

Memorandum

Department of Veterans Affairs

Date: March 23, 2010

From: Secretary (00)

Subject: VA Diversity Council Charter

To: Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made great strides in promoting and supporting a high-performing organizational culture through diversity and inclusion. I am strengthening this foundation to support VA's transformation into a 21st century Cabinet-level agency. Diversity is integral to the transformational effort; therefore, I have approved the attached VA Diversity Council (VADC) Charter.
2. I understand the Council is charged with identifying the strengths and weaknesses of policies and practices with regard to diversity and inclusion and to create a mechanism for VA leaders to make recommendations for improvement. The VADC will serve as a forum to share best practices, consider new initiatives, monitor progress, leverage resources, and ensure accountability in this critical area of organizational diversity and inclusion.
3. I would like to thank the original VADC members—representatives from VA's major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders—who helped create this Charter. They should be praised for their diligence and commitment to this effort.
4. To ensure VA's full participation, I ask that each of VA's major organizations and staff offices reaffirm or designate a representative, at the senior executive level, to serve on the Council. You may also designate an alternate representative to ensure that your organization is actively engaged.
5. I am counting on the VA Diversity Council to ensure that diversity and inclusion policies and practices are institutionalized and integrated at all organizational levels. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion, at (202) 461-4131 or Georgia.Coffey@va.gov.



Eric K. Shinseki

Attachments

1. Council's Official Designation (Title)

The Department of Veterans Affairs Diversity Council (VADC)

2. Definitions of Diversity and Inclusion

The Council operates with a common understanding of the following terms:

a. Diversity: All of the ways in which people differ, including innate characteristics (such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, mental or physical abilities, and sexual orientation) and acquired characteristics (such as education, socioeconomic status, religion, work experience, language skills, cultural values, geographic location, family status, organizational level, work style, philosophical and intellectual perspective, etc).

b. Inclusion: Enabling the full participation and contribution of all human resources in support of the mission of the organization by eliminating implicit and explicit barriers. Leveraging the diverse talents and attributes of the entire workforce by configuring work opportunities, business processes, functional operations, rewards systems, work-life options, professional interactions, communications, information-sharing, and decision-making to empower the full potential of all employees.

3. Objectives and Scope of Activities

The VADC will provide independent advice and recommendations to the Secretary, on areas relating to diversity and inclusion that may include, but are not limited to:

a. Workforce Strategies

- Advice and recommendations on identifying barriers or challenges to recruitment, retention, and advancement of employees in underrepresented groups and on development of programs or initiatives to address the challenges and change paradigms.
- Advice and recommendations on VA's framework development for integrating human resources programs into its strategic planning, annual planning, and management accountability for achieving diversity and inclusion results Department-wide.

b. Business Strategies

- Advice and recommendations regarding VA's administration of Veterans' health, benefits, and memorial affairs programs relating to service to groups with diverse backgrounds.

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- Advice and recommendations on VA's existing and future information management systems, technologies, and data collection, as well as recommendations to conduct analyses that support and strengthen diversity and inclusion programs in all areas including administrative and scientific areas.

c. Measurement and Evaluation

Advice and recommendations on measuring and evaluating VA's progress, quality, and adequacy in planning, developing, and implementing diversity and inclusion strategies, projects, programs.

d. Communication and Outreach

Advice and recommendations for improving how VA participates, collaborates, and communicates within the Department and with other Federal agencies, State or local governments, civil rights leaders, affinity networks (e.g. identity associations, professional societies, cultural groups, or organizations comprised of persons who are similar to the group that is targeted for outreach), military Veterans' groups, legislators, and the public on diversity and inclusion issues.

e. Training and Education

Advice and recommendations regarding VA's awareness, education, training, and other risk management activities and policies involving inclusion, diversity, equal opportunity, and conflict management.

