

Crafting Your Motivation Statement for a Peace Corps Application

By this time in your life, you have written dozens, perhaps hundreds, of important documents—class papers, reports, cover letters, scholarship essays, writing samples—not to mention thousands of texts, emails, and that third-grade report on polar bears. Now it's time to use your writing skills to introduce your authentic self and your motivations to a Peace Corps placement officer.



What's Your Why?

In some ways, the motivation statement is almost more important to you than it is to Peace Corps. It helps you crystallize your motivation for service—your “why” — and will give you insights into whether Peace Corps service is right for you. As one RPCV puts it, “Your ‘why’ is one of the things that will get you through the tough times of service—and there will be tough times.”

Advice from a Placement Officer

These tips from a Peace Corps staffer will help you make **your** 500 words stand out!

»» The Prompt

This is the prompt you will be asked to reflect on in preparing your motivation statement:

*Peace Corps service presents major physical, emotional, and intellectual challenges. Please provide a few paragraphs **explaining your reasons for wanting to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer and how you plan to overcome the various challenges associated with Peace Corps service.***

- **Follow the prompt.** Note that **the writing prompt requests a two-part response**. Many candidates focus so much on *why* they want to serve that they neglect to address how they might overcome the challenges of service.
 - The Peace Corps application process has many places to discuss challenges associated with service, because this is crucial to your readiness to serve.
 - Your motivation statement will shine if you **demonstrate an understanding and acknowledgement of these challenges and show your motivation to persevere.**
- **Balanced motivation.** Being a Peace Corps Volunteer comes with [many benefits](#), all of which may be motivators. The strongest motivation statements are those that express a **balance between individual benefits and benefits of serving others**. [Finding success as a Volunteer can be complex](#), so having more than one motivating factor will allow you to find resiliency when times get tough during service.

- **Write with purpose.** Five hundred words is not a lot of space, so use it wisely. **Many candidates confuse the motivation statement with a cover letter.** While both documents encourage you to express why you want a position, a cover letter often includes résumé highlights. Your placement officer will carefully review your résumé, so don't rehash what they already know.

- Instead, **focus on succinctly addressing the prompt, and let them learn about what drives you and your application.**

- Ask the MSU Peace Corps Recruitment Office for resources on creating a top-notch Peace Corps-specific résumé to complement your motivation statement!

»» Read Me!

*As you approach your motivation statement, remember that **it is just one piece of a larger application.***

Your motivation statement helps introduce you and your motivation for joining the Peace Corps to the placement officer.

You will have more opportunities to expand on your thoughts [during the interview.](#)

»» Formatting

***You will enter your motivation statement directly into a text field within the Peace Corps online application.** Since it is not uploaded as an attachment, you don't need to worry about having a title or including your name. On the other hand, a text field also means you can't do any formatting like use italics or bold fonts.*

***You should write your motivation statement in Word or a Google Doc, then copy it into the application.** Writing it as a separate file allows you to:*

- *Spell check and proofread (which is crucial—you want to present a professional appearance!).*
- *Do a word count to make sure you stay under 500.*
- *Get feedback from peers, family, or MSU's Peace Corps recruiters.*
- *Save a copy for your records.*

- **Cite specifics.** Back up your assertions with examples from your past, or with research you have conducted. It is OK to share experiences that highlight your ability to face challenges or show your character.

- To demonstrate your research into the organization, it might be useful to reference the Peace Corps' [Core Expectations](#) or the [three goals](#) when talking about why the Peace Corps is right for you.
- When taking this approach, remember that [Peace Corps service is a professional setting](#), so be careful not to be overly personal, traumatize your reader, or share confidential medical information in your statement.

Above four tips adapted from: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/connect/blog/4-tips-to-make-the-most-of-your-peace-corps-motivation-statement/>

Brainstorming for Your Motivation Statement: **Reasons to Serve**

When did you hear about the Peace Corps for the first time?



What “clicked” with you that made you decide to further explore Peace Corps opportunities?



People decide to apply to the Peace Corps for widely varied and deeply individual reasons. Why do *you* want to serve? List some of your reasons in the box below, from practical to personal, aspirational to concrete. Your ideas might range from big, idealistic notions like “I want to make the world a better place” to a specific goal like “I want to become fluent in Spanish.”

Stuck or feel like you might be missing something? Try brainstorming reasons in different categories, like **Personal Development**, **Career Goals**, **Emotional Growth**, **Creating Community**, **Short-term Goals**, **Long-term Goals**, or **Skills Development**.

Brainstorming for Your Motivation Statement: **Challenges**

Take a couple of minutes and jot down some of the physical, emotional, and intellectual challenges you imagine you might face as a Peace Corps Volunteer. No challenge is too big or too small! Don't feel like any of your concerns are more or less valid or important. We've started with an example in each column.

Physical	Emotional	Intellectual
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not having air conditioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being away from my loved ones for holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not being able to express myself in [Swahili]

Now choose the two challenges you are most concerned about in each category, and brainstorm possible solutions for each one.

Physical	Emotional	Intellectual