

MS 201 Eligibility and Standards for Peace Corps Volunteer Service

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Eligibility and Standards for Peace Corps Volunteer Service

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Authority: Sec. 4 (b), 5 (a) and 22 of the Peace Corps Act as amended, 22 U.S.C. 2503 (b), 2504 (a) and 2521; E.O. 12137, May 16, 1979; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; E.O. 13160.

§ 305.1 Purpose and general guidelines.

This subpart states the requirements for eligibility for Peace Corps Volunteer service and the factors considered in the assessment and selection of eligible applicants for Peace Corps Volunteer service.

(a) *Definitions.* For purposes of this part:

- (1) “Applicant” means an individual for enrollment as a Volunteer, who has completed and submitted the Peace Corps Volunteer application form.

- (2) “Trainee” means an individual for enrollment as a Volunteer during any period of training occurring prior to such enrollment.
 - (3) “Volunteer” means an individual who has taken the prescribed oath and enrolled for service in the Peace Corps.
 - (4) “Enrollment” means the act by which an individual becomes a Volunteer upon successful completion of training and taking the prescribed oath of office pursuant to Section 5 of the Peace Corps Act, 22 U.S.C. 2504.
 - (5) “Dependent” means an individual for whom an applicant or Volunteer has a legal or familial obligation to provide financial support.
 - (6) “Family member” means any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the applicant or Volunteer is the equivalent of a family relationship.
- (b) *Selection.* Invitations to serve in the Peace Corps are the result of a highly competitive application process. Many more individuals apply for Peace Corps Volunteer service than can be accepted. Because the Peace Corps cannot accept all eligible and qualified Applicants who wish to serve, it evaluates Applicants to select the best qualified among eligible Applicants. The Peace Corps determines Applicants’ eligibility, and assesses their relative skills, qualifications, and personal attributes, such as motivation, aptitude, fitness for service, emotional maturity, adaptability, productive competence, and ability to serve effectively as a Volunteer in a foreign country and culture.
- (c) *Authority.* Under Section 5 (a) of the Peace Corps Act, 22 U.S.C. 2504 (a), the President may enroll in the Peace Corps for service abroad qualified citizens and nationals of the United States. The terms and conditions of the enrollment of Volunteers are exclusively those set forth in the Peace Corps Act and those consistent therewith which the President may prescribe. The President has delegated his authority under Section 5 (a) of the Peace Corps Act to the Director of the Peace Corps pursuant to Executive Order 12137 (May 16, 1979), as amended.
- (d) *Non-Discrimination.* The Peace Corps does not discriminate against any person on account of race, color, religion, sex (including but not limited to gender identity and gender expression), national origin, age (40 and over), disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, union membership, genetic information, or history of participation in the EEO process, any grievance procedure or any authorized complaint procedure. Anyone who feels he or she has been discriminated against should contact the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity, 202.692.2139, ocrd@peacecorps.gov, Peace Corps, 1111 20th Street NW, Washington, DC 20526.

- (e) *Failure to Disclose Requested Information.* In order for the Peace Corps to be able to make appropriate selection and placement decisions, it is critical that Applicants provide complete and accurate information throughout the application process, including information provided for a mandatory background investigation. The Peace Corps may disqualify an Applicant or separate a Volunteer or Trainee from Peace Corps service at any time if the Peace Corps determines that the Applicant, Volunteer, or Trainee provided materially false, misleading, inaccurate or incomplete information during the Peace Corps application process.

§ 305.2 Eligibility.

In order to be eligible for enrollment as a Volunteer, Applicants must meet mandatory citizenship and age requirements.

- (a) *Citizenship.* The Applicant must be a citizen or national of the United States prior to entering on duty as a Trainee.
- (b) *Age.* The Applicant must be at least 18 years old at the time of entry on duty as a Trainee.

§305.3 Selection standards.

- (a) *General.* To qualify for selection for overseas service as a Volunteer, an Applicant must demonstrate that he or she is suitable, possessing the requisite personal and professional attributes required for Peace Corps service generally, and for the particular Volunteer assignment for which he or she is considered. The Peace Corps assesses each Applicant's personal, professional, educational, and legal qualifications in order to select those Applicants most likely to be successful in a Peace Corps assignment, serving under conditions of hardship if necessary to achieve the goals of the Peace Corps. Meeting these qualifications does not in and of itself entitle any individual to serve in the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps endeavors to select the best qualified individuals from among all eligible Applicants.
- (b) *Personal Attributes.* Applicants must adequately demonstrate the following personal attributes to Peace Corps:
- (1) *Motivation.* A sincere desire to carry out the goals of Peace Corps service, and a commitment to serve a full term as a Volunteer.
 - (2) *Productive Competence.* The intelligence and professional experience or educational background to meet the needs of the individual's assignment.
 - (3) *Emotional Maturity and Adaptability.* The maturity, flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and self-sufficiency to adapt successfully to life in another culture, and to interact and communicate with other people regardless of cultural, social, and economic differences.

