

MS 221 VOLUNTEER ALLOWANCES

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Responsible Offices: OCFO, Regions

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A Settling-in Allowance Volunteer Survey
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Attachment C Bank/Postal Facility Authorization
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1.0 AUTHORITY

Peace Corps Act, Section 5(b).

2.0 PURPOSE

This manual section sets out the policies and procedures governing Peace Corps Volunteers' settling-in, living, daily, travel, annual leave, and evacuation allowances.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

3.1 Settling-in Allowances are allowances paid to newly assigned Volunteers for necessary housing supplies and equipment.

3.2 Living Allowances are allowances paid to Volunteers for their support while in their country of assignment.

3.3 Daily Allowances are allowances paid to Volunteers on approved travel to cover the cost of meals, lodging, and/or incidental expenses after arrival at a location outside their country of assignment.

3.4 Travel Allowances are allowances paid to Volunteers to cover the cost of official travel in the country of assignment or travel outside their country of assignment.

3.5 Annual Leave Allowances are allowances paid to Volunteers for annual leave expenses.

3.6 Evacuation Allowances are allowances paid to Volunteers who are terminated within six months of their enter-on-duty date due to an evacuation or unplanned suspension of a country program.

4.0 SETTLING-IN ALLOWANCE

4.1 Policy

Upon initial site assignment, Volunteers are provided a settling-in allowance to purchase necessary housing supplies and equipment. This allows them to be involved immediately in their communities and gives them freedom to manage their own affairs. Volunteers are encouraged to purchase items available locally and to restrict their purchases to genuine needs. If a Volunteer is reassigned to another location, an additional settling-in allowance may be authorized if the Country Director believes it is justified.

4.2 Amount of Settling-in Allowance

In order to determine the appropriate amount of the settling-in allowance, the post shall conduct surveys on the prices and items commonly purchased by Volunteers with the allowance for each incoming group of Volunteers. The survey process requires Volunteers to complete the Settling-in Allowance Volunteer Survey (see Attachment A) within three months after receipt of the allowance. The CD shall analyze the results of the survey within 90 days of receipt of the survey and determine whether an increase or decrease in the amount is justified for the next group of Volunteers.

The Country Director may grant increases not to exceed 10 percent per fiscal year if the increase can be covered within approved budget authority. If the post cannot cover the increase, the CD must justify the increase by filling out Attachment B, Analysis and Request for Change in Settling-in Allowances and request additional funding from the Region.

All increases over 10% per fiscal year shall be approved by the Regional Director. To justify such increases, the CD must submit Attachment B. A survey response rate of a minimum of 75% is required to support an increase greater than 10%. The CD must also conduct an independent price survey, which gathers data from Peace Corps staff, host country representatives, available host country statistics, and information from the Volunteer Survey. The independent survey may consist of spot checks of prices of items, but it must be comprehensive enough to provide verification of price trends and support the analysis of the Volunteer Survey.

4.3 Ownership of Items Purchased with Settling-in Allowance

Supplies and equipment purchased with the settling-in allowance become the Volunteer's personal property. When Volunteers complete their tours, they should be asked by the Country Director to donate items in usable condition to appropriate institutions, such as schools, hospitals, other Volunteers, or the Peace Corps.

4.4 Procedures

For procedural guidance for settling-in allowances, refer to the Overseas Financial Management Handbook (OFMH).

5.0 VOLUNTEER LIVING ALLOWANCE

5.1 Policy

Volunteers are entitled to a living allowance in order that they may serve effectively and safely overseas. It is Peace Corps' policy that Volunteers live modestly by the standards of the people they serve, yet not in a

manner that would endanger their health or safety. Living allowances should be based on local living standards and costs and will thus vary among, and sometimes within, countries.

Each post should establish a base living allowance according to the categories outlined in Section 5.2. Supplements to the base living allowance may be added on a per Volunteer basis to cover housing, utilities, locality supplements, and PCVL supplements, as detailed in Section 5.3.

5.2 Base Living Allowance Categories

The base living allowance is comprised of the following categories:

- (a) Food – While the Volunteer is at site, to support a nutritious and varied diet with reliance on locally available food. This category includes contributions to host families for food, if applicable;
- (b) Household Supplies – Includes expendable items, such as cleaning supplies, soap and paper goods;
- (c) Communication – Includes local telephone calls, postage, internet connectivity, and reading materials;
- (d) Clothing – Includes provision for normal clothing replacement, consistent with wear and tear and climatic conditions;
- (e) Local Transportation – Includes travel costs to and from work and home. It does not include travel for medical or PC administrative reasons, which are paid through a travel allowance or reimbursed separately;
- (f) Personal Sundries – Includes expenses for personal items such as toiletries, etc.; and
- (g) Discretionary Items – Includes expenses for moderately priced local restaurants, recreation, entertainment, and incidentals.

