MANDATORY 201 JUMP START AND NEW TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM TRAINING FOR ALL NEW VHA HUMAN RESOURCE SPECIALISTS, GS-201-13 AND BELOW

1. PURPOSE:

This is an interim Veterans Health Administration (VHA) notice, pending establishment of a new VHA Directive, for the implementation of mandatory training for all Human Resource (HR) Specialists, GS-201-13 and below, new to VHA and/or new to the GS-201 occupational series. **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7301(b).

2. BACKGROUND:

a. Due to the growing complexity of HR regulations and programs in VHA, as well as increasing workload pressures due to high turnover and vacancy rates, the GS-201 occupational series consistently experiences the highest scores for burnout in the All Employee Survey (AES). Additionally, consistent feedback from the VHA HR community indicates a lack of sufficient training needed to be successful. Vacancy rates for HR professionals have ranked in the top 3 agency-wide on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Office of the Inspector General (VA OIG) Critical Vacancy list, for over three years. **NOTE:** For more information, please see OIG Report No. 16-00351-453, “OIG Determination of VHA Occupational Staffing Shortages.” Reports from third party auditing bodies, including the VA OIG and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) indicate an increasing gap in competencies in the primary functional areas of HR. **NOTE:** For more information, please see GAO Report December 2016, “Veterans Health Administration: Management Attention is Needed to Address Systemic Long-standing Human Capital Challenges,” the VHA Workforce Management and Consulting, “Shortage Occupation Report,” for the FY18 Workforce Planning Cycle, and the GAO 2018 Annual Report to Congress, “Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits”. The modernization of HR services, and the need for increasingly complex consultative skills to enhance the success of VHA at all levels of the organization has escalated the need for competent, consultative, and customer-centric HR professionals.

b. Given these ongoing challenges, a standardized, competency-based training curriculum for the GS-201 occupational series is needed. The widely requested new training program established in this notice is intended to address the lack of consistency and quality of HR services. This program is designed to:

(1) Deliver highly effective, standardized, comprehensive, and competency-based training for HR professionals across VHA; and
(2) Provide a model for similar administrative/professional non-clinical, front-line occupations in support of the VHA commitment to improving the Veteran experience.

c. The 201 Jump Start program is first phase of the training for new HR specialists. 201 Jump Start serves as the initial welcome and orientation for new 201 hires and provides an overview of VA and Federal human resources in addition to navigating the new Specialist to the tools, resources and job aids that are necessary to begin a new VA career.

d. The New Talent Development Program (NTDP) is the second phase of the training and development program that not only introduces the existence of these issues, but also provides the foundational competencies to function as HR professionals in VHA. The NTDP is designed to deliver highly effective, standardized, comprehensive and competency-based training for newly hired HR professionals across the VA. HR professionals are critical of the VA’s ability to ensure a highly-competent workforce is available, ready, and motivated to serve our Veterans with high quality and timely delivery of products and services. This program is designed to develop and validate the critical core and consulting skills of VA’s HR professionals within the first 6—18 months of their entry on duty into the 201 series. Combined with and following the 201 Jump Start orientation program, the NTDP provides the foundational competencies to function as HR professionals in VA to include effective on-boarding and development of new talent.

NOTE: There is a separate requirement for annual mandatory training of all GS-201 staff in VHA consistent with the requirements of Public Law 115-46.

3. SCOPE:

a. This notice applies to all Human Resource (HR) Specialists, GS-201-13 and below, new to VHA and/or new to the GS-201-occupational series on or after October 1, 2018, hereinafter “new HR Specialists.” New HR Specialists are required to complete 201 Jump Start and NTDP respectively within their first 18 months of assignment into the VHA and/or the 201-occupational series.

b. A Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) benchmark of 80 percent compliance, by September 30, 2020, is established for the first phase of implementing this training with a goal of reaching and sustaining a 90 percent VISN compliance rate by September 30, 2021 and beyond.

c. The VA Workforce Management, Director of Human Resource Development (Director, HRD) will be monitoring compliance with this notice, and sending a monthly report to the VISNs regarding their progress towards the above benchmarks.

d. New HR Specialists, as defined above, who enter(ed) on duty (EOD) or who were newly assigned to the GS-201-occupational series between October 1, 2018 and March 31, 2019 will have until September 30, 2020 to complete the required training.

e. New HR Specialists, as defined above, who EOD or who were newly assigned to the 201-occupational series on or after April 1, 2019 and forward will be required to
complete 201 Jump Start and NTDP within their first 18 months of assignment into the VHA and/or the 201-occupational series. Starting first with 201 Jump Start to be completed within the first 180 days (6 months) of their start date and following with completing New Talent Development Program (NTDP) thereafter within the 18-month timeline from appointment to VHA or the 201-occupational series.