(4) *Skills*. In addition to any educational, professional or other qualifications and prerequisites that an individual must possess in order to be selected for a given assignment, a Trainee must demonstrate competence in the following areas by the end of pre-service training:

- (i) *Language*. The ability to communicate effectively in the appropriate language or languages of the country of service with the fluency required to meet the needs of the overseas assignment.
- (ii) *Technical Competence*. Proficiency in the technical skills needed to carry out the Trainee's assignment as a Volunteer.
- (iii) *Knowledge*. Adequate knowledge of the culture and history of the country of assignment to ensure a successful adjustment to, and acceptance by, the host country society, as well as an appropriate understanding of the history and government of the United States which qualifies the individual to represent the United States abroad.

(c) *Failure to Meet Standards*. Failure to meet initial selection standards, failure to attain any of the selection standards by the completion of training, or failure to maintain these standards during service, may be grounds for de-selection and disqualification from Peace Corps service.

§ 305.4 Medical status eligibility standard.

(a) *Requirements*. Under the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. 2504 (e)), the Peace Corps is responsible for ensuring that Peace Corps Volunteers receive all necessary or appropriate health care during their service. To ensure that the Peace Corps will be capable of doing so, Applicants must be medically qualified for Peace Corps Volunteer service. An Applicant who is otherwise qualified must meet the following requirements:

- (1) The Applicant, with or without reasonable accommodation, removal of architectural, communication or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids or services, must have the physical and mental capacity required to meet the essential eligibility requirements for a Volunteer. In this context, the essential eligibility requirements for a Volunteer include, without limitation, the capability to:
 - (i) Live and work independently in an isolated location overseas at the same socio-economic level and in similar conditions as members of the community to which the Applicant is assigned;
 - (ii) Perform the job to which the Applicant is assigned; and

- (iii) Complete a specified tour of service without undue disruption.
 - (2) The Peace Corps must be capable of providing the Applicant with such health care as the Peace Corps deems to be necessary or appropriate.
 - (3) The Applicant must not pose a direct threat (as defined in paragraph (c) of this section).
- (b) *Individualized Assessment.* In determining whether an Applicant is medically qualified, an individualized assessment is required regarding each of the requirements set forth in paragraph (a) of this section.
- (c) *Direct Threat.*
- (1) A “direct threat” is a significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a reasonable accommodation to policies, practices or procedures, removal of architectural, communication or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids or services.
 - (2) In determining whether an applicant poses a direct threat, the Peace Corps will make an individualized assessment based on reasonable judgment that relies on current medical knowledge or on the best available objective evidence to ascertain:
 - (i) The nature, duration and severity of the risk;
 - (ii) The probability that the potential injury will actually occur; and
 - (iii) Whether reasonable accommodations, removal of architectural, communication or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids or services will mitigate the risk.
- (d) *Reasonable accommodation.*
- (1) The term “accommodation” means modifications to the Peace Corps’ policies, practices or procedures.
 - (2) An accommodation is not reasonable if:
 - (i) It would modify the essential eligibility requirements for a Volunteer;
 - (ii) It would modify, among other things, the Applicant’s Volunteer assignment or the Peace Corps’ medical program in a way that would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of the service, program, or activity; or
 - (iii) It would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the operations of the Peace Corps, including its medical program.

- (3) In determining whether an accommodation would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the operations of the Peace Corps, the Peace Corps may take into account, among other things:
- (i) The size and composition of the Peace Corps staff at the post of assignment;
 - (ii) The adequacy of local medical facilities and the availability of other medical facilities;
 - (iii) The nature and cost of the accommodation compared to the overall number of Volunteers and the overall size of the Peace Corps budget; and
 - (iv) The capacities of the host country agency and of the host community to which the Applicant would be assigned.

(b) *Medical status eligibility review.*

- (1) An Applicant who is determined by medical screening staff not to be medically qualified for Peace Corps Volunteer service may request review of that decision by submitting any relevant information to the Office of Medical Services (OMS). The information submitted by the Applicant will be reviewed by a physician, and, unless the physician determines that the Applicant is medically qualified, by a Pre-Service Review Board (PSRB) composed of medical personnel in OMS and advised by the General Counsel. Procedures for such review are subject to approval by the General Counsel.
- (2) The PSRB will include as voting members at least one physician as well as other medical professionals in OMS. In any case involving review of issues involving mental health, at least one mental health professional from the Counseling and Outreach Unit will also participate as a voting member.
- (3) The decision of the PSRB will be reviewed by the General Counsel for legal sufficiency. Subject to that review, it will constitute the final agency action.