5.3 Supplemental Living Allowance Categories

The Supplemental Living Allowances include:

- (a) Housing – Only if the host government has not provided housing to the Volunteer. The housing should be consistent with local conditions and the housing of the people served;
- (b) Utilities – Only if utilities are not provided by the host government or included in the house rent. Utilities include water, gas, kerosene, coal, electricity, etc. as available at the Volunteer's site;
- (c) Locality Supplement – Supplements the base living allowance for any regional cost differences, as determined through the Living Allowance Survey;
- (d) PCVL Supplement – Supplement covers additional expenses that a Volunteer Leader may incur, such as telephone services or supplies.

5.4 Special Living Allowances

- (a) Guard Service. The Peace Corps does not normally encourage the use of, or pay the cost of, guard services for Volunteer residences or property. However, when a Country Director determines, in consultation with the Regional Director, that the welfare of Peace Corps Volunteers is jeopardized during periods of insurrection, terrorism, civil disorders, or high rates of crime, the Country Director may authorize guard service for Volunteer residences for periods not to exceed 120 days. Requests in excess of 120 days, but not to exceed one year, may be authorized by the Regional Director.

The Country Director should also obtain the advice of the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO) before final plans are made. When such services have been authorized, the Country Director may pay a special allowance to Volunteers to cover costs of hiring guards or the Country Director may contract for such services.

- (b) Head of Household Volunteers. In order for Head of Household (HOH) Volunteers (Volunteers whose minor children live with them in-country during Peace Corps service) to serve effectively, the Country Director may authorize reimbursement for day care (*See* MS 263 Volunteer Pregnancy), or pre-elementary schooling for children. Such reimbursement may be in the form of a supplement to the living allowance or as a periodic reimbursement upon submission of receipts for authorized expenses. On a case-by-case basis, the Country Director may authorize a dependent child a living allowance supplement for Head of Household Volunteers with dependent children. The supplement shall pay only for the dependent child's dietary requirements and appropriate clothing.

5.5 Payment Schedule

The living allowance shall be paid on a monthly basis unless an exception to this policy is approved in advance by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in consultation with the Region. The exception waiver is given on an annual basis and must be renewed annually, with a new request from the Country Director.

5.6 Payment Currency

Allowances are budgeted, obligated, and paid in the currency of the host country. Any exception to this policy should be approved in advance by the CFO in consultation with the Region.

5.7 Determining Payment Amounts

Posts shall conduct surveys to justify and determine changes to the amount of the living allowance.

5.7.1 Volunteer Living Allowance Survey

At least annually, the post shall conduct a living allowance survey of the Volunteers, using the survey and analysis software issued by the Office of the CFO. This survey is intended to help the Country Director determine the most appropriate level of goods and services needed to ensure the health and effective service of Volunteers, and to determine if a different locality supplement is warranted for a particular site type or location.

The living allowance survey must collect data for each of the base living allowance categories in Section 5.2. The survey data should represent costs in a typical month and include item name, quantity, unit, and cost. The survey must capture the Volunteer's name and site. The data from the returned surveys should be aggregated and analyzed by the staff. For analysis of the survey data and determination of the appropriate allowance level for each category, the median amount determined by the survey shall be used.

5.7.2 Market Basket Survey

To verify living allowance survey submissions, a Market Basket Survey shall be conducted by staff. A market basket survey consists of selected staple items commonly appearing on the living allowance survey from each allowance category and should be priced by staff in multiple locations. If there are locality supplements being paid to some Volunteers, it is recommended that a separate market basket survey be conducted in each locality. The market basket survey is to be used as a guide to validate the cost data on the living allowance survey submissions. Large differences in prices between the market basket items and the volunteer allowance submissions should be reviewed by post during the analysis of the surveys and adjusted, if necessary.

5.7.3 Living Allowance Increases/Decreases

Increases or decreases to the base living allowance must be based on the findings of the Volunteer living allowance survey, as supported by the market basket survey, after elimination of seasonal fluctuations and other temporary influences. The Country Director may grant increases to the living allowance with concurrence of the Regional Director. A minimum Volunteer survey response rate of 75% is required to support an increase greater than 10%.

5.7.4 Effective Date and Retroactive Application

Living allowance increases become effective with the allowance payment following the approval of the Region. The Country Director may approve a single retroactive payment to cover the lapsed period from completion of the Volunteer survey to the effective date of the increase, subject to the availability of funds.

5.7.5 Temporary Increases

In an emergency situation, the Country Director, with concurrence from the Regional Director, may authorize a temporary increase in the living allowance. Temporary increases are limited to a 90-day period. An emergency situation is characterized by a rapid decline in the purchasing power of the local currency caused by such situations as a sudden devaluation of the currency by the host country or an extraordinarily rapid rise in inflation, which adversely affects the health and safety of the Volunteers. A temporary increase must be supported by a living allowance survey within 90 days after the effective date of the increase. An increase shall become permanent based on the survey results, consistent with Section 5.7.3. If no survey is conducted, the living allowance shall, at the end of the 90-day period, revert to the prior living allowance.

5.8 Partial Payment for Close of Service Volunteers

Payments for close-of-service Volunteers must be adjusted before the final payment is authorized to ensure that the living allowance payments cover only the number of days the Volunteer served. In those cases where the termination date of an early termination is known in advance, calculation of the final living allowance payment must also be adjusted to cover through the last day of service. Where information is not known in advance, the overpayment must be collected from the Volunteer or the termination e-mail must note any overpayment. (*See MS 223 Volunteer/Trainee Readjustment Allowance.*)

5.9 Overpayments

At the time of a Volunteer's departure from post, any overpayments of in-country Volunteer allowances should be collected directly from the Volunteer or recipient bank, if the Volunteer has already departed post. Overpayments should be recovered by the Collections Officer at the overseas post, who shall issue a receipt upon payment.

If direct collection is not possible, the Administrative Officer should request collection from the Volunteer's readjustment allowance, if the account remains open, by noting the request in the Volunteer's termination notification to the CFO's Office of Volunteer and PSC Financial Services. (*See MS 223 Volunteer/Trainee Readjustment Allowance for Close of Service e-mail format, and Manual Section 284 Early Termination of Service.*)

Authorization from the Volunteer must be obtained on a signed Peace Corps Volunteer Certificate of Non-Indebtedness and Accountability for Property Form No. PC-477 (*See MS 223 Attachment J*). The signed PC-477 form must be kept on file at post.

If the Volunteer is separated outside of the assigned country for medical reasons, Volunteer Services (VS) will ensure that the Volunteer signs a PC-477 and that VPS receives the signed copy.

Collections that cannot be made from the Volunteer or from the readjustment allowance will be pursued using the claims procedures set out in MS 777 Billing and Collection Procedures, Debts, and Claims.

5.10 Deductions from the Living Allowance

Debts that the Volunteer owes Peace Corps for mailing packages, phone calls, etc. may be deducted from the living allowance. Deductions should be made to the next living allowance to be ordered and the Volunteer must be notified of the reason for the deduction. If the Volunteer is at the end of his/her service and no allowance payments remain, debts should be recovered using normal billing and collection procedures at post.

5.11 Payment of Living Allowance to Volunteers on Medevac or Medical Hold

A Volunteer who is on Medevac or on Medical Hold, but who will return to service within 45 days, continues to receive a living allowance.

5.12 Payment of Living Allowances to Volunteers on Emergency Leave

A Volunteer who is on Emergency Leave will continue to receive a living allowance (excluding any extension period) during emergency leave and travel time. Payment of the living allowance during an extension depends on the type of extension authorized. Housing and utilities may continue to be paid as necessary during any period of Leave without Allowance (*See* MS 220 Leave for Volunteers and Trainees).

5.13 Discontinuation of Living Allowance during Administrative Hold

The living allowance will be discontinued during a period of administrative hold (*See* MS 220 Leave for Volunteers and Trainees).

5.14 Payment of Living Allowance to Volunteers on Special Leave

The living allowance (see section 5.2) continues to be paid during periods of special leave for Volunteers who extend in their original host countries (see MS 281.4.4). For Volunteers who take Special Leave in conjunction with an Extension in another Peace Corps country, the originating country will be responsible for the base living allowance during any period of Special Leave (see MS 282.3.9.1)

6.0 LIVING ALLOWANCE PAYMENT

Living Allowance payments shall be made via an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) or a single consolidated check to the bank(s) or postal facilities where the Volunteers have accounts or, with the concurrence of the Director of Global Accounts Payable (GAP), they may be paid directly to the Volunteer.

Consolidated payments must be accompanied by a Multi-Payment Listing (MPL) of the Volunteers to be paid, bank branches, account numbers, and the amounts to be deposited in each of their accounts.

6.1 Documentation of Consolidated Payments to a Bank or Postal Facility

The Country Director shall arrange for Volunteers to open accounts with one or more host country banks, or if banks are not accessible by the Volunteers, then an in-country postal facility and money order system may be acceptable as the only practical means for paying Volunteers.

All posts using the consolidated payment system to a bank are required to execute a Memorandum of Agreement (see Attachment D) with all banks involved. Copies of each agreement shall be retained on file at post. Each bank has its own procedures for establishing individual accounts; however, the agreement must encompass the substance of all the clauses in the Memorandum of Agreement. Country Directors should

refer all questions regarding clarification of the agreement, before it is executed, to the Director of GAP. Approval by the Director of GAP is required if the Country Director is unable to obtain bank approval of the substance of all the clauses in the Memorandum of Agreement.

Each Country Director wishing to use the postal money order system must prepare a written determination that the in-country postal facility and money order system is the only practical means for paying Volunteers their in-country allowance. A copy of the signed and dated determination document shall be filed at post, and provided to the Director of GAP.

Attachment C provides authorization from the Volunteer to the bank to accept funds on behalf of the Volunteer when payments are not issued directly to the individual Volunteer.

6.2 Changes to the Multiple Payment List

If there are reductions to consolidated payments from the time the payment request is prepared and the time the payment is received by the Post (e.g. a Volunteer has early terminated), Post should remove the Volunteer from the multiple payment listing, submit the check to the bank along with a Bill of Collection in the amount of the overage, and deposit the funds collected in the U.S. Disbursing Officer (USDO) account. The collection and deposit must be recorded in FOR Post. Posts may not use the funds from one Volunteer to cover a reimbursement or increase for another Volunteer.

6.3 Reconciliation of Amounts Paid

In order to maintain the appropriate internal control, at the end of each month in which the Volunteer's allowance payment is applied to the Volunteer's accounts, the Country Director is responsible for ensuring that the post performs a reconciliation. Posts are required to reconcile all allowance payments (processed through multiple payment listings or directly to the Volunteer) to assure that the requirements have not changed since the deposit was made to the bank or other institution. If the total payment exceeds the payment requirement due to an early resignation, administrative separation, early Close of Service, or other change in the status of a Volunteer, a collection should be made. See section 5.9 Overpayments.

6.4 Close-out of Volunteer Accounts

The Peace Corps may neither pay an obligation incurred by a Volunteer nor act as a collection agency for a bank or postal facility owed money from a former Volunteer, as noted in the Memorandum of Agreement. It is the responsibility of the Volunteer to close out his/her account with the bank or postal facility. This information, including any forms, should be made available to Volunteers by the Country Director so that the Volunteers may take the necessary action, when required.

In some situations, such as early termination for medical reasons, it is difficult for a Volunteer to close the account. In order to address situations like this, the Country Director shall confer with the financial institution(s) concerning the procedures Volunteers need to close out their accounts in case of unexpected departure.

7.0 ANNUAL LEAVE ALLOWANCES

Volunteers are provided allowances for annual leave expenses. Payment of a Volunteer's annual leave allowance will be included with the payment of the living allowance in local currency.

However, if the host country prohibits conversion of its currency, the Country Director with concurrence of the CFO may approve an alternate procedure. Under this procedure, Volunteer leave allowances would not

be paid in local currency with the living allowance, but would be paid in a single, cumulative lump sum upon notification by the Volunteer of planned vacation times. *See* the OFMH for procedures.

8.0 TRAVEL ALLOWANCES

8.1 In-Country Travel Allowance

Volunteers may receive a monthly travel allowance, to provide for in-country travel on official Peace Corps business. (*See* MS 218 Applicant, Trainee, and Volunteer Travel and Use of Hostels.)

8.2 En-Route Allowance

In addition to the daily allowances, Volunteers traveling between their country of assignment and the United States or their country of assignment and a third country, will receive an en route travel allowance to cover lodging (when necessary) and incidental expenses while in transit. Current rates for en route allowances are provided in the OFMH.

8.3 Travel Restrictions and Limitations

Peace Corps has no authority to pay expenses that Volunteers incur in their individual pursuit of future employment or educational opportunities. Thus, Peace Corps will not provide transportation, daily allowances, or travel allowances to Volunteers who travel outside their countries of assignment to take examinations relating to future employment or education. However, Volunteers who leave their sites to take examinations relating to their post-Peace Corps careers may take up to three days administrative leave. More than three days' absence must be charged to annual leave or leave without allowance. (*See* MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees)

9.0 DAILY ALLOWANCES

9.1 Daily Allowances in the United States

9.1.1 Current Rates

Current rates for allowances in the United States are provided in the OFMH.

9.1.2 Administrative or Medical Hold

A Volunteer with an unresolved medical condition who is outside the country of assignment may be placed on medical hold by the Office of Medical Services as necessary and appropriate for a maximum of 45 days.

A Volunteer whose departure for overseas duty, return to overseas duty, or transfer to another country of assignment is delayed for the convenience of the Peace Corps, may be placed on administrative hold by the Regional Director for a maximum of 60 days. (*See* MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees and MS 282 Transfers/Reassignments, Reinstatements, and Reenrollments of Trainees and Volunteers.)

Volunteers on administrative or medical hold status receive a daily allowance while in such status. Administrative or Medical hold allowances are authorized to be paid at the staging, or other authorized site, or at the home-of-record. The amount of this allowance varies, depending on whether the Volunteer is at his or her home-of-record during the hold period or has had an acceptable alternate housing arrangement authorized for the period. (*See* MS 218 Applicant, Trainee, and Volunteer Travel and Use of Hostels and MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees.)

The Regional Director may reduce the amount of allowances for any period beyond 30 days if it appears that the total allowances exceed the subsistence actually incurred by a Volunteer.

9.1.3 Emergency Leave

Volunteers on emergency leave receive an emergency daily leave allowance for a maximum of 14 days. (*See* MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees.) This allowance is usually disbursed by post from the imprest fund before the Volunteer departs for travel to the site of the emergency.

9.1.4 Special Leave Allowance

Volunteers granted home leave in conjunction with an extension of service receive a special daily leave allowance at the start of the leave. (*See* MS 220 Leave for Volunteers/Trainees and MS 281 Completion of Service Date Advancement and Extension of Service.)

9.1.5 Medevacs to the United States

Volunteers who are evacuated to the United States for medical reasons receive a daily allowance, which varies in amount depending on their destination and whether or not meals and lodging are provided at U.S. government or commercial expense, e.g., hospitals.

Volunteers receive the first three days of this allowance in U.S. currency in-country prior to departure for the United States plus a travel allowance in accordance with their itinerary. Daily allowances for periods in excess of three days are processed by OCFO, based upon the approval of the funding office.

9.1.6 Other Daily Allowances for Volunteers while in the United States

Volunteers on other approved travel receive a daily allowance while in the U.S., which varies in amount depending on whether or not meals and lodging are provided at U.S. government or commercial expense and whether the Volunteer is at the home-of-record or another site. These allowances are for:

- (a) Consultation (including medical, termination, transfer, re-enrollment, etc.); and
- (b) Authorized extraordinary purposes.

9.2 Daily Allowances in Third Countries

Volunteers traveling in a third country, including non-Peace Corps countries, for medical evacuations or for extraordinary purposes will receive daily allowances as described below:

- (a) For medical evacuations, Volunteers shall receive a daily allowance for the first seven days plus a travel allowance, prior to their departure. Once in the third country, Volunteers will receive a standard daily allowance for that period of time during which they are hospitalized. For any period of time in a third country during which they are not hospitalized, medically evacuated Volunteers will receive daily allowances applicable to extraordinary travel as described in the OFHM.
- (b) For other authorized travel, the per diem rate is established by the hosting Country Director, however, the rate shall not exceed 75% of the per diem rate allowed Peace Corps employees traveling in the same country; or 100% of the special per diem rate determined for workshops or conferences when lodging and/or meals are included.

10.0 EVACUATION ALLOWANCE

An evacuation allowance will be paid to V/Ts who are terminated within six months of their enter-on-duty date due to an evacuation or unplanned suspension of a country program.

10.1 Policy

The Peace Corps believes it should provide an allowance to Volunteers who have been terminated due to an evacuation or unplanned suspension and did not have the opportunity to accumulate a minimum amount of money through the readjustment allowance to support themselves when they return to the U.S. or while going through the re-enrollment process.

10.2 Amount

The amount paid to the Volunteer is calculated by VPS, based on the number of months since the Volunteer's enter-on-duty date. Generally, it is the difference between the gross amount of readjustment allowance the Volunteer has earned and six months' readjustment allowance at the current rate. The Volunteer will receive the evacuation allowance payment either by check to his/her home-of-record or by EFT to a designated U.S. bank account within two to three weeks after the complete termination documentation is received by VPS.

10.3 Limitations

Volunteers who continue their service uninterrupted in another country (i.e., direct transfers) do not receive the evacuation allowance since they do not have transitional needs in the United States. Volunteers who have served six months or more do not qualify to receive an evacuation allowance.

11.0 EFFECTIVE DATE

The effective date is the date of issuance.