

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# SIERRA LEONE



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

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# MAP OF SIERRA LEONE



Base 803101AI (C00986) 4-05

## A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps trainee,

As country director and on behalf of all the staff in Sierra Leone, we are delighted to welcome you to Peace Corps/Sierra Leone.

This letter and the Welcome Book will provide information and updates about the status of Peace Corps/Sierra Leone, as well as some “tips” from Volunteers who have had a successful and fulfilling experience with the Peace Corps. You and your colleagues will join the Peace Corps/Sierra Leone family. Together, Volunteers and staff members play key roles in shaping how Peace Corps can best meet the development needs of the people of Sierra Leone.

You are about to embark upon a great adventure. While not without its frustrations, it will provide you with the opportunity to learn about other worlds and about yourself in ways that few other experiences will. You will need to be prepared to work hard to learn about Sierra Leoneans—their language and their culture—and how to best utilize your skills and enthusiasm effectively. You will also need to gear your expectations to the realities of a developing nation that has only recently emerged from crisis.

While we plan for quite specific job assignments, conditions and personnel may change. The best strategy is to come to Sierra Leone prepared to be flexible and adaptable to whatever you encounter.

The Peace Corps staff here in Freetown has been working very hard preparing for your arrival. Whether it’s been readying your training site, procuring necessary equipment and supplies, hiring staff, or preparing lesson plans—in a sense, it has all been in preparation for your arrival. You will find our largely Sierra Leonean staff eager to assist you in adjusting to Sierra Leone and as an invaluable resource during your time here.

The people, government, and schools of Sierra Leone have expressed great interest in the re-establishment of Peace Corps in the country. While expectations are high, the opportunities for making a real difference are even higher.

In closing, we would like to give you your first language lesson: Padi Kusheh-O. In Krio language that means, “Friend, Hello.” You should also know Kaboh-o, which means “Welcome.” You most certainly will be.

See you soon!

Valerie Staats

Country Director

Peace Corps/Sierra Leone

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# CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsibly the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service



# **PEACE CORPS/SIERRA LEONE HISTORY AND PROGRAMS**

## **History of the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone**

The Peace Corps program in Sierra Leone began in January 1962 as one of the first countries entered after Peace Corps' launch in March, 1961. The Peace Corps signed an agreement with the new government of Sierra Leone just nine months after the country became independent from the United Kingdom.

The first group of Peace Corps Volunteers to arrive in Sierra Leone included 37 secondary school teachers in January 1962. They were joined by another 70 Volunteers in August 1962. For much of the 1960s, PC/Sierra Leone (SL) concentrated on education, with Volunteers involved in teaching at many levels and throughout the country. From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, PC/SL branched out into the sectors of agriculture, community development, and health.

In the early 1990s, political turmoil and civil unrest in the region engulfed Sierra Leone and the Peace Corps was forced to evacuate its 82 Volunteers as a result of a bloodless coup d'état that took place in Freetown on April 29, 1992. In July 1992, Peace Corps staff returned to reopen the program. Projects in agriculture, education, and health were re-established in areas not immediately affected by the civil conflict, but growing violence soon made it difficult for Peace Corps to continue. Following the evacuation of the remaining Volunteers, the program was finally closed in October 1994. More than 3,500 Volunteers served in Sierra Leone up until this closure.

The Peace Corps conducted a partial assessment in 2001, hoping to return as the country was stabilized and in dire need of development support. Agency finances did not allow a return, but full assessments were conducted in 2003 and 2007, both recommending that the security situation in-country was conducive to Peace Corps' return and that there was a tremendous need for, and goodwill toward, the Peace Corps. With the availability of funding in 2010, the agency made the decision to re-enter Sierra Leone with a group of 39 Volunteers in June 2010.

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Sierra Leone**

The Peace Corps began in Sierra Leone with an education project, but Volunteers have worked in many program sectors, including agriculture, education, fisheries, health, parks management, rural development, and small-scale food production/processing.

Throughout its history, the Peace Corps has enjoyed a significant amount of support from the government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) and the population at-large. This strong support still exists.

Soon after the war ended in Sierra Leone, education emerged as a national priority. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) developed a comprehensive education sector assistance plan for 2007-2015. Sierra Leone's educational system has been transitioning from post-conflict resolution to sustainable development. To strengthen the educational system, the government of Sierra Leone and its partners are collaborating to provide quality and affordable education. In response to this national priority, the Peace Corps' initial return to Sierra Leone has focused on secondary education. Volunteers teaching English, math, and science in parts of the country that face difficulty in attracting trained Sierra Leone teachers.

Volunteers currently are posted at schools in 12 districts throughout Sierra Leone, primarily located in small towns and villages in the interior of the country. As teachers of English, science, and mathematics in junior and senior secondary schools, they work to promote the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's (MEST) goal of improving the quality of education. They also coach and mentor teachers, facilitate extra-curricular activities, promote girls' enrollment in school, and oversee programs involving reproductive health and youth development. Volunteers also work to strengthen local schools by promoting partnerships and networks between the school, community, and other organizations and work to develop school infrastructure. In 2012, a Peace Corps Response program was added to provide support to teacher training institutions throughout the country. These are returned Peace Corps Volunteers who undertake more narrowly focused and shorter-term assignments. In addition to education and youth development, Volunteers in Sierra Leone work on secondary projects related to malaria, food security, and information technology.

# COUNTRY OVERVIEW:

## SIERRA LEONE AT A GLANCE

### History

Archaeology findings show that Sierra Leone has been inhabited for thousands of years. Traditional historiography has customarily presented it as peopled by successive waves of invaders; but the language pattern suggests that the coastal Bulom (Sherbro), Temne, and Limba have been in continuous settled occupation for a long time, with sporadic immigration from inland Mende-speaking people, including Vai, Loko, and Mende.

Populations were historically organized in small political units of independent kingdoms or chiefdoms, the powers of whose rulers were checked by councils. Secret societies, notably the Poro society, also exercised political power and instructed initiates in the customs of the culture.

Muslim traders brought Islam, and European contact began with Portuguese sailors Alvaro Fernandez in 1447 and Pedro Da Cintra in 1462. Located near present day Freetown, the Rokel estuary was established as an important source of fresh water for sea traders and explorers who traded goods such as swords and kitchen and other household utensils in exchange for beeswax and fine ivory works. By the mid-1550s, slaves replaced these items as the major commodity. British traders of the Royal African Company established forts along the coast for trading after the 1650s, but the British did not have a monopoly on the area.

In 1808, the Freetown area became an official British Crown Colony. Trade flourished and in 1896 a protectorate was declared, which unified all the areas that form the basis of modern day Sierra Leone. Building on that foundation, the country developed a single identity with a shared history and culture. The language Krio developed out of a mix of various languages, but English became the official language.

During British colonialism, Sierra Leone served as the seat of government for other British colonies along the West Coast of Africa. The first college for higher education south of the Sahara was established in 1827. The country is well known for its early achievements in the fields of medicine, law, and education, earning the nickname “the Athens of West Africa.”

Sierra Leone achieved independence from the British on April 27, 1961. Since independence, many changes have been experienced politically, economically, and socially in Sierra Leone. The 1990s brought successive civil disturbances, culminating into a ghastly war that led to the intervention of the international community, led by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Various international organizations helped provide an environment for the elections of 2002. The war has officially been over since

2002 and the process of rebuilding Sierra Leone and re-establishing its institutions is well underway. Since the war, Sierra Leone has held two multiparty elections which have been generally perceived as free and fair.

