. And don't worry, the straight Volunteers will get asked just as much as you why they aren't married."

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 Armenia without a significant risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Armenia staff will work with disabled Volunteers to support them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

In Armenia, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. There is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

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 Armenians to change their roles to conform better with traditional Armenia relationships. Armenian 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 Armenian 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.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community church. Although Volunteers not in the practice of attending church may have to explain their reasons for not attending, it is possible to politely decline if the church or religious practice is not one of their choice. Most Volunteers find effective ways to cope with this challenge and come to feel quite at home in Armenia.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in Armenia. 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 variously 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 50+ Volunteers, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A 50+ Volunteer 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.

Respect comes with age in Armenia. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. Older Volunteers may feel isolated within the Peace Corps community abroad because the majority of Volunteers are in their 20s.

Training may present its own special challenges. Older trainees may encounter insufficient attention to their needs for an effective learning environment, including timing, presentation of materials, comfort level, and health. You may need to be assertive in developing an individual approach to language learning.

Volunteer Comments

“Older Volunteers do not have to keep up with the 23- and 24-year-olds, or the 50-year-olds (if you are 70!). Be yourself. There’s plenty to do for all ages!”

“As an older Volunteer I don’t often fit what a ‘tateek’ should be like. I keep getting questions about why I don’t dye my hair, or why I just like to walk around with no specific destinations, etc. I’ve realized that it just takes time for the Armenians to get used to seeing me around. I try to just be myself and enjoy what I’m doing.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Armenia?

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 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds per bag.

Peace Corps 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 Armenia?

It is 220 volts, 50 cycles. Because power surges and cuts can put a strain on voltage converters and appliances, make sure that what you bring is of good quality. The Peace Corps does not provide transformers. Most battery sizes are easy to find in Armenia, though AA is the most popular size for portable electronics. Rechargeable batteries and rechargers are available on the local market.

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 should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. 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). Leave 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. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. 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). Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, electronics, 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 Armenia 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. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the

country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

What should I bring as gifts for Armenian 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.

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

Peace Corps trainees are assigned to individual sites during pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites.

You will have an 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. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a five- to seven-hour drive from 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 Armenia?

International phone service to and from Armenia is good relative to that of other developing countries. However, at times (especially on weekends and holidays), the phone system may be overwhelmed, and phone service may be disrupted. You can purchase international calling cards in Yerevan and in towns/cities or use the calling plans from local cellphone service providers.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

Differences in technology make most U.S. cellphones incompatible with the Armenian system. Only unlocked GSM cellphones (those not purchased with a calling plan such as AT&T wireless, T-Mobile, etc.) that are quad band will work in Armenia. Peace Corps/Armenia does not provide Volunteers with cellphones. Most Volunteers choose to purchase them locally on their own.

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

A growing number of businesses offer Internet access in the capital, larger cities, and towns. As noted in the Communications section, there is nearly nationwide 3G mobile Internet coverage using USB modems or SIM cards in smartphones or other Internet-accessible mobile devices.

Many people bring laptop computers, but they are responsible for insuring and maintaining the computers themselves. Note that you may not find the same level of technical assistance here as you would at home and that replacement parts can take months to arrive.

Peace Corps/Armenia is making an effort to go "green" and if you already have a Kindle or other e-reader, then bring it with you. If you don't have a Kindle or e-reader, you can bring your own device,

such as a laptop, tablet, or smartphone, and install an application that allows you to receive electronic documents through the Peace Corps' electronic delivery system.

The Peace Corps office in Yerevan has four computer workstations available for Volunteers to conduct project research and correspond via the Internet. If you bring a laptop, be sure to buy a high-quality surge protector (available locally).

Please note: Volunteers who have computers also significantly increase their risk of becoming a victim of crime. The Peace Corps will not replace stolen computers and strongly encourages those who bring them to get personal property insurance.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM ARMENIA VOLUNTEERS

Hi A23s,

My name is Brian Saliba. I'm 37 and serving as a TEFL Volunteer in a small city in the Vayots Dzor region. I've got a dual placement, which means two official jobs: teaching English at one of the local base schools (grades 3-9) and business English and economics at the local branch of Armenian State University of Economics. I've recently moved out of my host family's home, and into a dorm room of a defunct university here. It's small but clean, and although I really enjoyed my time with the host family, it's nice to have my own space again. Creature comforts: I have hot water, power, plumbing, Internet. I've got two site mates, three counterparts, and a pile of secondary projects. Life is busy, interesting, fun, hard, gratifying, frustrating, weird, surreal, and hilarious—but never boring.

