



The Peace Corps

FAMILY & FRIENDS RESOURCE GUIDE

Parents, Family, and Friends Play a Part in the Volunteer Experience

There are multiple ways to be involved with your Volunteer's experience, beginning with your approval and support. Family and friends are invited to attend information sessions held throughout the country and online. Find upcoming events at www.peacecorps.gov/events

If a loved one is considering applying to the Peace Corps or currently serving in the Peace Corps, congratulations! Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer is an exceptional experience, one that furthers the cause of world peace and provides an incredible opportunity for personal and professional growth. It is an honor to be a Peace Corps Volunteer, as the selection process is a competitive one.

This guide answers questions and provides information that can alleviate concerns. As Volunteers begin on the experience of a lifetime, love and encouragement from folks "back home" is tremendously helpful.

"Our advice for parents whose children have a desire to go into the Peace Corps is to let them fulfill that desire. If the child is selected, the parents should feel extremely proud. The Peace Corps is a life-changing experience. It will be the hardest job they've ever had and the one they will love the most."

Rebecca and Ronald Tubbs, whose daughter served in Ukraine

PEACE CORPS

Since its launch in 1961, the Peace Corps has aimed to promote world peace and friendship by

- Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
- Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
- Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Nearly 200,000 Volunteers have served in the Peace Corps with approximately 8,000 currently serving in over 75 countries. They work in education, youth and community development, health, HIV/AIDS, environment, agriculture, business development, and information and communication technology. The Peace Corps is an independent U.S. government agency.

Health and Safety of the Volunteer is Top Priority

One of the advantages of serving abroad with the Peace Corps is the safety net that comes from the agency being part of the federal government. Every country where Peace Corps serves has a medical staff and a safety and security coordinator assigned to provide health services and train Volunteers. There are inherent risks to living and traveling in the countries where the Peace Corps serves. To prepare and protect Volunteers, Peace Corps provides training, support, and services.



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HEALTH

The Peace Corps staff includes a medical officer at each country's post. A majority of these medical officers are American trained and, in all instances, have been approved by the Peace Corps quality assurance chief.

- The medical staff briefs Volunteers on staying healthy, provides them with the basic medical skills and supplies needed to do so, provides primary care as needed, and is on call 24/7 for emergencies. If a health problem occurs that cannot be treated locally, the Peace Corps, at its own expense, will send the Volunteer to an appropriate facility in a nearby country or back to the United States.

- Vaccinations and medications are given before and during a Volunteer's service.

- Peace Corps program managers and medical staff visit periodically to monitor issues related to the Volunteers' site assignments.

- The Peace Corps assumes the costs of all medical and dental expenses during an individual's service.

SAFETY

The Peace Corps provides Volunteers with two to three months of training designed to raise awareness of their new environment, build their capacity to effectively handle the many challenges they will face, and provide tools they need to adopt a safe and appropriate lifestyle. Peace Corps has a security program for each country in which Volunteers serve.

Training and Preparation

- Volunteers are tested for adequate communication skills in the local language before being placed in their individual sites.

- Most Volunteers live with a host family during training to fully immerse themselves in the new culture.

- Volunteers receive guidance about host country cultural expectations and how personal choices in dress, living arrangements, means of travel, entertainment, and companionship may have a direct impact on how Volunteers are viewed, and thus treated, by their communities.

- A strong emphasis is placed on mature behavior and the exercise of sound judgment to enhance personal safety. The Peace Corps has global and country-specific policies and procedures in place that support safe and healthy Volunteers.

Living, Working, and Building Relationships

- Peace Corps assesses and approves the sites where Volunteers will live and work, ensuring these locations are appropriate and safe.

- Volunteers are assigned work counterparts in their communities and often live with or near a host family.

- By living in the communities they serve, Volunteers develop close interpersonal relationships with host-country members. This fosters a safe environment as Volunteers are considered to be part of the local community and, as such, valued and protected as extended family members and respected colleagues.

- Volunteers are trained and expected to report safety concerns or incidents to the appropriate Peace Corps staff member. If a Volunteer's safety or well-being is at risk or compromised, Peace Corps staff will help resolve the situation or move the Volunteer to another location. The staff is prepared to provide appropriate medical, emotional, and administrative support as each case warrants, and Volunteer confidentiality is respected.

In-Country Emergency Action Plans

Peace Corps has country specific Emergency Action Plans (EAP) in place in each Peace Corps country and for which each Volunteer is trained. These plans, developed to address such events as natural disasters or civil unrest, are tested and revised annually. A component of the EAP ensures that Volunteers can be contacted in case of an emergency and for important notices. In a crisis, the Peace Corps coordinates with the U.S. Embassy in each host country to share information, develop strategies, and coordinate communications.

If a situation arises in a country that poses a potential threat to Volunteers, the Peace Corps will immediately assess the nature of the threat and respond in a manner that maximizes the Volunteers' safety and well-being. If the decision is made to remove Volunteers from a country, the Peace Corps will initiate calls to the emergency contact numbers each Volunteer has identified. As part of the Peace Corps safety and security procedures, Volunteers are instructed to stay in touch with the Peace Corps office. They are required to report their whereabouts when they travel from their community, and are required to receive Peace Corps authorization if they intend to leave the country of assignment for any reason.



Staying in Touch with the Volunteer

Family Emergencies: The Peace Corps Office of Special Services (OSS) has a 24-hour duty officer available for family members needing to advise their Volunteer of a critical illness or death of a family member. OSS notifies the Volunteer of an emergency and/or arranges for emergency leave; responds to family questions about a Volunteer's status; and supplies an update about civil unrest or a natural disaster in the host country. If a death occurs in a Volunteer's immediate family, the Peace Corps allows a leave period and pays for the Volunteer's travel home. **24-hour emergency telephone: 800-424-8580 (follow instructions for headquarters office, ext. 1470) or 202-692-1470.**

Communications: We have become accustomed to broad communication access through text messaging, instant messaging, cellphone calls, and email. While technology continues to increase even in the most remote places of the world, each country will have varying degrees of availability and reliability. In some countries, cellphones are common. In others, Internet cafés may be nearby. In all countries, Volunteers can use computers when they are at the Peace Corps office. After adjusting to the particulars of a Volunteer's location, staying in touch with the Volunteer is possible.

Postal systems in other countries may not always be consistent or may take longer to distribute mail than in the U.S. Deliveries many take several weeks. It is suggested to number letters for tracking purposes as correspondence may be delivered out of sequential order. Also, consider carefully before sending items of great value. Packages, unfortunately, can get lost.

Visiting: Some families and friends visit their Volunteer during his or her service. This is always an exciting time for everyone, including the Volunteer's community. Families who, at their own expense, want to visit a Volunteer are welcome to do so after the Volunteer's two to three month pre-service training and the first three months of service are both complete, and before the last three months of service. When making plans, families should work closely with the Volunteer to time a visit. Work schedules can be complex, and Volunteers need to obtain approval from their Peace Corps and host-country supervisors for vacation days.

Benefits of Service

Personal Development

The Peace Corps requires serious commitment and hard work. Volunteers leave the comforts of home and immerse themselves 24/7 in another culture, apply technical skills, and learn a new language that must be used every day – to shop for food, obtain transportation, develop friendships, and conduct work. Practical skills are gained, and intangible benefits come with making a difference in people's lives and relying on oneself to respond to the needs of others. The benefits of the Peace Corps don't end with overseas service. It's an experience to draw upon throughout a lifetime.

Professional Development

The skills Volunteers gain through their Peace Corps experience can enhance careers in business, education, nonprofit organizations, and government.

- **Skills for the Global Marketplace:** Fluency in another language, international experience, and cross-cultural understanding are highly sought-after assets in today's global economy. View a list of some notable returned Peace Corps Volunteers at www.peacecorps.gov/notables

- **Receive Advantages in Federal Employment:** Volunteers who complete two years of service receive one year of noncompetitive eligibility for employment in the federal government. This means, at the employing agency's discretion, if a Volunteer meets the minimum qualifications for a position, he or she can be hired without going through the standard competitive process. Those who are employed by the federal government after their Peace Corps service can receive credit toward retirement for their years of Volunteer service.

- **Transition and Job Placement Support:** Before departing from their country of service, Volunteers are prepared for the transition back to the U.S. during a close of service conference. When Volunteers return to the U.S., the Peace Corps Office of Returned Volunteer Services provides them with transition assistance related to jobs and education.



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Peace Corps Graduate School Programs

A list of participating schools and fields of study can be found at www.peacecorps.gov/gradschool

“Peace Corps shaped our son in terms of turning what had been only thoughts into a career path. While he was serving in the area of public health, he got his commitment to medical school. Now he is a second-year resident in emergency medicine at a hospital.”

Phil Graitcer, whose son served in Malawi

“Successfully completing Peace Corps under fairly challenging circumstances speaks a lot about character, fortitude, and the ability to take on difficult problems. When I see applicants with Peace Corps in their background, it is a real positive.”

Frank Fountain, Senior Vice President, External Affairs and Public Policy, Chrysler
Returned Volunteer, India



Job Assistance After Service

- Semimonthly online newsletter with job announcements, graduate school information, and career-related articles and advice.
- Sponsored career events throughout the year in Washington, D.C., and other cities around the U.S.
- Help for returned Volunteers to translate their field experience for prospective employers and other professional contacts.

Financial Incentives

- Peace Corps pays for travel to and from the country of service, pays a monthly stipend to cover living expenses, and provides dental and medical care. Volunteers also receive two vacation days per month of service, a total of 48 days over two years.

- Peace Corps recognizes that returning from overseas requires some adjustment, and provides Volunteers with a transition fund of \$7,425 (pretax) for a full 27-month tour.

- Volunteers in the Peace Corps who have Perkins loans are potentially eligible for a partial cancellation benefit. School loan deferments exist for several federal programs, i.e., Stafford, Perkins, direct, and consolidated loans. Some commercial loans may also be deferred during Peace Corps service. Because the rules that authorize deferment are complicated and subject to change, it is best for applicants to contact their lending institutions to see how this benefit applies to their particular situation.

- Peace Corps offers two unique graduate school programs that combine Peace Corps service and graduate studies:

Master's International allows Volunteers to incorporate Peace Corps service as credit in a master's degree program in a variety of fields at over 50 academic institutions nationwide.

Fellows/USA offers returned Volunteers a lifetime opportunity for scholarships or reduced tuition at approximately 50 participating campuses in a variety of subject areas, combining graduate study with substantive, degree-related internships that help meet the needs of underserved U.S. communities.



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