

MS 281 Completion of Service Date Advancement and Extension of Service

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1.0 Purpose

This Manual Section establishes the rules and procedures for advancing Volunteer completion of service (COS) dates and for extending Volunteer service. The COS date for a Volunteer is the date on which the Volunteer is scheduled to complete Peace Corps service. This Manual Section

does not apply to extending COS dates for Peace Corps Response Volunteers. For rules applicable to such Volunteers, see the Peace Corps Response Handbook.

2.0 Advancing Completion of Service Date

2.1 Policy

Each Peace Corps Volunteer is expected to honor fully his/her commitment to serve the people of the host country to the best of his/her ability for the period of time -- usually 24 months-- specified by the Peace Corps. A Volunteer's COS date may be advanced to a date that is more than 21 months after his/her oath date, provided that the Volunteer will have completed his/her primary and secondary responsibilities before the proposed COS date. (See paragraph 2.3 for approval authority). If a Volunteer has remaining responsibilities in the host country, or host country officials do not concur, his/her COS date should not be advanced solely to accommodate personal, educational, professional, or employment opportunities, including an assignment with Peace Corps Response or employment with the Peace Corps or any foreign affairs agency. (See discussion of Masters International program in section 2.2 below).

Volunteers who extend service are assigned a new COS date adjusted to reflect the extension of service. Volunteers who extend service for less than 12 months may have their new COS date advanced by any amount of time as determined by the Country Director and still receive a COS status. Volunteers who extend service more than 12 months are subject to the provisions listed in paragraph 4.8 below in regard to COS status.

See MS 284 *Early Termination of Service* for advancing COS dates in conjunction with an evacuation. See MS 341 *Non-emergency Post Closing* for advancing COS dates in conjunction with a non-evacuation post closing.

2.2 Criteria for Advancing a COS Date

All of the following must be considered in determining whether to advance a Volunteer's COS date:

- (a) Programmatic impact
 - (1) Whether the Volunteer will have completed his/her primary responsibilities.
 - (2) Whether the Volunteer will have completed his/her secondary responsibilities.
 - (3) Whether host country officials concur with advancing the Volunteer's COS date.
- (b) **Emergency leave and medical evacuation** Peace Corps will normally advance the COS date of a Volunteer who concludes an emergency leave or a medical evacuation more than 21 months after his/her oath date, unless the Country Director determines that there are compelling programmatic reasons for returning the Volunteer to the host country. (See MS 220 *Leave for Volunteers/Trainees*, paragraph 6.0; and MS 264 *Medical Evacuation*, paragraph 4.3.)

- (c) **Sexual assault, stalking and serious crime** If a Volunteer, who has served more than 21 months after his/her oath date, becomes a victim of a sexual assault, stalking or serious crime, Peace Corps will normally advance the COS date of the Volunteer at the Volunteer's request.
- (d) **Master's International Program:** Country Directors are encouraged to work with Volunteers who are participating in the Peace Corps Master's International (MI) Program to establish a COS date that will allow them to bring their primary and secondary responsibilities to completion in time to fulfill remaining MI academic requirements (e. g., a program that requires completion of a final semester of study, scheduled to begin prior to the projected COS date). Upon request by the Country Director, staff in VRS/R/MI will verify the date when an MI Volunteer needs to return to his/her university and the academic impact of delaying the Volunteer's COS beyond that date.

2.3 Approval Authority and Procedures

2.3.1 Advancing a COS Date to 23 months Volunteer of service

In accordance with this Manual Section, the Country Director may advance a Volunteer's COS date to a date that reflects more than 23 months of service after the Volunteer's oath date and report the advance through the Volunteer In Country Allowance (VICA) application within one business day from the date of the approval.

2.3.2 Advancing a COS Date to between 21 and 23 months of Volunteer service

If the Country Director determines, in accordance with this Manual Section, that a Volunteer's COS date should be advanced to a date that reflects between 21 months and 23 months of service after the Volunteer's oath date, the Country Director must request the Regional Director's approval of the advanced COS date by attaching a memo in the VICA application. The memo must contain the following information:

- (a) The Volunteer's full name, ID number, oath date, original COS date (prior to any date advances), and proposed new COS date.
- (b) A detailed statement of the reasons for advancing the COS date.
- (c) A request that the Regional Director approve the proposed new COS date.

The Regional Director, or his/her delegate, must either approve or disapprove the request through the VICA application. If the request is approved, the requested advanced COS date must be updated in VICA. If the request is denied, a denial reason must be displayed in VICA. It is critical that this process (both at post and Headquarters) occur as soon as an advancement request is suggested because, if approved, it will affect the timing of numerous payments due to the Volunteer.

