Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) Meeting Minutes

April 18, 2018, 1:30-3:00 pm

VACO, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Conference Room 630

1. Mr. Peter Shelby, DIVAC Co-Chair and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, and Mr. Harvey Johnson, DIVAC Co-Chair and Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Offices of Resolution Management (ORM) and Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), welcomed attendees.
   1. The minutes for the October 18, 2017, Meeting of the DIVAC were approved without objection.
   2. Ms. Yvonne Rannels, Training and Communications, ODI, discussed the Secretary’s Seventh Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program. The nomination period is now open through June 1, 2018. Council members were asked to widely distribute throughout their organizations the nomination materials to ensure that outstanding efforts throughout VA in this area are recognized. Council members were also asked to identify the individuals who will serve on the Screening and Judging Committees for the awards program. Individuals interested in serving on a Committee were directed to contact Ms. Rannels. ODI and ORM plan to once again hold a joint awards ceremony with the ADR Excellence Awards later this year at Central Office to be attended virtually by those awardees not in the immediate area. Ms. Perdita Johnson-Abercrombie, Regional Director, ORM, discussed the Secretary’s Seventh Annual Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program. *\*Ms. Rannels will assist with distribution to the Council and Ms. Tracey Therit, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Senior Executive Management Office, will assist with distribution to members of VA’s Senior Executive Service once the memo calling for nominations has been approved.*

Christina Polnak, Division President, Service Employees International Union, inquired about union representatives serving on the Screening Committee. *\*Ms. Rannels reported she would respond to Ms. Polnak after the meeting.*

1. Mr. Johnson discussed VA’s Modern Equity Access & Inclusion Program. ORM DAS has been given operational oversight of ODI as part of VA's modernization, restructuring and consolidation plan. There was discussion about ensuring diversity and inclusion are reflected in the graphic presented.
2. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Andreé Sutton, Chief of Reasonable Accommodation Services, discussed the four areas of focus (Training, Resources, Accessibility, and Accountability) for VA’s Reasonable Accommodation Services Office (RASO). VA’s Reasonable Accommodation (RA) program is now separate from VA's Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program. Ms. Sutton announced the RA program web page (<https://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/ra.aspx>) has been updated with current lists of VA’s RA Coordinators (RACs) and their contact information. RACs have been surveyed, and training has been identified as a need; they are to be qualified and trained in accordance with 5975.1. ODI is currently working on updating VA Handbook 5975.1, Processing Requests for Reasonable Accommodation from Employees and Applicants with Disabilities. Ms. Sutton also discussed the future state of VA’s RA program to include a VA Pulse page and the establishment of a RA tracking system. It was confirmed that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requires VA to track and report on all RA requests. Ms. Sutton confirmed that training will be available to labor and human resources employees as well as DIVAC’s union representatives and directed DIVAC members to contact her for specific questions or concerns. Ms. Beatrice Bernfeld, Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager, National Cemetery Administration, recommended that positive and successful RA examples be used during training to show how valued employees can be retained.
3. Mr. Johnson and Mr. David Williams, Director of Workforce Analysis, ODI, discussed the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) State of the Agency including the six essential elements of a model EEO program; VA’s three areas of excellence and three areas of deficiency; and barriers, planned activities to address barriers, and where ODI can assist. Ms. Therit suggested ODI study the impact of the direct hire authority for Veterans on VA’s diversity. Ms. Bernfeld discussed VA’s recruitment strategies and suggested VA use strategies other than USA Jobs to advertise positions. Ms. Nanese Loza, VA’s National Employment Program Manager for Individual with Disabilities and Selective Placement Coordinator, discussed the reestablishment of DIVAC’s Disability Employment Committee. Individuals interested in serving on one of the various Committees to be established to examine RA, Schedule A Hiring, and other elements of VA’s Disability Employment Program, are encouraged to contact Ms. Loza at [Nanese.Loza@va.gov](mailto:Nanese.Loza@va.gov). *\*ODI will distribute to the Council a quarterly scorecard system that the Administrations will be asked to report on at a future meeting. ODI will report on historical and current status of groups with less than expected representation at the next quarterly meeting.*
4. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Janet Mescus, Acting Settlement Chief, provided an update on VA’s settlement program. There was discussion about VA’s $5,000 limit requiring that settlements over this amount obtain a higher level of approval and the possibility of raising that limit if data shows that VA is settling fewer cases but receiving the same amount (or even more) complaints. Ms. Mescus discussed the future state of VA’s settlement program and automating with a tracker. DIVAC may be used as a testing platform for this system.
5. Mr. Johnson discussed the White House Initiative To Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Mr. Johnson has been designated as the senior official who will report directly to the agency head on progress made to implement Executive Order 13779. Ms. Tynnetta Lee is working with the Administrations to ensure that information is collected for VA’s Agency Report and Strategic Plan due June 1, 2018.
6. Mr. Johnson reported on the Harassment Prevention Video ORM, ODI, the Office of Discrimination Complaint Adjudications, and the Office of General Counsel worked to jointly produce. *\*The possibility was discussed that this video would be the first in a series and other pieces would focus on the employee–Veteran (patient) relationship and harassment as part of a comprehensive, public-facing campaign to end all harassment. This would cover Veteran harassment of employees (and the reverse) and would involve Women’s Health Services.*
7. Ms. A’ngela Dunn, ODI, discussed Public Service Recognition Week (May 7-13, 2018). Ms. Bernfeld noted that the planned activities to date are internally focused. *\*ODI will look to OPIA for suggestions for incorporating external recognition of VA employees using VA’s social media tools such as FaceBook and Twitter.* There was discussion about ensuring the involvement of facilities outside of Central Office. The Veterans Canteen Service will provide a cake, punch, and/or fresh fruit to any VA facility. Facilities are asked to contact their closest Canteen. Funds to purchase a cake will be provided to those facilities unable to access a Canteen. PSRW participants across VA are asked to email any photographs taken of events to [PSRWPhotos@va.gov](mailto:PSRWPhotos@va.gov).
8. Open Forum:
   1. Mr. Johnson reminded members that “Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day” is Thursday, April 26, 2018, beginning at 8 am in Central Office.
   2. *\*Mr. Williams asked DIVAC members to begin pulling applicant flow data and if any issues are experienced members are asked to inform him.*
   3. Ms. Sutton reminded members that centralized funding for RA is no longer available. Brochures will soon be made available online regarding RA, hiring, Section 501, Personal Assistance Services, and Processing RA for HR Management Officials.
9. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm. The next meeting will be held July 18, 2018. Future topics will include:
   1. Section 504
   2. Section 508
   3. Veterans Health Administration Office of Academic Affiliations
   4. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (External Title VI Civil Rights Programs)
   5. HBCU Update
   6. RA Handbook Status