Upcoming Events
January 2016
National Mentoring Month
Religious Freedom Day
January 16
World Religion Day
January 17
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
January 18 (observed)
VACO Event (Washington, DC)
January 21, noon-1 pm
VA Diversity Council Meeting
Washington, DC
January 20, 1-3 pm
Pathways Program
Management Office Launch
Washington, DC
January 20, 2 pm

Message from the DAS
Georgia Coffey

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season surrounded by family and friends. As we usher in the New Year, please take this time to reaffirm your commitment to creating and sustaining a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace to best serve our Nation’s Veterans and their families. To that end, ODI has formed a committee to refresh VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. That committee is scheduled to hold their first meeting in January. For more information or to join the committee, contact Mr. Antony Washington, ODI.

ODI is calling for VA organizations to submit their fiscal year 2015 accomplishments toward realizing the goals of VA’s current Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Plan. The FY 2015 VA Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report will provide a comprehensive view of the state of the agency with respect to D&I. Similar to the FY 2014 D&I Annual Report, relevant FY 2015 responsibilities, activities, and accomplishments will be identified for each administration, organization, and staff office within VA. For questions regarding this submission, contact Mr. David Williams, Director, Workforce Analysis. Continued on page 5.

Commemorate
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

VA Central Office (VACO) will commemorate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 21, 2016, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, at noon (ET). The theme for this observance is: “Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On, Not a Day Off.” Chief Master Sergeant Helen D. Noel, United States Air Force, Retired, will serve as this year’s keynote speaker. This event is coordinated by the VACO Black History Month committee and is sponsored by the Office of Diversity Inclusion. (Continued on page 3.)
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 January/February 2016 episode focuses on updates to VA’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Program; Workforce Recruitment Program; African American Employment Program; and Asian American and Pacific Islander Program and introduces the concept of the World Café on race relations.

Section 508 training for VA employees is available. Contact the Office of Information and Technology Section 508 Program Office.

Barrier Analysis training will be offered on Thursday, February 25, 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.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) will provide three free 1.5 hour Webcast sessions in 2016. The three-part series will cover Federal sector hiring and employment (January 20), reasonable accommodation (February 17) and best practices (March 16). All Webcasts begin at 2 pm eastern and continue for 1.5 hours. JAN will welcome guest speakers from the Transportation Security Administration and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Audience members will include Federal disability program managers, hiring managers, supervisors, EEO representatives, selective placement coordinators, and others involved in hiring and managing workers in the Federal government. You must register to attend.

Corporate Employee Development Board (CEDB) application window is open and CEDB is accepting initial applications until January 29, 2016. The CEDB program is an excellent opportunity for GS-13/14/15s to expand their leadership and strategy skills and become better prepared for the challenges of today and the future. You can find additional information on the program on the CEDB Web page.

To learn even more check out one of the Brown Bag sessions listed below:

Jan. 7, 2016, Topic: Travel Information, Q&A
Jan. 14, 2016, Topic: VA Supervisor Discussion, Q&A
Jan. 21, 2016, Topic: Past Graduates’ Comments and Feedback, Q&A
Jan. 28, 2016, Topic: Overview of the CEDB process, Q&A

The dial-in number is 1-800-767-1750, access code 58363.

Field Note

Pathways Program Management Office

After extensive research, development and piloting of products, tools and processes, VA Learning University (VALU) will officially launch its Pathways Program Management Office (PPMO) on January 20, 2016. Pathways is VA’s premiere hiring and recruiting program for students, recent graduates, and emerging leaders. VA has Pathways Programs in each of its three Administrations: Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration. The PPMO will serve as a centralized resource for the management and administration of Pathways Programs across VA.

As part of the launch, the PPMO will release its new “Pathways Tracker”: an online system for all Pathways participants, supervisors, mentors, and HR professionals across VA who are affiliated with the Pathways Program. Because of this, registration is strongly encouraged. The Pathways Tracker will be the place for all Pathways-related reporting, compliance activities, and communications and will be open for registration on January 20, 2016.

Don’t forget to mark your calendar for the big PPMO launch event being held in the Sonny Montgomery Room 230 at VA Central Office starting at 2 p.m. (ET) on January 20. Activities will include a briefing from Human Resources and Administration Assistant Secretary, Gina S. Farrisee, and VALU Dean, Dr. George Tanner, as well as the first of several Q&As about the PPMO and the Pathways Tracker.

For more information, contact the VALU Pathways Team.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement and was an advocate of using nonviolent means to protest discrimination. Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 as a result of his dedication to fighting for civil rights without resorting to violence. He was assassinated in 1968 and many activists petitioned for a holiday to be declared in honor of the civil rights leader. President Ronald Reagan declared the first Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal holiday which was observed on January 20, 1986.

