NATIONAL PEACE CORPS ASSOCIATION

GROUP LEADERS HANDBOOK

National Peace Corps Association

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Editor's Note:

This edition of the Group Leaders' Handbook is a work in process. It contains information valuable to group leaders managing a geographic, country-of-service, or nationwide group. Your suggestions are encouraged as we continue to develop materials to support group leaders. If you have any questions, comments, or additional materials to include in the next edition, please contact:

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The reasons Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) give for wanting to form groups are as varied as their reasons for joining the Peace Corps in the first place. However, the most common theme seems to be that RPCVs have had rewarding experiences that they want to communicate with like-minded people, both RPCVs and others who share a global perspective.

Chapter 1: Getting Started

1.1 Why start a group?
If you are starting a new group or taking over the leadership of an existing group, the first thing that pops into your mind is "Where do I start?" Perhaps the first thing to think about is the purpose of your group. What is your group all about? Why do you even bother organizing a group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers? Here are the reasons some groups have organized:

- To get together with other people who have shared the Peace Corps experience
- To carry out the third goal of Peace Corps, to bring the world back home, in an organized way
- To support projects in a country-of-service
- To support volunteers from your community who are currently serving overseas
- To help the Peace Corps recruit new volunteers
- To work with educators in your community to bring a global perspective to the classroom
- To continue to serve and express the volunteer spirit through community projects
- To advocate for the Peace Corps or a country-of-service

Most likely, your group will go through a number of stages. You may start out just getting together for a potluck dinner, sharing your slides and experiences and having a good time. Eventually, your group members may want to get more involved, taking on community projects, or they may see other needs that could be met by your group of RPCVs. You will get ideas of what kinds of things to do from other groups, and through your own awareness of a need that could be filled in your community or related to your country-of-service.

1.2 What to do first
New Group Packet: Whether your group is new or is reforming after a period of dormancy and is not currently a member group with the NPCA, you will need to go to http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/member-group-benefits to get a copy of the New Group Packet.

Benefits of Being an NPCA Member Group

- Promotion by NPCA via its materials, mailings and website
- Dues sent to the national office include a rebate to the member group of the individual member's choice. Each month your group will receive any rebates assigned to the group with all the pertinent information needed to maintain your group's database.
- The Group Leaders Forum online and at Annual General Meetings
- Mutual sharing of data
- Group organizing materials and assistance with specific problems is available from the NPCA Membership Department, as well as all other NPCA departments depending upon your needs.

Requirements for Group Renewal with the NPCA

- Each group must complete the application form and submit it to the NPCA Membership Department with the appropriate application fee.
- A minimum of 10 of your group's members must be members of the NPCA. These names must be submitted with the application form and fee. NPCA strongly encourages your group to choose officers that are NPCA members to facilitate better communication of events and activities.
- Each group is required to do an annual group renewal.
- Membership solicitations done by your group must include the opportunity to join the NPCA.
- Each group must share membership information with NPCA, as it does with the groups.
- Each group's organizational purposes *must* be in agreement with the NPCA mission statement:

"to lead the Peace Corps community and others to foster peace by working together in service, education and advocacy"

- Group applications are subject to the approval of the NPCA Board of Directors or Executive Committee.

1.3 Holding a planning meeting

At an organizing, reorganizing or planning meeting, you should record the ideas about the group and its purpose. Prepare an agenda or meeting outline ahead of time to ensure participants discuss the critical issues and do not get diverted by trivial matters. The template on the following page may be useful in helping you plan your meeting agenda.
Use the **PAL** method for managing your meeting.

> **P** Purpose of the meeting (Why is the group meeting? What is to be accomplished at the meeting? What decisions need to be made at the meeting?)
>
> **A** Agenda (How will the meeting be structured? What topics will be covered? In what order? For how long? Who will lead the discussion or be responsible for providing the information for the topic?)
>
> **L** Length (How long will the meeting last? When will the meeting start? When will it end?)

The **PAL** method can be a very effective tool for communicating with participants. Whatever method your group uses, some kind of agenda should, if possible, be distributed in advance to everyone who will attend the meeting.

Start the meeting by obtaining agreement on the purpose of the meeting, the proposed agenda items, and the time limit for the meeting. Appoint a timekeeper to help the leader keep the meeting on track, on topic, and on time. Participants will appreciate a well-organized and well-run meeting that accomplishes what it was convened to achieve.

Sample Planning Meeting Agenda

- Develop a mission statement for the group
- Develop goals and objectives
- Discussion of legal considerations

  - Group membership with NPCA

  - Bylaws (For existing groups, a review and discussion of any amendments; for new groups creation/adoption of bylaws)

  - Incorporation

  - Nonprofit status

- Organizational structure

- Activities

- Financial management/treasury status

- Communications

- Discussion of any additional items

- Record decisions made by group

- Set date and place for next meeting

- Record action items, due dates, and parties responsible

1.4 Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of a group can be formal or informal, but in order for the group to function there must be some sort of structure. Your group must have some way of keeping track of decisions that were made, of knowing who is responsible each task, and of keeping accurate financial records.

Key leadership positions and duties should include:

> *Group Leader*: The title of president, group leader, organizer, or convener can be used to indicate the head of the group. This officer presides at meetings, develops the meeting agenda, and is responsible for the general organization and management of the group. The group leader is also the main point of contact for NPCA.
>
> *Vice President.* This officer steps in to lead the group should the group leader not be able to fulfill the duties for a period of time. He/she may also take responsibility for leadership of specific group activities or tasks. Often this position is a training position for the person who will step into the group leader position next.
>
> *Financial Officer or Treasurer.* This officer should keep the bank account, deposit checks, pay bills, and report those transactions to the membership, NPCA, and the IRS depending upon the group's needs.
>
> *Communications Director, Newsletter Editor and/or Webmaster.* These officers are responsible for getting information out to the group members, NPCA, and any other entities about the activities of the group.
>
> *Secretary or Recorder.* This officer should be the custodian of the paperwork related to the group. He/she should have copies of the bylaws, goals, and other documents that describe the functions of the group. He/she should also keep records of meetings and decisions made by the group. Frequently these duties are combined with the finance, membership, or communications functions.

Membership Director. This officer is responsible for keeping track of the membership database, for communicating membership data to NPCA (either directly or through the Financial or Communications Officer), and for sending out renewals.

Additional officer positions may be created depending on the activities and needs of the group. These positions might include: global education coordinator, advocacy director, speakers bureau coordinator, publicity person, or social events coordinator. Many groups put these functions into a committee structure. Then, rather than defining all of these positions in the bylaws, the group can instead incorporate a broader phase such as: "the group will, from time-to-time, form committees to carry out the goals of the group."

Functions that are the responsibility of group officers should be specifically outlined in the group bylaws. These job descriptions can be used for all officers and for committee chairs. As the group goes through the exercise of setting its goals and objectives, it will become apparent what functions are needed to carry them out; and the group can decide how it wants to delegate those responsibilities.

One of the main reasons to pay attention to an organizational structure is to prevent a handful of people from being burdened with all of the work. If the responsibilities of each person are clear, it is much easier to find a replacement when someone leaves or doesn't want to do the job anymore. It also makes it clear if someone is not pulling his/her weight.

Most of the time the work needed to accomplish the goals of the group can be broken down into manageable tasks that have a beginning and an end. Very often setting up a committee works well and then within the committee structure the group can break up the task even further.

Chapter 2: Membership

The success of each group depends upon how they attract, manage, and retain their membership. Many of your members will be RPCVs. Other sources of members that might be interested in your group could include: national service organizations, elected officials, federal agencies, embassies, multinational organizations, and professional organizations. Look at your membership potential from a broad perspective and think about how you can reach out to those potential members as when as RPCVs.

2.1 Membership categories

Each group must determine what kind of membership categories it will offer.

The membership structure for the National Peace Corps Association contains a variety of membership categories. The annual membership fee for regular/individual membership is $35. On occasion, the NPCA may offer a constrained membership if an individual cannot afford the full membership fee, although this is not common.

NPCA also offers additional memberships in the Director's Circle as follows:

- Diamond Level: $10,000 minimum
- Gold Level: $5,000 minimum
- Silver Level: $2,500 minimum
- Supporting Level: $1,000 minimum

The member may join additional groups for $15 per group per year for a regular/individual membership. These amounts will be rebated on a monthly basis to current NPCA member groups.

2.2 Membership database

The strength of your group is in its membership and your group's ability to keep the members informed. Maintaining records and communicating with members are perhaps the most important and the most time consuming tasks to be accomplished.

The first decision your group has to make is to determine who is responsible for the database. Here are several options:

1. A member of the group can be responsible for this information. This means your group will be in total control of the database. As the database manager some things to keep in mind include:
   a) What computer program to use. It should be a common enough program so that it can easily transfer to someone else without losing the data (Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Access)
   b) Systems will have to be developed for sending out renewal notices and getting checks to the treasurer on a regular basis.

With access to a computer, your group can use a simple database to help keep track of your membership. Your group will want enough information on your membership to send out newsletters, call members for meetings and events, and tap members with special skills or interests. A well-maintained database will produce the necessary information with just a few key strokes, so take the time to design what will meet your group's current needs as well as something that can be easily modified when your needs change.

Setting up the database Fields you may want to consider when building your database are:

First Name
Last Name
Maiden name (or last name when in the Peace Corps if different from last name now)

Spouse
Address 1
Address 2
City
State
Zip
Home Phone
E-mail Address
Fax
Work Phone
Employer
Work Address
Work Address 2
Work City
Work State
Work Zip
Occupation
Country-of-service (some members served in more than one country, so your group may want to have Country-of-service 2 and Country-of-service 3 also)
Years of Service
Peace Corps Assignment
Membership Number
Membership Expiration

Fields can always be added later, but in designing your database, try to anticipate what your group will need and more importantly, how you will sort the database. Remember you can only sort for information that is there! Your group may want to consider adding fields based on what members are interested in doing to support the group.

For example, your group may want to produce a list of all members who are interested in being part of a speaker's bureau. You could do this in several ways. You could have a field for area of interest and have a drop down list with check boxes or buttons and check off all the areas of interest for each member. Your list could include speaker's bureau, work on newsletter, organize an event, etc. --all of the activities you anticipate your group will be doing. You can make this list field in a way that you could add more areas at a later date. Another solution would be to have separate fields and type in the interest or activity. A third solution would be to have just one interest field and type in all of the areas of interest. The last method can be a problem when sorting if you do not use exactly the same words for each record. With careful planning you can have a simple yet flexible database to keep your membership records.

New groups and reorganizing groups will want to send out some sort of questionnaire to members to update their records and get feedback as to the direction the group should take. As RPCVs are often mobile, established groups may want to periodically send questionnaires to their members to get up to date information and feedback.

Importing records into an existing database. After your group has developed your database you can import records from the NPCA file. The easiest way to do this is through the NPCA website which allows you to download your group information in a Microsoft Excel format. If you have fields that do not match with the NPCA records, you can go back and fit in the information. You might want to have a membership number field that can accommodate the NPCA membership number. When you want to update your file from the NPCA database you can then use that number to match records and make changes easily.

Producing labels from a database: If your group wants to produce labels from either your own database or from the data in the NPCA file, one of the easiest ways to do it is in a word processing program. Your word processing program should have a mail merge function. Use this to make your label document and then import the data either directly from the NPCA file or move the data from the NPCA file into Excel and into Excel and use that file as your data file.

If you open your file in Excel, you will find it easy to get rid of duplicate records and sort alphabetically, by zip, membership expiration, or any other field. The more you clean up your data before merging it into either a word processing document or into your own database the easier it is to get the result you desire. (Note: Excel may strip the leading zero on zip codes, leaving you with a three- or four-digit zip instead, e.g., 01002 may become 1002.)

Avery makes labels for laser printers and ink jet printers. In each box of labels they include a booklet telling you how to use the most popular word processing programs to create labels. Follow these steps and you will have perfectly aligned labels!

Using the reports function in your database: You can customize your group's database to sort and make reports on just about anything. You may want to develop phone lists for your phone tree, lists of members who you have not heard from for a few months, or lists of members who served in a country during a specific period of time. With most databases, you "query" the database and then make a report. If you will be producing certain reports regularly, you will want to save them to use again and again. Study your database manual and experiment with the standard reports that are already set up in your database. Think about the reports or lists you will want before you design your database.

2.3 Retaining members

One of the main reasons members do not renew their membership in a group is that they do not see what they are getting for their dues. Communicating the benefits of membership in your group to your members is critical. Quite often just getting a regular newsletter is enough to keep the inactive member renewing. The widespread availability of e-mail also makes it possible to remind members of events and to solicit membership renewals quickly and easily.

It is very important to be responsive to the general membership of the group. Too many times group leaders become burned out and feel like they alone are carrying the group. Yet there are members of the group who would help if asked. Members find they have different levels of commitment to a group at different stages of their lives. There are members who really enjoy meetings and the details of organizing. There are members who would be willing to organize a small project; and then there are those who would prefer to simply pay dues, get news about the group, and do nothing else. Your group needs all kinds of members and should strive to make all members, regardless of their level of commitment, feel welcome and appreciated.

2.4 Finding New Members

You may think you know all of the returned volunteers in your area, but there are over 190,000 RPCVs at this time. The NPCA has the names and addresses for about 100,000. There are volunteers who have changed their names or have moved several times who could be much more interested in an RPCV group today than they were in the past.

If your group is community-based, you may be able to find RPCVs who are not on anyone's lists but who live in your community. Every time you have an event or even just a potluck, try to get an announcement in the community events section of your local newspaper. End each announcement with the note: "All RPCVs and friends of Peace Corps are welcome to attend" along with a phone number for questions.

The NPCA offers one-year of free membership to newly returned Peace Corps volunteers for up to twelve months upon COS. These names are passed along to the groups with the monthly rebates. Groups are encouraged to offer the free membership also. Obviously, this policy is up to the groups; but it is a good way to get the newly returned volunteer active in your group. NPCA believes that getting RPCVs involved when they first return helps them with their re-entry and can also bring new energy to the groups.

Chapter 3: Communication

Now that you have the purpose of your group in mind and you have a database, you are ready to communicate with your members. There are a number of ways to do this. Letters, postcards, phone calls, and even personal visits are ways to keep in touch with your group's members. However, newsletters are perhaps the most effective way and they also provide valued information. For many members, getting the newsletter is their main reason for belonging to a group. Today, many groups are taking advantage of the Internet and e-mail to provide electronic newsletter for members.

3.1 The newsletter

The newsletter has proven to be one of the most critical services of a successful RPCV group. It is the most cost-effective and reliable way of regularly getting retrievable information to members who need to learn something, to remember to attend a meeting, or to be persuaded to become involved. If the newsletter doesn't work, the group probably won't work, either. If members do not have the newsletter, they do not know what is happening – they don't attend events, they don't vote, they don't renew their membership; they don't write to their Congressional delegation, they don't know about current issues.

G*eographic newsletters* focus on the community in which most, if not all, group members live and on the group's activities. These US-based newsletters tend to attract a wide range of social and political topics for a readership that is diverse in its professional and personal interests. They often deal with domestic US social issues and highlight immediately accessible volunteer opportunities. The editor's conceptual understanding of what the newsletter is all about is more critical to its success, because the geographic newsletter's choices are more varied.

Country-of-service newsletters usually have a more narrow content, focusing on those who served in one country, and on cultural, political, and social events in that country. The editor's responsibility and influence over that group is often great because, for many country-of-service groups, the newsletter is as close as they will get to "meeting with" the group.

Interest group newsletters also tend to be narrower in focus as well. They typically focus on issues and activities related to the interest focus of the group. Their goal is to bring together individual RPCVs who are particularly concerned about the focus area of the group.