This might sound strange coming from someone you've never met, but I'm looking forward to meeting you and working with you. In my very short time with the Peace Corps, I've been amazed by the intelligence, humanity, ambition, humor, weirdness, and character of the people this program attracts, and I'm sure you guys are going to be great fun to get to know and a great help to our mission here. Mission is a heavy word, I know, but using it has helped me keep priorities straight in what has at times been a dizzying eight months.

And let me go ahead and say this now: I love this job and this life. I feel like I am exactly where I should be and that I'm heading exactly where I want to go. Some days I wake up happy and go to bed frustrated; other days I wake up sad and go to bed laughing. Emotionally, it can be a roller coaster, but for me, the profound sense of purpose has not wavered or flagged. I don't know what you're looking for, so I can't know what to wish for you. But I hope you'll always be able to look deep inside and know the answer to the question you've been asked 1,000 times already and will be asked 1,000 more times: "Why are you doing this?"

But that's enough about me. I remember reading these letters a year ago—full of names of places I couldn't pronounce, acronyms I didn't understand, and personal advice from people I'd never met. I know the writers meant well, but it all felt so distant at the time. So I'll tell you what I wish they had told me.

For one, you're going to have a lot of people telling you what your service is going to be like. Don't listen to them. Here are two reasons why:

1. Most of the people dispensing this advice—people like me—have been in country for less than a year. What in the world can anybody know about a place after such a short time? If anyone gives you sweeping advice or says things like "Look, here's how it is here...", remember to take whatever follows with a large grain of salt. So much of the advice I was given before and soon after arrival turned out to be completely divergent from my own experience here, so I urge you to remember that this experience is extremely individualized and highly subjective. None of us are experts on anything other than our own personal experiences here. Seek advice but keep your mind open. Don't let any bozos like me shape your mental image before you get here.
2. You'll hear this a lot, but it's true: This experience is what you make of it. Everybody's experience directly correlates to what they bring to bear every day. For those of you old enough or nerdy enough to appreciate a Star Wars reference, remember what Yoda tells Luke before he enters the dark cave (for those of you too young or not nerdy enough, that is not a euphemism). Luke asks what's in there. Yoda responds, "Only what you take with you."

Second, stop worrying. This time last year, I was frantically worrying about what to bring, how much time to spend studying the language, which Armenian history books I should be reading, etc. The best piece of advice I got came from a returned Volunteer. I asked her what should I be doing now, in preparation for departure. She said, “Do you like good beer?” I said, “Yes.” She said “Drink good beer. Do you like hot showers?” I said, “Yes.” She said “Take a lot of long, hot showers.” Even if you don’t like beer or live in California where long showers aren’t a good idea right now, you get the gist. Don’t waste your time in America worrying about being in Armenia. Studying the language is a good idea (more on that shortly). Read up on some history, if that interests you. All good stuff. But enjoy where you are now, and enjoy the time with your friends and family. Peace Corps service is challenging; don’t hamstring yourself by showing up for pre-departure totally frazzled and frantic. These Peace Corps folks are really good at their job, and their job is to get you ready for your service. Excitement is good. A little nervousness and anxiety are normal. But worry and stress are unhealthy and unnecessary.

As for the language, which if you’re like I was, is your primary source of anxiety, here’s what I believe: Every Volunteer learns exactly the amount of Armenian that he or she needs. Some Volunteers need more than others, so they learn more. Some Volunteers aren’t content with the basics and need to be able to engage in complex philosophical discussions with host country nationals, so they push fluency. Some Volunteers spend most of their days surrounded by English-speaking Armenians who desperately want to learn more English, not teach some Volunteer how to speak Armenian—so they learn less. It depends a little on your surroundings, and a lot on you. You will learn exactly as much as you need, both personally and professionally. The Peace Corps’ language program is excellent, and you’ll have time and resources at your disposal. All of you will learn enough to get by; some of you—those who need it—will learn more. But don’t stress yourself out over it now.

