

# MS 285 Volunteer Description of Service and Certificate of Group Health Coverage

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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 under Executive Order (E.O.) 11103, 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 eligibility of benefits under E. O. 11103 for those Volunteers who qualify for the benefit. *See* Sections 5.0 through 5.4. 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 E.O.11103 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 E.O. 11103 certification, if Volunteer is eligible, as the final paragraph. (See paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 for eligibility and wording.)

### **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 the original DOS to the Volunteer before the Volunteer leaves the post. One copy of each DOS, grouped alphabetically by name, should be sent to the Office of Volunteer and PSC Financial Services (CFO/VPS). One copy of the DOS is filed at post for one year.

The DOS will be maintained either in paper form or converted by CFO/VPS into an electronic document and kept by CFO/VPS in accordance with the Peace Corps' records retention schedule. CFO/VPS will release a copy of the DOS to the Volunteer or anyone else upon request. Any SSN or excerpt of an SSN appearing on a DOS will be redacted before the DOS is released to anyone other than the Volunteer.

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 the original DOS to the Volunteer, send one copy to CFO/VPS and file one copy at post.

## **5.0 Executive Order 11103 Certification**

### **5.1 Authority for Certification**

Under the provisions of E. O. 11103, certain Returned Volunteers are eligible for one year of non-competitive eligibility for selection for federal employment. This eligibility does not mean that Returned Volunteers are entitled to federal employment.

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

### **5.2 Completion of Full Term of Service**

Volunteers who have satisfactorily completed a full term of service are eligible for E.O. 11103 certification. Country Directors should include the following certification statement as the final paragraph of the DOS of Volunteers granted this benefit:

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**

The Country Director will make the agency decision regarding eligibility for E.O. 11103 certification in all cases of early terminating Volunteers. The Country Director may issue certification to a Volunteer (1) who has completed a lesser period of satisfactory service than a full term (approximately two years) provided such lesser period was of sufficient duration to demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service, normally at least twelve consecutive months, including training, *and* (2) whose termination is determined to be for reasons beyond the Volunteer's control. For example, the Country Director may certify the eligibility of a Volunteer who has served for a sufficient duration, including a duration of less than twelve consecutive months, if the Volunteer's service was of sufficient duration to demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service but was terminated early for security, medical or other reasons beyond the Volunteer's control. Country Directors should include the certification statement in paragraph 5.2 as the final paragraph on the DOS of a Volunteer granted this benefit.

### **5.4 Denial of Certification and Appeal**

The Country Director must provide notification in writing to any terminating Volunteer who is denied E.O. 11103 certification. Notification must include the reasons for denial and a notice of the right to appeal. The notification to the terminating Volunteer should include the following paragraph on appeal procedures:

If you wish to appeal this decision, please write to the Associate Director for Global Operations, 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 your E.O. 11103 certification was denied because you did not serve for a sufficient duration to demonstrate the capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service, including training, due to circumstances beyond your control, you may appeal this decision on the basis that your service was nevertheless of sufficient duration to demonstrate your capability to complete satisfactorily a full term of service.

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

If a terminating Volunteer disagrees with the Country Director's decision regarding eligibility for E.O. 11103 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 recommendation on the appeal to the Director of the Peace Corps, who will make the final agency determination on such appeal.

## **6.0 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.

## **7.0 Certificate of Group Health Coverage**

**7.1** 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 certificate tells employers that Peace Corps service qualifies toward meeting coverage requirements.

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.

**7.2** 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;
- (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.

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

## **8.0 Effective Date**

The effective date is the date of issuance.