

The Peace Corps Training Selection Process

To maintain the
standards of quality
Volunteers have set,
selection is as thorough,
as fair, and as valid
as is possible

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Many applicants have requested information concerning the Peace Corps Training Selection Process. Training is a constantly changing procedure. Ideally, it is a personal process of self-assessment and self-analysis which will enable the trainee to answer a basic, all-important question: "Am I committed, really committed to the Peace Corps?" In seeking to give prospective Volunteers the most useful, pertinent preparation possible, to both make such a decision and to serve successfully abroad, the Peace Corps constantly reassesses its training projects. It experiments with new ideas in seeking to reach its goals. For these reasons, a composite description of the Selection Process will reflect such variations. So remember, for a given project there will be slight differences in the procedure outlined below.

An individual enters training to qualify as a Volunteer. All of his efforts are directed toward preparing for the difficult role of being a Peace Corps Volunteer overseas. Training programs are designed to help one gain knowledge of himself and to prepare him for his unique experience.

The training and assessment staff seek to help trainees become better suited for Peace Corps service. They contrast each participant's personality characteristics, motivation, skills and performance during training against the requirements of the job to which he is being assigned. The more exact the fit, the greater the probability that an individual will be a successful Volunteer and that his two years overseas will be a rewarding period of growth in his life.

Up to this point, the Selection Process has dealt with an applicant's qualifications as they appear on paper. These data were matched with Peace Corps Volunteer job classifications to provide assignments for each qualified applicant.

The next step is to see to it that the applicant meets Selection standards for the particular training project to which he is assigned. Much depends upon the applicant, but the training program has been structured to help him meet these various standards. In brief, they are:

1. Motivation which will insure commitment to serve in the Peace Corps despite periods of stress.
2. Intelligence sufficient to meet the demands of a particular program and to cope with other challenges of Peace Corps work, including rapid learning in a short training period.
3. Personal qualities including initiative, determination, friendliness, patience, ability to communicate and respect for other people regardless of race, religion, nationality, social standing or political persuasion.
5. Competence in the skills required for the assignment overseas.
6. Sufficient progress in the host country language before the end of training.
7. Adequate knowledge of both the host country and the United States.

In training, the emphasis is to help trainees make a mature decision about the Peace Corps. A climate which will maximize opportunity for personal growth and change is the goal. Staff members try to identify problems so that frank discussions in terms of the impact of the problem on the trainee's probable success as a Peace Corps Volunteer can be realized. Whenever possible, a constructive course of action will be suggested. Progress in solving the problem is closely followed. Trainees are encouraged to discuss problems with the staff as they arise so there is maximum opportunity for constructive action.

Usually twice during training a Selection Board will consider the accumulated information about each Trainee in the program. This

information may include: evaluation of performance by instructors and fellow trainees; the views of host country nationals participating in the training program; observations and interviews by the Field Assessment Officers; and, if indicated, observations of the psychiatric consultant.

The Selection Board is chaired by a Field Selection Officer and usually includes: representatives from the training institution; the Field Assessment Officer; the project psychiatrist and medical consultants; the Peace Corps Training Officer; and the Country Director or the Country Operations Officer from Washington. In some cases, where there may be a period of in-country training, the Selection Board may be held overseas during the final phase of training.

The Selection Board can make one of four recommendations: acceptance as a Volunteer; recommendation for service in another training program; outright disqualification; or disqualification pending correction of some deficiency. This last recommendation usually is reserved for those instances where improvement seems likely, as in medical cases, or where an additional year or two of experience and training before overseas assignment would benefit the individual.

The Field Assessment Officer is the key individual who is charged with organizing most of the data which is available on each trainee during the course of the program. These data come from many sources. The number and type will vary from training project to training project, but the major sources usually include:

1. *Assessment Summary*: This is a summary and review of an individual's background and experience. It is developed from data supplied by the applicant and his references.
2. *Psychological Tests and Inventories*: Varied items may be used to provide information about a trainee's capabilities in dealing with himself, in dealing with others, and in dealing with the abstract aspects of his culture. Such items can yield an important additional dimension

to the assessment data and they also provide excellent feedback to the trainees.

3. *Peer Evaluations*: Trainees associate closely with each other. Such contact provides a context from which important and otherwise unobtainable data may be gathered. These are known as Peer Ratings. They provide a rich source of information for placement and living assignment overseas. Peer evaluations also provide valuable information about one's impact on others. Feedback from our peers is highly important if we are to understand our interpersonal relationships and to participate in self-assessment. Once again, they, too serve as an excellent source of feedback.
4. *Reports from Instructional Staff*: Instructors will periodically review a trainee's status and progress in the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.
5. *Medical Data*: Some information is developed through Washington and some through the training institution. Peace Corps medical standards are high, but they are not arbitrary. In specific instances, a disqualifying medical problem may be waived by the Director of the Peace Corps. A trainee's medical review, for selection purposes, is concerned with his overall physical condition, any limitations of function noted, and the relationship of these limitations to job requirements, on the one hand, and possible health hazards on the other.
6. *Psychiatric Data*: Interviews and observations may be made for two reasons: to diagnose any psychological problems which may interfere with a trainee's effectiveness as a Volunteer, and to help him overcome them.
7. *Civil Service Background Check*: This is usually called a "full field check." It is a thorough report in which friends, employers, relatives, neighbors, teachers, references, and others are asked to describe a trainee's experience, behavior, and maturity.