BOSTON AREA RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

ANNUAL REPORT 2023
Dear BARPCV Community,

With 2024 upon us, I find myself once again inspired by the strength of our community of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers from around the Boston Area. Though membership is still lower than it was before the Peace Corps Volunteer evacuation in 2020, it is higher than it was ten years ago. Several of our members made generous donations over the course of the year, which enabled the board to fund two international grants, organize eight community service activities, and host multiple social gatherings for our community.

In 2023, many of you showed up for social events or to volunteer across Greater Boston. Over 120 of you volunteered with us for seven different partner organizations, including at the Boston Marathon Hydration Station in April. A big thank you to everyone who volunteered this year to make the Boston community a better place. Thank you for all that you give and all that you do.

It has been a great honor and pleasure to serve the Boston Area RPCV Community as a board member for eight years and Board President for four years. After much deliberation, I have decided that this will be my final year as a member of the BARPCV Board. Though it is bittersweet, I know it is time for a new generation of RPCVs to take the lead with this amazing group. I look forward to seeing what changes are in store in the coming years.

I’ll see you all at a BARPCV gathering soon.

Yours in Service,

Elise Simons
BARPCV President 2019 - 2024
RPCV Zambia 2010 - 2013
Boston Area Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Inc. (BARPCV) is a non-profit, membership-based organization, founded by Carol Ball, Marjorie Harrison, and Nancy Tiedeman in 1978, that serves as a support network for newly returned & prospective volunteers, and for those who have served or worked for the US Peace Corps. BARPCV also serves as an educational resource by connecting local communities with the unique experiences of members who gained important insight from living and working abroad. As BARPCV members, we share our skills and knowledge gained through Peace Corps life and professional experiences with our friends, families, and the greater community, in hopes of promoting a better understanding of each other and the world.
BARPCV BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elise Simons  
President

Brian McBride  
Community Service/  
Vice President

Haotian Liyou  
Treasurer

Johanna Meyer  
Website/Secretary

Kelsey Barringham  
TGIF

Cullen Heater  
Communications

Abe Kielar  
Social Media

Matt Lange  
Grants

Phoebe Lansing-Lee  
Photos

Andrew Mello  
Events

John Moriarty  
Sports
2023 OUTGOING CHAIRS

We thank the following board members, who stepped down from the BARPCV Board of Directors during 2023, for their service to the organization:

Rebecca Madden-Sturges
Photos

Erin Meade
Secretary

Matt Walsh
Treasurer

Sara Pipe-Mazo
Vice President

For full BARPCV Board Information, please visit: https://www.barpcv.org/cpages/board-of-directors
COMMUNICATIONS

In 2023, BARPCV sent a total of 69 emails to an average of 1240 people. We are missing email addresses for 682 of the 2283 contacts in the BARPCV database. Another 85 contacts are unsubscribed from our email list, and approximately 276 were dropped or bounced by the server before reaching the intended recipient, likely due to an issue with their email address or a spam blocker.

On average, 615 recipients opened emails from BARPCV and about 20 clicked on the link in the email. That gives BARPCV emails an average open rate of 49.9%, an average click rate (clicks/delivered) of 1.62%, and an average click through rate (clicks/opens) of 3.24%.

These numbers compare favorably with the industry averages for non-profit membership organizations which have an open rate of 42.27%, click rate of 1.86% and a click-through rate of 3.29%. (Source: Constant Contact, NeonOne)

Keep in mind: some emails were purely informational and did not direct recipients to click a link. Also, some emails were sent to targeted segments of 160 or so, which will reflect in the average. I have excluded outliers where appropriate.

Steps for Improvement:

In order to improve our reach, we should clean up our database, eliminating defunct email addresses and trying to find contact information for the 682 members of our database whose email addresses are missing. We should also dig deeper into why emails are dropping and try to improve those numbers. Perhaps at upcoming events we should ask new members to provide their email addresses, and existing members to make sure that information is up to date and accurate.

Additionally, we can analyze trends in the emails from the previous year and see what has been successful and what has been less successful. A consistent approach to email subject lines, format, and content should improve and maintain engagement.

Furthermore, the BARPCV board should decide on certain metrics of success (number of members, membership dues, event attendance, grant applications, etc.) so that we can target our communications strategy to achieve those goals.
2023 was a productive year for BARPCV community service. We held 8 service events with 7 partner organizations and engaged about 120 volunteers. Through these activities, we connected RPCVs through fun events, promoted a positive image of the Peace Corps, and continued to help neighbors in need.

A brief recap of this year’s service events:

**February**
- Mission of Deeds: furniture and home supplies for the needy

**April**
- The Boston Marathon - hydration Station at mile 23
- Arlington Reservoir Habitat Garden

**May**
- Project RESPOND: domestic violence prevention and support
- Greater Boston Food Bank: hunger prevention

**August**
- Prison Books: reading for the incarcerated
- Greater Boston Food Bank: hunger prevention

**September**
- Community Servings: nutritious meals for the critically ill

**October**
- Cradles to Crayons: necessities for kids

We continue to learn what events are most attractive to RPCVs. As always, the Boston Marathon is by far our most popular event with 80 volunteers—this year was a big success and great fun, despite the New England weather. Other monthly events draw 5 to 10 volunteers. We get most volunteers on weekend events, although that excludes some partners who are only open on weekdays. Publicizing our events well in advance allows volunteers to make plans. Our new table top display has helped volunteers find us at the site and publicizes the Peace Corps in a positive way. Finally, we’ve added volunteer locations outside of Boston proper (Quincy and Reading for example) and this has helped reach more people.

Going forward, we’ll try a combination of a Service event, followed by a TGIF this winter. The experimentation continues!
COMMUNITY GRANTS

As part of our mission of supporting current and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, we fund community grants twice a year, in the spring and fall, with annual application due dates of April 15 and October 15. We strive to increase participation in our local and global communities and to address needs and opportunities consistent with our members’ values.

Grants of up to 500 USD are available to all members of BARPCV. Grants may fund local Boston-Area projects or international projects in which BARPCV members are involved. Grants may fund total project costs, start-up project costs, or the expansion or replication of an existing successful project.

Spring Grant Cycle

Two grants were awarded during the Spring of 2023:

Sisian Development Initiatives (Sisian, Armenia)— A Spring 2023 grant was awarded to Anastasia Bannikova, an RPCV who served in Armenia, Ukraine, and Ghana. On behalf of Sisian Development Initiatives in Armenia, the award will promote an anti-littering campaign around the Shaki waterfall.

Atse Fasil Primary School (Azezo, Ethiopia)— RPCV Lynne Koester was awarded a Spring 2023 grant on behalf of the Atse Fasil Primary School in Ethiopia. The award provided educational materials for the school’s special needs classroom to support students with hearing and visual impairment. (Photos included)

Fall Grant Cycle

BARPCV did not receive any applications for the Fall 2023 grant cycle. As such, the Board agreed to apply funds dedicated for that cycle to an additional award in 2024.
PEACE CORPS WEEK

Peace Corps week started off with a Potluck Event at Elevation Parish in Newtonville! RPCVS and their families were invited to cook their favorite meals (from their country of service and/or in general), and come together for an enjoyable afternoon of good food and fellowship.

Thank you to Elevation Parish, and to all who were able to come and be a part of this wonderful event!

RESTAURANT NIGHT

BARPCV hosted four restaurant nights across the Greater Boston Area in 2023:

March kicked off with a delightful feast at Jana Bar and Grill in Watertown, treating our taste buds to the flavors of Georgian cuisine. The ambiance was enlivened with good music and the company was nothing short of outstanding.

In April, we ventured to Machu Picchu in Somerville for an evening of vibrant Peruvian fare and captivating melodies.

June brought us together on the terrace at Cesaria Cape Verdean Restaurant in Dorchester, where an idyllic evening unfolded with a gentle breeze, refreshing cocktails, delectable dishes, soulful music, and incredible camaraderie.

And finally, in August we indulged in Chinese delicacies at Jumbo Seafood, just steps away from the Chinatown Gate, before immersing ourselves in the thrilling Kung Fu film festival.
This year we were able to host 10 TGIFs, the BARPCV name for our monthly informal afterwork “Happy Hour” gathering and meet & greet for RPCVs from the Greater Boston Area. Traditionally, TGIFs have been the last Friday of the month from 6pm to 9pm at a Brewery or bar, and RPCVs are welcome to come and go during that time frame. The location changes each month, to accommodate RPCVs interested in attending the events who live in different parts of the Boston area. Nearby transit options, parking access, and options for purchasing food are considered when selecting each month’s location. We were able to host this year in Cambridge, Fenway, South Boston, Medford, Brighton, Downtown Boston, Everett, and Seaport.

Despite the last minute switch of venues due to rain, RPCVs were able to enjoy an evening at the Sam Adams Taproom at Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Downtown Boston (August 2023)

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Future Plans

Overall, feedback has been positive regarding the TGIF experience and we look forward to trying out some new ideas next year, such as combining Community Service projects with a TGIF-style social gathering. As the hybrid work environment continues to change post COVID, we are considering bringing our happy hour gathering to different nights of the week. We realize shifts in working norms are bringing fewer RPCVs into Boston on Fridays, which can be a deterrent or barrier for some to attend this event.
SPORTS

In 2023, BARPCV hosted a number of sporting events. In February, five people went on a hike in the Blue Hills. It was a perfect winter day for a hike. It wasn’t cold and the sun was shining brightly. We hiked up to the tower where we had a beautiful view of Boston and the surrounding area.

