

Civil Rights & Responsibilities Summary

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

The following information (including the next page) is provided to VISTA members and explains their civil rights relating to discrimination and harassment.

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**.

Protected Classes

The Corporation for National and Community Service defines protected classes 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

- 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 or gestures, physical encroachment, or threatening behavior

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

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Summary, cont.

What Should I Do?

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

If you cannot 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 CNCS Equal Opportunity Office (see contact information below). If you and/or your VISTA supervisor or state office contact chooses to contact the Equal Opportunity Office, 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, these questions and suggestions may be useful:

- 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).
- 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 at www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-offices

A complete list of the CNCS's official policies on discrimination and harassment can be found in the online VISTA Member Handbook at www.vistacampus.gov/lessons/vista-member-handbook

Contact Information

Equal Opportunity Office
250 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20525

202-606-7503	HOTLINE
202-606-3472	TTY
202-606-3465	FAX
eo@cns.gov	EMAIL