Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) Meeting Minutes

October 18, 2017, 1:30-3:00 pm

VACO, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Conference Room 630

1. Ms. Georgia Coffey, DIVAC Co-Chair and Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), welcomed attendees and introduced Mr. Nathan H. Maenle, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Human Resources and Administration.
   1. The minutes for the July 20, 2017, Meeting of the DIVAC were approved without objection.
2. Mr. Todd Hunter, Deputy Director, Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (OAWP), and Mr. Philip Works, Senior Advisor, OAWP, presented information on the OAWP established by Executive Order 13793 on April 27, 2017 and broadened by Public Law 115-41. OAWP’s mission is to advise and assist the Secretary in accountability matters, investigate and correct wrongdoing, and protect employees who lawfully disclose wrongdoing. OAWP receives, reviews, and refers whistleblower (WB) disclosures and referrals from other entities; investigates misconduct, poor performance, or retaliation against whistleblowers by members of the senior executive service, Title 38 senior leaders in certain roles, and any supervisors regarding retaliation for a WB disclosure; and performs employee relations role for investigated cases. A WB disclosure is information from an employee or applicant who has reasonable belief that their disclosure shows violation of law, rule, or regulation; gross mismanagement; gross waste of funds; abuse of authority; or substantial and specific danger to public health or safety. The three stages of the WB Disclosure Lifecycle were reviewed: Intake – Triage, Response Required Referrals, and No-response Referrals. There was inquiry as to how OAWP ensured that its processes interfaced with existing complaints processes to ensure adherence to equal employment opportunity complaint process deadlines. Council members expressed concern about the Department’s various avenues for complaint processing and risks associated with the lack of an enterprise-wide system or governance oversight council. Council members advised that documents should be produced outlining the OAWP and other processes for addressing complaints and that these be communicated throughout the Agency to assist all employees in navigating this process. OAWP reported that other agencies have been contacted to gather best practices. The Office of Resolution Management reported on the “Avenues of Redress” document as a tool/resource that could be updated to include OAWP. *\*“Avenues of Redress” will be disseminated to the Council as an attachment to these minutes.*
3. Ms. Maxanne Witkin, Director, Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA), shared information on the Third Annual OEDCA Employee Engagement Lecture, “Promoting Accountability by Preventing Workplace Harassment” featuring keynote speaker Commissioner Chai Feldblum, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).
4. Mr. Lester Stephens, Training and Communications, ODI, presented on the availability of an ODI Training Catalog at <https://www.diversity.va.gov/training/default.aspx>. There was also discussion about civility training offered by the 15 certified trainers in the Office of Resolution Management as well as adopting the “It’s on Us” campaign referenced in a recent report on harassment by the EEOC.
5. Issues discussed during the Open Forum included:
   1. The important role of communication in preventing workplace disputes.
   2. The experiences of Central Office employees with the removal of the Central Office Human Resources Service in alignment with ensuring that VA is maximizing resources.
   3. Ms. Coffey reported that EEOC has agreed to allow VA to submit one 462 report and one Management Directive 715 report this year and moving forward. VA will not be required to submit an Annual Agency Performance Report on Actions to Assist Minority-Serving Institutions or Federal Equal Opportunity and Recruitment Program report as VA has agreed to pilot a new consolidated Office of Personnel Management tool.
6. Mr. Maenle congratulated Ms. Coffey on her impending retirement effective Friday November 3, 2017.
7. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm. The next meeting will be held January 17, 2018.