

MS 204 Volunteer Conduct

Effective Date: July 21, 2023

Responsible Office: Safety and Security (OSS); Office of Global Operations (OGO); Office of Health Services (OHS)

Supersedes: 02/15/2023; 05/12/2022; 10/23/2020; 07/29/2020; 02/12/20; 12/01/17; 09/08/17; 02/09/17; 06/25/15; 10/31/14; 07/10/14; 08/19/11; 06/28/11; 03/18/11; 05/20/05; 11/26/03; 02/04/93; 5/04/83; MS 237, 04/30/73

Issuance Memo (11/26/2003)

Issuance Memo (05/20/2005)

Issuance Memo (06/28/2011)

Issuance Memo (08/29/2011)

Issuance Memo (07/10/2014)

Issuance Memo (10/31/2014)

Issuance Memo (06/25/2015)

Issuance Memo (02/09/2017)

Issuance Memo (09/08/2017)

Issuance Memo (12/01/2017)

Issuance Memo (02/12/2020)

Issuance Memo (07/29/2020)

Issuance Memo (10/23/2020)

Issuance Memo (05/12/2022)

Issuance Memo (02/15/2023)

Issuance Memo (07/21/2023)

Attachments

Attachment A – Options for Disciplinary Action under MS 204 *Volunteer Conduct*

Attachment B – Peace Corps Drug Free Service Agreement

Table of Contents

- 1.0 Purpose
- 2.0 Authority
- 3.0 Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers
- 4.0 Policies
 - 4.1 General Policy
 - 4.2 Post Policies
 - 4.3 Volunteer Professionalism
 - 4.4 Enforcement of Policies
 - 4.5 Disciplinary Actions
 - 4.6 Drug Use
 - 4.6.1 General Policy
 - 4.6.2 Voluntary Self-Referral
 - 4.6.3 Notifications
 - 4.6.4 Administrative Separation for Involvement with Drugs

- 4.6.5 Unconfirmed Allegations or Rumors
 - 4.7 Use of Alcohol
 - 4.8 Code of Ethics
 - 4.9 Financial Gain
 - 4.10 Political Expression
 - 4.11 Contact with Media Representatives
 - 4.12 Publication of Articles
 - 4.13 Social Media and Other Online Content
 - 4.14 Exercise of Personal Religious Beliefs
 - 4.15 Ownership/Use of Firearms
 - 4.16 Ownership/Use of Radio Transmitters and Drones
 - 4.17 Sexual Behavior
 - 4.17.1 Host Country Sexual Mores
 - 4.17.2 Procurement of Commercial Sex
 - 4.17.3 Sexual Activities with Children
 - 4.18 Fraternization
 - 4.19 Prevention and Elimination of Harassment, including Sexual Harassment
 - 4.20 Volunteer/Trainee Sexual Misconduct
 - 4.21 Volunteers/Trainees with Minor Dependents
 - 4.22 Volunteer/Trainee Adoption
 - 4.23 Paternity
 - 4.23.1 Volunteers/Trainees who Father a Child
 - 4.23.2 Financial Obligations in Cases Involving Volunteer/Trainee Paternity
 - 4.23.3 Legal Counsel for Volunteers/Trainees in Determining Paternity
 - 4.24 Personal Appearance
 - 4.25 Conduct of Non-Volunteer/Trainee Spouse
 - 4.26 Pet Ownership
 - 4.27 Gambling/Casinos
 - 5.0 Effective Date
-

1.0 Purpose

This Manual Section sets out the policies which govern Peace Corps Volunteer, Peace Corps Response Volunteer, and Peace Corps Trainee (collectively, V/Ts) conduct. The policies supplement Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers (*see* subsection 3.0, below).

2.0 Authority

22 U.S.C. §2504(a).

3.0 Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers

As members of the Peace Corps community, V/Ts are responsible for fulfilling and sustaining the highest ethical standards of the Peace Corps and will abide by the following commitments.

