



Peace Corps Funding

Background Information and Talking Points

Our Request to Congress

- **Hold the Line on Funding for the Peace Corps:** While the Peace Corps is worthy of a significant funding increase, at the very least Congress needs to fund the agency at its present level (\$430.5 million) for the next fiscal year (FY 2026).
- **Prioritize the Peace Corps:** Ask lawmakers to urge leaders to support robust funding for the Peace Corps in FY 2026, and include Peace Corps as a priority in their personal appropriations request.

Background

- Within the international affairs programs of our federal budget, there is a line item for the Peace Corps. The federal fiscal year runs from October 1st through September 30.
- Congress is now working on federal spending for Fiscal Year 2026, which begins this coming October 1st. The next key step will come when President Trump submits his FY 2026 budget to Congress. The president's request will include his recommendation for Peace Corps funding.
- For the current fiscal year (FY 2025), which began October 1, 2024, Congress completed work this past March on funding for the Peace Corps and other federal programs. Congress passed a "continuing resolution" to fund the government through the end of the fiscal year.
- Under a "continuing resolution" which keeps the federal government operating, the Peace Corps remains funded at a level equivalent to the last approved (FY 2024) funding level of \$430.5 million.
- In July 2024, the House of Representatives had finalized its recommendations for FY 2025 spending. While the House originally recommended cutting Peace Corps spending back to \$410 million, a House voice vote during final debate approved an amendment by Representative Mike Lawler (R-NY) to restore funding to \$430.5 million.
- In July 2024, the Senate Appropriations Committee, on a bi-partisan vote of 24 to 5, approved an FY 2025 State/Foreign Operations spending bill which included then President Biden's request of \$479 million for the Peace Corps.
- **Much has changed since the previous actions, which left the Senate and House with a nearly \$50 million difference in their FY 2025 Peace Corps funding requests.** This

includes the election of President Trump, a new Republican majority in the Senate, a continued Republican majority in the House, and recent actions of the “Department of Government Efficiency”. In this environment, holding the line on funding for the Peace Corps would be a significant victory.

- After his confirmation in January, 2025 as the new U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio outlined three criteria that will be used when considering funding for international affairs programs: 1) Does the program make the United States stronger? 2) Does it make the United States safer? 3) Does it make the United States more prosperous?
- More than 3,000 individuals are currently serving in the Peace Corps, in more than 60 countries. Since 1961, a quarter million volunteers and staff have served in the Peace Corps in more than 140 nations. Collectively, **Peace Corps Volunteers have provided well over one billion hours of service to our nation.**

Key Talking Points

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

- **The Three Key Criteria:** As you prepare for your meetings, consider personal experiences or stories you can share that demonstrates the Peace Corps’ ability to meet any of the three criteria (stronger, safer, more prosperous) outlined by Secretary of State Rubio. You can also consider the talking points below.
- **The Peace Corps Makes Our Country Stronger:** A 2023 survey of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers found that 86% of respondents remain active volunteers in their communities, well above the national average. Thousands of these volunteers serve in leadership roles, helping their communities thrive.
- **The Peace Corps Makes Our Country Safer:** By working in sectors such as health, food security, and education, Peace Corps Volunteers strengthen and stabilize communities around the world, lowering prospects for mass migration. Over the seven decades of service, volunteers have built lasting and enduring friendships and respect with tens of millions of people around the world, who have gotten to know Americans in a very personal manner. And, in 2013, General James Mattis issued this quote which referenced the State Department in particular, but also applies to the Peace Corps and other foreign development and diplomacy initiatives: “If you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately.”
- **The Peace Corps Makes Our Country More Prosperous:** A 2023 survey on the Peace Corps’ return on investment for the American taxpayer found that among the more than 4,000 respondents, nearly 25% said they started one or more successful business ventures, with the collective economic impact estimated to be between \$752 million and \$1.1 billion.
- **In Other Words...Emphasize the Impacts of Peace Corps Service Here at Home:** It is always important to remind lawmakers that Peace Corps service is much more than 27 months overseas. Share the significance of the ongoing commitment to service that Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) provide.

