

**THE PEACE CORPS
WELCOMES YOU TO
BURKINA FASO**



**A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS
December 2015**

MAP OF BURKINA FASO



Cover Photo:

Natalie Moore, Burkina Faso PCV 2012–14

1st Place in the 2014 Viewfinder Photo Contest

Photographer's comment: *"On Christmas Day, I was inside a church celebrating the holiday with the local Catholic population when I saw this young Muslim girl looking through the wall of the church. Having just arrived in the Muslim-majority village a few days earlier, I was amazed at how peacefully the different religious groups coexist."*

A WELCOME LETTER

Bienvenue! We invite you to join the Peace Corps/Burkina Faso team. During your service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso you will have the privilege of experiencing the colorful, dynamic, and welcoming country of Burkina Faso and her people! The country possesses a rich culture and history, and its people comprise 60 ethnic groups. The people of Burkina Faso, known as Burkinabè, are renowned for their tolerance and acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity, with Islam, Christianity, and indigenous animist beliefs all being practiced. The name Burkina Faso is a combination of two local languages, *mooré* (Burkina = man of integrity) and *dioula* (Faso = father's house or homeland). Thus, Burkina Faso is the "Land of the Upright/Honorable People." Burkinabè take pride in the fact that they are known for their integrity as well as their hospitality. On the African continent, Burkina Faso has a stellar reputation for the arts, including traditional music, dance, singing, mask festivals, and more. Burkina Faso hosts the [Pan-African Film and Television Festival](#) of Ouagadougou and the [International Arts and Crafts Show](#), two major international events that highlight Burkina Faso as a country devoted to cultivating the arts. Artists and art connoisseurs from all over the world attend these events.

The Peace Corps has enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the people of Burkina Faso since the first Volunteers arrived in 1967. The Peace Corps briefly ceased operations in Burkina Faso in 1987 due to host government development goals no longer aligning with the Peace Corps' mission. However, the Peace Corps was invited back in 1995 to begin a community health project, followed by the establishment of education and small enterprise development projects. Burkinabè communities have hosted over 2,100 Peace Corps Volunteers since 1967, carrying out meaningful development work built upon a strong foundation of cross-cultural understanding, community ownership, and the individual and collective strengths of the communities served. The Peace Corps' programmatic priorities align with those of the government of Burkina Faso and the U.S. Department of State Mission through three primary sectors: Community Health, Community Economic Development (CED), and Education. Additionally, the Peace Corps trains and supports all Volunteers and their community partners to address important cross-cutting development areas, leveraging global partnerships and resources to improve food security and nutrition, promote malaria prevention and youth development, support HIV/AIDS prevention, and foster integration of gender equality into development activities.

Our Volunteers are dedicated to promoting sustainable development, building the capacity of the local population, and enhancing mutual understanding on the part of Americans and Burkinabès. Our Volunteers collaborate with their community partners to address development priorities with an emphasis on community ownership and community resources. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso ensures that our remarkable Volunteers have the training and support they need to be successful in service through the assistance of a qualified team of dynamic staff. It is truly an honor and privilege to work with such a highly committed team of Volunteers and staff members. We celebrate our daily work with the people of Burkina Faso to build the long-term development capacity of the communities we serve. We will never cease to honor the valiant people of Burkina Faso and our host communities for their hard work, their warmth, and unsurpassed hospitality.

Sincerely,

Keith Hackett, Ph.D.
Country Director
Peace Corps/Burkina Faso
RPCV Mali, 1992–95

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers	1
Peace Corps/Burkina Faso History and Programs.....	2
History of the Peace Corps in Burkina Faso.....	2
Peace Corps Programming in Burkina Faso.....	2
Country Overview: Burkina Faso at a Glance.....	3
History.....	3
Government.....	3
Economy.....	3
People and Culture.....	3
Resources for Further Information.....	4
General Information About Burkina Faso	4
Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees.....	5
Online Articles/Current News Sites About Burkina Faso.....	5
International Development Sites About Burkina Faso.....	5
Recommended Books.....	6
Books About the History of the Peace Corps	6
Books on the Volunteer Experience.....	6
Books About Burkina Faso.....	6
Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle.....	7
Communications.....	7
Housing and Site Location.....	7
Living Allowance and Money Management.....	8
Food and Diet.....	8
Transportation.....	8
Social Activities.....	9
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior.....	9
Personal Safety.....	9
Rewards and Frustrations.....	10
Peace Corps Training	11
Peace Corps Training Continuum	11
Technical Training	12
Language Training	13
Cross-Cultural Training	13
Health Training.....	13
Safety and Security Training.....	13

YOUR HEALTH CARE IN BURKINA fASO	14
Health Issues in Burkina Faso	14
Helping You Stay Healthy	14
Maintaining Your Health	14
Women’s Health Information	15
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	15
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	16
Safety and Security in Depth	18
Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk	18
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	19
Support from Staff	20
Office of Victim Advocacy	20
Crime Data for Burkina Faso	20
Volunteer Safety Support in Burkina Faso	20
Diversity and Inclusion Overview	22
Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site	22
Cross-Cultural Considerations	23
What Might a Volunteer Face?	23
Possible Gender Role Issues	23
Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color	24
Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers	25
Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities	26
Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples	26
Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers	26
Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers	27
Frequently Asked Questions	28
Welcome Letters from Burkina faso Volunteers	30
Packing List	34
Pre-Departure Checklist	36
Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters	37

CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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

PEACE CORPS/BURKINA FASO HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Burkina Faso

The first group of Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Burkina Faso, then called Upper Volta, in 1967 and operated here uninterrupted for 21 years. Major projects included forestry extension, young farmer education, small enterprise development, secondary education (math, science, and English language), water well construction, agricultural and environmental extension, arts and crafts, basketball coaching, and parks development. In 1987, the Peace Corps program was phased out due to local political changes, but in 1995 the new government requested the re-establishment of the program.

The program was re-launched with a group of 17 Public Health Volunteers, who began their service in Burkina Faso in December 1995. Today, approximately 120 Volunteers serve in Burkina Faso, working in Health, Community Economic Development, and Education. In total, over 2,100 Volunteers have served in Burkina Faso since the Peace Corps first opened its program in 1967.

