Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2017, 1:00-3:00 pm

VACO, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Conference Room 830

1. DIVAC Co-Chair Ms. Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), welcomed attendees.
   1. The October 19, 2016, meeting minutes were approved without objection.
   2. Ms. Yvonne Rannels, Training and Communications, ODI, discussed the Secretary’s Sixth Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. The nomination period is closed. ODI received a total of 13 nominations from three different Administrations and Staff Offices. Nominations are being reviewed by the Screening Committee. Ratings are due back to ODI shortly and the top-rated nominations will go to the Judging Committee. Mr. Harvey Johnson, DAS for the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) discussed the Secretary’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards. ORM also received 13 nominations for their awards program. ORM and ODI will aim to hold a joint awards ceremony.
2. Mr. Antony Washington, Training and Communications, ODI, discussed the publication of VA’s new Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FY) 2017-2020. The 12 members on the Strategic Planning Committee were thanked for their contributions. This plan contains three goals; two remain the same and the third is modified to include engagement due to the ODI Workforce Analysis Team study linking organizational inclusion and employee engagement. The plan also highlighted past accomplishments since the publication of VA’s first strategic plan in 2009. The Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs offered to publicize the availability of the plan. *The plan is now available online at* [*https://www.diversity.va.gov/products/plan.aspx*](https://www.diversity.va.gov/products/plan.aspx)*.*
3. DIVAC Co-Chair Ms. Pamela Mitchell, Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, was introduced.
4. Dr. Uchenna Uchendu, Chief Office, Office of Health Equity (OHE), discussed Virtual Patient Training Modules available on the Talent Management System for VA employees and VHA TRAIN, which is open to both VA employees and the general public from the OHE website at <https://www.va.gov/healthequity>. One of the modules focuses on unconscious bias in treatment. Ms. Robyn Bolgla, National Federation of Federal Employees, asked if it would be possible to consolidate the training due to the impact it has on busy providers and if a plan was in place to communicate the importance of this training, perhaps by mandate from leadership. Help is welcomed on ways to get the message out about the availability of the training.
5. Ms. Kelley Carameli, Health Science Specialist – Communications Lead, Veterans Health Administration National Center for Organization Development, presented the 2016 All Employee Survey Diversity Demographic Scores. Some of the key findings include: differences in gender are few and diminish over time; differences in race/ethnicity are fairly consistent over time with White and Asian staff reporting the most favorable experiences, then Hispanic staff with moderate experiences, and less favorable experiences reported by Black, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Multi-racial staff; differences in age are diminishing, although young (<20 years) staff report less favorable experiences; experiences for employees with disabilities are informed by where they work and are likely due to the resources available; transgender/transsexual experiences are improving, but are still among the least favorable in VA, along with multi-selection staff; and favorable workplace perceptions increase with pay grade (members of the Senior Executive Service report the most favorable experiences and wage grade or grade scale 1-6 the least favorable).
6. Ms. Coffey pointed out that VA’s collective efforts appear to be having an effect on transgender individuals. This topic of psychological safety surfaced numerous times with regards to transgender individuals self-identifying as well as with regards to management status. Ms. Coffey reported that VA’s Transgender Employee Workplace Transition Guidance will be published soon.
7. Acting Secretary Robert Snyder provided remarks on the importance of the work of this Council and the State of the Agency briefing.
8. Ms. Coffey and Ms. Ryan Pugh, Workforce Analysis, ODI, provided the FY 2016 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) State of the Agency (*now available online at* [*https://www.diversity.va.gov/data/md715.aspx*](https://www.diversity.va.gov/data/md715.aspx)).
   1. Mr. Johnson discussed the EEO complaint process and ORM’s reconsideration of how first contact can be made by complainants.
   2. Ms. Pugh reported the change in Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) methodology to align correctly with EEOC’s guidelines. Because of these improved standards, VA’s Diversity Index (DI) decreased from FY 2015 to FY 2016. ODI developed the DI metric and proposed it to the Diversity and Inclusion in Government (DIG) Council for federal-wide implementation. *Update: ODI made a formal presentation to DIG on April 4, 2017.*
   3. ODI was asked to compare the VA-wide FY 2016 applicant flow data with the RCLF. *Attachment to these minutes addresses this request.*
   4. There was discussion about Veterans’ high separation rate and their expectations of VA organizational culture. Response rate, including Veterans, to exit surveys could be low because of lack of anonymity so Ms. Pugh recommended other delivery methods be considered. Also, it is believed that field facilities are not using a standardized exit survey and are instead creating their own.
   5. *Ms. Bolgla emailed the following on 2/8/17: “Request the minutes/notes reflect NFFE’s comment to recognize follow up on the standardized exit interview, to include how it is being implemented at each agency. What does the standardized exit interview look like? Does it address clearly why employees resign? Does it accurately reflect what our DIVAC committee strives to improve? Who is accountable for administering the survey. Maybe consider a briefing for our DIVAC committee. Also request [follow-up] on the EEO intake interview – did the option of “would you like to talk to a counselor?” get implemented and if so what is the impact?”*