In April, there was a different kind of activity, a bike ride. Four people braved the cold day to ride from Watertown to Boston. On the way back we rode into Harvard Square, and we walked our bikes into Harvard Yard for a quick tour. We all enjoyed the day, even though it was cold.

In May, the softball season began. We again were one of four teams who played on Monday nights at Hoyt Field in Cambridge. We had some new players join the team this year. We were always very competitive, even though we didn’t win many games. Our biggest win was when we beat a team by the score of 23-19. We played our best game of the whole season that night. In the playoffs we played the number one seeded team. We played them tough, but they scored a lot of runs to beat us. It was a long season that extended into October due to some rainouts. The team is looking forward to the 2024 season.

In the fall, there were two other events, one inside and one outside. On a pouring rainy Saturday night in October, six of us went to Boston to enjoy a fun evening of playing mini golf. It wasn’t a typical mini golf setting. Each hole had a unique set up. For instance, one hole had mini drums on it. After the resounding game of mini golf, we had a wonderful dinner where we talked about our Peace Corps experiences. By the time we left Putt Shack the heavy rain had stopped, so the rides back home were better.

To finish the 2023 sporting events, eight of us went on a beautiful walk around the Arnold Arboretum on a Saturday afternoon early in November. Again, it was a perfect day for a walk. We walked a few miles to a spot that had a gorgeous view of Boston. It was so clear that we were able to see the Blue Hills. What a fitting end to the 2023 sporting activities; to be at a beautiful site with a view of the site of the first activity, the hike in the Blue Hills.
SOCIAL MEDIA

Since coming on as the new social media chair in January 2023, it’s been great to contribute to the work of the BARPCV board through ongoing social media outreach. Efforts this year focused on finding new ways to help local members connect with each other at a variety of events. In combination with BARPCV emails, our Instagram and Facebook posts and stories provide additional info, along with the unique feature of real time updates and the ability to interact with our community in the comments.

This year was full of opportunities to participate in volunteering, restaurant nights, sports, outings, TGIF meetups, our annual photo contest, community grants, and our new members party. Big thanks to everyone who organized events for us to publicize, and also to those who took photos! One of the things we tried to do more this year was feature group photos from all our events – so here are a few of our favorites from 2023:

April - Boston Marathon Mile 23 Water Station
June TGIF at Notch in Brighton
The BARPCV softball team

Service day at Greater Boston Food Bank
New members party
Volunteering at Cradles to Crayons

Looking ahead to 2024, the plan is to continue advertising events and posting follow up pictures. We’d also like to experiment with some new ideas such as volunteer spotlights— keep an eye out for more updates there. We’re also open to ideas and suggestions for how we can better reach our members, so don’t hesitate to reach out to us!
PHOTO CONTEST

Congratulations to Chelsea Gaylord, this year’s contest winner!

In 2023, ten BARPCV members shared memories of their years of service by submitting 27 photos for our consideration. Years of service spanned from 1969 through 2020 and covered five continents. The board winnowed the field down to ten finalists. Those beautiful pictures were displayed during the month of December at Simon’s Coffee Shop in Cambridge for all to see and admire. Voting was online with 140 votes submitted. BARPCV general membership was sent a link to the contest but voting was also open to Simon’s customers. Prizes: $100 for first place, $50 for second place. Both winning photos were taken by Chelsea in Uganda 2015 - 2017.

First place: Bubbles

Runner Up: Leader
# MEMBERSHIP REPORT

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<th>Plan Name</th>
<th>Members at Start of Year</th>
<th>New Members</th>
<th>Membership Renewals</th>
<th>Change in Membership</th>
<th>Members at End of Year</th>
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TREASURER’S REPORT
BARPCV ended the 2023 fiscal year with a cash equivalent balance of $15,019.22. For fiscal year 2023, BARPCV's expenses were $3,509.80, and the organization’s income was $2,842.63, leaving BARPCV with a $672.17 negative cash flow for the year. A detailed profit and loss statement has been provided in the table below.

Profit and Loss Statement
January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023

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<td>Softball</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Expenses</strong></td>
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Boston Area Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Inc. (BARPCV) is a non-profit organization founded in 1978 with approximately 400 members concentrated in Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. BARPCV seeks to connect with and support Returned Peace Corps Volunteers as well as those thinking of serving and to carry out the third goal of the Peace Corps, as stated in the 1961 Peace Corps Act: “to promote a better understanding of other people on the part of the American people.”

BARPCV is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with employer identification number 04-2716236. All charitable contributions are fully tax-deductible to the extent of the law. Proceeds support our small grants program and programming for members.

Contact us at info@barpcv.org.

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