

The VAC Digest

Your most trusted (and only...) look at what went on at the latest VAC meeting.

November 2014

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Lots of words!

Things you should read!

All the answers you ever wanted... from your VAC representatives...

ASK Uncle Joel:

(Your guide to all things safety and security)

Q: Shikamoo Uncle Joel! I live in the Dirty South and was wondering if the Forbidden Road would be opened anytime soon?! - Road Runner

A: Road runner, Opening roads to the Dirty South will be discussed with the U.S. embassy, their safety and security suggestions dictate our ability to take the roads less traveled. Look out for an update!

Q: Mambo Mr. Joel! I recently lost all of my everything (except my pride...) Any advice on where to go from here? - Empty Handed

A: Empty Handed, Pole! PCTZ will provide PCVs with a pro-rated amount of cash to get through until the next pay period. Other than that, it is case by case and will need to be discussed with the safety and security team.

Q: Pole na kazi Anko Joel! I was recently staring at a wall for an extended period of time and thought, "Wardens... Who needs 'em?" Thoughts? - Warden Wasiwasi

A: Warden Wasiwasi, In order to make the warden position more meaningful, a group discussion is taking place and will be presented to acting wardens shortly. The general idea is wardens have the ability to take on a little extra work and provide our regions with better resources. This came from PCVs not the staff!

Q: Hi Joel (and Dada Happy!), So like every volunteer before me ETed... Why am I at this site? - Site Second-Guesser

A: Second Guesser, All known issues are assessed before placing a PCV at site; that being said it won't always make sense to the PCV. A monumental amount of safety and security considerations goes into site development and the safety and security team checks off each site before a PCV can be placed. If you have concerns please call Happy or Joel, they are very welcoming. Also, please remember to report if any safety and security issues arise.

Letter from the Editor

Some topics just don't seem to fit anywhere or are especially important, so below are just such issues. As an aside, thanks for all your hard work PCVs and PC staff! It's been another lovely year, so here's to a Happy Holiday season, safe travels, and onwards into the NEW YEAR!

ECONOLOGGE

A discussion with Econolodge has taken place after some recent complaints. Check out the WU's recent update for the results of that discussion!

EXTENSIONS, EXTENSIONS, EXTENSIONS!

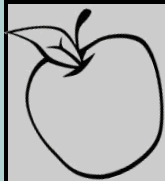
If you are hoping to extend, be sure to get started early. A timeline is given at MST, but Programming and Training will send out subsequent reminders. Know that COS date is the ABSOLUTE END of one's time in Tanzania, so make sure your extension is all set before this date rolls around.

ISSUES AROUND DIVERSITY

The PCTZ community is a diverse one, in many regards and is something we pride ourselves on. However, it has been brought to PC's attention that both PC staff and other volunteers can be better about recognizing this diversity and fostering a community of inclusion. As a result, PC staff will have extra diversity sessions at training, aimed primarily at understanding *subconscious* reactions to race or other forms of diversity. Additionally, it was noted that committees could do a better job of both being diverse, and showing their diversity. From this discussion, we've begun working on a "campaign" entitled EVERY COMMITTEE FOR EVERYBODY to showcase diversity in PC committees and to get the word out about all the great work that these committees are doing and how EVERYBODY can be a part of their missions. Look out for this is the Weekly Update!

GRE TESTING

First off, thanks EB for getting the GRE back in TZ! The US Embassy has a person designated for arranging testing in TZ, so check in with the Embassy to stay updated on what tests are happening when!



AN APPLE A DAY: Medical Advice and Answers from the PCMOs

Medical Refills

Some volunteers have wondered, and so VAC asked, "can the PCMO automatically send out refills for malaria meds every three months?"

It seems like a simple request, right? Well, sadly, but thoughtfully, the answer is "no". The PCMO understands that sending groups of meds sounds logistically easier and more efficient but it simply is not. Many problems could arise from this situation. But most importantly, the PCMO can monitor PCV adherence to malaria meds best when PCVs are responsible for calling-in refills. EMS (the mail carrier) will not notify the PCMO if packages are not received, therefore PCMO must be able to document that a volunteer calls in their refill every three months.

