

# V.A.C.ZINE



FEBRUARY V.A.C NEWSLETTER

February 27-28 2014

## COS Conference Information

Many volunteers have expressed concerns about COSING such as when is it, how do I choose my COS date, and what are my extension options. The education class COS conference will be held between May 5 and 9 and volunteers are expected to arrive on May 4th.

Volunteers from all classes have expressed concerned on how dates were chosen. Don't worry there is no battle to the death or internet connection involved. COS dates will be chosen at COS conferences and for each available date four volunteers are allowed to COS. What if everyone and their mom signs up for one date? The staff tries to be accommodating, if there is an extra person or two on a particular date the staff will try their best to squeeze the people in, but if that is impossible names will go into a hat and chosen at random. No worries though, if you have a legit reason for choosing a certain date such as going home to start school you can have a higher priority, BUT you need to let the staff know in advance so arrangements can be made. Just a reminder you can COS 30 days before or after the official COS date. If you can,

please try to keep it as close to the 27 month mark as possible, it is what we signed up for folks.

Other volunteers expressed that they would like to help shape the schedule for COS. Before the conference staff is hoping to send out ideas of what topics will be addressed at the conference so we can give feedback and build off those ideas. A need assessment will also be given out before the conference to give input.

Not quite ready to leave? Extension applications for the Education 2012 class are due at the end of March. In general there are three extension options. The first one is extension at your site, if this is what you are interested in start talking to your APCD. The Second one is extending at a new job that has already been formulated by Peace Corps and some general options were sent out with the extension application. Finally, the third option is if you made a contact with an organization and propose a new position. Regardless of

the case if you are interested in extending start talking to your APCD about options. For future reference extension options are given out five months before the official COS date.

Many Edu. COSers were wondering about requesting travel time in June You can submit a leave request for June break as long as 1. you are traveling within Tanzania and 2. you aren't traveling up until to your COS date. So if you travel, ok, but then go back to site to wrap things up before heading up to Dar to COS.

### **Per Diem (official expenses covered by Peace Corps)**

The Per Diem rates are as follows. Dar and Arusha 17,000Tsh for meals and incidentals, with a lodging max up to 25,000Tsh. Up-Country (everywhere else) 12,000Tsh for meals and incidentals, with a lodging max up to 15,000Tsh.

### Special points of interest:

- THE 2014 CALENDAR OF EVENTS SHOULD BE COMING OUT SOON
- THANK YOU TO RIAH FOR HER V.A.C. CONTRIBUTIONS. THANKS FOR ALL THE HARD WORK!
- SPECIAL THANKS GOES OUT TO HAPPY!
- DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK STAFF QUESTIONS OR REMIND THEM ABOUT A PENDING ANSWER

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## Money, Money, Money!!!

A number of money issues were discussed, including travel days, transportation, extension on travel, and monthly allowances. If you think something is unfair concerning the amount of money you receive, there is something each of us can do! The LIVING ALLOWANCE SURVEY has been announced and each of us have received an e mail including the survey form. On this form you want to be specific, noting specific fees that have increased for you/ your region. The Living Allowance Survey can not only influence an increase in all of our sala-

ries (all of Tanzania), but also regional disparities and possibly individual cases (groups) as overviewed by your APCD. Furthermore if you are the only one to fill out this form in your region, the office has no statistics to compare it to, so it will take longer to identify who needs changes in the allowance and why. If we all do the Living Allowance Survey, the office can use this information to better adapt our Living Allowances and quickly identify unfair outliers. Last year we didn't get a raise because only 40% of us returned the Living Allowance Survey, we need to

break the 75% mark for Washington to approve any increase in our monthly allowances. COSing volunteers you are also included in this 75%, so make sure you fill it out to help out future volunteers. I know you have senioritis, but make like nike and just do it

Wardens incurring expenses as a result of official warden business (telephone calls ect...), may receive reimbursement for these expenses via a submitted reimbursement form if the costs are legitimized. Additionally Wardens should report these expenses in the Living Allowance Survey, highlighting this as a warden expense.

MAKE SURE TO DO YOUR LIVING ALLOWANCE SURVEY. WE NEED 75% PARTICIPATION TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR A LIVING ALLOWANCE INCREASE

## Cash in Lieu— No Policy Change!

The Cash in Lieu policy has not changed and is as follows. 30 days on either side of your official COS date, you may receive the Cash in Lieu. At your COS conference (3 months before your COS date) you can elect to receive Cash in Lieu instead of a plane ticket home. Then you

must finish your contractual obligation to Peace Corps to receive the Cash in Lieu. For extendees, you must satisfy your new Peace Corps contractual obligation in order to receive Cash in Lieu (regardless of duration). If you ET during this time, you don't get Cash in Lieu.

## Volunteer Directories

After hearing concern about receiving updated volunteer directories, the staff has decided that they will be mailing out new directories to every vol-

## Who is doing what? - Volunteer Project Database

Many volunteers expressed an interest in having a database that includes current and past volunteer projects which could assist other volunteers looking to implement simi-

lar projects. VAC has taken on the responsibility to create a document to compile such information. This document will be updated every three months by your class VAC representatives. This is not a permanent

and we're working with Peace Corps IT to come up with a better solution. There is also still discussion on how/where this document will be available for all volunteer access.



## Vacation All You Ever Wanted? ... but takes SO long to get there?

So there you are on a bus, traveling for multiple days before you reach your destination. As you sit on the bus you can see all of your vacation days flying out the window. You feel this is wrong because you are losing out on vacation days due to sitting on a bus where as your BFF up in Lushoto takes half the time to get there. How unfair, it's not your fault you live 2,932 years away. We are in the process of revamping the Re-

quest for Leave Form to accommodate this issue. Instead of wasting a precious Vacation day on the front and/or tail end of your safari you can classify these days as TAC. TAC is Time Away from the Community and is the 4 days we receive each month to go to our banking town/neighborhood region for business, relaxation and general wellbeing. For clarity this addition will allow us to use TAC days in Dar as a

stopover en-route to a farther vacation destination. TAC days are not counted as vacation days but must meet the following requirements: TAC days can only be used for travel in your banking town, neighboring region, or Dar, as you are stopping there for sleep/errands before you can continue to travel the following day .

If you are concerned because you live so far away and you use more money than other volunteers DO THE LIVING ALLOWANCE SURVEY. If 75% of all volunteers do the survey and the difference in living allowance is significantly different by region your region could get a raise.



## PST and Preparing for Secondary Projects

Some volunteers think this is lacking in PST and EST and would like to see more emphasis put on secondary projects earlier on. One solution discussed would be to have Resource PCVs during PST compile and share personal stories and experiences about projects at site from other current PCVs. Furthermore, training

staff and PCVs will use more concrete examples during trainings.

### Staff Site Visits

Staff will now notify all surrounding PCVs by click-a-tell one week before they leave Dar. This is so you will know if someone will be coming your way soon and can bring meds or packages. As usual, the site visit calendar will also be posted in the Weekly Update, but weekly reminders will be added every week until the date of the trip.

## Online Sexual Assault Training

It was brought to attention that the mandatory online sexual assault training was not the best way to address sensitive topics to volunteers who have had safety and security issues.

The current plan for sexual assault training is that it will now be done entirely at PST, and in person. The point of

making the mandatory survey was to address that training with those volunteers that were already at site. From this point on, the survey will no longer be conducted online. However, staff is already aware of this situation and presented it to PC Washington.

For those volunteers who have not completed it, if there is any topic-sensitive reasons for a delay, please discuss your options with one of the doctors or SARLS.

There was an issue for the previous education class involving receiving water filters before leaving for site. This was a one-time problem and should not happen again. Pole sana!

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## Favoritism

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT FAVORITISM MAKE SURE TO COMPLETELY FILL OUT YOUR VRF SO STAFF KNOWS WHAT TYPES OF PROJECTS YOU ARE INTERESTED IN

The topic of favoritism was presented to VAC as a topic to discuss at the meeting. The point being that, to some, it seems that favoritism was leading to certain PCVs being selected for special events, committees, or privileges. This issue was brought up in our all-staff meeting as a point, and it was stressed that this should not be the case. Staff indicated that they are aware of our concerns, the concern has been reiterated to all, and they will try to make any selection of volunteers as fair as possible, whenever it is possible. There are some points that we as volunteers need to know about how volunteers are selected for certain events or committees.

- VRF's do matter.

Staff members *do* use the activities and interests you indicate in your VRFs as a starting point for making selections. Additionally, PC Washington also uses this info for any international events. This is another reason volunteers need to be proactive in reporting their activities and successes in VRF.

- Some special events need to have volunteers chosen extremely quickly, and there is simply no time for an official application.
- Some PCVs on com-

mittees (eg. VAC, PSDN, Grants, Food Security) are also chosen for training because they are able to perform double-duty, meaning they are able to speak at trainings on behalf of their committees, and they are also able to attend specialized sessions. This prevents the need to call too many volunteers to Dar.

The bottom line is, staff does not wish any unfair treatment for any volunteer, and will continue to make every attempt to avoid it. Except for me... JK

## New Dar Policy



Peace Corps Washington requires that all posts have a special policy for the official office city. Even though there is technically a new policy for when you are visiting Dar es Salaam there are very few differences from regular travel. The same rules apply to Dar as other parts of the country for official travel and also approved travel if you fill out a leave request form.

HOWEVER now when you are staying in Dar es Salaam you must notify your APCD on where you are staying! Are you staying at Econo? Let your APCD know. Are you staying with an Ex-pat? Let your APCD know their name AND address. Also please remember to be safe when taking taxis in Dar, all taxis

have a white license plate. It is also advised when using a taxi to call (or fake call) someone with the license plate number of the car and name of the driver. Let the taxi driver know, you know what's up. When traveling to Dar you are allowed to use one of your TAC days (Time Away from Community) on either side of your travel to run errands and buy bus tickets. Just again, let your APCD know where you are staying.

## Vitamins

Are you getting enough vitamins at site?

If you're not, the med office wants to remind you that multi-vitamins and vitamin C are available whenever you request medical supplies. Other supplements are only available when deemed medically necessary. If you feel as though you are not getting adequate nutrition, check out the advice in Kumbe! or talk to a PCMO about your concerns.