

MS 285 Volunteer Description of Service, Non-Competitive Eligibility, and Certificate of Group Health Coverage

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Responsible Office: Office of Global Operations; Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection; Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services

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1.0 Authorities

Executive Order 11103; 22 U.S.C. 2503(b); 45 CFR 146.115(a)(6)

2.0 Purpose

This Manual Section describes and sets out the policy and procedures for Volunteer Descriptions of Service (DOS), certification of Volunteer eligibility for Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE), and Peace Corps' Certificate of Group Health Coverage.

3.0 Volunteer Description of Service

The Volunteer Description of Service (DOS) is an official Peace Corps statement of a Volunteer's service. It describes the Volunteer's training and overseas activities in non-evaluative terms. It also includes the certification of NCE for those Volunteers who qualify for the benefit. *See* Sections 5.0 and 6.0. The DOS is a publicly available document except for any Volunteer's Social Security Number (SSN) or excerpt from a Volunteer's SSN that may appear on the document. The DOS can also serve as an official verification of services performed. Trainees do not receive a DOS.

4.0 DOS Procedures

4.1 Collection of Information

At least three months before a Volunteer's completion of service (COS), or at the time of early termination in-country, the Country Director should provide information in writing regarding preparation of the DOS in accordance with this Manual Section. *See* Attachment A for an optional model.

Returned Volunteers who are applying for employment, graduate school, or for training programs often find it useful to have their experience quantified (how many persons affected, hours involved, bridges built, gardens planted, fish ponds developed, students taught, and so forth).

4.1.1 DOS for Teachers

Volunteers who have been teachers should include the following information in three pages or less:

- (a) Supervising authority (e.g., Minister of Education);
- (b) On-the-job supervisor (e.g., principal, department chairman);
- (c) Type and level of school, name of school, district, region and country, and U.S. equivalent;

- (d) Size of school (number of students and teachers);
- (e) Dates of beginning and ending of school year (day and month);
- (f) Total number of school days in the school year and number that Volunteer taught;
- (g) Subjects/grades taught and students/hours in each class;
- (h) Special difficulties encountered and overcome (e.g., prepared students for Cambridge School Certificate);
- (i) Extracurricular activities;
- (j) Secondary projects;
- (k) Results of foreign language aptitude test at close of service; and
- (l) Special awards or commendations.

4.1.2 DOS for Non-Teachers

Volunteers who have not been teachers should include the following information in three pages or less:

- (a) Supervising authority (e.g., Minister of Commerce);
- (b) On-the-job supervisor (e.g., District Officer);
- (c) Type of project (e.g., Urban Community Development);
- (d) Level of work and title (e.g., supervisor, engineer, nutritionist);
- (e) Any teaching or training responsibilities;
- (f) Size of community or number of persons involved in a project;
- (g) Special difficulties encountered and overcome;
- (h) Secondary projects;
- (i) Results of foreign language aptitude test at close of service; and
- (j) Special awards or commendations.

4.2 Preparing the DOS

An original DOS and two copies should be prepared on good quality Peace Corps official letterhead. In addition to the information in Section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, the Volunteer should include the following information:

- (a) The Volunteer's full name (including maiden name if female Volunteer married while overseas).
- (b) The Volunteer's entry-on-duty date, training dates, swear-in date, and termination date. The entry-on-duty date is the first day of the staging or pre-departure event.
- (c) Statement of eligibility for Federal Employment Tenure Benefits, inserted immediately before the NCE certification.

Pursuant to Section 5(f) of the Peace Corps Act, 22 U.S.C. 2504(f), as amended, any former Volunteer employed by the United States Government following his/her Peace Corps Volunteer Service is entitled to have any period of satisfactory Peace Corps service credited for purposes of retirement, seniority, reduction in force, leave, and other privileges based on length of federal government service. Peace Corps service shall not be credited toward completion of the probationary or trial period of any service requirement for career appointment.

- (d) Statement of NCE certification, if Volunteer is eligible, to be inserted immediately following the Statement of eligibility for Federal Employment Tenure Benefits. (See paragraphs 5.0 and 6.0 for eligibility and wording.)
- (e) Statement of eligibility for Paul D. Coverdell Fellows program, if the Volunteer is eligible, to be inserted immediately after the statement of NCE certification as the final paragraph. (See MS 126 Attachment A for eligibility requirements.)

[Volunteer name] has earned lifetime eligibility for the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows graduate school fellowship program.