Peace Corps Programming in Burkina Faso

Peace Corps/Burkina Faso works within three program areas: Community Health, Community Economic Development (CED), and Education. These projects were recently revised, taking into account the country's needs and the comparative advantage of using Volunteers. Community Health Volunteers' primarily work in close collaboration with local health clinic staff to raise awareness on topics such as maternal and child health, malaria, hygiene, nutrition, family planning, and HIV/AIDS for people living in their communities. CED Volunteers help farmers increase their business skills and knowledge in an effort to develop profitable and sustainable income-generating activities such as gardens, woodlots, animal husbandry, and transformation of post-harvest crops into market products. Education Volunteers use participatory student-centered approaches to teach either English at junior-high school level or pre-school. School programs such as clubs, tutoring, and camps that generate awareness on life-skills and gender equality are also facilitated by all Volunteers.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: BURKINA FASO AT A GLANCE

History

Most of the area known today as Burkina Faso was once dominated by the Mossi people, who established their empire around 1500. In 1897, France imposed its rule over the people of Burkina Faso, but it was not until 1947 that the French colony of Haute Volta (Upper Volta) was created. Full independence from the French came on August 5, 1960, with Maurice Yaméogo as the nation's first president.

Four of the six presidents after Yaméogo came to power through military coups. Thomas Sankara, who led the country from August 1983 until his death on October 15, 1987, was arguably the most influential of Burkina Faso's presidents. Sankara's charismatic leadership style, which emphasized self-sufficiency and a lean, efficient government that transferred wealth from urban centers to rural areas, was popular with citizens, and created a sense of hope in the country. In 1984, the country's name was changed from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso: "Land of the Upright/Honorable People."

Former President Blaise Compaore had been in power since Sankara's death. Compaore led four years of military rule, and then was the only candidate in the presidential election; he was sworn-in as president of the fourth republic on December 24, 1991. Former President Compaore had won the last two presidential elections, held in 1998 and 2005, by wide margins. Former President Compaore resigned on October 31, 2014, following a popular uprising against his efforts to amend the Constitution's two-term presidential limit. A transition government, led by President Michel Kafando and Prime Minister Yacouba Zida, is in the process of organizing elections, which are scheduled for November 29, 2015.

Government

Burkina Faso is an independent republic with a unicameral National Assembly of 127 members, called deputies, who serve five-year terms. Political and constitutional reforms have moved Burkina Faso incrementally toward democratization. In 1991, a new constitution was passed following a referendum, laying the foundation of the current republic. There is currently some debate regarding the perceived necessity of drafting a new constitution after the November 2015 elections.

Economy

Burkina Faso has few natural resources, and 80 percent of its population engages in subsistence agriculture (peanuts, sesame, cotton, sorghum, millet, corn, rice, and livestock). Agricultural production varies geographically, but can be challenging due to poor soils in some regions and cyclical droughts which often impact the entire sub-region. Many young Burkinabè migrate to neighboring coastal countries annually, in search of unskilled employment. Burkina Faso is landlocked, which presents a significant obstacle to product exportation. The primary exports are cotton, livestock, and gold. Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world (per capita gross domestic product of \$1,213). Burkina Faso ranked 183 of 187 in the 2012 U.N. Human Development Index.

People and Culture

The population of Burkina Faso is approximately 18 million, with an annual growth rate of 3.05 percent. Burkina Faso is composed of a rich mix of over 60 language or ethnic groups. The major ethnic groups include the Mossi, Bobo, Peul, Gourmanche, Gourunssi, Bissa, Samo, and Dagara-Lobi. Islam is practiced by about 60 percent of the population. Christianity (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) is practiced by about 23 percent of the population. Traditional indigenous beliefs (animism) continue to play a major role in the lives of many Burkinabè, regardless of their formal religious orientation. The Burkinabè are known for their tolerance and acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity, and religious fundamentalism is rare. It is very common to find Christians, Muslims, and animists in the same family participating in one another's religious celebrations, and marriage across ethnic lines is widely accepted.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso

State.gov

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

Gpo.gov/libraries/public/

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

Lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html

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

[Http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf)

The United Nations resource book contains 2013 statistical data on all countries.

Data.un.org

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

Wikipedia.org

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

Worldbank.org

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

Data.worldbank.org/country

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

Www.countrywatch.com

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Burkina Faso to how to convert from the dollar to the Burkina Faso currency. Just click on Burkina Faso and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

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 Burkina Faso site: <http://www.friendsofburkinafaso.org/>

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Burkina Faso

UN.org/News/

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

VOAnews.com

Voice of America, the U.S. government’s multimedia broadcaster, covers news from around the world.

gouvernement.gov.bf/

This is the government of Burkina Faso website (in French).

fespaco.bf

This is the site of the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (in French or English), which takes place in Burkina Faso every two years.

allafrica.com

The All Africa Global Media site is a news and information service.

africa.upenn.edu/Country_Specific/Burkina.html

This page from the University of Pennsylvania’s African Studies Center links to other sites of interest.

<http://library.stanford.edu/areas/african-collections>

This Stanford University-based site on the region also links to a variety of other sites.

International Development Sites About Burkina Faso

unaids.org

This is the Joint United Nations program on HIV/AIDS.

unicef.org

UNICEF is the U.N. agency focused on promoting the rights and well-being of every child.

who.int/en

The World Health Organization website has information about several countries.

pnud.bf

The United Nations Development Program website is in French.

Recommended Books

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. "All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s." Cambridge, 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 Burkina Faso

1. Chilson, Peter. "Riding the Demon: On the Road in West Africa." Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999.
2. Else, David, et al. "West Africa." Oakland, Calif.: Lonely Planet, 1999.
3. Englebert, Pierre. "Burkina Faso: Unsteady Statehood in West Africa." Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995.
4. Guirma, Frederic. "Tales of Mogho: African Stories from Upper Volta." New York: Macmillan, 1971.
5. Rupley, Lawrence, and Daniel Miles McFarland. "Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso (2nd ed.)." Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1998.
6. Knight, James, and Katrina Manson. "Burkina Faso: The Bradt Travel Guide." Bradt Travel Guides, 2006.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Despite Burkina Faso's relatively good communications systems, you should be prepared for a significant reduction in the frequency and reliability of your communications with friends and family.