With that said—and knowing that I’ve told you to basically ignore any bits of sweeping advice offered you—here’s a bit of sweeping advice I’m offering you: Learn the alphabet. Just do that. Just learn the alphabet. Learn it before you get here. Pre-service training will be more enjoyable and gratifying. You’ll be able to concentrate on learning words and reading sentences, instead of flash-carding yourself to death with strange symbols. You’ll impress your language trainers. You’ll feel so much better about yourself. You’ll be more attractive to other people. All stray puppies will find homes. All good things will happen. Just learn the alphabet before you get here. Just do that one thing. Learn all 39 letters, both upper and lower cases. Ignore everything else I’ve said. But do that one thing. Learn the alphabet.

Third, keep in mind that you are part of a team. I didn’t really understand how much of my success as a volunteer would depend upon the relationships formed with fellow volunteers—both those in my group and groups prior. I suppose that if you want your service to be an individual one, that’s your choice. But speaking from my own experience, I wish I’d had a better sense of how important relationships with other volunteers and staff would be. If you’re reading this, you are probably a very motivated, goal-oriented, independent individual. All that is important for your service. But my experience here has taught me that volunteers who put the goals of the team—the mission, if you will—ahead of, or at least on-par with, their own goals, tend to be better adjusted, more effective volunteers. But, that’s just my experience. And as I said up front, feel free to completely ignore sweeping advice from people like me. Except for the alphabet part. Don’t ignore that. Learn the alphabet.

Feel free to contact me if you have any other questions, or to lambast me about the hypocrisy of prefacing an advice letter by saying ignore all advice. Look forward to meeting you soon!

Best,
Brian Saliba

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Dear A23s,

First of all, congratulations on your invitation to Armenia! You've basically hit the jackpot as far as Peace Corps posts go (and I'm only a little biased). My name is Hannah Frantz, and I'm a TEFL Volunteer here. I live in a village about 45 minutes to the south of the capital city of Yerevan. I am one of the closest Volunteers to Yerevan—I'd say it's more typical to be two or more hours away. But Armenia is a small country, so Volunteers tend to cross paths with some frequency no matter what. By now you've probably heard the phrase "the Peace Corps family," and let me tell you now, it is absolutely a thing! I look at the Volunteers and staff in this country as my giant, extended, and highly emotional family. You're about to be adopted into it, so prepare yourself for loads of hugs, love, passion, and endless pictures of snuggly animals (OK...that's only a handful of us, but trust me, you want to be in on that).

I currently live with a host family and intend to keep living with my host family throughout my service. My family consists of a mother (Sylva, 59), a brother (Argam, Sylva's son, 33), a sister (Anna, Argam's wife, 29), and two little brothers (Erik, 5 and Varkes, 8; Anna and Argam's boys). When I arrived in Armenia I was utterly terrified to live with a host family—it was absolutely my greatest fear. I'd had some negative host family experiences in the past and was absolutely certain that I'd be out of my family's home ASAP. But then the Peace Corps put me with two of the greatest host families on face of the planet. My PST family was incredible, and they allowed me a ton of independence. I still talk with them and visit them because I'm not too far away. My current host family at site is very traditional and includes me in all of their cultural happenings. They work hard to educate me, laugh at my mistakes, and share in my successes. When the time came for PCVs to make a choice as to whether to move out and live independently in their communities, I really did think hard about the option of moving out. But, living with a family really does help me to continue to integrate into my community. I think living alone is totally doable and very safe in Armenia, I also know that my family is highly respected in the community. As a result, living with them positively influences my role in the community as well.

