Dear VHA Advanced Fellow,

Thank you for your dedication to America’s Heroes and for allowing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to help advance your professional skills! Please consider applying these advanced skills to improve Veteran care as an employee of VA once you finish your program. A career in VA offers graduating fellows an opportunity to work in a collegial and collaborative environment while enjoying unmatched work-life balance.

As you prepare to search for VA employment opportunities, you’ll want to consider reaching out to VA’s own in-house National Recruitment Program (NRP) recruiter team. Our team of recruiters works directly with candidates and hiring managers to facilitate mutually-beneficial placements.

VA’s TakeACloserLook@VA (TACLVA) program is an ongoing recruitment campaign that connects you with VA Recruiters and allows you to learn more about how you can serve Veterans at VA! Be sure to check out www.vacareers.va.gov/taclva/ to stay current on all things VA!

We invite you to review the job search tips we have provided below. This information will help you navigate your future transition into the VA workforce.

Good luck!

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VA HIRING PROCESS OVERVIEW:

VA is a federal agency able to use various hiring authorities when staffing vacancies. The most commonly used hiring authorities for healthcare occupations in VA are Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 while Title 5 is the hiring authority used for administrative non-healthcare occupations in VA.

**Title 38:** VA has a separate employment system under Title 38 U.S.C. for appointment of Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists, Optometrists, Nurses, Nurse Anesthetists, Physician Assistants, and Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries (EFDAs). These appointments are made on the basis of an individual’s qualifications and professional attainments in accordance with standards that have been established by the Secretary. Title 38 employees are paid under specific pay schedules. Appointments may be either full-time permanent, temporary full time, part time, or intermittent. Most full-time appointments under Title 38 are subject to a 2-year probationary period. A functional statement is provided that spells out the duties and responsibilities of the employee. The functional statement is updated when a change in duties occurs.

**Hybrid Title 38:** Title 38 hybrid employees are employed under a combination of both Title 5 and Title 38 personnel systems. Title 38 hybrid positions currently include (but aren’t limited to) Psychologist, Certified/Registered Respiratory Therapist, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Pharmacist, Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse, etc. Hybrids are covered by Title 38 for appointment, advancement, and certain pay matters, and Title 5 for performance appraisal, leave, hours of duty, adverse actions, probationary period, reemployment rights, reduction-in-force, and retirement rules (except part-time service is calculated under Title 38 retirement rules). Appointments may be either full-time permanent, temporary full time, part time, or intermittent. A functional statement is provided that spells out the duties and responsibilities. The functional statement is updated when a change in duties occurs.

**Title 5:** Title 5 positions include all non-healthcare occupations not covered by Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38. Title 5 employees are subject to all regulatory and legal provisions governing employees in the Competitive Service and as a result, Title 5 recruitment processes are competitive in nature and offer fewer flexibilities than do Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38. Veterans’ preference rules are also strictly applied to Title 5 recruitments. Appointments may be either full-time permanent, temporary full time, part time, or intermittent. Most full-time appointments under Title 5 are subject to a 1-year probationary period. A position description is provided that spells out the duties and responsibilities. Position descriptions are updated every two years.

No matter the occupation or hiring authority, VA has the ability to consider current VHA trainees on a non-competitive basis meaning individuals can be considered and selected for vacancies without the VAMC having to announce the position externally at [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov) or
anywhere else. With that said, Veteran’s preference procedures and local bargaining unit job posting requirements must always be followed even when considering someone non-competitively.

Advanced Fellows should begin reaching out to VAMCs for employment once they’re within 8-12 months from completing their programs.

The ideal situation is for VAMCs to forecast their future vacancies and then consider VA Advanced Fellows for these vacancies on a non-competitive basis. It is best to network with the appropriate hiring manager(s) and local HR staff at the VAMC(s) you are interested in as early as possible to facilitate a non-competitive hiring process.

VAMCs that do not forecast future vacancies typically wait until their positions go vacant before requesting “approval to recruit” through a local resource management committee process. In these cases, it’s advantageous for Advanced Fellows to have already networked with the hiring manager and HR staff so that once a position is approved to recruit, they can be considered on a non-competitive basis (without the position being announced externally).

We also recommend that you build a profile at www.usajobs.gov and establish a “job search agent” and set it for daily delivery. This will enable USAJOBS to send you email notifications when positions are announced that match your search criteria (keywords, geographic interests, etc.).