Mail

The postal system in Burkina Faso is reliable by African standards. Few Volunteers report problems receiving letters sent from the United States by airmail, however packages have arrived damaged or gone missing. Airmail letters and packages typically take three to four weeks to arrive, but can take longer if there are mail strikes or other disruptions. Internal mail service is reliable for the most part, with mail delivered within a few days to two weeks.

Packages sent via courier service or the post incur customs fees, which need to be paid by the recipient before receiving the package. These fees run anywhere from \$1 for a small package through the post to **\$100 or more for packages through DHL, FedEx, or other courier services**. Please discourage friends and family from sending packages via DHL, FedEx, or other courier services. The Peace Corps will usually pay these fees up front and deduct them from your living allowance. You can receive mail at the Peace Corps office or at your site through a local post office box. During pre-service training, have mail sent in care of the Peace Corps office to the following address:

“Your Name,” PCT
S/c Corps de la Paix
01 B.P. 6031 Ouagadougou 01
Burkina Faso

Telephones

Cellphone service in Burkina Faso is relatively reliable and is expanding rapidly. All Volunteers have cellphone coverage in their sites. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso will make basic cellphones available for purchase soon after your arrival and you will be part of the Peace Corps/Burkina Faso “family plan,” which allows unlimited calling to other Volunteers and staff once you complete initial training. Additional usage for texting or calls outside the Peace Corps group is on a pre-paid basis, but is generally inexpensive for local calls. Phone credit is readily available and can be used for talk/text/data. Many Volunteers bring a smartphone for basic email and Internet access. While data coverage is far from universal, and very slow compared to the U.S. or Europe, it has expanded rapidly across many parts of the country in recent years. If you choose to bring a phone from the States, be sure it is a GSM phone compatible with the European bands and is “unlocked” or it will not work in Burkina Faso.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Computer access is available at private Internet cafes in many towns and cities and, for work-related purposes, at the Peace Corps office. Wireless coverage, when available, can be slow. Unlocked smartphones can provide Internet access almost anywhere. In smaller villages, there may not be electricity, but there are almost always places to charge electronic equipment for a small fee. Many PCVs have solar panels that allow them to charge phones and computers.

Housing and Site Location

Your community or the government ministry to which you are assigned is responsible for providing you with housing in accordance with the Peace Corps' site selection criteria. Peace Corps housing is modest and comparable to houses in your community. The majority of Health and Community Economic Development Volunteers live in small rural villages, while Education Volunteers tend to live in larger

villages and towns. Volunteer housing is typically a small house made of mud or cement bricks with a thatch or tin roof. Most Volunteers do not have running water or electricity; they draw their water from a well and use kerosene lanterns for light at night. Some Volunteers live with a host family during their Volunteer service. Most Volunteers are within a couple hours of a neighboring Volunteer and able to reach the Peace Corps office in Ouagadougou by public transport within a day.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly living allowance in local currency (West African CFA franc) that is sufficient to live at the level of people in their host community. The allowance covers food, household supplies, clothing, transportation to and from work, utilities (if available), recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses. Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to live at a level that is comparable with that of their host country counterparts. The Peace Corps discourages Volunteers from supplementing their living allowance with funds from home. Volunteers are considered to be working seven days a week and they accrue two days of annual leave allowance for every month of Volunteer service. Each PCV receives the equivalent of \$24 per month in CFA, representing the two days of vacation (leave) allowance you are entitled to each month regardless of whether you actually travel during that month. Travel within Burkina Faso or West Africa is highly encouraged.

Food and Diet

Your drinking water is likely to be of poor quality and thus will require boiling and filtering (the Peace Corps will provide you with filters). Availability of fruits and vegetables varies based on location, but can be somewhat limited in villages and small towns where Volunteers live, with only one or two fruits or vegetables available during any given season. Burkina Faso produces some of the best mangoes and papayas in the world, but the mangoes are seasonal. Garlic, onions, tomatoes, and a local variety of eggplant are available year-round in many locations. Other fruits and vegetables grown in the country, **depending on the season and location**, include oranges, limes, grapefruits, bananas, strawberries (available in January in Ouagadougou), melons, carrots, cabbages, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, bell peppers, hot peppers, beets, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, and cucumbers. Bulk dried spices (basil, oregano, cumin, coriander, curry, turmeric, cinnamon, cloves, etc.) are also readily available in Ouagadougou and other large towns. Burkinabè meals are simple. A typical dish consists of a staple food such as rice, millet, yams, sorghum, or maize served with a sauce made from okra, various greens (e.g., spinach), tomatoes, and/or peanuts. Sauces may contain fish or meat. French bread is available in larger towns and villages and whole wheat bread is available in Ouagadougou. The normal diet in village is typically lacking in certain nutrients, thus Volunteers are provided and encouraged to take multivitamins to address deficits in their diet.

Transportation

Paved roads connect the largest towns and cities in Burkina Faso, and fairly well-maintained buses service these routes on relatively consistent schedules. Smaller towns and villages are served by “bush taxis,” typically overcrowded and poorly maintained minibuses, which do not normally run on fixed schedules. As some Volunteer sites are not on paved roads, Volunteers are sometimes required to bicycle to a nearby town or village where public transport is available. All Volunteers are issued basic mountain bikes for work purposes and must wear a bicycle helmet when cycling. **Trainees should bring a bike helmet from the U.S. with them. If you need to purchase a bike helmet in the States, bring the receipt with you for reimbursement after arrival in-country.** For safety reasons, Peace Corps/Burkina Faso prohibits Volunteers from driving or riding on any two- or three-wheeled motorized vehicles (such as a motorcycle), traveling at night, or owning/driving any type of motorized vehicle. As a Volunteer in Burkina Faso, riding public transportation is the most dangerous thing that you do on a routine basis. As part of your pre-service training (PST), you will receive information on how to reduce risk while riding public transportation.

Geography and Climate

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country that sits on the edge of the Sahel. Topographically, it is mostly flat with undulating plains. It has an area of 274,200 square kilometers, slightly larger than Colorado. It is bordered to the north by Mali and Niger and to the south by Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. While the north is approaching desert conditions, the southern and central regions are partially forested. There are two distinct seasons in Burkina Faso: the rainy season from June to October and the dry season from November to May. The climate is warm, dry, and dusty from November to February (harmattan season), very hot and dry from March to May, and warm and wet from June to October, when most staple crops are grown. The monthly mean maximum temperature ranges from a high of 104 °F (40 °C) in March and April to a low 86 °F (30 °C) in August. The monthly mean minimum temperature ranges from a high of 80 °F (27 °C) in April and May to a low 61 °F (16 °C) in December and January. During the heart of the hot season in April, it is not unusual for daytime temperatures to reach 110 °F (43 °C). Average rainfall ranges from approximately 40 inches in the south to less than 10 inches in the north.

Social Activities

Social activities will vary according to where you are located. They might include relaxing and talking with friends and neighbors, drinking tea, going to the market, or taking part in local festivals. The cultural diversity of Burkina Faso means that there is always something of interest taking place nearby that you can learn from, be it drumming and dancing or planting peanuts. In keeping with its goal of cross-cultural exchange, the Peace Corps expects Volunteers to establish social networks with Burkinabè friends and colleagues at their sites rather than seeking out other Volunteers for social activities. Such networks enhance Volunteers' ability to integrate into their communities and be effective in their work.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the biggest challenges faced by Volunteers in Burkina Faso is defining their role as professionals in the Burkinabè context. The tendency of Burkinabè counterparts to blur (from a Western perspective) the distinction between professional and personal time and space adds a layer of complexity to the challenge of establishing oneself as a professional. Cultivating work relationships is not something that happens only during work hours: Behavior and activities outside the work setting will have a significant impact on your professional relationships.

The Burkinabè, like other Africans, put a great deal of emphasis upon dressing well in public, whether at work or in the market. It is almost unheard of for a Burkinabè man or woman to wear shorts in public unless he or she is taking part in some kind of sporting event. Nor would a professional man or woman ever be seen wearing dirty, disheveled, wrinkled, or torn clothing. Observe how respected colleagues are dressed in your workplace as a guide to professional dress in your school or office.

Volunteers need to be aware of other unwritten rules of the culture, such as the fact that Burkinabè women never go to a bar on their own. Exposed body piercings on men and women or long hair on men may elicit stares and, possibly, rude questions or comments, and may make it more difficult to integrate into your host community. Serving in the Peace Corps often demands sacrificing personal preferences regarding dress and behavior. There will be ample discussion of this subject during cross-cultural sessions in pre-service training.

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 (often alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and

being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that increase the risk level for Volunteers. 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 Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso. 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 and 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. 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.

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

Rewards and Frustrations

The Peace Corps has been accurately described as *“the toughest job you’ll ever love.”* The experience of adapting to a new culture and environment commonly results in a series of emotional peaks and valleys. You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance from supervisors. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from, or without receiving feedback on, your work. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results. To overcome these challenges, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Based on feedback from returned Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Burkina Faso feeling they have gained much more than they were able to give during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and fully dedicate yourself to your work, you will have a productive Volunteer service.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Peace Corps Training Continuum

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso 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 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.

The continuum of learning starts at PST when you arrive in Burkina Faso and continues until your departure 27 months later (Figure 1). Training combines structured classroom study, independent study, and hands-on 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 (staging) through the end of service. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso staff members anticipate that you will approach training with an open mind, a desire to learn, and a willingness to become involved.

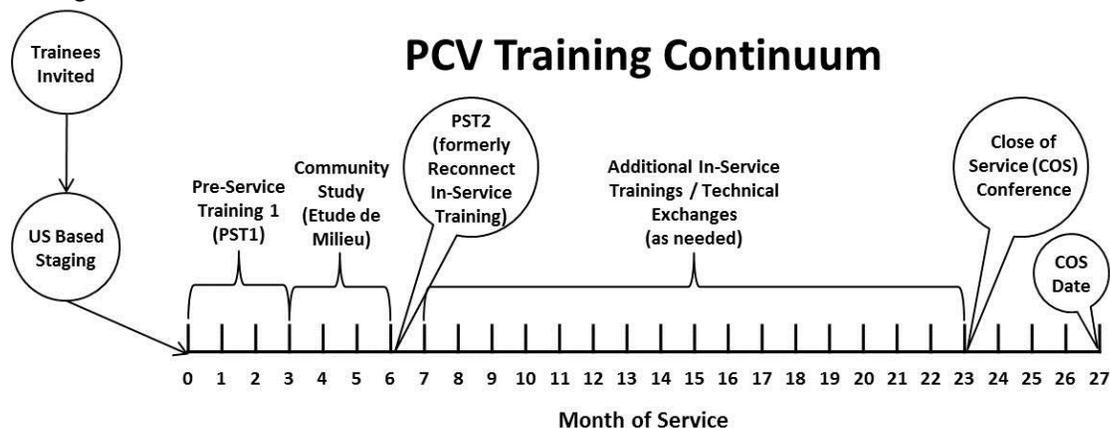


Figure 1. Peace Corps Burkina Faso Volunteer Training Continuum

PST has traditionally been the first 11–12 weeks of in-country training that trainees receive before swearing-in as a Volunteer and being assigned to a site for two years of service. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso employs an extended PST model (Figure 1), which encompasses the initial 11–12 weeks of in-country training (referred to as PST1), a three-month *etude du milieu* (community study), and an additional two weeks of intensive technical training (referred to as PST2). The beginning of PST1

consists of several days of orientation that will take place in the capital city of Ouagadougou. After this orientation period, trainees will travel to Leo, about 180 kilometers south of Ouagadougou, where the training center is located. Trainees will live with host families, which is one of the most valuable and critical elements of training. The integration into the host community and host family fosters language and cross-cultural learning and helps ensure Volunteers' health, safety, and security. By the end of PST1, trainees will have developed the competencies (technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, safety and security) necessary to begin Peace Corps service. These competencies will serve as the foundation upon which you will build your experience as a successful Peace Corps Volunteer.