§ 305.5 Legal status eligibility standard.

- (a) *General Requirements.* The existence of an arrest or conviction record may, but will not automatically, exclude an Applicant from consideration for Peace Corps service. The Peace Corps will consider the nature of the offense, how long ago the offense occurred, whether the Applicant was acquitted of the offense, the terms of any applicable parole or probation, and other relevant facts or indications of rehabilitation.

(b) *Drug and Alcohol Related Offenses.*

- (1) An Applicant with any drug-related conviction, with a conviction for public intoxication, driving under the influence (DUI), or driving while intoxicated (DWI), with a conviction for reckless driving after having been initially charged with DUI or DWI, or with a

similar alcohol-related conviction, is not eligible to have his or her application for Peace Corps service considered until 12 months has passed from the date of the incident.

- (2) An Applicant who, at any time on or prior to the day of departure for Peace Corps service, is arrested for any drug offense or for public intoxication, DUI, DWI or any similar alcohol-related offense will have any pending application or invitation for Peace Corps service withdrawn. If the charges are dismissed, an Applicant whose application or invitation for Peace Corps service was terminated may immediately reapply. If the applicant is convicted of the offense, he or she may reapply after 12 months from the date of the incident.
- (c) *Review Process.* An Applicant who is rejected for a Volunteer position because of an arrest or conviction may request a review of that decision by submitting any relevant information to the Associate Director of the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS). The Associate Director will review the information submitted and consult with the General Counsel. The decision of the Associate Director will be the final agency decision. The Associate Director may delegate authority to conduct such a review to another senior member of VRS, but not to the supervisor of the office making the original eligibility determination.
- (d) *Subsequent Application.* An Applicant rejected for service due to failure to meet the legal status eligibility standard may reapply at a later date, but not sooner than 12 months after the final agency decision.

§ 305.6 Applicants with an intelligence background.

- (a) *General.* It has been the longstanding policy of the Peace Corps to exclude from Volunteer service any individuals who have engaged in intelligence activity or related work or who have been employed by or connected with an intelligence agency, either for a specific period of time or permanently (depending on the agency). This policy is founded on the premise that it is crucial to the Peace Corps in carrying out its mission that there be a complete and total separation of Peace Corps from the intelligence activities of the United States Government or any foreign government, both in reality and appearance. Any semblance of a connection between the Peace Corps and the intelligence community would seriously compromise the ability of the Peace Corps to develop and maintain the trust and confidence of the people of the host countries. To ensure that there is not the slightest basis for the appearance of any connection between the Peace Corps and the intelligence community, this policy contains certain temporary and permanent bars to Peace Corps service. Serious doubts about an Applicant's connection with intelligence activities are to be resolved in favor of exclusion.
- (b) *Definitions.* For purposes of this section:

(1) “Intelligence activity” includes any activities or specialized training involving or related to the clandestine collection of information, or the analysis or dissemination of such information, intended for use by the United States Government or any foreign government in formulating or implementing political or military policy in regard to other countries. The term "intelligence activity" includes any involvement in covert actions designed to influence events in foreign countries. The fact that the name of an employer or the description of a person’s work uses or does not use the term “intelligence” does not, in and of itself, mean that the person has or has not engaged in intelligence activity or related work.

(2) “Intelligence agency” includes:

- (i) Any agency, division of an agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government that is a member of the United States Intelligence Community; and
- (ii) Any other agency, division of an agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government or any foreign government, a substantial part of whose mission has been determined by the General Counsel to include intelligence activities.

(3) "Employment," "employee" or "employed" refer to the existence of a relationship of employer and employee, whether full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary, whether or not the individual is engaged in intelligence activity for an employer, without regard to the length of time the relationship existed or is proposed to exist, and includes individuals performing duties as volunteers, fellows, interns, consultants, personal services contractors, contractors (non-personal services contractors), and employees of contractors who were assigned to work for an intelligence agency or to engage in intelligence activities. Employees of contractors who were or are not themselves assigned to work for an Intelligence Agency or to engage in intelligence activities are not considered to have been or to be employed by an intelligence agency.

(c) *Employment by an intelligence agency or engagement in intelligence activities.*

- (1) An Applicant currently or formerly employed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is permanently ineligible for Peace Corps Volunteer service.
- (2) An Applicant who has been employed by an intelligence agency other than the CIA is ineligible for a minimum of 10 years from the last day of employment by such intelligence agency. This bar on an Applicant who is or was employed by an intelligence agency applies whether or not the Applicant was engaged in intelligence activity for the intelligence agency.

- (3) An Applicant who has been engaged in intelligence activities is ineligible for service as a Volunteer for a period of 10 years from the last date on which the Applicant engaged in intelligence activities.
- (4) An Applicant may be ineligible for service for a period in excess of 10 years if the General Counsel determines that the Applicant's background or work history with regard to intelligence activities warrants such action.

(d) *Relationship to intelligence agency or activity.*

- (1) An Applicant whose background discloses a relationship to an intelligence agency or intelligence activity may be ineligible to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer. The term "relationship" means any association with an intelligence agency or with an intelligence activity, if such association could be the basis for an inference or the appearance that an Applicant was engaged in an intelligence activity. The association could include, but not be limited to, one based upon a familial, personal or financial connection to an intelligence agency or with an intelligence activity.
- (2) Determinations of the eligibility or periods of ineligibility of such Applicants will be made by the General Counsel on a case by case basis using the criteria set forth below. Examples of the type of relationships among others that could lead to ineligibility are Applicants whose spouses, domestic partners, or parents are or were involved in actual intelligence activities, or members of the immediate family of prominent highly placed officials in an intelligence agency who might be the target of harassment or violence overseas as the result of family connections. Employment by an organization that has been funded by an intelligence agency may also lead to ineligibility.
- (3) In determining whether an Applicant's relationship to an intelligence agency or intelligence activity makes the Applicant ineligible for service, or in determining the duration of any ineligibility, the General Counsel will consider the following factors as appropriate:
 - (i) Nature of the relationship.
 - (ii) The intelligence agency with which the Applicant has the relationship.
 - (iii) Duration of the relationship.
 - (iv) Length of time that has elapsed since the last connection to the intelligence agency.
 - (v) Where the intelligence activity or work was performed.
 - (vi) Nature of the connection with intelligence activity or work.
 - (vii) Whether or not the intelligence activity or work involved contact with foreign nationals.

- (viii) Whether the connection was known or unknown to the Applicant at the time it occurred.
 - (ix) Training received, if any.
 - (x) Regularity of the contact with foreign nationals, and nature of duties, if any.
 - (xi) Public knowledge of the activity or connection.
 - (xii) Any other information which bears on the relationship of the Applicant to an intelligence agency or intelligence activity.
- (e) *Determination.* VRS is responsible for the initial screening of Peace Corps Volunteer applications for compliance with the provisions of this policy. In cases where that office is unable to make a decision regarding the eligibility of an Applicant under this policy, the individual's application will be referred to the General Counsel, who will make the determination on eligibility.
- (f) *Appeal.* VRS will inform all Applicants promptly and in writing of any decision to disqualify them based on an intelligence background and the reasons for that decision. Applicants have 15 days from the date of receipt of the letter from VRS to appeal the decision to the Director of the Peace Corps. The decision of the Director of the Peace Corps will be the final agency decision.
- (g) *Post Peace Corps Employment by United States Intelligence Agencies.* Pursuant to agreements between the Peace Corps and certain intelligence agencies, those intelligence agencies will not employ former Volunteers for a specified period after the end of their Peace Corps service and will not use former Volunteers for certain purposes or in certain positions. Information regarding such agreements may be obtained from the Office of the General Counsel.

§ 305.7 Special circumstances.

- (a) *Couples.* Two Applicants who are married to one another or two unmarried Applicants who are in a same-sex or opposite-sex domestic partnership or other committed relationship are eligible to apply for service as a couple. In the case of an unmarried couple, each member of the couple must provide a sworn statement, in a form acceptable to the Peace Corps, attesting to their domestic partnership status or committed relationship (as the case may be) and their request to be considered for assignment as a couple. In all cases, both members of the couple must apply and qualify for assignment at the same location.
- (b) *Serving with dependents and other family members.* In general, dependents and other family members may not accompany a Volunteer during service. However, the Peace Corps may

from time to time make exceptions either on a case-by-case basis or for particular categories of Volunteers to the extent permitted by Federal law.

- (c) *Military service.* The Peace Corps welcomes applications from veterans, reservists, and active duty military personnel who are interested in Peace Corps service after completion of their military service. After receiving an invitation for Peace Corps service, applicants with reserve obligations are reminded to comply with all requirements to notify their reserve component that they will be unavailable for drills and annual training because of their Peace Corps service. Such applicants are urged to obtain written confirmation from their reserve component that they have complied with these requirements.

§ 305.8 Background investigation.

Section 22 of the Peace Corps Act requires that each Applicant be investigated to ensure that enrollment of the Applicant as a Volunteer is consistent with the national interest. The Peace Corps therefore obtains an appropriate background investigation for all Applicants who are invited to serve in the Peace Corps. Information revealed by the background investigation may be grounds for disqualification from Peace Corps service. Under the Peace Corps Act, if a background investigation regarding an Applicant develops any data reflecting that the Applicant is of questionable loyalty or is a questionable security risk, the Peace Corps must refer the matter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for a full field investigation. The results of that full field investigation will be furnished to the Peace Corps for information and appropriate action.