- **National Service Brings Us Together:** While our country faces serious challenges and divisions, service opportunities bring people together. If you have an anecdote that reflects how service or your post-Peace Corps volunteer efforts has allowed you to connect with various communities or bridge divides, please consider sharing that with a congressional office.
- **So Much, For So Little:** While fiscal conservatives strongly urge for a reduction in federal spending, our entire international affairs programs represent less than one percent of our federal budget. And – within our international affairs programs – Peace Corps accounts for less than one percent of that budget! For all of the good that the Peace Corps does, reducing funding will have no meaningful impact on federal spending.
- **Share Your Peace Corps Story:** While facts and figures are important, Members of Congress and/or their staff also benefit greatly when they hear about your personal Peace Corps experience. However, as time is limited, you will need to keep your personal Peace Corps reflections short.

Other Talking Points

- **The Peace Corps and Controlling Federal Deficits:** Over the past ten years, the Peace Corps has had to operate with only a (recent) five percent increase in its congressional appropriation. (You could pose the question...What companies or individuals are being successful with only a five percent increase in their finances over the past decade?)
- **Peace Corps' Budget Has Lost Purchasing Power Over Eight Years Due to Limited Funding:** Peace Corps was funded at \$410 million in Fiscal Year 2016. Current funding of \$430.5 million has not kept up with inflation. When adjusted for inflation, the FY 2016 equivalent level of funding at this time should be nearly \$550 million. The Peace Corps has lost more than 20% of its purchasing power during this time.
- **Accelerating the Return to Service:** It is now about two years since Peace Corps Volunteers began returning to service. Now, nearly 3,500 Volunteers and Trainees have returned to service in more than 60 countries.
- **Infrastructure Costs in Countries are Most Significant:** While the number of volunteers is still lower than pre-pandemic levels, the number of countries where volunteers are serving has nearly reached pre-pandemic levels. This is important because infrastructure costs (office space and daily operational needs, transportation, safety and security, volunteer health care support, staffing) have extremely large start-up/resumption costs). And, (for example), a doubling of the number of volunteers in a country will not result in a doubling of country costs, as the existing infrastructure could likely absorb additional volunteers..
- **Supporting Volunteers:** In its FY 2023 Budget, Peace Corps projected 71% of expenditures were devoted to "Direct Volunteer Operations." Necessary infrastructure for operations is a major expense for the agency.
- **Indo-Pacific Expansion:** There has been bi-partisan interest in expanding Peace Corps programs in the Pacific region. In its FY 2025 budget request, Peace Corps requested nearly \$6 million for expanding Peace Corps programs in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2024, the Peace Corps announced plans to return to the Republic of Palau in 2025. At the same

time, at least four other Pacific Island nations (Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands) have formally requested the return of volunteers. If Congress is serious about expanding Peace Corps presence in the Pacific, it needs to invest in those operations. To expect otherwise would be irresponsible.

- **Recruitment:** As is the case with the military and domestic service programs, the Peace Corps is facing recruitment challenges to meet the demand for volunteers. In its FY 2025 budget justification to Congress, the agency is seeking an additional \$2.5 million for recruitment and marketing.
- **IT and Cybersecurity:** The agency continues to seek investments to its information technology systems, including improvements to systems to better track crimes against volunteers in support of improved safety and security planning. The FY 2025 budget request to Congress includes \$10 million to address critical cybersecurity requirements in the agency's IT systems.
- **Americans Support Federal Volunteer Service Programs:** A January 2021 poll conducted by Change Research for Service Year Alliance found 77 percent of those polled support expansion of service opportunities such as Peace Corps and AmeriCorps. Majorities of Democrats (93 percent), Republicans (59 percent), and Independents (77 percent) all supported national service expansion.
- **Say Thank You!:** Go to the NPCA website and visit our State Resources page (advocacy, then resources, then state resources) to find profiles for every member of Congress. See if you can thank them for previous, positive actions in support of the Peace Corps! These pages will also provide you with figures on the number of Peace Corps Volunteers from your state currently, and since 1961.