Message from the DAS

Greetings. We are pleased to announce that Secretary Shinseki’s 2013 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Diversity, and No FEAR Policy statement is now available online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/policy/statement.aspx. I encourage all employees to read this summary of VA’s workplace policies and workforce protections that address EEO, diversity and inclusion, workplace harassment, workplace violence and bullying, whistleblower protections, reasonable accommodations, conflict management, Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA) rights, and related mandatory training. A notable enhancement in the 2013 policy statement is the strengthened protections in the area of discrimination based on gender identity. Read more on page 6.

On June 27, VA’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) and the VA Central Office (VACO) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Workgroup held a highly successful LGBT Pride Month in VA Central Office. Read more about it below. I was also pleased to hear about all of the LGBT Pride Month events at VA facilities across the Nation, including some facilities that held their very first Pride Month event this year. Our VACO Pride Month event took place the day after the Supreme Court issued its landmark decision ruling that the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional. We applaud that decision, which rights the wrong of discrimination enshrined in law. The President has directed the Attorney General to work with other members of his Cabinet to review all relevant Federal statutes to ensure this decision, and its implications for Federal benefits and obligations—including benefits administered by this agency—are implemented swiftly and smoothly. We look forward to working with the Department of Justice to do so. Continued on the next page.

Commemorate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month

This June VA joined the Nation in commemorating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month. VA Central Office (VACO) held an event on June 27 hosted by Allison Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits. The theme was “One VA—We Serve with Pride!” Tricia Heller—a graduate from the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA); former Air Force pilot; and current Director of Blue Alliance, the LGBT supporting group at the USAFA—served as the keynote speaker for the program sponsored by ODI and the VACO LGBT Workgroup. VA facilities across the Nation joined VACO in commemorating LGBT Pride Month. Some VA facilities held their own events while others participated in parades and other community events. Other VA facilities held cultural competence trainings and some had booths or other displays. Each of these events support VA’s efforts to foster inclusive work and customer service environments that are responsive to the needs of the Veterans we serve and allow all employees to realize their full potential. Continued on page 7.
Message from the DAS

Continued from the previous page.

In accordance with the Secretary’s EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, and No FEAR policy statement, VA will continue to aggressively protect the rights of LGBT employees to work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment.

I am excited to report on the partnership ODI created with the VA Learning University to provide career development opportunities in order to eradicate potential barriers to equal employment opportunity in VA. This joint initiative targets employees in pay levels at and below GS-9/equivalent and in wage grade positions who wish to progress in their field or move to a new field. The pilot program will utilize cutting-edge career development tools and resources offered through MyCareer@VA and provide employees with knowledge and resources that can be used to achieve their career goals at VA. For additional information, contact Trina Faison, ODI, at (202) 494-6013 or Trina.Faison@va.gov.

Finally, please join me in remembering the important anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26. Be sure to read more on page 7. ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

VACO/Field Notes

Farewell!

ODI wishes a fond farewell to Betty Cook, Program Support Assistant with ODI’s Administration Management Team, who is retiring after 39 years of VA service. Congratulations, Ms. Cook!

Hispanic Employment Program Managers National Teleconference July 15

The next Hispanic Employment Program Managers (HEPM) teleconference will be held Monday, July 15, from 3:00 to 4:15 p.m. (EST). Participants may dial in at 1-800-767-1750 (access code 70087). The July teleconference will feature Mark Hugo Lopez, Associate Director, Pew Hispanic Research Center, Washington DC. Mr. Lopez will discuss “Closing the Digital Divide: Latinos and Technology Adoption.” For more information, contact Arlene Gonzalez, National HEPM, ODI, at Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov.

It’s Time to Start Planning Activities for Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM), September 15 through October 15, commemorates the contributions Hispanics have made to American society and culture. The National Council of Hispanic Employment Program Managers recently announced the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month theme, “Hispanics: Serving and Leading Our Nation with Pride and Honor.” Now is an opportune time for facilities to begin planning their HHM events. ODI encourage you to make them educational. For more information about planning HHM activities, contact your local VA EEO office. For information about the Hispanic Employment Program (HEP), visit http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/hispanic.aspx or contact Arlene Gonzalez, National HEP Manager, ODI, Arlene.Gonzalez2@va.gov.

VA Program Management Center of Excellence

Are you in search of assistance with your program? Are you in need of guidance, templates, or tools to improve your project’s performance? The VA Program Management Center of Excellence (VA PMCOE) was recently established to promote collaborative forums for PM experts and novices alike to share and learn from proven best practices and intellectual capital. These forums are focused on knowledge areas (KAs) such as requirements management, cost estimation, and general program management. The VA PMCOE also offers subject matter expert (SME) support services to anyone in VA. This team of certified, experienced, and high-quality experts is available on-call to provide direct support in the form of advice, review and coaching. To learn more about this community, to join a KA, or to request SME Support Services, email VAPMCOE@va.gov.
Training

**VSSC Online Training**

ODI announces the availability of training on the Veterans Health Administration’s Support Service Center (VSSC) Human Resources (HR) Reporting Tools. VA uses VSSC to store HR data for all of VA in an easy-to-use reporting format. This interactive training is designed to alert a wide range of managers, HR, equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity specialists to VSSC’s HR query applications. All managers have a duty to ensure there is equal opportunity in the workplace with regard to hiring, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment. This training provides guidance on how to properly use the applications to conduct various workforce analyses, identify triggers, and define and distinguish between Relevant Civilian Labor Force and Civilian Labor Force. Training classes will be offered on the following dates from 10 a.m. to noon (EST):

- Wednesday, August 21, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569354](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569354))
- Wednesday, September 18, 2013 ([https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569357](https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=2569357))

Each session will be conducted via Live Meeting. You can register using the relevant link above. Once you click on the link, you will need to sign into the VA Talent Management System (TMS) and click confirm. Spaces are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. If none of these dates work for you, you can use TMS to request additional dates. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ryan Pugh, Management and Program Analyst, ODI, at Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov.

**Mandatory EEO, Diversity, and Conflict Management Training for Managers and Supervisors Updated**

The mandatory Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Diversity, and Conflict Management Training for Managers and Supervisors (TMS Course #1328672) has recently been updated and is scheduled to replace the current online course on or before July 8, 2013. Revisions include updates on EEO laws and regulations, VA’s Disability Employment Program (Schedule A Hiring Process and Reasonable Accommodation), and understanding cultural competence and leveraging diversity for the best organizational performance.

Prior to uploading the revised course, managers and supervisors who are currently in the course were notified in June by TMS and given 20 days to finish the course so that they can receive a certificate of completion. If the course was not completed within those 20 days, the learner will have to re-start the training from the beginning. For more information, contact Carolyn Williams, Diversity Training Specialist, ODI, at Carolyn.Williams12@va.gov.

**IALPAE Conference**

The International Association of Latino Public Administration Executives (IALPAE) will hold its Executive Leadership, Diversity & Training Conference on August 27–29, 2013, at the Holiday Inn-Key Bridge in Arlington, Virginia. The theme for this year’s conference is “Leading the President’s Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion: Demonstrating Excellence, Equity, Integrity, and Transparency in Public Service.”

This conference qualifies as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and is open to all Federal employees. The Conference will offer workshops and presentations aimed at enhancing executive skills and preparing individuals for the Senior Executive Service. Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion, will be the keynote speaker during the luncheon on August 27.

IALPAE, Inc is a nonprofit professional membership organization founded in 2006. Their mission is to be a leading public service organization that advances the dissemination of information on public administration, promotes the value of public administration and public service as a career, particularly to the Latino community, and provides networking and professional development opportunities to individuals committed to public service, entrepreneurship, human rights, and democracy globally.

All VA attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending the conference must be authorized by your organization. Additional information is available at [http://www.ialpae.org](http://www.ialpae.org). Prior to registering, you must receive appropriate approvals including travel approval from your organization. Continued on page 11.
Reasonable Accommodations

Summary on How to Process Requests

Employees with disabilities may ask for an accommodation in order to perform the duties of the job or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment. Although the Rehabilitation Act calls these requests "reasonable accommodations," the employee is not required to use those words in his/her request. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission provided guidance on how to process these requests. Due to the large volume of questions, we are providing a summary of the process.

The immediate supervisor approves accommodation requests from employees, except for requests that involve facility renovations or alterations.

Therefore, for most requests, only the immediate supervisor and the Local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator (LRAC) know that the employee has a disability—this is confidential information.

If the supervisor has decided to deny the request, the Local General Counsel or the National Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator (NRAC) must be consulted before giving the denial to the employee. The purpose is to address improper denials that may lead to equal employment opportunity complaints.

Only the LRAC sees the medical documentation. The supervisor will be told whether the employee has a disability covered by the Rehabilitation Act, and the functional limitations caused by the disability. If the LRAC can't understand the medical terminology, the internet search functions can be used to obtain information. If it still seems ambiguous, the LRAC can black out any identifying information and then ask occupational health unit or the facility health unit for assistance. (This should be an occasional situation, and not used for every request.) No one else is permitted to see the medical documentation.

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act lowered the threshold for disabilities; no longer must disabilities last six months. If major life functions are affected, it is considered a disability under the law. Breathing, internal systems, and blood structure are examples of major life functions that can be affected by a disability.

If the supervisor and LRAC cannot identify an accommodation that would be effective in addressing the employee's functional limitation, they can consult with the Job Accommodation Network (http://www.askjan.org), a facility committee, or a local non-profit advocate for people with disabilities. However, the employee is not part of these conversations, these groups may not see the medical documentation or know the name of the employee, and these groups do not make the decision.

Aside from facility modifications, accommodations not supplied by the Department of Defense's Computer/Electronics Accommodations Program (http://www.cap.mil) can be reimbursed from the Centralized Fund operated by ODI. If an item will cost more than $500, the LRAC will check with ODI first to ensure that they have found a reasonable price. (This does not apply to services such as interpreters.)

It should always be remembered that the majority of employees request an accommodation so they can continue working, or to improve the quantity or quality of their work. These requests are not for "special accommodations," they are for items that are essential if the employee is to work or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment (such as use of the cafeteria, the fitness center, attending retirement luncheons, etc.) These requests remind us to examine a "one size fits all" mindset when setting up an employee's work station, equipment, etc.

The major steps that cannot be skipped are the interactive discussion with the employee to understand what is being requested, and the obligation to ensure that the accommodation chosen is effective in meeting the needs of the employee. The overarching rule is that confidentiality is required by the Rehabilitation Act.

If you have any questions, please contact your LRAC. The lists of LRACs by Administration are online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#lrac.
Who ya gonna call?

Are you having disputes or disagreements with your boss or co-workers? Need answers to questions about workplace issues or policies? Or maybe you’re a Veteran and have concerns about your healthcare and benefits. If so, it’s time to pick up the phone and call VA’s Resolution Support Center. This call center, run by the Office of Resolution Management, has specialists standing by to help VA employees or managers discuss work-related issues and questions ... find the right resources and experts ... and figure out the best way to proceed. For assistance, call 1-888-566-3982 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in all the time zones. Or go to http://www.va.gov/ORM/RSC.asp. Your wellbeing is important, that’s why we care for you while you care for our Veterans.

Office of Human Resources & Administration
ADVANCE

VA

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Policy Alert

2013 Secretary’s EEO, Diversity, and No FEAR Policy

On May 31, 2013, Secretary Shinseki issued the 2013 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Diversity, and No FEAR Policy Statement to the VA workforce. This annual policy statement contains a summary of VA’s workplace policies and workforce protections that address equal employment opportunity, diversity and inclusion, workplace harassment, workplace violence and bullying, whistleblower protections, reasonable accommodations, conflict management, Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA) rights, and related mandatory training. This consolidated policy statement (available online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/policy/statement.aspx) provides all employees with efficient, comprehensive access to policy guidance and information resources on their workplace rights and responsibilities. Notable enhancements in the 2013 policy statement include strengthened protections in the area of discrimination based on gender identity; updated Whistleblower protections; and new sections on workplace violence and bullying, Prohibited Personnel Practices, and USERRA. The issuance of this policy demonstrates VA’s commitment to promoting a safe and inclusive work environment that is free from discrimination and harassment.

MyCareer@VA Updates

MyCareer@VA Introduces New Ways to Uncover Career Possibilities

MyCareer@VA, VA’s premier career development program, recently unveiled new courses, skill-building activities and resources designed to empower you to achieve your professional goals. These practical and easily accessible new options include something for every career. Whether you are aiming to advance, looking to make a change or simply curious about what VA has to offer, MyCareer@VA (http://www.mycareeratva.va.gov) can help you get where you want to go.

One of the exciting new features released this month is CareerPrep (http://mycareeratva.va.gov/Resources/Pages/CareerPrep.aspx), a resource that prepares you to take advantage of career opportunities. CareerPrep includes courses and activities that you can use to build essential skills. Topics include interviewing, preparing an “elevator speech” and overcoming obstacles.

As you practice techniques for advancing your own career, be inspired by CareerTalk (http://mycareeratva.va.gov/Resources/Pages/CareerTalk.aspx), an interview series in which VA leaders share stories and advice from their own professional journeys. Also new in June, CareerTalk gives you a front row seat to candid conversations about first jobs, career shifts and finding the right fit. The first interview in this exciting new series is with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion’s own Deputy Assistant Secretary Georgia Coffey.

Rounding out the recent additions to MyCareer@VA are six new web-based training courses, each of which focuses on a different aspect of career development. If you are interested in developing your own career, you’ll find trainings, tutorials and webinars in the “Develop Self” section of the site (http://mycareeratva.va.gov/Resources/CareerLearning/Pages/CareerLearning.aspx) that help you find a job that fits, increase job satisfaction and make the military-to-civilian transition, among other things. If you are a supervisor helping others grow, there are trainings within the “Develop Others” section (http://mycareeratva.va.gov/Develop/supervisors/Pages/supervisors.aspx) that show you how to retain top talent and guide successful developmental conversations.

Whatever your goals may be, you can use MyCareer@VA at any time and from any computer to take charge of your career. The new features highlighted above are just some of the many options available at http://www.mycareeratva.va.gov. Visit today to create your own customized career plan, use tools, and connect to resources that level the playing field and empower you to take charge of your future. For more information about all of the new features and how you can use them to develop your career, visit the “What’s New” page at http://mycareeratva.va.gov/about/Pages/WhatsNew.aspx.
Commemorate

Continued from page 1.

Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act


Since our earliest days, America has measured its progress not only by the growth of our borders and the breadth of our economy, but also by how far we reach toward fully realizing the fundamental rights, protections, and freedoms afforded to each of us by our Nation’s founding documents. For generations, many Americans with disabilities lived as second-class citizens who were denied those most basic opportunities. Not content to accept the world as it was, they marched and organized and testified, coupling quiet acts of persistence and perseverance with vocal acts of advocacy. And step by step, progress was won. Protections were put into law. And a wave of change swept across our country, tearing down the barriers that kept persons with disabilities from securing their fullest measure of happiness.

Today, we mark the 22nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—a historic piece of civil rights legislation that affirmed Americans with disabilities are Americans first. When many wrongfully doubted that people with disabilities could participate in our society, contribute to our economy, or support their families, the ADA asserted that they could. Under this landmark law, America became the first Nation to comprehensively declare equality for its citizens with disabilities—an accomplishment that continues to guide our country toward fulfilling its most essential promises not just for some, but for all.