“With integrity, and a shared commitment to equity and intercultural understanding, I will:

1. Prepare my affairs to keep my commitment to serve the full term of my assignment.
2. Build relationships and work alongside community members on locally prioritized projects that promote knowledge exchange and contribute to a lasting impact.
3. Serve where the Peace Corps places me with the flexibility needed for effective service.
4. Collaborate with the local community members on sustainable development work and spend most of my time respectfully integrating into the host community and culture.
5. Accept that during service I am responsible for my personal conduct and professional performance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
6. Honor diversity, advance equity, champion inclusion, and treat every human being with dignity and respect.
7. Adhere to the policies and rules of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where I serve.
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect the health, safety, and well-being of myself and others.
9. Recognize that during service I represent the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America.
10. Promote a better understanding of other cultures by intentionally and ethically sharing my Peace Corps experience with family, friends, and the American public during and after service.”

These expectations are included in the Volunteer Service Handbook for each Post, which every V/T signs to indicate their compliance with global and Post policies.

4.0 Policies

4.1 General Policy

It is Peace Corps policy that V/Ts conduct themselves in a manner reflecting credit on the Peace Corps and the United States. Appropriate V/T conduct is critical to the Peace Corps and the success of its programs because it is intimately tied to the reputation and effectiveness of the Agency's Volunteer program and the safety and security of V/Ts and post staff.

V/Ts have responsibilities more complex than those of private citizens. While they are expected to learn and respect host country culture and customs as Peace Corps Volunteers, they must also conduct themselves in a way that reflects credit on the United States and the Peace Corps. Indeed, the V/T is often the most identifiable, and frequently the only, U.S. citizen in a community. Accordingly, V/Ts are expected to adopt lifestyles sensitive to host country cultural

norms, and exercise common sense and good judgment to promote safety and reduce risks at home, at work, and while traveling. (*See also MS 270 Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security*).

4.2 Post Policies

Because cultural values and safety and security considerations vary among Peace Corps countries, each Country Director (CD), with the advice of host country nationals and V/Ts, shall establish written local policies on V/T conduct consistent with the Peace Corps Manual (*see* Peace Corps Global Policy Handbook for a summary of Peace Corps policies applicable to V/Ts) and Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers (*see* subsection 3.0, above). Post policies shall identify specific inappropriate conduct that would likely affect the credibility of the program, impair the effectiveness of a V/T in their assignment, or endanger the V/T's safety and security. The CD shall distribute the post's local policies to all V/Ts.

4.3 Volunteer Professionalism

To maximize their effectiveness and protect the reputation of the Peace Corps, V/Ts are expected to act with professionalism, integrity, competence, honesty, and to exhibit personal accountability in accordance with the Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers set forth in subsection 3.0, above. Specifically, V/Ts should adhere to the following professional standards:

- (a) Show respect for the people and culture of the host country (including Peace Corps staff) and other Volunteers, at all times, as demonstrated by appropriate behaviors;
- (b) Observe local standards, behavior, dress, and practices/protocols that demonstrate respect for the host country;
- (c) Abide by established standards of moral and ethical conduct, including applicable Peace Corps policies;
- (d) Honor commitments and work obligations;
- (e) Acknowledge and accept responsibility for actions (including mistakes);
- (f) During interactions in-person and over technology (including social media) with host country co-workers, other Volunteers, and Peace Corps staff, V/Ts shall:
 - (1) Communicate courteously, professionally, and empathetically;
 - (2) Resolve any differences through open and respectful dialogue and actions;
 - (3) Avoid gossip, rumor, or personalization of conflicts, and the use of profanity or other offensive words or phrases;
- (g) Not discriminate against any individual in connection with their work on behalf of the Peace Corps, such as on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, age, disability, or other bases as provided for under U.S. federal law and the non-discrimination laws of their host country; and

- (h) Comply with policies and guidance that ensure V/T safety and security, and protect and preserve V/T effectiveness and the reputation of the Peace Corps.

4.4 Enforcement of Policies

Basic responsibility for enforcing Peace Corps policies regarding all aspects of V/T conduct rests with the CD. The CD, with the support of in-country staff, is responsible for providing V/Ts with continuous guidance regarding appropriate behavior throughout their terms of service. When the CD becomes aware of any failure to comply with or violations of this policy by V/Ts, they should take appropriate disciplinary or corrective action, up to and including administrative separation. All Peace Corps program, training, and administrative staff and contractors are also responsible for immediately reporting any non-compliance or violation, or suspected non-compliance or violation, of the Peace Corps Policies on V/T conduct to the CD. In addition, Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMO) must extend confidentiality to the CD regarding actual or possible drug use and excessive use of alcohol as set forth in subsections 4.6 and 4.7. V/Ts are also strongly encouraged to report non-compliance or violations, or suspected non-compliance or violations, of this policy by V/Ts (*see MS 271 Confidentiality Protection*).