2.3.3 Advancing a Cohort's COS Date

If the Country Director determines, in accordance with this Manual Section, that the COS date for a cohort of Volunteers, or a portion thereof, should be advanced by more than 30 days or less than 30 days for reasons other than operational efficiency (e.g. the staggering of COS dates), the Country Director shall email the Regional Director requesting that the Regional Director approve the proposed new COS date for the group. The request must contain the following information:

- (a) Original COS date (prior to any date advances) and proposed new COS date.
- (b) Each Volunteer's full name, ID number, and oath date.
- (c) A detailed statement of the reasons for advancing the COS date for the cohort.
- (d) A request that the Regional Director approve the proposed new COS date for the cohort.

The Regional Director must email the Country Director either approving or disapproving the request. If the request is denied, the Regional Director must advise the Country Director of the reasons for his/her decision. If an approval is received by the Country Director, post should update the Projected COS date for each Volunteer in the VICA application within one business day of receiving the approval.

2.3.4 Advancing a COS Date after Special Leave

A Volunteer who has taken special leave in connection with an extension of service (see section 4.0) may request an advance of the extended COS date and the request will be processed as follows:

- (a) If the request is for an advance of the extended COS date by up to 30 days, the Country Director may advance the extended COS date by up to 30 days and report the advance through the VICA application within one day from the date of approval.
- (b) If the request is for an advance of more than 30 but not more than 90 days, the Country Director must request the Regional Director's approval of the advanced COS date by attaching a memo in the VICA application. The memo must contain the following information:
 - (1) The Volunteer's full name, ID number, oath date, extended COS date (prior to any date advances), and proposed new COS date.
 - (2) A detailed statement of the reasons for advancing the COS date.
 - (3) A request that the Regional Director approve the proposed new COS date.

The Regional Director must either approve or disapprove the request through the VICA application. If the request is approved, the requested advanced COS date must be updated in VICA. If the request is denied, a denial reason must be displayed in VICA. It is critical that this process (both at post and Headquarters) occur as soon as an advancement request is suggested because, if approved, it will affect the timing of numerous payments due to the Volunteer.

2.3.5 Advancing a COS Date for a Peace Corps Response Volunteer

The COS date for Peace Corps Response Volunteers may be advanced by the Peace Corps in accordance with special rules that reflect the fact that PCRVs normally have 3 to 12 month assignments, rather than 24 month assignments.

In determining whether to advance a COS date for a PCRV, the Country Director must be guided by the criteria specified in 2.2, disregarding for such purposes the references to “21 months after his/her oath date”.

Advancing between 1 and 30 days. The Country Director may advance a Peace Corps Response Volunteer's COS date to between 1 and 30 days before the Peace Corps Response Volunteer's COS date and report the advance through the VICA application as soon as possible.

Advancing between 31 and 90 days. If the Country Director determines that a Peace Corps Response Volunteer's COS date should be advanced between 31 days to 90 days before the COS date, the Country Director must request the Regional Director's approval of the advanced COS date by attaching a memo in the VICA application. The memo must contain the following information:

- (a) The Peace Corps Response Volunteer's full name, ID number, oath date, original COS date (prior to any date advances), and proposed new COS date.
- (b) A detailed statement of the reasons for advancing the COS date.
- (c) A request that the Regional Director approve the proposed new COS date.
- (d) The Regional Director, or his/her delegate, must either approve or disapprove the request through the VICA application. The Regional Director will inform the Peace Corps Response Director after making a decision. If the request is approved, the requested advanced COS date must be updated in VICA. If the request is denied, a denial reason must be displayed in VICA.

3.0 Extension of Volunteer Service Within the Host Country

3.1 Policy

A Volunteer may request permission to extend service by submitting a written request to the Country Director. For administrative purposes, such requests must be made at least two months before the established COS date. In unusual situations an extension request made during the last two months of a Volunteer's service may be considered for approval by the Country Director.

3.2 Criteria for Extensions

The Country Director must consider all of the following factors in determining whether to grant an extension request:

- (a) A Volunteer's unique importance to the total program and the overall benefit to the host country.
- (b) The degree to which the Volunteer's supervisor and other host country officials support an extension.
- (c) The Volunteer's motivation in seeking the extension.
- (d) Medical approval from the Peace Corps Medical Officer.
- (e) The previous conduct of the Volunteer.
- (f) The quality of the Volunteer's service to date.
- (g) The total time the Volunteer will have served as a result of the extension (see paragraphs 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 below for further guidance).