In addition, I have access to a lot of accommodations including a regular toilet, a shower with hot water (most of the time), a washing machine, and a fully stocked kitchen. While none of these things are necessary, and a lot of Volunteers find creative ways to do without, it did play a part in my deciding to stay on with my host family. As of relatively recently, I started cooking all of my meals for myself. Armenians are excessively hospitable—to a point that they will stuff you so full of food that you'll be bursting. It can be a bit much, but as my LCF told me once, "They show you how much they love you by how much they feed you." And, oh man, did my family love me. They've been fine with me cooking for myself, and my sister is often really interested in what I'm making/how I make it. Recently, I made a batch of my favorite cookies (browned butter happiness stuffed with Nutella and sprinkled with the salt of the gods), and my family loved them so much that my sister wanted to learn how to make them. Since then we've had a fresh batch in the house every few days. That's one cross-cultural exchange that I am *always* going to be OK with.

I work at my village school which houses about 200 students. I'd say that's average-to-large for village schools, though there's enormous variety among all Volunteers. I work with an Armenian counterpart to teach grades 3 through 12. The students are absolutely the highlight of my work as a TEFL. Sometimes it can be hard to see progress because things move really slowly in this country, but when a student is able to greet me in English and carry on a basic conversation about the weather, that small victory will lift my spirits for weeks. My class sizes range from four students up to 25...there's really no meaningful average there. Our classrooms are generally equipped with a chalkboard and chalk, and nothing more. The only printer in my school is only used for exams, so any resources or handouts I use I generally make myself. Your creativity will be challenged as a TEFL Volunteer, I can promise you that much!

As far as other projects go, I've been actively involved with two. One of them is called Write On! It's an international creative writing competition that takes place in a number of Peace Corps countries. I was a co-coordinator along with two other PCVs. For the competition, students have one hour to write a creative essay based on a prompt provided by Write On! International. The essays are judged only on creativity and not on spelling and grammar. PCVs all over Armenia ran creative writing workshops and competitions, and my job was to coordinate that effort. Helping to put on Write On! was so much fun for me: I was given the opportunity to read all of the essays for Armenia and it was just really cool to get into the heads of all of our exceptionally talented and creative students.

I also worked with another Volunteer on writing the curriculum for the Border2Border project. This June, 19 PCVs will be walking the length of the country for 21 days and teaching "Healthy Body, Healthy Mind" themed lessons in 30 villages along the way. The lessons included anti-smoking, nutrition, exercise, environmental awareness, gender equality, and conflict resolution. In addition to working on the curriculum I'll be walking the South route in June! I couldn't be more excited (and terrified) to set out for a 21-day walk through the mountains and the summer heat. This project is one that I am incredibly passionate about; health is a major concern in Armenia, and as a result I think the message that B2B brings is essential.

Here are some packing tidbits of advice for you in the form of things you absolutely must have: a quick-dry towel, a sleeping bag, slippers (seriously, Armenians will not let you do anything without slippers), your favorite article of clothing, an iPad/Kindle (because if I've already read 35 books, you're bound to read a few, too), and an external hard drive (we all share hundreds of shows and movies, and you want to be in on that exchange).

And then just some general pieces of advice: Come here with an open mind. I was actually reassigned to Armenia after preparing to leave for another country for a much longer time. I wasn't necessarily excited or passionate about coming here. But I've found that Armenia is like home to me. I'm happy, I love the people here, and I learn something new about myself every day. I couldn't be happier with my placement both in Armenia and at my site, and I didn't necessarily start with that attitude. You'll grow and change here, and that's OK. Don't limit yourself, and don't hold yourself to any expectations about who you think you're supposed to be. It's OK to come out of this experience a little bit different—actually if you don't, you're probably doing something wrong. You'll have bad days here—the days you get food poisoning, or the days your little host brother ate all your Nutella (literally never forgiving him for that), or maybe the days when it just takes too much energy to speak Armenian. But then you'll have days when you fall in love with this country over and over again. You'll forge a weird hodge-podge of a family here, but you'll love them like your own. We're so excited to have you, and we really can't wait to meet you all. Best of luck in your preparations!