Newsletter editor, you are not alone, but you are in charge! In any of the approximately 140 RPCV groups in our network, the editor usually has some help: other members who will make a regular commitment to gather to duplicate, staple, fold, label, stamp, and mail. But the responsibility for producing these newsletters usually falls to a single individual who will assure that accurate and timely information is gathered regularly and put onto the newsletter's pages.

There is an attraction to creating the message. Designing a newsletter in the post-typewriter age can be addictive. And there is satisfaction to be gained from being a big link between the best of intentions and serving as the print catalyst for a group that truly makes a difference. You may produce it for several years in the quiet of your studio apartment or at your dining room table. As editor, you can assure the group of its direction and, possibly, its success.

Who decides things? The editor makes initial and long-term decisions about the shape, color, size, number of pages, the way it folds, the way it looks, the kind and size of the type that is used, the photographs, but most importantly, the words and ideas that are expressed. The post office determines the form it takes. The local photocopy shop may advise on the color and size. The treasurer cautions about how much to spend, and the board of directors may have something to say about the topics, range of ideas or extremes of opinions that are suitable for publication in the newsletter. But the editor makes almost all of the decisions and there are hundreds of them: how many times to call a group member and remind him/her to turn in the news about the speaker for the next potluck, how long to hold up publication for the president to turn in her editorial, whether there is enough space for one more story, choosing what to publish and what to not publish, which is the preferred spelling, and the never-ending question of "What do these readers need to know, and want to read?"

What's going on here? If you're taking over an old publication, or starting from scratch, start right there. Assume nothing. Think about everything. Who is your audience? The group is more than just the most active of members, and more than the elected leaders of the group. The newsletter must always attempt to persuade the inactive to become active. What do all of those potential readers want? How should you give it to them?

Chances are you will not bank solely on the Internet, because even among our post-modern membership there are still many RPCVs who do not use the Internet. So, assuming you start with print, we're talking about a paper-and-ink-in-the-U-S-mail newsletter: that is news (information that is current and new to the reader) in a letter (not a slick magazine or a large-format local newspaper with great attempts at objectivity).

So, what to put in it? First think in broad terms. Who are the readers? How old? What level of education? Are there common interests or values that transcend all the other variables of the usually diverse membership? What will they read that will give these readers a sense of community with other RPCVs? What do they want to do? Volunteer to help in poor neighborhoods? Lobby foreign policy? Visit over ethnic dinners?

What will be the style of the newsletter? Do you want to be on a chatty first-name basis or maintain a journalistic arms length? What do you want to emphasize with best placement? Essays, letters to the editor, excerpts from other publications, editorial opinions about global or community issues? How often should we publish to perform the best service? Maybe two pages every month, brief, easy-to-read notices, that have more currency in a package less intimidating might have better affect than eight pages every other month. Would photographs give it more reality, more personality? Should this be a newsletter of diverse opinions or a notice board that facilitates action?

Just a few rules: As the group's editor, you are obligated to follow a few basic rules: offer reliable information; be accurate with facts, times, directions, titles of people, spellings of names and usage of the English language; and limit the messages in your newsletter to those items and articles that are useful to many readers and as interesting as possible to everyone. Double-check all the facts you are given. Trust only a standard English dictionary for meaning and spelling. Do not always trust your telephone company's Yellow Pages. And confirm the accuracy of your information only with someone who has first-hand knowledge of it. Never be afraid to call the person in question to make sure your information is correct. Once it's in the mail, it is too late to check it and you will be terribly embarrassed.

Basic ideas for features

1. Board decisions and discussions. Don't write everything that happens and don't make it official Roberts Rules. Just include phrases that announce final decisions and topics board members discussed but have not yet decided. Let this be a way for less active members to get involved with new issues and new projects.

2. A calendar of events with times, dates, and locations of events in the community that might interest RPCVs.

3. News about members. Call and ask about recent job changes, births, deaths, elections to public office, or the arrival of the new RPCVs. Use the Peace Corps Area Office nearest you (call 800 424 8580 to find out where it is).

4. Opinion pieces. Give members an opportunity to express their beliefs within areas of expertise or interest.

5. Reviews of relevant art, music, books, etc. See the website for the Peace Corps Writers for the latest on RPCVs writing and reviewing essays, novels, and non-fiction books at http://peacecorpswriters.org.

6. Peace Corps news. Check for Peace Corps news on the Group Leaders Forum online (http://community.peacecorpsconnect.org/group/groupleadersforum), NPCA website (www.peacecorpsconnect.org), or Peace Corps website (www.peacecorps.gov)

7. Check for re-printable items in the monthly NPCANews and the NPCA website.

As you gain experience within this network, expand your reach. For country-of-service groups, the Washington, DC desk officers of federal agencies such as State, the Agency for International Development, Commerce, and Agriculture might be willing to help supply current information about what's going on, especially if you find that the desk officer is an RPCV. Others to try are CARE and other non-government organizations working in your country-of-service or the press attaché at your country's embassy in Washington, DC. The NPCA will try to help you get started.

Equipment you may (or may not) need Desktop publishing is endemic in the guerrilla network of grassroots newsletters and too much is sometimes made of the benefits of the computers and the software that makes them work.

There are great software programs out there. PageMaker by Adobe is probably the US standard in publishing documents that are predominately text, such as our black-and-white newsletters.

But if you do not want to invest large amounts of time and some money into electronics, stick to what you know or what will be easiest for you. What is most important is publishing good ideas and new information using clear, concise language and good grammar.

The art of design Design is art and art serves to draw the reader's eye, but in newsletters you should avoid abstract art. Begin your desktop publishing career at the beginning. Your message is in the words and if the readers skip over the words, your message goes into the trash. Focus on the content while you have fun with the design.

The final edit The best editors are good at getting others to do the bulk of the work: recruit members and officers to write articles, give written reports of events, write news and humor, handle a regular column of news briefs about other members, or excerpt running news briefs about issues or a country-of-service. You can also find others to photocopy and staple the document, maintain the database updating names and addresses, or stamp and mail the newsletter. But you are in charge of the content. Get a good dictionary, sit under a good light, and read what others have written very carefully. If you wrote some of it, make sure you have someone else with good grammar skills proofread what you have written. Use a red pencil. If you read along and pause at a word, it's probably not the right one. Is there a word with a clearer, more precise meaning that fits the author's original intent?

Always check spelling and grammar. Do not guess. If you're not sure, open the dictionary. If you use spell-checking software on a computer, be sure the computer knows what the author means. Do not let the program run on automatic pilot.

Punctuation is a never-ending pursuit of your high school English teachers' pursuit of grammatical perfection. Whatever you do, be consistent in your approach to spacing, format, capitalization, contractions, hyphens, colons, and semi-colons, but do not let the nitpickers among us to slow you from your appointed volunteer rounds of getting the job done.

Tone Be sure the tone of the article you are editing is appropriate to the intent. If you want to tell readers about the researcher who is giving a slide show or what will be sold at auction or describe the geographic location and economic conditions of a women's weaving co-op to which your group is giving development funds, be sure the tone and degree of detail is appropriate to the purpose of the story. If you get have a few facts to put down, leave the chatty or academic style of the piece out. If, however, the article you have received is of a more personal tone, strongly stated, be sure that you allow for personal expression and voice to survive your editing. There are important times when the author needs an individual and idiosyncratic voice. In such cases as the submission of editorials, try to give the author time to read and approve the final text.

On the other hand, do not be afraid that you will hurt the feelings of contributors. Your purpose is to communicate with your members. You are trying to make that process simple and effective. Contributors have willingly left the responsibility for editing in your hands. It's your job. If you don't do it, nobody else will. Your members will thank you.