3.3 Approval Authority and Procedures

3.3.1 Extensions of Service up to 25 months

The Country Director may approve extensions of service, including any period of special leave, of up to 25 months beyond the original COS date. All extensions of service are reported through the VICA application as soon as the extension is approved. A change of 30 days or less beyond the original COS date is classified as a date change, not a technical “extension of service”.

3.3.2 Extensions Beyond 25 Months

A Volunteer's request for an extension of service beyond 25 months from the original COS date may be approved only by the Regional Director. The Country Director must request the Regional Director's approval for the extension by attaching a memo in the VICA application. The memo must contain the following information:

- (a) The Volunteer's full name, Volunteer ID number, oath date of the Volunteer, original COS date (prior to any extensions of service), and proposed new extended COS date.
- (b) Why, based on the criteria in paragraph 3.2 above, the Country Director considers/believes the extension is warranted.
- (c) What extraordinary circumstances warrant the extension beyond 25 months.
- (d) Whether special leave would be applicable.
- (e) A request that the Regional Director approve the proposed new extended COS date.

The Regional Director, or his/her delegate, must either approve or disapprove the request through the VICA application. If the request is approved, the requested extended COS date must

be updated in VICA. If the request is denied, the Regional Director will provide the reason for the denial in VICA.

3.4 Terms and Conditions

All terms and conditions of Volunteer service continue to apply to extending Volunteers, except as provided in paragraph 4.0 below.

3.5 Additional Requirements

The Country Director must assign a current project code to Volunteers who extend their service for more than six months.

3.6 Annual Leave

An extending Volunteer is credited at the beginning of each extension with annual leave in accordance with MS 220_(see also paragraph 4.3 below).

3.7 Readjustment Allowance

Volunteers extending less than 12 months from the original COS date may not receive a one-third payment of readjustment allowance at the time of extension. Volunteers extending for 12 months or more are entitled to a one-third readjustment allowance payment at the time of original COS date and a one-third readjustment allowance payment at the extended COS date. Country Directors must follow the procedures in MS 223.

4.0 Special Leave for Extending Volunteers

4.1 Eligibility for Special Leave

Volunteers extending their service for 12 months or more are entitled to 30 days of special leave upon either the completion of the original term of service or as provided for under section 4.3. below. Each day of special leave is considered part of the Volunteer's service, but is not counted toward completion of the extension period, e.g., a 12-month extension and 30 days of special leave extends a Volunteer's COS date by 13 months.

If the Country Director determines that the nature of the Volunteer's assignment is such that an 11-month rather than a 12-month extension would be appropriate, then he/she may request the concurrence of the Regional Director to authorize an extension with special leave privileges. This option should be exercised only where the shortness of the Volunteer's assignment results from circumstances beyond the control of the Volunteer, such as the length of the school year. In requesting concurrence, the Country Director must request the Regional Director's approval of the extension with special leave privileges by attaching a memo in the VICA application. The memo must contain the following information:

- (a) The Volunteer's full name, ID number, oath date, original COS date (prior to any extensions of service), and proposed new extended COS date.
- (b) Volunteer project code.
- (c) Reasons for requesting the 11-month extension with special leave privilege.
- (d) A request that the Regional Director approve the proposed new extended COS date.

The Regional Director must either approve or disapprove the request through the VICA application. If the request is approved, the requested advanced COS date will be updated in VICA. If the request is denied, a denial reason will be displayed in VICA.

If approval is granted for an 11-month extension with special leave, the Country Director may not at a later date advance the new COS date by any more days.

4.2 Second Extension and Special Leave

After 25 months of extended service, including any period of special leave, a Volunteer who extends service for an additional 12 months will again be eligible for 30 days of special leave. Eligibility for a second special leave is based solely on the length of extended service regardless of the timing of the previous special leave.

4.3 Timing of Special Leave

Extending Volunteers are expected to take special leave as soon as possible after the beginning of extended service, preferably during the first three months. However:

- (a) A Volunteer may, with the written approval of the Country Director and concurrence of host country officials (i) begin special leave within the last 60 days prior to his/her original COS date, or (ii) conclude special leave prior to 90 days in advance of the Volunteer's new COS date.
- (b) A Volunteer who has completed 18 months of Volunteer service may begin special leave more than 60 days prior to the original COS date if the Country Director determines, with the Regional Director's concurrence, that for programmatic reasons such leave should be authorized.

A Volunteer may extend the special leave period by using up to 15 days of advanced annual leave for a combined total of leave not to exceed 45 consecutive days.

A Volunteer who does not take special leave within the time frames allowable forfeits his/her right to any special leave allowances and airline tickets for travel in conjunction with that special leave.

