



Peace Corps Funding (All Meetings)

Our Request

- **The Ask for Your Members of Congress**
 - **Increase Peace Corps Funding:** Ask lawmakers to increase funding for the Peace Corps in Fiscal Year 2024.
 - **Appropriators:** If your Representatives are members of the Senate or House Appropriations Committee (and especially the State/Foreign Operations Subcommittee which determines funding levels for the Peace Corps) ask them to lead efforts to secure a funding increase for the Peace Corps.

Background

- Within the international affairs programs of our federal budget, there is a line item for the Peace Corps.
- The new (118th) Congress is beginning work on the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 2024) budget. FY 2024 runs from October 1, 2023 through September 30, 2024.
- Last year, President Biden recommended and Congress approved a Peace Corps appropriation of \$430.5 million for the current fiscal year (FY 2023, which continues through September 30th). This appropriation was a five percent, \$20 million increase from the previous fiscal year.
- Last year's funding increase was the first meaningful increase in Peace Corps' baseline funding in seven years. From October 2015 through September 2022, Peace Corps funding was \$410 million (the agency did receive a minimal \$500,000 increase in 2019).
- **On March 9, 2023, President Biden submitted his FY 2024 budget to Congress. His budget includes a request of \$495 million for the Peace Corps.** This \$65 million, 15 percent increase in funding represents one of the largest single year increases requested in Peace Corps' history.

- In 2020, the Peace Corps received a one-time special appropriation to assist with the suspension of programs, the safe return of volunteers, and support for evacuated volunteers upon their return home.
- Peace Corps has in the past received additional funding through partnerships through programs including PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), and global initiatives to combat malaria and food insecurity. Unlike the specific Peace Corps line item, this funding is not guaranteed.
- This March in the House of Representatives, 136 House members signed the annual Peace Corps funding "Dear Colleague" letter, supporting the president's request. A similar Senate Dear Colleague letter is expected soon.

Key Talking Points

(PLEASE NOTE: You do not have to know or memorize all these points. We offer them so you can pick and choose those talking points that most resonate with you – and the offices you will meet with).

Justifying The Increase

In your meetings, there is a strong possibility you will be asked to defend a \$65 million increase in funding for the Peace Corps, at a time when volunteers are just beginning their return to service. These are our strongest arguments to justify such an increase:

- **Accelerating the Return to Service:** It is more than a year since Peace Corps Volunteers began returning to service. Now, more than 1,200 Volunteers and Trainees have returned to service in 51 countries. FY 2024 has not yet begun. And by the end of the fiscal year – September 30, 2024 – Peace Corps projects nearly 5,200 Volunteers will be at work in more than 60 countries. This would bring the agency near the pre-pandemic levels, when just over 7,000 volunteers were serving overseas.
- **Supporting Volunteers:** In its FY 2023 Budget, Peace Corps projected 71% of expenditures were devoted to "Direct Volunteer Operations." Necessary infrastructure for operations is a major expense.
- **Pacific Expansion:** Statements from the Biden administration and bi-partisan legislation in Congress (the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act) emphasize the importance of expanding Peace Corps service in the Pacific region. To conduct such expansion in a responsible manner that supports the well-being and safety of volunteers requires extra resources. Some of these island nations are among the most expensive for the Peace Corps to operate. If Congress is serious about expanding Peace Corps presence in the Pacific, it needs to invest in those operations.
- **Peace Corps' Budget Has Lost Purchasing Power Over the Past Eight Years Due to Limited Funding Increases:** Despite last year's funding increase, Peace Corps funding of \$410 million that was approved in FY 2016 has not kept

up with inflation. When adjusted for inflation, the equivalent level of funding for FY 2024 should be \$520 million. That's \$25 million below the president's request.

- **Recruitment:** As is the case with the military and domestic service programs, the Peace Corps is facing recruitment challenges to meet the demand for volunteers. In its budget justification to Congress, the Peace Corps seeks \$6 million to elevate its brand and raise nationwide awareness about Peace Corps service. It also wants to take steps to remove barriers to service for qualified volunteers who face financial challenges. This includes reimbursing invited volunteers for medical clearance expenses, and increasing the monthly readjustment allowance to keep pace with inflation.
- **IT and Cybersecurity:** The agency continues to advance investments to its information technology systems, including improvements to systems to better track crimes against volunteers in support of improved safety and security planning. The budget request to Congress includes \$10 million to address critical cybersecurity requirements in the agency's IT systems.
- **Pay Raises:** The agency projects \$7.7 million for planned pay raises for staff projected in FY 2024.

Other Talking Points

- **Share Your Peace Corps Story:** While the following facts and figures are important, Members of Congress and/or their staff also benefit when they hear about your personal Peace Corps experience. However, as time is limited, you will need to keep your Peace Corps stories short. Plan to condense your experience to a minute or two, depending on the projected time for your meeting and the number of speakers in your group.
- **A Smart Decision:** The return of volunteers to service was enhanced by keeping Peace Corps posts overseas open during the pandemic. This allowed the agency to maintain its infrastructure, and retain sufficient talent to ramp up programs.
- **The Newest Peace Corps Country:** Fifty years ago, our nation was at war with Vietnam. On December 30, 2022, the Peace Corps swore in the very first volunteers to serve in Vietnam. As noted in the agency press release, "Peace Corps' English education program in Viet Nam, officially established with the signing of an implementing agreement in July 2020, is a collaborative partnership between Peace Corps and Viet Nam's Ministry of Education and Training. Since arriving in VietNam in October, the nine English education volunteers successfully completed a comprehensive cross-cultural, language, and technical training program which prepared them to understand and follow the policies and practices of the Vietnamese education system and to co-teach alongside Vietnamese teachers for two years".
- **Our National Security is Advanced by the Peace Corps:** Peace Corps' mission and work align very well with the Biden Administration's Foreign Policy and National Security objectives, which include the need to "Strengthen Global

Health Security” and “Revitalize Our Ties with Allies and Partners.” A strong Peace Corps strengthens our nation in its relations with other nations.

