

# The VAC Newsletter



US Peace Corps Tanzania

So you want to get away from site?

- TAC Days are only usable for neighboring DISTRICTS, not for neighboring regions.
- If you're feeling blue, call your APCD and ask about taking time away from community to recuperate. These are given on a case by case basis. Stay mentally healthy out there!
- Don't forget to Pack Your Sack with medical supplies and your passport!

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## Words From Our, Thankfully, Temporary CD

Armed with questions and feedback in hand, we pulled up to David's menacingly large wooden desk. His obsession with power is apparent and the glisten of sweat on his balding head is a reminder that this man needs to be taken seriously. Frustrations were raised by committees about the selection process for new

committee members, and David expressed his understanding. But ultimately, senior staff have factors they must take into account like region distribution, or reasons that cannot be divulged. Senior staff is aware that increased transparency is necessary and are working to provide better feedback.

## Behind The Huge, Interlocking, Wooden Desk

After receiving our VAC concerns and suggestions, David, DMO and acting CD, jumped into action, looking into new swag for the office and also an e-cycling program at the office for dead phones, batteries, and other electronics (no more throwing dead batteries into holes!), items we will hopefully hear about as soon as he gets responses to his inquiries. He was able to clear up some confusion concerning contacting staff on WhatsApp as well, letting us know that WhatsApp is not approved as an official communication tool. Some phones approved by Peace Corps are not approved for downloading specific apps (i.e. if they download an unapproved application the phone will threaten to shut itself down forever). Therefore, staff members cannot use WhatsApp exclusively, or even primarily, as a contact method. He also brought us hiring updates, like the exciting news that our new

Director of Training will be arriving sometime at the end of November! Most importantly, there has been a policy change that started with HE/AG 2016 but applies to ALL volunteers concerning TAC days. Policy states "For personal business, Volunteers may travel to sites within their district or a neighboring district." TAC days can no longer be used for neighboring regions, unless specifically approved by the APCD. Additionally, For volunteers looking to extend, please be aware that the visa process is long. With the changes in government the hoops we must go through have increased, and the office has no way of expediting the process. So volunteers are encouraged to start the process early and to check in with the office periodically.



Picture of Peace Corps HQ hours after David took over as acting CD.

### DBAD

- Remember, if you're experiencing problems at site, call your APCD to request assistance.
- If you have a pet at site, don't leave it at site for the next volunteer to take care of. That's not cool.
- Got crime? Report, it! Tell Joel and Emma so they can document it. They don't have to do a follow up!
- Return forms to PCHQ that have been sent to you!

## Programming and Training

Programming and Training staff are looking forward to using volunteer input to continue to improve the volunteer experience. Staff will conduct a needs assessment to learn more about what island-specific ISTs would be useful to volunteers who live on Zanzibar and Pemba. In addition, staff is aware that changing the dates of trainings is both difficult and frustrating for volunteers, and do make every effort to finalize dates significantly in advance.

A number of volunteers have expressed interest in receiving their VRF earlier in the reporting period, and APCDs are able to send you your VRF after you have submitted the previous quarter's report. Remember to submit your VRF by the deadline in

order to enable the APCDs to give you feedback in a timely fashion. There are no significant changes anticipated for the VRF in the near future.

Volunteers have been expressing concerns about site development, which were discussed in further detail with the Programming and Training staff. APCDs reassured us that they make every effort to develop sites in all regions, but there are factors beyond their control that influence this process, including lack of adequate housing or miscommunication with regional officials. To foster better relationships and alleviate miscommunication at site concerning the volunteer's work, APCDs encourage Health and Agriculture volunteers to report to supervisors and village leadership

on a quarterly basis. Ultimately, staff can work with other Volunteers, government and community leaders to identify and prepare a site, and we are continually trying to improve the way we do this and the strategic plans we use. However, once Volunteers are at their sites, this process continues with them steering, working with their communities and other stakeholders to help people to achieve what they want to achieve - that's site development and it goes on for your entire service.

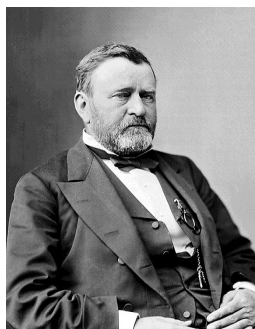
Finally, input from the Health/AG 2016 class about their experience with PST, EST, and the CEP will be taken into account when planning training for future classes. APCDs and Programming and Training staff will

continue to develop the technical training sessions at both PST and EST, and discuss which sector specific sessions are of value to both health and agriculture volunteers. Volunteers that want more technical information on agriculture and health related topics are encouraged to take advantage of the resources available to them via committee google drives and to reach out the Health and Ag APCDs with questions. Additionally, training staff will continue to refine the PDM session at EST and standardize CEP feedback processes. If volunteers would like a soft copy of the Swahili Counterpart handbook or a CEP written by the volunteer they have replaced, they should reach out to their APCD.