After a provisional swearing-in ceremony, which takes place at the end of PST1, you will be assigned to your site where you will have three months to complete your *etude du milieu* (community study). During the community study, you should focus your energy on integrating into your community. This can be accomplished by improving your French and local language skills, getting to know your neighbors, learning about the culture of your community, eating with your neighbors, participating in community social gatherings, attending classes at the primary schools, and reading technical documents. Successful, sustainable development is based on the relationships you build and your ability to respectfully integrate into your host community and culture.

Because of the importance of integration to your success as a Volunteer, you are required to remain within your community during your community study. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso recognizes that you may need to leave your site from time to time to conduct personal business (e.g., banking and shopping). Therefore, you are authorized a personal absence of two nights per month, **within your region**, during your community study.

At the end of your community study, you will participate in PST2, which consists of two weeks of intensive technical training. During PST2, you will also be asked to present the findings of your community study to your supervisor and other trainees. Peace Corps staff will measure your progress and determine if you have successfully achieved the necessary competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Trainees officially become Volunteers after successful completion of PST1, the community study, and PST2.

In addition to PST, the Peace Corps provides Volunteers with a continuum of opportunities to increase their technical and cross-cultural skills through in-service trainings and technical exchanges. These additional training events are optional and tend to be focused on a specific topic of interest that addresses a major need of Burkina Faso. As the Peace Corps is a capacity-building organization, Volunteers are required to bring counterparts or community members to training events. Approximately four months before your service ends, you will attend a close of service (COS) conference. The goal of the COS conference is to prepare Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service. Additionally, the COS conference is a time to review Volunteers' respective projects and personal experiences.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Burkina Faso 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 and other Burkina Faso experts will conduct the training program, with input from current Volunteers. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Burkina Faso and strategies for working within such an environment. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Burkina Faso 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.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, language skills are the key to a productive and meaningful service. Language skills are critical to your job performance, help you integrate into your community, and ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Burkina Faso language instructors usually teach formal language classes five days a week, in small groups.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to meet, and hopefully exceed, the minimum language requirements during PST1 and to continue to develop your language skills after you arrive at your site. Prior to being assigned to your site, you will develop strategies to improve your language skills during your service. Volunteers are encouraged to continue studying language with the assistance of a local tutor. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso will support your continued language learning for up to one year after you have been assigned to your site.

Cross-Cultural Training

During cross-cultural training, you will have opportunities to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Burkina Faso. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Burkina Faso, 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. During cross-cultural training we will explore 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 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 Burkina Faso. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and basic treatment of medical illnesses found in Burkina Faso. 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 Burkina Faso.

Safety and Security Training

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

YOUR HEALTH CARE IN BURKINA FASO

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Burkina Faso, 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 Burkina Faso

Major health problems among Peace Corps Volunteers in Burkina Faso are rare and are often the result of Volunteers not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common major health concerns in Burkina Faso are malaria, amebic dysentery, hepatitis, meningitis, and HIV/AIDS. Because malaria is endemic in Burkina Faso, Volunteers are required to take anti-malarial pills. You will also receive vaccinations against yellow fever, hepatitis A and B, meningitis, typhoid, and rabies, if you are not already vaccinated against these diseases.

Other health problems in Burkina Faso are similar to those found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, headaches, dental problems, sinus infections, skin infections, minor injuries, STIs, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Burkina Faso because environmental factors raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of certain 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 Burkina Faso, 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 officers. 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 in country 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 officer(s) in Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso, 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 Burkina Faso is to take the following preventive measures:

Falciparum malaria is endemic in Burkina Faso and the surrounding countries, so you are required to take malaria prophylaxis. The medical officers work with each Volunteer to provide the best prophylaxis possible. There will be more information on malaria prevention during pre-service training.

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are preventable if proper food preparation and water treatment guidelines are followed. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worm, tapeworm, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water treatment and food preparation in Burkina Faso during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the most effective way to prevent STIs, including HIV. 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 officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptives are available, without charge, from the medical officer.

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

Women’s Health Information

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

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit 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	Antibiotic ointment
Ace bandages	Antifungal cream
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Antihistamine
Adhesive tape	Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner
Antacid tablets	Band-Aids
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)

Butterfly closures
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 may be helpful if you are questioned by officials 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 eliminate all risk.

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

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work.
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria.
- The Peace Corps provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks.
- 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, 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. As in the United States, you should never leave your phone or wallet on a table and walk away from the table.

Before you depart for Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso, 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 Burkina Faso 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
- Do not carry a purse, backpack, or bag in Ouagadougou or Bobo Dioulasso; individuals with bags are targeted by thieves
- 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. **Never leave items 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 risks of being a target of crime. As anywhere in the world, crime occurs in Burkina Faso. You can reduce the risks by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking simple 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. However, tourist attractions in large towns are favorite sites for pickpockets and other thieves.

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

- Ouagadougou, the capital city, and other large towns are frequently the worksites of scammers ("*faux types*" in French) who will portray themselves as good Samaritans and act as if they want to help you. Their real goal is to steal from you, change counterfeit money, or sell you fake items. Do not be impressed by the fluency of their English or their clean appearance.
- When riding in public transport, do not accept food or drinks from strangers. Incidents have occurred in which Volunteers were given a drugged soft drink and subsequently been robbed. Another example is drugged candy or snacks. The criminal eats untainted candy or biscuits and gives drugged candy or biscuits to his target.
- Taxis are often the worksite of criminals. Certain passengers, working with the driver, distract Volunteers and steal from them. Peace Corps/Burkina Faso has a list of preferred taxis in Ouagadougou and urges all Volunteers to use the preferred taxis.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing strong relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Burkina Faso may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: be cautious, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your risk of being a victim of 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 Burkina Faso will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to crimes committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment if 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. 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 to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not properly preserved at the time of the incident.

Office of Victim Advocacy

The Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) is a resource for 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 Burkina Faso

Crime data and statistics for Burkina Faso, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/burkinafaso>. 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 assist you in filing the complaint. The Peace Corps staff will ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand the local legal process. 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 Burkina Faso

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. Burkina Faso's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps Burkina Faso office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in updates 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. You will be required to get approval from your supervisor or the medical unit before leaving your site.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Burkina Faso. 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, 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. Peace Corps staff work 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 Burkina Faso's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will be instructed to remain in your site (stand fast) or gather with other Volunteers in Burkina Faso at predetermined locations (consolidation points) until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate. There is a team of security professionals (including the U.S. embassy's regional security officer, the U.S. ambassador, Peace Corps headquarters security staff, Peace Corps regional security staff, and post security staff) who will evaluate security threats and coordinate any needed actions to insure the safety and security of Volunteers.

