

# Policies on Civil Rights, Equal Opportunity and Harassment

## **Corporation for National and Community Service Civil Rights Statement Regarding Volunteers, Service Participants and Other Beneficiaries**

We continue to maintain the policy stated in our June 6, 1994, Civil Rights Statement:

Recognizing that the fabric of our society is strengthened by the diversity of its citizens, the policy of the Corporation for National and Community Service is to ensure a mutual respect for all differences among us. Participation in the Corporation and its programs and projects will be based on merit and equal opportunity for all, without regard to factors such as race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, political affiliation, marital or parental status, military service, or religious, community, or social affiliations.

By adhering to this policy, the Corporation will be able to foster civic responsibility, strengthen the ties that bind us together as a people, and provide educational opportunity for those who make a substantial commitment to service.

This policy applies to programs and projects we conduct, as well as those receiving federal financial assistance from us. For civil rights purposes, all programs and projects funded or receiving volunteers or service participants under the National and Community Service Act, as amended, or the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, as amended, are programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. Any grantee found to have unlawfully discriminated against a volunteer, service participant, client, employee or beneficiary of such a program or project will be subject to a finding of noncompliance and administrative procedures which may result in termination of federal financial assistance from the Corporation and all other federal agencies.

Any volunteer, service participant, client, employee or beneficiary of a program or project who believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination in violation of nondiscrimination provisions of applicable laws, regulations or this policy may raise his or her concerns with the Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness. However, discrimination claims not brought to the attention of our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness within 45 days of their occurrence may not be accepted in a formal complaint of discrimination. Our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness may be reached at (202) 606-7503 (voice), (202) 606-3472 (TDD), eo@cns.gov, or through [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org).

The Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness attempts to resolve concerns about discrimination promptly and, when possible, uses an informal conciliation process to do so. We encourage, but do not require, volunteers, service participants, and other beneficiaries to first bring concerns about discrimination to the director or appropriate personnel of the program or project. We likewise encourage directors of programs and projects to facilitate prompt resolution of these concerns.

Directors of all programs and projects are requested to provide a copy of this policy to all volunteers or service participants.

## **Corporation for National and Community Service Equal Opportunity and Workforce Diversity Policy for Employees and Applicants for Employment**

It is our policy to provide equal employment opportunity for all applicants for employment and employees of the Corporation. We do not discriminate in any aspect of employment because of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, mental or physical disability (including AIDS), sexual orientation, or any other improper criterion. We strive to provide a work environment free of sexual, racial, national origin, religious or other unlawful harassment.

# Policies on Civil Rights, Equal Opportunity and Harassment (cont.)

Equal opportunity for all employees is an integral part of accomplishing the mission of the Corporation. As chief executive officer of the Corporation, I am strongly committed to fostering a workplace that is free of discrimination in any form. I believe that we should be committed to practicing inclusiveness, fairness, and participation of all employees in every facet of the Corporation.

Beyond the basic policies of equal employment and non-discrimination described above, we aspire to provide an environment that is hospitable for all employees. We value diversity among our employees, and I am committed to promoting a climate of mutual respect and appreciation for the strengths that a diverse workforce brings to bear on our important work.

In addition to making certain that our employees are treated with respect and according to the principles of equal opportunity in the workplace, we must make every effort to ensure that our employees, as they carry out their duties, do not discriminate on unlawful grounds against persons or organizations, volunteers or service participants, including subjecting them to any form of unlawful harassment.

I expect every Corporation manager, supervisor, and employee to actively carry out our equal opportunity policy. Implicit in each employee's "successful" performance level is his or her full and complete implementation of this policy. I call upon all managers and supervisors to ensure that all decisions affecting our workforce, service environments, grantees and programs are consistent with the principles of equal opportunity and this policy. Any person who violates this equal opportunity policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Any Corporation employee or applicant for employment who believes he or she has been discriminated against in violation of equal opportunity laws, regulations, or this policy, or in retaliation for having participated in an activity protected under these nondiscrimination provisions may raise his or her concerns with our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness. However, discrimination claims not brought to the attention of our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness within 45 days of their occurrence may not be accepted in a formal complaint of discrimination. Our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness may be reached at (202) 606-7503 (voice), (202) 606-3472 (TDD), or [eo@cns.gov](mailto:eo@cns.gov), or through our Web site at [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org).