The purpose of the public holiday celebrating Dr. King’s life and recognizing his accomplishments is to remember the struggles that people have had to overcome to obtain civil rights. As the observance approaches, many schools dedicate class sessions to teaching students about the importance of preventing racism and other forms of prejudice. In recent years, the holiday has become an opportunity for Americans to dedicate the day to providing volunteer services to charitable organizations aimed at ending prejudice and aiding those who have experienced discrimination. The holiday is designed to fall near Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s actual birthday on January 15, 1929. The observance has been held on the third Monday in January since 1992.

VA is committed to Dr. King’s principles by ensuring that we practice equal opportunity in our programs through the hiring and promotion of a diverse workforce and by advocating the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

From the 2015 Presidential Proclamation: A champion for justice, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., helped awaken our Nation's long-slumbering conscience and inspired a generation. Through a cacophony of division and hatred, his voice rang out, challenging America to make freedom a reality for all of God's children and prophesying a day when the discord of our Union would be transformed into a symphony of brotherhood. His clarion call echoed the promise of our founding—that each of us are created equal—and every day he worked to give meaning to this timeless creed.

Today, we pause to pay tribute to the extraordinary life and legacy of Dr. King, and we reflect on the lessons he taught us. Dr. King understood that equality requires more than the absence of oppression; it requires the presence of economic opportunity. He recognized that "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." In a world full of poverty, he called for empathy; in the face of brutality, he placed his faith in non-violence. His teachings remind us we have a duty to fight against poverty, even if we are wealthy; to care about the child in the decrepit school long after our own children have found success; and to show compassion toward the immigrant family, knowing that we were strangers once, too. Dr. King transformed the concepts of justice, liberty, and equality, and as he led marches and protests and raised his voice, he changed the course of history.

From Dr. King's courage, we draw strength and the resolve to continue climbing toward the promised land. Our Nation has made undeniable progress since his time, but securing these gains requires constant vigilance, not complacency. We have more to do to bring Dr. King's dream within reach of all our daughters and sons. We must stand together for good jobs, fair wages, safe neighborhoods, and quality education. With one voice, we must ensure the scales of justice work equally for all—considering not only how justice is applied, but also how it is perceived and experienced. As Dr. King told us, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," and this remains our great unfinished business.

Through struggle and discipline, persistence and faith, patriots and prophetic leaders like Dr. King have driven our country inexorably forward. In every chapter of our great story, giants of history and unheralded foot soldiers for justice have fought to bridge the gap between our founding ideals and the realities of the time. We will never forget all who endured and sacrificed, or those who gave their lives, so that our children might live in a freer, fairer, and more just society. In sermons and speeches, Dr. King’s voice rang out with a call for us to work toward a better tomorrow. As we honor his legacy, Americans across the country will join one another for a day of service, picking up the baton handed to us by past generations and carrying forward their efforts. As one people, we will show when ordinary citizens come together to participate in the democracy we love, justice will not be denied.

For more information on VA’s African American Employment Program or the VACO observance, contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, VA’s National African American Employment Program Manager and VA’s Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator, at Tynnetta.Lee@va.gov.
VA is committed to increasing the representation of qualified individuals with disabilities, including Veterans and individuals with targeted disabilities, in all levels of its workforce and to meeting the Secretary’s three percent hiring goal for individuals with targeted disabilities. To this end, ODI is pleased to announce the VA Centralized Workforce Recruitment Program, or WRP, for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. WRP is a recruitment and referral program that connects Federal sector employers with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are interested in temporary or permanent Federal jobs.

The VA Centralized WRP is a centrally funded source managed by ODI to bring new talent into VA’s workforce through Schedule A appointments for winter, spring, and summer sessions, at no cost to the requesting office. Effective FY 2016, in accordance with VA budget policy, ODI will centrally manage all payroll functions for WRP interns.

Managers seeking to hire WRP interns under this program will be responsible for identifying interns from the WRP Web site and by registering, interviewing, and performing all onboarding activities. ODI will be responsible for paying the WRP intern directly from its cost center. Provision of WRP interns under this program is subject to funding availability, and requests will be approved by ODI on a first-come, first served basis.

From Greg Weiss, Chief of Voluntary Service, Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center:

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center (OGJVAMC) in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan faces many challenges related to covering one of the VA’s largest patient service areas east of the Mississippi which includes a total of 25 counties in both Michigan and Northern Wisconsin.

There are 25,864 square miles to be exact, mostly covered with forest and small pockets of civilization spotting the territory. This brings a wide range of issues unique to recruitment and retention of employees. The facility has been keenly focused on various internship programs such as Pathways, National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP), and other such programs as a means of recruitment. The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) has been of interest; however not having any participating schools combined with the rural and sparsely populated coverage area has posed barriers to utilizing the program.

