



Upcoming Events

May 2016

Asian American and Pacific Islander
Heritage Month
VA Central Office Commemoration
May 19, noon–1 pm; Room 230

Jewish American Heritage Month
Mental Health Awareness Month
Older Americans Month

Military Spouse Appreciation Day
May 6

Mother's Day
May 8

Women's Health Week
May 8–14

Federal Asian Pacific American Council
National Leadership Training Program
May 9–13; Orlando, FL

Armed Forces Day
May 21

Memorial Day
May 30

ORM

Steps Toward Resolution

Alternative Dispute Resolution
can help with resolving conflict.
To file a discrimination or
harassment complaint, you must
contact the **Office of Resolution
Management** at (toll free)
888-737-3361 within 45 calendar
days of the date of the alleged
discriminatory incident.

Commemorate

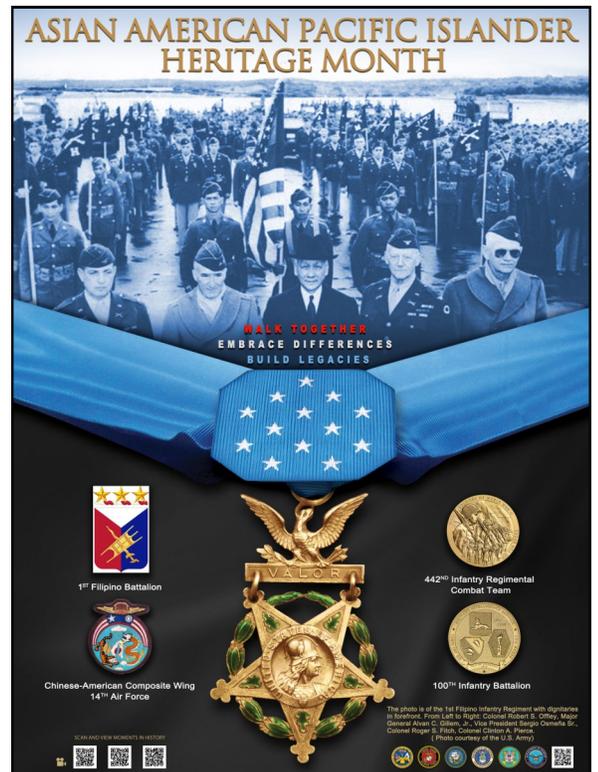
Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Message from the DAS

First, I would like to share that the Secretary has signed a new charter available [online](#) changing the name of the VA Diversity Council to the Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) and broadening the Council's focus. This is an example of VA's continuing efforts to transform the VA culture under the Employee Experience cornerstone of MyVA.

Congratulations again to the winners of the Secretary's Fifth Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. We recently held a virtual awards ceremony jointly with the Office of Resolution Management to also honor the winners as well as the winners of the Secretary's Fifth Annual Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards. Be sure to read about the accomplishments of the D&I Excellence winners on the [ODI Web site](#) and the accomplishments of the ADR winners on [ORM's Web site](#). The new awards cycle will begin shortly so please consider nominating an individual or team who has made sustaining impact on your workplace. Information about how to make a nomination will also be placed on those pages. I want to take a moment to personally thank each of our winners and you, our readers, for your support and commitment to D&I.

Finally, VA joins the Nation in commemorating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Jewish American Heritage Month, Mental Health Awareness Month and Older Americans Month this May as well as Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 6, Women's Health Week May 8-14, and Armed Forces Day on May 21. You can read more about each of these observances in the Commemorate article that begins below. ~Georgia Coffey



DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE POSTER

VA joins the Nation in commemorating May as National Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month. The theme for this year's observance is "Walk Together, Embrace Differences, Build Legacies." [Continued on page 3.](#)

Training

Barrier Analysis Training will be offered on Thursday, June 16, 2016, from 1 to 4 pm. The course covers all aspects of the barrier analysis process under Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Management Directive 715 to include analysis and interpretation of workforce statistics, trigger identification, barrier analysis investigation, preparing action plans, and following up on the action plan. This training will allow the participants to work through the majority of the process using VA specific workforce statistics. Attendees must register through the VA Talent Management System (TMS). For more information, contact [Ms. Ryan Pugh](#).

The Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) 31st Annual National Leadership Training Program will be held in Orlando, Florida, May 9-13, 2016, at the Doubletree by Hilton. The FAPAC NLTP is a great opportunity to obtain leadership, EEO, diversity and inclusion and career advancement and management training, as well as gain useful information regarding the current policies directly affecting federal employees. It will also offer free seminars and programs specifically designed for students and Veterans. Costs associated with attending must be authorized by each employee's organization. No centralized funding is available to pay for registration or travel. Employees who plan to attend the FAPAC NLTP should follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations, and are also required to pre-register through the [VA Attendance and Cost Estimation System \(ACES\)](#). For the intranet link address, or for additional information, contact [Ms. Angela James](#), VA's National Asian American and Pacific Islander Employment Program Manager, ODI. Additional conference information including registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules is available [online](#).



The Asian American Government Executives Network (AAGEN) 2016



Leadership Workshop and Banquet will be held June 16, 2016, at the Crystal City Doubletree Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. The AAGEN Leadership Workshop and Banquet is an opportunity for federal employees to attend training seminars aimed at increasing employee effectiveness in the workplace and enhancing professional and leadership development. It also offers opportunities to hear from executive leaders from throughout the federal sector. Employees desiring to attend the AAGEN Leadership Workshop and Banquet should follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations, and are also required to pre-register through [ACES](#). Costs associated with

attending must be authorized by each employee's organization, no centralized funding is available to pay for employee registration or travel to this event. For the intranet link address, or for additional information, contact [Ms. Angela James](#), VA's National Asian American and Pacific Islander Employment Program Manager, ODI. Additional conference information including registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules will soon be made available [online](#).

The 47th Annual Federally Employed Women (FEW) National Training Program (NTP)

will be held in Dallas, Texas, July 11-14, 2016, at the Hilton Anatole. This year's program offers over 140 workshops on leadership, project management, career planning, interpersonal communications, finance, writing, human resources, equal employment opportunity, special emphasis programs, reasonable accommodation, and courses that address the Executive Core Qualifications required for the Senior Executive Service. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending the FEW NTP must be authorized by each employee's organization. Employees who plan to attend the FEW NTP must also pre-register through [ACES](#). For the intranet link address, or for additional information, contact [Ms. Mercedes N. Kirkland-Doyle](#), VA's National Federal Women's Program Manager, ODI. Additional conference information including registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules is available [online](#).



The 12th Annual African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA) Professional Development Workshop

will be held September 12-14, 2016, at the College Park Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in Maryland. Employees desiring to attend the AAFEA Leadership Workshop and Banquet should follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations, and are also required to pre-register through [ACES](#). Costs associated with attending must be authorized by each employee's organization, no centralized funding is available to pay for employee registration or travel to this event. For the intranet link address, or for additional information, contact [Ms. Tynnetta Lee](#), VA's National African American Employment Program Manager, ODI. Additional conference information including registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules are available [online](#).



Commemorate

Continued from Page 1

AAPI Heritage Month is a celebration of AAPIs in the United States and is a broad term that encompasses all of the Asian continent and the Pacific islands of Melanesia (New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands), Micronesia (Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia) and Polynesia (New Zealand, Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, Midway Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia and Easter Island).

As of September 30, 2015, AAPIs represented 7.43 percent of VA's permanent workforce (26,913 of 361,946 employees). VA experiences less than expected participation of AAPI men when compared to the Relevant Civilian Labor Force. In addition, VA experiences less than expected participation of AAPIs at the GS 12–14 and Senior Executive Service/Title 38 equivalent pay grades when compared to the pay grade distribution of the total workforce. To view more information on VA's workforce to include barrier analysis for each group identified as having less than expected participation rates, as well as action plans to address these barriers, review [VA's FY 2015 Management Directive 715 \(MD-715\) Report](#).

VA continues to develop and implement strategies to identify potential employment barriers in the areas of recruitment, hiring, promotion, career development and retention affecting the full participation of all race, ethnicity, and gender groups in VA's workforce, including AAPIs. When barriers are identified, viable solutions are developed to help eliminate those barriers to employment and full participation by all VA employees. For more information, contact your local Equal Employment Opportunity Manager; [Angela James](#), VA's National AAPI Employment Program Manager; or visit [VA's AAPI Employment Program Web page](#).

VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to support attendance at events and activities that recognize the contributions of AAPIs to our Nation. Additionally, on Thursday, May 19, 2016, VA Central Office will commemorate AAPI Heritage Month in the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, Room 230, at noon. This year's keynote speaker will be Dr. Thakor G. Patel, M.D. who currently serves as an Adjunct Associate Professor of Medicine at the Uniformed Services of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland. A sign language interpreter will be present. For more information about this event, contact [Tynnetta Lee](#), Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator.

Jewish American Heritage Month

VA joins the Nation in observing Jewish American Heritage Month this May. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *From our Nation's earliest days, Jewish Americans have been a critical part of our story. In the face of unspeakable discrimination and adversity, they have fought tirelessly to realize their piece of the American dream and the promise of our founding, holding tight to the belief that a better day lies ahead. Their relentless spirit and remarkable achievements have enriched our country, stirred our conscience, and challenged us to extend the miracles of freedom and security. This month, we honor the vast contributions Jewish Americans have made to our world, and we recommit to standing up for the traditions we believe in and the values we share.*

As we celebrate the rich heritage of the Jewish American community, it is impossible to separate their accomplishments from the struggles of Jewish people around the world. American Jews have worked to strengthen the promise of religious freedom because their ancestors were tested from the moment they came together and professed their faith. Today, they continue to teach us empathy and compassion, inspired by the lessons of their parents and grandparents who knew how it felt to be a stranger, and to stand up for a more perfect Union for all—relentlessly pursuing tikkun olam—because they have always understood that we must recognize ourselves in the struggles of our fellow man.

This year, Jewish American Heritage Month begins as the world commemorates the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Dachau by American soldiers, and we are once again reminded that the vibrant culture of the Jewish people has not always been embraced. As tragic events show us all too often, Jewish communities continue to confront hostility and bigotry, including in America. Our Nation shares an obligation to condemn and combat anti-Semitism and hatred wherever it exists, and we remain committed to standing against the ugly tide of anti-Semitism in all its forms, including in the denial or trivialization of the Holocaust... [Continued on the next page.](#)

Commemorate

[Continued from the Previous Page](#)

For centuries, Jews have reached for the blessings of freedom and opportunity in the United States. Today—as pillars of their families and leaders in their communities—Jewish Americans represent a link in an unbroken chain of perseverance. During Jewish American Heritage Month, we celebrate the hard-fought progress won through struggle and sacrifice, and we rededicate ourselves to building a world where diversity is cherished and faith is protected.

National Mental Health Awareness Month

VA joins the Nation in observing National Mental Health Awareness Month this May. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *This year, approximately one in five American adults—our friends, colleagues, and loved ones—will experience a diagnosable mental health condition like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or post-traumatic stress, and many others will be troubled by significant emotional and psychological distress, especially in times of difficulty. For most of these people, treatment can be effective and recovery is possible. Yet today, millions of Americans still do not receive the care they need. This month, we stand with those who live with mental illness, and we recommit to ensuring all Americans have access to quality, affordable care.*

In the past decade, our Nation has made extraordinary progress in recognizing severe psychological distress and diagnosing and treating mental illness, and my Administration is committed to building on that success. The Affordable Care Act extends mental health and substance use disorder benefits and parity protections to over 60 million Americans. Protections under the law also prohibit insurers from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions like a diagnosis of mental illness and require most insurance plans to cover recommended preventive services without copays, including behavioral assessments for children and depression screenings. As part of the BRAIN Initiative, we are funding innovative research that aims to revolutionize our understanding of conditions that affect the brain, such as mental health disorders, and to improve the lives of all who live with them. And we continue to invest in community health centers, enabling them to expand access to mental health services where they are needed most.