Under a multiparty democracy, Sierra Leone's economy is gradually picking up. Mining and oil extraction have, in recent years, played a key role in providing additional income to the government and citizenry. With peace, the tourism sector is growing and shows signs of great potential. Many Sierra Leoneans who left during the war years are returning and bringing needed investment and expertise back to the country. Political stability and tolerance have fostered a peaceful co-existence and the country is making strides in many aspects of development.

## **Government**

Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with a directly elected president, a unicameral legislature, and a judiciary branch. The president serves as the head of government and can be elected to two five-year terms, after which time the individual is barred by the Constitution from running again. The president is also head of state and, as such, is commander in chief of the armed forces and national police. The current president of Sierra Leone is Ernest Bai Koroma, who was sworn in on September 17, 2007, after what was widely acclaimed as a free, fair, and peaceful election. In light of elections across the continent, the campaign and election results in Sierra Leone was a credit to the country, especially considering that opposition parties rarely achieve victory at the polls. The transfer of power from one president and political party to another was a sign of the stability the country had achieved since the end of the civil war.

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has 124 seats, with 112 consisting of the elected members, and the remaining 12 seats reserved for traditional rulers or paramount chiefs from each of the country's 12 administrative districts. The military, restructured following the civil war, stands at over 10,000, but there are plans to downsize it.

Since independence in 1961, Sierra Leone's politics have been dominated by two major political parties, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), with predominant support from the south (i.e. the Mende), and the ruling All People's Congress (APC), with predominant support from the north and Western Area (i.e., the Temne). Although other minor political parties have also existed, they have generally had little significant support. Regionalism and ethnic affiliations have been a primary part of the political process since 1961 and are still evident in election results today.

## **Economy**

Greater freedom of movement means residential areas are being resettled, and investor and consumer confidence continue to rise.

About two-thirds of the population engages in subsistence agriculture, which accounts for 52.5 percent of national income. The government is trying to increase food and cash crop production and upgrade small farmer skills. The government works with several foreign donors to operate integrated rural development and agricultural projects.

Rich in minerals, Sierra Leone has traditionally relied on mining, especially diamonds, for its economic base. The country is among the top 10 diamond producing nations in the world. In recent years, the extractive industry has boomed. Sierra Leone has very large iron ore deposits and they are currently being developed. They now provide significant income to fund government activities. In addition, Sierra Leone is a major producer of rutile and will soon be developing oil found off its coastal shelf. Mineral exports remain the main foreign currency earner.

Sierra Leone is a major producer of gem-quality diamonds. Historically, Sierra Leone has struggled to manage diamond exploitation and export. In October 2000, a U.N.-approved certification system for exporting diamonds from the country was put in place and led to a dramatic increase in legal exports. In 2001, the government created a mining community development fund, which returns a portion of diamond export taxes to diamond mining communities. The fund was created to raise local communities' stake in the legal diamond trade. Artisanal (small scale) diamond mining is waning as larger companies become involved in the field.

Despite its successes and development, the Sierra Leone economy still faces significant challenges. There is high unemployment, particularly among the youth and ex-combatants. Authorities have been slow to implement reforms in the civil service, and corruption remains a problem.

Decades of poor governance followed by 11 years of civil war have left Sierra Leone's economy and social infrastructure in a dire condition. Despite significant progress made toward peace and stability since 2002, the country remains today at the bottom of the Human Development Index, with an estimated 63 percent of the population living in extreme poverty. Conditions are exacerbated by marginalized unemployed youth, educational system degradation, major health concerns (infant mortality, malaria, infectious diseases), limited infrastructure, and low human capacity.

While there have been clear signs of improvement in the last few years, an HDI indicator of 180/187 countries (UNDP, 2011) continues to reflect stark economic, health, and educational conditions. Sierra Leone faces the need for long-term development assistance, particularly in terms of human capacity and infrastructure development as it advances beyond the post-conflict stage. As was noted by one American nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff member interviewed during the 2007 Peace Corps country entry assessment, "no matter where you throw a rock, you'll hit a problem." This comment seems as relevant today as it was a few years ago. Some illustrative indicators that reflect ongoing concerns:

- Life expectancy at birth – 47.8 years (UNDP HDI Index, 2011)
- Mean years of schooling for adults – 2.9 (UNDP HDI Index, 2011)
- Adult (over age 15) literacy rate = 35 percent (133 out of 139 rated countries), (CIA World Factbook, 2011)
- Per capita income = \$900 (215 out of 227 rated countries), (CIA World Factbook, 2011)
- Population living below U.S. \$1,25/day = 62.79% (UNDP, 2011)
- Less than half the population has access to safe water (Human Development Report, 2007)
- 25 percent of women in Sierra Leone marry before age 15; 62 percent before age 18 (Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 2007)
- Children under 5 who are stunted (36 percent), wasted (10 percent), underweight (21 percent), (SL MOH Demographic and Health Survey, 2008)
- One out of six mothers die in childbirth– highest in the world (HDR, 2008)

While there are undoubtedly many problems as Sierra Leone emerges from post-conflict to development stages, there are significant bright spots that give rise to optimism that things are getting better. They include:

- Relative political stability, which witnessed the peaceful transition of political leadership from one political party to its opponent in 2007;
- A spirited multi-party system with a free press;
- The commercial exploitation of Sierra Leone’s natural resources (oil, iron ore, rutile) that is likely to lead to increases in job opportunities, overseas investment, and income for government-financed projects;
- The government’s recently established (2010) free health care program for pregnant and lactating women and children under 5 is significantly improving the health status of the poor;
- Consistent growth (2003-2008) in the economy of 3.7 percent (World Bank, 2010) and 4.7 percent in 2010 (U.S. Embassy, Economics Section), leading to a low, but steadily improving, standard of living;
- School enrollment at all levels has more than doubled in the last decade; and
- Strong desire of the population to move away from conflict and toward development.

## People and Culture

Sierra Leone has witnessed a great deal of changes within the last two decades due to the civil war. Its population of roughly 5.9 million people, with a population density of 217 per

square mile, has experienced dramatic shifts. The overall population is youthful, with about 50 percent under the age of 15 years. The average woman bears six children in her lifetime, and the population growth rate is over 2 percent. Thirty-six percent of the population lives in urban areas, creating great demands on the weak infrastructure. There is a large Sierra Leonean Diaspora, especially in the U.S. and U.K., whose remittances to families at home is very important to them and the local economy. The religious makeup of the country is split between Muslims and Christians, with 55 percent practicing Islam and 35 percent Christian; 10 percent practice traditional religious beliefs, though such beliefs are still important to many Muslims and Christians as well.

For one of the smaller African countries, Sierra Leone has a relatively large mix of ethnic groups, with the government recognizing at least 16 groups. There are 15 to 20 different ethnic groups, the discrepancy being due to debate about whether local dialects continue to be mutually distinct in the face of population expansion, intermarriage, and migration. For example, the two largest ethnic groups, the Temne and Mende, each comprise about 30 percent of the total population, and have come to “absorb” many of their less populous neighbors. Other groups include the Limba, Kono, Susu, Sherbro, Fula, and Krios. While each ethnic group speaks its own language, the majority of people speak either Mende or Temne, with almost everyone speaking Krio, the lingua franca. It is not unusual for a child growing up to speak four different languages—that of his/her parent’s ethnic group, a neighboring group, Krio, and English. There is a noticeable presence of Lebanese in the business community, especially in Freetown, many of whom were born in Sierra Leone because their parents and grandparents migrated to the country decades ago.

Relations among the ethnic groups have generally been cordial, and Sierra Leone has largely avoided the racial or religious tensions characteristic of other parts of the world. For instance, during the civil war, one family may have had children fighting for opposing sides, which made the violence deeply and personally felt. When ethnic problems do arise, they often do so around the time of elections, when politicians are accused of catering to their own ethnic group. The two main political parties find their major respective support either in the north among the Temne or in the south among the Mende.

The palm tree and the rice grain are symbols recognized nationally, represented in currency, song, and folklore, and valued for their contributions to everyday life. Different species of palms contribute to cooking oil, thatch roofs, fermented wine, soap, fruits, and nuts. Rice is the staple food, usually eaten every day. It is often hard for outsiders to grasp the centrality of rice to daily existence in Sierra Leone. Mende people, for example, have over 20 different words to describe rice in its variant forms, such as separate words for “sweet rice,” “pounded rice,” and “the rice that sticks to the bottom of a pot upon cooking.” Kola nuts are highly valued in and of themselves, and are often associated with greetings, diplomacy, and various other cultural interactions. High in caffeine concentration, they are also used as a stimulant, a clothing dye, and even in the preparation of medicines.

The people of Sierra Leone welcome visitors and are proud to show off their country. Despite distinctive variations in language and local traditions, Sierra Leoneans today are united by many factors, such as their shared lingua franca Krio, widespread membership in men's and women's social associations and societies, and even sporting events, especially when the national football (soccer) team plays. Krio is particularly prevalent in trade and interaction across ethnic groups, and major men's and women's social organizations include Poro among men, and Bundu or Sande among women.

## **Environment**

Geographically, Sierra Leone starts with 250 miles of coastline, followed by low-lying mangrove swamps, rain-forested plains and farmland, and finally a mountainous plateau in the east with the highest peak at 6,390 feet. The climate is tropical, with two seasons determining the agricultural cycle: the rainy season from May to November, followed by the dry season from December to May, which includes Harmattan, when cool, dry winds blow in off the Sahara Desert. Only about 5 percent of Sierra Leone's original forest remains. While mining is a primary economic sector, it contributes significantly to a number of ecological woes and pressures on water and other resources.

As conflict has now ended, ecotourism and cultural tourism are on the rise, but is a very small component of the national economic pie at present. Much wildlife was displaced during the war, but chimpanzees and hippotamuses, as well as an incredible diversity of birds, are making a comeback.



## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps, Sierra Leone, and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experience, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

### General Information About Sierra Leone

#### **[www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)**

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Sierra Leone to how to convert from the dollar to the Sierra Leonean currency. Just click on Sierra Leone and go from there.

#### **[www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations)**

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

#### **[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)**

The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Sierra Leone and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

#### **[www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm](http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm)**

This includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

#### **[www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm](http://www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm)**

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information, and each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

#### **[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp)**

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

**[www.worldinformation.com](http://www.worldinformation.com)**

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

**[www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)**

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the “Friends of” groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Sierra Leone site: **[www.fosalone.org](http://www.fosalone.org)**.

**[www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org](http://www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org)**

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

## **Online Articles/Current News Sites About Sierra Leone**

**<http://freetown.usembassy.gov/>**

The official website of the United States Embassy in Sierra Leone has information on programs, policy, and consular affairs.

**<http://allafrica.com/sierraleone/>**

All Africa is a multimedia electronic distributor of African news and information worldwide. Registered in Mauritius, with offices in Johannesburg, Dakar, Lagos, and Washington, D.C.

**<http://www.fosalone.org/>**

Friends of Sierra Leone website. Friends of Sierra Leone is a group of former Peace Corps Volunteers and Sierra Leoneans supportive of development in the country.

**<http://www.sierra-leone.org/>**

The Sierra Leone Web, an independent site run by an RPCV.

## International Development Sites About Sierra Leone

### **countries/sierraleone/**

The official website of the United States Agency for International Development, with details on its many programs in Sierra Leone.

### **<http://www.worldbank.org/>**

The official website of the World Bank, look for information about Sierra Leone under the “Countries” tab.

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- *Cry Freetown* (2000), *Sierra Leone: Return to Freetown* (2002) and *Blood on the Stone* (2007). By Sorious Samura and broadcasted on CNN International.
- *Heart of the Matter* (1954). Based on the book of the same name by Graham Greene.
- *Family Across the Sea* (1991). At <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,166>
- *Lord of War* (2005). Lions gate Entertainment, starring Nicolas Cage.
- *Operation Fine Girl* (2001). See excerpts at <http://hub.witness.org/en/OperationFineGirlExcerpts>
- *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars* (2005). See <http://www.refugeeallstars.org/>
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# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## Communications

### Mail

Mail may be sent to:

[your name]  
Peace Corps Volunteer  
P.O. Box 905  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
West Africa

Letter and parcel mail may be received at the above post office box number. It is recommended that expensive or irreplaceable items not be sent. Please keep in mind that mail delivery is difficult in Sierra Leone and does not exist outside of Freetown, so Volunteers should expect long delays in receipt of mail. While mail may be limited, it can be a great source of joy to both send and receive letters.

### Telephones

Peace Corps/Sierra Leone provides each trainee with a cell phone upon arrival. This phone is linked to a “family plan” that allows trainees/Volunteers to call Peace Corps staff and fellow Volunteers/trainees for free. Not every PCV will have cell phone coverage at his/her home, but all will have coverage somewhere within or near their community. Many Volunteers find that calls originating from the U.S. are less expensive than calls from Sierra Leone so you might want to check out calling plans before you depart. It is not possible to make collect calls or calls to toll-free numbers from Sierra Leone. Note that Sierra Leone is five hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (four hours ahead during Daylight Savings Time).

### Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Email is a good way to stay in communication, but access will vary according to location. There will be a few computers available for Volunteers in the Peace Corps office in Freetown, the nation’s capital, but trips to Freetown are infrequent. Some larger towns have Internet access in small Internet cafes. Bandwidth is typically limited in these centers. Volunteers might be able to access these resources on an occasional basis. Overall, you will have much less Internet access than you are used to in the U.S.

Please be aware and inform friends and family that communication options are much more limited than in the States and not to be concerned if they do not hear from you regularly.

## **Housing and Site Location**

Before Volunteers arrive, Peace Corps/Sierra Leone staff members, in collaboration with local partners, identify safe and secure Volunteer housing. Housing is provided by the school and/or community. Housing is in short supply in many regions of Sierra Leone, so be prepared for very basic housing. Each Volunteer will have his/her own house. Electricity will likely not be available and water may need to be carried from a neighborhood pump. Volunteers will have their own latrine and shower facilities. You must be prepared to accept the living conditions to which you are assigned as you will be living under the same conditions as the people with, and for whom, you work. The Peace Corps inspects all potential housing to ensure it meets its standards for health and safety.

Most Volunteers are assigned to work in rural towns or large villages. The workplace will be within walking distance of your home, but it might be a long walk! Each Volunteer will be provided with a mountain bike and helmet, footlocker for safekeeping of valuables, medical kit, and water filter. Dependent on community need, the Peace Corps makes every effort to cluster Volunteers within reasonable distances of each other in order to promote collaborative efforts and minimize isolation.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

Volunteers will receive a settling-in allowance to cover the basics they need, such as bedding, dishes, etc.