4. Council Role and Responsibilities

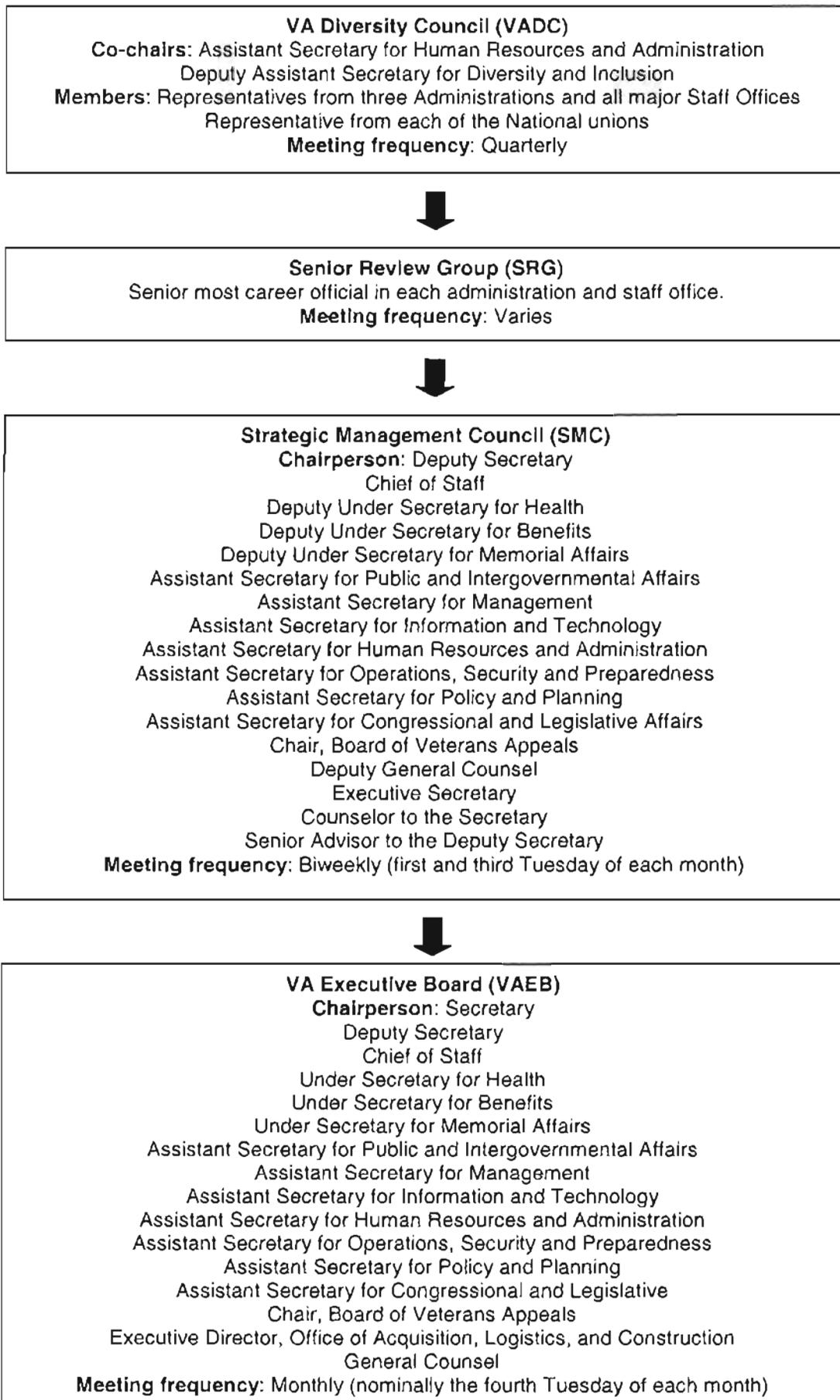
The primary role of the VADC is to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs through the Senior Review Group (SRG), the Strategic Management Council (SMC), and the VA Executive Board (VAEB) on areas related to diversity and inclusion as described above. VADC responsibilities may include serving as a communication link between the workforce, subcomponent organizations, and VA leadership and also as a clearinghouse on diversity and inclusion issues. To this end, the VADC may engage in research, benchmarking, data collection, special initiatives, and other activities, and may use its structure to share best practices and leverage organizational resources in support of common aims.