4.4 Allowances During Special Leave

For each day of special leave actually taken, a Volunteer receives the current special leave allowance. The living allowance continues to be paid during periods of special leave for Volunteers who extend in their original host countries or extend and transfer to another country. (For guidance regarding payment of living allowance to those Volunteers who extend and transfer, see MS 282 *Peace Corps Service Re-enrollments, Reinstatements, and Transfers.*)

Readjustment allowance continues to accrue during special leave.

4.5 Travel During Special Leave

Volunteers departing on special leave should be issued a ticket for round-trip travel from the host country to the U. S. home-of-record. Excursion fare tickets are to be issued, whenever possible, for the most direct route to the U. S. home-of-record. If Volunteers wish to use indirect travel that will not conform to the excursion fare restrictions, they must pay the difference and coordinate any additional cost directly with the airline.

4.5.1 Travel to other than Home-of-Record Volunteers who wish to travel elsewhere than to their home-of-record may request a ticket for round-trip excursion air fare from the host country to any location in an amount not greater than the cost of the least expensive fare from the host country to the U. S. home-of-record, or pay the difference.

4.5.2 Cash in Lieu Volunteers will not be given cash in lieu of this ticket under any circumstances.

4.6 Medical Care for Conditions Arising During Special Leave

The Peace Corps continues to provide Volunteers with necessary medical care during special leave. A condition arising in the U. S. that requires post-service care will generally not be deemed "service-connected" for purposes of Federal Employee Compensation Act (FECA) benefits. See MS 266 *Post-Service Health Benefits Program for Volunteers, Trainees, and Dependents.*

4.7 Life Insurance

Extending Volunteers continue to be eligible for the Peace Corps life insurance during special and advanced annual leave, regardless of where the leave is taken.

4.8 Early Termination after Receiving an Extension of Service

4.8.1 Effect on Special Leave and Non-Competitive Eligibility

- (a) The granting of special leave is based on a Volunteer's commitment to a minimum 12-month extension (not including the days of special leave). Volunteers who fail to fulfill that commitment forfeit their right to special leave and, if they have already taken special leave, may be required to refund certain amounts to the Peace Corps.

- (b) A Volunteer who resigns after extending service will be eligible for non-competitive eligibility certification, subject to the provisions of MS 285 *Volunteer Description of Service, Non-Competitive Eligibility, and Certificate of Group Health Coverage*.

4.8.2 Resignation before Special Leave

A Volunteer who resigns during an extension of service and who has not taken special leave will be deemed to have shortened his or her service extension and to be a COS Volunteer as of the date of resignation. See section 4.8.6 below for resignations in lieu of administrative separation.

4.8.3 Resignation during Special Leave

A Volunteer who takes special leave and resigns before returning to the host country while on special leave will be deemed to have shortened his/her service extension and to be a COS Volunteer as of the date when he/she formally notifies the Peace Corps of his/her intent not to resume service or his/her last day of special leave, whichever is earlier. The Volunteer must refund any allowances granted during special leave (excluding the cost of excursion class airfare from the host country to the home-of-record) and return any unused plane tickets provided at Peace Corps expense. The Volunteer also may not receive any living allowances held for him/her during special leave.

4.8.4 Resignation after Taking Special Leave

A Volunteer who takes special leave and resigns after returning to the host country will normally be granted a COS as of the date when the Volunteer formally notifies the Peace Corps of their intent to reduce their extension of service. If the Country Director determines, after consultation with the Region, that the Volunteer accepted the Special Leave in bad faith, the Volunteer may be required to refund the cost of the Special Leave round-trip airfare between the host country and home-of-record, as well as any allowances granted to the Volunteer for use during Special Leave, which shall be deducted from their readjustment allowance.

4.8.5 Medical Separation or Interrupted Service

Volunteers who extend and are medically separated or have interrupted service during that extension will be considered either early terminees (i.e., medical separation or interrupted service) or COS Volunteers depending on whether they are separated before, during, or after special leave. Their designation will be based on the standards used for resigning Volunteers in paragraphs 4.8.2, 4.8.3 and 4.8.4. These Volunteers will not be required to refund allowances granted to or held for them during special leave.

4.8.6 Sexual Assault, Stalking and Serious Crime

Notwithstanding the forgoing provisions of this paragraph 4.8, a Volunteer who has extended service and is a victim of sexual assault, stalking or serious crime may terminate Peace Corps service and receive an advance of the Volunteer's extended COS date. The Volunteer will not be required to refund allowances granted to or held for the Volunteer during special leave.

4.8.7 Administrative Separation

Volunteers who fail to complete their extension of service as the result of an administrative separation or resignation in lieu of administrative separation will be deemed early terminees and treated in accordance with the provisions of MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*, regardless of the point during their extension of service when the termination occurs or whether they have taken special leave.

5.0 Effective Date

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