



Northern California  
**PEACE CORPS**  
ASSOCIATION



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# Letter from the Board President

# Treasurer's Report

Dear NorCal Peace Corps Community,



Ashley (left) with Board member Andrea Crider at the 2023 SF Pride Parade

As we wrap up 2024 and I finish my second and final year as NorCalPCA President, I'm thrilled to report we had another wonderful year of RPCV programs, events, and connections. Nearly five years after the Covid pandemic, NorCalPCA is thriving and it's been great to see the hard work of our members pay off in big ways.

One highlight of 2024 was filling several vacant Board positions and having representatives in all five NorCal regions once again. We now have regular monthly trivia nights in both Redwood City and Petaluma in addition to happy hours, hikes, art gallery visits, and more in Monterey/Santa Cruz, San Francisco, and East Bay. We also marched in this year's SF Pride Parade and Monterey 4th of July Parade, organized several beach cleanups and habitat restoration

projects, restarted our Send Off Parties for departing volunteers in partnership with our local Peace Corps office, camped in state and national parks, and continued our important work in advocacy and grants (make sure to read more about our newest grantees and advocacy work in this newsletter!). Finally, our 2 biggest events of the year brought together hundreds of RPCVs from around the Bay Area: our Annual General Meeting in San Francisco and Annual Picnic in Santa Cruz. These events would not have been possible without massive amounts of help and planning behind the scenes, so thank you to everyone involved on these respective committees.

In order to continue all of these fantastic activities into 2025 and beyond, we need your support! Please consider joining or renewing your membership at the Appreciator, Supporter, or Volunt'Hero level, or making a donation to our general fund or grants program before the end of the year if you are able. You can find ways to join our community or make a donation on our website at [www.norcalpca.org](http://www.norcalpca.org).

We also encourage you to support NorCalPCA by joining us at an event near you (visit [norcalpca.org/events](http://norcalpca.org/events) for a full list), sharing your ideas, and/or joining the Board. Nominations for the Board open in January, so we encourage you to throw your name into the ring! We are especially in need of someone to take over as Chair of our Grants Committee, which is an extremely fun and rewarding position. Reach out to us at [elections@norcalpca](mailto:elections@norcalpca) for more info!

Finally, be sure to mark your calendars for our 2025 Annual General Meeting & NorCal RPCV Reunion, which will take place on **Saturday, March 8, 2025** at the Sports Basement Presidio community room (610 Old Mason St. in SF). We'll have delicious international food, NorCalPCA updates, guest speakers, and more. We hope to see you there!

Thank you to everyone for your generosity and support during my tenure as President, and to our amazing Board members who will be rolling off in 2025. NorCalPCA is one of the largest RPCV chapters in the country and run entirely by volunteers, so please join me in showing them some love and gratitude!

Thank you again for being part of our NorCalPCA community! Please take some time to read through this annual newsletter to learn more about what our organization and members have been up to.

Wishing you a very happy holiday season and new year,

Ashley Burke  
NorCalPCA Board President  
Niger 2010-2011; Rwanda 2011-2012

## 2024 LEADERSHIP NorCalPCA Board of Directors

**Executive Committee**  
Ashley Burke, President  
Brady Fuller, Vice President/Treasurer  
Kristina Cabrera, Secretary

**At Large**  
Andrea Crider  
Kaitlyn Mansoorieh  
Frank Price (Advocacy Chair)  
Vida Tehrani

**Santa Cruz/Monterey**  
John Bost  
Toni Thomas

**San Francisco**  
Lauren Cono  
Brittany McLaren

**East Bay**  
Christine Ambegia  
Andrew Stober

**North Bay**  
Sierra Anderson

**South Bay/Peninsula**  
Diana Garcia  
Roy Kornbluh

**Extraordinary Committee Chairs**  
Nancy Beam, Grants Committee Chair  
Pete Johnson, Historian/Membership Chair



## NORCALPCA VALUES STATEMENT

The Northern California Peace Corps Association is committed to bettering our communities at home and abroad. Our actions are driven by communication, active listening, transparency, and collaboration. We recognize that RPCVs have all had varying experiences and that we all bring different ideas, goals, opinions, values, and purposes to our actions. We are honest and curious with open hearts and minds. We believe in progress and embrace opportunities for growth. Our diversity unites us and helps us bring about meaningful change.