4.3 Review of DOS

The DOS is an official Peace Corps statement of a Volunteer's service, and although usually drafted by the Volunteer, the Country Director may require changes before approving it. The Country Director must sign and date all copies of the DOS.

4.4 Distribution of DOS

The Country Director will return a copy of the DOS to the Volunteer before the Volunteer leaves the post. Original copies of each DOS shall be scanned, grouped alphabetically by name, and saved in the format "*Last Name, First Name, Country Code, COS Year*", and emailed to the Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services (D/3GL) at certify@peacecorps.gov. One copy of the DOS is filed at post for a period of one year.

The DOS will be maintained as an electronic document kept by D/3GL in accordance with the Peace Corps' records retention schedule. D/3GL will release a copy of the DOS to the Volunteer or anyone else upon request. No Social Security Number (SSN) or partial SSN shall appear on a DOS, and any SSN data will be redacted before any DOS is released.

A Volunteer who terminates service while away from post will prepare the DOS and forward it to the post for the Country Director's approval and signature. The Country Director will then return a copy of the DOS to the Volunteer, email the original to D/3GL at certify@peacecorps.gov One copy of the DOS is filed at post for a period of one year.

5.0 Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) Certification Under EO 11103

5.1 Authority for NCE Certification - Executive Order 11103

Under Executive Order 11103, certain Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) qualify for one year of NCE, i.e., to be non-competitively appointed as a career-conditional employee in the competitive civil service. An RPCV must have been appointed (either by initial appointment or extensions to an initial appointment) to a term of service of at least two consecutive years to be eligible for NCE.

NCE does not mean that RPCVs are entitled to federal employment.

Non-competitive eligibility permits, but does not require, an agency to hire non-competitively an RPCV who meets the minimum qualifications for the position. The decision whether to hire an RPCV under non-competitive eligibility is at the discretion of the hiring agency.

5.2 Completion of Full Term of Service

A Volunteer who has been appointed (either by initial appointment or extensions to an initial appointment) to a term of service of at least two consecutive years and satisfactorily completed his or her full term of service is eligible for NCE certification. Country Directors shall include the following certification statement as the final paragraph of the DOS of the Volunteers granted NCE:

This is to certify in accordance with Executive Order 11103 of April 10, 1963, that [Volunteer name] served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Volunteer. His or her service ended on [date]. He or she is therefore eligible to be appointed as a career-conditional employee in the competitive civil service on a non-competitive basis. This benefit under the Executive Order extends for a period of one year after termination of the Volunteer's service, except that the employing agency may extend the period for up to three years for a former volunteer who enters military service, pursues studies at a recognized institution of higher learning, or engages in other activities that, in the view of the appointing agency, warrant extension of the period.

5.3 Early Termination

A Volunteer whose service is terminated prior to the end of the full term of service may be eligible for NCE certification when:

- (a) the Volunteer's period of service was of sufficient duration (at least 12 consecutive months, including training) to demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service; and

- (b) the termination of the Volunteer's service is determined to be for reasons beyond the Volunteer's control.

5.3.1 12 Months or more of Service. If a Country Director determines that an early terminated Volunteer who has served 12 or more months has satisfied (a) and (b) above, the Country Director should certify that the Volunteer is eligible for NCE. The Country Director should include the NCE certification statement in paragraph 5.2 as the final paragraph on the DOS of the Volunteer granted this benefit.

5.4 Denial of NCE Certification and Appeal

The Country Director must provide a written notification to any Volunteer whose service terminate for reason beyond the Volunteer's control and who served at least 12 months if such Volunteer is denied NCE certification. The notification must include the reasons for denial and the following paragraph on appeal procedures:

If you wish to appeal this decision, please write to the Associate Director for Global Operations, Peace Corps, 1111 20th St. NW, Washington DC, 20526. The appeal must be postmarked or sent by e-mail within 30 days of notification of the denial of certification. In the absence of special circumstances, appeals postmarked after this period will not be considered. Your appeal must detail specifically the reason for the appeal and include a copy of the Country Director's written notification. If you served for at least 12 months and your NCE certification was denied because you did not demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service due to circumstances beyond your control, you may appeal this decision on the basis that your service demonstrated your capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service.

The Country Director must provide the Volunteer with the original copy of the notification and maintain a copy in the Volunteer's in-country file.