Best,
Hannah

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Welcome to the Caucasus! You're about to arrive in Armenia! Since ancient times, this land has been one of the great crossroads of history. Many empires have risen, fallen, and then disappeared in this region, but the Armenians have remained for 3,000 years. Since the end of the Soviet Union, the economy has contracted severely and unemployment has led to many leaving to find work elsewhere. The country now bearing this ancient name is but a fraction of its previous size, is the poorest country in the region, and has hostile relations with two of its neighbors. Despite this, they soldier on, attempting to preserve their great history through their strong traditions and cultural values. The tragedy that befell them during the final days of the Ottoman Empire, when some 1.5 million Armenians died, weighs heavy upon them and plays

a major role in the psyche of the nation. Also of great importance is the Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–94), in which they managed to make significant territorial gains against Azerbaijan, but has led to repercussions that have isolated them politically and economically. These dichotomies of victim and victor influence cultural values to such an extreme level that they will shape all the work you do here. You’ll hear people speak with pride about their ancient history, but with little expectation for change as they speak of current economic and political situations. They’re reverent about the past, but at the same time are so pre-occupied with it that they struggle to move forward.

This is where your job as an “American Volunteer” comes in—your biggest asset will be your cultural background of “looking toward the future.” Put aside any expectations you may have already conjured—your work here might be tabled “teaching” or “community development,” but the real work you do here won’t be quantifiable. Your real work is helping Armenians look to the future with excitement and hope: It’s showing them that the international community cares enough to come and volunteer time here, not out of cultural superiority, but because we genuinely care about them, and their future, and their successes. It’s showing them the opportunities are limitless and that hard work and dedication are the means to a successful end. It’s showing that there is the possibility of a successful future for their country, and that risk-taking and fear are just a part of the journey toward success. Although this seems slight, it’s in this that Volunteers find meaning in their service, and this is where you’ll have the most impact.

While I feel like the work I was doing in America was more impactful than anything I’ve done here, I do believe that here I show Armenian women and girls that they can aspire to more than being a housewife, and that in some ways this is much bigger than anything I did in America. In my English clubs, in my work at a local NGO, in my daily interactions and friendships with Armenian women, I encourage them to dream big and champion those dreams. For many of them, this is the first time they’ve seen an alternative to living and dying in the same village or city as their parents and grandparents before them, and seeing them pursue those dreams is where I feel most success.

Come with an open mind, come with excitement, come ready to find joy in little things, and Armenia will welcome you with open arms.

See you soon!
Josephine Burns, A22

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Vorchjuin! Hi!

Welcome to Peace Corps/Armenia! I’m an A22 CYD Volunteer living in a small mountain town. I am absolutely loving my service and am thrilled to meet the newest class in just a few months. The actual experience of Peace Corps service is indescribable; as we go through this together, each person’s experience is truly his/her own. That said, there are obviously a lot of things to share about life in Armenia as a Volunteer: I’ll do my best to give you a little snapshot of my own experience.

Armenian people are incredibly welcoming and hospitable. From the training villages and host families to my permanent site community and even random people in metro in Yerevan, people have been warm, kind, and helpful. As I developed a better understanding of life here, I discovered more and more differences between American and Armenian culture. I have found beauty in and a depth of appreciation for both of those cultures as I have spent more time here. The long history and collective cultural passion is very inspiring!

My work is very simple compared to my busy and dynamic job in California. I thought I came with no expectations, but I am still shedding expectations about work and life. The realities of working at a new, unstructured NGO as I do, though, are incredibly rewarding because even the smallest of changes or professional growth in my counterpart is a huge feat. I get to work in all areas of organizational development and mentoring and, in the meantime, I have made friends and had some wonderful cultural exchanges. I have also gotten quite involved in Peace Corps-driven initiatives outside of my NGO assignment, which has helped keep me feeling “productive” in the American understanding of the word and also connect with fellow Volunteers.

My advice for you as you prepare to spend the next 27 months in Armenia is to enjoy your life at home as much as you can. The Internet, once you get it set up a few months in, is pretty reliable and you can relatively easily connect with friends and family at home, but emails and Google Hangouts can’t replace just being with people you love (and eating your favorite foods). If you have time and energy, it’s helpful to learn the letters of the Armenian language and how to say “thank you” (shnor-ah-kaal-oo-tyoon). I did not do that and survived just fine, but I wished I had. As you’re packing, keep in mind that the super-professional wardrobe recommended from the Peace Corps doesn’t really hold true for many places -- business casual (e.g., jeans and nice shirts) are more what we wear.

