

# The Reverse Peace Corps

by Scott Beale

Ever since Sargent Shriver and Harris Wofford first traveled overseas to launch the Peace Corps, there has been an interest in the idea of volunteers from around the world serving in the United States. While the idea piloted in the early years, it stalled a few years after launch and since then generations of Peace Corps Volunteers have thought it would be a great idea to allow young leaders of the countries they served in to have a similar opportunity to serve in the U.S. This idea, sometimes called a “reverse Peace Corps” because it reverses the flow of volunteers from overseas to the U.S., has been embraced by the rapidly growing nonprofit organization, Atlas Corps. Although independent of the Peace Corps, Atlas Corps has partnered with the Peace

Corps many different ways to make it possible for leaders from overseas to serve in the United States.

Atlas Corps launched seven years ago with nonprofit professionals from overseas serving at nonprofits in Washington, D.C. These “Atlas Corps Fellows” have two to ten years of social sector experience, are proficient in English and have college degrees. They tend to be nonprofit leaders in their late 20s and early 30s. These Fellows spend 12-18 months volunteering at an organization and are enrolled in a leadership development program. Since 2006, Atlas Corps has grown to support 164 leaders from 52 different countries serving across the United States and Colombia (Atlas Corps also sends U.S. volunteers to Colombia).

Atlas Corps has partnered with some of the world’s best organizations to host



All Photos Atlas Corps

Atlas Corps Fellow Katya Garcia.

these Fellows, including Ashoka, Global Citizen Network, Grameen Foundation, Operation Smile, Special Olympics, U.N.



Atlas Corps Fellows pay a visit to Peace Corps headquarters.

## Host Country Nationals

Foundation, UNICEF, World Wildlife Fund, and many more. Atlas Corps partners are usually nonprofit organizations, but we also partner with the private sector, such as McKinsey & Co., and the government, such as the Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps has hosted two Atlas Corps Fellows in the Washington, D.C. headquarters: Katya Garcia from Mexico who served in the IAP (Inter-America and Pacific) Regional Office and Tom Balesesa from Uganda who served in the Africa Regional Office. Katya and Tom took their peace building experience to strengthen the work of the Peace Corps. For example, Tom had a Master's Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies and nearly eight years of peace building experience in Africa. He worked with World Vision International in Uganda and the Africa Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) in South Africa. After serving with Atlas Corps at Peace Corps for one year, he returned to Uganda to work at the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE). He is committed to showing how development and conflict resolution are linked. Tom says, "Atlas Corps changed my perspective on international development. It is not just Americans who can come and serve in Africa, but people from around the world can serve abroad." Tom says he learned a lot as an Atlas Corps Fellow to be an effective nonprofit leader. He was inspired by his fellow Atlas Corps Fellows and loved his Peace Corps colleagues. He enjoyed D.C. networking and U Street dancing, and is happy to now be back in Uganda working to improve his country and also grow his farm.

Katya Garcia was the second Atlas Corps Fellow placed at the Peace Corps. Before coming to volunteer in the U.S., Katya had started a nonprofit called Paz Es ("Peace Is" in Spanish) to use her media and marketing skills to promote a culture of peace in conflict ridden northern Mexico. Katya helped the Peace Corps strengthen their training materials for PCVs in Latin America



Atlas Corps Fellows Katya and Tom.

and is now bringing the new social media skills she learned as an Atlas Corps Fellow to a Mexican company that helps organizations improve their communications. Katya says "Atlas Corps changed my life by introducing me to inspiring nonprofit leaders from all over the world and showing me how I can make change on a global scale. The opportunity to serve at the Peace Corps was incredible and I am proud of the work I did to help strengthen training in the IAP region."

In addition to hosting Atlas Corps Fellows, the Peace Corps community has nominated many candidates. Peace Corps Volunteers encourage host country nationals who fit our criteria (two to ten years of experience, college degree, English proficiency) to apply to be Atlas Corps Fellows ([apply.atlascorps.org](http://apply.atlascorps.org)). In fact, one Atlas Corps Fellow from Armenia, Zhirayr Edilyan, worked with the Peace Corps in Armenia before becoming an Atlas Corps Fellow. Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) have also introduced host organizations and funders to Atlas Corps, for example John Hecklinger's (Central African Republic 1995-96) organization, GlobalGiving, has taken Fellows from India and Japan. Susan Megy (Bulgaria 2002-04) helped secure the first major foundation funding for Atlas Corps when she was at Humanity United. Atlas Corps has hired RPCVs including Erin Lawless (Uganda 2005-07) who recently left Atlas Corps to work in Peace Corps headquarters, and Emily Flanagan (Bangladesh 2005-06) who currently works at Atlas Corps. Finally, we are very proud that members

of the Peace Corps community, including Harris Wofford and Ester Benjamin have served as senior advisors and individual donors to Atlas Corps, helping guide and support our growth.

When former Director Aaron Williams came and spoke to the Atlas Corps Fellows he remarked at the diversity of our Fellows. Egyptian activists who had protested in Tahrir square were promoting citizenship with John Bridgeland at Civic Enterprises, a doctor from Sudan was working on women's health at Susan G. Komen, a Korean youth activist was promoting volunteerism at Service for Peace, and a Spanish marketing professional serving at Habitat for Humanity in Atlanta. This is the future of development. Not just a diverse room, but also an inclusive room where people of all countries have the opportunity to serve abroad just like Americans have had for 50-plus years.

At Atlas Corps we are proud of what we have been able to accomplish in a few short years, and we are particularly proud of our close relationship with Peace Corps and RPCVs. To learn more about how you can get involved check out [atlascorps.org](http://atlascorps.org) or email [peacecorps@atlascorps.org](mailto:peacecorps@atlascorps.org) to find out how you can help leaders from around the world have a similar, life-changing experience that you had when you served abroad.

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*Scott Beale is the Founder and CEO of Atlas Corps. The Washington Post called Scott "The Nonprofit Entrepreneur" for his work creating a sustainable, multilateral, service corps that has been profiled by the Brookings Institution as a "best practice" in international exchange. Prior to Atlas Corps he served with the U.S. Department of State in New Delhi helping coordinate the U.S. Government's efforts to fight human trafficking in India. He also worked at Ashoka's Youth Venture, in the White House, and with OSCE organizing elections in Bosnia. He is the author of Millennium Manifesto: A Youth Activist Handbook. He has his B.A. from Georgetown University and his MPA from the University of Delaware.*