

Preparing for Your Peace Corps Interview

An interview provides you an opportunity to connect with a Peace Corps Placement Officer one-on-one. This is a chance to add depth to what is otherwise a two-dimensional written application. You'll have a chance to discuss your reasons for choosing your country of service, sector-related experience, ability to handle change, and other traits that make you a great candidate for service. The following tips can help you prepare for your mock interview here on campus as well as your eventual Peace Corps interview.



Interview Process

- Interviews are typically conducted via Zoom. In rare cases (e.g., applying from overseas with a bad internet connection), interviews might be done over the phone. Double check if there is a time zone difference! Most interviews are Eastern time.
- Your interview will involve just you and a Peace Corps Placement Officer.
- Each interview will last from 60-90 minutes. Have a bottle of water on hand!

Top Ten Tips (plus a bonus one)

1. **Don't panic.** You have gotten this far in the process, and you are coming in prepared with this Peace Corps Prep training as well as your formative experiences at MSU and elsewhere. Plus, *you will receive the interview topics in advance (see tip #4)!*
2. **Dress for a professional interview.** There is no specific dress code but use your best judgement to look prepared and professional. You want to reflect an image such that the Peace Corps would feel comfortable sending you to represent the US in your host community. This is not the time to channel your perceived inner Volunteer and show up in flannel and a bandana.
3. **Be yourself.** The interview gives the Peace Corps staffer a chance to connect a real person with the application they have read. They want to get to know you a bit and gain a sense for what kind of Volunteer you would be.

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Corps is pronounced like "core" as in apple core



*It is **not** pronounced like "corpse"—don't say the "ps"!*



4. **Reread your interview request email.** Peace Corps will send you the interview topics ahead of time, as well as links to the country page, tips, and the “Ask Peace Corps” blog series for details about the process. This email is a treasure trove for those who really like to be prepared.
5. **Be ready to articulate why you chose your proposed country of service.** Why is this the best place to send you? What led to your interest in this country? Did the country lead to you selecting a particular placement available there, or did an intriguing placement lead you to choose the country?
6. **Be familiar with your country of service.** You don’t have to be able to spout statistics about its major exports and elevation above sea level, but familiarize yourself with current events and cultural trends. Do a deep read of the [Peace Corps country page](#) for your host country to learn about the living conditions, typical diet, common transportation methods, safety and security, and so on.
7. **Reread your application.** It may be months between when you hit “submit” and when your interview is scheduled. Re-familiarize yourself with all aspects of your application, because the interviewer may ask questions not only about your motivation statement, but also about how a course from your transcript prepared you to work in your proposed sector, or how a volunteer experience or semester abroad helped shape your world view.
8. **Know your strengths.** Be proud of your application! You’ve worked hard to get this far. Think about your hands-on work as a summer intern in your sector, or the amazing connections you’ve made with students in your English tutoring job. Remember you were published in a journal as an undergraduate, or you have advanced proficiency in French. It’s possible to be an advocate for yourself without veering into arrogance.

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As part of their training to mitigate unconscious bias, Placement Officers are told to remain emotionally and physically neutral during the interview. They may not even have their camera on.

*They will not provide a lot of conversational cues you may be used to, especially in American culture. Don’t expect them to nod, use feedback sounds like “Mmmm hmmm,” smile if you try to inject a little humor, or otherwise react. **This can feel quite unsettling, but it is normal for Peace Corps interviews.***

Rest assured the Placement Officer is paying attention and taking diligent notes.



9. **Review the [origins of the Peace Corps](#) and the agency's [current priorities](#).** Remember that this interview is in part to determine what kind of cultural ambassador you would be for the US. Be prepared to address your application in that context.
10. **It's OK to not know.** If you get a question that surprises you, it's all right to say "I don't really know" and follow up on how you might be able to find out. You can pause for a moment and gather your thoughts instead of babbling. If you're unsure of the meaning of the question, ask the interviewer for clarification.
11. **Bonus tip: prep your tech and space.** Make sure your device is plugged in or fully charged. Know where to go for the strongest Wi-Fi connection in your room, apartment, or other space. Know how to turn your camera and microphone on and off. Choose a spot to sit where you have good lighting on your face and are not backlit by a window behind you, which can make it hard to see you. Log in at least ten minutes early. This seems basic, but being confident in your tech and space set-up can help mitigate pre-interview stress. If something does go wrong with your tech during the interview, *see tip #1: Don't panic*. Placement Officers are used to all kinds of scenarios, so just take a deep breath and try again. If all else fails, you'll have their email address from setting up the interview. You can always email and ask to reschedule.

Possible Interview Questions

Every interview is different and dynamic but thinking through and practicing responses to the following questions¹ will help you frame answers and feel better prepared for your conversation with a Placement Officer.

The Basics (but these are biggies!)

- Why do you want to join the Peace Corps? What motivated you to seek service opportunities abroad?
- How does Peace Corps service fit into your long-range plans?
- Why do you want to serve in the [XYZ] sector?
- Why do you want to serve in [country]?
- Would you be willing to serve in other parts of the world and sectors?
 - If so, what countries or sectors?



