VA Diversity Council (VADC) Meeting Minutes

July 16, 2014, 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 provided opening remarks.
2. Ms. Coffey led VADC operations:
	1. May 14, 2014, VADC meeting minutes approved.
	2. Yvonne Rannels, ODI, provided an update on the Secretary’s Fourth Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. The nomination period is now closed. VADC members were thanked for ensuring that nominations were received from all three Administrations and some Staff Offices this year. Those nominations are currently with the Screening Committee. It is expected that the awards will be presented by September/October 2014.
3. Michael Youngblood, ODI, provided an update on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Committee, reviewed the VA guidance to same-sex married couples seeking benefits and accompanying fact sheet, and the Under Secretary for Health’s Information Letter: Guidance Regarding the Provision of Health Care for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Veterans.
4. Georgia Coffey and Hansel Cordeiro, Office of General Counsel, provided a briefing on VA’s plan for completing the Office of Special Counsel’s (OSC’s) 2302(c) Certification Program. Congress enacted 5 U.S.C. § 2302(c) in response to reports of limited understanding in the federal workforce concerning employees’ right to be free from prohibited personnel practices, especially retaliation for whistleblowing. Section 2302(c) requires agency heads to ensure, in consultation with OSC, that employees are informed of the rights and remedies available to them under the Whistleblower Protection Act and related laws. *Follow-up: On October 3, 2014, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) certified VA under its Section 2302(c) Certification Program.*
5. Michael Youngblood, ODI, provided a briefing on the VA, African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA), and Asian American Government Executives Network (AAGEN) Memorandum of Understanding to establish a mutually beneficial partnership that fosters coordination, collaboration, and resource sharing between VA, AAFEA, and AAGEN to support their respective missions and to achieve the parties’ common aim of increasing diversity in the federal leadership candidate pool.
6. Diane Ditzler, Office of Human Resources and Administration, provide a briefing on Employee Engagement and Human Capital Analysis. Ms. Ditzler is seeking participants for the Engagement Working Group. A request with the criteria will be sent to the VADC email distribution groups. William Jefferson, National Representative, American Federation of Government Employees, suggested Ms. Ditzler partner with local or national unions. Ms. Ditzler requests any ideas regarding this initiative to be email to her: Diane.Ditzler@va.gov.
7. Michael Hogan, Assistant General Counsel, provided an update on VA’s Religious Expression Guidance. VA sent a draft on to the Department of Justice (DOJ) the day before this meeting because DOJ would have to defend these actions uniformly across the Executive Branch. VA hopes to have DOJ’s comments by the fall and the new VA guidance release prior to this year’s holiday season.
8. Andre Castillo, Program Manager, and Jacob Flinck, Senior Consultant, MyCareer@VA, provided a briefing on the new VA Career Facilitators Program.
9. Renaee Allen, President, and Ethel Sligh, Treasurer, VA Blacks in Government (BIG) Chapter, provided a briefing on the Blacks in Government affinity organization.
10. Ms. Coffey discussed the Acting Secretary’s Memo on the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
11. Lester Stephens, ODI, provided a briefing on the Acting Secretary’s 2014 Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Protection Policy Statement. There was discussion as to ensuring that this policy is disseminated to all employees, including new employees during orientation sessions. It is important that all 11 pages of this document (not just the cover page) are made available.
12. Ms. Mitrano provided a briefing on the memo: Ensuring Appropriate Review of Findings of Discrimination. This memo explains the expanded procedures to ensure that proper consideration is given to taking appropriate corrective action whenever discrimination is found in the VA workplace.
13. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for October 15, 2014.