If a position is announced externally at USAJOBS, Advanced Fellows are only eligible to be considered for those positions that specify current and/or former trainees or “US Citizens” in the “Who May Apply” section of the announcement. Positions advertised to “Status Eligibles” are only open to current/former federal employees and certain Veterans. Advanced Fellows are NOT eligible to be considered for positions advertised for “Internal” VA employees only since fellows and other trainees are on temporary, time-limited appointments.

At a minimum you will want to involve the following individuals in your job search: 1) Regional recruiter(s) for the geographic areas you’re interested in; 2) Hiring Managers; 3) Local Facility Recruitment Liaisons (FRL); 4) local HR Staffing and Recruitment Specialists.

The appendixes at the end of this document will aid you in seeking non-competitive appointments in VA. Should you need additional assistance, feel free to email james.marfield@va.gov.
RESUME/CURRICULUM VITAE (CV) TIPS:

Standard Resume/CV Format
- Contact Information
- A Traditional CV starts with education
- Professional Experience
- Licenses (if applicable)
- Certifications (if applicable)
- Memberships (if applicable)
- Additional Information
- Published Material & Presentations (if applicable)
- References

Okay to Include:
- Honors
- Special skills
- Language proficiency
- Hobbies
- Always note if references are available or include a list of references

Presentation of your Resume/CV:
- Relevant to the position
- Chronological
- Send as an email attachment
- If sending printed file, do not use colored paper, but any weight is fine
- Leave out the fancy fonts, format and tables
- No images
- Use a separate document for listing publications and/or research
- Spell-Check

Cover letters:
- Always personalize to organization and/or a person
- State why you are interested in the specific position or location
- Include as attachment with your CV or as the body of the email
TIPS FOR [WWW.USAJOBS.GOV] – THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S JOB BOARD:

Understanding Vacancy Announcements: Vacancy announcements provide information to potential applicants about positions being advertised. While they might look different from federal agency to federal agency, the content should be similar. The types of information that will be included in the vacancy announcements:

1. **Position Title:** The position title provides the official position title for the position being advertised.
2. **Series and Grade:** The series and grade provides information on the occupational series used in the Federal Government for positions and the grade level that has been assigned to the position. All positions in the Federal Government have a position title and a four-digit occupational series number.
3. **Salary Range:** The salary range provides the range of salaries for the grades of the position being advertised.
4. **Type of Appointment:** The type of appointment indicates whether the position is permanent or temporary and whether it is full-time or part-time.
5. **Location of Position:** The location of the position provides the name of the location, the city and state where the position is located.
6. **Announcement Number:** The announcement number provides the announcement number for the position being advertised. Each position has a different announcement number.
7. **Opening and Closing Dates:** The opening and closing dates provide the opening and closing dates for the announcement. If your application is late, you will probably be excluded from consideration unless you contact the local HR department directly and let them know you missed the deadline but still want to be considered (this is allowed in non-competitive recruitment).
8. **Area of Consideration:** This indicates the area from which applications will be accepted. For example, if the area of consideration is:
   a. "All U.S. citizens" - all U.S. citizens are eligible to apply
   b. "All US citizens in the local commuting area" - only those US citizens within the particular commuting area would be considered
   c. "VA employees only" - only current permanent VA employees may apply (VHA trainees are considered temporary and are not eligible when the area of consideration is "Internal VA employees").
9. **Duties:** This item describes the main duties and responsibilities for the position being advertised.
10. **Qualifications:** The qualifications section describes the main qualification requirements for the position being advertised.
11. **Application Information**: Lists what must be included in your application package for you to be eligible for consideration. You may also locate your [regional VA recruiter](#) and request their assistance.

12. **Contact Information**: Contains information that can be used if you have a question about the position or your application.

**Submitting the Application**:  
1. To apply for Federal positions advertised at [www.USAJOBS.gov](http://www.USAJOBS.gov), you can apply online according to the announcement’s instructions or merely submit a completed resume/CV to the listed point of contact.
2. You can also apply for positions by working with your [regional VA recruiter](#).
3. When applying online, you will be directed to the “application manager” where you will be asked to respond to an online questionnaire. Please ensure accurate and truthful answers here as some negative responses may result in your application not being considered. If you’re in a healthcare occupation that requires licensure and the licensure question in the online questionnaire states “do you have a current full and unrestricted license to practice medicine from a US State or Territory” or something similar, you should contact the point of contact on the announcement and let them know you are on track to complete your program and become licensed and therefore you should be allowed to apply.