¹ Adapted from various sources, primarily: <http://gracedidwhat.com/2017/09/22/thepeacecorpsinterview/> and <https://griffinslair.setonhill.edu/pdf/Peace%20Corp%20Sample%20Interview%20Questions.pdf>

Getting to Know You

- What have you done to prepare yourself for Peace Corps service?
 - Pro tip: think about this from a past-present-future perspective. For example:
 - For the **past** four years, you've been working toward a major that relates to your proposed sector. Or your participation in Peace Corps Prep shows that you've been preparing yourself in tangible ways through classes and experiences.
 - In the **present**, perhaps you're reading up on the host country, trying to learn some of the language, networking with RPCVs who served there, reading blogs by educators/medical personnel/diplomats/whatever based in your host country, etc.
 - In terms of the **future**, how do you plan to prepare even more before you go? How can you learn more about the culture? Bring your language up to speed? Make sure you're keeping up with trends in your field?
- Tell me about a time you had to adapt to living or working with people from another culture. Have you stayed in touch or visited them since then?
- Tell me about the most meaningful situation you have experienced helping others. What motivated you?
- Tell me about the most challenging experience you've had working as part of a team.
- Conversely, tell me about a challenge you faced with little support or input from others.
- Tell me about a time when you were able to transfer knowledge or skills to others. Talk through your lesson plan or activity. What challenges did you face?
- Tell me about a stressful time in your life. How did you cope?
- Tell me about a time you experienced a setback or obstacle while working on a significant goal or project (this could be a professional, volunteer, or academic experience).
- What language training, if any, have you had? What aptitudes or abilities can you draw on to help you succeed in learning a new language?
- What, if anything, might keep you from completing a 27-month commitment to Peace Corps service?

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Talk up Peace Corps Prep!

Your participation in this program demonstrates that you have been interested in Peace Corps service for some time and have committed to preparing for it throughout your undergraduate years. That's important!

Can You Adapt?

Remember the tip about reading up on your country of service? This comes into play here. The Placement Officer could ask about some of these topics and how you might handle different scenarios:



- Exposure to different foods (how adventurous an eater are you? How would you maintain a vegetarian/vegan/kosher/halal diet?)



- Handling common health issues (common ailments Volunteers might face in your country, what you would do if you got sick)



- Possibility of living without electricity and/or running water (many communities lack access to these resources)



- Lack of privacy (different cultures may have varying ideas about privacy)



- Geographic isolation (what if you're the only Volunteer for 50 miles?)



- Gender roles (what do roles look like in your host country? Are you comfortable with that?)



- Challenges faced by people of color or other minorities (e.g., LGBTQ+, disabled Volunteers)



- Possible need to adapt your appearance (in some countries, tattoos, body piercing, or unusual hairstyles may be culturally unacceptable). To be successful in such a country, you might have to modify your appearance so that it conforms to local norms. Are you willing to make such an adjustment? Give an example of a time that you had to modify your appearance.



- Lack of access to your religion (what if you are one of the only people practicing your religion at post? Would you be OK celebrating Christmas alone? Fasting for Ramadan and explaining about it to neighbors who want you to come over for lunch? Asking for a day off to observe Yom Kippur?)



- Traditions and taboos around alcohol use (or lack thereof) in your host country



- Relationship—what is the longest you have been physically separated from important people in your life (e.g., family, friends, romantic partner)? What was the most difficult part of being away from those closest to you? How did you cope?



- Support (or lack thereof) you have received from those closest to you on your decision to join the Peace Corps; has anyone close to you opposed your decision to apply? If so, who? What were their concerns? How have you responded to their concerns?



Questions for the Placement Officer

- It's always a good idea to prepare a few questions for the interviewer. Consider some of these.
 - Ask about the interviewer's experience in the Peace Corps. Where and when did they serve? What was it like? What was the most difficult thing they encountered? How did they deal with this? What was the thing they least expected that happened? What did they get out of it the most?
 - Ask if the interviewer can elaborate more on pre-service training for your host country, for example, "I have heard in-country training consists of language, culture, technical, and safety—can you tell me anything more specific about how training is done in [country]?"
 - What steps does the Peace Corps take to make sure they are providing Volunteers with the safest possible environment?
 - What if I get severely ill or injured and can't get to the Peace Corps office or another volunteer?
 - What happens if there is a natural disaster or civil unrest in my host country?

More Resources

- Here is an [article written by a Placement Officer](#) about preparing for your interview. The author also shares her actual [Peace Corps Interview Notes!](#)
- Here's another [Peace Corps article](#) that specifically addresses how you can prepare for behavior-based questions.
- This [blog post](#) talks about one woman's experiences in preparing for her interview to serve in Namibia.
- Feel free to search for other tips online! Each applicant has a different experience and you may find that some tips resonate with you more than others.

Good luck! You've got this!

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Once you've read this handout and practiced a bit on your own, email the MSU Peace Corps Recruitment Office (msupeace@msu.edu) to set up a mock interview!

If you are completing the interview as part of the requirements for PC Prep Competency 3, be sure to bring a copy of the [Interview Preparation Verification Form from this page](#) to the meeting. Don't have a printer? No worries, there are extra copies in the office.