Yet, despite the gains we have made, independence and freedom from discrimination remain out of reach for too many individuals with disabilities…

...Because every American deserves access to a world-class education, we have worked to make learning environments safer and more inclusive. Last September, the Department of Education implemented new standards for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that will help measure and improve outcomes for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Moving forward, we will continue to take action to help all children learn, develop, and participate in instructional programs that equip them with the tools for success in school and beyond.

As we mark this milestone and reflect on the barriers that remain, we also pay tribute to the courageous individuals and communities who have made progress possible. Because so many advocates understood injustice from the depths of their own experience, they also knew that by allowing injustice to stand, we were depriving our Nation and our economy of the full talents and contributions of tens of millions of Americans with disabilities. Today, those Americans are leaders not only in every field and throughout every part of our national life, but also in the journey to bring the American dream within reach for our next generation. On this anniversary of the ADA, we celebrate the contributions Americans with disabilities have made to our Nation, and we rededicate ourselves to empowering every individual with those most American principles of equal access and equal opportunity.

New Employee Orientation

Diversity and Inclusion Portion Available Online for New Employees

The April 2012 edition of Diversity News, available online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/dn.aspx, features Carolyn Williams, diversity training specialist, presenting the diversity and inclusion portion of the VA Central Office new employee orientation. This asset, as well as the “Short Video About ODI” at http://www.diversity.va.gov, can be integrated in the on-boarding programs at VA facilities.
Management Directive 715 Report

VA’s Fiscal Year 2012 Report is Hot Off the Press

ODI is pleased to announce the release of VA’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Management Directive (MD) 715 report. MD-715 serves as a roadmap/blueprint to establishing and maintaining effective affirmative programs of equal employment opportunity (a model EEO program).

A Model EEO Program is divided into six essential elements:

1. **Demonstrated Commitment from Agency Leadership**: VA Leadership issues written policy statements expressing commitment to EEO and a workplace free of discriminatory harassment.

2. **Integration of EEO in the Agency’s Strategic Mission**: VA’s EEO programs must be organized and structured to maintain a workplace that is free from discrimination in any of VA’s policies, procedures or practices, and support VA’s strategic mission.

3. **Management and Program Accountability**: VA Leadership must hold all managers, supervisors, and EEO officials responsible for the effective implementation of VA’s EEO Program.

4. **Proactive Prevention**: VA Leadership must make early efforts to prevent discriminatory actions and eliminate barriers to equal employment opportunity in the workplace.

5. **Efficiency**: VA Leadership must ensure that there are effective systems in place for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of VA’s EEO Programs as well as an efficient and fair dispute resolution process.

6. **Responsive and Legal Compliance**: VA must be in full compliance with EEO statutes and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations, policy guidance, and other written instructions.

Each year, VA conducts a self-assessment against the six essential elements. The self-assessment is used to identify strengths and challenges in the agency’s EEO programs. The following is a list of some of those strengths and challenges identified.

Continued on the next page.

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VA D&I Report

Fiscal Year 2012 Report Hot Off the Press

ODI is proud to announce the release of the VA Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012. This Report was produced in collaboration with ODI’s partners and stakeholders in the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, the National Cemetery Administration, and Staff Offices. The report presents VA’s accomplishments and progress in achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2012-2016.

VA released its first Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report four years ago under the auspices of VA’s first Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. Since then, VA has made tremendous progress in becoming a model in the area of diversity and inclusion throughout Federal Government. This fourth report follows the new objectives and strategies outlined in VA’s updated Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2012-2016. This new Plan was developed in accordance with President Obama’s Executive Order 13583, “Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce.”

Continued on the next page.
Following last year’s introduction of the innovative metric to assess an organization’s diversity, the VA Diversity Index, ODI completed work on a new and complementary metric: the VA Inclusion Index. These two metrics have garnered government-wide attention and serve as efficient ways for our leadership to measure progress.

