

ENG

## IVCO 2024 THINK PIECE

# GROWING THE CIRCLE OF SERVICE: TOWARDS A MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT

Ted Adams

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer has never been a one-off experience. We know that on return, like with other organisations, Peace Corps volunteers go on to jobs, volunteering and roles that carry on the kind of commitment to service that they showed part of the Peace Corps. Sargent Shriver, the first Director of the Peace Corps, always made a point to explain that once Volunteers in the programme finished their terms of service, they would be referred to as Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) because Peace Corps Volunteers are called to serve for a lifetime. But the networks and connections this produces have not always been fully leveraged at the organisational level; there is a circle of service that Peace Corps animates and supports and provides an opportunity for enhanced impact and ongoing collaboration. This can help address longstanding exclusions from participation in service, helping with recruitment as well as contributing to the wider sector more strategically.

## The Roles of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

Over the years, Peace Corps Volunteers have consistently demonstrated their enduring desire to serve upon their return home, and the agency has offered opportunities to both support and tap this commitment. For example, U.S. citizens serving in the agency's hallmark two-year programme have often gone on to serve again as Peace Corps Response Volunteers (a shorter-term programme designed for more technical projects and volunteer expertise). More recently, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers have served again as Peace Corps Virtual Service Participants. They have gone on to volunteer in other organisations, work for volunteer organisations as staff, and/or serve as board members. RPCVs lead in the volunteer sector, on state and local service commissions, and in local and Federal agencies that support service. They also lead indirectly in roles outside the volunteer sector, as employers hiring service alumni and as public and private partners who can bring resources and innovation to the sector.

These returned volunteers also play a significant role in helping amplify awareness and encouraging others to serve in the Peace Corps, and the agency provides resources and support towards these efforts. On college and university campuses, RPCVs share their service stories at events. They inform students about post-service career opportunities and how to fit Peace Corps into their professional aspirations. They are uniquely equipped to share their Peace Corps experience with friends and family and often take on an informal recruitment role. The agency recently launched an online platform to provide returned volunteers with the latest programme and benefits information, so that they might reach out to someone who might be interested in service.<sup>1</sup> Local public officials who have served, speak to the skills and experience that they bring back home from their Peace Corps service and promote the hiring of RPCVs. These relationships help Peace Corps recruiters access state and local volunteer service networks to recruit future Volunteers. Some volunteers continue their careers working with local leaders in the US from communities that are too often underrepresented in the Peace Corps, including African American, Diaspora, Latino, Veteran, Asia-Pacific Islanders and Native American communities. This work is essential to the agency's outreach, helping it understand the potential socio-economic and cultural hurdles to Peace Corps service and then reaching out to these communities with the information that they might find most relevant. This commitment is critical to ensuring that all people have an opportunity to serve.

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[1] The Peace Corps platform 'Each ONE Reach ONE' can be accessed [here](#).

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This circular path within the service sector and the changing roles as volunteer, as staff member as advocate and perhaps again as volunteer, is a valuable asset for the agency, in particular in supporting Peace Corps efforts to recruit future volunteers. Realising that this same circular commitment to life-long service, and rich experience, thrives within other service-minded organisations, the Peace Corps is looking to more formally engage with and tap into these dynamic and vital networks. This year, the agency is launching a pilot to leverage this circular nature of volunteering, hoping to work in solidarity with multiple service-minded strategic partners to raise the visibility of lifelong service opportunities and drive more U.S. citizens to serve. Sharing the value of this circle of service and the core components that make up this pilot will hopefully inform and or provoke conversations around how Volunteer Involving Organisations might collaborate within their respective volunteer sectors.

## Peace Corps' Circle of Service Recruitment Pilot

Through the years, the Peace Corps has engaged with U.S. nonprofit organisations both formally and informally to support the agency's recruitment efforts. Agreements have proven an effective vehicle to enable collaboration as they may help clarify priorities, support communications and coordination, ensure compliance, and help initiate and accelerate collaboration between the agency and the strategic partner. The Circle of Service pilot will target collaboration to more efficiently reach new and diverse audiences interested in Peace Corps service while offering the service and career opportunities of its partners to its RPCVs. The pilot seeks to attract experienced and qualified applicants to the Peace Corps and its strategic partners by offering a streamlined system for service minded organisations to partner with the agency, but it also hopes to create an enduring community of practice to strengthen volunteer pipelines across the sector.<sup>2</sup>

Circle of Service partners will share certain organisational elements in common with the Peace Corps, including programming focused on cross-cultural understanding and volunteer service; and will have a robust and accessible alumni network that meets the basic eligibility requirements for the two-year Peace Corps Volunteer service model. Each Circle of Service partner will agree to sign on to a Master Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), with an established set of agreed upon activities:

- The Peace Corps will offer a two-week turnaround on applications completed by Circle of Service partner alumni (the typical Peace Corps application can have an 8-10 week turnaround);
- Circle of Service partners will promote Peace Corps service to their alumni on a quarterly basis, host an annual alumni recruitment event, and identify an opportunity to host Peace Corps speakers at an event during the year; and
- When Peace Corps Volunteers begin thinking about returning home, the Peace Corps will lift up Circle of Service partners as offering excellent opportunities to continue to serve and grow their careers, such as offering links to job and volunteer opportunities at these partner organisations.

[2] As of the publication of this piece, the Circle of Service has identified, vetted and confirmed four strategic partners with more likely to be added before the end of the year. They will be announced in October 2024.

While collaboration is not limited to these established activities, the MoU establishes concrete deliverables for both the Peace Corps and the strategic partners. It also allows the agency to engage multiple partners under one partnership mechanism, requiring significantly less staff time to develop and increase the number of partners.

Tapping the life-long commitment, skills, and experience of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers is an important element of the agency's ability to bring visibility and innovation to its programming. By expanding this "circle of service" to include other service-minded organisations through this formal recruitment pilot, Peace Corps hopes to offer insights into how other volunteer-involving organisations might tap into and leverage the experience and commitment of these service alumni networks across their own domestic volunteer sectors.

## About the Author

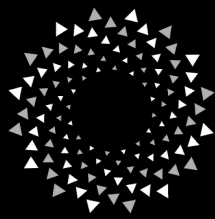


### Ted Adams

Ted Adams manages a diverse portfolio of strategic partnerships for the Peace Corps, with an emphasis on supporting Peace Corps collaboration with organisations and institutions that share a common goal of inspiring, supporting and leveraging the potential of volunteer service, both domestically and around the world. His background includes promoting partnerships at AmeriCorps, building corporate-community partnerships at the volunteer-fuelled playground non-profit KaBOOM!, and implementing engagement programmes with domestic nonprofits such as Rare Conservation and Potomac Riverkeeper. Ted's brand-building work includes names such as Kimberly-Clark, The Home Depot, and General Mills. Ted and his wife served as Peace Corps Volunteers in Ecuador from 1998 to 2000.

### To cite this Think Piece:

Adams, T. (2024). *Growing the circle of service: Towards a more collaborative approach to recruitment*. International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum). DOI: 10.25398/rd.northumbria.26840038



**IVCO**  
NEWCASTLE 2024