

Peace Corps Assignment Area 143 A & B

Information Technology

THE PEACE CORPS: CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you help translate host country development plans into community action, thus improving the lives of local people. You arrive, not with funds and equipment, but with skills and knowledge as well as 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. The language and cross-culture training provides you with an understanding of the country's resources, governmental system, cultural norms and values, 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

The Peace Corps places Volunteers to work in Information Technology to assist communities and organizations to capitalize on available and appropriate information technologies. Volunteers identify innovative approaches that build the capacity of resource-poor communities to access and use information technology for their own development purposes. Through a variety of activities, Volunteers can help bridge the divide that exists between those who can afford access to technology and those who cannot. Even where basic human needs are evident, governments are requesting assistance in building technological skills, particularly to prepare youth for the information age.

Peace Corps Volunteers' work in this area may include a broad range of activities. For example, Volunteers can help link entrepreneurs to new business opportunities (including to new markets via e-commerce), expand farmers' access to current information on market prices, bring the Internet into the classroom, track immunization coverage, or provide a forum for communities to share ideas about development activities.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will provide technical assistance, training, and support to those interested in using information technology to enhance their community or organization. In many cases, you will be introducing people to the computer and its abilities as a tool for efficiency and communication. These activities are likely to fall within a broad program area, such as business, health, education, the environment, or agriculture. You may be assigned to a school system, health ministry, municipal government office, or non-governmental organization. You may focus on transferring data processing and computer skills, developing regional databases, or implementing an area-wide network for use by a government office. Depending on your interests, skills, and the nature of the assignment, you may be involved in:

- Teaching computer literacy to teachers, students, and community members in a classroom setting and developing appropriate training materials;
- Using e-mail and creating web pages to create links among small businesses and other organizations, helping them advertise goods and services;
- Assisting the national health system to develop databases for tracking

epidemiological information and designing intervention strategies;

- Providing training in alternative energy sources, computer maintenance and repair, and installation of hardware and software;
- Establishing self-sustaining computer resource centers and helping communities assume responsibility for maintenance, fees-for-service, support, and teaching.

The key to success will be in helping people use computer equipment—not as a goal itself—but as a means to address their own development needs. Given that the infrastructure in many host countries may be uncertain and resources may be limited, you will need to rely on your patience, creativity, and resourcefulness to be effective. The equipment you will use is likely to be dated by the standards of a US company, access to repair services and spare parts may be difficult at times, and power could be intermittent.

Despite these challenges, working in information technology in a developing country offers many rewards. In each of your activities, you will educate people about how information technology can be used to offer new and innovative solutions to critical development challenges. By teaching the simple techniques of computer literacy that we often take for granted, you will greatly enhance the confidence of your host country coworkers and counterparts and provide them with highly marketable job skills. Most importantly, as a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will have the unique opportunity to promote greater access to information technology to those with the greatest need.

EXAMPLES OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS

Kenya: Volunteers are teaching computer and Internet use to artisans and other small entrepreneurs in the “Jua Kali” or

“informal” sector. They have helped artisans create Web pages to access outside markets and to use e-mail to communicate with customers. They have taught them to use productivity software to improve the internal management efficiency of their enterprises. They have also taught computer skills to young people in Technical Training Institutes to enhance their employment and business skills.

Lithuania: Six Volunteers have helped create or improve the Web pages of two regional governments, three NGOs, and one university. A Volunteer is helping establish a computer training facility at a women’s center, which will generate income. Volunteers who teach English as a Foreign Language incorporate the use of computers into their lesson plans and activities.

Turkmenistan: Volunteers have helped establish English resource centers in regional capitals and in secondary schools. They teach computer and Internet skills to community members, enhancing their employment opportunities.

Dominican Republic: Volunteers assist the Ministry of Health to establish an information network. The network will link rural clinics and small hospitals to share epidemiological information for decision-making, and to allow them to access hospitals in the United States through the Internet.

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 you learning as it is about teaching.

Volunteer service strengthens 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.

There may be days of frustration and disappointment, but 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

Volunteers working in Information Technology assignments possess a broad spectrum of skills, from basic word processing and community organizing experience to professional backgrounds in software development or instructional technology. Although some specialized assignments may require a degree in computer science or a related field, most positions will use Volunteers who have a basic understanding of computer technology and the ability to transfer that knowledge to others. All Volunteers should possess the following attributes:

- Self-motivation and the ability to motivate others;

- Adaptability, flexibility, and resourcefulness to take on projects with limited resources;
- Ability to educate and train others about the use of information technology.

GENERALIST ASSIGNMENTS (143 A)

Volunteers serving in generalist assignments may possess several of the following skills and experiences:

- Knowledge and use of basic computer applications, such as word processing, spreadsheets, or databases;
- Strong leadership and organizational skills;
- Ability to teach and train others in computer literacy;
- Experience developing training materials;
- Volunteer or work experience with community or school-based organizations;
- A bachelor's degree in any discipline.

SPECIALIST ASSIGNMENTS (143 B)

Volunteers serving in specialist assignments may possess several of the following skills and experiences:

- A degree in computer science, instructional technology, or related field;
- Use of a specialized computer application in a professional field (e.g., business, epidemiology, or natural resource management);
- Ability to train others in computer software, hardware, and maintenance;
- Experience in computer programming, database systems analysis, or systems design;
- Experience in web-based technology, such as HTML development, web site design, or on-line marketing.