The facility made numerous attempts at enlisting area colleges in participating with the WRP program. Despite the win-win logic behind the program and numerous attempts to encourage participation, local schools did not seem interested. Curbing frustration the medical center decided on a different approach, that of targeting a single university. Michigan Technological University (MTU) perched atop the peninsula was selected. A carefully constructed email that concisely described the WRP program was drafted. The email spoke to the sense of service the WRP program could be to the students, calling for compassion, purposefulness and consideration. It was pointed out that participating in the program would increase the probability of their placement rates of individuals with disabilities. It was also noted that this can be a student recruitment tool for their school.

The question arose, whom should this explanatory letter or email be sent to? We had seen too many attempts at approaching a single school official go ignored. Does the fisherman target a single fish? No...the bait on the hook is cast into the waters for any taker. This email was sent to many at the MTU, in fact, to almost every official at the school. What was the outcome? Three months of silence and waning hope in the medical center. Then one morning came a voicemail message from the Assistant Dean of Students. This resulted in volleys of email exchanges. As the approaching fall season greeted the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, it carried wonderful news. MTU was fully behind the effort and became enrolled as a participating university. The fact that the OGJVAMC has a fourth year Pathways student attending this school, who offered to assist the campus coordinator with a recruitment plan and recruitment, did not hurt this effort. Incidentally, the student interned under the VA Public Affairs Officer because her field of study is Communications and Technical Writing.

This week marks the posting of student information for Federal employers to review for consideration the potential WRP interns. Within that posting there are a number of students from MTU. At this time the OGJVAMC’s Engineering and Biomedical Departments are reviewing student profiles and preparing to make calls to MTU students. The OGJVAMC is honored to be able to assist supporting the WRP program in giving our youth the chance to display their enthusiasm and self-discipline, and consider a career in Federal service.

For more information, contact Ms. Aurelia Waters, ODI’s Centralized WRP Manager, or visit VA’s WRP Web page.
Policy Alerts

Guidance for Criteria Regarding Motor Vehicle Operators and Employee Vaccinations

On the advice of the VA Office of General Counsel, regulations regarding the current medical requirements for employees who drive a vehicle and cited in the VA Handbook 5019, Employee Occupational Health Service, Part II Appendix A, Section 1a and 1d dated, March 27, 2015, are to be placed in abeyance, until the policy can be revised. The decision as to whether or not an applicant or employee meets that qualification for a position that requires driving a government vehicle must be in compliance with the Rehabilitation Act (also known as ADA). Specifically, the major issue with the 2015 revised Handbook is that it requires the examiners and/or providers to disqualify applicants or employees from positions that require driving based on broad categories of medical conditions without any individualized assessment of how the medical condition actually affects the employee or applicant’s ability to drive, most particularly insulin dependent diabetics.

Furthermore, notification of employee vaccination recommendations found in the current VA Handbook 5019, Employee Occupational Health Service, Part IV, Section 2, Vaccinations, dated March 27, 2015, are to be corrected following recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and/or The Joint Commission for healthcare workers/personnel.

Questions may be directed to the Worklife and Benefits Service.

72/80 Alternate Work Schedule (AWS) That Cross Pay Periods

Based on guidance received from the Office of the General Counsel, the Office of Human Resources and Administration plans on amending VA Handbook 5011, Part II, Chapter 3, paragraphs 2c(3)(A) and 7c(2)(a).

The revised Handbook, and the policy, will allow a registered nurse on a 72/80 AWS who has a tour of duty that begins on the last day of one pay period and ends on the first day of the next pay period to be credited, for the time actually worked in the new pay period, to the pay period in which the nurse’s tour of duty began.

Questions that are specific to hours of duty may be directed to Worklife and Benefits Service. Questions regarding the 72/80 AWS program may be directed to the VACO Office of Nursing Services at (202) 461-6958 or (202) 461-6988.

Message from the DAS

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Finally, please join VA and the Nation in observing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 18, 2016. Dr. King said, “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable.... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” Those words are as meaningful today as when he first uttered them. Throughout the world, we continue to face obstacles to human progress in civil rights as in matters of race relations, gender equity, and religious tolerance. Let’s honor Dr. King’s words by living his dream every day.

I want to thank those passionate individuals who work so tirelessly in their own VA workplaces to ensure diversity, inclusion, and equality in VA. With the start of the New Year and as we approach the anniversary of Dr. King’s birth, I ask that we each consider rededicating ourselves to this righteous cause; read more beginning on page 1. ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion