VA Diversity Council (VADC) Meeting Minutes

January 21, 2015, 1:00-3:00 pm

VACO, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Conference Room 830

1. Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Office of Diversity & Inclusion (ODI) and VADC Co-Chair, welcomed attendees and introduced Secretary Robert A. McDonald.
2. Secretary McDonald provided opening remarks focusing on the business case for diversity and inclusion in the VA workforce, VA’s I CARE values, the MyVA initiative, and ensuring that the interaction between VA employees and the Veterans they serve is a positive experience for both groups, no matter age or demographic. It was suggested by one attendee that VA needs to shift mentality and practices to meet the needs of the new generation of Veterans that relies on smartphones. It was suggested by another attendee that VA needs to “get back to the basics” and look to volunteer and community-based organizations that also work with Veterans one-on-one. Another attendee suggested that VA have more presence in colleges and universities so that the Department can ensure diverse applicant pools for positions within VA’s workforce. The issue that the Nation is not producing enough doctors was discussed as a potential barrier. Secretary McDonald departed after his remarks.
3. Denise Andrews, MyVA Project Management Officer, Office of Policy and Planning, further discussed the MyVA initiative. Launched on September 2, 2014, MyVA is an initiative which will reorient VA around Veteran needs and empower employees to assist them in delivering excellent customer service to improve the Veteran experience. It is the largest department-wide transformation in VA’s history and will be a product of ideas and insights shared by Veterans, employees, members of Congress, VSOs, and other stakeholders. The first phase of MyVA has included creating the task force and building the team to support the mission and an organizational change of this breadth. MyVA is focused on five areas of improvement:

1) Improving the Veteran experience

2) Improving the employee experience so they can better serve Veterans

3) Improving internal support services

4) Establishing a culture of continuous improvement, and

5) Enhancing strategic partnerships.

VA employees are welcome to VA Central Office conference room 430 to learn more about the MyVA initiative.

1. Christopher Orszak, Veterans Health Administration National Center for Organization Development, discussed the 2014 All Employee Survey diversity demographic scores.
2. Catherine Mitrano, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management, discussed VA's new Anti-Harassment Program. There was discussion over whether this effort is being duplicated and Ms. Mitrano clarified that this program is being established as directed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In a letter to VA, EEOC identified this as an area of deficiency. EEOC expects to see action plans and progress in next Management Directive 715 report. Although harassment remains a management responsibility, this program will ensure accountability and an oversight of the process (which will be separate from the EEO complaint process although both are founded on EEO bases), training, and tracking.
3. Susan Blauert, Deputy Assistant General Counsel, Office of General Counsel, discussed the proposed VA regulation on service animals which will establish nationally applicable criteria regarding the presence of service animals on VA property. Important to note is that under this proposed regulation, VA defines a service animal as a dog properly trained as such. This regulation was in the Federal Register for comment until January 20, 2015. There was discussion over how this proposed regulation and the comment period was communicated to both Veterans and VA employees and the need to for an improved communications system.
4. Lester Stephens, Training and Communications, ODI, discussed the Guidance on Religious Exercise and Expression in VA Facilities and Property Under the Charge and Control of VA. There was a question about the availability of a nondenominational place designated for employees to practice their religious beliefs. Chaplain Michael McCoy confirms that all VA medical centers have such a space established; VA Central Office does not.
5. Ms. Coffey led VADC operations:
   1. October 15, 2014, VADC meeting minutes approved.
6. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for April 15, 2015.

*Following the meeting, an email was distributed to the Council congratulating the winners of the Secretary’s Fourth Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. Their accomplishments are online at* [*http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx*](http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx)*:*

*a. Perdita Johnson-Abercrombie, Equal Employment Opportunity Manager, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), VA Central Office, Washington, DC (Manager/Supervisor)*

*b. Leslie R. M. Hausmann, PhD, Research Health Scientist in the Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, Veterans Health Administration, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Nonsupervisory Employee)*

*c. VISN 8 Diversity & Inclusion Sub-Committee, Veterans Health Administration, in St. Petersburg, Florida (Team)*

*Applications for the Workforce Recruitment Program centralized fund are being accepted on a first come, first served basis and the deadline for submissions is Monday, March 16, 2015. For more information, visit* [*http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#WRP*](http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/pwd.aspx#WRP)*.*

*Organization accomplishments are past due for VA’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report. For more information, contact Thomas Middleton at* [*Thomas.Middleton@va.gov*](mailto:Thomas.Middleton@va.gov)*.*

*The Secretary has reviewed the VADC 2014 Biennial Report and has approved the FY 2015-2016 Action Plan.*