



Diversity in the Peace Corps

The Peace Corps promotes world peace and friendship. Peace, tolerance, and improving lives are core values of our organization. Supporting a diverse and inclusive environment is essential to achieving the Peace Corps mission. We value diversity—the individual attributes that together help us meet our goals. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Our success and longevity are dependent on our ability to engage and include people of all backgrounds and perspectives. The Peace Corps Office of Diversity and National Outreach and the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity are dedicated to helping the agency realize this vision.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the Peace Corps accept openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Volunteers?

Yes. The Peace Corps does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. The agency seeks to reflect the diversity of America in its recruitment, inclusive of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community whose members have a long history of important contributions as Peace Corps Volunteers and staff.

Are LGBTQ Volunteers explicitly protected in nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies?

The Peace Corps provides equal volunteer opportunities for all persons. No person will be denied equal opportunity under applicable laws to volunteer with the Peace Corps because of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Can LGBTQ Volunteers be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in-country?

Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Most 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 mix of positive and negative reactions, while some come out only to select Peace Corps staff and fellow Volunteers. Peace Corps staff will work with Volunteers to provide them with locally informed perspectives, which may influence a Volunteer's decision.

Should LGBTQ applicants disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to Peace Corps recruitment staff? If so, at what point?

If an applicant is comfortable disclosing his or her orientation or gender identity, then yes. If an applicant comes out to a recruiter, he or she will be able to provide a better idea of what service is like for an LGBTQ Volunteer. One can choose to disclose orientation or identity at any time (or not at all). Note: The Peace Corps does ask that transgender Volunteers state their gender identity and expression when applying so the agency and staff can respect their preference and ensure they receive appropriate medical care.

What is the likelihood of an LGBTQ applicant being placed in a country where homosexual activity is criminalized?

While Volunteers can indicate what countries they would prefer to be placed in, placements are made based on a number of factors, including country need and applicant skills. LGBTQ Volunteers have successfully served in most Peace Corps countries, including those where homosexual activity is illegal. Before accepting an invitation to serve in a particular country, potential Volunteers may speak with currently serving and returned Peace Corps Volunteers about the potential challenges, as well as review country-specific cultural climate information.



What support is available for LGBTQ Volunteers?

As an agency, the Peace Corps intends to create open, inclusive, and accepting environments and encourages Volunteers to serve as allies to their LGBTQ colleagues to create a safe environment. Many Peace Corps posts have implemented Safe Zone trainings to enable staff to offer support and discuss LGBTQ and diversity issues with Volunteers (look for the “Safe Zone” signs). Many posts also offer LGBTQ support training for Volunteers and have Volunteer support groups—such as diversity committees and peer support networks—that offer a safe space for Volunteers to share experiences and seek support.

Can I speak with an LGBTQ Volunteer?

Yes. Recruiters can put applicants in touch with LGBTQ returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Additionally, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni provides a forum for returned and currently serving Volunteers to discuss and write firsthand accounts of their experiences. Visit lgbbrpcv.org for more information.

Can same-sex couples serve together in the Peace Corps?

Yes. Like heterosexual couples, same-sex couples can apply to serve together abroad. For more information, visit peacecorps.gov/couplesquestions.

“Because male homosexuality is criminalized in the country where I served, I decided to live a double life: I was open with U.S. citizens but closeted with local community members. Being gay certainly made my Peace Corps experience more complicated, but joining the Peace Corps was one of the best decisions of my life.”

A. Cotton

USAID, Africa Team Leader

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, 2004–06

“I made the decision to come out to host country nationals in my village and workplace. Being a member of the LGBT community was a blessing during my two years and two months in my country of service. I made the greatest friends, had the greatest experiences, and the greatest dialogues about diversity.”

A. Washington

DC Public Schools, Office of Special Education

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, 2010–12

**Make a difference.
Be a Volunteer.**



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