In addition, Volunteers receive a monthly living allowance. The Volunteer living allowance is intended to cover regular expenses, such as food, transportation, work supplies, and clothing. It should allow you to maintain a standard of living comparable to your Sierra Leonean counterparts. Most Volunteers, however, find that the living allowance surpasses the resources of many community members.

The official currency is the Leone (SLL or Le), which is divided into 100 cents. The banking system in Sierra Leone is rebuilding from the long period of war. Peace Corps payments are deposited monthly in bank accounts established by Volunteers at or near their sites. Because of high levels of fraud, Sierra Leone is predominately a cash economy and credit cards are not accepted at most places. There might be a few higher end hotels in Freetown that accept credit cards. The potential for credit card fraud, however, does exist and PC/Sierra Leone recommends that Volunteers not use credit cards in-country.

## **Food and Diet**

In Sierra Leone, rice is the staple. Other favorite foods include plantains, fufu, and okra. Fufu is prepared from fermented cassava (manioc) and eaten with a soup.



The typical meal is a sauce called “soup” or “gravy” poured over rice. They can be thick stews of vegetables (such as okra or greens) with meat and/or fish, or more of a broth with meat and vegetables. Frequently, a combination of meats is used in the soup. The meat is not trimmed the way Americans are accustomed, so there are frequently bones or cartilage. The variety may be beef, chicken, or “bush meat” (which covers a wide variety of animals). Fish may be fresh, dried, or smoked. If meat or fish is not available, peanuts are always a good source of protein. Most cooked dishes will have meat in them. If you have the ability to remove the meat and eat the rest of the dish, then you will have more dietary choices. Strict vegetarians and vegans will be challenged.

Sierra Leone is graced with wonderful fruits, including pineapples, bananas, papaya, coconuts, and mangos. In season, fruits and vegetables are a good buy. Out of season, specific fruits may be unavailable and also unevenly distributed across the nation. It can be challenging to eat a well-balanced meal during some seasons and the variety of foods may be limited.

Access to western style foods may also be very limited, so you will have to adapt your diet (and tastes) to local foods.

## **Transportation**

Peace Corps country, Volunteers primarily use public transportation. Many of the roads and means of public transportation are in poor condition. Most rural roads are unpaved and for much of the year will be either muddy and rutted, or dusty, depending on the season. Up-country there are small taxis and medium-sized mini buses. In cars, there are usually two passengers in the front passenger seat and four in the back seat. You might also have chickens, produce, and some children (as only adults are counted as passengers). Be prepared to let go of your need for personal space.

Motorcycle taxis have become widely used in Sierra Leone. Due to safety concerns, Peace Corps Volunteers are not permitted to use them.

Vehicles from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF) traverse the country and are sometimes an option based on relationships and friendships.

You will receive in-depth training on all of the safety measures and policies related to transportation.

## **Geography and Climate**

Sierra Leone borders the North Atlantic Ocean, Guinea, and Liberia and is slightly smaller than South Carolina. Sierra Leone has four physical regions: the coastal belt of mangrove swamps; the Sierra Leone Peninsula, with thickly wooded mountains that rise from the

swamps; the interior plains, consisting of grasslands and rolling wooded country; and the interior plateau and mountain regions.

The climate, especially on the coast, is warm and humid year-round, dominated by a dry season from November to April and a rainy season from May to October. Rainfall along the coast can reach 495 cm (195 inches) a year, making it one of the wettest places along coastal, western Africa. The dusty and dry harmattan (desert winds) blows from the Sahara to the coast in December, bringing some relief from the high relative humidity with a nighttime temperature that can be as low as 16 degrees Celsius (60.8 degrees Fahrenheit). The average temperature is 26 C (78.8 F) and varies from around 26 C (78.8 F) to 36 C (96.8 F) during the year.

## **Social Activities**

You will be invited to the major celebrations in your village, such as marriages and baptisms, which usually feature music and a feast for all participants. There may be an opportunity to study local dance or drumming. Some villages may also have dance halls (discos) or bars, but your activities there will be decided by the cultural norms in your community.

There will also be times you see other Volunteers and take advantage of the time to relax and process your new life as a Volunteer. The best opportunities for socializing, however, will come when you have made friends at your site. Be prepared to spend a Friday night talking about how much rain fell that week and what that means for the crops or sharing ways you adapted to your new home with a fellow teacher who just moved to your community. You will find yourself looking forward to moments like these.

## **Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior**

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity. It is not an easy situation to resolve, but we can provide you with some guidelines. As a professional at the invitation of a government ministry, you will be expected to dress and behave professionally both on and off the job.

While some of your Sierra Leonean counterparts may dress in seemingly worn or shabby clothes, this is more likely a matter of economics than choice. It is likely that they are wearing their best and work very hard to keep their clothes clean and as presentable as possible. Much importance is placed on appearance in this culture, and you should always try your best to present a neat, clean, and professional appearance.

In general, dress is more conservative, particularly for women. Short skirts (short is defined as anything above the knee), tops that expose your stomach or lower back, low-rise jeans/pants, backless dresses, spaghetti strap tops, and shorts (outside of sporting activities

where long shorts are appropriate) are considered inappropriate for female Volunteers. Slacks are acceptable for women, although most women will wear skirts or dresses.

Long hair and long beards are not normal for men in this society. While there is no restriction in place, please be aware that a male Volunteer with long hair or a long beard will attract unwanted attention and might have to work harder to prove his professionalism. Shorts are normally worn by boys or students rather than men. It is appropriate to wear shorts for sporting events or around the house and yard; otherwise, pants or jeans are appropriate.

Visible tattoos and body piercing may attract unwanted attention and commentary. Earrings and nose rings on men may create concerns among supervisors and counterparts, or minimally, bring questions and unwanted attention.

It is against the law for civilians to wear military fatigue dress or camouflaged uniforms or clothing.

## **Personal Safety**

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Sierra Leone Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Sierra Leone. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. We encourage Volunteers and families to look at our safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [www.peacecorps.gov/safety](http://www.peacecorps.gov/safety).

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and Volunteer safety. There is a section titled "Safety and Security – Our Partnership." Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts' safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

## Rewards and Frustrations

Living and working in Sierra Leone will not be easy. Your challenges will stem in part from the differences between American and Sierra Leonean cultures. You are a guest in Sierra Leone and will need to learn to become effective within the Sierra Leonean culture. You will need all of your technical skills, but more importantly, you will need to learn how to adapt those skills to the interpersonal situations that you experience.

Life for a Peace Corps Volunteer can be in a “fishbowl,” with everyone being curious and interested in all of your activities. You will need to manage all of the attention you receive, be it welcome or unwelcome. You will need to be sensitive to the fact that you represent the Peace Corps 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You will need to consider your actions so the Volunteers who come after you will benefit from the same excellent Peace Corps reputation that you will enjoy.

Sources of frustration are myriad: the inability to communicate effectively at first, loneliness, the slow pace of change, disinterest or lack of understanding by others as to what you are trying to do, and the lack of positive reinforcement.

As part of Peace Corps’ return to Sierra Leone, there are special challenges and rewards. The infrastructure of the country is not developed, so you will need patience. Simple tasks, like making or completing a phone call, take longer. Transportation is a huge challenge, with difficult roads, as well as limited and run-down public transportation options.

There will be certain cultural and interpersonal situations that will take a long time to understand and appreciate. You might hear personal stories that are difficult to hear or you might not be able to discuss certain personal topics with people you consider your friends and family. You will need patience, empathy, and the ability to recognize appropriate boundaries.

