Peace Corps
Community Environmental Conservation Extension Agent

Apply By: July 1, 2016
Know By: September 1, 2016
Depart By: February 28, 2017

Project Description

This project is focused on supporting environmental education in schools, promoting environmental conservation practices at the community level, as well as life skills, gender and youth empowerment through community youth groups. Volunteers will be seen as role models to youth and adults alike. They will work in schools with teachers and students on specific environmental themes based on their educational background and experience, as well as addressing the needs identified by community members.

Projects are located in areas of the country with high environmental priority such as protected areas and buffer zones, as well as important river watersheds, including the Panama Canal watershed. Volunteers will work at the community level creating or strengthening groups (youth and adults) with a focus on their environmental needs. Through their work with youth groups, Volunteers will develop opportunities to train and/or mentor students and youth in leadership, life skills, while promoting a positive environmental stewardship encouraging a civic participation as well as the importance of accomplishing personal goals. Through their work with adult groups, Volunteers will develop environmental activities such as organic gardening, nursery/reforestation, waste management and promoting eco-stoves use. Additionally, Volunteers will actively work to create after-school programs and support youth. They will also work with government agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations to develop sustainable living strategies and techniques that allow them to live in their communities while conserving their sensitive ecosystems and natural resources.

Required Skills

Competitive candidates will have an expressed interest in promoting environmental awareness in schools and communities, and one or more of the following criteria:
• BA/BS in Environmental Education; or
• BA/BS in Environmental Science, Environmental Studies, Environmental Interpretation, Natural Resources, Conservation, or Ecology; with expressed interest in promoting environmental awareness in schools and communities; or
• BA/BS in any discipline with 2 years professional experience organizing/leading environmental education activities; or
• BA/BS in any discipline with certification in primary education or secondary science education and 6 months experience organizing/leading environmental education activities.

Desired Skills

Competitive candidates will demonstrate the following skills:
• Conversational Spanish Language Skills
• Professionalism and a strong commitment to teach, basic teaching experience preferred
• Demonstrate the ability to respect of the local education system roles and protocols
• Public speaking and presentation skills
• Willingness to facilitate cultural integration
• Strong interpersonal skills
• Leadership skills
• High level of self-initiative and self-direction, mixed with a good sense of humor.
• Leading formal (schools) and non-formal environmental education activities, training teachers, working with youth groups, organizing or initiating environmental awareness activities (e.g. recycling campaigns)
• Working experience in one or more of the following: climate change/renewable energy, biology, natural resources management, reforestation, organic gardening, waste management, agro-ecology

Required Language Skills

Candidates must meet one or more of the language requirements below in order to be considered for this position.

A. Completed 4 years of high school Spanish coursework within the past 8 years
B. Completed minimum 2 semesters of Spanish college-level coursework within the past 6 years
C. Native/fluent speaker of Spanish

Candidates who do not meet the language proficiency levels above can take the language placement exams to demonstrate their level of proficiency. Competitive applicants typically attain a score of 50 on the Spanish College Level Examination Program CLEP exam or a score of Novice-High on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL OPI).

Additional Language Information

Volunteers need to demonstrate an Intermediate level of oral and written proficiency in Spanish for site placement by the end of Pre-Service training.

Living Conditions

Volunteer’s site will be in a Spanish-speaking community (small town to large town/100-4000 members). They may live in a common Panamanian style home made of simple concrete block and cement floors or in an adobe structure with dirt floors, depending on the level of development of the site. Services such as potable water and sanitation may be very basic. Volunteers are required to live with host-families during the first three to four months of service in site. After this period of time, Volunteers may opt to live on their own in pre-approved local housing that meets Peace Corps/Panama’s housing criteria.

Food and Diet:
The Panamanian diet varies according to the region and the ethnic makeup of the population. Most often the diet consists of rice, beans, bananas or plantains, yuca (cassava), and corn. Rice and beans (kidney beans, lentils, black-eyed peas) is the staple dish. Corn is served in many guises but is usually ground, boiled, or fried. Sancocho is a traditional dish (somewhere between a soup and a stew) prepared with a variety of vegetables and chicken. Most rural areas have an array of fruits available, including mangoes, papayas, pineapples, avocados, oranges, and guanabanas (soursops). The availability of garden vegetables, such as tomatoes, sweet peppers, and cucumbers, varies according to the region and the season. The most common
meats are chicken and beef, which are often deep-fried or stewed. Fish is available sporadically in coastal regions and riverside communities. Larger towns and cities have at least one restaurant that will be familiar, such as McDonald’s, KFC, Pizza Hut, Subway, or Dairy Queen.

Some Volunteers are vegetarians, but few Panamanians follow these diets. Many volunteers start a garden at their sites, and sometimes buy food in Panama City or a provincial capital. Most have supermarkets where you can buy a wide variety of foods and imported goods.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access:
Internet access in Panama is spreading. All provincial capitals and other large towns have internet cafes. Connection speeds tend to be slow, but the service is reasonable priced and otherwise reliable. Internet access for Volunteers is available at the Peace Corps/Panama office. Almost all volunteers have a computer or tablet. Should you choose to bring electronics, it is your responsibility to maintain and insure it.

Some sites will not have electricity but solar panels can be purchased in Panama or a community member or the local store may offer charging at a price.

Medical Considerations in Panama

- Volunteers whose health is maintained with access to care related to the following conditions or subspecialties may not be able to serve: hematology.
- The following medication(s) are not permitted for legal or cultural reasons: none identified.
- Volunteers who should avoid the following food(s) may not be able to serve: eggs.
- After arrival in Panama, Peace Corps provides and applicants are required to have an annual flu shot, to take daily or weekly medication to prevent malaria, and to receive mandatory immunizations.

Learn more about Peace Corps medical requirements »

Learn more about what it's like to serve in Panama.

Visit Peace Corps Panama's website.