Training

Diversity News videos, produced by ODI and the VA Central Office Broadcast Center for your education initiative, are available on the ODI Web site. The September/October 2015 edition focuses on updates to VA’s diversity and inclusion program.

From the DAS

Georgia Coffey

I am pleased to announce the launch of VA’s Student Outreach and Recruitment (SOAR) initiative with Valencia College, a major Hispanic Serving Institution in Orlando. We inaugurated our new partnership with a signing ceremony hosted by Valencia College President, Dr. Sanford C. Shugart. We are very excited about executing this SOAR initiative with Valencia and other Minority Serving Institutions around the country to build a diverse, inclusive, and high performing VA workforce.

Please join VA and the Nation in commemorating National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15. This year’s theme is “Hispanic Americans: Energizing Our Nation’s Diversity.” Hispanic culture immeasurably influences America’s own celebrated diversity, and this observance recognizes that impact as well as the countless contributions of Hispanic Americans, including those who served in the United States Armed Forces, to our Nation. VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to support events and activities that recognize these contributions. VA Central Office will hold a program commemorating National Hispanic Heritage Month on Thursday, September 17, 2015, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, at noon. For more information, contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator.

National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week is September 21–25. This observance commemorates those educational institutions that ensured African American students were provided equal opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Read more in the Commemorate article.

ODI recently hosted a VA Agency Forum at the Blacks in Government (BIG) National Training Institute where we provided an analysis of African American employment in the Department and presented corresponding training and career development information. VA and BIG signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) during the Forum. This MOU fosters a mutually-supportive relationship to enhance VA’s ability to recruit and retain highly skilled African American men and women and prepare them to become future VA leaders while increasing the awareness and visibility of BIG as an employee support group, professional development organization, community resource, and networking mechanism.

At the conclusion of the fiscal year 2015 cycle of the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), I am happy to share that we reached our goal of converting at least 20 percent of VA’s WRP interns to permanent employees. Kudos to those facilities that not only provided these students with internship experiences but used the WRP as a means to hire qualified candidates for the second consecutive year, furthering VA’s efforts to be the best Federal employer for individuals with disabilities.

Finally, if you haven’t received the FY 2016 list of external affinity conferences approved for VA-wide participation, it is now available on the ODI Web site.
Training

African American Federal Executives Association (AAFEA) Annual Training Workshop will be held September 14–15, 2015, at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in Maryland. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Funding associated with attending AAFEA’s Annual Training Workshop must be authorized and provided by each employee’s organization. Prior to registering through the AAFEA Web site, employees must preregister through ACES. For the ACES intranet link address or more information, contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, Program Lead for VA’s Memorandum of Understanding with AAFEA.

National Image, Inc. will hold its 43rd National Training Program (NTP) September 21–24, 2015, at the Houston Marriott Medical Center in Texas. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Funding associated with attending the National Image, Inc. NTP must be authorized and provided by each employee’s organization. Prior to registering through the National Image, Inc. Web site, employees must preregister through ACES. For the ACES intranet link or more information, contact Mr. Andy Gonzalez, VA’s National Hispanic Employment Program Manager.

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Third Annual Federal Training Institute Partnership (FTIP) will be held September 22–24, 2015, at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Natcher Convention Center, in Bethesda, Maryland, and at the Department of Education in Washington DC. The FTIP is no-cost and will have two components. The Senior Executive and Leadership Development Training will be held September 22–23 (8:30 am–5 pm) at NIH and will focus on the Executive Core Qualifications and other leadership and developmental workshops. VA has been allotted ten slots. The Senior Executive Service (SES) Roundtable Discussion & Speed Mentoring will be held September 24 (8:30 am–1 pm) at the Department of Education and will provide GS-14 and GS-15 employees interested in moving into the SES ranks an opportunity for a more direct, give-and-take interaction with experienced managers in leadership positions. Employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend these events, with supervisory approval. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Prior to registering through the LULAC Web site, employees attending the conference must preregister through ACES. For the ACES intranet link or more information, contact Mr. Andy Gonzalez, VA’s National Hispanic Employment Program Manager.

Gay Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) 33th Annual Conference will be held September 24–26, 2015, at the Hilton Portland and Executive Tower in Oregon. VA’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) will host an exhibit booth to provide VA employees and conference attendees with information on professional development; networking; VA’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) workforce demographics; and ODI workforce initiatives. Employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend this event, with supervisory approval. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Funding associated with attending the GLMA Conference must be authorized and provided by each employee’s organization. Prior to registering through the GLMA Web site, employees attending the conference must preregister through ACES. For the ACES intranet link or more information, contact Mr. Sterling Akins, VA’s National LGBT Program Manager.

Section 508 offers various trainings to help VA employees better understand how Section 508 applies to their job functions. For more information, contact the Office of Information and Technology Section 508 Program Office.