While the challenges may seem numerous, the rewards can be tremendous. As you integrate into a totally different culture, you will be amazed at how quickly people accept and welcome you, quick to forgive a cultural blunder. Most Volunteers come to realize that the most important and lasting achievements of service are very personal in nature and are realized in the context of relationships. These relationships are with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, of different ages, and with different opportunities for their future. These friendships are built upon mutual respect, often after seeing you adjust to the physical hardships to which Sierra Leoneans have grown accustomed and in appreciation of your becoming a true community member, embracing the local culture.

# PEACE CORPS TRAINING

## Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training is the first event within a competency-based training program that continues throughout your 27 months of service in Sierra Leone. Pre-service training ensures that Volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform their jobs. On average, nine of 10 trainees are sworn in as Volunteers.

Pre-service training is conducted in Sierra Leone and directed by the Peace Corps with participation from representatives of Sierra Leone organizations, former Volunteers, and serving Volunteers. The length of pre-service training is 10 weeks. Sierra Leone measures achievement of learning and determines if trainees have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Throughout service, Volunteers strive to achieve performance competencies. Initially, pre-service training affords the opportunity for trainees to develop and test their own resources. As a trainee, you will play an active role in self-education. You will be asked to decide how best to set and meet objectives and to find alternative solutions. You will be asked to prepare for an experience in which you will often have to take the initiative and accept responsibility for decisions. The success of your learning will be enhanced by your own effort to take responsibility for your learning and through sharing experiences with others.

Peace Corps training is founded on adult learning methods and often includes experiential “hands-on” applications, such as conducting a participatory community needs assessment, teaching practicum, and facilitating groups. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas. Integrating into the community is usually one of the core competencies Volunteers strive to achieve both in pre-service training and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence Volunteers build by living in, and respectfully integrating into, the Sierra Leone community and culture. Trainees are prepared for this through a “homestay” experience, which requires trainees to live with host families during pre-service training. Integration into the community not only facilitates good working relationships, but it fosters language learning and cross-cultural acceptance and trust, which help ensure your health, safety, and security.

Woven into the competencies, the ability to communicate in the host country language is critical to being an effective Peace Corps Volunteer. So basic is this precept that it is spelled out in the Peace Corps Act: No person shall be assigned to duty as a Volunteer under this act in any foreign country or area unless at the time of such assignment he (or she) possesses such reasonable proficiency as his (or her) assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he (or she) is assigned.

## **Qualifying for Service**

The pre-service training experience provides an opportunity not only for the Peace Corps to assess a trainee's competence, but for trainees to re-evaluate their commitment to serve for 27 months to improve the quality of life of the people with whom Volunteers live and work and, in doing so, develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes while adapting existing ones.

Peace Corps/Sierra Leone's competencies are designed to be accomplished throughout the Volunteer's 27 months of learning. A trainee may not be able to complete all learning objectives for a competency during pre-service training; however, he or she must show adequate progress toward achieving the competencies in order to become a Volunteer.

Sierra Leone's competencies will be provided to all trainees at the beginning of pre-service training.

Evaluation of your performance throughout service is a continual process, as Volunteers are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for personal conduct and professional performance. Successful completion of pre-service training is characterized by achievement of a set of learning objectives to determine competence. Failure to meet any of the selection standards by the completion of training may be grounds for a withdrawal of selection and disqualification from Peace Corps service.

Progress in one's own learning is a dialogue between you and the training staff. All of the training staff—including the training manager, and the language, technical, medical, safety and security, and cross-cultural trainers—will work with you toward the highest possible competencies by providing you with feedback on learning objective performance throughout training. After reviewing and observing your performance, the country director is responsible for making the final decision on whether you have qualified to serve as a Volunteer in the host country.

Upon successful completion of training, trainees who qualify for Peace Corps service are required by law to swear or affirm an oath of loyalty to the United States; it cannot be waived under any circumstances. The text of the oath is provided below. If you have any questions about the wording or meaning of the oath, consult a staff member during training.

I, (your name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, domestic or foreign, that I take this obligation freely, and without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge my duties in the Peace Corps (so help me God).

## **Technical Training**

Technical training will prepare you to work in Sierra Leone by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of

the country. The Peace Corps staff, Sierra Leone experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Sierra Leone and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Sierra Leone agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

## **Language Training**

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Sierra Leone language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

## **Cross-Cultural Training**

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Sierra Leone host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Sierra Leone. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

## **Health Training**

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive health care and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Sierra Leone. Nutrition, mental health, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

## **Safety Training**

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

## **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **Midterm conference (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service):** Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



## **YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN SIERRA LEONE**

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Sierra Leone maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer, who takes care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Country X at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

### **Health Issues in Sierra Leone**

Major health problems among Peace Corps Volunteers are rare and are often the result of a Volunteer not taking preventative measures to stay healthy.

The most common health problems here are minor ones that are also found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, adjustment disorders, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Sierra Leone because certain environmental factors here raise the risk and/or exacerbate the severity of illness and injuries.

The most common major health concerns here are malaria, amoebic dysentery, giardia, schistosomiasis, lassa fever, dengue fever, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and HIV/AIDS.

Because malaria is endemic in Sierra Leone, Volunteers must take anti-malarial medication and use other recommended prevention strategies, including mosquito nets and insect repellent. Amoebic dysentery and giardia can be avoided by frequent hand washing, thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables, and treating your drinking water. Additionally, you can avoid contracting schistosomiasis by not swimming or bathing in freshwater lakes, ponds, and rivers. The risk of lassa fever is low as Peace Corps does not place Volunteers in lassa fever-affected areas. Personal protection methods to prevent mosquito bites will lower the risk of dengue fever. Practicing abstinence or safer sex will protect against STDs and HIV.

### **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Sierra Leone, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Sierra Leone will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Sierra Leone, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage “An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Sierra Leone is to take the following preventive measures:

It is extremely important to fully comply with the recommended drug regimen to prevent malaria. Malaria can be fatal for people who have no natural immunity to the disease (such as Volunteers). Thus, it is mandatory that you take your malaria prophylaxis regularly. Your medical officer will discuss specific recommendations for the prevention of malaria when you arrive in Sierra Leone. It is also important to prevent mosquito bites, through the use of mosquito nets and insect repellent.

Volunteers will be taught health prevention strategies during the medical sessions in pre-service training. It is essential to apply these lessons in your daily life in Sierra Leone to prevent significant illnesses.

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Sierra Leone during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

## **Women's Health Information**

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Sierra Leone will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

### **Medical Kit Contents**

Ace bandages	Dental floss
Adhesive tape	Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook	Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)
Antacid tablets (Tums)	Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)	Lip balm (Chapstick)
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)	Oral rehydration salts
Band-Aids	Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Butterfly closures	Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
Calamine lotion	Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)
Cepacol lozenges	Scissors
Condoms	Sterile gauze pads
	Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)
	Tinactin (antifungal cream)
	Tweezers

## **Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist**

If there has been any change in your health – physical, mental, or dental – since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Sierra Leone. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment – which can take several months – you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you – a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps discourages you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health care plans, you may wish to consult an

insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY: OUR PARTNERSHIP**

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

Beyond knowing that Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. We depend on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice – in this case to help manage the risk of burglary – is:

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria
- Peace Corps provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks
- Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country authorities in your new community
- Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise
- You lock your doors and windows
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live
- You get to know neighbors
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you
- You don't change residences before being authorized by Peace Corps
- You communicate concerns that you have to Peace Corps staff

### **Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk**

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Sierra Leone there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the U.S.
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Sierra Leone, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Sierra Leone learn to:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Sierra Leone. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Sierra Leone of which you should be aware:

- Unsafe transportation in taxis and minibuses
- In the major towns, especially Freetown, petty theft and pick pocketing of wallets, purses, cell phones, etc. occur in crowded markets, nightclubs/discos and/or beachfront areas.