Earlier this year, NorCalPCA Vice President Brady Fuller stepped into the role of interim Treasurer until our next elections in March 2025. We would like to thank Toni Gale for her service as Treasurer over the last several years! Since that transition, we have been hard at work setting up a new system of accounting that matches the needs of our volunteer-run Board and members, and you can look forward to more robust financial reporting in the year ahead as we get the necessary processes and procedures in place. If you had any issues making a donation or receiving an acknowledgement this year, please accept our sincere apologies as we migrated to a variety of new systems organization-wide in 2024. Onward and upward!

We are happy to report that your Northern California Peace Corps Association has continued to perform well financially thanks in part to the strategic investments of past Boards, financial surpluses from previous years, and the generous support of our membership. Our funds sit in two accounts. Our Beneficial bank account, used for operating expenses and grants, has a current total of \$49,814. Our Fidelity investment account, used for long-term projects and to ensure the health and long-term sustainability of NorCalPCA, now totals \$65,020. Funding of approved grants this year was \$19,346.20 - be sure to read more about our grantees in this newsletter!

We look forward to serving you, our growing community, and value your continued financial support!

## 2023-2024 Donors

*These members and friends generously donated to NorCalPCA during the last fiscal year (October 1, 2023-September 30, 2024). Their generosity supports all Northern California RPCVs and the communities we continue to serve. Please join us in thanking them!*

*Note: As you may know, the National Peace Corps Association, of which we are an affiliate, migrated all affiliate websites and databases to a new system earlier this year. This process was a challenge to say the least, so please 1) accept our apologies if you made a donation and do not see your name listed below, and 2) notify us immediately at [help@norcalpca.org](mailto:help@norcalpca.org) so we can correct the error. Thank you for your patience and understanding!*

Garth Anderson	Genevieve Evenhouse	David H. Krevor	Erik Scheller
John Alexander	Charisse Feldman	Clay LaPoint	Kathryn Schergo
Patricia Anderson	Audrey Fielding	Jennifer Larkin	Jill C. Schiager
Peter C. Anderson	Lynn Foden	Dr. Evelyn M. LaTorre	Daniel Schier
Sierra Anderson	Tim Frahme	Vincent Anthony Lauter Jr.	James M. Schutz
Sharon Armstrong	Brady Fuller	Tai H. Le	Karen Scott
Laurence Bahr	MaryAnn Girard	Karen Littell	Mike Smith
Aileen Barandas	Martha Brown Gould	Brianna Maltez	Andrew Stober
Marikay Batina	Phyllis Gunther	Cal Mann	Stevin J. Strickland
Adrienne L. Borgia	Gloria J. Haars	Kaitlyn Mansoorieh	Christine Su
Jaelyn T. Bos	Mary Elaine Hegland	Robert McKoon	Peter A. Szydlowski
John & Jenny Bost	Russell Hensley	Brittany McLaren	J Thibault
Dirk Bouma	Thinh M. Hoang	Lisa McNally	John C. Thoelecke
Noah Brod	Maryanne Hoirup-Bacolod	Elaine Neufeldt	Suzanne Thomas
Amy Brownell	Diana Hsieh	Nancy Paul	Mark R. Trabing
Bruce Buchholz	Marilyn Hyde	Christa Peacock	Niko Tsikoudis
Kathleen Campbell	Larry Hyde	Isaac Pearlman	Michele P. Tsuchiya
Sue Castle	Pete Johnson	Emily Perales	Paul Vega
Charles (Skip) Clemens	Catherine Jordan	Piper Perreault	Stephanie Vickers
Todd Cowgill	Barbara Jue	Marie Phipps	Ryan Vieira
Katherine Doar	Susan W. Kanold	Peter Pike	Thea Vierling
Gary B. Dobbas	Larry & Suzanne Kaye	Gordon Radley	Richard Villanueva
Doris D. Dodge	Geraldine G. Keh	Kathryn Rato	Ashley Welborn
D Dorrie	Clinton & Madeleine Kellner	Susan Reep	Camille Whitney
Clifford Duong	Pedro Khoury-Diaz	Ken Roberson	Jennifer Woltz
Christine Emberley	Michael Kiernan	Jessica Beth Romm	William Worthington
Stephanie Engelsen	Richard H. King	Peter Ross	Heather Zunguze
Janet Espinosa	Roy Kornbluh	Timothy Sandoe	