If a terminating Volunteer disagrees with the decision regarding eligibility for NCE certification, he or she may appeal that decision in accordance with the procedures described above. The Associate Director for Global Operations, in consultation with the appropriate Regional Director and Country Director, will make a final agency determination on such appeal.

6.0 Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) for Peace Corps Response Volunteers

6.1 Eligible Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs)

A Peace Corps Response Volunteer (PCRV) is not eligible for NCE with agencies other than the Peace Corps unless the PCRV meets the requirements set out in Section 5.0 above. However, a PCRV who:

- (a) has been appointed (either by one appointment or multiple appointments) to a term of service aggregating at least 12 months over a 24-month period; and
- (b) has satisfactorily completed his or her service under each such appointment,

qualifies for non-competitive eligibility (NCE) for Peace Corps positions in accordance with the provisions of Section 8.0 of MS 601.

6.2 Completion of Full Term of Service

A PCRV who has satisfactorily completed his or her service under a particular appointment is eligible to receive credit toward the 6.1(a) requirement for a period equal to the full term of such appointment. Country Directors shall include the following statement as the final paragraph of the DOS of the PCRV:

This is to certify in accordance with Section 6.0 of Peace Corps Manual Section 285 that [PCRV name] served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Response Volunteer for a full term of service under an appointment of [X] months.

6.3 Denial of NCE Certification and Appeal

The Country Director must provide a written notification to any terminating PCRV who served at least 12 months who is denied NCE certification. The notification must include the reasons for denial and the following paragraph on appeal procedures:

If you wish to appeal this decision, please write to the Associate Director for Global Operations, Peace Corps, 1111 20th St NW, Washington DC, 20526. The appeal must be postmarked or sent by e-mail within 30 days of notification of the denial of certification. In the absence of special circumstances, appeals postmarked after this period will not be considered. Your appeal must detail specifically the reason for the appeal and include a copy of the Country Director's written notification.

The Country Director must provide the PCRV with the original of the notification and maintain a copy in the PCRV's in-country file.

If a terminating PCRV disagrees with the Country Director's decision regarding eligibility for NCE certification, he or she may appeal that decision in accordance with the procedures described above. The Associate Director for Global Operations, in consultation with the appropriate Country Director and Regional Director, will make a final agency determination on such appeal.

7.0 Personal Recommendations

Peace Corps staff members may serve as personal references for trainees, Volunteers and Returned Volunteers as long as both of the following rules are observed:

- (a) A letter of recommendation may be provided by a Peace Corps staff member using his or her official title in response to a request for an employment recommendation or character reference. The recommendation must be based on personal knowledge of the ability or character of the Volunteer, acquired by the reference writer in the course of his or her Peace Corps job. An example of this would be a request by a Returned Volunteer for a

letter of recommendation from his or her Country Director. Under these circumstances, it is permissible to use official stationery and sign the letter using an official title; and

- (b) When providing a reference for a Volunteer, the staff member must clearly state in the reference that it is based on personal knowledge and that it is not an official evaluation by the Peace Corps. For example, "this reference is based on my personal knowledge of [name of the Volunteer] and should not be construed as an official evaluation by the Peace Corps." Such a statement must be added whenever a preprinted appraisal or reference form is completed for a Volunteer.

8.0 Certificate of Group Health Coverage

8.1 Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, Returned Volunteers and Trainees may be entitled to enter employer-provided group health plans without exclusion for pre-existing health conditions, if they have had sufficient health care coverage and become employed without a break in coverage of more than 63 days. The health insurance Peace Corps provides during Volunteer service meets the minimum essential coverage requirement of the Affordable Care Act. In addition, the certificate tells employers that Peace Corps service qualifies toward meeting coverage requirements, including creditable prescription drug coverage.

Under 45 CFR 146.115(a)(6), Peace Corps must issue a "Certificate of Group Health Plan Coverage" (*see* Attachment B) to each Volunteer or Trainee as he or she leaves service for any reason.

8.2 Each time a Volunteer or Trainee leaves service, post must:

- (a) Fill out the certificate per the instructions in Attachment B and print it on post letterhead;
- (b) Sign the certificate; and
- (c) Give the original signed copy to the Volunteer.

The Certificate of Group Health Plan Coverage must not be sent to CFO/VPS or attached to the DOS sent to CFO/VPS.

8.3 CFO/VPS will field questions and issue duplicate certificates if needed.

9.0 Effective Date

The effective date is the date of issuance.