While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and respond according to the training you will receive.

## **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Sierra Leone may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Sierra Leone will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

## **Support from Staff**

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

## **Crime Data for Sierra Leone**

Crime data and statistics for Sierra Leone, which is updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/sierraleone>. Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes and crimes that do occur overseas are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities through the local courts system. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to pursue prosecution. If you decide to prosecute, Peace Corps will be there to assist you. One of our tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country.



If you are the victim of a serious crime, you will learn how to get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps can provide you with the help you need.

## **Volunteer Safety Support in Sierra Leone**

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Sierra Leone's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Sierra Leone office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

**Volunteer training** will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Sierra Leone. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Sierra Leone's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Sierra Leone at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any security incident to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established protocols for **addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

## **DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES**

In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to assure that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent history. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Sierra Leone, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Sierra Leone.

Outside of Sierra Leone's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Sierra Leone are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Sierra Leone, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

### **Overview of Diversity in Sierra Leone**

The Peace Corps staff in Sierra Leone recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

## **What Might a Volunteer Face?**

### **Possible Issues for Female Volunteers**

Female Volunteers who are single are often considered an oddity because most women, particularly in rural areas, are married, many with children, by the time they are in their 20s. Single women may also face what in the United States would be considered inappropriate advances from male colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances. Gender roles have changed drastically over the years in the United States; it can be a challenge to adapt to a culture with more traditional roles and to know how to effectively set boundaries. Unwanted attention, and even harassment, can be one of the greatest frustrations as a female PCV. Strategies for minimizing such unwanted attention will be addressed thoroughly in pre-service training.

Above and beyond traditional gender roles and possible harassment, is the possibility of sexual violence. Sexual violence against women is a reality in Sierra Leone. Rape was used as a weapon of war and the government has launched campaigns to address this problem with the hope of reducing its occurrence. Domestic violence is also a possibility in this post-conflict country. According to police, most acts of sexual violence occur between people who know each other. Female Volunteers must exercise caution with their consumption of alcohol and going out in the evening unaccompanied. Volunteers will learn what is and is not acceptable in the Sierra Leonean culture, such as when it is and is not advisable to invite men into their homes. Often, Volunteers must take an even more conservative approach than their Sierra Leonean friends and colleagues.

Strategies to deal with these issues are discussed during training, and the Peace Corps staff can offer help in resolving any problems.

Volunteers should report any concerns or incidents to the Peace Corps medical officer (PCMO) or country director (CD) immediately.

### **Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color**

Volunteers who belong to minority ethnic groups will generally not experience overt biases. However, Sierra Leoneans may make some stereotypic assumptions based on someone's background. For example, many Asian-American Volunteers are considered experts in Chinese or kung fu and African-American Volunteers may be mistaken for a Liberian or Sierra Leonean.

### **Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers**

In Sierra Leonean culture, people believe age brings wisdom and experience. Volunteers in their 20s sometimes find they have to make an extra effort to be accepted as professional colleagues. Older Volunteers, in contrast, are automatically accorded respect. In turn, older Volunteers might find that almost too much is expected of them because of their age; or

conversely, older Volunteers who are accustomed to living independent lives may at first feel frustrated by the fact that younger Sierra Leoneans want to do things for them. For all trainees, living with a host family with some of the restrictions and protectiveness imposed by a traditional culture will be an early and significant introduction to some of the constraints PCVs will face during their service.

### **Possible Issues for Married Couple Volunteers**

While serving as a married couple offers unique challenges and rewards, there are none specific to service in Sierra Leone. In general, more traditional gender roles exist. So, a married couple with a husband who helps cook or clean might draw teasing or even unwanted comments. This may serve as an opportunity to quietly share an alternative view of gender roles. Generally, couples will be regularly asked why they do not yet have children and when they will start a family. Couples live together during training and are normally assigned to different, but nearby schools.

### **Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers**

Most cultures in Sierra Leone consider homosexuality taboo. Homosexuality certainly exists in Sierra Leone, but there is no open homosexual community.

Volunteers who are lesbian, along with female Volunteers who are heterosexual, will have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex. Some female Volunteers wear an “engagement ring” to avoid unwanted attention. While this practice might be helpful, it might also create complications.

Volunteers may not be able to freely discuss their sexual orientation with new friends and family; this can obviously be very difficult. Peace Corps staff is aware of this challenge and will offer support as you navigate through your new culture. Within the Peace Corps “family,” sexual diversity is supported and an informal LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) support group exists.

A recommended resource for support and advice prior to and during your service is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender U.S. Peace Corps Alumni website at [www.lgbrpcv.org](http://www.lgbrpcv.org).

### **Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers**

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Sierra Leone without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Sierra Leone staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

## **Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities**

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Sierra Leone without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/ Sierra Leone staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Sierra Leone and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Sierra Leone.

### **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Sierra Leone?**

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

### **What is the electric current in Sierra Leone?**

There is alternating current (ac) with a nominal voltage of 230 and approximately 50 hertz. The frequency is not stable, so look into surge protection if possible. Type D and G plugs are used, so bring converters (and adapters) as needed.

### **How much money should I bring?**

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

### **When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as

long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

### **Will my belongings be covered by insurance?**

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

### **Do I need an international driver's license?**

Volunteers in Sierra Leone do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

### **What should I bring as gifts for Country X friends and my host family?**

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

### **Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?**

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 8- to 10-hour drive from the capital.

### **How can my family contact me in an emergency?**



The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services (OSS) provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 855.855.1961, then select option 2; or directly at 202-692-1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the OSS duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 855.855.1961.

### **Can I call home from Sierra Leone?**

The cell phone system in Sierra Leone is improving but there are still some sites that do not have regular coverage. Volunteers are regularly able to call and receive calls from the U.S. It is cheaper for the call to originate in America so you may want to explore phone card options before your departure. The Sierra Leone international dialing code is 232.

### **Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

Peace Corps/Sierra Leone will provide you with a cell phone soon after your arrival that allows you to call other trainees/Volunteers and staff free of charge. Usage charges are based on the amount of minutes used. Phone scratch cards, for calls outside the PC "family," are sold for an average of Le 10,200 (\$2.50 USD) per card and a modest amount of basic costs for this purpose has been calculated into your living allowance.

### **Will there be email and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?**

The climate and environment in Sierra Leone are very hard on electrical equipment. Additionally, if you do bring a laptop or other electronic device, it will be challenging to keep it charged since electricity is typically not available in Volunteer's homes. Most Volunteers charge cell phones and other electronic equipment in generator-powered cell charging kiosks located in almost all locales. Having said this, many PCVs have found that a low-end computer was valuable for reports, lesson preparation, and receiving Internet, when possible. Electronic devices, especially computers, are also seen as valuable items and are at risk for theft, if not adequately secured.

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM COUNTRY VOLUNTEERS

Dear Volunteers,

We are so excited about your upcoming service! You are embarking on an adventure that will undoubtedly change your lives. Our time as education Volunteers in a village at the end of a very rough road certainly changed ours. From 1976 to 1978 we taught in a community school whose first principal in the late-1960s had been a Peace Corps Volunteer. Not only did we make lifelong friends, but we also learned much that affected our professional ambitions. Your participation in the “return” of Peace Corps after the heartbreaking rebel war signals hope for a country where tragedy has touched every household. That war devastated the educational system and dashed the educational aspirations of a decade’s cohort of students.

Visitors to Sierra Leone often develop deep attachments to the people there. This is certainly true of many returned Peace Corps Volunteers who have maintained contact after their service, and Sierra Leoneans, likewise, remember their Peace Corps teachers and friends with great fondness. We have been fortunate to have participated in volunteer educational projects in Sierra Leone yearly since 2005 ([www.hope4salone.org](http://www.hope4salone.org) and [www.fosalone.org/fraz.php](http://www.fosalone.org/fraz.php)). These projects have involved building and refurbishing classrooms and offering professional development for junior secondary science and mathematics teachers and for primary teachers. During our trips we have been amazed at just how many people would share a special memory of a Peace Corps Volunteer they knew. On one occasion we had the chance to visit our village at the end of the road. The people asked if we didn’t think the road was much improved. We smiled politely. The real treat of that visit was a reception at the school where the current principal recited a litany of all the Volunteers who had served at the school and in the community—almost as if the Peace Corps had attained status as a family whose history warranted remembering. Meeting former students among the teaching staff made the reception particularly poignant.

This past year several of us former Volunteers offered a professional development workshop for teachers in Bo. The workshop emphasized bookmaking, literacy, science, mathematics, health, and environmental studies. The content for the teacher-made books came from the local environment. Though many teachers point to the lack of materials as one of the greatest challenges for teaching and learning, they are also enthusiastic about the natural and cultural richness of Sierra Leone. They are also optimistic about the promise of education to improve lives—even when every need seems to cry out for priority.

You may find yourself wondering at times: How can a country that is rich in so many ways be so poor? Or, how is it that the Volunteer who comes to give, benefits immeasurably in return? We ponder these questions still, and we also remain committed to the bonds we have made with our new and old friends in Sierra Leone. We hold in high regard your

willingness to pick up the legacy of the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone and hope you will find the experience as intensely meaningful as we and so many other returned Volunteers have. Your new students and colleagues are eager to meet you, to befriend you, to learn from you, and to teach you, as well, about Sweet Salone.

Na in dat,

Drs. Richard and Catherine Frazier

Njala Komboya, Sierra Leone (1976-1978)

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Dear Volunteers,

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers remember their service in Sierra Leone very fondly. Many of us are jealous of your opportunity.

You have the Internet at your fingertips, so read up before you go. When I went in the early 1990s, information was hard to come by. So, when the Peace Corps started talking about rebel incursions over the border, I didn't have the context. Context is even more important today, with Sierra Leone recovering from war.

In the early 1990s, I read a publication listing Sierra Leone as a "fifth world" country because it had gone backwards in its development since its independence from Britain in the 1950s. There was little power or running water and roads were deteriorating. That will be even truer today, with little opportunity for community or economic development over the past 20 years. Amid war, Sierra Leoneans have either returned to their subsistence roots in the villages, or piled onto the teeming masses in the capital city. Most likely, you will be placed amid those subsistence roots, and seeing that way of life is a rare thing in today's world.

Sierra Leoneans will be excited about the return of the Peace Corps, and they have always been very friendly to Americans. However, you will also find desperate people who will see you only as a way to improve themselves. You'll have some instant celebrity, and that can be hard to deal with. You will have to make very hard daily determinations about motives. Do not let this deter you from meeting all the people you can! Be open, but be wary. Be quick to smile, but deliberate in deciding who and how to help.

Prepare to be patient and flexible. In the months when teachers were not on strike, I taught in classrooms that were poorly equipped and filled with students who were not ready to learn the high school math I had come to teach. I had to throw out my assumptions and seek the counsel of Sierra Leoneans around me. We learn more from the people we serve than they learn from us. That, too, is one of the goals of the Peace Corps.

A big difference now, though, is that you will have cellphone and Internet connections that will make your service much less remote than mine. You will even be able to communicate with returned Volunteers who will be eager to answer your questions and maybe even provide resources for your special projects. We will want to know how you're doing, and we will be watching you warmly.

Mark Hager

Kamakwie, Sierra Leone (1991-1992)

Faculty, Arizona State University

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Dear Invitee,

Welcome to the opportunity of a lifetime! I know you've been waiting for your invitation to come in the mail, and now you have the chance to join PC/Sierra Leone. I remember my tangled emotions of anxiety about leaving my life in America, mixed with excitement about beginning a new experience far away. The unknown can be scary. We all feel this way. But I'll tell you one thing; I've never regretted my decision to go. I'm so lucky to be here in Sierra Leone.

During your service you'll play many roles. First and foremost, you are a teacher. I teach English to middle school girls. The challenges can be daunting: limited resources, language barriers, multilevel learners, large class sizes. But don't fear, you're in a unique position. You come with a strong education background and bring new perspectives and ideas. At the same time, your own capacity for problem solving, patience, creativity, and conflict resolution will grow. Talk about a resume builder!

You'll also be a community member, neighbor, friend, adopted child, and resident expert on all things American. You'll fetch water, laugh, cook, wash clothes, discuss ideas, and eat with Sierra Leoneans. Adjusting to life in a village has its difficulties. You'll have good days and not so good days. You'll have to give up many conveniences of American life. But you'll become close with some of the friendliest and giving people I have ever met. You have to be willing to sacrifice the small things to receive bigger rewards. Open yourself up to new experiences and be flexible.

One of your most interesting new roles will be serving as ambassador of Sierra Leone to your family and friends back home. The support and understanding of your loved ones is important and, in return, you get to share your service with them. My family learns about Salone through my eyes. I also communicate with a middle school class in my hometown through the Coverdell World Wise Schools program. I enjoy the chance to share a positive

image of Africa with Americans who otherwise might never be exposed to its many qualities.

When you're making the decision to join the Peace Corps, you have to ask yourself many questions. But don't stress. Everything will work itself out. You can do this. Plus it's fun! We're eagerly preparing for your arrival. I can't wait to meet you. Congratulations!

Meghan Welsh,

Moyamba, Sierra Leone (2010-2012)

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Dear Invitee,

Seneo Seneo! (That is Mende for congratulations!) You are about to embark on one of the truly great adventures of your life. Sierra Leone is a nation that is not only in need of your service, talent, and energy; but also is desirous of it and will express its appreciation in more ways than you can imagine. What is most fortuitous about this experience is that you will have it in one of the most beautiful countries in the world. The beauty of Sierra Leone is not contained in its colorful cities, idyllic beaches, lush mountains, or diverse wildlife—its beauty exists in its people. Sierra Leoneans are some of the friendliest people you will ever meet. You cannot help becoming intoxicated by their humor, warmth, food, music, will, and spirit.

As you sift through the surplus of pages in this Welcome Book, I can only imagine the vast spectrum of emotions you are feeling, heart beating, and head spinning. That is good. Most meaningful endeavors begin in trepidation. It is somewhat ironic that what makes this job, this journey, most fulfilling is that it is not about you. It is about your neighbor, your school, and your community. It is about your fellow Volunteer and representing your country with class and dignity. But Salone cannot be comprehended through hearsay. You must experience Salone with your eyes, mind, and heart.