# National Peace Corps Park in Washington D.C.

*Based on feedback from our membership and Board, we approved a \$5,000 donation to the Peace Corps Foundation in 2024 in support of a Peace Corps Park on the National Mall in Washington DC. We are excited to support this initiative dedicated to inspiring visitors to make a better world and promote peace. Below is a letter of thanks and more info from local RPCV, former Congressman, Peace Corps Foundation Director, and NorCalPCA friend, Sam Farr.*

Dear NorCal RPCVs, Former PCV Staff, and Friends of the Peace Corps,

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to NorCal for its leadership in supporting the creation of the [Peace Corps Park](#), a commemorative work on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. NorCal's generous seed donation of \$5,000 is a powerful start and should inspire other National Peace Corps Association affiliates to join this important cause. However, our collective impact will be even greater if each of us shows up in force to back this campaign.

I am also grateful to NorCalPCA Board member John Bost for spearheading our efforts to broaden support. To equip him with the resources needed to effectively persuade other affiliates, your donations are crucial. Please consider [making a donation now](#). Also, share your personal reasons for supporting this project with John at [jbpcv@gmail.com](mailto:jbpcv@gmail.com). Remember, while the total amount is important, the number of individual donors who participate will significantly amplify our support.

Peace Corps Foundation has been leading the effort on this initiative. It has successfully secured a prime location and an exciting design from the National Park Service, but it is now our time as a community to do our part. The responsibility for funding construction falls to all RPCV, former staff, and our friends. It is essential for us to take ownership and demonstrate our commitment to the Peace Corps' enduring legacy.

In my years of advocating before the House Appropriations Committee, which oversees all foreign aid—including Peace Corps—I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of our Volunteers. The Peace Corps is uniquely positioned to reach the world's most underserved areas and make a lasting difference. This commemorative park honoring the Peace Corps, and all those who have served, will stand as a testament to that impact.

Thank you for your support in making this vision a reality.

Sam Farr, PCV Colombia 1964-66

House of Representatives 1993-2017

Director, Peace Corps Foundation, 2022-present



The southwest to northeast cross section illustrates the slope from north to south.

# Regional Updates

## North Bay

North Bay RPCVs have engaged in a flurry of social activities this year. Monthly happy hours at Pond Farm Brewery in Marin County continue to provide consistent opportunities to enjoy our local RPCV community over good drinks and food. Potlucks in Sonoma County in both the spring and fall created spaces for shared conversation over delicious food and gorgeous views, and Aquas Cafe in Petaluma graciously opened its doors once again for RPCV Community Dinners in March and October.

Branching out, in May a group of RPCVs partnered with the Morgan Horse Ranch in Point Reyes Station, spending a Saturday extending their fence and rekindling a multi-decade partnership. Monthly trivia nights in Petaluma began in August, with the group continuing to chase the first month's podium place, flexing our obscure knowledge muscles!

## San Francisco

SF NorCal members have had an action-packed year connecting at delicious international restaurants, out in nature, and throughout our beautiful city. Keeping with the spirit of previous years, we have made it a priority to explore the various neighborhoods around the city and highlight what makes them each so unique. A few favorites from this past year included movie nights at SF's Sundown Cinema (Bullitt and Nightmare Before Christmas), marching in the SF Pride Parade, Shakespeare in the Park, a Thundercat concert in Golden Gate Park, and a night at the SF Opera.

We hope you will join us at an upcoming SF event soon, and if you have any ideas or suggestions, please let us know! Our fab SF rep Brittany McLaren will be taking over as NorCalPCA President in 2025, so we encourage any SF-based RPCVs to nominate themselves for the vacant SF rep seat and help us plan another fun year of adventures!

## Santa Cruz/Monterey

We closed out last year's (and this year's!) holiday season with a well-attended Holiday Cheer Potluck at Nalini Elkin's home in Carmel Valley, where guests enjoyed food, drinks, and conversation, capped off by a lively white elephant gift exchange. We were delighted that former Congressman and Peace Corps volunteer Sam Farr was able to join. In the fall, we also enjoyed a lovely potluck gathering at the home of Suzie Russin and her husband Linc at their home in Santa Cruz.

Other 2024 highlights included a successful hike in Pinnacles National Park led by Peter Szydowski, a former Peace Corps staff member who later served as a park ranger there; a welcome party for new MIIS RPCVs and beach cleanup at Cannery Row in partnership with the Middlebury Institute of International Studies' (MIIS) Peace Corps Club; hikes at Wilder Ranch and Palo Corona Park; a Zoom happy hour titled "Artificial Intelligence & You"; various Third Goal activities sharing our Peace Corps experiences with local groups; and our second year marching in the Monterey 4th of July Parade. We were also grateful to have hosted NorCalPCA's Annual Summer Picnic in our region at Seacliff State Park in Aptos, with almost 85 in attendance!

Looking ahead to 2025, we are proud of the vibrant community we've built through shared experiences and service and look forward to building on these successes and introducing new events in the coming year. Thanks to everyone who made these gatherings memorable!

## East Bay

In January we hosted another day of service in honor of MLK Day at the Alameda County Community Food Bank, and in November we had a group come out for a beach cleanup in beautiful Alameda. As RPCVs we are no strangers to service, and we are looking forward to more volunteer events in the upcoming year! In addition, we had an awesome camping trip in Mt. Diablo State Park as well as a gorgeous day of wine tasting and stand-up comedy in Livermore in June. As if all that wasn't enough, East Bay RPCVs came out for a variety of other fun meet-ups including hikes, happy hours, and art shows. Hope to see you at an event soon!

## South Bay Peninsula

This year we were thrilled to welcome a new South Bay rep to the Board (Roy Kormbluh, Ecuador 1991-94), who instituted a monthly trivia hangout on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at Freewheel Brewing in Redwood City. Whether you're a trivia buff or just enjoy good company (or both!), we encourage you to come join us. In the South Bay we also had the pleasure of gathering for an amazing Friendsgiving celebration at the home of NorCalPCA members Paul R. and Susan S. (Kazakhstan 2009-11), and to swap stories at several happy hour events at Ludwig's in Mountain View.

Follow us on social media @norcalpca, check out our events calendar at [norcalpca.org/events](https://norcalpca.org/events), and/or email us at [board@norcalpca.org](mailto:board@norcalpca.org) if you are interested in attending or hosting NorCalPCA events in your area!

# Meet Our 2024 Grant Recipients

The NorCalPCA Grants Committee received 5 requests for funding this year. Following intense discussion, the committee and the Board voted to fund all five for a total of \$19,346.20. Read more about these fantastic projects below, and special thanks to everyone who generously donated to our grants program this year!

**Guatemala:** \$3600 to Plenty International, a non-profit founded in 1974, on behalf of the women's group Grupo de Soya Santa Maria (GSSM). GSSM produces high protein cookies and fresh soy milk for distribution to children living near the landfill in Guatemala City. This is one of the largest waste dumps in Central America, where a few thousand people, many of them Maya, earn an average of \$2-5.00US/day for their long, difficult, and dangerous work. Plenty International is committed to maintaining this program as they have for the last 14 years. However, deaths and attrition due to the COVID pandemic have led to a need for training additional staff. NorCal's contribution will allow the project to maintain the monthly contribution of \$900 to the program for 4 months, allowing Plenty to focus program resources on building staff capacity for increased production to enable local retail sales. The project was recommended by NorCal member Celia Bosworth.

**Lesotho:** \$2549.20 to African Library Project to cover the cost of their 2025 teacher-librarian training to support up to 60 community teachers in improving literacy outcomes and library sustainability. Funds from NorCal will pay for three regional teacher-librarian trainings in the Central, North, and South regions of the country between January and March 2025 as part of the distribution of new books that will be delivered to Lesotho at the end of 2024. This project was recommended by NorCal member Beth Spencer.

**Mali:** \$5,000 to Mali Kalanso, a nonprofit that supports a rural community school which hosts approximately 425 students annually from preschool through 9th grade. This education project was co-founded by two RPCVs who began raising funds for the project in 2010. The school currently has 6 primary school classrooms and 3 middle school classrooms. Despite the current political and economic challenges in Mali, the school has been able to maintain high student academic achievement. Mali Kalanso is requesting NorCal grant funding for replacement desks for their students. Although UNICEF donated desks when the school opened 14 years ago, the desks are currently unusable and need replacement. Previously, NorCal has funded desks for Mali Kalanso's middle school, which were built by local blacksmiths using higher quality local products. Each desk costs \$157, and overall transport costs for these desks would be \$783.