## Grants

Some people have had issues receiving grant money in a timely fashion. Wait time to receive funds depends on funding source, whether it is an in-house grant or provided by donors or PC partners. It should take two weeks to two months from time of final approval. If delayed after two months, contact Yovitha. We would proudly like to inform you that two projects are in the works for the Robert S. Lehman Memorial Fund. Updates and stories of their progress will be shared in the WU as they develop. A friendly reminder from grants: Please close grants as projects finish to eliminate a bottleneck before/during COS which mo-

nopolizes staffs' time, making it harder for PCVs who are actively working on grant projects. Additionally, PCVs applying for grants are eligible once the PCV has completed EST. The PCV may not apply for new grants in their last 6 months of service. Thank you for all of your hard grant work!



Get it?

## Safety and Security

VAC sat down with Emma to discuss some recent safety and security concerns. There have been a few instances in recent weeks when the duty phone was unreachable due to technical issues, and Joel and Emma are currently working with Airtel to resolve them. If at any point you try to reach the duty phone and are unable to do so, immediately contact Joel, Emma, or any other office staff for assistance. Additionally, the safety and security team are aware of the security issues experienced during the Health/Ag 2016 EST in Morogoro, and are working to mitigate them in the future. Finally, don't forget to report all crimes! Even if you

don't believe that any action needs to be taken by Uncle Joel, reporting crimes enables the office to have accurate statistics and better understand what is happening on the ground. When reporting, you can let Joel and Emma know that you don't want any follow-up to occur.



## Medical

The most common feedback from volunteers with regards to the medical office involved working with Medlink. We discussed with the medical team why some volunteers have been having issues receiving medical supplies much later than anticipated. Dr. Liwayway explained that when a volunteer receives an email on confirmation from Medlink, this only confirms that the medical office has received the request, not sent out the medications. Medications are sent out every Thursday. We also discussed the policy on confirmation of receiving medical supplies. The medical office stated that for most general medications, it's not urgent to respond immediately via your airtel phone or Medlink. However, any medication accompanied with an Attachment D Blue Form, such as malaria prophylaxis and other prescription drugs, needs a swift confirmation response from the volunteer. Signed Attachment D forms should be returned to the medical office as soon as possible via a scanned copy sent by email, a picture sent through WhatsApp, or returned to the medical office when you're in Dar. With regards to ordering medications via text message, some volunteers suggested providing the acronym for each medication in future medical handbooks. The medical office explained that the acronyms were provided to the Education 2016 class on flashdrives and they will be included in the next medical handbook.

Not getting all of the meds you ordered in your medlink order? The most likely scenario is that the meds you ordered are out of stock in the office. It is also likely that the medical unit made note of this in their own records but they may have forgotten to tell you. Once the meds come back into stock, the medical unit will ensure that these meds are packed up and sent out ASAP (Thursday). Moving forward, the medical office will notify a volunteer in the comments section of Medlink if

supplies are out of stock. However, a volunteer should follow-up with the office if they did not receive their medical supplies. Also, if a volunteer needs to make a change to an order (i.e. means of picking up medical supplies), make a call to the medical office: 0686 199 570 If you experience continuous issues with Medlink or your medical orders please talk to the medical unit. Medlink is an evolving system and DC is working out the kinks so please maintain patience through this process.



Some volunteers asked about the accessibility of specialty medical supplies. Lubricants are available upon request, but epipens can only be provided on a case by case basis. The medical office is still unable to provide pads/tampons/diva cups; however, the medical office will be looking further into this issue and suggest that for now volunteers make note of this expense on the annual living allowance survey. Other volunteers showed interest in having basic first aid and wound care taught at PST. The medical unit assured us that common health and basic first aid were taught to the Education 2016 class and will continue to be a session for all PSTs moving forward. Various volunteers have been asking about the existence of mental health days. The only official mental health days are known as Respite Leave days and approved by the office in Washington D.C. Respite Leave can be for up to two weeks. Contact the medical office for more information. The unofficial mental health days are given out on a case by case basis. If you're feeling extremely

down or "blue" at site, contact your APCD to discuss potential options.

The medical unit would like to remind volunteers to please carry an "essential travel medical kit" with them at all times. It is important to keep this kit with you even if you are traveling for one night to a fellow volunteers site or your banking town. The kit at minimum should include: Thermometer, ORS, anti-vomiting, Cipro, MRDT, Coartem, Tylenol, Advil, Malaria prophylaxis, Passport\*. Your passport is important



because there have been many instances where volunteers have unexpectedly been medically evacuated and you cannot leave the country without your passport. If you do not have your passport on you in the event of a medical evacuation, you must travel all the way back to site to collect your passport in order to board a plane out of the country. Thank you for helping the medical unit help YOU!

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