

MS 285 Volunteer Description of Service, Non-Competitive Eligibility, Peace Corps 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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Attachments

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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); eligibility of returned Volunteers and Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs) for Peace Corps Eligibility (PCE); and the Peace Corps' Certificate of Group Health Coverage.

3.0 Volunteer Description of Service (DOS)

The Volunteer Description of Service (DOS) is an official Peace Corps statement of a Volunteer or PCRV's service. It describes their training and overseas activities in non-evaluative terms. It also includes the certification of NCE for those Volunteers and PCRVs who qualify for the benefit. (*See* subsection 4.0.) The DOS is a publicly available document except for any Social Security Number (SSN) or excerpt from a 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.

3.1 DOS Procedures

3.1.1 Collection of Information

At least three months before a Volunteer or PCRV'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 and PCRVs who are applying for employment, graduate school, or for training programs often find it useful to have their experience quantified (e.g., how many persons

affected, hours involved, bridges built, gardens planted, fish ponds developed, and students taught).

3.1.2 DOS for Teachers

Volunteers and PCRVs 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 chairperson);
- (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) Other community-defined activities;
- (k) Results of foreign language aptitude test at close of service;
- (l) Special awards or commendations; and
- (m) Volunteer Competencies (*see* MS 285 Attachment A).

3.1.3 DOS for Non-Teachers

Volunteers and PCRVs 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) Other community-defined activities;
- (i) Results of foreign language aptitude test at close of service;
- (j) Special awards or commendations; and
- (k) Volunteer Competencies (*see* MS 285 Attachment A).

3.1.4 Preparing the DOS

When preparing the DOS, Volunteers should reference the Volunteer Reporting and Grants Tool (VRG) to review their accomplishments, challenges, and community-defined activities. 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 or PCRV should include the following information:

- (a) Their full name (including former name if changed during service).
- (b) Their entry-on-duty (EOD) date, training dates, swear-in date, and termination date. The EOD date is defined in MS 203 *Enter-on-Duty Date*.
- (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 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 eligible, to be inserted immediately after the statement of NCE certification as the final paragraph:

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

(*See* Attachment A of MS 126 *Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection: Organization, Mission, and Functions* for eligibility requirements.)

3.1.5 Review of DOS

The DOS is an official Peace Corps statement of service usually drafted by the Volunteer or PCRV. The Country Director may require Peace Corps staff to review the DOS and may make changes before providing their approval. The Country Director must sign and date all copies of the DOS.

3.1.6 Distribution of DOS

The Country Director will return a signed copy of the DOS to the Volunteer or PCRV before they leave the Post. If feasible, the Country Director, or their designee, shall also email a copy of the signed DOS to the Volunteer or PCRV. 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 returned Volunteer or PCRV 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 or PCRV 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 or PCRV and 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.

4.0 Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) at Competitive Service Agencies

4.1 Authority for NCE Certification – Executive Order 11103

Under Executive Order (E.O.) 11103, certain returned Volunteers and PCRVs qualify for NCE and may be appointed as career-conditional employees in the competitive civil service without regard to competitive examination and in accordance with regulations established by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). (*See MS 101 The Peace Corps Act. E.O. 11103 is set forth at the end of that Manual Section, following the Peace Corps Act.*)

NCE permits, but does not require, an agency to hire non-competitively a returned Volunteer or PCRV who meets the minimum qualifications for the position. The decision whether to hire a returned Volunteer or PCRV under NCE is at the discretion of the hiring agency. NCE certification does not entitle individuals to federal employment.

4.2 Eligibility and Term of NCE Certification

Returned Volunteers who have been appointed by the Peace Corps (either by initial appointment or extension to an initial appointment) to a term of service of at least two consecutive years and have satisfactorily completed the full term of that service qualify for NCE certification. Under

E.O. 11103, the length of NCE may be extended by the employing agency for up to three years for a returned 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 employing agency, warrant extension of the period.

4.3 NCE Certification for Volunteers

4.3.1 NCE Certification for Volunteers on DOS

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 [name] served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Their service ended on [date]. They are 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 employing agency, warrant extension of the period.

4.3.2 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) their period of service was of sufficient duration (at least twelve (12) consecutive months, including training) to demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service; and
- (b) the termination of their service is determined to be for reasons beyond their control.

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 shall certify that the individual is eligible for NCE. The Country Director shall include the NCE certification statement in subsection 4.3.1 as the final paragraph on the DOS of the Volunteer granted this benefit.

4.4 NCE for PCRVs

4.4.1 Eligible PCRVs

A PCRv is only eligible for NCE if the PCRv meets the requirements set out in subsection 4.2 above.

4.4.2 NCE Certification for PCRVs on DOS

In the event a PCRV satisfactorily serves a sufficient length of time to meet the requirements of subsection 4.2, the Country Director shall include the NCE certification statement in subsection 4.3.1 as the final paragraph of the PCRV's DOS.