Employee Competencies Training Opportunities are now being offered by the VA Learning University (VALU). The employee competencies define what every VA employee needs to know and be able to do to contribute to the overall mission of VA while upholding the “I CARE” values. For more information, contact VALU Communications.

Commemorate

National Hispanic Heritage Month

As of September 30, 2014, Hispanics represented 6.62 percent of VA’s workforce (23,178 employees). VA employs 109,594 Veterans, of which 7.6 percent (8,332) are Hispanics. VA is experiencing less than expected participation for Hispanic men and women when compared to the Relevant Civilian Labor Force. In addition, Hispanic men and women have less than expected participation rate at the GS 12–14/Title 38 equivalent pay grades when compared to the pay grade distribution of the total workforce. These numbers indicate that considerable work is ahead of us to ensure that Hispanics are fully included in the VA workforce. VA is developing and implementing strategies to improve outreach and career development/retention programs to ensure that all employees, including members of groups with less than expected representation, are encouraged to apply.

VA will continue its efforts to create a diverse, results-oriented, high-performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve and the diversity of our Nation. VA is committed to equal employment opportunity and to promoting an inclusive workplace where all employees can achieve their full potential so that VA can continue to deliver outstanding service to our Nation’s heroes—our Veterans. For more information, contact Mr. Andy Gonzalez, VA’s National Hispanic Employment Program (HEP) Manager, or visit the HEP web page.

National HBCU Week

VA joins the Nation in observing National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week September 20–26, 2015. From the 2014 Presidential Proclamation: For generations, the promise of an education has been a beacon of hope for millions of Americans seeking a better life. At a time when it was deemed illegal for African Americans to learn to read or write, brave men and women took great risks to learn these skills in secret. And after the Civil War, determined individuals made extraordinary sacrifices to establish the institutions we know today as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). (Continued on page 4.)
MyCareer@VA
Team Conflict: The Good, the Bad, and the Solution

Imagine you are part of a team that is streamlining an operating procedure within your department. Just when you think the group has come up with a solution, one of your teammates expresses strong disagreement. Now, your team is caught in the middle of a conflict.

If this scenario makes you cringe, you’re not the only one. Many people think of team conflict as something negative that should be avoided at all costs. However, there are times when conflict is beneficial. If managed well, positive conflict can actually inspire creative thinking and lead to more well-rounded decision making. In fact, absence of team conflict may indicate other issues, like a group environment where team members don’t feel comfortable voicing their opinions.

Here are a few ways to identify and work through productive conflicts – and tips on how to manage unproductive ones.

Identifying Good Conflict

The first step when facing team conflict is to determine whether or not the conflict can be productive for your team.

Most team conflict falls into three categories: task conflict, process conflict, or relationship conflict. Task conflict occurs when team members have differing ideas about the best way to get a job done, while process conflict involves disagreements over how a team should assign work or define roles of its members. Working through task conflict can help team members better understand problems and consider different approaches to accomplishing something. And although process conflict can be negative if it leads to relationship conflict, it can also be helpful when a team decides how to divvy up work to complete its objectives.

Relationship conflict – disagreements that arise due to personality differences, lack of trust, or other interpersonal issues – always has a negative effect on the team. If team members need to work closely with and depend on each other to do the team’s work, relationship conflict can be especially harmful.

Working through Positive Conflicts

If you realize your team is dealing with a task or process conflict, there are a few ways to resolve it.

First, don’t automatically shy away from the issue. Conflict is normal and should be expected. Each team member is coming to the table with his or her own unique backgrounds, experiences, and values – which means some conflict is inevitable.

Next, reframe the problem as an opportunity for collaboration and improvement. A great way to start is by clearly explaining your viewpoint and encouraging your teammates to share theirs, too. For example, you may think it’s best to include monthly status reports as a new departmental procedure, while a teammate may suggest a combination of quarterly reports and weekly check-in emails instead. By working through the problem, sharing different ideas, and listening to your teammates, you can come up with a new solution that will further your team’s common goals.

Dealing with Negative Conflicts

What if you’re challenged with relationship conflict? Spending time trying to solve these negative conflicts is unlikely to help your group succeed and may actually worsen the issue for you and your team members.

Instead of confronting relationship conflict, avoiding it is often the best solution. Are you frustrated by a coworkers’ assertive style of communication or a teammate’s tendency to hold grudges? Taking a timeout and letting your emotions cool down may help you realize that the conflict isn’t as big of an issue as you thought it was.

Another strategy is to drop the issue altogether. Remember that building relationships with teammates requires time. As you and your team members spend more time getting to know each other, the personality differences that are causing relationship conflicts may become less important – and you’ll be able to focus your energy on working together instead of on interpersonal issues.

Need more advice on how to handle conflict within your team? Check out VA’s four-step guide to alternative dispute resolution and dealing with conflict. And as always, stay up-to-date with career advice and articles like this one by signing up for the MyCareer@VA Monthly Update.

