

NCE FOR VISTAS

[SLIDE 1]

HOW AMERICORPSVISTA GIVES YOU AN ADVANTAGE WHEN APPLYING FOR FEDERAL JOBS

As your VISTA term winds down, you might be thinking about future job prospects. Keep in mind that the federal government is the nation's largest employer and that your VISTA service can:

- Open the door to federal positions not available to the general public
- Secure you a federal position in less time than the traditional process

Non Competitive Eligibility (or NCE) -- a hiring status granted to you for 1 year upon successful completion of your VISTA service -- can help you in your job search. This presentation will show you how to make your NCE status work for you.

Salina Greene

A VISTA alum who served in the Baltimore area, Salina Greene used her VISTA experience to help her get a job as an investigator with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Chicago.

Phillip Pless

After serving for a year in New Hampshire, Phillip Pless used his NCE status to secure a position as a management analyst with the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Washington, DC.

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WHAT IS NCE?

Non Competitive Eligibility (NCE) gives VISTAs and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RCPVs) a leg up in applying for positions in the federal government. Your VISTA service permits you to compete in a smaller pool of applicants, drastically improving your chances for success. In short, NCE can help you get a job.

NCE also permits a federal agency to hire a former VISTA without going through a formal review process. In other words, all it takes is an open position and an applicant's resumé that reflects the necessary experience and education for an agency to make a job offer to an applicant with NCE. Broadly advertising the position, interviewing candidates, and other

common hiring procedures are NOT required for an agency to hire an applicant with NCE status—though they are often still used.

Whether you are fast tracked without the formal hiring process or just compete against a limited NCE applicant roster, being a VISTA alum with NCE can help you make a quick transition from job seeker to federal employee when selected for a position.

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STORIES OF 2 VISTAs WHOSE SERVICE LED THEM TO FEDERAL JOBS

SALINA GREENE

Salina Greene joined VISTA not only to give back to the community but with the goal of finding a federal position. When she learned that VISTAs received a year of NCE status, it was an added selling point.

After graduate school where she focused on international relations, human rights, and economic development, she served as a VISTA in the Baltimore area with nonprofits focused on home ownership and financial services education.

With a month left in her term, she began job hunting and found several listings on [VISTA Campus](#). Of the listings, only one focused on social justice -- a position as an investigator with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Chicago.

When she spoke to a recruiter with EEOC, she learned that the agency was facing a hiring freeze in the near future and was looking for candidates with NCE status to fill positions quickly. Even with NCE status, it was a long shot for Salina to get the job as thousands of applications were submitted. Though VISTA alums and RPCVs have NCE, she was still competing against veterans and anyone already working in the federal government wanting to change positions.

A month and a half after submitting her application, Salina started her new position in Chicago and works alongside several other former VISTAs and RPCVs who also used their NCE to secure their positions.

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STORIES OF 2 VISTAs WHOSE SERVICE LED THEM TO FEDERAL JOBS

PHILLIP PLESS

After a week-long student experience in Atlanta as a volunteer and learning about hunger issues and urban poverty, Phillip Pless promised himself he would not enter the corporate

workforce until he spent a year in service. After graduating from the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill, Phillip joined VISTA.

His assignment took him to Manchester, NH, where he worked with an organization on its initiatives to end hunger in the area. The experience sparked Phillip's interest in affordable housing, community development, and special needs populations.

Phillip learned about NCE early in his VISTA term and kept it in mind so that he was ready to use it when the opportunity presented itself. In an email from VISTA, he learned about a job fair for VISTAs and RPCVs hosted by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Though he thought there was no way he could be qualified for a position, his supervisor encouraged him to apply.

In preparing his application, Phillip demonstrated how the experience and skills gained from his VISTA service had prepared him to be successful in the open position with HUD. He also mentioned in his cover letter that his VISTA service ended and that he had Non Competitive Eligibility for a year. Although the job fair was in Washington DC, Phillip was able to interview by phone from Manchester.

Shortly after that, Phillip received a job offer to become a management analyst with HUD, which he accepted. He now works in HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development in Washington, DC.

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WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

You should know these things about your NCE status:

1. You attain NCE status only after successful completion of at least a 1-year VISTA term. (Serving a summer term does not grant you eligibility.)
2. Your NCE status begins when you finish your VISTA term and lasts 1 year. While you can search for positions while serving, your NCE status only kicks in after you finish.
3. If you attend school or relative training after VISTA service, a hiring agency can extend your NCE status up to 3 years.
4. If applying for a federal job that has been advertised to the general public, your NCE status will give you an extra advantage in that it puts you on a separate roster from which a manager can hire and creates a shortcut for agencies looking to hire VISTAs and RPCVs specifically.
5. NCE status gives you a boost in applying only for jobs that match your qualifications. If a position requires skills and experience you don't have, NCE won't help you.

6. Even if you meet all the qualifications for a position, NCE doesn't guarantee you'll get the job!

7. This is a VISTA-only benefit. It is not available to AmeriCorps State and National or NCCC members.

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GETTING A FEDERAL JOB

For the most part, finding employment in the federal sector is similar to finding a job anywhere.

In some ways, it's more simple, as all advertised positions are listed on 1 site: USAjobs.gov. If you are looking to apply for federal jobs, this is a powerful resource, and we'll soon cover how to search for jobs using your NCE status on the site.

There are also some elements of federal-job seeking that are unique enough to suggest some preparation before diving in and looking for jobs. Also, it's helpful to know the ins and outs of federal hiring, including how to find the specific titles of jobs that match your skills, experience, and interests. An excellent resource is a free booklet, [How to get a job in the Federal Government](#) (PDF).

What the booklet doesn't explain is how to use the NCE status granted by your VISTA service to get a federal job.

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STEPS TO APPLY NCE TO YOUR JOB SEARCH

Step 1: Download your letter

Your noncompetitive eligibility status begins when your VISTA service ends.

The first step is to download a PDF of your certification of service letter. Once you've logged on to your [My AmeriCorps](#) account, look for "My Service Letter" in the left column of your homepage.

Select your dates and from the drop down menu select, "VISTA Certification of Service and Non Compete." Type in your name and address in the box below and click print or save as a PDF.

You'll need to include this document with application materials to confirm your NCE status. (For technical assistance, please contact the National Service Hotline at 800-942-2677.

Question: What if I am applying for positions before my VISTA term ends and don't have my service letter yet?

Answer: Technically, your NCE status doesn't begin until you successfully complete your term. If you find yourself in this situation, call the HR department of the agency where you are applying to explain when your NCE status begins. (If you are serving back-to-back VISTA terms, you can use your previous year's eligibility to apply for positions while finishing your current term.)

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STEPS TO APPLY NCE TO YOUR JOB SEARCH

Step 2: Find positions

How do you know where to look to find job openings in the federal system?

- Attend local job fairs (where federal employers are present) to learn about opportunities, as well as meet in person with agency representatives.
- Contact agencies directly for assistance and for information about special hiring programs.
- Visit [USAjobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov) to search for positions open to individuals with NCE status.

Tips from Salina

1. Be sure to check the [VISTA Campus job board](#) in the forums. I found 4-5 listings I was interested in on the VISTA Campus before I started submitting applications.
2. Even if you don't get a job or a deadline has passed, contact the recruiters who posted the job opening and ask if anything else will be opening up. Remind them of your NCE status.
3. On [USAjobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov), make sure you click the boxes that show you the jobs open to you. (The next page will show you how.)

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STEPS TO APPLY NCE TO YOUR JOB SEARCH

Making USAjobs.gov work for you

When looking for open positions on [USAjobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov), there are options for refined and advanced searches where you can mark your NCE status. Clicking these boxes will show you a wider range of job possibilities than what are available to the general public.

Advanced Search **[Includes screen shot from website]**

Mark "yes" in the Applicant Eligibility box. This will expand your search to jobs that are not open to the public but open to you because of your NCE status.

Standard Search **[Includes screen shot from website]**

Mark "Jobs for Federal Employees" in the Refine Your Results box. Your NCE status makes you eligible to apply.