For a PCRV who satisfactorily completed their service but does not meet the requirements of subsection 4.2, Country Directors shall include the following statement:

This is to certify in accordance with subsection 4.0 of Peace Corps Manual Section 285 that [name] served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Response Volunteer for a full term of service under an appointment of [XX] months.

4.5 Denial of NCE Certification and Appeal

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

If you wish to appeal this decision, please write to the Associate Director for the Office of Global Operations, The Peace Corps, 1275 First Street NE, Washington, DC 20526 or to NCEappeal@peacecorps.gov. 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 Volunteer or PCRV with the original notification and maintain a copy in their in-country file at Post.

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

5.0 Peace Corps Eligibility (PCE) for Returned Volunteers and PCRVs

It is the policy of the Peace Corps that returned Volunteers and PCRVs who have satisfactorily completed the term of their Peace Corps service shall be granted Peace Corps Eligibility (PCE). PCE will qualify them for appointment to domestic staff positions at the agency, pursuant to the agency's excepted service authority and in accordance with the provisions of MS 601 *Administration of the Peace Corps Direct Hire Personnel System*.

PCE is limited to domestic positions within the Peace Corps and does not entitle individuals to employment at other federal agencies. The decision whether to hire a returned Volunteer or

PCR/V having PCE is at the discretion of the Peace Corps official authorized to make a selection in the hiring process (Selecting Official).

PCE permits, but does not require, a Selecting Official to:

- (a) hire a returned Volunteer or PCR/V from a certificate of applicants with PCE, otherwise known as the “PCE Roster,” who meets the minimum qualifications for an entry level position (positions at the Foreign Pay (FP) grades 5/6/7); and
- (b) limit competition for non-entry level positions (FP 4 and above) to returned Volunteers and PCR/Vs having PCE status and internal Peace Corps candidates.

5.1 PCE Certification on DOS

In the event a Volunteer or PCR/V satisfactorily completed the term of their Peace Corps service, the Country Director shall include the PCE certification statement below in the Volunteer or PCR/V’s DOS:

This is to certify in accordance with subsection 5.0 of Peace Corps Manual Section 285 that [name] served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Volunteer/Response Volunteer for the term of their Peace Corps service under an appointment of [XX] months.

For those Volunteers or PCR/Vs who are expecting to end their Peace Corps service satisfactorily within 90 days and wish to apply to the PCE Roster or for another domestic staff position at the agency, the Country Director will provide them with a “Pre-Close of Service Consideration of PCE” letter (*see* Attachment C) to submit as part of their application. Their appointment is contingent upon their satisfactory completion of service and submission of their signed DOS.

5.2 Early Termination

A Volunteer or PCR/V whose service is terminated prior to the end of the full term of their Peace Corps service may be eligible for PCE when:

- (a) their period of service was of sufficient duration to demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service, i.e.,
 - (1) at least twelve (12) consecutive months, including training, for Volunteers and
 - (2) a minimum of 3 months or at least 50 percent of their assigned term of service, whichever is greater, for PCR/Vs; and
- (b) the termination of their service is determined to be for reasons beyond their control.

If a Country Director determines that an early terminated Volunteer or PCR/V has satisfied (a) and (b) above, the Country Director shall certify that the individual is eligible for PCE. The Country Director shall include the PCE certification statement in subsection 5.1 in the DOS of the Volunteer or PCR/V granted this benefit.

5.3 Term of PCE

Returned Volunteers and PCRVs who are eligible for PCE may be granted three (3) years of PCE status, commencing immediately upon the successful completion of their term of Peace Corps service.

5.4 Denial of PCE Certification and Appeal

The Country Director's determination shall constitute the final agency action.

6.0 Personal Recommendations from Staff

Peace Corps staff members may serve as personal references for trainees, Volunteers, PCRVs, and returned Volunteers and PCRVs 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 their 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 individual, acquired by the reference writer in the course of their Peace Corps job. An example of this would be a request by a returned Volunteer for a letter of recommendation from their 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, 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] and should not be construed as an official evaluation by the Peace Corps." Such a statement must be added whenever a pre-printed appraisal or reference form is completed.

7.0 Certificate of Group Health Coverage

Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, Trainees, Volunteers, and PCRVs ending service 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 the 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), the Peace Corps must issue a "Certificate of Group Health Plan Coverage" (*see* Attachment B) to each Trainee, Volunteer, or PCRV as they leave service for any reason.

7.1 Post Responsibilities

Each time a Trainee, Volunteer, or PCRV 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 departing Trainee, Volunteer, or PCR.V.

The Certificate of Group Health Plan Coverage must not be sent to the Office of Volunteer and Personal Services Contractor (PSC) Financial Services within the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO/GAP/VPS) or attached to the DOS sent to OCFO/GAP/VPS. OCFO/GAP/VPS will field questions and issue duplicate certificates if needed.

8.0 Effective Date

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