**What Happens Next?**  
1. If you applied online via [www.USAJOBS.gov](http://www.USAJOBS.gov), you should see email correspondence confirming receipt of your online application. Once the Human Resources (HR) Department reviews your application, they will determine whether or not you are qualified and will send you a 2nd email notice. This 2nd notice will either state you have been qualified and referred for consideration or that you have been determined to be disqualified along with the reason. If you were disqualified and you feel you are indeed qualified, you should 1) contact the HR point of contact on the announcement; and 2) notify your [regional VA recruiter](#).

**Interviews**:  
1. Interviews are scheduled and conducted, references are checked, and final candidate selections are made.
2. The recruitment and selection process may take several weeks from the time a position is advertised to when a selection is made. Don’t be deterred by this. Ask questions and keep in touch during the application process.
**On-Boarding:**

1. You should be notified via email once a final selection has been made. If you are a physician who was selected for an opportunity the next stage in the process will be for the VA Medical Center to conduct a physician compensation panel to set your official VA salary. This formal process considers your credentials, local labor market salaries, the needs of the medical center, and other factors. Once the Medical Center Director signs the paperwork, HR will then provide you a written offer with the approved salary and any approved incentives being offered (recruitment/relocation incentive, education debt reduction program, etc.). If you are in a non-physician healthcare occupation, your grade and corresponding salary will likely be set during a professional standards board process. If you are a Title 5 employee (administrative non-healthcare positions), your grade and salary is based on your qualifications and the grade level of the position you were selected for.

2. VA does not utilize employment contracts so the formal offer with approved salary is the point at which most candidates give notice to current employers (if applicable) and remove themselves from the job market. If you are selected for and accept certain healthcare occupations you will still have to be credentialed and privileged, pass a pre-employment health physical, be appointed and pass a background investigation before starting employment. If you feel there are issues with your background that could jeopardize these additional on-boarding steps you may want to consider delaying giving official notice to a current employer until you have been notified by HR that you have completed all necessary on-boarding steps and are cleared to start. Your local HR Office can provide additional details.

**Job Search Tips:**

1. Contact your regional VA recruiter and provide your resume/CV, detailed geographic preferences and availability timeframe.
2. Create a profile at [www.USAJOBS.gov](http://www.USAJOBS.gov) and upload your resume/CV there.
3. Create a “Job Search Agent” based on your specific specialty and detailed geographic preferences and set it up for daily delivery.
4. Follow “How to Apply” instructions in each announcement you apply for.
5. Contact the POC listed in the announcement if you have questions or concerns.
6. If you’re in a healthcare occupation that requires licensure and the language in the announcement and/or online assessment questionnaire stipulates a current full and unrestricted license is required, please contact your regional VA recruiter and/or the HR POC listed in the announcement and advise them the announcement and/or questionnaire incorrectly eliminates current trainees from consideration and should be fixed according to the “Hiring VA Trainees (5-12-2015)” flier and “HR Questions Answers (5-19-2015)” Q&A.
INTERVIEW TIPS:

Questions to ask during your interview process:

During the Interview
1. What are your department’s biggest challenges?
2. What are the department’s future plans? Expansion?
3. What is the philosophy of the leadership team?
4. What, if any, administrative duties will be expected of me?
5. What is the next step in the hiring process?

After the Interview
1. Contact the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Offices, and realtors
2. Spend time looking at neighborhoods to get a feel for housing prices
3. Meet school principals or leaders and ask about their statistics, strengths and extracurricular activities
4. Look up school report cards online
5. Work with your recruiter to ensure you have all the necessary details to make a decision
NETWORKING TIPS:

Social Networking:
1. LinkedIn – profile with keywords, grow your network, niche group membership
2. Twitter – Twitter Chats, #WorkatVA, @JobsatVA, VAMC handles, etc.
3. Facebook – VA Careers, local VAMC pages, FacebookLive events, etc.
4. VA – VA blog, VA Pulse

Potential Person-Person Networking:
1. Regional VA recruiter(s)
2. Local Facility Recruitment Liaison (FRL) – this individual typically works in HR and is the local point of contact on mission-critical recruitment. They perform traditional recruitment activities such as attending career fairs, networking with affiliates, placing external job ads, sourcing candidates, screening and referring candidates, etc. Ask the local HR Office if they have a FRL on staff and then reach out to this individual requesting consideration for current/future non-competitive hiring options
3. Local service line managers and section chiefs – makes the hiring decision and manages FTE levels
   a. Express an interest in non-competitive hire – make a business case
   b. Let them know all the local/regional duty locations you are willing to work at – this could increase the likelihood they would offer you a future position
4. HR Staffing Specialist(s) supporting the service line(s) you wish to work in
5. Fellow VA trainees and other students
6. Staff at the VA Medical Center – especially those you know
7. University Training Program Director
8. Designated Education Officer at the VA Medical Center you wish to work at
Appendix A: OAA’s FY 2016 “Myth Busters” Leveraging Title 38/Hybrid Title 38 Hiring Flexibilities

The Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) frequently hears from Service Chiefs, training directors, and trainees that they face challenges utilizing Title 38/Hybrid Title 38 special hiring authority. Not hiring our qualified trainees wastes VA’s investment in preparing them for VA employment. In collaboration with Workforce Management and Consulting’s Healthcare Recruitment and Marketing Office (HRMO) we are releasing the following guidance to clarify many hiring myths filtering through the field.

Myth 1: Trainees can only be hired using special hiring authority during their first year after completing VA training.

False. There is no limitation on who can be hired via Title 38/Hybrid Title 38 special hiring authority or when they are hired so long as they are qualified (or will be qualified), bargaining unit job posting requirements are met (does not require USAJOBS announcements) and Veterans preference is not violated. Any current or former trainees (VA or non-VA) can be hired non-competitively at any time no matter how long ago they finished training.

Myth 2: Incentives can only be offered if they were advertised in a USAJOBS posting.

False. VA has flexibility to offer incentives in recruitment. The most common are 1) Recruitment/Relocation Incentive; 2) Educational Debt Reduction Program (EDRP); and 3) Permanent Change of Station (PCS) relocation benefits. It is not necessary to post positions at USAJOBS for the sake of offering aforementioned incentives. If incentives are approved in advance and a person is hired via special hiring authority, the incentive approval language should appear in the final commitment letter issued by HR. If a position is announced at USAJOBS then the appropriate language must appear in that announcement.

Myth 3: Language in USAjobs postings may not be adjusted by HR.

False. If as a last resort a position is announced on USAJOBS, it is critical to ensure that the language reflects that current trainees may apply and assessment questionnaires are not screening out trainees. Although Office of Personnel Management has not modified the announcement templates for many professions, local HR managers have the ability to make revisions (when allowed) to the posting. In addition, it is important to include any exceptions that may be documented in the profession’s qualification standards. For example, in a psychology posting, include language about the exception for applicants who completed a
newly funded, unaccredited VA internship to be eligible to apply. Additionally, it is important that VAMCs include marketing information about the local community and avoid using the word incumbent in job descriptions.

**Myth 4:** Current trainees may not be considered for vacant positions while in their training program.

False. Current trainees may be recruited and selected before receiving degree if they are on track to complete their academic program and meet the profession’s qualification standards at the time of appointment. Use of appropriate language in Tentative Job Offers (TJO) will protect VA if candidates fail to become fully qualified at the time of appointment. There is also no limit on how early trainees can be considered and offered positions.

**Myth 5:** Local union bargaining unit agreements require that positions are announced through a USAjobs posting.

False. Local Bargaining Unit (BU) agreements rarely specify USAJOBS announcements as a requirement. Typically the language is vague and similar to “post at the facility.” Local postings can be as simple as a bulletin board announcement or an internal e-mail. If you do not receive interest locally from VA employees or trainees you may expand an announcement to other training directors and chiefs in your profession, still utilizing the special hiring authority. USAjobs postings should only be used if candidates are not available for direct hire via special hiring authority, such as current trainees or practicing professionals who have already expressed interest in a position. The best practice in VA is to comply with job posting requirements in local BU agreements prior to receiving approval to recruit. When service lines are ready to request approval to recruit from the facility’s resource management committee, the internal announcements to the BU can take place so that the job posting period finishes at approximately the same time the position is approved to recruit. It is prudent to include this language when advertising positions to the BU: “This position has been submitted for approval and no personnel actions will take place unless the position is ultimately approved to recruit.”

**Myth 6:** Veterans Preference must be used for all professions.

False. Hybrid Title 38 professions listed on the Office of the Inspector General’s (OIG) report of the top five mission critical shortage professions may waive Veterans Preference rules for the fiscal year for which the profession is identified on this listing. If the profession remains
on the list in subsequent years Veterans Preference rules will remain waived until it is a profession no longer in the top five. The IG’s Top 5 Critical Shortage Occupations for FY16 are 1) Medical Officer; 2) Nurse (RN, CRNA, NP); 3) Physician Assistant; 4) Physical Therapist; and 5) Psychologist. Veterans’ preference rules for Title 38 occupations state “The primary consideration in making appointments of physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, nurses, nurse anesthetists, PAs and EFDAs under 38 U.S.C., chapter 73 or 74, will be the professional needs of VHA. Consistent with this policy, however, veterans will be given preference when qualifications of candidates are approximately equal. This includes qualified disabled veterans and preference eligibles as defined in 5 U.S.C. 2108.”