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

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

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

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

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Outside of large towns in Burkina Faso, residents of rural communities have likely had little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. People will likely have misconceptions regarding typical U.S. behavior or norms. The people of Burkina Faso 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 community, but also for learning from the diversity of your host community and 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 productive 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 community has both a specific explanation and an expected outcome. Trust that members of your host community 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 Burkina Faso, 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.

Burkina Faso has a traditional, patriarchal society. Female Volunteers may be surprised by the extent to which community and domestic roles are defined along gender lines. Men generally hold positions of authority in the workplace (though women are becoming more visible there), in the community, and in the home. This can present challenges for female Volunteers, as the work they do may be seen as a typically “male” job. The difficulties are exacerbated because single women do not usually have the status and respect that comes with marriage and having children. Thus, women may find it challenging to have their ideas recognized and respected by both women and men.

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. People from different cultures may not 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 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 extremely kind to 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 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 interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

Although Burkinabè society can be conservative, Volunteers generally find the Burkinabè to be hospitable and accepting of people with a wide variety of backgrounds. Nevertheless, Burkinabè may have preconceived notions of Americans based on the kind of information available in Burkina Faso about Westerners, which comes mainly from television, movies, magazines, and local news reports and

often presents a limited view of American diversity. For example, Asian Americans are often called Chinois (Chinese), regardless of their actual background, and African Americans may not be considered Americans.

Volunteer Comment:

“Volunteers of color can have a much different experience from white Volunteers. Issues that Volunteers of color face that are not mentioned above involve the question of lineage. Once you have established that you are African American to the people in your village, they then want to know about what part of Africa you are from. For most African Americans, pinpointing exactly where they come from is difficult and it is even more difficult explaining this to someone in your village. Even though you may face this issue it is important to use it as a teaching experience. This allows you to teach people about American history and also about the history of Africa. Sometimes being a Volunteer of color can present challenges that other Volunteers probably will not face, but it is important to know that people ask questions and make statements because they do not know. So it is important to be patient and open-minded.”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Burkina Faso’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. 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 Burkina Faso is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbprcv.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 Burkina Faso and have very fond memories of their community and service. LGBTQ support groups may be available in your country of service, providing a network to support the needs of the Peace Corps LGBTQ community. Peace Corps staff will work with Volunteers to provide them with locally informed perspectives.

While same-sex acts are not illegal in Burkina Faso, the country has a very restrictive climate for sexual and gender minorities. LGBTQ individuals who are open about their orientation or gender identity face significant safety and security concerns. LGBTQ Volunteers will need to exercise caution about disclosing their orientation or gender identity in their host community, as doing so will most likely impede building a working relationships in the community. Other Volunteers and the Peace Corps staff will provide support, but it will likely be very difficult to be open outside of that circle.

Volunteer Comment:

“Having it not be an option to be open with my sexual identity in my village community is not easy: There are some days that are very difficult. But through understanding, and acceptance, of why that is, along with the well of acceptance that is offered from the Peace Corps community, this part of who I am isn't fully kept in the dark.”

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

As a disabled Volunteer in Burkina Faso, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Burkina Faso, 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 host country nationals to change their roles to better conform to traditional Burkina Faso relationships. Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso 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

Christianity, Islam, and animism are all practiced in Burkina Faso. You will be free to practice your own religion as long as you demonstrate respect for the religion of the people in your community and refrain from proselytizing.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

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

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

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

The high regard for elders in Burkinabè society lends support to older Volunteers' effectiveness at work. They, in turn, are able to find ways to use their extensive experience to assist their communities.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Burkina Faso?

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 Burkina Faso?

If you have electricity at your site, and it works, the current will be 220 volts, 50 cycles. Voltage sags and surges are very common and place a real strain on power supplies and voltage transformers or regulators. The Peace Corps does not provide transformers or regulators to Volunteers. Many Volunteers use rechargeable batteries with a solar charger, which is a good alternative to disposable batteries.

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 (though traveler's checks may be hard to cash in Burkina Faso). 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 (not including PST1, i.e., the first three months in-country). Leave may not be taken during pre-service training, community study, PST2, the close of service conference, or the last three months of service. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the community study as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays (longer than three weeks) 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. You are encouraged to 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 Burkina Faso do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking.

What should I bring as gifts for Burkina Faso 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 will be assigned sites at the beginning of pre-service training. 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 frequently within one hour of another Volunteer. Some sites require a day's travel to reach the Peace Corps/Burkina Faso office.

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 Burkina Faso?

International phone service to and from Burkina Faso is quite good, and you should be able to send and receive calls and text messages from your cellphone in Burkina Faso. Alternative SMS and phone services like Viber, WhatsApp, Skype, and Mio have become very popular with Volunteers. U.S. calling cards cannot be used in Burkina Faso, and calling collect is not possible.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

Peace Corps/Burkina Faso will make basic cellphones available for purchase soon after your arrival and you will be part of the Peace Corps/Burkina Faso "family plan," which allows unlimited calling to other Volunteers and staff once you complete PST1. Additional usage for texting or calls outside the Peace Corps group is on a pre-paid basis, but is generally inexpensive for local calls. Phone credit is readily available and can be used for talk/text/data. Many Volunteers bring a smartphone, for basic email and Internet access. While data coverage is far from universal, and very slow compared to the U.S. or Europe, it has expanded rapidly across many parts of the country in recent years. If you choose to bring a phone from the States, be sure it is a GSM phone compatible with the European bands and is "unlocked" or it will not work in Burkina Faso.

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

Computer access is available at private Internet cafes in many towns and cities and, for work-related purposes, at the Peace Corps office. Wireless coverage, when available, can be slow. Unlocked smartphones that use SIM cards can provide Internet access almost anywhere.

