Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) Meeting Minutes

January 20, 2016, 1:00-3:00 pm

VACO, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Conference Room 830

1. Georgia Coffey, DIVAC Co-Chair and Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), welcomed attendees and introduced Harvey Johnson, VA’s new DAS for the Office of Resolution Management (ORM).
2. Gina S. Farrisee, DIVAC Co-Chair and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, introduced Secretary Robert A. McDonald.
3. Ms. Coffey presented VA’s Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) State of the Agency.
   1. Minority selections fall below their application rates and White men and women fall below the Civilian Labor Force (CLF). VA is still working with the Office of Personnel Management to obtain applicant flow data. Following the meeting, the Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) submitted a VISN Support Service Center report on leadership by race and gender as of September 2015 depicting that minorities were also available in the pool of leadership grades (attached). Leadership believes VA’s outreach efforts have been successful in ensuring diverse applicant pools but a concern is that VA demonstrates less than expected representation for specific groups potentially as result of practices that occur during the hiring phase.
   2. Data indicates that marginal improvement was made in VA Senior Executive Service (SES) diversity from the previous year but attendees discussed the fact that half of SES hires were external. Following the meeting, CMV submitted the 2015 Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV) Report (attached) depicting minorities as approximately 11 percent of the SES in 2000 and approximately 20 percent in 2014. CMV identified the potential for uncovering a best practice in exploring why although White women are below the Relevant CLF (RCLF) along with Hispanic men and women their numbers increased in the SES from 12.55 percent in 2000 to 32.4 percent in 2014.
   3. Although VA managers continue to take too long to accommodate disabilities, VA’s new Reasonable Accommodation Compliance System will assist in streamlining this process.
   4. Although VA does not issue final agency decisions (FADs) in a timely manner, the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA) continues to streamline the process.
   5. Secretary McDonald focused on ensuring that candidate pools are diverse and reflect the RCLF. He focused on the idea of targeted outreach to ensure the diversity of applicant pools particularly in the southwest where many new VA facilities will be hiring.
   6. Black males have a higher percent of involuntary separations (23.17 percent) compared to their percentage of the permanent workforce (9.47 percent). Veterans represent 56.6 percent of involuntary separations. Eddie Riley, Veterans Employment Service Office, provided some reasons which may help explain this separation rate including military versus civilian culture and a lack of engagement and support system. Following this meeting, CMV recommended a review to determine the source of regrettable losses of Veterans by race and ethnicity.
   7. Following the meeting, CMV submitted pages 11-12 of the 2015 ACMV Report that reflects GS14 and 15s in 2000, 2003, and 2014 by actual numbers for review. CMV also submitted pages 12 and 13 of the 2015 ACMV Report which includes the Office of Diversity and Inclusion’s (ODI’s) response to the ACMV recommendation related to diversity in VA senior leadership. (Both documents attached.)
   8. Secretary McDonald discussed how VA could tie findings of discrimination into managers’ performance plans and the need for differentiating pieces of data to help managers improve.
   9. There was discussion regarding participation rates in the All Employee Survey (AES). Christine Kluh, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), reports a 70 percent participation rate for her Administration in the AES. Ms. Kluh credits this to her Administration informing their employees of any actions taken as result of feedback received through the AES. Secretary McDonald committed to communicating to the VA workforce in 2016 that it is the employee’s responsibility to complete this survey in order to obtain more data.
   10. Ms. Coffey reported on the World Café pilot on race relations conducted on December 8, 2015, with ODI staff and others from Central Office including staff from OEDCA and ORM. The World Café will be rolled out to the field with the St. Louis Records Management Center, Veterans Benefits Administration, later in 2016.
   11. Secretary McDonald affirmed that diversity and inclusion must improve lives of Veterans through innovation—something diverse groups of individuals can provide. He encouraged attendees to read “The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves” by Matt Ridley.
4. Nicole Maldon, Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist, presented the National Cemetery Administration’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2015 Accomplishments.
5. Stephanie Studstill, Director, Office of Diversity Management & EEO, presented the Veterans Benefits Administration’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2015 Accomplishments.
6. Audrey Oatis-Newsome, Director, VHA EEO/Affirmative Employment Office, presented the Veterans Health Administration’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2015 Accomplishments.
7. Ms. Coffey led VADC operations:
   1. October 21, 2015, VADC meeting minutes approved.
   2. The Council voted to adopt the revised charter clarifying that voting members must be Federal employees and to change the Council name from “VA Diversity Council” to “Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council” to reflect the aims of Executive Order 13583 on “Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce” and comport with VA’s strategic priorities in the area of workforce diversity and workplace inclusion.
8. CEDB: Chris: NCA campaign prepping folks for application process, look at who is sitting on board,
9. Earl S. Newsome, Deputy Director, Center for Minority Veterans, suggested asking VA employees of LGBT status. Census collects this information but does not report it. This information is voluntarily collected on the AES and FEVS.
10. Ms. Farrisee provided closing remarks. She stated her appreciation for participation and invited participants to provide email feedback.
11. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm.