Commemorate International Day of Persons with Disabilities

VA joins the Nation in observing International Day of Persons with Disabilities, first proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3 in 1992. International Day of Persons with Disabilities aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. The theme for this year’s observance is, “Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

Taken from the 2017 Statement from President Donald J. Trump on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-international-day-persons-disabilities): Today, we rededicate our efforts to uphold the principles of human dignity, empowerment, and opportunity for all. Too many people around the world hold the misguided view that disabilities justify degrading or destroying precious human lives or that people with disabilities should not be entitled to full participation in civic life. This way of thinking will always be morally wrong and contrary to our Nation’s core values. As Americans, we must set the global standard for ensuring those with disabilities are treated with the dignity and respect that all people deserve. Working with other nations, we will advance the rights of people with disabilities around the world.

For more information on VA’s Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program, visit https://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/iwd.aspx.

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Veterans Affinity Group
Newly Energized Employee Association Focuses on Issues Faced by Veteran Employees

Veteran employment and retention are important issues for the Department. One way to ensure Veterans’ success and career development within VA is through the Veterans Affinity Group (VAG). The VAG is a newly energized VA employee association established by the Office of Human Resources and Administration (HRA) that aims to link Veteran employees to community resources and services; professional development training opportunities; and access to Veteran-related informational and networking sessions. VAG welcomes and embraces the unique differences and similarities that every Veteran brings to the VA workplace.

VA currently employs more than 391,000 people, of which 127,000 are Veterans. This constitutes 32.5 percent of the entire VA workforce. In fiscal 2016, VA hired more than 18,000 Veterans. Of them, 6 percent left VA within their first 90 days, 12 percent left within their first 180 days, and 21 percent left within their first year.

To reduce the high turnover, VA has established strategic goals and steps to cultivate and sustain a culture that advocates for Veteran employment, recruitment and retention throughout the Department. Additionally, VA established a hiring goal that increases the Veteran workforce from 32 to 35 percent by fiscal 2019. The mission of the VAG is in direct support of this goal.

For more information about the VAG or the Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO), contact John Brown, Acting Director, VESO, at John.Brown@va.gov.

Policy Reminder
Guidance on Religious Exercise and Expression

During this holiday season and throughout the year, all VA employees are expected to be mindful of the Department’s Policy Guidance on Religious Exercise and Expression in VA Facilities and Property Under the Charge and Control of VA, available at https://www.diversity.va.gov/policy/files/rel-exp-memo-2016-update.pdf.

At all times, the government must ensure that it does not act in a manner that would lead a reasonable observer to conclude that it is sponsoring, endorsing or inhibiting religion generally or favoring or disfavoring a particular religion. The government must also ensure that it does not require or pressure its employees or others to participate in religious activities or to refrain from participation in such activities. Please read the associated FAQs at the link above for more information. We all have a responsibility to be respectful and to ensure that our workplaces are harassment-free zones.

Harassment Prevention
Steps for Reporting

The Office of Resolution Management’s (ORM’s) Harassment Prevention Team ensures allegations of harassment, including bullying and cyber-bullying, receive a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation preferably before harassment becomes severe or pervasive. ORM ensures that VA takes immediate, appropriate corrective action when it determines harassment has occurred. The Harassment Prevention reporting process is different from the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint process. The Harassment Prevention Program exists to stop harassment immediately by a separate process.

Employees should report the matter to their immediate supervisors or to another management official; to the Harassment Prevention Coordinator (HPC) listed at http://www.va.gov/ORM/HPP.asp; or to the Harassment Prevention Team at (888) 566-3982, option 3.

If the matter raised before the Harassment Prevention Team does not fall within its purview, the employee will be informed of his or her options for redress. Contacting the Harassment Prevention Team does not preclude an employee from filing an EEO complaint. Please keep in mind that contacting this Team does not initiate the EEO complaint process and you do not delay your time limits for filing an EEO complaint. However, if you want to file an EEO complaint, you must contact ORM within 45 calendar days of the date of the alleged discrimination by calling (888) 566-3982, option 1. For more information, visit http://www.va.gov/ORM/HPP.asp.
Training
VA Virtual Aspiring Leaders Program (vALP) Application Closing December 6

Do you know someone with the desire, determination, and drive to lead others? If so, the Virtual Aspiring Leaders Program (vALP) can help make their goal a reality. vALP is an enterprise-wide program that prepares a new cadre of leaders to meet the challenges of a 21st century VA. The program is conducted entirely online over the course of five months. Participants learn fundamental concepts of leadership dynamics, including the roles of a leader, influences that can affect leadership, and principles of ethical leadership.

The Healthcare Leadership Talent Institute (HLTI) will launch two cohorts comprising 200 selected VA professionals in February 2019. The Application window will open on November 6, 2018 and will close on December 6, 2018. HLTI needs your help to promote this valuable developmental opportunity to Emerging and Team Leaders to apply for the program. Candidates MUST meet the requirements listed below:

- Have at least one year of tenure at VA as of January 1, 2019.
- Be a grade GS-09 thru GS-13 and Title 38 and Wage Grade equivalents (including Title 38 Hybrids).
- Be committed to complete this five-month cohort-based program.
- Be endorsed by their VA supervisors.
- Devote three to five hours of time per week on vALP learning activities and coursework, with approximately two of those hours completed during regular business hours.
- Applicants will contact their local vALP point of contact in their local Staff Office or Facility for applications.

Please contact Mitchell Scott, National Program Manager, or Richard Bruce, Program Support Specialist, at vaovalp@va.gov for questions related to vALP or for the Share Point site to find your local vALP POC.

December eLearning (Skillsoft) Webinars

VA has various licenses in place with Skillsoft so employees have access to a wide range of on-line training and educational resources, including books, audio books, and videos. Interested in developing your personal or professional life? This December, learn more about online training and educational resources offered by Skillsoft and available to all VA employees including the following featured eLearning Skillsoft webinars:
- Skillsoft, What’s In It For Me?
- Skillsoft’s Networking and Development: The All Employee Competency (AEC) Model
- Skillsoft Leadership Now and Tomorrow
- Skillsoft Books and Videos
- Just in Time Skillsoft Training: Microsoft Office 2016

You can access Skillsoft courseware, books, and other resources via several links including the Talent Management System (TMS), Skillsoft Pulse, and 24x7 Learning. You can also access and download books directly (outside of the TMS) via https://valo.skillport.com. For more information, contact Mr. Terik Hartz, of the Human Resources Enterprise Center, OHRA, at Terik.Hartz@va.gov.

Update to Diversity and Inclusion Learning Products Available On Demand

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is collaborating with Office of Information and Technology (OI&T) Information Technology Workforce Development (ITWD) to design, develop, and deliver diversity and inclusion live broadcasts as well as on-demand learning content for all OI&T employees. The live broadcast will enable OI&T employees to participate in virtual instructor-led employee education events, and the on-demand products will enable OI&T employees to access D&I learning content at their convenience. The following courses are now available on the Talent Management System (https://auth-hcm03.ns2cloud.com/SecureAuth35) and are available to all VA employees:
- Enhancing Workforce Diversity & Workplace Inclusion in OI&T (VA 4221993)
- Managing Implicit Bias in VA (VA 4222000)
- Applying Cultural Competence in a Multicultural VA (VA 4221996)
- Introduction to Combatting Incivility in the Workplace (VA 4221998)
Commemorate
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Human Rights Days, Human Rights Week, and Bill of Rights Day

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Human Rights Day on December 10, Human Rights Week from December 10-16, and Bill of Rights Day on December 15.

From the 2017 Presidential Proclamation (https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-proclaims-december-10-2017-human-rights-day-december-15-2017-bill-rights-day-week-beginning-december-10-2017-human-rights-week): Our great country was forged in the fires of a revolution to overthrow the rule of a tyrant, by a free people who understood the fundamental truth that liberty is best secured when the state’s power is carefully limited. From the Declaration of Independence, to the Constitution, and through the Bill of Rights, our country and our people have always known the true, God-given nature of liberty and the ability of law to safeguard it against the state. For 226 years, the final piece of this freedom-sustaining bulwark—the Bill of Rights—has formed the bedrock of the constitutional protections every American holds dear as their birthright.

On Bill of Rights Day, we recognize the importance of the first 10 Amendments to our Constitution to protecting our liberty and freedom against the inevitable encroachment of government. Our Founding Fathers understood the threat of expansive, omnipresent government. From the beginning of our republic, therefore, they endeavored to enhance the Constitution with a bill of rights, a specific enumeration of fundamental rights that would prevail even against a future government inclined to abuse the power it has over the lives of citizens.

On June 8, 1789, James Madison, originally skeptical of the need for a bill of rights, introduced in the Congress several amendments to the Constitution that would eventually form the Bill of Rights. During the ensuing debates, Madison told the Congress that because “all power is subject to abuse” it was worth taking steps to ensure that such abuse “may be guarded against in a more secure manner.” Many of the rights set forth in the amendments Madison introduced that day are quite familiar to us as Americans: the right to worship as we please; the right to speak our minds and consciences; the right to firearms to protect ourselves and our loved ones; the right to be free from unwarranted government searches and seizures; the right to a jury of our fellow citizens when accused of legal wrongdoing. Others—like the right to object to housing troops in our homes during peacetime—are often thought of as relics of a bygone era. Regardless of their familiarity or applicability to our daily lives, however, each clause of the Bill of Rights addresses profound and real abuses the Founders faced and each is crafted and locked into law to protect us and future generations from their repetition.

Since its adoption, the reach of the Bill of Rights has spread far beyond America’s shores. As George Washington rightfully said: “Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.” For example, in the wake of the devastation of World War II, the spirit of the Bill of Rights inspired the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Just like the Bill of Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is grounded in the recognition that just governments must respect the fundamental liberty and dignity of their people. By enumerating core rights that should be immune from government encroachment, both the Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have helped fuel remarkable prosperity and achievement around the world.

During Human Rights Days, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, we rededicate ourselves to steadfastly and faithfully defending the Bill of Rights and human rights. Our God-given, fundamental rights are soon overcome if not safeguarded by the people. We, therefore, also reflect upon the many individuals who are unable to enjoy the God-given rights that we as Americans know are secure. We remember those suffering under the yolk of authoritarianism and extremism for doing nothing more than standing up to injustice or daring to profess or practice their religion, and we acknowledge those imprisoned or in peril simply because of their political views or their sex.