**Sierra Leone:** \$5497 to the Organization for Peace, Reconciliation, and Development Sierra Leone (OPRDSL), a local NGO, to establish a beekeeping project in the Mamaka Village of the Tonkolili District. OPRDSL has worked in the area since 1999. In 2022, the organization trained 45 farmers (2/3 women) as a three-year training program wherein farmers learned—and practiced—the skills necessary to operate a sustainable family farm business, which can provide a year-round nutritious food supply for their families, and supplementary income for education, healthcare, and adequate housing. The goal was, and still is, to help these farmers transition from subsistence to modern, sustainable, family farm businesses. The program has been successful and a new cohort of farmers started training this year. NorCal's contribution will pay for the materials to build 75 hives and the equipment needed to care for the hives. This project was recommended by NorCal member John Bost.

**South Sudanese Refugee settlements in Northern Uganda:** \$2700 to South Sudan Leadership and Community Development to establish micro-economic sewing businesses for two new co-operative work groups in the two settlements. Along with funds donated by two Michigan Rotary Clubs, 20 sewing machines will be purchased and women will be provided training and access to their use. The project is expected to be self-sufficient in 2 years and enable participants to purchase their own sewing machines. This project was recommended by NorCal member Nancy Paul.

## Grant Recipient Spotlight: Berkshire Amistad

During our 2022 grant cycle, NorCalPCA gave \$2,500 to Berkshire Amistad to fund maritime shipping expenses for medical equipment such as wheelchairs, crutches, and walkers from the U.S. to Honduras. This non-profit organization, headed by RPCVs Edward O'Toole (Honduras) and Kelley Feltmate O'Toole (Kenya), uses shipping containers that come to the U.S. filled with bananas to ship used medical equipment back to Honduras. With our assistance, 85 wheelchairs, 300 pairs of crutches, and 50 walkers were distributed to hundreds of patients and clinics.

Please visit [norcalpca.org/grants](https://norcalpca.org/grants) for more information on our grantees, how to nominate an organization for a grant, and how to get involved with the grants committee.



# 2024 Advocacy Report

By Frank Price, NorCalPCA Advocacy Chair



2024 was a year filled with challenges for the Advocacy Team. Looking ahead, 2025 will even be more of a challenge, but a meaningful and important one! The two major areas of emphasis are budget and reissuing The Peace Corps Reauthorization Act. Both require Congressional support to move forward, and both are needed for the continued success of the Peace Corps.

Looking back at Day on the Hill in early March, I was most fortunate to be among the more than 100 RPCVs from around the nation who rallied to be a part of the training and teams that visited just about every Congressional office to deliver important messages around these two areas of emphasis. For me, being in the office of Representative John Garamendi (D-CA 8th District and the last RPCV in Congress!) and

hearing his wisdom was a big highlight. Another highlight is the camaraderie that has been growing among those I see every year. I look forward to next year's Day on the Hill and Peace Corps Connect, which will be held from July 18-21, 2025. This is a great time to get involved and I encourage any RPCVs who are interested to attend!

In addition to Day on the Hill, many phone calls were made and postcards and emails sent by Northern California RPCVs. We also organized several successful virtual meetings with the staff of our local Senators, Feinstein, Butler, and Padilla.

I want to encourage each of us to begin 2025 with the goal of writing and calling our elected Congressional leaders. Now more than ever, our energy, efforts, and enthusiasm are needed. Please reach out to me at [advocacy@norcalpca.org](mailto:advocacy@norcalpca.org) with any thoughts or ideas!

## Help us do more in 2025! Become a member or make a donation to support our mission.

Membership is open to ALL, and we offer several ways that members can support NorCalPCA.

*NorCalPCA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Membership dues and other contributions are tax deductible to the extent of the law.*

**FREE!** NorCalPCA Basic Membership

**\$20** NorCalPCA Appreciator Membership

**\$50** NorCalPCA Supporter Membership

**\$100** NorCalPCA Volunt'Hero Membership

Or give in any amount to our General Fund or Grants Fund!

Register online at  
[www.NorCalPCA.org/join](http://www.NorCalPCA.org/join)



You can also make out a check payable to NorCalPCA and mail it to:

NorCalPCA

P.O. Box 2547

San Francisco, CA 94126