I keep a quote from Rick Steves about traveling: “Be fanatically positive and militantly optimistic.” Every person has his/her own strategy for negotiating the excitement and challenges of this crazy experience; this is mine. Finding the opportunities for positivity in every situation and choosing to hold on to that goodness has been vital to me. As you envision your life in this beautiful new country, I encourage you to think about your own outlook on life so that you can hold onto it as you go through this experience.

I’m so excited to meet you and for you to start your service. The cliches hold true: The Peace Corps is an incredibly wonderful, challenging, and inspiring life-changing experience. I am so happy and grateful to be here and I’m sure you will feel the same!

Lav menaq, Stay well,
Katy Berrey

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Dear A23s,

Welcome to Peace Corps/Armenia! It feels like just a few weeks ago that I was reading my own invitation letter and I remember the excitement and nervousness of what was to come. Be assured, you are joining an amazing group of people who are beyond excited to meet you and you are coming to a country that both wants and needs your contributions.

My name is Emily and I’m a CYD Volunteer working and living in a small town just south of the Georgia border. Noyemberyan is nestled in the mountains, surrounded by huge pine trees. As a Texas native, this could not be more different than what I’m used to but it has been a welcome change. I have dual placement, which means I work at two organizations. One works with small business owners in the area and we host programs that help them create more jobs in the town. The other is at the YWCA. There we work on empowering women and young girls through programming about health, government and life skills classes. To be honest, this isn’t at all how I pictured my Peace Corps service, but every day I am so thankful that I wound up here.

In my free time I enjoy reading, crocheting, visiting Armenia’s many churches and spending time with my host family. My host mom has taught me how to make some amazing Armenian food and drinks and my host sisters work with me daily on improving my Armenian. They’ve had a great deal of fun teaching

me Armenian games, slang phrases, and jokes. They are a beautiful family and have been so kind to me, it's almost impossible to imagine that just a few months ago I didn't know them at all! You'll find that kind of hospitality wherever you go in Armenia!

You'll hear a lot that your service is what you make of it and that is so true. On those difficult days that inevitably come, keep your head up and remember that you have a strong support system of volunteers already in country who will do anything to help you succeed. All of us are looking forward to meeting you and helping you discover the country we've already fallen in love with.

Welcome to the adventure!

Emily Berg
CYD, A21

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Welcome, A23s, to amazing Armenia.

My name is Jim, and I am an A21. I arrived in May 2013 and am a TEFL—teacher of English as a foreign language. After training I was assigned a small town that's about a 40-minute bus ride from the capital Yerevan and has a population of about 15,000.

Joining the Peace Corps was one of the best decisions of my life. I love Armenia. The people are very appreciative of our services. The Peace Corps staff is very professional, supportive, and understanding. They will listen to your concerns and take action. The A20s have been very helpful, and I hope we will serve you as well as they have served us.

I teach alongside my Armenian counterpart. She is very interested in improving her English and is receptive to new ideas. The children at my school are adorable, and when they see me out shopping they shout, "Good morning, Mr. Jim," at all times of the day. The children have few opportunities to talk to native speakers, so they are very appreciative of the opportunities that we provide. Every day is an emotional roller coaster, but it is so worthwhile and enjoyable. Get used to being a celebrity in the community.

I practiced architecture in California for over 30 years and have always admired the goals of the Peace Corps. If you are interested in architecture, this country has amazing churches and pagan temples. I was able to use my abilities to create sketches. At the end of class, I usually draw an item on the blackboard, which the children love to copy. I am working with an A20 Volunteer to complete "Green Apple Day of Service." We will talk to the students about environmental issues and encourage them to recycle and conserve energy. As part of the program we plan to work with the students in cleaning up the school courtyard. We also set up an English club.

You will all arrive with talents that you will re-discover, and you will find a very supportive family in the Peace Corps. If you are outgoing and willing to come here with an attitude of learning from the Armenians and being willing to integrate as much as your knowledge of the language will permit, you will fall in love with the people and the country. I look forward to meeting all of you.

Hajoghutyun (Good luck)

Jim Daly
A21 TEFL

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Armenia and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Armenia.