**Myth 7: VA can only recruit for a position after the position becomes vacant.**

False. In truth, VAMCs should forecast future healthcare vacancies 1-2 years in advance by analyzing historical turnover rates and projected growth in uniques/services. This will allow early selection and offers for health professions trainees.
Appendix B: FY 2016 “Hiring Trainees” Flier sent by VHA Title 38 Policy Office to all VHA HR Offices

**URGENT - ACTION NEEDED!**

**RECRUIT AND APPORT**

VA HEALTH PROFESSIONS TRAINEES TO TITLE 38 AND HYBRID TITLE 38 VACANCIES

**HOW TO LEVERAGE HIRING FLEXIBILITIES**

- VA loses the majority of trainees to private sector competitors
- Hiring current or former VA health professions trainees into Hybrid or Title 38 positions can be quick and easy
- Once internal employee job posting requirements in local bargaining unit agreements are met, current or former trainees can be appointed to Hybrid and Title 38 vacancies without posting any type of vacancy announcement
- Title 38/Hybrid Title 38 allows selection of current trainees who will meet qualification standards at the time of appointment as well as former graduates
- Trainees may be selected and tentatively offered positions prior to graduation
  - Offers may be made contingent upon meeting qualifications at the time of appointment
  - Graduates who still have pending credentials (licensure, certification, etc.) may be hired as graduate technicians in their occupations, in accordance with VA Handbook 5005 procedures for the occupation
- The VAOG has designated 5 critical shortage occupations for FY16:
  - Physicians (all specialties)
  - Nurses (RN, CRNA, NP)
  - Physician Assistants
  - Physical Therapists
  - Psychologists

**CONSULTATIVE/STRATEGIC APPROACH**

- Selecting officials and Human Resources should recognize current and former VA health professions trainees as a priority applicant pool for Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 vacancies
- This pool of talent can help VA achieve local and national hiring goals
- Early consultation between HR and internal clinical service chiefs and/or training directors should occur to identify viable candidates (current or former graduates) before initiating recruitment
- Fully utilize Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38 flexibilities; don’t bog down the recruitment and hiring process with external USAJOB announcements when these types of announcements are not required to hire upcoming or former graduates
- Commit upcoming graduates/graduates to positions as quickly as possible

Questions about hiring upcoming graduates/graduates may be forwarded to Linda.Dailey-2@va.gov
Appendix C: FY 2016 “HR Q&A” for trainees sent by VHA Title 38 Policy Office to all VHA HR Offices

HUMAN RESOURCES QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Leveraging Hiring Flexibilities To Recruit & Appoint VA Health Professions Trainee Program Graduates To Hybrid & Title 38 Occupations

(Prepared by VHA Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC), HR Policy & Programs 5/5/16)

1. Question: We have posted a USAJOBS vacancy position open to VA internal candidates for a Social Worker position and have satisfied our internal bargaining unit requirements. The selecting official now wants to hire an upcoming graduate from a VA training program. Do we have to post an external vacancy announcement on USAJOBS since the trainees are not regular VA employees and are considered external candidates?

Answer: No. External vacancy announcements are not a requirement for Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 vacancies, and there is no requirement to post these announcements on USAJOBS. The HR Specialist can easily work with the selecting official to identify the upcoming VA training program graduates or former graduate candidates either from your station or from other VHA facilities and select from that applicant pool, as appropriate.

2. Question: Are USAJOBS vacancy announcements required in order to insure all Veterans get a chance to apply for openings before we consider a VA trainee for a Social Worker position? Don’t we have to do this before we hire one of our upcoming graduates for a Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 vacancy?

Answer: No. USAJOBS vacancy announcements are not a requirement for Hybrid Title 38 or Title 38 vacancies. The flexibilities to noncompetitively appoint VA trainees into VHA positions has not diminished, even with recent Veterans’ preference changes to Hybrid Title 38. Once local bargaining unit agreements related to internal VHA employees are met, there is no requirement to post a “general public” type announcement of any kind to hire into Hybrid and Title 38 occupations. See attached HRM 05-14-05 which describes specific flexibilities for the Hybrid occupations when hiring trainees.
3. Should we or do we need to have an RN vacancy identified before we convert an SNT to a GNT? It is not always possible to give the vice up front when we convert an SNT to a GNT for a particular unit. We are concerned we may lose great new grads because there are not technically vacancies, although Nursing is always under the budgeted FTEE.