4.5 Disciplinary Actions

Any violation of the policies in the Peace Corps Manual or post-specific policies regarding V/T conduct may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including administrative separation under MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*. In determining appropriate disciplinary action, CDs should consult:

- (a) MS 204, subsection 3.0 on Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers.
- (b) Attachment A – Options for Disciplinary Actions under MS 204 *Volunteer Conduct*.
- (c) Attachment B – Peace Corps Drug Free Service Agreement.

4.6 Drug Use

4.6.1 General Policy

Peace Corps has a zero-tolerance policy regarding V/T involvement with drugs. Involvement with drugs includes, but is not limited to, the direct sale, distribution, acquisition, purchase, possession, smuggling, and use of illicit drugs, including marijuana, and any drug not authorized by the Peace Corps for medical purposes. V/T involvement with drugs can seriously jeopardize the entire Peace Corps program, as well as the safety and health of V/Ts.

In accordance with MS 861 *Office of Inspector General*, suspected sale, distribution, or smuggling of illegal or prescription drugs, or any other violations of Peace Corps policies that may have a serious impact on the integrity of Peace Corps programs or operations, shall be reported expeditiously by Peace Corps staff to the Office of Inspector General (OIG). In case of uncertainty as to whether particular misconduct by V/Ts should be reported to OIG, Peace Corps staff are urged to consult with OIG or the Office of the General Counsel (OGC). In accordance with MS 271 *Confidentiality Protection*, all allegations or concerns identified by V/Ts will be

given serious consideration and review and will be handled, resolved, or disposed of, as appropriate, by Peace Corps management or, if appropriate, the Office of Inspector General.

Except as described in subsection 4.6.2 below regarding Voluntary Self-Referral, a V/T found to be involved with drugs, as described above, in a manner not authorized by the Peace Corps for medical purposes, in any way and in any country, shall be administratively separated immediately pursuant to subsection 4.6.4. The Peace Corps enforces this strict policy not only because the cultivation, manufacture, and traffic in and use of drugs, including marijuana, is illegal in most countries; but also because drug involvement by V/Ts in any country could seriously jeopardize the entire Peace Corps program, as well as the safety and health of the V/Ts. Moreover, it is a violation of the trust Peace Corps has placed in V/Ts upon their selection and entry into public service. Individuals separated in connection with involvement with drugs (whether via administrative separation, resignation in lieu of administrative separation, or medical separation) shall not be considered for a transfer to another program or reinstatement regardless of the quality of their service.

Applicants are required to sign the Peace Corps Drug Free Service Agreement reflecting this policy (*see* MS 204 Attachment B). Any applicant who fails to sign this agreement will not receive further consideration.

4.6.2 Voluntary Self-Referral

A V/T may request help from Peace Corps staff on the basis that their involvement with drugs is associated with an illness (such as a substance use disorder as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) that requires treatment. A V/T who makes such a request prior to the Peace Corps (including the Office of Inspector General) receiving information indicating that the V/T may be in violation of subsection 4.6.1 General Policy will not be immediately administratively separated for drug use. Instead, a V/T who requests help under these circumstances shall be referred to the PCMO and Office of Health Services (OHS) for assessment. The PCMO/OHS must inform the CD about whether or not the assessment resulted in a recommendation for medical evacuation to the United States of America. A V/T who is medically evacuated shall not return to service. If the V/T is not medically evacuated or medically separated, the V/T shall be referred back to the CD for administrative separation in accordance with MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*. In addition, if a V/T for whom medical treatment is recommended subsequently does not comply with recommended treatment, the OHS will notify the CD, who shall initiate administrative separation procedures. (*See* MS 294 *Confidentiality of Volunteer Information*; MS 294 *Confidentiality of Volunteer Information* Guidance subsection 4.1.3(e).)

4.6.3 Notifications

Because of the potentially serious social, political, and legal impact of such incidents, every case of V/T drug involvement shall be brought immediately to the personal attention of the Peace Corps Director, Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, Associate Director for the Office of Global Operations, and the appropriate Regional Director.

