Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) Meeting Minutes

July 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 Pamela Mitchell, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS), Human Resources Administration (HR&A), who was is representing the Acting Assistant Secretary for HR&A and DIVAC Co-Chair Meghan Flanz who was unavailable to attend.
   1. The minutes for the April Meeting of the DIVAC were approved without objection.
   2. Ms. Coffey announced that the Employee Engagement Service (EES) has been transferred to ODI and that a new Employee Engagement (EE) Council has been established.
2. Ms. Terri Cinnamon, Director, EES, provided an overview of the services her team provides. The EES conducts analyses of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) administered by the Office of Personnel Management and collaborates with the Veterans Health Administration National Center for Organization Development on the All Employee Survey (AES). EES convened the first meeting of the EE Council which is now soliciting nominations for EE Champions throughout VA. EES also provides training and guidance on action planning in response to survey results. FEVS and AES results will be available in fall. Mr. Harvey Johnson, DAS for the Office of Resolution Management (ORM), provided comments on the “sinking boat scenario” whereby 25% are engaged, 55% are disengaged, and 20% are toxic to the organization. Ms. Mitchell mentioned “The Boys in the Boat” as a resource.
3. Ms. Boriana Cavicchia, Management Program Analyst, Workforce Analysis, ODI, presented the findings of a study conducted by ODI on the Impact of Diversity, Inclusion, and Engagement on Organizational Performance. Ms. Cavicchia correlated the Diversity Index, Inclusion Quotient, and Engagement Index with organizational performance indicators in VHA and VBA, including quality, productivity, and customer satisfaction. (Executive summary attached.)
4. Mr. Sterling Akins, VA’s National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Program Manager, ODI, provided an overview of the transgender transition plan that has been under development by the LGBT workgroup over the past year. The plan will be presented to the DIVAC for the Council’s review and approval in October. He reiterated that VHA policy already covers Veterans with regards clinical matters. Some of the points Mr. Akins made included the following:
   1. The EEOC has affirmed that employment discrimination and harassment based on gender identity is prohibited by law (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act) and by the Secretary’s Annual Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy.
   2. Transgender employees should be addressed by the name and gender pronouns they identify with.
   3. By law, a transgender employee must have access to the restroom corresponding to the employee’s gender identity. Mandatory use of unisex restroom is a violation of EEO law.

Mr. Akins clarified that the transition begins with the employee informing his or her supervisor. Supervisors should engage with their local EEO managers regarding the protection and rights of transitioning employees. The transgender transition plan will provide guidance on the process and will help to ensure that employees are protected from discrimination and workplace harassment in the workplace.

1. Ms. Denene Burnette, Anti-Harassment Office (AHO), ORM, provided a summary of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s Task Force Co-Chair Call on Employers and Others to “Reboot” Harassment Prevention. An AHO directive will be issued in August 2016.