**Answer:** A GNT will typically count towards FTEE/authorized position on a unit. If FTEE/a vacant position is not available for placement, it is recommended that HR and the Selecting Official collaboratively work with the Nurse Executive, Director, Fiscal Officer, local Resources Committee, etc., to see if overceiling options exist, if a particular unit doesn’t have the vacant FTEE, or if there are other options for placement on other units before the SNT loses interest in VHA. The goal is always to try and fully utilize flexibilities in hiring trainees into positions for which they were trained.

4. Just to be clear, the AFGE Master Agreement indicates all Title 38 bargaining unit positions will be announced facility wide. There are no exceptions listed. Should GNTs be selected from an announcement? We have a process of identifying our best qualified candidates and this would, in most cases, not be a new grad, so without the flexibility we will not be able to reach the GNTs. Any suggestions or other interpretations?

**Answer:** Once internal bargaining unit processes/requirements are met, any external hiring may occur with or without any type of external vacancy announcement, as appropriate. If the selecting official determines he/she is not going to select an internal candidate and local bargaining unit processes are met, the selecting official can choose to select a GNT or any other candidate, as appropriate, with or without an announcement. In some cases, the selecting official may have a particular unit/assignment/tour that may not be a good fit for a GNT... but in many cases, there are numerous opportunities at any VA for GNT appointments. If the GNT was trained at the VA, the ultimate goal is to try to retain these potential applicants.

5. Question: Can we announce an external vacancy announcement on USAJOBS that limits the area of consideration to current VA trainees or past graduates of VA trainee programs? This is for Hybrid Title 38 positions. What happens if one of the trainees is a preference eligible Veteran.

**Answer:** Yes, Hybrid Title 38 provides great flexibility to post external vacancy announcements to target this pool of candidates as an area of consideration. A vacancy announcement may limit the area of consideration to individuals who have completed or will soon complete the appropriate VA trainee program. If in the pool of trainee candidates, one of the trainees is a preference eligible Veteran, then appropriate Veterans’ preference rules apply. If an upcoming graduate is selected, he/she may be tentatively committed to employment contingent upon successfully completing the program and requirements for
appointment to the permanent position. Note that most occupations will allow temporary appointment as a graduate technician pending appropriate licensure, registration or certification if upon graduation this requirement has not been achieved. See VA Handbook 5005 for specific guidelines on graduate technician appointments.

6. Question: Where and how do VHA Nursing SNT and Valor’s fit in this “VHA Trainee Program”? Are they viewed in the same category as OAA funded trainees that are actually on our roles?

Answer: VA SNTs and Valor students are VHA trainees. All VHA trainees whether in funded or non-funded roles are an excellent source of candidates.

7. Question: Would the Area of Consideration be to all US Citizens with an additional clarification in the WHO MAY Apply Section of also being a VHA MSW Trainee (or Psychology Trainee/Post Doc Fellow) i.e. US Citizens & Current VHA MSW Trainee?

Answer: Assuming this question is related to an external USAJOBS vacancy announcement, the vacancy announcement can include specifics about trainee candidates; however, vacancy announcements for external candidates are not a requirement and if the selecting official desires to select a current or upcoming VA training program graduate, there does not have to be a posted vacancy announcement on USAJOBS. If the selecting official chooses to post a USAJOBS vacancy announcement to all US citizens and wishes to include upcoming graduates in the candidate pool, HR may need to tailor the job announcement so the upcoming graduate criteria is included and trainees are not automatically excluded because they have not satisfied their program and/or the qualification standard requirements.

8. Question: Since most current VHA trainees are only going to qualify at the entry level grade (GS 9 for Social Workers & GS 11 or GS 12 for Psychologists), is the facility able to do a posting that focuses on the trainee applicant pool at the entry level grade of the occupational series versus having to do a multi graded posting? Can the posting be done with the grade of “00” similar to how we have to do the internal hybrid postings for VHA employees?