- **More Support for Volunteer Recruitment and Placement:** As volunteers returned to service in 2022, the Peace Corps took the deliberate strategy to build volunteer presence in countries gradually in order to “stress test” program operations. The rest of FY 2023 and all of FY 2024 should present opportunities for volunteer numbers in individual countries to grow to pre-pandemic numbers. At a time when volunteer recruitment is down (not just for the Peace Corps, but also domestic service programs and military service) strong funding for the Peace Corps will allow for more robust recruitment initiatives.
- **Support Critical Peace Corps Reforms:** While a limited version of the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act is expected to be introduced this year, several items removed from last year’s legislation need to be supported. Meanwhile, past laws – including the Sam Farr and Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act (passed in 2018) – need to be fully implemented. And, the Peace Corps has received praise for its commitment to increased emphasis to further build up a diverse and welcoming Peace Corps and break down economic barriers to service. Many key reforms come with a price tag.
- **Americans Support Federal Volunteer Service Programs:** A January 2021 poll conducted by Change Research on behalf of Service Year Alliance found that 77 percent of those polled support the expansion of service opportunities such as Peace Corps and AmeriCorps. Support is bipartisan, with majorities of Democrats (93 percent), Republicans (59 percent), and Independents (77 percent) supporting national service expansion.
- **The Peace Corps is a National Treasure:** Since 1961, more than 240,000 citizens have served our nation as Peace Corps Volunteers in 143 countries. They collaborate with host-country counterparts on a wide range of projects that correspond to the United Nations’ sustainable development goals, working in the fields of health, education, food security, environmental protection, and more. Over the past 60-plus years, Peace Corps Volunteers have provided well over 2 billion hours of service, building lifelong friendships with countless citizens around the world.
- **A Quote From Eswatini:** As noted by Prime Minister Cleopas Sipho Diamini, “We are grateful that (the Peace Corps) has returned in 2023 to assist with HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.”
- **A Quote From Guyana:** As said by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Gail Teixeira at the December, 2022 swearing in of volunteers, “The basic things that we sometimes take for granted are the things we need to support at the community level.”
- **So Much, For So Little:** While fiscal conservatives strongly urge for a reduction in federal spending, our entire international affairs programs represent only one percent of our federal budget. And – within our international affairs programs – Peace Corps accounts for only one percent of that budget! For all of the good

that Peace Corps does, cuts to its funding will have virtually no impact on federal spending.

- **Don't Pull Back!:** As the Peace Corps returns to normal, this is exactly not the time to pull back resources. For Fiscal Year 2024 – at the very least – Congress should support no less than the \$430.5 million appropriation the agency received for the current fiscal year.

And...Don't Forget the Domestic Dividend of Peace Corps Service!

It is always important to remind lawmakers that Peace Corps service is much more than 27 months overseas.

Share the significance of the ongoing commitment to service that Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) provide. Our State Resources website page includes a one page summary of Peace Corps activity in your state, providing some examples of Peace Corps' domestic dividend. Please provide your personal examples as well.

Additionally, leading members of the Peace Corps community recently finalized and submitted the findings of a 2021/2022 survey of RPCVs. The report, *The Power of Peace Corps: The Domestic Benefits of RPCVs*, includes the following findings:

- Of the more than 4,000 survey respondents, RPCVs worked in 14 different career fields after service. Top fields included social services (16 percent), youth (13 percent), public service, government, law, and policy (11 percent), and community development and outreach (11 percent).
- Approximately half of the RPCVs across multiple sectors pursued a career field either directly related or associated with their Peace Corps project assignment. A majority of RPCVs remained in the areas of business (55 percent), education (63 percent), environment (54 percent), and government and/or public service (68 percent).
- 86 percent of RPCVs continued to volunteer after Peace Corps service, nearly double the number reported in earlier studies. RPCVs are also three times more likely to volunteer than the average American...Additionally, of those who answered about their service, 67 percent have served in leadership positions in the organizations through service on a single or multiple boards of directors.
- Of the 86 percent who volunteered, the top three areas of participation were with civic organizations (17 percent), groups that work with disadvantaged populations (16 percent), and faith-based groups (12 percent).
- A majority of RPCVs reported greater intercultural awareness (96 percent), more confidence (92 percent), being more accepting of diversity (87 percent), a greater

interest in service (86 percent), more awareness of the value of community (86 percent), and greater awareness of professional goals (67 percent).

- A majority of RPCVs reported that they have used their Peace Corps knowledge in their profession in some capacity (74 percent) either daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly, or in the past. These include languages (67 percent), cultural knowledge (86 percent), political system knowledge (72 percent), and economic system knowledge (70 percent).