Message from the DAS

Last week, we witnessed the fruition of a dream deferred: the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC. A century in the making, this Museum tells the story not only of Black America, but of all America. It shows the good, the bad, and the resilient in us. Mostly, it is a story of victors, not victims of our complicated and painful past. It provides a prescient lesson for all to learn. As Maya Angelou wrote, “History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.” I hope we all heed that important lesson.

The Office of Personnel Management has released the 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results. While the results for VA clearly show we have more work to do, we are pleased to see that both the VA Inclusion Quotient and Engagement Index increased since last year. Although modest, the increases demonstrate that our efforts at building an inclusive workplace and engaged workforce are paying off. Thank you to all of our VA partners for their invaluable contributions to these promising accomplishments.

Learn more about our collective accomplishments in these areas by reviewing our VA Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report. You can also learn about leading practices in employee engagement by contacting the Employee Engagement Service. By ensuring all employees are provided a voice in the workplace and are empowered to problem solve and take action, we can unlock the full potential of the VA workforce in place today and build the workforce we need for the future.

Finally, please join VA and the Nation in commemorating National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Increasing the employment numbers for this group is a goal we all can embrace. Individuals with disabilities are from every race, national origin, and gender. The best way for every VA office and facility to commemorate NDEAM is to recruit and hire a qualified individual with a targeted disability to a position with promotion potential. Offices and facilities that do not have vacancies can ensure that current qualified employees with targeted disabilities receive promotion opportunities. Read more in the Commemorate article below. “Georgia Coffey

Commemorate

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

VA joins the Nation in observing National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) this October. This year’s theme is “#InclusionWorks, Make Inclusion a Core Value!” (Continued on page 4.)
The Leadership VA (LVA) Class of 2017 "Call for Applications" is open through 11:59 pm (ET) October 7, 2016 for qualified applicants in the grades of GS-13 (minimum 52 weeks in grade) through GS-15 and Title 38 equivalents.

LVA is one of the Department's premier leadership development training programs and has been infusing VA with thousands of results-oriented leaders since its inception over 35 years ago. The program prepares and equips high-potential, high-performing leaders with the necessary skills to meet the needs of a diverse population of Veterans, family members, survivors, employees, and stakeholders.

The LVA application process is entirely virtual, competitive and merit-based. Applicants will create an LVA-specific virtual application consisting of professional experience, educational history, community involvement and respond to leadership competency-based essay questions.

Here’s the list of documents and information required to submit a complete application:

- Recent Notification of Personnel Action (SF-50) that verifies grade-level
- Summary of qualifications, which will serve as a general introduction for reviewers
- Employment history to include position title, time in position, organization, and description of responsibilities (limited to no more than 10 years of job history)
- Major career accomplishments including measurable impacts where possible
- Education and training to include academic, industry training and certifications, as well as honors and awards
- Professional or community organization involvement including a description of any leadership roles
- Possession of a current (within the past year), overall performance rating of "Fully Successful" or above
- Applicant must occupy a permanent, full-time VA position
- Demonstrate leadership successes and potential for career progression
- Actively participate in their communities
- Commit to travel for the four residential weeks of the 8 to 10 month program
- Commit to working with an InnoVAtion project team, as part of the program
- Commit to completing 20 hours of self-paced instructional activities during pre-session and intersession weeks

The core curriculum of the LVA program consists of four one-week residential sessions that allow Fellows to interact with VA strategic and national industry leaders, discuss academic readings, participate in highly interactive leadership workshops and contribute to an InnoVAtion project team with a goal of solving some of VA’s most difficult issues.

LVA Fellows will also participate in more than 60 hours of self-paced intersession activities that target key VA Competencies.

LVA Fellows also create actionable personal development plans that they can implement when they return to their organizations to better prepare them for senior leadership roles and to support Department succession planning. During the final residency week, LVA Fellows will brief their projects to senior leaders as part of an InnoVAtion Symposium.

Participation in the LVA Program creates well-rounded alumni, poised to contribute significantly to the Department. Essentially, the LVA Program produces alumni that:

- Champion VA strategic goals and objectives
- Build and shape enterprise-wide leadership throughout their organizations
- Lead creativity and drive innovation for a 21st century VA
- Integrate and align enterprise-wide objectives
- Develop networks and a "continuity of practice/best ideas" across VA to help drive positive change

Detailed information about the LVA program and access to the application can be found online.

For questions, contact the LVA Program Team.

The 2016 Out & Equal Workplace Summit will be held October 4-7, 2016, at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, Florida. The theme for this year’s summit is “Shaping the Future of Global LGBT Workplace Equality and Inclusion.” Employees who plan to attend the summit must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending must be authorized by each employee’s organization. Attendees must pre-register through the Out & Equal Web site and through VA’s Attendance and Cost Estimation System (ACES). For that link or for additional information, contact Mr. Sterling Akins, VA’s National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Program Manager, ODI.
Workforce Analysis Updates

New RCLF Methodology
Effective Friday, September 2, 2016, the VISN Support Service Center (VSSC) Management Directive 715 (MD-71) workforce tables reflect a correction to the relevant civilian labor force (RCLF) computation. In particular, Tables A1, A2, and A8 reflect the new RCLF methodology. Tables A6 & A7 are not affected. The update corrects the RCLF computation to align with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidance in establishing the benchmark for determining which race/ethnicity and gender group falls below expected representation and is consistent with the method other Federal agencies use to determine their RCLF. The proposed change was briefed to EEOC and approved by EEOC in the first quarter of fiscal year 2016 to proceed with the corrective change. In general, at the national level, White women are no longer an under-represented group, the benchmark for Hispanics has significantly increased, and White males now fall below their expected benchmark. Because of this change, VA’s national Diversity Index (RCLF based) for July 2016 decreases from 89.64 percent to 85.10 percent. The update does not affect the CLF-based Diversity Index. Updates to the UREP report and the RCLF report applications were also implemented. Each administration is requested to push this notification to their constituent regional and facility EEO directors as quickly as possible. Updates to the remaining VSSC applications (i.e., the EEO, Diversity, and Alternative Dispute Resolution Dashboard and the Quarterly Diversity Report) will be deployed by mid-October. For questions or concerns regarding the new RCLF methodology, contact Mr. David E. Williams, Director, Workforce Analysis, ODI.

Internet Explorer and VSSC Applications
Many users of the VSSC applications have been experiencing problems with Internet Explorer updates. Local IT support staff at facilities are setting several parameters, which allow users to run VSSC reports, incorrectly. Please advise your constituents to check their Internet Explorer options. To do this open Explorer, go to Tools, Compatibility View Settings, and ensure that “va.gov” is added to the “Websites you’ve added to Compatibility View.” This will allow the users to be able to select their station and other options. If you are unable to make the changes, call your local IT helpdesk for support.

Bridging the Gap
Dialogue Through World Café Initiative Opens Channels of Communication in VA Workplaces

Over the past few years, Dr. John Fuller, Diversity Program Manager in the Employee Engagement Service, ODI, has traveled to VA facilities across the country to train employees in diversity and inclusion matters. From these experiences he saw how the Department could provide a way to open channels of communication among employees of different races, genders, and ethnicities in a psychologically safe environment to promote constructive race relations dialogue and to increase employee engagement.

“Racial tensions run high, including at work,” he quoted a July 18, 2016, National Public Radio story on racial tensions straining workplace relations, “Employers are seeing more cases, but many people are finding it hard to find the words to bridge the gap with their colleagues.” VA was no exception.

Convinced that he had identified an initiative that would bridge that gap, in 2015 Dr. Fuller piloted a “World Café” session on the topic of "Race Relations" with ODI and a few other VA colleagues in the diversity and inclusion arena. Dr. Fuller presented this initiative to the Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) and with the groundbreaking support of VBA and Robert Waltemeyer, VBA’s DIVAC representative and Director of VBA’s Office of Management, proudly launched the World Café initiative aimed at promoting diversity, inclusion, and engagement and giving voice to employees on these important issues.

The inaugural World Café event was rolled out to the field on April 28, 2016, to the VBA St. Louis Records Management Center with outstanding positive results and feedback. Other events have subsequently been held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver, Washington; and Detroit, Michigan. Continued on page 5.

Do you know a VA employee or team who has accomplished groundbreaking work in the diversity and inclusion arena? Nominate them for the Secretary’s Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Award! Nominations are due December 1, 2016!
Commemorate
Continued from page 1

VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to support events and activities that recognize the many contributions of individuals with disabilities to America’s workforce. VA Central Office (VACO) will commemorate NDEAM on Thursday, October 20, 2016, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, Room 230, at noon. For more information about VA’s Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program or this event, contact Ms. Tabetha McFeders, VA’s National Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program Manager, Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

From the 2015 Presidential Proclamation: A quarter century ago, our country took a major step toward fulfilling the fundamental American promises of equal access, equal opportunity, and equal respect for all when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was made the law of the land. While we have continued to make advancements that help uphold this basic belief, we must address the injustices that remain. During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we celebrate the ways individuals with disabilities strengthen our workforce, our communities, and our country, and we recommit to cultivating an America where all people are able to build vibrant futures for themselves and for their families.

Americans with disabilities make up almost one-fifth of our population, but are unemployed at a rate that is twice that of people without disabilities; and for women and minorities with disabilities, the rates are even higher. Despite all they contribute to our society, people with disabilities still face discrimination by employers, limited access to skills training, and, too often, unfairly low expectations. As a Nation, we must continue to promote inclusion in the workplace and to tear down the barriers that remain—in hearts, in minds, and in policies—to the security and prosperity that stable jobs provide and that all our people deserve. And we must actively foster a culture in which individuals are supported and accepted for who they are and in which it is okay to disclose one’s disability without fear of discrimination...America is at its strongest when we harness the talents and celebrate the distinct gifts of all our people...let us pay tribute to all who fought for better laws, demanded better treatment, and overcame ignorance and indifference to make our Nation more perfect. In their honor, and for the betterment of generations of Americans to come, let us continue the work of removing obstacles to employment so every American has the chance to develop their skills and make their unique mark on the world we share.

For more information, visit VA’s Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program Web page.

Policy Alert
VA Handbook 5005/88, Staffing

VA Handbook 5005/88 has been changed to revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding the application of Veterans Preference in making appointments to occupations covered by 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) (Hybrid Title 38). Significant changes include:
a. Clarifies the difference between application of Veterans preference in making appointments to full Title 38 occupations (38 U.S.C. 7401(1)) and Hybrid Title 38 occupations (38 U.S.C. 7401(3)).
b. Provides new guidance and policy on application of Veterans Preference when making appointments to occupations covered by 38 U.S.C. 7401(3), also known as the “Hybrid Title 38” occupations.

For more information, contact VA’s Recruitment and Placement Policy Service.
World Café: Bridging the Gap
Continued from Page 3

The World Café methodology is a simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue and can be modified to meet a wide variety of needs. Specifics of context, number of participants, purpose, location, and other circumstances are factored into each event’s unique invitation, design, and topic or question of choice. The following five components comprise the basic model:

1. **Setting.** Create a “special” environment, most often modeled after a café, with four to five chairs at each table.
2. **Welcome and introduction.** The host begins with a warm welcome and an introduction to the World Café process, setting the context, sharing the café etiquette, and putting participants at ease.
3. **Small Group Rounds.** The process begins with the first of three or more rounds of twenty-minute conversation for the smaller group seated around a table. At the end of the twenty minutes, each member of the group moves to a different new table. One person is chosen by the participants at each table as the “table host” for the next round. The host welcomes the next group and briefly fills them in on what happened in the previous round of conversation.
4. **Questions.** Each round is prefaced with a question specially crafted for the specific context and desired purpose of the World Café. Successive questions are built upon each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction.
5. **Harvest.** After the small group rounds, individuals are invited to share insights or results from their conversations with the rest of the large group. These results are reflected visually in a variety of ways, most often using graphic recording in the front of the room.

A World Café session lasts approximately two hours and costs for one facilitator are preferably provided by the facility. The basic process is simple and simple to learn, but complexities and nuances of context, numbers, question crafting and purpose can make it optimal to bring in an experienced organizer like Dr. Fuller who can facilitate open, honest, and respectful dialogue while employees share their experiences and “listen to understand.” These sessions are so profoundly positive that managers will see, as has been reported by the locations where sessions have been held to date, an increase in communications and pride that VA is leading the way on race relations dialogue in the Federal workplace.

For more information on the World Café, contact ODI.

At the St. Louis VBA Regional Office on August 23, 2016, Dr. John Fuller facilitated the World Café which was renamed by Mr. James Thomas, Jr., EEO Program Manager, the “Partnership Café” for the opportunity it presented to improve the management-union relationship. Facility Director Mitzi Marsh worked in partnership with the local union president to ensure participation of members of VA management and union officials.

During the session, participants engaged in an open dialogue about workplace issues, family issues, and community issues. Participants were encouraged to “listen to understand” others while they were sharing their experiences. After each round of discussions, employees presented a summary of what was discussed and shared experiences that may not have otherwise been discussed in the workplace. Because this event enhanced communications among the ranks, the St. Louis VA Regional Office will continue to expand the opportunity for employees to participate in future Partnership Cafés!