As Americans, we have a sacred obligation to provide those who suffer from the invisible wounds of war with the support they have earned. Earlier this year, I was proud to sign the Clay Hunt SAV Act, which authorized additional steps to address mental health and prevent suicide among veterans. This law will build on my Administration’s ongoing work to bolster mental health services for service members, veterans, and their families. We recently established a new policy that will ensure the continuity of mental health medications during service members’ transitions to care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and we took action to make certain those receiving mental health care are connected to mental health professionals as they transition to the VA or a community provider. My Administration has also worked to increase the number of counselors available to our veterans and to expand the capacity of the Veterans Crisis Line.

Despite how common it is to experience severe psychological distress, substance use problems, and mental illness, there is still considerable stigma associated with mental health treatment. This month, we must bring mental illness out of the shadows and encourage treatment for those who might benefit; it is our shared responsibility to recognize the signs of psychological and emotional distress and to support those in need. We must strive to remove the stigma around mental illness and its treatment, overcome fear and misunderstanding, and make sure all those dealing with a mental health issue know they are not alone. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness—taking action to help yourself is a sign of strength. If you or someone you know is in need of immediate assistance, call 1-800-662-HELP. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline also offers immediate assistance for all Americans, including service members and veterans, at 1-800-273-TALK.

Older Americans Month

VA joins the Nation in observing Older Americans Month this May. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *In America, every person who is willing to work hard and play by the rules should be able to build a life of opportunity and prosperity. We learned this simple truth from our oldest generation—the women and men who relentlessly pursued progress throughout the 20th century.* [Continued on the next page.](#)

Commemorate

Continued from the Previous Page

Drivers of enormous change, they have enriched our Nation and bravely defended the values we cherish; they have broken down barriers and blazed pathways for all who followed; and they have raised us all and endowed us with a freer, fairer, more equal world.

After a lifetime of contributions, they have earned our care and respect, and they deserve to live out their years with dignity and independence. Our Nation is strongest when older Americans live comfortably in their golden years and have the opportunity to continue to contribute to the fabric of the country and society they helped to shape. This month, we celebrate the accomplishments and sacrifices of our elders, and we reaffirm our belief that the promise of our Nation extends to Americans of all ages.

The United States is entering a new era, and the face of our Nation is growing older and more diverse. For the next 15 years, thousands of Americans will reach retirement age every day, and by 2030, there will be more than twice as many older Americans as there were at the beginning of this century. This growing population is a tremendous national asset. By changing the way we think and talk about aging—by focusing on the opportunities of aging rather than the limitations—we can work to maximize the potential of this generation and ensure they continue to thrive as they age...Throughout the last half-century, the Older Americans Act has empowered older Americans by upholding their rights and supporting social and nutrition services, as well as a nationwide network of employment, training, and research programs. These vital services help millions of seniors across our Nation...Our elders forged a bright future for all our Nation's children, and they deserve the best America has to offer. As heirs to their proud legacy, we must reach for the world they have made possible. During Older Americans Month, we lift up all those whose life's work has made ours a little easier, and we recommit to showing them the fullest care, support, and respect of a grateful Nation.

Military Spouse Appreciation Day

VA joins the Nation in observing Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 6. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *The strength of our Nation's military comes not just from the brave women and men who defend the values we cherish, but also from their families, who serve alongside them and make great sacrifices in service to our country. With determination and unshakable resolve, military spouses endure long absences and shoulder the burdens of war, constantly wondering what kind of dangers lie ahead for their loved ones. Through numerous moves and difficult deployments—often as they uproot their lives and families and restart their careers—their steadfast devotion to their spouses and to our Nation represents the best our country has to offer. On Military Spouse Appreciation Day, we recognize the selfless heroes who stand with the finest fighting force the world has ever known, and we honor their relentless courage and commitment...The wives, husbands, and partners of our service members bring adaptability, creativity, resilience, and leadership—skills they demonstrate every day—to the workforce, and it is unacceptable when any military spouse struggles to find work and support their family. That is why we launched the Military Spouse Employment Partnership, an online resource to connect military spouses with meaningful career opportunities and companies that are eager to hire them. And we are reminding businesses across our country that if they want the job done right, they should hire a military spouse.*

Four years ago, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden launched the Joining Forces initiative, calling on Americans across our country to rally around service members, veterans, and their spouses. By raising awareness about the unique aspects of military life, they are helping ensure military spouses have all the opportunities and benefits they deserve. To learn more and get involved, visit www.JoiningForces.gov.

Military spouses serve alongside our troops through trial and triumph, and in their example, we see the bravery and pride that reflect who we are as a Nation. These homefront heroes deserve respect and support worthy of their sacrifice and grace—every day, they should know their country supports them, is there for them, and is grateful for all they do on our behalf.

National Women's Health Week

VA joins the Nation in observing National Women's Health Week May 8-14. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *The security of quality, affordable health care should not be a privilege—it should be a fundamental right for every person, regardless of their sex or gender. [Continued on the next page.](#)*

Commemorate

Continued from the Previous Page

Today, the Affordable Care Act is helping to secure this right for women across our Nation. The law is saving money for women and their families, and it is saving lives—of our mothers, daughters, and sisters—and helping more women achieve their fullest potential. During National Women’s Health Week, we reaffirm the belief that ensuring all women and girls have the opportunity to live full and healthy lives is vital to their success and to the prosperity of our Nation; we celebrate the difference the Affordable Care Act has made for countless women; and we recommit to building on its success because we know that when women succeed, America succeeds.

Over the past year, millions of women have gained the security of knowing their personal and professional goals will not be jeopardized just because they face a health challenge. Because of the Affordable Care Act, women can no longer be charged different premiums than men for the same coverage or be denied insurance based on pre-existing conditions, such as pregnancy or violence-related injuries. The law also requires most insurance plans to cover basic health services, including contraceptive, prenatal, and maternity care. And today, tens of millions of women are benefiting from expanded access to preventive care under the law—services which can lead to early detection of some of the many health challenges that disproportionately affect women. Because these preventive services—like screenings for breast cancer, domestic violence, and osteoporosis—are available without cost sharing, women are not forced to choose between health care necessities and other essential expenses. The equality that all women deserve is inextricably linked to safeguarding access to preventive services and treatment and eliminating disparities in health outcomes...Every day, we are working to make women’s health care more affordable, increase women’s access to sexual and reproductive health services, and improve maternal and child health outcomes.

As we celebrate National Women’s Health Week, we rededicate ourselves to advancing women’s health and building a healthy future for all women and girls across our country. To learn more and to access additional information and resources, Americans can visit www.WomensHealth.gov and www.GirlsHealth.gov.

Armed Forces Day

VA joins the Nation in observing Armed Forces Day on May 21. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): At the heart of our Nation is the idea that we are each endowed with certain unalienable rights. We hold this truth to be self-evident, but from the moment a small band of patriots first came together to declare independence, we have never believed it to be self-executing. From Lexington and Concord to Iraq and Afghanistan, brave women and men have fought to defend the blessings of liberty and freedom and to protect the way of life we cherish. On Armed Forces Day, we salute the unbroken chain of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen who have continuously secured and renewed the promise of our Nation.

This year, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, we honor the generation that triumphed over tyranny and laid a foundation for peace around the world. In the face of oppression, more than 16 million Americans left everything they knew and everyone they loved to fight for freedom far from home. Today, this legacy of extraordinary service is carried forward by patriots who protect the same liberties our parents and grandparents fought for. Year after year, tour after tour, the members of our Armed Forces serve with honor and distinction. Their sacrifice makes our Nation more free and more safe, and in their example, we see the best of America.