ODI thanks all partners and stakeholders for their support in producing this report and for their continuing commitment to diversity and inclusion as VA works together to build a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment for all employees. The VA Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for FY 2012 is available at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/diar.aspx. You are encouraged to promulgate this report to your colleagues within VA and outside alike. For more information, contact Thomas Middleton, Management Analyst, ODI, at Thomas.Middleton@va.gov.

Management Directive 715 Report

Strengths

- VA’s EEO policy statements are up-to-date, communicated to all employees, and are vigorously enforced by Agency management.
- The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration is provided with appropriate authority and resources to effectively carry out a successful EEO Program.
- VA has committed sufficient human resources and budget allocations to its EEO programs to ensure successful operation.
- EEO program officials advise and provide appropriate assistance to managers/supervisors about the status of EEO programs within each manager’s or supervisor’s area or responsibility.
- The use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is encouraged by senior management.
- VA has an effective complaint tracking and monitoring system in place to increase the effectiveness of the facilities’ EEO Programs.
- There is an efficient and fair dispute resolution process and effective systems for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the facility’s EEO complaint processing program.
- VA has effective systems in place for maintaining and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of its EEO programs.
- VA ensures that the investigation and adjudication function of its complaint resolution process are separate from its legal defense arm of facility or other offices with conflicting or competing interests.
- Personnel are accountable for timely compliance with orders issued by EEOC Administrative Judges.
- VA staff is accountable for the timely completion of actions required to comply with orders of EEOC.

Challenges

- The Human Resources Manager and the EEO Manager do not meet regularly to assess whether personnel programs, policies, and procedures are in conformity with instructions contained in EEOC management directives.
- When findings of discrimination are made, VA doesn’t always explore whether or not disciplinary actions should be taken.
- VA is working on a way to conduct trend analyses of the workforce’s compensation and reward system.
- VA did not have a centralized tracking mechanism to determine if 90 percent of accommodation requests are processed within the time frame set forth in the facility procedures for reasonable accommodation.
- VA’s system of management controls does not ensure that VA timely completes all ordered corrective actions and submits its compliance report to EEOC within 30 days of such completion.

Not only does VA have to report on these strengths and challenges to equal employment opportunities, it has to report plans to overcome identified barriers in MD-715. The FY 2012 MD-715 Report is available at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/reports.aspx. For more information, contact David Williams, Director of Workforce Analysis, ODI, at David.E.Williams@va.gov.
Workforce Planning

Community of Practice Launched

The Workforce Planning & Analysis (WPA) team leads VA’s corporate workforce planning (WFP) capability. Successful workforce planning will help VA’s Administrations and Staff Offices plan their long-term staffing needs to meet VA’s organizational mission and better serve the Nation’s Veterans and their families. VA’s WFP Community of Practice (CoP) is a resource and networking hub for VA workforce planners that WPA launched in the fall of 2011.

The WFP CoP houses a variety of resources and information for VA workforce planners. All workforce planners are encouraged to review the resources available in the Reading Library and upload items that may be useful to the greater community. Join the workforce planning conversation on the Discussion Board, and read about available eLearning on the Training page. Don’t miss the Wednesday, July 16, CoP webinar from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. (EST) that features Scott Schimetz, VHA, and an overview of ProClarity’s Common Challenges and Solutions. For specific details, contact Teneka Collet.

Those who are interested in increasing their WFP knowledge should read about the WFP Certification Program. This year-long program, which will launch in 2014, offers VA workforce planners a baseline of WFP knowledge, networking opportunities, and three levels of certification to improve their WFP skills. Currently, more than 50 workforce planners across VA are participating in a modified pilot through September 2013.

The WPA team and the WFP CoP have been featured in two previous Office of Human Resources and Administration (HRA) blogs. If you missed them, please take a moment to read about Workforce Planning and Analysis Tools and Webinars and HRA’s Role in the Future of VA Workforce Planning Efforts.