Sources:
Commemorate
National HBCU Week (Continued from page 2)

These schools waged a war against illiteracy and ignorance and offered a newly free people the opportunity to write their own chapter in the American story. This week, we honor their important legacy and renew our commitment to their spirit: that every person deserves a chance to succeed.

Over more than 150 years, HBCUs have provided students with the tools to meet the challenges of a changing world. These institutions are hubs of opportunity that lift up Americans and instill in their students a sense of who they are and what they can become. Their campuses are engines of economic growth and community service and proven ladders of intergenerational advancement. Across our country, their graduates strengthen our communities, lead our industries, and serve our Nation. And their successes inspire the next cohort of graduates and leaders.

HBCUs have forged pathways to help students overcome barriers to equal opportunity, but more work remains to ensure that a world-class education is within the reach of every person willing to work for it...Today, because of the work of bold leaders—and of parents and grandparents who never dreamed of going to college themselves but who saved and sacrificed so their children could—more young people have the chance to achieve their greatest potential and full measure of happiness. During National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week, we recognize the ways these schools have made our Nation more just and we continue our work to make higher education accessible to every child in America.

For more information, contact Ms. Mercedes Kirkland-Doyle, VA’s National African American Employment Program Manager, or visit the African American Employment Program web page.
Healthcare Equality Index
Medical Centers Encouraged to Participate

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Health Equity (OHE) announces the opening of the Healthcare Equality Index (HEI).

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation skillfully designed the HEI to evaluate healthcare facilities while giving resources needed to provide Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) patient-centered care and recognizing those who explicitly commit to LGBT equity and inclusion. Last year, 102 VHA facilities participated in the HEI with 91 receiving the designation of Leader in LGBT Healthcare Equality. This resulted in positive publicity for those facilities in their communities and VHA nationally. It also conveyed to all Veterans that VHA is committed to ensuring an inclusive environment for all who served.

Medical centers are encouraged to participate in the HEI again this year. If your facility achieved Leader Status in the past, you still need to participate to receive that designation again.

Participation in the HEI requires minimal resources with significant rewards. For questions regarding the HEI or how to participate, contact the HEI staff or visit the HEI Web site. Submissions are accepted until the 2016 HEI closes on October 31, 2015.

ROTA
Consider Applying for a Rotational Assignment

Officially launched on August 20, 2015, ROTA is a new feature of MyCareer@VA, a program from the VA Learning University that helps current and prospective employees build the career they want at VA. ROTA is a rotational assignment tool that facilitates the process of hiring and applying for rotations online at VA. Employees who are interested in developing new skills in a different area of work can search for open rotational assignments and apply for the ones that interest them by submitting a résumé. Developmental managers who are looking to post and fill open rotations in their offices can post rotational assignments and review submissions to their rotations within ROTA.

Rotational assignments are temporary, developmental opportunities for employees to perform duties outside of their current skill set. Using ROTA to promote rotational assignments will help cultivate the future leaders of VA. Contact the MyCareer@VA program manager, Lisa Allison-Lee, to learn more about ROTA and request a demonstration of the tool.

Also, stay up-to-date with the latest in career advice from MyCareer@VA. Sign up for the MyCareer@VA monthly update to get the information you need delivered straight to your inbox each month. By subscribing, you’ll receive exclusive expert career advice for VA, career tips from VA employees, and more.

Cemetery Director Intern Program
Congratulations to the Class of 2015

The National Cemetery Administration graduated 11 new directors through the Cemetery Director Intern Program during a graduation/recognition ceremony. Since matriculating in September 2014, class members have completed a curriculum emphasizing leadership, business acumen, field operations and NCA’s history, culture and core values. They spent time in the classroom and also many hours at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, supporting interments and ceremonies and learning how to maintain our national shrines. All of this year’s interns are Veterans, proudly representing the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. Eight of the 11 were selected for the program from within the ranks of VA—5 from NCA and 3 from VHA. The new directors are: Natalie Hubble, Asst. Director, Houston National Cemetery—Continental District; Thomas P. Kulich, Asst. Director, Great Lakes National Cemetery—Midwest District; Albert M. Maxwell Jr., Asst. Director, Dallas-Ft. Worth National Cemetery—Continental District; James L. Mitchum, Asst. Director, Tahoma National Cemetery—Pacific District; Susan M. Parks, Asst. Director, National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona—Pacific District; Lance Steven Pridemore, Director, Culpeper National Cemetery—North Atlantic District; Celethia De’Vonne Reed, Asst. Director, Washington Crossing National Cemetery—North Atlantic District; Darrell L. Ryan Sr., Asst. Director, Ft. Snelling National Cemetery—Midwest District; Anthony Walter Sessions, Asst. Director, Ft. Logan National Cemetery—Continental District; Mary Hazel Bilyeu-Thompson, Asst. Director, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery—Midwest District; and Eldon A. Woodie, Asst. Director, South Florida National Cemetery—Southeast District.