General Clothing

Although you can buy clothing in Armenia, much of it is synthetic and it may not meet your tastes. Variety in clothing is not as important as how it looks. Bring sturdy clothes that will last a long time; Volunteers suggest dark colors because they look clean longer than light colors. You can have some clothes made locally, so it is a good idea to bring patterns or pictures of clothes you like.

- A good supply of underwear
- Polypropylene, wool, and cotton socks and glove liners
- Long underwear of different weights (e.g., wool and silk)
- Warm coat, wool hat, scarf, and wool or ski-type gloves
- Shorts, for wearing at home or while jogging early in the morning (Armenian women do not wear shorts in public; Armenian men only wear shorts to play sports)

For Women

- Dressy and casual clothing for winter and summer: skirts, dresses, blouses, knit tops, slacks, and jeans
- One formal outfit (skirts and dresses should fall below the knee)
- Slips
- Leggings
- Jewelry and makeup (if you wear either regularly; women in Yerevan wear both)

For Men

- An assortment of winter and summer clothing, including collared shirts for work
- At least one dressy outfit (sport coat, tie, dress shirt, and slacks)

Shoes

- Tennis shoes, winter boots, and hiking boots if desired (quality is important)
- A pair of Yaktrax or similar ice-traction devices (to handle walking in the snow and ice of the harsh winters)
- For women: at least two pairs of flat shoes, along with dressy sandals
- For men: Shoes for work and sandals for summertime

Kitchen

- Good can opener
- Spices (your favorites may be difficult to locate, especially in winter)
- Basic cookbook
- Plastic storage bags
- Measuring cups and spoons
- No need to bring cooking supplies (can be found locally)

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Favorite over-the-counter medical supplies (some items provided will be generic brands)
- A three-month supply of any prescription drugs you take Two pairs of eyeglasses, if you wear them (replacements can take several months to arrive)
- Contact lens supplies (not available locally and not supplied by the Peace Corps)
- Towels, absorbent and of good quality
- Hair-coloring products, if you prefer a certain brand

Electronics

- Watch (durable, water-resistant, and inexpensive); batteries can be purchased in Armenia
- Travel alarm clock (battery operated is best)
- Digital camera (if you prefer film cameras, film and processing are available locally)
- Variable voltage adapter, which switches the current from AC to DC and can reduce the need for battery replacements (also available in Yerevan electronics stores)
- Flashlights (available in Armenia, but choices are limited)
- MP3, CD, or tape player/recorder and shortwave radio
- Netbook, notebook, or tablet PC
- Unlocked quad-band cellphone (can also be purchased in-country)

Miscellaneous

- Sunglasses, for dusty road travel and for winter and summer glare
- Poncho and folding umbrella
- Fanny pack
- Small daypack without a frame (for shopping and carrying books or work materials)
- One or two sets of full-size sheets (available locally)
- Small tool kit (available locally)
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman tool
- Sewing kit
- Pictures and video recordings of home (for yourself and to share with friends and students)
- U.S. postage stamps (so travelers going home can hand-carry mail for you)
- U.S. and world maps, which make good teaching aids and can serve as wall hangings
- Inexpensive gifts (e.g., toys, costume jewelry, magazines, key chains, kitchen gadgets, such as potato peelers)
- Games (e.g., Scrabble, chess, Trivial Pursuit)
- Sports equipment (e.g., Frisbee, baseball, volleyball, soccer ball, etc.)
- Detergent for delicate fabrics (e.g., Woolite); dry cleaning is available only in the capital city
- Sleeping bag rated for minus 10–20 degrees Fahrenheit and a pad (Volunteers also suggest a compactable bag and fleece liner)

Work-Related Materials

- English language audio material
- Dictionary and thesaurus
- Word games
- Songbooks
- Calendars with colorful pictures
- Scissors
- Tape measure (with inches and centimeters)
- Novels and short stories (for yourself and your work)

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
Armenia	Armenia Desk Officer Armenia@peacecorps.gov	ext. 2434	202.692.2434
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	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

Peace Corps Armenia Social Media

-  <http://armenia.peacecorps.gov>
-  [Peace Corps Armenia](#)
-  www.youtube.com/pcarmeniatv
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