Birth Control Pill Options

Having issues with your birth control pills? Wonder why you were switched when you arrived in-country?

First, the PCMO is required to keep a PCV's current prescription if the PCV arrived in country with the prescription documented in their medical file. The PCMO will switch the brand of the pill to generics if they are available but that does not affect the medication itself. If a PCV's specific pill is not available because the U.S. supplier/headquarters does not supply that type than the PCMO works with the volunteer to find the closest match. If a switch in type is not working for a PCV, as always, the PCMO should be consulted in order to best assist a PCV to get the correct medication. As far as options are concerned, there are many. Currently the PCMO is supplying volunteers with 14 different birth control medications. Approximately 10 of the 14 are available to any PCV who may have come to country without a prescription but decided to begin the pill once in TZ. The additional four types are results of very specific prescriptions which PCVs came to country with. **Myth busting!**—There is a myth that the TZ PCMO now only supplies birth control pills which are available in TZ. FALSE. This system was considered by the PCMO but it was determined to be unreliable and not in the best interest of PCVs' health.

Calcium and Protein Supplements

The issue of vitamins and now supplements has plagued some volunteers so VAC had to ask? "Yo, can we get these? And how?"

Again, the answer brings us back to PCMO policy/rules... There is no medical policy which says that the PCMO will or can provide specific vitamins, i.e. Calcium, to volunteers. The only exception is a MULTIVITAMIN which all PCVs are given in the initial med-kit and can be refilled.

The PCMO is only obligated to supply calcium if a volunteer arrives in country with a prescription from the U.S. This is made clear in the medical screening period before arriving in country. Otherwise, The PCMO advises you visit a local duka la dawa and calcium should be available in most cities and affordable. Please do not ask for a medical reimbursement if you choose to purchase calcium, the PCMO will not agree. Please accurately document your expenses in the yearly Living Allowance Survey and policies may change!

Next, protein is not something that ever has or ever will be covered by the PCMO. If a PCV is having issues accessing protein in their region they should speak to the PCMO to brainstorm local food options. If a PCV requires larger amounts of protein like from shakes or supplements they are available in Dar (PCMO can discuss with you where to look) or have them sent from home. Yay, packages!!

From the Desk of: *Programming and Training*

Three's a Crowd (3-generation limit in villages)

There was some concern over there being a 3-generation volunteer limit at sites, which (for education volunteers) could further exacerbate the large teacher turnover problem present in Tanzania schools. The 3-generation limit isn't so much a rule, but a suggestion pulled from the Project Framework. Peace Corps is wary of spoiling a village, and wants to ensure that after a time, it will be able to fulfill the goal of continuing independently, without support from a PCV. In particular to Education volunteers - they are placed based on the need of teachers.

Ants in the Pants (more sector specific, technical training during PST)

Lenny and the Programming Staff are continuing to search for the balance for how much technical training to give to trainees in PST. They will try to implement more anchoring activities (ie: composting, jam making) for the next training, as well as reach out to the FEAST and Malaria committees for advice on how best to sequence out training delivery.

Out of my room, MOM! (APCDs seeing private rooms during site visits)

It is mandatory for Peace Corps to have access to private rooms during site visit for health and safety reasons. As this has come as a surprise to some volunteers, Peace Corps will put together a check list for what happens at site, and remind volunteers before coming to visit that there is a chance their rooms will be visited.

Get a Clue (receiving complete site history information)

Some volunteers have asked for more complete site histories upon site arrival. It is the previous volunteer's responsibility to thoroughly fill out a closing report form. Once filled out, it is up to the APCD to pass that information along. The Programming Staff is working on a better record keeping system for current sites, and ensuring that the information is passed along in a timely fashion.

Prepare the Masses! (Village Leaders aren't thoroughly explained PCVs' role)

Globally, PCTZ has the lowest staff to volunteer ratio, and we take great pride in having the highest retention rate on the continent (thanks all! keep up the hard work). One solution is to involve current PCVs in the site development process, so talk to your APCDs if interested in site development! Another strategy that will go into effect is the translation of the Project Framework into Kiswahili, so APCDs and PCVs can hand over a comprehensive list of the goals that volunteers will be focused on in the village.

Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Match (better site selection method, and better focus on matching a PCV's skill-set with a Village's needs)

The office is working on providing more complete and informative site descriptions for the next set of volunteers. These descriptions will include more than an environmental description, attempting to dig deeper into details on past projects or community's interests. However, site placement is not skill-focused, but volunteer-centered. Monitoring is conducted and reported by staff from our first interview up until site placement at PST (big brother, anyone?). Placement is designed specifically to match the volunteer's interests, strengths, and weaknesses to their site placement, all done with consideration to the health and safety issues present.

Give Me Some Sugar - I am Your Neighbor! (APCDs should provide a comprehensive list of organizations/NGOs with regional contacts)

With our hands dirty and feet on the ground, it is PCVs responsibility to know what organizations and NGOs are present and working in the neighborhood. However - as we are attempting to do across the board - Peace Corps will try to keep an updated knowledge back and find a better system of retaining and transferring that information to future volunteers. This processes can be aided by Volunteers by adding a comprehensive list of NGOs and working organizations in their Closing Report Forms.

We Are The World (More in-class training on gender, race, and diversity)

Lenny and the Programming Staff have already fine-tuned the in-class diversity training since the new Ag/He volunteer's PST. There are now more people than just the PSDN Committee teaching on diversity topics, and it is geared towards creating a more supportive environment. Ask the new Ed class to see how it went!

SHOW ME THE MONEY!

The primary issue concerning the grants office is how to deal with the new internet-intensive grants process to make it more realistic for the average PCV's internet capabilities. As of now, little can be done as the new system is being implemented, but Washington is currently in the process of making an OFFLINE version as well. YAY!

THIS ISSUE OF THE VAC DIGEST BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

Pat McCabe (HE/ENV 12-14), Sam Temple (HE/ENV 12-14), Noel McCoy (ED 13-15), Allison Belfield (ED 13-15), Erin Polka (HE/AG 14-16), Paul Baker (HE/AG 14-15)

HELP WANTED

VAC is looking for 2 new members from the ED Class! Elections will be at EST.

Contact:

Noel McCoy
(0782120495) or Allison
Belfield (0782173614)
with inquiries!

TRENDSSETTERS

circa 1964



What's in the Stars?:

Your Admin Horoscope

For those Volunteers who are extending in Dar...

... study is in progress to accurately assess a correct living allowance. Market basket surveys have been done by both Peace Corps drivers and by Volunteers already living in Dar. PCVLS in Dar are mid-way through tracking their expenditures to help in the calculation. By December, the data will have been evaluated and an amount which can be justified will be proposed.

For those who are extending in general...

...a request was made for more follow-up to the needed procedures and requirements. David offered to review the existing check-list (similar to the one used by the volunteer to guide you through the COS process.) This procedure would connect all the pieces, including everything from work permits, medical, closing out connections made to other organizations, etc.

For those with a post office in Iringa or Njombe...

...The post office in Iringa (also Njombe) has been difficult. PC is aware of this. The document we receive to exempt us from fees on packages is not an official rule, but rather a "good will" request. Peace Corps will send out staff to talk this issue over with the offices that are problematic. ****Please note:** that the "good will" request to exempt fees are ONLY for the first six months in country. If you are in one of the luckier areas that the folks do not charge you, it is out of their good hearts!

For those who are hoping we'll go paperless...

...Smart phones, tablets, e readers: a good way to potentially help volunteers but is not in the near-future plans. There are the issues with maintenance and security (who's responsible for it if it breaks, gets stolen, etc...). To receive PC resources, any time you are in Dar, Crispin can put the materials on a thumb drive or update what you have.

For those settling-in...

...Upon arrival at site, some volunteers will have many of the essentials present and some none. It was decided that it's not feasible to give varying amounts of start-up money. Petitioning for a case by case adjustment was also not an option. That settling-in allowance is decided and adjusted by the settling-in survey that we all are required to fill out.