Answer: There are several recruitment/hiring options when the selecting official is interested in trainees. These include, but are not limited to (assuming any internal bargaining unit posting requirement has been met): Not posting an external/inside vacancy announcement and the selecting official selecting an upcoming or past graduate of a VA training program, posting a vacancy announcement targeting just VA trainees (upcoming graduates and current graduates), posting a vacancy announcement targeting everyone (all US citizens), which will include all qualified trainee program graduates, and include eligibility for those upcoming VA trainee program graduates who don’t currently meet the full intent of the VA qualification
standard for the occupation but will upon graduation, etc. All grades should be reflected on any external vacancy announcement for positions up to the full performance level (or at just at the full performance level if the selecting official wishes to consider external candidates at that grade level) and a professional standards board will board the selectee, as appropriate, and recommend the appropriate grade/step.

9. Question: Do facilities issue the MSW trainees some type of Certificate of Completion? I’m asking because some of the trainees will have a SF 50 (to use as documentation of being a VA trainee) because some get a VA paid stipend but others do not (as they are without compensation). I’m wondering about the types of documentation that would be acceptable as proof of completing the MSW training at the VA and the types of documentation facilities are giving to the trainees.

Answer: Completion of a training program may be verified with the appropriate VHA training director/program. SF-50s may also be used as verification.

10. Question: Is there a program office in CO that keeps a listing of the current MSW trainees, Psychology Trainees, Post Doc Fellows that are in the medical centers nationwide? Perhaps that office can issue a list of eligible trainees (to include the trainees’ resume, completed 102850 C application, etc). Is there an office in CO that could do recruitments that target the trainees during certain periods of the year (right before they graduate) and then issue a referral thru USA Staffing/Selection Manager to those facilities that express interest? What role (if any) does the Office of Academic Affiliations have in this process? Do they keep a list of trainees who are completing or have previously completed the training at the VA?

Answer: The VHA Healthcare Recruitment & Marketing Office (HRMO), in collaboration with the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), pioneered the agency’s first standardized internal outreach initiative, Take A Closer Look at VA (TACLVA), to recruit Health Professions Trainees (HPT) following clinical training through VHA academic affiliates. Using attractive marketing emails, the initiative reaches HPTs while receiving their training at VHA facilities, providing them with information on the benefits of a long-term career serving Veterans. Candidates are connected directly with a VHA National Recruiter that can assist with the application process and address questions about career opportunities. There are currently over 221,000 current or former VA health professions trainees (HPTs) receiving quarterly e-mails with calls to action. Since its implementation, TACLVA has generated 603 employment leads (includes 159 Doctors of Medicine (MDs) and 360 other healthcare providers).

While the TACLVA program has a list of all trainees, this list does not include specific occupations. There are ongoing discussions regarding adding “occupational identifiers” to
these lists and providing lists to specific facilities. However, at this point, no final decision has been reached.

In the meantime, facilities are encouraged to work closely with their Designated Education Officers (DEO), clinical service line managers, and program directors to help identify trainees for recruitment. For more information about the TACLVA program, please contact James Marfield at james.marfield@va.gov.

11. Question: What about doing recruitment that is targeted to former VA trainees as well? For example – those who completed their VA training within the last 2 years. Is there guidance on that?

Answer: Once internal bargaining unit requirements are met in relation to internal VHA employee candidates, there are many options for hiring under Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38. In working in collaboration with the local HR, the vacancy may be filled with an external candidate using any method desired. The guidance for hiring external candidates to Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 positions is very generic and the processes and how and if vacancy announcements are posted are left to the discretion of the local appointing official, the HR Officer. This includes how to attract and consider upcoming or former graduates from VA trainee programs. If a selecting official wishes to focus on upcoming graduates or former graduates of VA trainee programs within the past two years, then he/she may focus their application pool on that area of consideration. Again, there is great flexibility under the authorities.

12. Question: Can you comment on challenges to non-competitive hiring (not posting announcements) of VA trainees to Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 positions? How do we defend these hires if challenged? Current employees as well as members of the general public may feel as if they didn’t get an opportunity to be considered (because there was no posting done).

Answer: The flexibilities and ability to non-competitively hire a trainee into a Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 position are not new. These flexibilities do not negate the requirement for a selecting official and appointing official to follow fair hiring practices, to be ethical in these practices and to have nondiscriminatory employment outcomes.

Here is just one scenario of what might occur as an appropriate hiring practice. A particular station has 5 trainees graduating from a Pharmacy Residency program and all 5 are equal in training/specialty. One of the 5 upcoming graduates is a preference eligible Veteran. The 2 vacancies have already been posted internally to current employees in accordance with the local bargaining unit agreement and the selecting official has reviewed and fairly considered any internal qualified candidates and did not select an internal candidate. The selecting official now wishes to also consider local upcoming graduates who will finish their VA training program in the next couple months in the applicant pool. A fair approach at the local level
may be to advise the 5 graduates of the 2 job opportunities and ask those interested to apply by a certain deadline. All 5 apply for consideration and are found that they will be qualified upon graduation. The selecting official interviews all 5. The preference eligible Veteran is the first selected; the selecting official then selects what he/she considers the best qualified for the second position based on the interview and/or application package of the remaining candidates and selects a second trainee for the other vacancy. All candidates were treated equally and fairly. Veteran’s preference was appropriately applied. This is just an example. It is important that the selecting official works collaboratively with the local HR experts.