## Corporation for National and Community Service Policy Against Sexual, Racial, National Origin, or Religious Harassment

Our policy is to provide work and service environments free from sexual, racial, national origin, or religious harassment. Whether in Corporation or grantee offices, in other work- or service-related settings such as service sites, training sessions, or site visits, or at work- or service-related social events, such harassment is unacceptable.

Sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or any verbal, physical or graphic conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. submission is explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment or service;
2. submission or rejection is a basis for work or service decisions; or
3. such conduct has the purpose or the effect of interfering with work or service performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or service environment.

Slurs and other verbal or physical conduct relating to an individual's race, national origin or religion also constitute harassment when that conduct's purpose or effect is to interfere with work or service performance or create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or service environment.

We expect Corporation and grantee supervisory and management personnel to immediately take appropriate action to prevent or stop any harassment of employees, service participants, or clients of which they become aware, whether the harassing conduct is by employees, service participants, or outside individuals such as service site or contractor personnel. Also, we will not retaliate or tolerate any attempt at retaliation against a person

# Policies on Civil Rights, Equal Opportunity and Harassment (cont.)

who raises harassment concerns in good faith. Any Corporation employee who violates our policy against harassment, or asserts a false claim of harassment with a malicious intent, will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Any grantee that permits harassment in violation of this policy will be subject to a finding of noncompliance and administrative procedures that may result in termination of federal financial assistance from the Corporation and all other federal agencies.

Persons who believe they have been subjected to harassment in violation of non-harassment provisions of applicable laws, regulations or this policy may raise their concerns with our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness. However, claims of unlawful harassment not brought to the attention of our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness within 45 days of their occurrence may not be accepted in a formal complaint of discrimination. Our Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness may be reached at (202) 606-7503 (voice), (202) 606-3472 (TDD), eo@cns.gov, or through our Web site at [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org).

We encourage, but do not require, volunteers, service participants, and other beneficiaries to first bring concerns about harassment to the director or appropriate supervisory personnel of the program or project. We likewise encourage programs and projects to facilitate prompt resolution of these concerns.

Directors of all programs and projects are requested to provide a copy of this policy to all volunteers or service participants.

# Civil Rights and Responsibilities Summary

You are protected by VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service from being subjected to discrimination or harassment. You also have an obligation as a VISTA to make sure you do not subject anyone else to discrimination or harassment. This extends to everyone you come in contact with, including other VISTAs, clients, and volunteers and employees at your service site.

## What Is Discrimination?

Discrimination is treating people differently because of who they are, where they come from, or the groups they belong to. Discrimination in a VISTA service setting is **illegal** when it targets a person or group based on such **non-merit factors** as race, gender, or religion, also known as **protected classes**, which the Corporation for National and Community Service defines as the following:

- Race, color, or national origin
- Sex/gender
- Disability (physical or mental)
- Age
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Gender identity and expression
- Sexual orientation

Illegal discrimination:

- BOTH targets a person or group because of a difference AND singles them out for different treatment
- May be a one-time occurrence or part of an ongoing pattern
- Can happen to anyone

## What Is Harassment?

Illegal harassment in a VISTA service setting is **severe and/or pervasive** verbal or non-verbal communication relating to an individual's gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, or any other **non-merit factor** that interferes with a VISTA's performance and/or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive service environment. Harassment can consist of spoken or written words, images, or actions and can happen to anyone. It includes but is not limited to:

- Explicit or implicit demands for sexual favors
- Pressure for one's company
- Unwelcome persistent letters, phone calls, emails or other media
- Distribution or display of offensive material
- Offensive looks, gestures, physical encroachment, or threatening behavior

# Civil Rights and Responsibilities Summary (cont.)

Illegal harassment:

- Includes – but is not limited to – sexual harassment
- Can be spoken words or unspoken actions
- Is more than just annoying or uncomfortable behavior
- Generally happens over a period of time
- Creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive service environment
- Prevents a VISTA from serving effectively
- Can happen to anyone

## What Should I do if I Experience or Witness Discrimination or Harassment?

If you feel safe and comfortable doing so, you can approach and talk to the person you suspect of engaging in harassing or discriminating behavior directly yourself. If that doesn't work, or if you do not feel safe and comfortable doing so, you can also talk to your VISTA supervisor.