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STEPS TO APPLY NCE TO YOUR JOB SEARCH

Step 3: Submit an application

When applying for federal jobs, make sure you follow good job-seeking practices, such as highlighting your past experiences that match the job requirements.

Also be sure to:

1. Mention early on that you have NCE status in your cover letter
2. Include a PDF or a print out of your "My Service Letter" with your application materials

Tips from Phillip:

1. Be specific about your VISTA experience on your resume. Federal resumes can be longer and more detailed than the typical 1- or 2-page resume. HR officials must have enough evidence in order to evaluate you as qualified for the position.
2. Follow directions in job announcements carefully. If you don't understand a component of the announcement or a question on the application, contact the HR contact person and get clarification (unless the announcement advises applicants not to call).
3. The application is essentially a multiple choice test graded by a computer. Don't overthink the questions and undersell yourself. Your answers will be corroborated by an HR specialist, but you must pass the computer check first.
3. Be patient. The federal hiring process can be slow in many cases (even with NCE).

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NEXT STEPS (WHILE YOU ARE STILL SERVING)

1. Sign up for [USAjobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov), learn the particulars of how to get a job in the federal government, and keep your eyes open for appealing agencies with positions that might open around the time you are finishing service. Make you sure your search includes NCE applicable positions.
2. Check out job postings on the [VISTA Campus](#). The agencies who post positions on the Campus are often looking for applicants with a VISTA-type skill set.
3. As your year winds down, start submitting applications. Be sure to mention in your cover letter that you will receive NCE on the date your VISTA service ends.
4. When applying for positions after your year is complete, mention your NCE status in your cover letter AND attach your "My Service Letter" from your My AmeriCorps account.

Thank you for viewing this presentation and best of luck in job hunting!

[SLIDE 12 Optional]

COMMON QUESTIONS

Q. I AM SERVING FOR 2 YEARS. DOES THAT MEAN I GET 2 YEARS OF ELIGIBILITY?

No matter how long you served, you only get 1 year of eligibility that starts when you complete a 12-month term.

Q. I AM SERVING FOR 2 YEARS. CAN I USE MY NCE STATUS FROM MY FIRST VISTA YEAR TO APPLY FOR JOBS WHILE I AM SERVING A SECOND TERM?

Yes, but make sure you time it right so that if you are offered a federal position, your start date occurs after you finish VISTA.

Q. ARE THERE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WOULD ALLOW ME TO GET AN EXTENSION?

That is at the discretion of the hiring agency. According to the law, the hiring agency may extend a candidate's NCE status for up to 3 years after the close-of-service date. Reasons for the extension can include military service, higher education, or other activities that, in the agency's view, warrant an extension. If time is running out on your NCE status as you are submitting an application, contact the HR manager at the agency where you are applying to inquire about an extension.

Q. ARE THERE PLACES OTHER THAN USAJOBS.GOV WHERE I CAN HEAR ABOUT OPENINGS?

Check the job board in the [VISTA Campus forums](#). Not all the jobs listed will be federal positions, though most are positions of interest to job-seeking VISTAs.

Q. I HAD TO LEAVE MY VISTA SERVICE EARLY FOR COMPELLING REASONS. EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T SERVE A FULL YEAR, DO I HAVE NCE STATUS?

No, you must serve the full 12-month terms to receive NCE. If you leave VISTA service early for compelling reasons, you might receive a prorated education award but do not receive the NCE benefit.

Q. I'VE SERVED SEVERAL PART-TIME VISTA TERMS THAT ADD UP TO A FULL YEAR. CAN I GET NCE?
Even though you do have 12 months of VISTA service, you need to serve a full-time, yearlong VISTA assignment to receive NCE status.

[SLIDE 13 Optional]

KEY POINT SUMMARY

To recap the key points, the noncompetitive eligibility (NCE) granted to you upon successful completion of your VISTA year can:

- Open the door to federal positions not available to the general public
- Secure you a federal position in less time than the traditional process

A [downloadable 2-page pdf](#) includes all the information given in this presentation.

Key items to know:

You should know these things about your NCE status:

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