

URBAN PLANNING

ASSIGNMENT 134

PEACE CORPS: CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The Peace Corps was established through the vision of President John F. Kennedy who challenged Americans to join a grand and global alliance to promote peace, friendship and better living conditions in the world. Since the first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Ghana in 1961, more than 148,000 American men and women have responded to the challenge. Volunteers have served in over 100 countries. Volunteers continue to respond today and 6,500 are currently serving in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific Islands, Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

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 even after you have left.

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. Language and cultural training- an understanding of the country's political system, cultural norms, and interpersonal relations- helps you become an integral member of the community. Technical training gives you the ability to effectively transfer your skills and knowledge to host-country people.

YOUR WORK AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER:

The influx of rural migrants to urban areas has created severe strains on the fledgling infrastructures of developing nations and has resulted in congestion, pollution, unemployment, lack of housing, and deteriorating transport. As a Peace Corps Volunteer in urban planning, you work closely with local planners and administrators. You may provide technical assistance to address issues such as: housing, potable water systems, sewage disposal, zoning, and land-use controls. You may also assist in developing accurate data for decision makers, conducting a community assessment, analyzing resources, and providing alternate models if applicable. Other Peace Corps projects that

improve the quality of life include self-help housing, infrastructure planning, economic development, municipal management, and urban community development.

The exact goals of your project will vary according to the type of project, your qualifications, and the location of your assignment. In collaboration with local government officials and community leaders, your responsibilities may include:

- assisting in creating initiatives for local economic development;
- assisting in developing appropriate environmental planning regulations;
- conducting a community assessment to identify strengths and needs;
- conducting land-use planning and zoning studies;
- assisting in planning and implementing affordable services that ensure safe drinking water, sanitation systems, and solid waste management;
- determining how to use available energy resources and preparing proposals with relevant supporting data.

In addition to your primary duties, you coordinate other activities depending on community interests and skills. For example, you may teach English to your co-workers or help create income-generating projects with a women's group or with youth who are considered at risk.

Urban planning is new to many developing countries. It is vital that you understand not only the myriad of technical problems, but also the cultural views and social and political context in which you operate. Your assignment may have little or no established structure or schedule. You continually define your role in response to the needs of the local people. Your creativity, flexibility, self-motivation, and self-discipline may be vigorously challenged as you establish credibility and adapt to your new environment.

You need to have a variety of organizational, communication, and consensus-building skills and an ability to formulate action plans to help deal with complex problems and scarce resources. You must also keep in mind that your role is that of an advisor so that the organization will continue to sustain itself even after your departure. Your can-do attitude and your willingness to work with your hosts to find appropriate solutions will help people to help themselves.

EXAMPLES OF PEACE CORPS PROJECTS

Lithuania: Since regaining its independence in 1991, Lithuania has been experiencing an economic and political transformation. Peace Corps Small Enterprise Development Volunteers collaborate with the Ministry of Economics to aid in the transition to a market economy. Volunteers provide support to Lithuania's privatization efforts and help create regional economic development plans. They also conduct workshops to: encourage more efficient local and regional governmental planning; provide hands-on financial and management assistance to local governmental entities; provide organizational development expertise to non-governmental organizations; provide training in the development of brochures, informational booklets, and other materials on industrial development, social services; and serve as a resource to other business Volunteers. Volunteers help counterparts develop a long-term sustainable capacity to continue to provide similar services even after their departure.

Philippines: Rapid urbanization is causing a shortage of skilled human resources, funds for basic services, and an alienation of the vast majority of grassroots constituents. Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to municipal/city or provincial governments and responsibilities include: general public administration (budget preparation and planning); research on local government laws and legal advocacy; physical planning (land-use, zoning regulations, road/transport systems, water works and sewage, low-income housing); pollution control (environmental impact assessment, solid waste management, research on environmental laws); networking with non-governmental organizations; and community consultation on public interest issues.

Ivory Coast: The Peace Corps' Urban Environmental Management project encourages grass-roots initiatives for community-based urban services. Volunteers work as part of a team of at least four members, including two Volunteers and two Ivoirian colleagues. Their work combines planning, engineering, and construction with environmental/health education and serves to reinforce existing infrastructure or services while teaching the population about health hazards. Volunteers focus on the organization and development of municipal sanitation systems: low-cost and no-cost erosion control, latrines, road maintenance, and garbage collection systems.

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 the problems they 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 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 discover a focus for 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 most.

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.

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

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS ASSIGNMENTS IN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING INCLUDE:

- A. BA/BS or MA/MS Urban/Regional Planning, OR
- B. MA/MS Public Administration or Public Policy with Urban Planning emphasis, OR
- C. BA/BS Architecture, Urban Studies or Geography AND one year Urban Planning experience, OR
- D. BA/BS any discipline with five years professional experience (3 years directly related to urban planning).