Commemorate

Women’s History Month

Please join the Federal Women’s Program Committee as VA Central Office (VACO) observes Women’s History Month on Thursday, March 17, 2016, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, at noon (ET). This year’s theme is: “Working to Form a More Perfect Union: Honoring Women in Public Service and Government.” This event is sponsored by the Office of Diversity Inclusion. For more information about this event, contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator, ODI. (Continued on page 3.)
Training

**Barrier Analysis Training** will be offered on Thursday, April 21, 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.

**Conflict Management and Alternative Dispute Resolution Training** sponsored by the Office of Resolution Management Centralized Alternative Dispute Resolution Office will be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the HUB Centers for Collaboration. The following sessions remain:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Target Audience</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 19-21</td>
<td>GS-12 and Below</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 26-28</td>
<td>Senior Executive Service</td>
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<td>May 10-12</td>
<td>GS-13 and Above</td>
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These three day trainings provide an opportunities for participants to examine the factors that contribute to workplace conflict. It offers tools that managers can use to prevent these situations from escalating and diverting valuable time, resources, and energy from VA’s mission. This training also allows participants to become more familiar with the role a third party can play in assisting managers and employees in resolving workplace disputes at the lowest possible level.

While not asking you to become a professional mediator among your many other responsibilities at VA, it is hoped that by spending in-depth time studying, discussing, and trying the myriad of techniques and communication skills related to the mediation process, you will adopt new approaches, ideas, and skills in dealing with disputes. All of this will benefit you, all employees with whom you interact, and ultimately, the Veterans that you serve.

Each training session is limited to 30 participants; a wait list will be established after the first 30 participants have been confirmed. Those on the wait list will be contacted in the order the nominations were received by this office upon notices of cancellations. The VA Learning University (VALU) is funding all travel associated costs for approved participants; VALU will not reimburse local travelers. For questions about this training (not relating to travel), contact Jeff Gangi.

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

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. FEW NTP qualifies as a training activity in accordance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and 5 CFR 410.404 and all sessions are mapped to the Office of Personnel Management’s Senior Executive Service Executive Core Qualifications (Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions). Tentatively, ODI may present a no-cost VA Agency Forum, designed to provide VA employees and Veterans with information on professional development, VA workforce demographics, leadership, and ODI workforce initiatives. If scheduled, employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend the Agency Forum, with supervisory approval. Attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending the Agency Forum and/or NTP must be authorized by each employee’s organization. Employees who plan to attend the Agency Forum, if scheduled, and/or the FEW NTP must also pre-register through VA Attendance and Cost Estimation System (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.

**Books24x7 Desktop Videos** can teach you tips and tricks to improve your productivity using Outlook tools discover how to set reminders in your iPhone, or finally figure out how to create a pivot table in Excel. VA employees now have access to thousands of three-to-five minute tutorial videos that demonstrate specific tasks and features of PC tools and applications. Everything from MS Office applications, to iPhone and Android mobile devices, to getting the most from Social Media sites is covered. Getting started is easy, just launch Books24x7. Once on the home screen, go to the “Browse Topics” drop-down on the upper right side of the screen and select “Desktop Video Topics.” Then select from the product and topic categories on your left to see a list of demo videos that can put you well on your way to mastering your PC or mobile device. To receive VA Learning University communications and updates such as the Monthly e-Learning Digest and the Career Advisor, be sure to sign up.
As VA joins the Nation in observing March as Women’s History Month, we pause to commemorate women and their impact on history, present-day, and the future. The theme for this year’s observance, “Working to Form a More Perfect Union: Honoring Women in Public Service and Government,” recognizes women and their contributions to American history and acknowledges how they will shape the future through their public and government service.

This year marks the 36th anniversary of the Women’s History Movement and the National Women’s History Project (NWHP). NWHP determines the theme for this annual observance. This year, NWHP will honor 16 women from the past and present who exemplify the theme. The list includes women such as Betty Mae Tiger Jumper, the first woman Chairman of the Seminole Tribe and Presidential Adviser; Dorothy C. Stratton, WWII Director of the SPARS (Coast Guard Women’s Reserve), First full-time Dean of Women at Purdue University, and Executive Director of the Girl Scouts of the USA; Nadine Smith, LGBT Civil Rights Activist and Executive Director of Equality Florida; Bernice Sandler, women’s activist and “Godmother of Title IX”; Nancy Grace, Chief of Astronomy at NASA; Karen Narasaki, Civil and Human Rights Leader; Inez Milholland, Woman Suffrage Leader and Martyr; Barbara Mikulski, longest serving woman in the United States Congress; Oveta Culp Hobby, WWII Director of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps and first Secretary of the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare; Judy Hart, National Park Founding Superintendent of Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park and Women’s Rights National Historic Park; Suzan Shown Harjo, Native American Public Policy Advocate and Journalist; Ella Grasso, Governor of Connecticut, First Woman Governor of any US State Elected in her own right; Isabel Gonzalez, champion of Puerto Ricans securing American Citizenship; Sonia Pressman Fuentes, NOW co-founder, first woman attorney in the Office of the General Counsel at the EEOC; Daisy Bates, Civil Rights Organizer, Leader of the Little Rock School Integration, and Sister Mary Madonna Ashton, CSJ, Public Health Leader and Minnesota Commissioner of Health. To see the complete list, visit the NWHP Web Site.

From the 2015 Presidential Proclamation: Throughout history, extraordinary women have fought tirelessly to broaden our democracy’s reach and help perfect our Union. Through protest and activism, generations of women have appealed to the values at the heart of our Nation and fought to give meaning to the idea that we are all created equal. As today’s women and girls reach for new heights, they stand on the shoulders of all those who have come before and carry forward their legacy of proud achievement. This month, we celebrate countless pioneering women and the victories they won, and we continue our work to build a society where our daughters have the same possibilities as our sons.

Courageous women have called not only for the absence of oppression, but for the presence of opportunity. They have demonstrated for justice, but also for jobs—ones that promise equal pay for equal work. And they have marched for the right to vote not just so their voices would be heard, but so they could have a seat at the head of the table. With grit and resolve, they have fought to overcome discrimination and shatter glass ceilings, and after decades of slow, steady, and determined progress, they have widened the circle of opportunity for women and girls across our country.

Today, more women are their family’s main breadwinner than ever before. Women are nearly half of our Nation’s workers, and they are increasingly among the most skilled. At the same time, more than 60 percent of women with children under the age of 5 participate in the labor force. This increasing participation of women in our workforce has bolstered our economy and strengthened our families, and it has demonstrated that the policies that benefit women and working families benefit all of us.

But not all of the rules that govern our workplaces have caught up with this reality, and today, too many of the opportunities that our mothers and grandmothers fought for are going unrealized...We know that when women succeed, America succeeds. The strength of our economy rests on whether we make it possible for every citizen to contribute to our growth and prosperity. As we honor the many patriots who have shaped not only the destinies of other women, but also the direction of our history, let us resolve to build on their efforts in our own time. As a Nation, we must join our voices with the chorus of history and push forward with unyielding faith to forge a more equal society for all our daughters and granddaughters—one where a woman’s potential is limited only by the size of her dreams and the power of her imagination.

For additional information on Women’s History Month, contact your local EEO Manager or Ms. Mercedes N. Kirkland-Doyle, VA’s National Federal Women’s Program Manager, ODI.
Commemorate
Irish-American Heritage Month

VA joins the Nation in observing Irish-American Heritage Month this March. From the 2015 Presidential Proclamation: The vibrant culture and rich heritage of the Irish people shaped many of the earliest chapters of America's story. Our common values and shared vision for the future laid the foundation for an eternal friendship between Ireland and the United States, and today, daughters and sons of Erin continue to enrich our Nation. This month, we reaffirm the bonds of affection between our two great countries, and we honor the courage and perseverance of the Irish-American community.

From ethereal green shores, generations of Irishmen and women set out across an ocean to seek a new life in the New World. Often without family or funds, these brave souls put their faith in the ideas at the heart of our democracy—that we make our own destiny, and if we work hard and live responsibly, we can build a better future for our children and grandchildren. Early immigrants from Ireland shaped our founding documents, and in the decades and centuries since, Irish-American heroes—like the courageous members of the Fighting 69th—have fought and died to protect a Government of, by, and for the people.

Today, tens of millions of Americans proudly trace their heritage to the Emerald Isle. They are descendants of our Founding Fathers, heirs to a resilient spirit forged during the Great Hunger and painful periods of discrimination, and the latest in a long line of Irish Americans who have poured their energy and passion into perfecting our Union. With grit and determination, they have enhanced our communities, bolstered our economy, and strengthened our Nation. And their brogue continues to ring out from our halls of government and every place people strive to make our society more free, more fair, and more just.

The Irish story is one of hope and resolve—in it Americans see our own dreams and aspirations. Our pasts are bound by blood and belief, by culture and commerce, and our futures are equally, inextricably linked. During Irish-American Heritage Month, let us celebrate the people-to-people ties between our nations and continue together our work to forge a brighter tomorrow for every American and Irish child.

César Chávez Day

VA joins the Nation in observing César Chávez Day March 31. From the 2015 Presidential Proclamation: For more than two centuries, the arc of our Nation's progress has been shaped by ordinary people who have dedicated their lives to the extraordinary work of building a more perfect Union. It is a story of achievement and constant striving that has found expression in places where America's destiny has been decided—in Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall, and in the golden fields of California where an American hero discovered his mighty voice. Today, we honor César Chávez and his lifetime of work to make our country more free, more fair, and more just, and we reaffirm the timeless belief he embodied: those who love their country can change it.

A son of migrant workers and a child of the Great Depression, César Chávez believed every job has dignity and every person should have the chance to reach beyond his or her circumstances and realize a brighter future. When no one seemed to care about the farm workers who labored without basic protections and for meager pay to help feed the world, César Chávez awakened our Nation to their deplorable conditions and abject poverty—injustices he knew firsthand. He organized, protested, fasted, and alongside Dolores Huerta, founded the United Farm Workers. Slowly, he grew a small movement to a 10,000-person march and eventually a 17-million-strong boycott of table grapes, rallying a generation around "La Causa" and forcing growers to agree to some of the first farm worker contracts in history. Guided by a fierce commitment to nonviolence in support of a righteous cause, he never lost faith in the power of opportunity for all.

As a Nation, we know the struggle to live up to the principles of our founding does not end with any one victory or defeat. After César Chávez fought for higher wages, he pushed for fresh drinking water, workers' compensation, pension plans, and protection from pesticides. He strove every day for the America he knew was possible. Today, we must take up his work and carry forward this great unfinished task...César Chávez knew that when you lift up one person, it enriches a community; it bolsters our economy, strengthens our Nation, and gives meaning to the creed that out of many, we are one. As we celebrate his life, we are reminded of our obligations to one another and the extraordinary opportunity we are each given to work toward justice, equal opportunity, and a better future for every one of our sisters and brothers.
Policy Alert
VA Handbook 5017, Employee Recognition and Awards

VA Handbook 5017, Employee Recognition and Awards, Part V, Title 38 Special Advancements and Cash Awards will be rewritten in its entirety in order to provide clarity in regards to the eligibility criteria, technical review and processing of Special Advancements for Achievement, Special Advancements for Performance, and Cash Awards for Registered Nurses and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists. Changes will include the following:

- Special Advancement for Achievement (SAA) is updated to provide more specific information about the types of recognition available for this award and the justification needed to support this achievement.
- Special Advancement for Performance (SAP) is updated to ensure that this type of award is used in recognition of job-related performance.
- Additional guidance regarding cash awards for specialty certifications received by registered nurses and certified registered nurse anesthetists.
- More information about the technical review to be conducted by Human Resources when processing the types of awards covered by this Part.
- Clarification regarding the timely processing of awards covered by this Part.

For more information, contact the Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051).

The New IQ
Measuring Inclusion

Most Federal employees have heard of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), which provides government employees with the opportunity to share their perceptions of their work experiences, their agencies, and their leaders. However, many employees are not as familiar with the New Inclusion Quotient, or New IQ, which is derived from information gathered from the FEVS. The New IQ refers to inclusive intelligence and consists of 20 questions on OPM’s Employee Viewpoint Survey. The 20 questions are grouped into 5 habits, or behaviors, of inclusion: Fair, Open, Cooperative, Supportive, and Empowering.

The New IQ is built upon the concept that certain individual behaviors, repeated over time, form the habits that create essential building blocks of an inclusive environment. These behaviors can be learned, practiced, and developed into habits of inclusiveness and subsequently improve the inclusive intelligence of an organization and its members.

Looking at the New IQ questions and associated behaviors, OPM found that the five main drivers of employee engagement are: meaningful performance feedback conversations; management styles that foster communication and collaboration; adherence to merit system principles; employee training and development, and work/life balance. Using this information, we can clump the behaviors identified into five strategic categories:
1. Policies/Programs/Practices
2. Training and Development
3. Performance
4. Work Life Balance
5. Communication and Collaboration

With the strategic categories outlined, we can develop measures to show progress through implementation of each strategy. These measures would show a reduction in certain behaviors or workplace issues, and an increase in positive behaviors as well as VA scores on the FEVS.

In order to accurately measure some of VA’s growth, however, we must first increase participation by VA employees in the survey. Case in point, in 2015 only 32,236 out of 89,428 VA employees who received the survey responded (36%). VA had the 4th lowest response rate of all Department/Large Government Agencies. The other three low response rates came from DOD agencies. Continued on the next page.
The New IQ  
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For those VA employees who are responding to the survey, the results are showing that we are not doing well. VA’s scores in all areas of Employee Engagement, Global Satisfaction, and the New IQ questions have steady declined. There are two sub-categories which have remained relatively steady, with no significant increase or change: Supervisors (the interpersonal relationship between worker and supervisor including trust, respect, and support) and Supportive (whether employees feel they are valued by their supervisors). Additionally, VA is consistently trending below overall government scores in all areas with the exception of Intrinsic Work Experience (employees’ feelings of motivation and competency relating to their role in the workplace).

Although VA employees feel competent in their role in the workplace, and that they have interpersonal relationships with their direct supervisors who value them, they are not satisfied with their job, their pay, or the organization overall. The drop in most of VA’s New IQ Index trends shows that VA employees do not feel that the work environment is very fair, open, cooperative, or empowering or—in one word—inclusive.

Brain scans captured through functional magnetic resonance imaging (or an MRI) show that the brain reacts similarly to social rejection as it does to physical pain. Just in the same way we would not walk by and ignore someone who is in physical pain, we should not ignore employees who feel excluded.

Research has proven that an inclusive culture drives employee commitment, satisfaction, and performance. There are many other benefits such as better employee retention, ability to recruit and retain top talent, and a more engaged workforce.

Research has also shown that workplace inclusion is a contributing factor to employee engagement and organizational performance. Specifically, studies show that inclusion was positively correlated with employee satisfaction and that exclusion from decision making is a predictor of attrition.

The New IQ bolsters agencies with essential elements and organizational values needed to actualize the benefits of diversity and inclusion.

Inclusive intelligence is the foundation to allowing any organization to maximize the talents of its workforce while simultaneously empowering a cultural belief and practice of succession planning by nurturing and preparing the organization’s future leaders.

Fostering inclusive work environments and realizing the full potential of our workforce’s diversity requires us to employ effective management practices, such as incorporating the New IQ behaviors in what we do every day, placing strategies that tie in with the New IQ into our workforce strategic plans, and making the purposeful choice to embrace diversity and inclusion and make it a priority in our workplace.

As we move forward in prioritizing diversity and inclusion in VA, let us keep these three important points in mind:

- Diversity is not an imposition; it’s an advantage.
- Inclusion is not a problem; it’s a solution.
- Working together is more than a good idea—it’s essential to individual and organizational success!

For more information on FEVS and the New IQ, as well as to view the 2015 FEVS results, visit the Office of Personnel Management Director’s Blog. The employee engagement and global satisfaction results of this year’s FEVS can now be viewed by the public in visual formats on UnlockTalent.gov, OPM’s innovative digital dashboard. This tool allows customized views of the data which was previously available only to the leadership of Federal agencies.

*Article written by Ms. Angela James, VA’s National Asian American and Pacific Islander Program Manager, ODI.*
VA's Anti-Harassment Office
Establishing a Workplace Free of Harassment

The Office of Resolution Management established the Veterans Affairs Anti-Harassment Office (AHO) to confront and eliminate workplace harassment. Education, training, and enforcement are paramount to the success of the program.

In January 2016, the newly formed AHO began recording, tracking, monitoring and reporting incidents of harassment throughout the VA. The process initiates with the AHO main office at VACO, and utilizes a network of collateral duty, anti-harassment coordinators from within the administrations to serve as core practitioners for the program.

AHO Coordinators follow these three steps when handling complaints:
- ensure that employees understand the process for reporting suspected incidents of harassment;
- ensure swift and appropriate action is taken upon receipt of a complaint; and
- document alleged complaints and report the allegation to leadership.

If an anti-harassment coordinator is not available the complainant should call the toll free number at: 1-888-566-3982. This service is staffed by ORM Resolution Support Center professionals who will accept the allegation and ensure it is routed to the appropriate office or individual(s) for action.

All incidents of harassment should be reported to the immediate supervisor or to the second line supervisor when the immediate supervisor is the alleged harasser. The AHO program aims to empower leaders to engage employees, resolve harassment, and ensure actionable results.

The AHO Directive and Handbook are in the final stages of coordination and will be promulgated throughout VA as soon as they are available. Training for supervisors and anti-harassment coordinators can be arranged by contacting the AHO, and fact sheets and FAQs may be accessed on the AHO Web page.

VA is committed to establishing a workplace free of harassment. For more information please call the VA AHO at (202) 461-0224 or send an email.

Field Note
Pathways Program Management Office

On December 27, 2010, President Obama signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13562 establishing the Internship Program and the Recent Graduates Program and revising and reinvigorating the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program. These two new programs, along with the PMF Program, collectively form what the President called the Pathways Programs.

In support of E.O. 13562, HR&A recently established the Pathways Program Management Office (PPMO) in the VA Learning University as a Career and Employee Development Program. The PPMO was created to provide VA-wide governance, oversight, administration, management, marketing and support for Pathways. The PPMO has developed a SharePoint Database and Resource Center known as the Pathways Tracker designed to track individual Pathways Participants program requirements and provide pertinent Pathways informational resources in one convenient location.

To ensure compliance with Pathways program requirements in accordance with 5 CFR Part 362 and assist in reporting accurate Pathways program metrics required by the Office of Personnel Management, all VA employees associated with the Pathways Programs either as participants (Interns, Recent Graduates, and Presidential Management Fellows), as well as their supervisors, and servicing Pathways Human Resources Specialists will register in the Pathways Tracker and utilize the forms, products, and processes as prescribed by the PPMO.

For more information on the Pathways Programs including the Pathways Tracker, visit the Pathways at VA Web site.
Compliance Corner
Protecting Muslim and Middle Eastern Employees

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently released two resource documents, in question-and-answer format, explaining federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination against individuals who are, or are perceived to be, Muslim or Middle Eastern. One Q&A is for employees, and the other is for employers. Given recent world events, this guidance is a great reminder of the importance of workplace protections for all employees.

In a 2013 decision, the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA) took up this very issue and found that a Muslim employee, of Greek and Arab nationalities, was harassed based on his religion and national origin. The Complainant was a supervisor at a VA healthcare facility. A co-worker told the Complainant that he killed people like the Complainant in Iraq and that he should be at home fighting with his brothers. The co-worker also refused to work with Complainant because of his national origin and religion. Other employees at the facility also harassed the Complainant by subjecting him to slurs based on his national origin. For example, he received an anonymous cartoon depicting an Arab with a sword stating “American jobs for Americans."

Although the Complainant reported these events to management officials several times, no effective action was taken to stop the harassment. First, the Complainant was directed to the EEO office. A mediation was scheduled between the Complainant and his co-worker harasser, but never held due to the harasser’s deployment to active military duty. After the Complainant reported that he was subjected to slurs by other employees, an investigation was conducted. However, the alleged harasser could not be identified and thus cultural sensitivity training was provided to all employees in the Complainant’s work unit.

Finally, the Complainant submitted his resignation stating that he could not continue working at VA due to the “intentional roadblocks and discriminatory actions perpetrated against him.” He also stated that he no longer felt safe working at the facility. Management officials attempted to persuade him not to resign telling the Complainant that the harassment would be stopped. However, the Complainant went forward with his resignation. He stated that he did not have confidence that the harassment would end because he had reported it several times to his supervisors and the EEO office, but no effective action was taken to stop it.

OEDCA determined that the Complainant was subjected to unlawful discrimination based on his national origin and religion and that the actions taken by management officials to end the harassment were not effective. OEDCA further found that the Complainant’s working conditions were so intolerable that he was forced to resign, i.e. he was constructively discharged. “Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA’s Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

Internship Program
Operation Warfighter Internship Program Offers Nonpaid Federal Internships to Veterans

A partnership between VA’s Veteran Employment Services Office and the Department of Defense’s Office of Warrior Care Policy is allowing some transitioning Service members to gain new professional skills through a federal internship program, with candidates becoming available beginning in February. Launched nearly 15 years ago, the Operation Warfighter Internship Program matches qualified wounded, ill, and injured Service members with nonpaid federal internships, so they can gain valuable work experience during their recovery and rehabilitation. Intern candidates will be available for interviews at several national hiring fairs this year. VA hiring managers and supervisors interested in identifying potential candidates should contact Mr. Billy W. Wright, VA’s Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action program manager. Mr. Wright can also be contacted for more information about this year’s Operation Warfighter intern fairs across the Nation.

Fairs in the National Capital Region include:
Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Md.: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. March 16
Fort Belvoir: 10 a.m.-1 p.m. April 27
Walter Reed: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. May 18