3.2 Electronic communication

E-mail Widespread access to computers and the Internet have made a huge difference in the ability to communicate quickly. If you do not have a computer, most public libraries now offer Internet access to their patrons. And you can get your own e-mail address quite easily. Hotmail and Yahoo offer free e-mail as do several other services. These services can be accessed from any computer anywhere as long as it has Internet access. To get a Hotmail or Yahoo e-mail address, just go to their websites (http://www.hotmail.com or http://www.yahoo.com) and follow the instructions. These sites are very user friendly and are designed to make the whole process as non-threatening as possible.

Websites: Your group must have a group on Connected Peace Corps. These websites should include information about the = group and contact information for the group and/or its officers and can include a calendar of events as well. Some groups also publish a non-NPCA website that can be linked from this page where photos from activities and events, links to other sites of interest to your membership, or just about anything else of interest can be listed.
A step-by-step website creation guide is included at the end of this section.

Listservs What a great invention! With a little effort, you can create a self-managed group mailing list. Individuals sign themselves up and you do not have to spend time constantly updating your e-mail list for your group.

Yahoo.com offers a free group listserv function although other sites probably do this as well. To set up a group on Yahoo, go to www.yahoogroups.com. If you want to get more details about Yahoo groups you can also go to http://help.yahoo.com/ and select “groups” under Help by Feature or Service.

NPCA Listservs *The* NPCA maintains several listservs to help keep our members informed. These listservs are vital links for our groups and their members.

> **NPCANews**: monthly e-newsletter with news for the greater Peace Corps community and updated information on NPCA’s service, education and advocacy programs.
>
> **GlobalEdNews**: global education announcements, opportunities and information
>
> **NPCAAdvocacy**: an occasional newsletter and other items relating to advocacy workshops and other meetings, groups, leaders, issues and action alerts

Website Step-by-Step Guide[1]:

STEP 1: Define the purpose, objectives & targeted audience

Too many organizations cut this step short and then encounter more serious problems later in the life of the project. It is a necessity for an organization to define a clear statement of purpose and objectives for the website project prior to sitting at a computer to begin designing. This is even more important when a cross-functional team is involved in building the site.

[1] Adapted from submission by PCVs Erik Peterson & Jon Daigle

Ask these questions when beginning a website project in order to refine the overall purpose and objectives:

- How will the website support your organization's missions/goals?
- What key audiences will be the top visitors to the site?
- What do you anticipate these key audiences will be looking for on the site?
- What other audiences would you like to attract?
- What kinds of information, products, services, or tools will be of interest to these visitors?

Next, ask yourself what you want the website to do. For example, do you want to publicize a "message," or use the website as a reference source, describing your organization, product or service?

Answering these questions will help an organization to begin to determine the content (including language requirements) that will go onto its site, as well as how the site should look and feel (i.e. layout, graphics, etc.) A site directed towards professionals will most likely be designed to look more conservative than a site aimed at teenagers or children, which may focus on creating a more "fun" environment.

STEP 2: Creating the website

Separate sub-teams may work on a website's content and design/structure simultaneously.

Structure and Navigation
Planning the structure is an important first step to creating any website. Much like an outline of a document or a book's table of contents, a clear site structure will help an organization to better organize its site's content and create an unambiguous navigational system for its visitors.

Begin by browsing the websites of other organizations. Take note of the good attributes and the areas that are confusing. Next, create at least two or three variants on paper before spending too much time on the development of a refined, electronic version.

A few rules to consider in regard to navigation:
- Include a set of links, displayed in a consistent graphical format, to the major sections of the site on every page.
- Within the pages of each major section on the website, include navigation links that are specific to that area (possibly in a separate box titled, "related material.")
- Make it easy for visitors to identify where they are in the website's structure by creating a breadcrumb trail, or map from a site's homepage (i.e. Home > Products > Electronics.)

Content
Although flashy graphics and cool music might help attract visitors, only relative content will make them stay and come back for more. Balance text with graphics. Too much text can be inconvenient to read and too many graphics may take too long to download. Content should be clear and concise, while graphics should be functional (e.g., help convey a message, or only exist as part of the site's navigation system.) Make it easy for visitors to find the information they are looking for by bulleting major content sections on each page, using bold face, or highlighting with different colors. Don't get carried away, because excessive highlighting, bold face type, etc. can make a web page look more confusing. Check for misspelled words.

<u>Common sections of a website</u>:
- *Welcome page* – Include the organization's logo, unique site features, and contact information. Everything should fit on one screen and avoid using graphics that take a long time to download. This is the organization's chance to make a good first impression. If visitors have to wait over 15 seconds to see anything, they will go elsewhere.
- *About us* – More detailed description of the organization's history, mission and objectives, activities, partners, etc.

- *Services* – Description of the services the organization offers. Offer free expert advice via the website (see promotion: tips for bringing visitors back.)
- *Events* – Calendar of activities that the organization is planning for the near future, including where each will be held and who to contact for more information.
- *FAQs* – Questions frequently asked by clients/visitors to the organization. Include a message board or contact information where visitors can ask questions.

Checklist:
- Text and graphics together are no more than 50 KB on each page. (Keep in mind that graphics, once downloaded, are stored in the browser's cache and will load quickly on website's other pages that use the same graphics.)
- Have textual links as a backup for all graphical links – these can go at the bottom of the web page. (For quicker downloads, a user may search the web with their browser's graphic function turned off.)
- Check the website on different browsers (i.e. Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator), because websites can look completely different on different browsers.
- Ask friends and co-workers to review the site for usability and informational content.
- Add a counter to keep track of visitors and the most popular pages visited. Cybercounter at http://www.cyber-counter.com/ offers a free and comprehensive counter

STEP 3: Promotion

You've put a lot of work into creating your organization's website and now you want people to notice it.

How to bring visitors to your site:

- Submit your URL (the Internet address of your website) to the main search engines on the Internet (10 of the most popular.) These are Internet computers (or servers) that are dedicated to the classification of other websites. In the same way as you need a catalogue to find resources in a library, the search engines act as a catalogue of the websites on the Internet and area vital sources of potential traffic to your site. Find the "submit a URL" link, usually located at the bottom of the page. (On Google, click the "All About Google" link.)
- Your website should contain the keywords and references necessary for it to be properly indexed by the "robots" used by some of the search engines on the net. These programs constantly crawl the Net and classify websites according to certain parameters and keywords. Keywords should appear frequently in the text of the site as well as n the META tags in the head of the HTML document. (see appendix 2 for keyword tips.)

A few popular search engines/directories (note: although most search engines use meta tags and frequency of keywords in the text to rank relevancy, the following search directories have human editors that determine the quality and appropriateness of your site to a specific topic:

- Google (www.google.com) – The benchmark for the search engine industry.
- Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) – popular search directory
- DMOZ (www.dmoz.org) – many search engines that have a directory, including Yahoo, draw their listings from this source.

Other Considerations for Promoting a Website:

Due to the sheer number of sites on the Internet, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get noticed on the major search engines.

- Look for community sites that focus on and provide links to organizations similar to yours and post your site there.
- Seek links to your site from related sites, with a few to obtaining derivative visitors from that site. Expected to place reciprocal link on your sit to the organization you are requesting a link from.

- Join a webring of associated sites to assist in their mutual promotion.
- Display your URL in all your printed advertising, including business cards and on the signature of your e-mails.

Tips for Bringing Visitors Back:

- Give something away for free, such as expert advice on subjects relevant to the activities of your organization.
- A business center might have a question and answer page, where visitors can ask for advice on writing business plans and obtaining grants/funding.
- An environment organization might have lesson plans and activities on how to celebrate International Earth Day.
- A travel agency could offer free quotes on airfares.

Step 4: Maintenance

Creating and maintaining a website demands a great deal of responsibility. You might want to divide up the work among several employees at your organization. One person may be in charge of developing content for a particular section of the site; another the design and general maintenance (uploading files to the server.)

You should regularly revisit your website and assess its continuing relevance to your present and dynamic activities. Ensure that the site focuses on your current issues and is not becoming irrelevant to your objectives.

Ensure that any dynamic information, such as dates on “Coming Events,” is up-to-date. Having outdated information on your website conveys a very negative impression to the reader.

APPENDIX:

Keywords

1. Think of words you would use to find a site like yours using a search engine and write them down in order of importance.
2. Ask friends, associates, customers, etc., about the words that they would use and write them down in order of importance, the most important ones being the ones that match up with your list.
3. Use these keywords with every major search engine and see what you come up with.
4. Find your competitors sites and look at their source code. More specifically, their meta tags for “keywords” and “description.” Hint: look at the top of the page under the following tags: <meta name=”KEYWORDS” content=”marketing, business,…” These keywords are especially important if they correlate with steps 2 and 3 above and if their sites is easily found in a search engine. Now, organize your all-important list of keywords into one list, with the most important words at the top.
5. Your tags should be in the correct place so that when searching engines spider your site correctly. Use the following order:
   <html>
   <head>
   <title>Descriptive Page Title Which Includes Keywords</title>
   <meta name=”DESCRIPTION”
   content=”description of page (using keywords) that will appear in the search results when people find the page through a search engine that uses this META tag”>
   <meta name=”KEYWORDS”
   content=”the,very,important,keywords,
   separated,by,commas,no,spaces,in,order,of,importance”>
   </head>
6. Don’t limit the use of these META tags to your index.html page. Use these META tags at the beginning of every page describing the content held within.

7. Limit the character counts of your KEYWORDS tag to 1,000. Use commas to separate keywords, no need to use spaces except with phrases.
8. Do not repeat a keyword more often than seven times. Only use repetition if you absolutely need to, for instance in phrases like business planning, business development, etc. Not like business, business, business, or else you may be penalized and your site will not be indexed by the search engine.

9. Page title is an important feature, so make it very descriptive but short. Put the most important keywords here as well. Some search engines rate how many times the search terms occur in the document and the title is the first place the engines look.
10. Some search engines don't use META tags at all and index your site based on the content of your page. In some cases they may pay more attention to content used in headings, that is between tags like <h1></h1>, <h6></h6>. The larger the heading the better. Also don't forget the <alt> tag for your pictures. In addition to making your page easier to navigate for someone browsing with images turned off, descriptive phrases can help with indexing in search engines using keyword frequency to rank search results. Another thing to keep in mind are the file names for your pages. Using keywords here is also a big plus. In short, use your keywords as often and as many place as you can to secure higher placement on the search engines.
11. Do it right the first time of you can spend months fixing it.

Places to post your site:

These sites offer templates to create sites online, so you don't need to know any HTML. Or, you can create your site offline and upload it through their file management programs. Because they are free, they place advertisements on your site.

Geocities (www.geocities.com)
Tripod (www.tripod.com)
Angelfire (www.angelfire.com)
Doteasy (www.doteasy.com)

Oxygenate offers an excellent manual about creating an effective website for an NGO. Good information for creating a site for any institution. Go to: www.oxygenate.com/web101/index.htm.

Website Creation tools: Joomla, Macromedia Dreamweaver, Microsoft Front Page

Chapter 4: Finance and Fundraising

4.1 Membership dues

Currently the regular membership dues in NPCA are $35 for a membership in NPCA and $15 for each group of the member's choice.

NPCA membership is open to all RPCVs as well as anyone who is interested in supporting the goals of the NPCA. Many of the country groups find they attract members who are host country nationals now living in the United States. Groups also attract associate members who are the friends or family of currently serving volunteers.

4.2 Record keeping

Every group should have someone designated as the treasurer or financial officer. This person should keep a simple set of books relating to financial transactions made on behalf of the group. Many groups include a financial report in their newsletters. Others give a treasurer's report orally at their meetings and include a written report as part of the minutes of the meeting. All groups must include the financial information in their annual reports to the NPCA. It is very important to keep good financial records.

There are a number of financial management software programs available. Groups can also set up a simple spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel or link their financial records to their membership databases.

Your group should keep track of all income and all expenditures. Very simply, it is money in and money out. Possible categories of income include: money received for membership dues, fundraising events, special donations, etc. Money paid out for postage, newsletter printing, deposits on meeting rooms, and so forth are possible expense categories.

NPCA also requires that groups submit a financial report during the group renewal process each year. The reason for this requirement is to provide a record of the use of the dues that the NPCA is sending to active groups. If your group is obtaining nonprofit status, you may also need to provide financial statements reflecting the income and expenditures of the group.

4.3 Fundraising

Who can't use extra money? Aside from funding local and country projects and supporting your group a little extra money could also be used to ensure participation of your group in regional and national conferences or events. Groups should consider supporting their officers and rewarding those members who undertake projects that require a large commitment of time. Members should be reimbursed for agreed upon expenditures on behalf of the group; and each group should make sure it is represented at regional and national events. If members are not reimbursed (or at least subsidized), then attendance at those events is limited to those members who can afford to go on their own.

There are a variety of ways to raise money for your group. The most direct approach is to call people and ask for donations. If your group has a specific program or project for which you need to raise money, you will have a lot more success than just asking for money to support the group.

If the direct approach seems a little too direct, you can send out a fundraising letter and then follow the letters up with a phone calls. Many groups have an annual fundraising drive and send out letters to members asking for larger donations. Often premiums are offered in order to entice donors. Some groups have different levels of donors. Start looking at the fundraising appeals from other organizations. You will notice they all ask for money for a specific purpose and you will also find that the appeal is urgent. Keep in mind the more specific and the more direct you are in asking for money, the more likely it is that you will get it.

You can also raise money by passing the hat at events and meetings. Here again make a direct appeal and be specific as to where the money is going. The danger in limiting your fundraising to active members is you are asking the same small group of people over and over again. They may stop participating or start to tune your appeals out.

Another option is to get into the retail business to make money. Many groups have their own T-shirts and sell them at a profit. Groups get tables at the national conferences, community events, or other appropriate places and sell a variety of merchandise. One of the greatest success stories is the Madison Wisconsin group's calendar. They started small but now have grown to the point where they sell in quantity to other groups. As you don't want your fundraising efforts to turn into fund losers, order small enough quantities of merchandise to insure you will sell it. Charge enough so that it is worth your while and keep good records.

Garage, yard, or tag sales and tables at flea markets can produce funds without tapping into the pockets of your own members. Everyone has stuff in their basement or garage that they could part with. You probably have a member who lives in a high traffic area that would be great for a
yard sale and most likely have people who could pick up the stuff, sort it, tag it, and even take the remaining treasures to Goodwill or another charity when it was over.

Other fundraising activities include:

- Arts and crafts sales
- Auctions
- Raffles
- Concerts
- Dances
- Dinners

Remember there is nothing wrong with raising money!

Disclaimer: This chapter is not to be construed as formal legal advice, but rather information that we have provided for your guidance, based primarily on experiences shared by NPCA groups. To the best of our knowledge this information is accurate as of July 2008, but this information is subject to change. Please consult legal counsel.

Chapter 5: Legal Considerations

When forming, there are four legal documents or authorities that your group needs to consider. They are the bylaws, articles of incorporation, tax-exempt status 501(c)(3), and nonprofit bulk mailing status. You do not have to do all of this at once. It is better to take it one step at a time and not go on to the next until you are sure it is necessary. If you start with the bylaws that will get you going. You can then open a bank account and do most of the things you want to do as a group.

5.1 Bylaws for your group

A committee to draw up proposed bylaws is usually appointed at the first organizational meeting. Robert's Rules of Order can be used as a guide for establishing bylaws and also can be relied upon for conducting business meetings. Often there is someone in the group who is familiar with Robert's Rules and he/she can be designated as the parliamentarian.

Factors influencing the content of bylaws: The committee generally starts with a discussion of the desired content of the bylaws. Looking at samples from other groups will help your group establish just how detailed you would like your bylaws to be. An example set of by-laws can be found at http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/sites/default/files/samplegroupbylaws.pdf. In order for the group to have the greatest freedom to act, the bylaws should be no more restrictive or detailed than necessary.

After the bylaws committee has drafted a proposed set of bylaws, a critical examination of each provision should be made. This is the legal document for the group, so be sure that there are no ambiguities or inconsistencies. If your group has a member who is an attorney, it is a good idea to ask him/her to be on the bylaws committee or at the very least to review your draft.

The bylaws then need to be approved by the membership. They should be presented article by article and clearly explained. This is the time to be doubly sure you mean what you say. As time passes and your group grows and changes you may find it necessary to change the bylaws. You can do this by amending the bylaws. Be sure to attach any amendments to copies of your bylaws when you distribute them as well as filing them with any agencies such as the secretary of state or the IRS if you have filed incorporation or nonprofit papers.

The bylaws should have essentially the same form and content whether or not the group is incorporated. This makes it much easier to move down the road to nonprofit status if your group decides to do so at a later date. The bylaws define the primary characteristics of the group. They should prescribe how the group functions and should include all the rules the group thinks are so important that they cannot be changed without previous notice to the members and the vote of a specified large majority, such as a two thirds vote. The number of articles in the bylaws will be determined by the size and activities of the organization.

5.2 Incorporation

The corporate form of organization is the easiest way to gain charitable or not-for-profit status under the Internal Revenue Code. Incorporation limits the liability of the officers or directors and encourages donations as they may be tax deductible as charitable contributions. Remember, in most states your group has to have bylaws in order to incorporate.

Articles of Incorporation The secretary of state or the equivalent office in your state is the best source for how to incorporate in your state. A good source for help in this process is http://www.idealist.org/if/idealist/en/FAQ/QuestionViewer/default?section=02&item=04. Country-of-service groups may want to check the requirements and fees of several states to make sure that the state they select has the lowest fees and fewest requirements. Also consider where the majority of your group's members live as when you change officers in the future, your group wants to make sure that someone who is living in the state where the group is incorporated can deal with any problems or changes that might need to be made.

Generally your group will be asked for the name of the corporation. That would be the official group name. The duration of your corporation would be perpetual. They will want to know your group's purpose. In order to be a nonprofit corporation there will usually be a place where you state that no earnings will go to the officers, directors, or members, except for services rendered, etc. Read the fine print carefully and if you have a member who is a lawyer, this may be a good assignment for him/her.

5.3 Becoming a nonprofit organization – section 501(c)(3)

What exactly is a nonprofit organization? Nonprofit organizations are generally legally constituted, nongovernmental entities, incorporated under state law as charitable or not-for-profit corporations that have been set up to serve a public purpose and are tax-exempt according to the Internal Revenue Service. All nonprofits must have the following four characteristics:

- They must have a public purpose.
- Their governance structure must preclude self-interest and private financial gain.
- They must be exempt from paying federal tax.
- They must possess the special legal status that stipulates gifts made to them are tax-deductible.

The National Peace Corps Association is a nonprofit organization exempt from Federal Income Tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The NPCA wants to encourage its groups to apply for recognition of exemption.

The advantages of being registered as a 501(c)(3) organization are:

- Donors may deduct contributions to your group under section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Your group can apply for a nonprofit bulk mail permit.
- Purchases for your organization are exempt from state tax.

Section 501(c)(3) is the section of the Internal Revenue Code that allows people to deduct contributions to those tax-exempt organizations as charitable donations. It also allows not-for-profit organizations certain tax exemptions and the group can also apply for a nonprofit rate for bulk mailing at the post office.

In order to qualify for exemption from federal income tax, an organization should be organized and operated exclusively for one or more of the following purposes:

- Charitable
- Religious
- Educational
- Scientific
- Literary training for public safety
- Fostering national or international amateur sports competition
- The prevention of cruelty to children or animals

In all probability, your group would qualify under the charitable category. Before going any further, the group must have written bylaws and must have an employee identification number. This is required even if your group has no employees. You can obtain one through the Internal Revenue Service.

To qualify you must show that your group is organized and operated for purposes that are beneficial to the public interest. Your group must submit information showing how your organization achieves that goal.

Look in IRS Publication 557 for help. You are required to file annual information returns with the Internal Revenue Service, if you have gross revenue of over $25,000.

You will probably not have to file; but if your group does a fund-raiser and donates the money to a Peace Corps project or other needy group, you still need to count this as revenue generated. ***[New in 2008: if your gross receipts are under $25,000, you may need to file the Form 990-N e-Postcard. See section 5.6 below.]*** A tax-exempt organization that fails to file a required return is subject to penalty. Read carefully publication 557 and other documents available from the Internal Revenue Service as you are making a big commitment to paperwork. Also refer to http://www.idealist.org/if/idealist/en/FAQ/QuestionViewer/default?section=02&item=04 a good source for how to acquire 501(c)(3) Status

5.4 Application procedures

Form 1023 Your group's application must be in writing using Form 1023. To obtain the latest revision, write to the IRS Forms Distribution Center for your state, call 1-800-TAX-FORM, or http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1023.pdf. For more questions about the Form 1023, check the "Frequently Asked Questions about Form 1023" page on the IRS website: http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=130101,00.html.

User fee The law requires the payment of a user fee for a determination on your group's application for recognition of tax-exempt status. Use **Form 8718** (http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8718.pdf) to figure the amount of your fee and pay it. Your payment must accompany your request. The IRS will not process a request unless the fee has been paid.

Before you complete form 1023 make sure you have the following:

Employer identification number: Every exempt organization is required to have an employer identification number (EIN), whether or not it has any employees. If your group does not have one you can apply for it by including a completed Form SS-4

Organizing documents: Each application for exemption must be accompanied by a conformed copy of your Articles of Incorporation or Articles of Association. If your group does not have an organizing document, it will not qualify for exempt status.

Bylaws: If your group has adopted bylaws, include a copy that an authorized official certifies as current. Do not submit original documents as they become part of the IRS file and cannot be returned.

Description of activities: A full description of the purposes and activities of your group should be included in your application. You can include brochures, written material, publications that describe the purpose of your group. This information is also on your articles of incorporation.

Financial data: Your group must include with your application financial statements showing receipts and expenditures for the current and 3 preceding years (or for the number of years your group has been in existence, if less than 4 years). Describe sources of receipts and nature of expenditures. If you have not begun operations or have operated for less than one year, a proposed budget for two years and a current statement of assets and liabilities can be included.

Fundraising activities description: The financial data included with your group's application should show how your group's activities will be financed. Try to come up with a list of major contributors and include their addresses and the amount contributed. If your group has been awarded a grant include that information and the purpose of the grant.

Signature

The powers and duties of officers are usually stated in the bylaws. Make sure your group's forms are signed by an officer who is authorized to sign on behalf of the group.

Where to file
Your group's application for recognition of tax-exempt status must be filed with the District Director for the key district in which your group's principal office or place of business is located. The addresses are shown at the end of publication 557.

Appeal Procedures
Your group will receive a determination letter or ruling from the IRS. If your group receives an adverse determination, you can appeal. You will have to let them know within 30 days from the date of the determination letter that your group would like an appeals office conference. Refer to Chapter 1, page 5 of publication 557 for more information.

Remember everything your group does to get to this point is useful. It is important to incorporate as you could be personally liable for your group's operations if you do not. Your group needs bylaws to incorporate and your bylaws are the framework for effective governance. If your group goes through all the steps and gets recognition for exemption, you are then required by law to file various returns and reports. Refer to Chapter 2, page 8 of publication 557. It is very important to keep a record of everything your group submits to the IRS. Make sure these and other financial documents are turned over to newly elected officers at the end of your term. Your group should also forward copies to the National Peace Corps Association for their group files. This helps establish a history of the group; and when leadership changes, there is a central set of records, should the group's records get lost or misplaced.

5.5 Not-for-profit bulk mailings

When your group gets your status as a 501(c)(3) organization, your group can get a bulk mailing permit for sending out your newsletter or other similar materials. To apply, an officer from your group must apply for the permit at the post office where the mailings will be dropped. You must have proof of your group's nonprofit status. Form 3624 is the form you get from the post office. You will need to attach copies of your group's articles of incorporation and evidence of your nonprofit status. Documents such as a list of the activities your group has undertaken in the past twelve months, a financial statement which includes a copy of your group's budget are also requested.

Other documents such as copies of the newsletter, minutes of meetings, etc. may also be required. After receiving authorization, your group is required to make at least one bulk mailing during a 2 year period. Your group's bulk mailing permit is for your sole use. Other groups or organizations are not allowed to use it.

The application fee if your group uses the bulk mail imprint on your newsletter or other mailings is $85.00. In addition, the annual fee is also $85.00. The ***minimum*** number of pieces per mailing is 200. All pieces in your mailing must be exactly the same. Your actual postage charges are calculated in a rather complicated fashion depending on the number of pieces in a zip code or the number of pieces in a state sort. Most of the people at the bulk mailing facilities are extremely helpful and will supply you with booklets and forms. When you get to the stage of preparing the mailing they will usually help you out with stickers for sorting, rubber bands for banding, and trays for transporting your mailing.

Before your group decides that a bulk mail permit is a good idea, think about the $85.00 initial fee and the additional $85.00 per year and make sure that the amount you are saving on sending your materials out at a third class rate is worth it. Also remember that as third class mail, your mail will be at the bottom of the bag and will not be forwarded. Moreover, the post office specifies where you can drop bulk mail and specifies how it must be sorted. You can put address correction requested on your mailing and the post office will inform you of people that have moved, but the post office does not forward bulk mail. There is a charge of 80 cents for each address correction.

If your group decides that your group mails out enough materials to make it worthwhile sending it out at the

the bulk rate, have one person in your group in charge of processing the bulk mail. That person can develop a rapport with the post office to ensure that your mail is sent out in a timely manner. He /she will also be able to master the many rules of bulk mail preparation, including which way the rubber bands have to be put around the envelopes.

5.6 Filing Form 990-N (e-Postcards) for Small Tax-Exempt Organizations

The Pension Protection Act of 2006 is requiring most small tax-exempt organizations, whose gross receipts are generally $25,000 or less, to electronically submit Form 990-N (also known as the e-Postcard). Effective January 1, 2008, it ensures that the IRS and potential donors have current information about your organization. There is a disclosure site where the public can view an organization's e-Postcard or electronic filings by these small organizations. Go to http://www.irs.gov/app/ePostcard/ to search for an organization, or you can download the entire database of e-Postcard filings here: http://www.irs.gov/app/ePostcard/forwardToDownload.do.

Who Must File
Most small tax-exempt organizations with gross receipts that are generally $25,000 or less must file the e-Postcard. Exceptions to this requirement are:

- Organizations that are a subordinate of a parent organization and is already included on the parent's group return (the group return satisfies the reporting requirement) ***[Note: for these purposes, NPCA is not considered a parent organization and thus the groups are not subordinate or included in NPCA's return.]***
- Churches, their integrated auxiliaries, and conventions or associations of churches

The following organizations cannot file the e-Postcard but must file different forms instead:

- Tax-exempt organizations with annual gross receipts that are normally greater than $25,000 must file Form 990 (http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f990.pdf) or Form 990-EZ (http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f990ez.pdf).
- Private foundations must file Form 990-PF

Information Needed to File the e-Postcard
To make the e-Postcard easier to complete, please gather the following information about your organization:
- Employer Identification Number (EIN), also known as a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN)
- Tax Year
- Legal name and mailing address
- Any other names the organization uses
- Name and address of a principal officer
- Confirmation that the organization's annual gross receipts are normally $25,000 or less
- Website address (if applicable)
- A statement that the organization has terminated or is terminating/going out of business (if applicable)

How to File
There is no paper form—this 990-N form must be completed and filed electronically. Visit http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=169250,00.html and click the link in the "How to File" box to file the e-Postcard. You can also go directly to the form at http://epostcard.form990.org/.

Deadlines
The first e-Postcards are due in 2008 for tax years ending on or after December 31, 2007. The e-Postcard is due every year by the 15th day of the 5th month after the close of your tax year. For example, if your tax year ended on December 31, 2007, the e-Postcard is due May 15, 2008. **You cannot file the e-Postcard until after your tax year ends.**

Late Filing or Failure to File the e-Postcard
If you do not file your e-Postcard on time, the IRS will send you a reminder notice but you will not be assessed a penalty for filing the e-Postcard late. However, an organization that fails to file required e-Postcards (or information returns – Forms 990 or 990-EZ) for three consecutive years will automatically lose its tax-exempt status. The revocation of the organization's tax-exempt status will not take place until the filing due date of the third year.

To access the Frequently Asked Questions or to find complete information about the e-Postcard filing requirement, visit (http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=169250,00.html).

You may also call the Customer Account Services at 1 (877) 829-5500.

Chapter 6: Activities

Now you are organized, have officers, and have set up a communications network, what is your newly formed or re-organized group going to do? The activities and projects undertaken by RPCVs are many.

Many of the country-of-service groups maintain close connections with their countries of service. Activities include:

- Peace Corps partnership projects
- Lobbying on behalf of their country
- Support for individual volunteer projects in country
- Dinners at ethnic restaurants
- Newsletters with the latest news reports from their country-of-service
- Organizing trips back to their host countries
- Scholarship programs for residents of Country of Service

Geographic groups often have more community-based activities such as:

- Community volunteer days
- Picnics
- Potlucks
- Speakers bureaus
- Coordination with World Wise schools
- Assisting the local Peace Corps office in recruiting
- Hosting going away parties for newly recruited volunteers
- Hosting welcome home parties for new RPCVs
- Participation in international community events such as international festivals
- Provide volunteers to other organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, public broadcasting stations' telethons, etc.
- Support partnership programs
- Support projects of serving volunteers from the community
- Produce public broadcasting "global awareness" TV shows

6.1 Events and projects

There is an old adage: "Many hands make light work." Group leaders and officers do not have to do all of the work. As a matter of fact, they shouldn't do all of the work. A common lament is "there is no one else to do it" or "if I don't do it, it won't get done." There is another old saying, "if you want it done right, do it yourself." While often there is an element of truth to these statements, you will find that members of the very same group will tell you they would be willing to do some of the work, but no one has asked them, and they may even go as far as to say the group is run by a clique. Your group wants to be as inclusive as possible and still get the job done.

The challenge is to make sure the activity takes place and is successful or the event raises money or the volunteers show up and work on volunteer day. Whatever your group does, it should be fun and rewarding. Every event or project has elements in common. Planning is the first step to ensuring success.

The answers to the following questions will help your group get under way. What are we going to do? When are we going to do it? Who is going to do it? How are we going to do it? Specific and detailed answers to these questions are needed. For example, on who is going to do it "members of the group" is not a detailed enough response. It is a good idea to have a written plan that includes deadlines and time lines. Your group may want to use a form similar to the one that follows.

Events Planning Form

Name of Event

Purpose of Event

Event Coordinator Phone: E-mail:

Who will be interested in this event?

Expected number of participants

Date(s) of Event

Time for Event

Location:
What would be a suitable location?

Who will be in charge of finding the location?

Restrictions (budget, accessibility, etc.)

Event Activities (outline the activities that will take place at your event)

What equipment or supplies will you need?

Who will be responsible for:
Publicity
Tickets
Cash box
Invitation
Name tags
Area set up
Decorations
Clean up
Recruiting
Volunteers
Food
Utensils
Beverages
Any licenses
Insurance
Transportation
Introductions
Speakers

6.2 Recruiting help from your membership

Finding volunteers is just like raising money. It is easy if you ask. The number one reason people volunteer is because they were asked. When you approach potential volunteers, they are more likely to say yes if you are specific about what you are asking them to do and realistic about the time commitment involved. Provide the volunteers with as much information as you can about the task you are asking them to do and set a time frame in which it should be done.

There are tasks that are suited to everyone and the secret of managing a good volunteer organization is to find the right person for the job. Your group may want to list jobs that need to be done in your newsletter and then call people to follow up. Look at the range of skills your members have and see if there are people who have the skills you need. For example, look for people who are lawyers or have a legal background for help in writing bylaws and incorporation documents. Look for people who have told you about their home renovation projects to organize a volunteer day for Habitat for Humanity and use the skills of a teacher to coordinate participation in global awareness week. Your group may want to go as far as having members fill out a form that can be used to enter information into your database so your group can do searches for specific skills.

The temptation is great when you find volunteers who do a good job on a particular event to rely on them again and again. Make sure you don't back them into a corner and eventually loose them. Perhaps they could train others in producing the event the next time or help in a more advisory role. Most people, especially RPCVs, will let you know when a project is not working out, or when they are getting burned out, but you should try to remember to ask.

Burnout occurs when people are overworked and under-recognized. Ask members for input when making decisions. People are much more committed to things they help plan. Make sure the volunteers know what is expected. Write a job description or project description. Encourage members to work together as committees or teams. The most important thing your group can to do ensure success is to thank your volunteers and recognize them in your newsletter and at meetings. A card, handwritten note, or phone call after the event expressing your appreciation makes everyone feel good.

Chapter 7: Resources

You have the heard the expression, don't re-invent the wheel. Almost everything you are going to do as an group has been done before. There are a lot of sources for help in whatever your group is doing and people are willing to share their ideas and support. Do not be afraid to ask others for ideas and help. Some of the resources that are available to your RPCV group are described below.

7.1 National Peace Corps Association

Membership renewal notices: Sending out renewal notices can be a time consuming and thankless job for someone in the group. Your group can simplify your work by relying on the NPCA to handle most of it for you—at least for your members who are NPCA members. NPCA processes renewal notices every month with the first notice going to members whose expiration dates are 60 days out. The second notice goes to those whose membership is 30 days out. The third notice is sent to members whose membership has recently lapsed. At least once a year former members get a letter asking them to rejoin.

Web pages: NPCA, Peace Corps, and many of the groups have home pages on the worldwide web. Current information is available on these sites. Your group can find information you can use in your newsletters and you can develop your own site to get information out about your group and its activities. NPCA also hosts a website with web pages available for groups to list their activities and contact information.

Listservs: NPCA offers a variety of listservs aimed at distributing information, announcements, and resources to your group. See section 3.2 of this handbook for more information.

7.2 The Peace Corps

Overview: Peace Corps country directors and desk officers can be great resources for NPCA groups to communicate with currently serving PCVs. NPCA staff meets regularly with Peace Corps leadership to facilitate relationships between the two organizations. Peace Corps is a large governmental organization. With the 5 year employment rule, even the most dedicated contact is likely to move on eventually. Groups should also develop relationships relating to their specific needs with the appropriate staff.

The following are some ideas to facilitate your group's relation with Peace Corps staff.

About Contacting Peace Corps:

Establishing relations with Peace Corps staff depends on the people involved and the timing. Don't be discouraged if a particular person does not follow through. Reach out to other staff until you find someone who appreciates your needs.

If you don't have a specific contact name at Peace Corps HQ or in-country, here are some ideas to help you get in contact with relevant Peace Corps staff:

- Call the general Peace Corps HQ phone number and ask for the relevant desk officer. Introduce yourself.
- Ask for the name and contact information of the Country Director.
- Have recently returned volunteers contact the staff they know.
- Make friends with the receptionist and administrative staff in-country.
- Call your Peace Corps Regional Recruitment Office (RRO). Introduce yourself. Ask them to make introductions or offer contact information.
- When in D.C. or in-country, stop by the local Peace Corps office to introduce yourself and meet the relevant staff. If you have a member who lives or regularly travels to D.C. or in-country, empower them to keep in contact.
- Ask about staff changes.

- Ask Peace Corps staff for feedback on your group's activities and engage them in the planning process.

Activities Peace Corps Staff Can Facilitate:

- Send copies of your group's newsletter to the host country office to distribute.
- Ask if your group leaders can be on the mailing list for the PCV newsletter.
- Encourage current PCVs to submit stories for your newsletter.
- Promoting your group by distributing your literature to newly COSing volunteers.
- Finding and vetting projects managed by PCVs that your group can fund.
- Submit articles for in country newsletters. This makes them aware of your group and the types of activities you do and support.
- Make yourself known to the Country Directors and APCDs.
- Coordinate activities that involve both current and returned PCVs (e.g. fundraising activities).
- Group participation in staging events.

Activities Your Group Can Do to Support Peace Corps:

- Offer grants to support the work of PCVs. Get the Peace Corps staff involved in your project selection.
- Fund Peace Corps Partnership Projects - and then promote your support and that program in your newsletter.
- Support events for Peace Corps nominees ("Nomination Party").
- Help promote events Peace Corps is organizing.
- Speak and assist at recruiting events.
- Invite Peace Corps staff to your group's events.
- Get press coverage for your activities involving Peace Corps volunteers and staff.

Activities Peace Corps Can do to Support Groups:

- Regional Recruiting Offices can assist with targeted mailings to RPCVs. They cannot give you the list, but they may be willing to do a mailing for you or include your group's information their own mailings.
- Communicate with currently serving PCVs to inform them of your group's activities.
- Distribute newsletters to PCVs.
- Inform you of staging dates and COS dates so you can time your activities.
- Allow you to participate in staging events.

Things Peace Corps staff CANNOT Do:

- Give out personal contact information about PCVs or RPCVs.

Other Peace Corps Programs

- World Wise Schools
- Peace Corps Fellows program

General Peace Corps Contact Information:

Unofficial list of Peace Corps staff: http://www.peacecorpsjournals.com/staff.txt

List of PC Regional Recruiting Offices: http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=meet.regrec

Website: www.peacecorps.gov

General Information Number: 800.424.8580 (Ext. 1 for RRO and Ext. 2 for PCHQ)

Mailing Address:

Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20526

7.3 Elected representatives to the NPCA Board

You have a representative on the NPCA Board of Directors. It is your representative's job to represent your group on the Board. Check the NPCA website for the name of your elected board representative (http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/member-elected-representatives-npca-board)

7.4 Other organizations

Country-of-service groups often find that the embassies for their respective countries are a great source of information about current events in their countries. And the embassies are usually very interested in meeting or communicating with RPCVs. Local groups may find that other volunteer organizations in their area can be a source for collaborative projects or another way of assessing the needs of the community. Frequently, these other volunteer groups are interested in having a presentation by an RPCV relating to global issues or an educational presentation about a specific country or area of the world.

7.5 Other Resources

Books: *Securing Your Organization's Future* by Michael Seltzer
The Grass Roots Fundraising Book by Joan Flanagan

Websites: Service Leader.org: http://www.serviceleader.org/
Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance: http://www.ani-rrg.org
Society for Nonprofit Organizations: http://wicip.org/snpo/

Chapter 8: Annual Group Renewal Process

8.1 Annual Group Renewal

Every year your group will be required to renew with the National Peace Corps Association. This process will occur from January to March of each year.

Requirements include:

1. Group renewal fee of $25, $100, or $400 depending on your member size:
    a. Small groups (10-100 members): $25
    b. Medium-size groups (100-400 members): $100
    c. Large groups (401 and more members): $400
2. Update your group NPCA website
    a. http://community.peacecorpsconnect.org ....
3. Update NPCA database with current information
4. Submit recent form of correspondence with group members
    a. Mail paper newsletter to NPCA, 1900 L Street, NW, Suite 404, Washington, DC 20036 or email a PDF of your newsletter to groups@peacecorpsconnect.org
    b. Add groups@peacecorpsconnect.org to your electronic newsletter list
5. Your group's leader(s) must sign up for the Group Leaders Forum online
6. Financial report