

Business Advising

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

The Peace Corps' business advising program promotes local economic development through income generating activities and self-employment, using the Peace Corps' traditional strengths: self-help, grass-roots philosophy, sensitivity to local customs and traditions, Volunteer entrepreneurial skills, and collaboration with public and private sector development agencies.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you provide technical assistance and training in business development and management—how to improve internal organizational systems, as well as analyze external market trends, opportunities, and issues. You may be assigned to work with small enterprises, cooperatives, a government extension service, a private agency, a secondary school or university, a community organization, or a non-governmental organization. You may focus on assisting women to enter non-traditional fields and increase household income or on training youth for employment and entrepreneurship activities. Depending on your skills and the nature of the assignment, you may be involved in:

- Teaching applied economics, accounting, and other business subjects to high school or university students—many who are the country's future business leaders—in a classroom setting;
- Training entrepreneurs in organizational development and internal management systems and control, such as finance, accounting, cost control, record keeping, planning, inventory control, management and supervision;
- Identifying and establishing linkages among businesses to facilitate the exchange of services and information;
- Conducting feasibility studies and business surveys for production and marketing. Developing appropriate marketing strategies for merchandising, advertising, pricing and displays. Identifying market niches for products, including value-added products;
- Developing efficient production systems and quality controls. Working with enterprises to find economically and environmentally sustainable production processes;
- Providing technical assistance to village bank managers who establish mechanisms to expand the availability of capital essential to growth of small enterprises;
- Assisting in identifying successful business ventures that are an alternative to traditional work.

Since the success of the business sector in the local communities contributes to the host country's development, your work is very important. The focus is on business development activities, but you may find yourself working in other areas, such as community and resource development, simple construction projects, or literacy education. 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 will present challenges such as having little or no established structure or schedule. You continually define your role in response to the needs of the local people. Your willingness to integrate into your community and help your hosts find appropriate solutions can encourage people to participate. It is your responsibility to develop your role as a catalyst or advisor within your community so that the work will continue after your departure.

EXAMPLES OF BUSINESS ADVISING PROJECTS

Honduras. Peace Corps Small Business Development Volunteers advise small and micro-businesses. They work with entrepreneurs to identify successful business ventures and design marketable products. Many unemployed people create their own jobs in the informal sector but their ventures fail to generate enough income to feed their families. Volunteers work with local and national private voluntary organizations to create and maintain jobs. Some Volunteers work with local chambers of commerce, or as advisors to Junior Achievement clubs or youth enterprise programs.

Kenya. Small Enterprise Development continues to be one of the highest priorities of the Government and people of Kenya. Volunteers serve in the community as business and management experts and teach related skills. They travel on foot or via public transport to deliver services. Businesses are often one- or two-person enterprises in the retail, service (i.e., bicycle repair), or small scale manufacturing (i.e., tailoring) areas. The technical assistance provided may be rudimentary, but these businesses operate in a complex environment with limited understanding of forward and backward linkages and limited access to resources such as credit and marketing information.

Uzbekistan. Private business is still a very new concept in Uzbekistan and the regulatory environment pertaining to private enterprise is confusing and in a constant state of flux. Business Education Volunteers are teaching Junior Achievement's applied economics and other business subjects to secondary school and university students. The teaching schedule includes a minimum of nine classroom hours per week. Each class consists of about twenty students. They are working with limited resources—computers and photocopiers are limited or non-existent. Volunteers live with host families to enhance language acquisition and integration into the community.

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

Business Advising Volunteers are usually recent college graduates who have previously studied a foreign language. Most have a degree in business, economics, management, finance, marketing or accounting. These Volunteers have several of the following skills:

- business experience;
- experience as owner or operator of a small business;
- creative problem solving skills;
- market research and financial advising;
- self-motivation and ability to motivate others;
- volunteer work experience with community or school-based organizations.



It is the policy of the Peace Corps to provide equal opportunity in all its programs for all persons and to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, age (over 40), sex, disability, political affiliation, and sexual orientation in the recruitment, selection, placement, service, and termination of Peace Corps Volunteers.