Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) Meeting Minutes

July 19, 2017, 1:00-3:00 pm

VACO, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Conference Room 830

1. Ms. Georgia Coffey, DIVAC Co-Chair and Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), welcomed attendees and introduced Mr. Peter Shelby, DIVAC Co-Chair and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration.
   1. Mr. Shelby provided introductory remarks emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion to a healthy work environment and ensuring the definition of diversity is understood as more than race, ethnicity, and gender. Inclusion of diverse perspectives ensures better solutions for our Nation’s Veterans.
   2. The minutes for the February 19, 2017, Meeting of the DIVAC were approved without objection.
   3. Ms. Yvonne Rannels, Training and Communications, ODI, discussed the Secretary’s Sixth Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. Thirteen nominations from three different Administrations and Staff Offices were reviewed and ranked by the Screening and Judging Committees. DIVAC members who served or recommended individuals to serve on those Committees were thanked. The top-rated nominations for both the Diversity and Inclusion and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards were sent forward to Secretary Shulkin for approval. ODI will work with the Secretary’s office and the Office of Resolution Management to plan a joint awards ceremony based on the Secretary’s availability. ODI will inform the Council of the winners and ceremony details. *\*Secretary Shulkin approved the winners on July 24, 2017. A separate email announcing the winners and ceremony details will be sent to Council members.*
2. Mr. Lester Stephens, Training and Communications, ODI, presented the Secretary’s Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy Statement signed by VA Secretary David J. Shulkin and available online at <https://www.diversity.va.gov/policy/statement.aspx>. This year’s policy provided clarifying language on social media harassment, added a separate section on VA’s Harassment Prevention Program, provided clarifying language on the filing of an EEO complaint through the Office of Resolution Management regarding parental status, provided clarifying language regarding comfort animals in the workplace, and added a section on limited English proficiency. *\*Mr. Peter O’Rourke, Executive Director of the newly established Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection, will be invited to the next Council meeting.*
3. VA established a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), a state university offering award-winning academic programs and leading provider of postsecondary educational services for active-duty military servicemembers, Veterans, and military spouses and families. Ms. Kristin Schrader, Assistant Director of InternPLUS and Military Career Programs, Office of Institutional Advancement: Career Services and Alumni Relations, UMUC, presented an overview of the UMUC program services. The VA/UMUC MOU charters a framework for VA and UMUC to participate in outreach activities for students, increasing diversity outreach and recruitment to diverse students for internships, fellowships, jobs, and other training and development activities. Mr. Ed Bach, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, UMUC, and Ms. Pat Delaney, Director of Government Outreach, UMUC, discussed UMUC’s participation in the Federal Academic Alliance, a Federal employee benefit that provides post-secondary education at reduced tuition rates. *\*Information on the Federal Academic Alliance can be found at* [*https://www.opm.gov/wiki/training/Federal-Governmentwide-Academic-Alliances.ashx*](https://www.opm.gov/wiki/training/Federal-Governmentwide-Academic-Alliances.ashx)*.*
4. Ms. Coffey presented the new VA Handbook 5975.4, Transgender Employee Transition Guidance, now available on the VA Publications page at <https://www.va.gov/vapubs>. She reported that VA is one of the first agencies to publish such guidance.
5. Mr. David Williams, Director, Workforce Analysis, ODI, presented results of the adverse impact analysis for Corporate Employee Development Board (CEDB) and Leadership VA (LVA) development programs. Regarding the CEDB 2016/2017 program, there appears to be no adverse impact of race/ethnicity, or gender, or disability, or Veteran status when comparing selections to applications. Regarding the LVA 2017 program, data indicates Black Men and Women, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Women may be adversely impacted. There appears to be no adverse impact of Veteran status when comparing selections to applications. Meeting attendees discussed the importance of communicating the value of these programs to leadership and the necessary improvement of personal and consistent messaging marketing these program across organizations. It was pointed out that leadership and program managers may not be aware that Nurses 3 and 4 are GS-13 equivalent and qualify for these programs. Future discussions will focus on analysis over time and analysis for individual organizational components. There is no current method for examining Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) status although there is no legal restriction from collecting this data as both the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) and the All Employee Survey (AES) collect LGBT status. The AES is scheduled for August 2017 but Council members report no significant messages regarding this survey have been communicated. The FEVS, coordinated by the ODI Employee Engagement Service, will fall under the Veterans Health Administration’s National Center for Organization Development in Fiscal Year 2018. Ms. Coffey reports that the Office of Personnel Management is considering combining these surveys. *\*CEDB and LVA Program owners will be invited to the next Council meeting to be briefed.*
6. In response to the Co-Chair’s call for hot topics, the discussion identified these topics:
   1. Social media as an area of increasing complication for the workforce.
   2. Religious expression and exercise challenges as a recurring issue.
   3. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s pending consideration of VA’s request to submit one agency Management Directive 715 report
   4. VA’s new accountability website and the effect of publicizing employee firings on VA employees’ engagement. The Council discussed interest in learning how VA compares to other agencies.
   5. Increasing incivility and lack of executive diversity in VHA.
   6. Office of Resolution Management’s civility training pilot.
   7. Construction and Facility Management’s training initiative to develop soft skills to address emotional and social skills, customer service anxiety, and negotiation bias.
7. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm. The next meeting will be held October 18, 2017.