As we pay tribute to today's servicemen and women, we acknowledge the obligations we have to all who serve in our name. This sacred trust requires that we fulfill our promise and guarantee that these patriots, and the families who serve alongside them, have all the resources and benefits they have earned and deserve—supporting them as they carry out their missions and ensuring they get their shot at the American dream they helped to defend. As a Nation, we are called to recognize the enormous debt of gratitude we owe the members of our Armed Forces, and we must never forget those who laid down their lives to safeguard our freedoms, or their loved ones who carry their legacies forward.

Today and every day, let us celebrate the women and men who make our military the greatest fighting force the world has ever known. As a grateful Nation, let us show our appreciation by working to uphold the values they protect every day and by continuing to strive to build a country worthy of their enormous sacrifice.



VALU
VA LEARNING UNIVERSITY

MyCareer@VA

MyCareer@VA

How to Handle Emails and Meetings

We've all been there. You're nearing the end of the work day but a number of things are demanding your time, including meetings and unanswered emails. Some days you feel frustrated that you don't have enough time in the day to get your work done. Does this situation sound familiar to you? If you want to grow in your career, it's important that you improve your job performance and maximize your productivity, but this can be hard to do if you're constantly pressed for time. If you feel that emails and meetings demand too much of your time, consider the following tips.

Manage Emails to Fit Your Work Style

You may find that your workplace relies on emails for communication, project management, and scheduling. Do you ever flag an email in your inbox as a reminder to complete a task? Many people do this. One reason why email has become so stressful is that it's used as a project management tool, too.¹

Although there isn't one particular way to best manage your inbox,² you can use filtering methods and set communication expectations to help. To filter, take a few seconds to unsubscribe from emails that you don't want to receive so they aren't flooding your inbox. Additionally, if you think you can delete, respond to, or archive an email in 2 minutes or less, do it. This will help keep emails from piling up in your inbox.

You can also set communication expectations for yourself and with your teammates. For example, designate times during the day to check and respond to emails—if it makes sense for your job. Let your coworkers know when you aren't available, and communicate with them in-person, through phone calls, or instant messenger, if those are methods you would rather use. And, send fewer emails if you want to be emailed less!

Streamline Meetings

Meetings are essential to productivity and job satisfaction. The more content you are with meetings, the more likely you are to be satisfied with your job, because meetings allow you to interact with coworkers and supervisors who help shape your perception of your workplace.³

However, spending too much time in meetings can lead to fatigue, a perception of more work, and additional pressure to perform.⁴ Below are some tips to help ensure your meetings are productive.

Ask Yourself

- Is this meeting really necessary?
- Does everyone invited really need to attend?

Prepare

- Shorten meeting times
- Set an agenda and send it out to ahead of time so everyone is prepared to discuss the topics at hand
- Hold meetings outside of regular meeting spaces to change up the routine
- Increase engagement and encourage collaboration by removing chairs and scheduling stand-up meetings⁵

Lead

- Be punctual and don't recap for latecomers to encourage punctuality
- Ask for feedback to help you streamline future meetings

Although the modern workplace can demand more and more of your time, the tips above can help you maximize your productivity and find time to focus on your career growth.

You can also take [this 30-minute TMS training course on Making Meetings Work](#), or learn about [effective communication](#) in your workplace. Visit our [What's New](#) page to explore more career development topics that you can implement today to help you achieve your career goals. And if you haven't already, stay up-to-date with career advice and articles like this one by signing up for the [MyCareer@VA Monthly Update](#).

Sources:

¹Barley, Stephen, Debra Meyerson and Stine Grodal. "E-mail as a Source and Symbol of Stress." *Organization Science* 22.4 (2011): 887-906.

²Dabbish, Laura, Robert Kraut, Susan Fussell, and Sara Kiesler. "Understanding Email Use: Predicting Action on a Message." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (2005)*: 691-700.