13. Question: Why do we have to post jobs internally? Why do we make this so difficult? Why can’t we just direct hire anyone we want since Title 38 allows this?

Answer: Part of being an employer of choice and retaining valuable staff, is to have opportunities for advancement and various assignments available to our own permanent employees – to grow from within. Many of our great successes come from our own employees advancing their career within VA. We also have to abide by local bargaining unit agreements.

14. Question: We have no internal candidates interested in a position, but we have a supply of external candidates – 50 qualified external candidates – that applied for previous announcements that we retained for future vacancies. Do all of those applicants who qualify at the entry grade level (as that is what the upcoming VA trainee program graduates will qualify for) have to be considered and thus Veteran preference applied to them (other than Psychologists and PTs in FY 2015) along with the upcoming VA trainee program graduates which would have the upcoming graduates most likely blocked from consideration?

Answer: The upcoming VA trainee program graduates may be considered prior to going to this separate source of candidates that have gathered at the local level as you have described in your question. If an upcoming graduate is selected, then he/she may be noncompetitively appointed under Hybrid or Title 38 procedures. If one of the upcoming graduates is a preference eligible Veteran, he/she would have priority over the other upcoming graduates being considered.

Don’t make hiring VA trainees into Title 38 and/or Hybrid Title 38 occupations even more complex than how we hire trainees under Title 5. Although we have to adhere to the Graves verses VA/MSPB decision and apply Veterans preference to Hybrid occupations, as appropriate, VHA hasn’t lost any flexibility when it comes to hiring trainees into Hybrid and Title 38 occupations.
15. Question: VA Handbook 5005 doesn’t go into detail about how we should noncompetitively hire Title 38 or Hybrid Title trainees once they have finished their program. Can you provide some examples of how best to take advantage of this applicant pool once the internal processes have been satisfied? Some examples that show the actual process to follow, when we should announce and when we shouldn’t, when to just let a selecting official consider one trainee verses the entire pool, etc.

Answer: The advantage of Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38 is the tremendous flexibility the local selecting official and HR have when it comes to hiring VA trainee program candidates into these occupations. Because of that flexibility, policy doesn’t dictate a specific process for a local facility to use in the recruitment and hiring process. It really is a local decision and a collaborative effort to determine what should and should not happen to meet the end goal of filling the position and a selecting official’s needs – even if the goal is to hire an upcoming graduate. As described in the previous answer to Question 12 in this Q&A document, there are various avenues to be considered depending upon the specific situation at the facility and the selecting official’s needs. It may be that there is only one trainee at the facility in question that is graduating in June and that trainee can definitely be selected and tentatively committed to VHA employment contingent upon completion of the program and satisfying the requirements for appointment. There may be numerous trainees in a particular specialty that could be considered, and the selecting official wishes to interview and decide on the best fit for his/her organization. There may also be no local trainees and a desire by the selecting official to find out who is interested in his/her location from upcoming graduates nationwide. Also, some selecting officials desire to consider upcoming graduates as well as more qualified external candidates and will ask for an outside vacancy posting on USAJOBS to consider everyone.

Encourage the HR Specialists to meet and collaborate with selecting officials as soon as a vacancy is identified to assist with determining which course of recruitment and/or noncompetitive hiring initiative best suits the needs of the hiring manager.

16. Question: Since Pharmacists are not listed in the top five critical positions identified by VAOIG, are the Pharmacy trainees not included in the ability to hire directly into a permanent Pharmacist position? Don’t we have to announce the position externally for the trainee to compete with everyone else and Veterans?

Answer: The VAOIG list identifies the top critical shortage occupations and does impact hiring practices when it comes to Veterans Preference (see HRML 05-15-01); however, this list does not change the hiring flexibilities that already exist in policy for all Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38 occupations. External announcements are not required. Pharmacist trainees can be hired into permanent Pharmacist positions without posting an external vacancy announcement. Selecting officials should work closely with their servicing HR Offices to take
the necessary steps when they wish to hire a trainee for any Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 occupation. It is a fairly easy process.