The decision whether to bring a laptop computer depends on your own needs. Among the factors to consider are that computers are not required for Volunteers' work; the Peace Corps does not provide technical support or insurance for personal computers; you may not be assigned to a site with electricity; and, as mentioned above, computer access is available at Internet cafes and at the Peace Corps office. However, most Volunteers who have brought laptops with them have been happy with their decision and have used their computers for both personal and work-related purposes. Volunteers recommend bringing an external hard drive or large flash drive and computers with long battery life. In smaller villages, there may not be electricity, but there are almost always places to charge electronics for a small fee.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM BURKINA FASO VOLUNTEERS

Welcome to Burkina Faso!

Congratulations on surviving the application process and being invited to serve. You should feel both proud and excited about the experience and adventure that you are embarking upon. Burkina Faso, although one of the poorest countries in the world, has tons to offer and your experience in the Faso will probably be marked with you taking away more than you contribute. As with all things, your experience here is what you make of it and every Volunteer's experience is different.

I affectionately call Burkina Faso the "Wild West" of Africa because this is one of the frontiers of global development. Anything and everything that you will do here will touch the lives of the people around you because things can only realistically get better. You will make a difference. Volunteers here are making a difference while teaching an English class of rowdy eighth graders, setting up business plans with farmers, and also while hanging out with villagers drinking local home-brewed beer. An important thing to note is that your experience will only be worth as much as you yourself invest into it. You may not always see the dividends that you expect, but the ratio remains true: big input = big output.

As with the stereotypical idea of the "Wild West," your dusty adventure here will be complete with cowboys, beautiful sunsets, wandering animals, Wild West-style towns and saloons, and more than a few adrenaline rushes. This is the ultimate adventure that you will never adequately be able to prepare yourself for. In order to be successful you need only bring lots of clean underwear, a way to stay connected to home, and an attitude targeted towards adventure and hard work. Leave any and all expectations at home along with unnecessary clothing and tools. You can buy anything that you need here, barring good underwear, and the most useful expectations are the ones that you never have. "*Ça va aller*" (It's all good homie!)

Good luck with your preparations and enjoy your last few weeks in AmericaLand.

Best wishes,

Pat, Health Volunteer

Dear Invitee,

Félicitations! You are one step closer to becoming an official Peace Corps Volunteer. That's a big deal. At the moment you may be feeling excited, anxious, eager, uncertain, or all of the above and that's OK. By accepting your invitation, you will face some of the toughest challenges you will have ever confronted, but you will also gain a wealth of unique and invaluable experiences. As a Volunteer, not only will you commit to spend 27 months in one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world, you will also be continuously challenged by an unfamiliar culture, moments of self-doubt and loneliness, and bouts of homesickness. However, these obstacles will only serve to strengthen you in the long run and will push you to undergo important moments of introspection in which you will learn a tremendous amount about yourself and your capabilities. Additionally, you will forge lasting friendships with other Volunteers and locals within your village. You will learn to speak at least one of the many local languages in addition to French, and will get to experience firsthand the generous and fascinating Burkinabe culture. Throughout your service, you will experience moments of overwhelming fulfillment and joy in which you will remember exactly why you joined the Peace Corps. It is moments like these that you will cherish and that will keep you driven. And when confronted with temporary hardships it's always useful to remember the common Burkinabe saying, "*Ça va aller,*" meaning "Things will work out," as they indeed always do if you persevere and remain optimistic.

However, these are considerations that apply only to you, and you are only half the picture when it comes to the Peace Corps. Our Peace Corps slogan for Burkina Faso is "Challenge Yourself. Empower Others." As it suggests, more than anything, your purpose as a Volunteer is to empower those you work with. Whether it's through teaching science at a high school, raising awareness of gender equality issues, or teaching local womens' associations bookkeeping skills, you will be empowering those around you to take control of their lives and work toward improving their living conditions. Even through your mere presence in village and your daily interactions with the locals, you will help to "promote world peace and friendship," the very bedrock on which the Peace Corps is founded. It is with all this in mind that I sincerely hope you choose to take the next step by accepting your invitation. An unforgettable journey is just around the corner. It's yours for the taking.

Nadim, CED Volunteer

Dear Peace Corps Invitee,

Congratulations on the start of a new and wonderful chapter of your life! Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso is an opportunity for you to become a part of a new culture, to empower your new community, and to grow personally.

The culture of the people of Burkina, the Burkinabe, is rich and exceptional. You will learn about their kindness, even while you are still a stranger. When you meet your host family, they will introduce you to their lives: their food, their language, their daily chores, and their families. At first, you will find it all very strange and foreign. Meals consisting of millet and leaves, languages like French, Moore, and Bissa, chores including pumping water and washing clothes by hand, and families with two wives and 15 children will take time to get used to. However, you will slowly grow accustomed to it and embrace it as your own.

The work that you do at your site will be different from mine and even different from the Volunteers that will come in with you. Your activities will take all different shapes and forms. Whether it is inviting your Burkinabe family to Thanksgiving dinner, teaching them about America and the rest of the world, empowering one woman in your village by teaching her how to make tofu so she can sell it in the market and pay for her children to go to school, starting a girls' mentoring project at your elementary school, or running workshops with parents and teachers to better run and maintain your school, your work will be fulfilling. There will be days when the only thing you check off your list will be hanging out with your neighbors and getting water from your nearby pump to wash your clothes. The most important things to remember are that your experience is unique and that you will get as much out of your experience as you put into it!

I am sure a lot of you are nervous about coming to Burkina. It is true, Burkina Faso is a challenging post, but also the best post (alright, that is my opinion, but it truly is a wonderful post). The Burkinabe are thoughtful, caring, and will do everything possible to help you through your time here; whether that is when you are taking public transport across the country or struggling with a new language, they will be there for you. Peace Corps staff and all of the other Volunteers will also always be there to support you. Making mistakes is normal, but smiling and saying, "*Ça va aller,*" (things will work out) will make your experience continue and only get better.

Enjoy a wonderful service in land of the upright people! Your community is already looking forward to you and cannot wait.

Katie, Third Year Volunteer

Hey All!

Congratulations on being invited into the Peace Corps! As you've probably heard this is a very challenging, rewarding, thought-provoking, experience that is full of personal growth. I'm very excited for you all. It is not always easy, there are many difficulties, but it continually gets easier, and Burkina Faso becomes your home, and your colleagues and friends, both American and Burkinabe, become your family.

In the Peace Corps, what you give is what you get, and your experience will be what you make of it. If you keep your mind open, and commit to the experience with a positive attitude and an ability to go with the flow, you'll find time passing by too quickly.

Looking back at the process of getting here, it can be very long and often stressful, dealing with medical, etc. But if you hang in there you'll get to start the adventure of a life time.

Burkina Faso is a special place. I've been told multiple times (not just by Burkinabe) that it has the nicest people in Africa. It is a diverse country, home to over 60 different ethnic groups, the largest being the Mossi. Many figures point to Burkina Faso as being one of the poorest countries in the world, but it is also a country full of acceptance, culture, stability, and peaceful people.

At this point in the process, you're probably feeling a mix of emotions: anxiety, excitement, nervousness, stress, and maybe even sadness at the thought of leaving everyone you love and the comforts of home. Well, this mix of emotions, and many more, will probably ebb and flow and change and resurface throughout your service as you move from one day to the next, and then one year to the next. But through it all, remember that the Peace Corps is a two-year process for a reason. Be patient with yourself. You will make mistakes, and that's OK, because in the end you will learn French. You will learn your local language. You will become a leader in your community. And, in time, you'll learn to love your new home in Burkina Faso.

I would also like to state that whatever your background/past experience, you have something to offer. You will learn appropriate skills, and we are here to help, teach, and train each other as well. I believe it is an almost universal thought of not being prepared/qualified for this experience...But it will be OK. I know that from the moment you all meet, your start of service will be full of memories, both challenging and joyful, frustrating and fun, and I wish you the best, and enjoy the U.S. while you are there.

Calder, PCV

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Burkina Faso and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is unique. 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 Burkina Faso.

General Clothing

- 1 pair of nice jeans
- Dress clothes (business casual for trainings; Education Volunteers should dress nicely in the classroom or at work). Don't bring too much clothing as you will begin having clothes made locally during PST.
- Slacks, 1 tie (you can buy more here if you really feel like you're going to wear them)
- Solid color button up shirts (2-3)
- Nice quality solid color dress T-shirts (2)
- A good amount of quality underwear!
- 5 pairs of good socks
- Shorts: only for sports (not for everyday use—you can also get them here)
- Light jacket and/or sweatshirts
- Nice belt

Shoes

Your shoes should be nice and clean if you are in a professional environment—no old Berks or holey tennis shoes.

- A good pair of Chacos, Tevas, Keens, etc., for walking/traveling
- Running shoes
- Nice-looking comfortable dress shoes
- Work boots/something to go to the farm in
- Don't bring anything white or white-ish (black or brown recommended)

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

Note that the medical kit Peace Corps gives to Volunteers includes Ibuprofen, non-aspirin, tampons, sunscreen, insect repellent, basic first aid supplies, pepto bismol, and multivitamins, so there is no need to bring these items. Other things that are easy to find include toothpaste, lotion, toothbrushes, and soap, so only bring enough to get you through the first month or so.

- Good conditioner (shampoo can be found)
- Deodorant
- Good razors (inexpensive razors are available)
- Extra reading glasses (if you need them)
- Hand sanitizer (can be found in supermarkets in Ouaga and in pharmacies)

Electronics

- USB key (a MUST—bring a couple)
- Laptop (if you have one and are OK with the possibility that you may not return with it). Note: viruses are rampant here, so come with either great virus protection or a Mac, set a system restore point before coming, and backup everything. Or bring a portable DVD player and good DVDs (there's a DVD player in the capital and new movies or series are great here).

- iPod, wall charger, good headphones, small speakers
- Lithium batteries for the camera (batteries here are poor quality and expensive)
- Cellphone – see information in previous sections
- External hard drive (for movies, music, and documents. Bring a 500GB if you can afford it.)
- Short-wave radio for security reasons, and if you're old school and like Voice of America/BBC
- Headlamp/wind-up flashlight/led flashlight
- Solar charger
- Protective coverings for electronics (Burkina Faso is a very dusty country)

Kitchen

- Spices—ones that are difficult to find are chili powder, dill, paprika, nutmeg, and a good peppercorn grinder
- Zip-top bags/plastic food containers—important for protecting food against pests (containers can be found in town).
- Snacks for training before you get used to the food, such as granola bars.

Miscellaneous

- Quick-drying/microfiber towel
- Hand crank lantern/flashlight.
- Leatherman/Swiss Army knife
- A good pillow/airplane pillow (difficult to travel with, worth it for some Volunteers)
- Hair-cutting scissors
- Good, durable watch.
- A few good novels/books. There is a large library of shared books, so bring your favorites to get you through training.
- Photos of family, friends, your hometown
- Padlock/combination lock
- Good travel games (cards, scrabble, etc.)
- Money belt for traveling
- French press (if you love coffee)
- Nice-looking but inexpensive jewelry
- Sleeping sac—lightweight—amazing for traveling
- Vegetable seeds for a personal garden
- Good sunglasses
- Yoga mat/exercise band

What Not To Bring

- iPad (no USB drive)
- Medical supplies (i.e., ibuprofen—all essentials provided by the Peace Corps)
- Shoes that you wouldn't wear in the U.S. (Chacos, Keens, Tevas are not for everyone. If you like them, bring them; if you don't like them normally you won't wear them here.)
- Cheap sunglasses (can be found everywhere here; bring nice ones if you want them)
- Dishes, utensils, etc.
- French dictionary (provided by the Peace Corps during training)

You are going to forget stuff you wish you had, and bring stuff you don't need. Don't stress about it too much. You can find everything you really need here, and your family can send you essentials and treats during your service. Don't spend too much money. It's better to buy things here after you know what you need/want. Good luck!

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 expires after you COS; 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.
- Bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control) you are currently taking.

Insurance

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

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. Information about loan deferment is at peacecorps.gov/loans/.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Christina Stegura Desk Officer	ext. 2852 burkinafaso@peacecorps.gov	202.692.2852
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	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 Applicant Portal questions			amsadmin@peacecorps.gov
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
New Volunteer Portal questions			staging@peacecorps.gov
<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