Questions? Contact Ms. Collet, Office of Human Resources Management, at Teneka.Collet@va.gov or the WPA team at VAWorkforcePlanning@va.gov for more information.
Training BIG National Training Institute

Blacks in Government (BIG) will hold its 35th Annual National Training Institute (NTI) from August 19–22, 2013, at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas. The theme for this year’s conference is “Strategizing and Strengthening Government Leadership in the Global Economy.” The BIG NTI will offer training sessions to participants to help them identify, analyze, and build competencies required for successful career development and management. Also, in addition to the plenary sessions, workshops on communication, financial management, equal employment opportunity, information technology, and resource management will be offered.

ODI, in collaboration with the BIG VA Headquarters Chapter, will present a no-cost VA Agency Forum on Tuesday, August 20, 2013, from 8 to 10 a.m. The agency forum will consist of a panel discussion titled “Where Do We Go From Here” in response to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s African American Workgroup Report, which describes seven obstacles to opportunities for African Americans in the Federal workforce. Guest Panelists will include Shirley Jones, President, Blacks in Government Region XI Council; Florine McCall, EEO Manager, Dallas VA Medical Center; Delvka Seth, Senior Trial Attorney, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Ethel Sligh, Executive Assistant, Veterans Health Administration; Josie Lopez, Outreach Coordinator, U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; and Gregg Reeves, Division Chief, Financial & Accounting Application Services, Department of Veterans Affairs.

VA employees are invited to review information related to conference registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules at http://bignet.org/index.php/2013-nti-dallas-texas. As always, supervisory approval is required to attend this conference. All attendees must follow VA conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Attendance is subject to availability of local training and travel resources authorized by your organization.

For additional information about VA’s Black Employment Program, contact Trina Faison, National African American Employment Program Manager, ODI, at Trina.Faison@va.gov. For information about VA’s participation at this event, contact Renaee Allen, African American Veterans Liaison, Center for Minority Veterans at Renaee.Allen@va.gov.

FEW National Training Program

Are you looking for an opportunity to receive top-notch training to better your future and network with other Federal employees and leaders? This event is for you! Registration is now open for the Federally Employed Women’s (FEW) National Training Program (NTP) being held from July 22–26, 2013, at the Orlando Hilton in Orlando, Florida. This year’s theme is “Passport to Career Success.” Registration information for the NTP can be found at http://www.few.org/training-education/national-training-program/registration. Funding for NTP attendance must be authorized by your supervisor and organization. All registrations for the conference must be completed using this link.

In addition to the FEW NTP, VA employees are encouraged to attend the VA Agency Forum being held on Monday, July 22, 2013, from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. This forum will begin with a warm welcome from the Orlando VA Medical Center Director and will include VA specific information such as a brief on “The State of Women at VA” provided by Nanese Loza of ODI, Diversity and Inclusion training provided by Carolyn Williams of ODI, MyCareer@VA and TMS information presented by the VA Learning University, as well as a Q&A portion. This forum is free of charge for all VA employees attending the conference or in the local commuting area, with supervisory approval. Registration for this forum will be limited to the first 49 employees to register via TMS using the following link: https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERINGDETAILS&schedul eid=2594014. Please note that registration for the forum does not constitute registration for the conference and vice versa.

For additional information or questions about the NTP or the VA forum, or to request a reasonable accommodation, contact Nanese Loza, National Federal Women’s Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 461-4049 or Nanese.Loza@va.gov.

Diversity News: An Online Training Resource

Compliance Corner

Religious Accommodation

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires employers to reasonably accommodate the religious practices of employees, unless doing so would create an undue hardship. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines the term “religious” to include moral or ethical beliefs as to right and wrong that are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views. When an employee or prospective employee notifies VA of the need for a religious accommodation, such as change in work schedule, the agency has a legal obligation to reasonably accommodate the individual’s religious practices unless it constitutes an undue hardship.