f. This training will be part of the onboarding and orientation plans for these new HR Specialists, when hired.

g. Facilities and/or Network Offices will be responsible for funding the one week of travel for the Face-To-Face component of training.

h. New HR Specialists, as defined in this section, need only to be assigned to one of the two training tracks identified below to meet this mandatory requirement, based on their assigned occupation specialty. If the HR Specialist does not fit into a specific specialty identified, the HR Manager or Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) may choose which track would be most beneficial to the organization and the employee.

i. Extensions may be granted on a case by case basis based on unusual, extenuating circumstances as determined by the Director, HRD). Participants may request the approval for an extension through their VA medical facility Director and HR Manager, and VISN Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), to the Director, HRD. **NOTE:** Workload, funding, prior training, and/or experience will not be approved as the basis for an extension.

j. Exemptions may be granted on a case by case basis for highly unusual and extenuating circumstances as determined by the Director, HRD. A participant's facility HR Manager may request the approval for an exception through their facility Director and VISN CHRO to the Director, HRD. Workload, funding, prior training, and/or experience outside of VHA will not be approved as extenuating. **NOTE:** An example for an exemption would be: A HR staff worked for VHA for a number of years, left to another agency and then returned to VHA, within a reasonable timeframe, where they are able to pick back up with very minimal to no training.

k. If for any reason, HRD is unable to deliver on training as specified above, due to extenuating circumstances, the Human Resources Officers will be notified as soon as practical with an alternative plan to deliver training. Any TMS numbers for program components will be provided to participants and facilitators and will be used for tracking purposes.

4. PROGRAM STRUCTURE:

a. **201 Jump Start.** This program is set up with a live virtual session and then a web-based, self-paced virtual Blackboard classroom. 201 Jump Start is introduced within the first 90 to 120 days of hire and consists of approximately 98 hours of formal instruction and self-paced learning over a 6-week period requiring 2-3 hours of self-paced learning each week. 201 Jump Start serves as the initial welcome and orientation for new 201 hires and provides an overview of the VA and Federal Human Resources
b. **New Talent Development Program.** This program is designed to ensure and enhance skill in VA-specific rules and practices for HR Specialists in six competency areas of Classification, Staffing, Compensation, Employee Relations, Labor Relations and Performance Management. These six competencies are divided into two primary tracks. The tracks focus on the assigned specialties over a period of approximately 3 to 4 months. Training is set up as a systematic progression of self-paced monitored components in Blackboard, virtual sessions through Skype and a final workshop, to bring all the training together in a comprehensive face-to-face component. **NOTE:** As indicated in Paragraph 3.f., New HR Specialists need only to complete one of the assigned tracks, based on their assigned occupational specialty. The two primary tracks are as follows:

1. Classification, Staffing & Compensation (CSC).
2. Employee/Labor Relations & Performance Management (ELP).

**c. NTDP Course Format**

1. Welcome/Orientation (Approximately 2 hours).
2. Self-paced pre-work/preparation modules (Approximately 2-3 weeks (12 hours total)).
3. Virtual Instructor Led Training (VILT) Sessions (3 days (12 hours total)).
4. Comprehensive face-to-face (F2F) (3 full days – travel on Mon & Fri). Facility must fund travel.

**NOTE 1:** If participants do not complete the pre-work they will not advance to the VILT portion of the training. The same goes for the VILT, if the participant does not attend and/or participate in the VILT they will not advance to F2F and they will be removed from the training and reported as incomplete.

**NOTE 2:** The training schedule is mapped out 12 – 18 months in advance with a F2F scheduled approximately once a month. HR Specialists will be assigned to the next available track upon completion of the 201 Jump Start Component. Sample training schedule:
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Orientation/Pre-Work</th>
<th>Virtual Learning</th>
<th>F2F</th>
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5. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Office of Workforce Management and Consulting, Human Resource Development (10A2A1D) is responsible for the contents of this directive. Questions may be referred to either the NTDP@va.gov or 201JumpStart@va.gov mailboxes.

6. This VHA notice will be archived as of August 31, 2020. However, the information will remain in effect.

CERTIFIED BY: BY DIRECTION OF THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH:

/s/ Steven Lieberman, MD, MBA, FACHE
Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: Emailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List on August 8, 2019.

NOTE: All references herein to VA and VHA documents incorporate by reference subsequent VA and VHA documents on the same or similar subject matter.