If you can not go to your supervisor, or you do and the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact your state office (see the link to the list of state office contacts below). Finally, you can contact the Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness or OCRI (see contact information below). If you and/or your VISTA supervisor or state office contact chooses to contact OCRI, note that claims must be made within 45 days of the incident.

## Useful Questions/Suggestions if you think you have experienced or witnessed Discrimination or Harassment?

- Have I (Can I) talk to the person involved?
- What assumptions might I be making? How can I check out these assumptions?
- Assume positive intent. Communicate to clarify.
- Use statements such as, "It appears to me that..."
- Speak with a supervisor (if you can).
- Ask yourself: Is there something I can learn from this?

## Where Can I go for More Information?

The Corporation for National and Community Service takes discrimination and harassment very seriously and makes the following resources available to you:

- **Corporation State Office Contacts** – A list of state offices can be found online at [www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-offices](http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-offices)

# Civil Rights and Responsibilities Summary (cont.)

- **Contact Information for OCRI** – Contact OCRI via mail, phone, fax or email at:
  - 1201 New York Avenue, NW**
  - Suite 10800**
  - Washington, DC 20525**
  - (202) 606-7503 (hotline)**
  - (202) 606-3472 (TDD)**
  - (202) 606-3465 (fax)**
  - eo@cns.gov (email)**
- **Complete List of the Corporation’s Official Policies on Discrimination and Harassment** – These can be found in the online VISTA Member Handbook at <http://vistacampus.gov/mod/book/view.php?id=2093>.

# Fraternization Policy

Civil Rights and Responsibilities

Relationships between VISTA members and the staff members (including volunteer and contracted personnel) of the Corporation, sponsoring organization, and project site that are exploitive or that have the appearance of partiality, preferential treatment, or the improper use of position for personal gain, are prejudicial to the morale of VISTA members and will not be tolerated.

Relationships between members and the aforementioned staff members are forbidden if the relationship compromises or appears to compromise supervisory authority or could result in preferential treatment. Relationships are prohibited if they appear to involve the improper use of rank or position for personal gain.

All VISTA members must avoid nonprofessional relationships with other members or staff members that create real or perceived conflicts of interest, discord, or distractions that interfere with other members' productivity, or potentially could result in charges of sexual harassment. These problems are serious in situations in which one person has authority over another.

Inappropriate relations include, but are not limited to,

- a Corporation state office staff member and a VISTA supervisor within that state;
- a Corporation state office staff member and a VISTA member or leader;
- a VISTA supervisor and a VISTA member at the same project; and
- a VISTA leader and a VISTA member under his/her coordination.

Such relationships are strictly forbidden and will not be tolerated. Violators may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including removal.

Nonprofessional relationships between members and the aforementioned staff includes, but is not limited to,

- intimate/sexual relationships
- borrowing or lending money, automobiles, or other personal property
- engaging in financial or business dealings, or acting as an agent or sponsor with any commercial services
- allowing services to be performed (compensated or uncompensated) that have no reasonable connection with VISTA activities
- gambling for goods, services, or money
- any activity and/or relationship that, in the judgment of the Corporation state program director, may reasonably be perceived to undermine discipline, good order, and/or morale
- socializing that might lead to the perception of a relationship or overtures to activities listed above

**Corporation for National and  
Community Service  
Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness  
1201 New York Avenue  
Washington, DC 20525  
Voice: 202-606-7503  
TDD: 202-606-3472  
FAX: 202-606-3465  
E-Mail: eo@cns.gov**

*EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS EVERYONE'S  
RESPONSIBILITY*