

General Construction & Skilled Trades

THE PEACE CORPS: CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you help translate host country development plans into community level action, thus improving the lives of local people. You arrive, not with funds or equipment, but with skills and knowledge as well the willingness to adapt them to your community. A successful project is one that continues to function effectively after you leave.

Before starting your two-year assignment, you receive up to three months of training that focuses on language, cross-cultural, and technical skills. It is usually provided in the country where you serve. The training focuses on language and cultural training to give you an understanding of the country's governmental system, cultural norms, and interpersonal relations. This assists you in becoming an integral member of the community. Technical training enhances your ability to effectively transfer your skills and knowledge to host-country people.

YOUR WORK AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

One of the critical tasks confronting the developing world is the creation of a physical infrastructure — water and sanitation facilities, school rooms, food storage facilities, housing, community centers, and health clinics. Peace Corps general construction Volunteers provide the technical and organizing skills needed to construct and renovate buildings. To foster ongoing community commitment, local people participate in project planning and implementation. Volunteers may train young people or tradesmen in technical or project management skills or teach at a secondary school, technical institute, or employment training center, working with young people in either urban or rural settings. In a school environment, a Volunteer may provide instruction in the fundamental principles and concepts of technical subjects and teach students how to manufacture, install, maintain, and repair basic domestic and industrial equipment.

Volunteers work with local materials, such as mud and manure blocks, brick, stone, cement, and poplar or pine woods. They may work with local government extension agents, skilled tradesmen, or community groups. Depending on the type of assignment, responsibilities may include:

- working with members of the community in the planning and construction of needed facilities from existing or innovative designs;
- organizing fundraising efforts for building materials;

- participating in various community development activities to engage support for projects and to encourage full, appropriate usage of the resulting structures;
- renovating or improving existing facilities;
- helping with administrative tasks, such as hiring and contracting of workers and setting up a bookkeeping system and training others to perform these duties;
- aiding in estimating and procuring needed supplies;
- serving as a vocational skills trainer for youth.
- teaching, in collaboration with host country staff, one or more of the following skills: woodwork, building construction, carpentry, computer skills, applied electricity, auto mechanics, or home economics. Duties might include: developing teaching materials, writing lesson plans, evaluating student progress, providing individual instruction, and preparing students to pass standardized examinations;
- preparing technical materials and evaluating current teaching techniques;
- ordering, maintaining and managing all equipment in the classroom or shop;
- counseling students on how to set up their own shops or enter the skilled labor force;
- helping organize evening courses for adults;
- initiating youth clubs, such as Junior Achievement.

A site may be in an urban area where Volunteers support efforts to establish local infrastructure and provide services for people living and working in lower income neighborhoods. Your responsibilities may also include traveling by local transportation to rural villages to promote construction of appropriate facilities using locally-available materials.

You must be adaptable and flexible about work that can sometimes be demanding and frustrating. You may find that construction materials are in short supply, that they are not of good quality, or that they are expensive and difficult to transport. Be prepared for delayed work schedules due to seasonal interruptions such as harvests or heavy rains. You need patience, determination, and a sense of humor. Those Volunteers who discover that the ability to communicate, motivate, and organize is just as important as their technical knowledge can make tremendous contributions to the lives of others.

EXAMPLES OF PEACE CORPS GENERAL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

Belize. The rural primary school system in Belize cannot meet expanding needs. Lack of facilities result in overcrowded classrooms. Schools often lack appropriate water and sanitation. The Government of Belize intends to increase the overall effectiveness of rural primary education. Volunteers help communities build or maintain educational facilities. Volunteers assist communities to identify, plan, and implement viable self-help development projects. Collaborating with the Ministry of Education and the community, Volunteers develop plans, coordinate purchasing of materials, supervise work teams, and participate in construction.

Niger. Traditional housing is a large contributor to land degradation in the form of deforestation. Woodless construction was introduced ten years ago to address problems of deforestation, but the concept has not yet been completely accepted. The potential is great, but the number of experienced craftsmen is limited. Volunteers are educating government civil engineers, designing workshops and training masons, and promoting the construction of woodless, adobe buildings. They establish relations with local village masons and government authorities; organize and administer training workshops; research and document relevant local housing construction information; provide education on the benefits of woodless construction to the general population through village visits, field trips, model houses; and aid masons in forming an association.

EXAMPLES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ASSIGNMENTS

Ghana. Non-governmental organizations in Ghana are addressing some of the problems facing children and young people who are affected by the unemployment rate. Volunteers are working with street youth in collaboration with vocational training institutions. They help students prepare for the national exam by teaching technical skills and guidelines. They organize and run summer workshops to enhance the skills of trade instructors.

Solomon Islands. This country in the South Western Pacific Ocean is a nation of villages on small, scattered islands. The purpose of the vocational education program is to help improve access, quality and relevance of education and training programs. Volunteers are posted in remote rural communities or in rural training centers sponsored by churches. The curriculum focuses on hands-on instruction in subjects such as small engine mechanics, woodworking and building, agriculture, crafts production, and home economics. The Solomon Islands have asked for married couples to be placed at these sites because of the isolated and rural conditions.

A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Service as a Peace Corps Volunteer offers you a unique opportunity to learn about critical development issues from the inside by helping people address community problems that they themselves have identified. You can make a tremendous contribution to the lives of others. At the same time, you discover that your experience is as much about your learning as it is about teaching.

Volunteer service develops or accentuates your professional abilities and enhances your personal growth. Virtually all returning Volunteers agree they have received far more than they have given. Recent college graduates gain hands-on experience and sometimes further define their career goals. Others confirm their commitment to their profession and receive career-boosting international experience. Retirees bring their accumulated life experiences to those that need and respect them.

Many employers place great value on the Peace Corps experience. You will find that your worldview, resourcefulness, and cross-cultural skills set you apart. You can have easier access to federal government jobs or earn college credit or scholarships because of your Peace Corps service. Whatever you decide to do after Peace Corps, you will bring with you a rare knowledge of the world, of people, and of yourself.

While there may be days of frustration and disappointment, there will also be a lifetime of satisfaction. The courage, patience and fortitude you call upon helps you understand why Peace Corps is still the toughest job you'll ever love.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Most General Construction/Skilled Trades volunteers hold a college degree. They also have six months to two years of experience in a skilled trade. Volunteers in this assignment also demonstrate several of the following:

- interest in teaching or tutoring;
- leadership experience in youth and/or adult service organizations;
- public speaking or presentation experience;
- community organizing and outreach experience;
- strong interpersonal skills.



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