



Tapping the Volunteer Pool: Non-Competitive Status for AmeriCorps Members

The quality of federal programs at all levels depends on a high-performing federal workforce. The federal government, however, is facing a significant recruiting and retention challenge as it seeks to hire 193,000 individuals for “mission critical” jobs by the end of 2009. To remain competitive with the private sector and meet this rising demand for public servants, we propose expanding the federal talent pool by affording AmeriCorps members a streamlined way to join the federal workforce through non-competitive employment status. Tapping AmeriCorps members for federal employment is a win-win scenario, allowing volunteers with a demonstrated commitment to public service to benefit from a simplified hiring process and helping federal managers quickly fill important positions with qualified candidates.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

The federal government faces considerable recruiting challenges. As seen in the Partnership’s 2007 report, *Where the Jobs Are: Mission Critical Opportunities for America*, one third of all federal employees will either retire or leave the government within the next five years, including more than half of all supervisors. This number is compounded by the fact that less than 4 percent of the federal workforce is currently under the age of 25. Simply stated, the federal workforce is aging but it is also evolving, creating exciting and valuable opportunities for young individuals to enter into public service. Thousands of jobs, from accountants and linguists to biologists and nurses, must be filled by talented individuals from all academic backgrounds.

Contrary to popular perceptions, interest in federal service is high, with more than 42 percent of high school juniors and seniors extremely or very interested in federal government jobs, only eight points lower than the interest in large private sector companies. However, the primary problems in recruiting top young talent are a general lack of knowledge about public sector jobs and the perception that government hiring procedures are overly bureaucratic and slowed by red tape. Faced with these unique challenges, it is necessary to streamline the hiring of qualified individuals, like those in AmeriCorps, who have demonstrated a prior commitment to public service, and quickly bring them into government positions.

TAPPING THE VOLUNTEER POOL

Tapping AmeriCorps members, a rich source of talent with a proven commitment to public service, is one sensible remedy to the government’s recruiting challenge. This can be done by extending “**non-competitive status**” to AmeriCorps participants who wish to apply for jobs in the federal government. Non-competitive status is already available to both Peace Corps and Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) members. See 5 C.F.R. 315.605. Federal managers are free to hire a non-competitive status applicant without holding a competition. Federal hiring and selection processes are thereby accelerated for the benefit of those who have already demonstrated a commitment to public service. Such individuals do not gain any entitlement to federal employment but rather federal agencies gain the option of directly selecting them for a vacant position for which they qualify. Applicants must still be rated as “qualified” for a particular position by agency personnel specialists before a hire can be made under this authority.

The Partnership for Public Service is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to make the government an employer of choice for talented, dedicated Americans through educational outreach, research, legislative advocacy, and hands-on partnerships with agencies on workforce management issues. For more information on the Partnership, visit www.ourpublicservice.org.