Non-Competitive Eligibility Frequently Asked Questions

What is non-competitive eligibility status and how does it apply to VISTAs?
Former VISTAs who have successfully completed their VISTA service attain a status – commonly referred to as "non-competitive eligibility" (NCE) status -- for one year following their completion of VISTA service. As set forth in federal law, such individuals "shall be eligible for appointment in the Federal competitive service in the same manner as Peace Corps Volunteers as prescribed in Executive Order No. 11103 (April 10, 1963)." Section 415(d), Title IV, of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

What that means is that VISTAs who successfully complete at least one full year of VISTA service are accorded, for a one year period after completion of VISTA service, a status that makes them eligible (1) for appointment by a federal agency into the federal competitive service and (2) to compete for certain federal employment jobs that only federal employees are also eligible to compete for. This one year NCE status is a benefit only available starting from the date of completion of service, and expires after one year following a VISTA's successful completion of a year of VISTA service. VISTAs who have completed less than one year of service (including training time) will not receive NCE status.

Having current NCE eligibility status does not mean that a former VISTA is entitled to federal employment. However, although non-competitive eligibility does not require, it does permit an agency to hire a former VISTA who meets the minimum qualifications for the position without going through all of the formalities of the competitive process. The decision whether to hire a former VISTA under non-competitive eligibility status is within the discretion of the hiring agency. Therefore, to alleviate any confusion it is advised that a former VISTA who is currently in the one-year NCE status period, makes it as clear as possible to the hiring agency where they are seeking employment, the time remaining in which the former VISTA retains that NCE status.

What are "competitive service" positions?
Congress has established laws, policies, and procedures governing employment. This formal process is designed to eliminate illegal discrimination and favoritism and to provide fair and open competition so that hiring and promotion are based on merit. These competitive service jobs are governed by specific examination or appointment procedures as set out by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Thus, former VISTAs with NCE status who have an interest in a "competitive service" position may be hired more easily because the employing agency in which a former VISTA is seeking employment can select that VISTA without going through all the competitive-related hiring procedures.

How do I find federal jobs where my non-competitive status may be advantageous?
When searching for federal jobs on http://www.usajobs.opm.gov (the official job site of the United States Federal Government), a question in the search menu asks about an applicant's eligibility. If you are a former VISTA who is currently in a period where you have NCE status, select "Yes".

Applicant Eligibility ❓
Are you a current or former Federal civilian employee who holds or held a non-temporary appointment:

- In the competitive service in the Executive Branch or in a position not in the Executive branch specifically included in the competitive service by statute, or
- In an excepted service position covered by an interchange agreement, or
- Eligible for reinstatement?
- A Veteran eligible for veterans? preference or separated from the armed forces under honorable conditions after 3 years or more of continuous military service?
- A person with non-competitive appointment eligibility?

☐ **No** ☑ **Yes**

How do I make sure the employing agency is aware of my NCE Status?
The regulatory authority for an individual to have NCE status is set out under Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations, at 5 CFR § 315.605. Former VISTAs who currently have NCE status – i.e., are currently in the one-year period following VISTA service when they are accorded NCE status -- should highlight the NCE status in their cover letter, on their resume, and through the supplemental documents area most online applications systems contain. See the example in the cover letter on Page 4 of this document.

How do I prove NCE status?
To establish your non-competitive status, you will need proof of eligibility. Once you have completed service, log onto the My AmeriCorps portal to print an AmeriCorps VISTA certification letter. Visit http://my.americorps.gov to register at the My AmeriCorps portal. Click the "My Service Letter" link to create and print your letter. If your letter is incorrect or the portal cannot locate your record, please contact the VISTA Member Support Unit by submitting a request online at http://www.nationalservice.gov/questions.

How do I prove NCE without filling in a grade and series on the application?
Many federal applications require that you enter your grade and series when proving NCE status. Typically, VISTAs do not have a grade and series since they were volunteers and were never previously federal employees. If a VISTA who is currently accorded NCE status has no grade and series to enter, s/he must contact the employing agency to determine how they should fill out an application that requires a grade and series in order to prove NCE.

What are some instances that non-competitive eligibility is extended?

A hiring agency may extend the period on an individual's NCE status beyond one year for two additional years, to a total of three years if the individual, after the qualifying service (e.g., after VISTA service), is:

- In the military service, or Peace Corps service
- Studying at a recognized institution of higher learning
- In another activity which, in the agency's view, warrants extension

Additional information can be found in 5 CFR § 315.605.

Can non-competitive eligibility be "used up" prior to the end of the one year of NCE status?

No. You are able to use your non-competitive eligibility status multiple times during the period of eligibility if the hiring agency permits you to do so.

Does non-competitive eligibility apply only to federal positions?

Yes. NCE is applicable only to federal government positions. Non-competitive eligibility does not apply to state or local government jobs. Information on federal positions can be obtained from USAJOBS, the federal government's one-stop source for federal jobs and employment information. USAJOBS is accessible at http://www.usajobs.opm.gov.

Example of Cover Letter for Federal Position

Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Personnel Operations 123
Downtown Street, S.W. Washington, D.C.
20201

Re: Grant Analyst Position, GS-7
Vacancy Announcement EX-03-03
Non-competitive Eligibility

Dear Selecting Official/Panel:

I am very interested in the above-captioned Grant Analyst position. [*In two to three paragraphs and less than one page, state reasons why you are interested in and qualify for the position. This letter should cover your interest and purpose, highlight your enclosed résumé by stressing what you can do for the employing agency, and request an interview while providing your best contact information.*]

As I recently completed my year of service with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), I request that I be placed in your agency's "non-competitive" group of eligible candidates upon the finding that I meet the qualifications for the position. Per Federal employment regulations, **I am eligible for non-competitive hire** because I have recently completed my year of service with VISTA, on [**ENTER DATE OF COMPLETION OF VISTA SERVICE**], and meet the requirement under 5 C.F.R. § 315.605. If you have any questions about my non-competitive eligibility status, you can review information related to this special appointment authority at U.S. Office of Personnel Management's website at http://www.opm.gov/employ/html/sroa2.asp and go to the "Miscellaneous Authorities Regulated" section.

Sincerely,

VISTA alumnus/a