4.6.4 Administrative Separation for Involvement with Drugs

For administrative separation for involvement with drugs, *see* MS 284 *Early Termination of Service* subsection 4.0 Administrative Separation.

4.6.5 Unconfirmed Allegations or Rumors

Although a V/T may not be formally charged with violating drug laws, some host countries' attitudes toward involvement with drugs are so negative that mere rumors of such involvement, though unproven, may affect the credibility of the individual V/T or the Peace Corps program. In cases where an unsubstantiated allegation is made that a V/T is involved with drugs while serving in the host country, and the CD determines that the knowledge of the allegation is sufficiently widespread to jeopardize the credibility of the V/T or the program, the CD may discontinue the service of the V/T as interrupted service (*see* subsection 5.0 of MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*). When documenting such cases, the CD shall refrain from indicating that an opinion has been formed regarding the validity of the allegations.

4.7 Use of Alcohol

4.7.1 Peace Corps recognizes that excessive use of alcohol, including binge drinking, may compromise a V/T's health, safety, and security, lead to behavior which is a discredit to the Peace Corps or the individual V/T, or affect the V/T's performance in an assignment. Examples of such behavior include but are not limited to: public intoxication, drinking while at the work site, failure to appear for work or training due to intoxication or hangovers, and verbal or physical aggressiveness while under the influence of alcohol. Such inappropriate or unsafe behavior or inability to perform adequately in the assignment may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including administrative separation. V/Ts who choose to drink are responsible for their conduct at all times; and must always consider host country laws and culture and the effects of their conduct on their service and the in-country program.

4.7.2 Excessive alcohol consumption may also be a medical problem as determined on a case-by-case basis by the PCMO. In all such cases, the PCMO should consult with the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services for guidance, and, in cases of alcohol-related behavior as provided in subsection 4.7.1, at the same time extend medical confidentiality to the CD.

4.8 Code of Ethics

Peace Corps V/Ts may not take advantage of a situation in the host country or use their Peace Corps status or information gained from their service for financial gain. This means that V/Ts shall not:

- (a) Purchase or acquire real estate, bonds, shares, or stocks of commercial concerns headquartered in the country of assignment, or which conduct a substantial portion of their business in that country;

- (b) Engage in any business or activity for profit or personal financial gain (including fundraising through individual effort or using platforms to fundraise) or undertake any gainful employment, be compensated or paid for any work done or related to Peace Corps service or for other services, work, or tasks while in service in their country of assignment; or
- (c) Sell or dispose of personal property at prices producing profits, including those which might result from import privileges deriving from their status as a Peace Corps V/T.

4.9 Financial Gain

As outlined in the Code of Ethics for V/Ts, V/Ts may not accept payment for their services except from the Peace Corps or engage in any activity for financial gain within the host country. This prohibition includes a ban on making investments within the host country, through individual efforts or using platforms to fundraise, or receiving payment for services, including but not limited to, written work or photographs relating to the V/T's assignment or other services, work, or tasks during Peace Corps service. In cases where payment cannot be avoided, the V/T must report receipt of such payment to the CD and donate the proceeds to a worthwhile institution or organization in the host country or, if they choose, to the Peace Corps Partnership Program.

In accordance with MS 720 *Peace Corps Small Grants Program* and MS 721 *Gifts and Fundraising*, V/Ts are prohibited during their service from accepting funds on behalf of the Peace Corps. MS 720 states that V/Ts “may not accept external funds outside of the Small Grants Program because it not only makes them susceptible to safety and security risks, but also undermines the Peace Corps’ approach to development and their effectiveness in their communities.” In the event there is a possible, pending, or future gift to the agency, which advances the mission of the agency and the post, the V/T should contact their Director of Programming and Training (DPT), CD, and, as needed, the Office of Gifts and Grants Management (GGM) for further guidance.

4.10 Political Expression

The agency recognizes that V/Ts may wish to express their opinions and views regarding certain topics or movements arising in the United States, their country of service, or any other country. However, in doing so, they must comply with the laws of the host country, and they should make it clear that the views expressed are their own and not necessarily those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. Government. V/Ts are free to privately discuss issues relating to the United States or other countries. V/Ts are also free to petition the U.S. Government and its officials in the same manner as if they had remained in the United States.