5. Reporting Structure

The VADC will provide advice and recommendations and report through the SRG, the SMC, and the VAEB to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Recommendations presented to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs will require a simple majority vote of VADC members (or designated representatives who must be spokespersons for their organizations and have access to the heads of their organizations) who were in attendance at the meeting as recorded in the VADC minutes. (see Flow Chart)

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Flow Chart



6. Office Responsible for Providing the Necessary Support

The Department's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) will be responsible for providing basic financial and administrative support.

7. Estimated Annual Operating Costs and Work Years

- The estimated annual operating cost of the VADC will include .50 person-years of ODI support. ODI will be responsible for providing basic financial and administrative support and will arrange teleconferencing services for VADC members.
- When approved by their organizations' sponsors, VADC members will receive travel expenses and per diem allowance from their home organizations' operating budget in accordance with the Federal Travel Regulations for any travel made in connection with their duties as VADC Members.
- As needed, financial and staff support for specific initiatives will be the responsibility of VA components that will sponsor the effort and designate representatives for the associated subcommittees or workgroups.

8. Process Owners and Council Chairs

The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion will serve as Process Owners and co-chairs of the VADC and may exercise a single combined vote as a tie breaker.

9. Member Composition

VADC members, or their alternate representatives, are classified as either "voting" or "nonvoting." Only current VA employees may be designated VADC members, with the exception of national union representation described in paragraph 11.

- The VADC will comprise voting members representing each of the Department's three Administrations and all major Staff Offices. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs will recognize the VADC members who are designated by their organizations' leadership. Voting VADC members and their designees must be spokespersons for their organizations and have access to the heads of their organizations. When these members or their designees are called to vote on VADC matters, each organization will have one vote.
- The VADC will include one representative from each of the National unions as voting members. When these members are called to vote on VADC matters, each union will have one vote.

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- The VADC may include representatives of VA employee groups or VA affinity groups that are structured or chartered to address VA business or employee matters.

These representatives will be nonvoting VADC members and will participate only to provide factual information or individual opinions without being involved in the deliberative process.

10. National Union Members Representation

- VADC members who are union representatives shall be on duty time for work, travel and attendance to the VADC meetings.
- The assigned Union representative may be a retired VA employee.

11. Subcommittees

- The VADC may form subcommittees or workgroups as standing entities or ad hoc groups for any purpose consistent with this charter.
- These subcommittees or workgroups may be assigned work by the VAEB or the SMC. The VAEB comprises the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Chief of Staff, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals, and General Counsel. The SMC comprises the Deputy Secretary, Chief of Staff, Principal Deputy Secretaries or Equivalents, Assistant Secretaries or Equivalents, Chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals, and Deputy General Counsel.
- These subcommittees or workgroups have no authority to make decisions on behalf of the chartered VADC nor may they report directly to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Such subcommittees or workgroups may not work independently of the chartered VADC and must report their recommendations and advice to the VADC for full deliberation and discussion.
- Although the VADC will have no oversight role over subcommittees or workgroups established by other authorities, strong collaborations and communications will be supported.

12. Estimated Number and Frequency of Meetings

The VADC may meet quarterly, or as approved by the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion, who serve as co-chairs of the VADC. ODI will arrange teleconferencing services for VADC members who are outside of the Washington DC area. The Office of Human Resources and Administration may pay travel and per diem expenses when determined necessary and appropriate by the VADC co-chairs.

13. Duration and Termination

The VADC will exist for ten years to facilitate the transition of the organization and to integrate diversity and inclusion initiatives into a normal course of business activities.

Revisions to the VADC charter may be proposed, and by approval of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a revised charter may be adopted during this period.



Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs



Date