The Supreme Court has determined that a religious accommodation that creates more than de minimis monetary or efficiency costs can cause an undue hardship. Undue hardship can be shown where an employer has to vary a bona fide seniority system in order to accommodate an employee’s religious practices, and by granting the accommodation, it would deny another employee her job shift preference guaranteed by that system. However, a showing of undue hardship cannot be speculative, and must include evidence of an actual imposition on co-workers or disruption of work schedules or routines.

In a recent case, an EEOC Administrative Judge found that VA failed to provide a religious accommodation to an employee. Complainant was a Housekeeping Aid at a VA Medical Center. He belonged to a Christian religion, Holiness, which practices its teaching and worships on Saturdays and Sundays. When Complainant began working at VA he had a 3:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. schedule which enabled him to go to church and still arrive at work before his shift. However, after six months, his schedule was changed to 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

After the shift change took effect, Complainant asked his second-level supervisor for Saturdays and Sundays off. His supervisor told him to put his request in writing, but he never responded to the Complainant’s written request. Complainant continued to ask management for religious accommodation, Saturdays and Sundays off, but again, he never received any response.

The EEOC judge found that the compliant had a bona fide religious belief that conflicted with his weekend work schedule and that he informed management both about his religious beliefs and that his work schedule conflicted with those beliefs. The judge further found that the Complainant clearly requested a religious accommodation that was repeatedly ignored by management. The judge concluded that VA did not “even offer that his request would cause an undue hardship” and awarded the Complainant $10,000 in compensatory damages.

~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA’s Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

Diversity Council Activity

Next Quarterly Meeting Scheduled for July 17

The next VA Diversity Council (VADC) quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 17, 2013, from 1 to 3 p.m. in VA Central Office room 830 and via teleconference. The VADC serves as an independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion. The Council comprises representatives from each of the Department’s major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders. The VADC serves as a communications link between the workforce and leadership and a forum to share best practices, consider new initiatives, monitor progress, leverage resources, and ensure accountability in the area of organizational diversity and inclusion. The Council ensures that diversity and inclusion considerations are integrated throughout VA’s strategic planning efforts, business practices, and organizational components. Future Council meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, October 16, 2013, and Wednesday, January 15, 2014. Meeting agendas and minutes, the roster, and a copy of the charter are available online at http://www.diversity.va.gov/council.
D&I Online

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ diversity and inclusion program is to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and strategic focus on diversity and inclusion as key components of the Department’s human resources strategies. Here’s a sampling of online tools available at [http://www.diversity.va.gov](http://www.diversity.va.gov) that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- **Observance resources.**
- **Training resources, guides, and reports.**
- **Links to professional and community organizations.**
- **Best practices for diversity management.**

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**D&I In Your E-mail Inbox**

ODI sends out *NewsLink*, an e-mail message with annotated links to current news items and other information related to leveraging diversity and building inclusion. For a FREE subscription to this electronic news service, e-mail **odi@va.gov** with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWSLINK in the subject line. Find a sample of *NewsLink* at [http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx](http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx).

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**D&I on Your TV or PC**


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**July 2013 Calendar**

[http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar](http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar)

- **Independence Day**
  - July 4

- **Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership Fourth Annual Asian American and Pacific Islander Career Fair**
  - July 19; Washington, DC
  - [http://www.capal.org](http://www.capal.org)

- **2013 National Council of La Raza Annual Conference**
  - July 20–23; New Orleans, LA

- **Federally Employed Women’s 2013 National Training Program**
  - July 22–26; Orlando, FL
  - [http://www.few.org](http://www.few.org)

- **Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act**
  - July 26

- **National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day**
  - July 27

- **28th Annual Federal Dispute Resolution Conference**
  - July 29–August 1; Orlando, FL
  - [http://www.fdrconferences.org](http://www.fdrconferences.org)