³Rogelberg, Steven, Joseph Allen, Linda Shanock, Cliff Scott, and Marissa Shuffler. "Employee Satisfaction with Meetings: A Contemporary Facet of Job Satisfaction." *Human Resource Management* 49.2 (2010): 149-172.

⁴Luong, Alexandra and Steven Rogelberg. "Meetings and More Meetings: The Relationship Between Meeting Load and the Daily Well-Being of Employees." *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research Practice* 9.1 (2005): 58-67.

⁵Knight, Andrew and Markus Baer. "Get Up, Stand Up: The Effects of a Non-Sedentary Workspace on Information Elaboration and Group Performance." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5.8 (2014): 910-917.

Field Note

Hire An Intern!

VA's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is currently accepting applications for facilities/offices VA-wide who want to hire a summer intern through the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP). Requests will be approved on a first come, first served basis. These WRP candidates are all college students in good standing or recent graduates. VA is strongly committed to the employment of individuals with disabilities, including Veterans and individuals with targeted disabilities. To identify an intern, register on the [WRP Web site](#). Provision of WRP interns under this Program is subject to funding availability. For more additional information and to confirm funding, contact [Aurelia Waters](#), VA WRP Program Manager, ODI.

Policy Alerts

Definition of Spouse

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is revising the definition of spouse in its regulations on the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) as a result of the decision by the United States Supreme Court holding section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional. The new definition replaces the existing definition, which contains language from DOMA that refers to "a legal union between one man and one woman." The new definition permits Federal employees with same-sex spouses to use FMLA leave in the same manner as Federal employees with opposite-sex spouses. This final rule is effective on May 9, 2016. For more information, read the [Federal Register](#).

Cooperation During the EEO Complaint Process

The Office of Resolution Management (ORM) is responsible for administering the VA equal employment opportunity (EEO) discrimination complaint resolution program and accountable for timely resolution and processing of concerns and complaints. A critical part of ORM's role is responsibility for conducting an appropriate investigation which results in an investigative file that allows a fact finder to draw conclusions as to whether discrimination occurred. In order to accomplish this, ORM needs the full cooperation of agency employees.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations mandate agencies to ensure that full cooperation is provided by all agency employees to personnel in the processing and resolution of complaints. To ensure the Department is in compliance with this requirement, and in order to adequately investigate complaints of discrimination, ORM requests pertinent documents through a written "Document Request List" that accompanies notification to the senior executive over the responsible management official(s) when a complaint has been accepted for investigation.

The items listed in ORM's "Document Request List" are appropriate and necessary for inclusion in the investigative file. While the "Document Request List" may appear burdensome, documentation relevant to the specific claim(s) under investigation can in many instances demonstrate the Department's actions were legitimate, and therefore, non-discriminatory in nature.

ORM makes document requests on three occasions. The initial request is made when a complaint is accepted for investigation. A second request, if necessary, is made when the investigator is assigned to the case. These requests are documented in the investigative file, as well as your/your staffs response, or lack thereof. Lastly OEDCA requests for supplemental investigations often involve document requests.

It is important that you understand failure to provide documentation/testimony may result in sanctions pursuant to 29 C.F.R. §1614.108(c)(3). Without good cause shown to comply with a request for information, an adverse inference may be drawn resulting in a finding of discrimination. The Department has been sanctioned for this reason and findings rendered resulting in damages, training, consideration of disciplinary action, and posting of notices. Accordingly, timely responses are required. Your support in communicating this policy to staff at your facility is appreciated.



MyCareer@VA | Office of Human Resources & Administration | Office of Human Resources Management
Office of Resolution Management | Resolution Support Center
VA Whistleblower Rights & Protections | VHA Diversity & Inclusion Community of Practice
VA on Facebook | VA on YouTube | VA Jobs

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Office of Diversity & Inclusion
810 Vermont Avenue, NW (06) | Washington, DC 20420 | 202-461-4131 | 202-501-2145 (Fax)