V/Ts serve at the invitation of the host country and hold an obligation to demonstrate balance and tolerance in respecting host country norms as well as honoring the primacy of its citizens as the rightful agents of social and political change. V/Ts should be aware, however, that public political expression overseas may raise issues of V/T safety and security if the issues could provoke hostility locally. V/Ts should also be aware that, particularly in the area of foreign affairs, some policies or actions of the United States or other countries may relate to political

issues or other controversial issues within the host country. The Peace Corps' credibility, and hence its ability to perform its mission, is contingent on not becoming identified with controversial or political issues of local interest or local political issues or movements. V/Ts abroad are not in-country in a purely individual capacity with obligations only to themselves. They are abroad having responsibilities to and representing Peace Corps.

Therefore, V/Ts must avoid becoming involved in the political affairs of their host country. Any public statements or actions, which potentially may involve a V/T with host country political issues or other controversial issues within the host country, or which are otherwise matters of official concern to Peace Corps, must be first discussed and reviewed with the CD. "Matters of official concern" are those that are related to Peace Corps or U.S. foreign policy or matters that can reasonably be expected to affect the foreign relations of the United States. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including administrative separation. A V/T's statements or actions concerning such issues that, in the opinion of the CD, impair the effectiveness of the Peace Corps or the individual V/T, may be grounds for administrative separation or other disciplinary action. A V/T's statements or actions concerning such issues that may, in the opinion of the CD, endanger the safety and security of the individual V/T or the post, or impair the effectiveness of the Peace Corps or the individual V/T, may be grounds for administrative separation or other disciplinary action.

4.11 Contact with Media Representatives

V/Ts are free to discuss their role in the Peace Corps with media representatives; however, they should notify their CD of such discussions before they take place. V/Ts must be aware of and be sensitive to the impact their personal comments may have on themselves, their co-workers and program, and the Peace Corps worldwide.

4.12 Publication of Articles

V/Ts may write articles for publication; however, these should be discussed in advance with the CD to ascertain whether they might cause problems which the V/T may not have anticipated. Publication of material in any format, contrary to the advice of the CD, which subsequently results in adverse consequences for the V/T or the program, may be grounds for disciplinary action.

4.13 Social Media and Other Online Content

V/Ts are representatives of the agency and the U.S. government. This means that communication, in person or via social media or other on-line platforms, should reflect professional and respectful content consistent with the Volunteer Professionalism requirements set forth in MS 204 *Volunteer Conduct* subsection 4.3 and the guidance set forth in MS 543 *Use of IT Systems by Volunteers, Trainees, and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers*. Note that anything that a V/T may post in a positive or negative light can be shared widely. Even if the social media or other on-line account is private, a V/T's photos, videos, stories, or comments may still end up in the public sphere. Posts on social media or other on-line platforms, which subsequently result in adverse consequences for the V/T or the program, may be grounds for disciplinary action.

4.14 Exercise of Personal Religious Beliefs

V/Ts are free to exercise their religious beliefs, but they may not engage in religious proselytizing. V/Ts who are not clear as to what activity constitutes religious proselytizing should consult with their CD. Violation of the restriction against proselytizing, because of the serious adverse consequences it could have on the program and for the V/T, may be grounds for administrative separation.

4.15 Ownership/Use of Firearms

V/Ts are not permitted to use or possess any firearms while at any Peace Corps post.

4.16 Ownership/Use of Radio Transmitters and Drones

Use or possession of radio transmitters, drones, and similar equipment by V/Ts can be viewed with mistrust by host country communities and authorities or may be illegal in the host country. V/Ts are not permitted to use or possess radio transmitters, drones, or similar equipment during their service, except as explicitly approved in writing by the CD.

4.17 Sexual Behavior

While the matter of V/T sexual behavior is a highly personal one, V/Ts are required to follow certain legal and policy requirements and failure to do so may be grounds for appropriate disciplinary or corrective action, up to and including administrative separation.

4.17.1 Host Country Sexual Mores

Because of the legal, social, and political implications of inappropriate sexual behavior, Peace Corps expectations and standards in this regard must be clear. CDs shall ensure that V/Ts understand host country sexual mores, including in relation to dating, pre-marital sexual activity, adultery, and single parent maternity and paternity, and the consequences for V/Ts and the Peace Corps program if these mores are questioned or violated. Post Guidance in this area should be provided in writing to V/Ts. A V/T shall not be disciplined under this Section if that V/T has reported behavior in the context of a sexual assault or stalking incident.

4.17.2 Procurement of Commercial Sex

V/Ts are prohibited from procuring commercial sex, regardless of whether prostitution is legal in the host country. For the purposes of this Section, “commercial sex” is defined as any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

4.17.3 Sexual Activities with Children

Regardless of the applicable age of consent, V/Ts are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity or contact with anyone who is under the age of 18 (*see MS 648 Child Protection*). Depending on the applicable age of consent, V/Ts who engage in sexual activity or contact with minors overseas may be subject to criminal prosecution both in the United States and in the host country.

4.18 Fraternization

Fraternization, whether occurring in person or via electronic means (including over social media), is prohibited by the Peace Corps. For the purposes of this Manual Section, “fraternization” is defined as: dating; intimate physical relationship; sexual relationship, or any attempt thereof, between any Peace Corps V/T and any individual over whom the V/T holds authority (such as a student) or maintains control over needed support or resources (such as host family members and paid language tutors). Fraternization between Peace Corps staff and V/Ts is also prohibited (*see MS 644 Fraternization*). Violation of the fraternization policy is grounds for appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including administrative separation from the Peace Corps. This Section does not apply to instances where the V/T is coerced or otherwise not acting freely.

4.19 Prevention and Elimination of Harassment, including Sexual Harassment

V/Ts may not engage in harassment, including sexual harassment, against other V/Ts, staff, community members, or other persons they encounter during Peace Corps service. The Peace Corps will not tolerate retaliation against any V/T for opposing harassing conduct, for reporting harassing conduct, or for assisting in any inquiry, investigation, or disciplinary action about a report of harassment. V/Ts who engage in harassment, including sexual harassment, against other V/Ts, staff community members, or other persons, are subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including administrative separation.

For the purposes of this Section, “harassment” is defined as unwelcome conduct based on one or more of the protected categories set forth in subsection 4.1 of MS 653 *Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Employment*.

Examples of harassment covered by this Section, when based on a person’s protected characteristics, include but are not limited to the following, whether they occur in person, electronically, on social media, or in any other manner: offensive jokes, comments, objects, or pictures; unwelcome questions about a person’s identity; undue and unwelcome attention; ridicule or mockery; insults or put-downs; unwelcome touching or contact that would not be covered by IPS 1-12 *Volunteer/Trainee Sexual Misconduct*; slurs or epithets; threats or other forms of intimidation; or physical assault. Harassment on the basis of sex does not need to be sexual in nature.

V/Ts who believe they have been harassed or witnessed harassment based on a protected category under MS 653 *Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Employment* by any currently serving V/Ts may report it to their CD and/or the OIG.

For reports that allege harassment based on a protected category, including sexual harassment, by currently serving V/Ts, CDs have both the authority and the responsibility to investigate the allegation, and, if harassment is found to have occurred, to take immediate corrective action (which includes appropriate disciplinary action against the accused V/T, up to and including administrative separation). CDs should consult with their Region and OGC regarding reports of harassment and should ensure that the complaint and subsequent actions are documented in the Security Incident Management System (SIMS) or any subsequent case management system.

Complaints of general harassment that are not based on a protected category under MS 653 *Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Employment*, may also be filed with the CD or with the OIG. V/Ts who believe they have been harassed or witnessed harassment by Peace Corps staff should consult the Peace Corps harassment policy in MS 645 *Prevention and Elimination of Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment*.

4.20 Volunteer/Trainee Sexual Misconduct

V/Ts are subject to the Peace Corps sexual misconduct policy as outlined in Interim Policy Statement 1-12 *Volunteer/Trainee Sexual Misconduct*.

4.21 Volunteers/Trainees with Minor Dependents

No V/T may serve with a minor dependent who lives in the country of service. If a V/T becomes a parent or guardian of a minor dependent who lives in the country of service, the V/T will be separated with interrupted service. This includes situations in which a V/T fathers a child in a country, regardless of whether the child is living with the V/T. In that case, the V/T will be separated with interrupted service after the child is born. (See MS 284 *Early Termination of Service* subsection 5.1 Grounds for Interrupted Service.)

4.22 Volunteer/Trainee Adoption

Adopting children during their service may be a complicated process, which may place an enormous burden on the V/T and is incompatible with continued Peace Corps service and will result in termination of service. The CD should suggest that before making a decision to proceed with the adoption of a child, the V/T consult with appropriate consulate personnel to understand the legal requirements and complications of the adoption, both in the host country and the United States. V/Ts must personally obtain the necessary approvals for an adoption and, when appropriate, for the child's exit from the host country and entry into the United States. Peace Corps staff will not assist in the adoption process.

4.23 Paternity

4.23.1 Volunteers/Trainees who Father a Child

In a case where a V/T fathers a child, the V/T, prior to leaving service, should be encouraged to fulfill, or arrange to have fulfilled, their responsibilities for providing support to the mother and child. Host country law or custom may serve as a guide in determining the appropriate extent of compensation and support. The CD has no authority to question the adequacy of any compensation or support offered by the V/T. If inquiries are made, staff should inform the involved parties that the Peace Corps has no responsibility in any further compensation by the V/T.

4.23.2 Financial Obligations in Cases Involving Volunteer/Trainee Paternity

A V/T's readjustment allowance may be used to satisfy financial obligations in cases involving V/T paternity only when the V/T has consented in writing to such use or where their financial obligation has been established through legal process. (Peace Corps policies concerning prenatal

and birth-related care of pregnant non-V/Ts are detailed in MS 262 *Peace Corps Medical Services Program*.)

4.23.3 Legal Counsel for Volunteers/Trainees in Determining Paternity

The Peace Corps will not provide legal counsel to a V/T in the event that legal action is commenced against the V/T to determine paternity unless the CD determines, and the General Counsel concurs, that proceedings will result in a violation of the V/T's substantial rights. (See MS 774 *Retention of Counsel and Payments of Expenses* for the procedures governing retention of counsel overseas).

4.24 Personal Appearance

CDs have both the authority and the responsibility to establish specific post guidelines with regard to the personal appearance of V/Ts. Such guidelines should reflect the Peace Corps policy that V/Ts are expected to dress professionally and suitably both on and off the job, and respect host country and community attitudes towards personal appearance. Where required by the host entity or school, V/Ts are expected to adhere to the dress code applicable to their counterparts at those institutions.

4.25 Conduct of Non-Volunteer/Trainee Spouse

The behavior of a V/T's non-V/T spouse may have direct impact on the effectiveness of the V/T's service and on the Peace Corps program. As a result, non-V/T spouses are expected to maintain the same standards of conduct expected of V/Ts.

V/Ts whose non-V/T spouses behave in a manner which adversely affects their credibility or that of the program may be subject to early termination, according to the procedures of MS 284 *Early Termination of Volunteers and Trainees*.

4.26 Pet Ownership

In general, as long as a Volunteer fully understands, agrees to, and follows the rules of responsible pet ownership, the Peace Corps allows Volunteers to own a dog or cat. A Volunteer should obtain permission from the CD, in accordance with established post policy and procedures. Peace Corps Trainees are not permitted to own a pet.

If permitted by post, a Volunteer may own a pet in accordance with post policies and host country laws and regulations. Volunteers are responsible for all aspects of pet ownership, including but not limited to the following:

- (a) Obtaining any required permissions (e.g., from post, local authorities, host country counterparts, host families) and completing all required procedures and documentation;
- (b) Ensuring all required immunizations (including rabies) and anti-parasitic prevention (for internal and external parasites) and treatments are completed in a timely manner and updated in accordance with post and host country requirements;

- (c) Paying for all costs and expenses related to pet ownership and care;
- (d) Providing proper care and supervision of the pet; and
- (e) Making necessary arrangements for the pet while away from site, including but not limited to annual leave, official Peace Corps business, the activation of a post emergency action plan, medical evacuation, interrupted service, other early termination, or Close of Service.

Upon their Close of Service, the Volunteer is responsible for finding a new home in-country for the pet and any related costs, or for arranging and paying all costs for transport, vaccinations, and other requirements for U.S. entry.

4.27 Gambling/Casinos

All casinos and gambling establishments are off-limits to V/Ts. In addition to the safety and security risks in and around these establishments, gambling could also be considered culturally inappropriate by the majority of community members where V/Ts are serving.

5.0 Effective Date

The effective date of this Manual Section is the date of issuance.