Sincerely,

Liam Flaherty

Jimmi Bagbo, Sierra Leone (2010-2012)

# PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Sierra Leone and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Sierra Leone.

## General Clothing

### Women

- Two to three-week supply of cotton underwear
- Five to eight bras, including a sports bra (good bras are unavailable locally)
- A few pairs of socks
- Three nice outfits appropriate for teaching, conferences, and meetings (Most women will wear dresses or skirts, but pants are acceptable)
- Two or three casual long dresses/skirts that cover your knees, even when sitting (sleeveless or very wide straps are OK, but spaghetti straps are not appropriate)
- Two or three casual long skirts that cover your knees, even when sitting (dresses and skirts can be part of the “three nice outfits”)
- One or more pairs of jeans or pants
- Two to four cotton shirts (used ones can be bought locally—sleeveless or very wide straps are OK, but spaghetti straps are not appropriate)
- Two or three short-sleeved, button-down or polo-type collared shirts
- Clothes for outside of work
- One sweater/cardigan
- Rain jacket
- Swimsuit (two-piece is fine)
- One or two pairs of long shorts if you plan to participate in sports
- Hats or caps for sun protection
- Five or more bandannas (for dusty taxi rides)

### Men

- Two- to three-week supply of cotton underwear

- A few pairs of socks
- Three nice outfits (business casual, possibly one with a coat and tie) appropriate for teaching, conferences, and meetings
- One pair of jeans
- Two pairs of casual pants (can be part of the “three nice outfits”)
- Three or four short-sleeved, button-down, or polo-type collared shirts
- Two to four T-shirts (easy to buy used ones locally if you need more during your service).
- One or two long-sleeved shirts and one or two ties
- One pair of shorts
- Swimsuit
- Five or more bandannas (for dusty taxi rides)
- Hooded sweatshirt or sweater
- Belt (leather acquires mold rather quickly)
- Rain jacket (very light and very good)
- One tie

### **Shoes**

- One pair of sandals
- One pair of running/walking shoes
- One pair of nice work shoes (nice sandals are fine for the office and travel; however, closed-toe shoes may be more appropriate). You may wish to have shoes that are water proof or that may be washed if dirty

### **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Two to four toothbrushes
- At least two tubes of toothpaste
- Mouthwash with fluoride (if you choose)
- Vitamins (if you prefer a specific brand)
- Face wash; face scrub or mask
- Moisturizers, lotions
- Shampoo, conditioner, and soap
- Brush and/or comb

- Razor blades (enough for your normal shaving routine)
- Makeup and nail polish (if you choose)
- Tweezers, nail clippers, pummel stone
- Travel toothbrush and soap holders
- Small bottles of gel hand sanitizer
- Two pairs of prescription glasses—PCVs think contacts are OK (although not recommended by medical unit), but you must bring solution
- Hand sanitizer
- Soap and toothbrush holders

The following are included in your medical kit. Just bring a small supply to get started, unless you want a specific brand:

- Sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent
- Feminine hygiene products, preferably menstrual cup (Diva Cup, Keeper, etc.)

#### **Miscellaneous**

- Umbrella
- Hat for sun protection
- Good-quality sunglasses
- Wristwatch (not “showy”)
- Refillable water bottle like Nalgene
- Swiss Army-type knife or Leatherman-type tool (remember to pack in checked luggage)
- Zip-close plastic bags (some large, some small) and Tupperware
- Flashlight or headlamp (mini-maglight style might be the easiest to carry around)
- Extra batteries (consider rechargeable or solar-powered)
- Camera and memory sticks
- Laptop (be aware of potential theft or loss and the expense of Internet connectivity)
- iPod, MP3 player, or CD player with mini-speakers (Local radios will play MP3s on USB memory sticks or Mini SD memory cards)
- Adaptors



- Sheet (full size) or sack sleeping bag (available in travel catalogues like [www.dreamsack.com](http://www.dreamsack.com))
- Pillow (pillows are sold locally, but quality varies)
- Frisbee, volleyball, football, playing cards, etc.
- Photos from home
- Journal
- Travel alarm clock
- Simple calculator (solar-powered is best)
- Calendar/planner
- A good book or two
- Musical instrument (if you play one)
- Sewing kit
- Art supplies (e.g., markers, colored pencils, glue, glitter, construction paper, sketch books)
- Something that reminds you of home, or makes you feel happy and/or luxurious
- Backpack for travel within country (35-40 liter) and a multi-day pack (70-liter)
- Quick dry towel
- Duct tape
- Solar charger for iPod and phone (cell phone is provided by PC)
- Sleeping pad
- Calculator
- Combination lock
- Nice kitchenware, such as a knife, can opener, vegetable peeler
- American stamps
- \$100-\$300 for emergencies/travel (bring big bills recently made)
- Laptop computer (bring case for dust/environment)
- Sports balls deflated/Frisbee (can be bought here and will be ruined immediately)
- “Must have” cooking spices
- Textbooks (recognize that the level of students is much lower than back home)
- Pens (can’t find good ones here)
- Pencils

- Markers (Sharpies; all others available here)
- Things to make you feel pretty
- Dollar store stuff for gifts/parties (glow sticks, Mardi Gras beads, etc.)

Note: The Peace Corps provides many different teaching resources. If you don't bring any, you will be OK, but many people find their own resources helpful.

### Final Notes

- PCVs will be provided with a medical kit, mosquito net, and sun block upon arrival.
- Only bring a large supply of toiletries if you are really particular about something, otherwise, you can find things you need in-country. Do bring enough for your first three months, though.
- Photos are sensitive to the elements, so choose the ones you bring carefully; make copies or don't bring any you don't want to have ruined or lost.
- You will be LIVING here for two years—NOT camping. Everything you need, you will learn where to find it and be able to find it.
- You will be coming to the best secondhand store in the world for clothing. For those items you cannot find, there is always a tailor who can make absolutely anything rather inexpensively. This includes shoes, such as flip-flops, trainers, and dress shoes, and everything else outside of electronics, including knives, beddings, toiletries, kitchen items, tools and more. For electronics, the three-prong British style is used and cheap adapters are readily available. Electricity is limited to larger towns or via generators so don't expect much. Power is 240 volts.
- A final bit of advice is to be conservative when packing since most things are available in-country and what is not can be sent.

# PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

## Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 1-855-855-1961, then press 2; or directly at 202-692-1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' On the Home Front handbook to family and friends.

## Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

## Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

## Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

## Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

## **Voting**

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

## **Personal Effects**

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

## **Financial Management**

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a Power of Attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

**Peace Corps Headquarters Toll-free Number: 855.855.1961, Press 1 or ext. # (see below)**

Peace Corps' Mailing Address: Peace Corps Headquarters  
1111 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526

Questions About:	Staff:	Toll-Free Ext:	Direct/Local #:
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement	x1840	202.692.1840
Country Information	Nicole Williams Desk Officer / (Sierra Leone, Guinea & Liberia) SierraLeone@peacecorps.gov	X2318	202.692.2318
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or other travel matters:	CWT SATO Travel	x1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	x1840	202.692.1840
Medical Clearance & Forms Processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	x1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)	Seven Corners	N/A	202.692.1538 800.335.0611
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Financial Operations	Office Of Volunteer and PSC Financial Services	x1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney, Staging (Pre-Departure Orientation), and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	x1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Office of Special Services	x1470	202.692.1470