

EXTENDED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive states policy for the establishment and administration of extended educational leave (EEL) in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive revises and replaces VHA Handbook 1400.11, Extended Educational Leave, dated April 1, 2016. Major changes from VHA Handbook 1400.11 include moving information from the body of the document into Appendices A-F, and updating the language in Appendix B to use hours rather than using days as the time unit for physicians and dentists.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** VA Handbook 5015/1, Employee Learning and Professional Development, dated June 25, 2010 and 5 U.S.C. § 3396.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Academic Affiliations (14AA) is responsible for the content of this directive. Questions may be referred to the Office of Academic Affiliations Action Group at vha14aooaaaction@va.gov.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Handbook 1400.11, dated April 1, 2016, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of July 2027.

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

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Assistant Under Secretary for Health
for Discovery, Education and Affiliate
Networks

DISTRIBUTION: Emailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List on July 19, 2022.

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

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EXTENDED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE

1. PURPOSE

a. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive establishes policy concerning how eligible VHA employees can be granted paid and non-paid leave for up to one year to pursue education and other professional development opportunities which assist in achieving the agency's mission and performance goals. This VHA Directive discusses the purpose of extended educational leave (EEL), the administration of EEL, paid and unpaid leave authorized for EEL and the reporting required for the EEL program.

AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. §§ 301-302; 38 U.S.C. § 7301(b).

b. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Health recognizes that VHA will function most effectively when employees can pursue professional development relevant to the agency's mission. The agency will benefit if employees can pursue activities as part of that development that meet both the employee's professional goals and the critical needs of VHA. Certain professional development activities are best accomplished with EEL from regular duties, either because of the location of the activity or the time commitment for the activity. This authority has no post-participation service agreement because this program requires service to have been completed in advance for employees to be eligible for this award.

c. Extended educational leave is the mechanism by which management can approve combinations of duty and leave for VHA employees for the purposes of pursuing education and professional development. It is not itself a timekeeping status. The EEL may be posted as either leave without pay (LWOP) or a paid status of administrative leave (authorized absence), regular duty status, regular duty with temporary duty assignment to a non-VA location, annual leave, or a combination of these. The amount of awarded EEL depends upon several factors, including time in service, the relation of the proposed activity to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mission and the service needs of the agency. The awarded EEL can be either used contiguously or intermittently (e.g., one day a week) over a period of up to two years.

2. DEFINITIONS

a. **Approving Official.** The approving official is the individual responsible for deciding a request for EEL. This individual may be the VA medical facility Director, or the VHA Central Office Chief Program Officer/Executive Director, depending on the professional duties of the employee.

b. **Extended Educational Leave.** Extended educational leave is a leave status for VHA employees, awarding a combination of LWOP and paid authorized absence of not less than 30 days or more than 365 days combined for the purposes of education and professional development. The amount of extended educational leave that can be awarded is dependent upon several factors, including time in service, applicability of the proposed activity to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) missions, and the service

needs of the agency. The awarded leave can be requested to be used either contiguously or intermittently over a time period of up to two years.

c. **Reporting Official.** The reporting official is the individual responsible for receiving information from the EEL participant and forwarding it to the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA). This individual may be the Designated Learning Officer at the VA medical facility, or the designee of the VHA Central Office Chief Program Officer/Executive Director.

3. POLICY

It is VHA policy to authorize EEL, when appropriate, to certain eligible VHA employees who pursue educational and professional development activities that require extended absence from their regular work. These individuals must have sufficient time in VA service to be eligible, and the EEL request must document that the training is for the benefit of VA and not for the sole benefit of the employee. VHA may authorize EEL for any VHA employee that meets the eligibility and other requirements in this directive.

EEL is not an entitlement program for all VHA employees seeking educational or professional development. Rather, EEL is granted by facilities in special cases where it will meet the needs of the organization. It is not the normal path for those who wish to pursue academic education, which is covered by other programs. The program emphasizes the needs of the organization as opposed to the needs of the individual. See Appendices A and C for limitations.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary for Health is responsible for ensuring overall VHA compliance with this directive.

b. **Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations.** The Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations is responsible for:

(1) Communicating the contents of this directive to each of the Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs).

(2) Assisting VISN Directors to resolve implementation and compliance challenges in all VA medical facilities within that VISN.

(3) Providing oversight of VISNs to ensure compliance with this directive and its effectiveness.

c. **Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks.** The Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks is responsible for supporting the Office of Academic Affiliations with oversight of this directive.

d. **Deputy Under Secretary for Health**. The Deputy Under Secretary for Health is responsible for approving EEL requests arising from VHACO Chief Program Officers and Executive Directors.

e. **Chief Program Officer/Executive Director**. The Chief Program Officer or Executive Director of a VHACO program office is responsible for approving requests arising from employees of that VHACO office and designating the Reporting Official.

f. **Chief Officer, Office of Academic Affiliations**. The Chief Officer, Office of Academic Affiliations, is responsible for maintenance of this directive and for collecting data on usage of EEL program.

g. **Veterans Integrated Service Network Director**. The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director is responsible for ensuring that all facilities within the VISN comply with this directive and informing leadership (or OAA) when barriers to compliance are identified. The VISN Director is also responsible for approving EEL requests arising from VA medical facility Directors.

h. **VA Medical Facility Director**. The VA medical facility Director is responsible for approving or disapproving requests arising from the VA medical facility staff, and for providing oversight to ensure VA medical facility compliance with this directive.

i. **VA Medical Facility Designated Learning Officer**. The VA medical facility Designated Learning Officer (DLO) or designee is responsible for reviewing eligibility of VHA employees for EEL under this Directive and making recommendations to the VA medical facility Director. The DLO is also responsible for assuring that post-activity reporting is accomplished.

5. PROCEDURES

Procedural information related to this directive can be found in Appendix A (Activity Objectives), Appendix B (Employee Eligibility), Appendix C (Exclusions), Appendix D (Employee Pay During Extended Educational Leave), Appendix E (Requests for Extended Educational Leave) and Appendix F (Post Activity Reporting).

6. TRAINING

There are no formal training requirements associated with this directive.

7. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

All records regardless of format (e.g., paper, electronic, electronic systems) created in this directive shall be managed per the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records schedules found in VA Records Control Schedule 10-1. Questions regarding any aspect of records management should be addressed to the appropriate Records Manager or Records Liaison.

8. REFERENCES

- a. 5 U.S.C. § 4109
- b. 5 U.S.C. § 3396
- c. 38 U.S.C. § 7421
- d. 38 U.S.C. § 7431
- e. VA Directive 5007, Pay Administration, dated April 15, 2002.
- f. VA Handbook 5015/1, Employee Learning and Professional Development, dated June 25, 2010.
- g. VA Handbook 5011, Hours of Duty & Leave, dated April 15, 2002
- h. VA Financial Policy Volume XIV Travel Chapter 6, International Travel, dated July 13, 2020.

APPENDIX A

ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES

Although EEL experiences commonly involve a continuous block of time away from the duty station, this policy is intended to be flexible. VHA recognizes that educational experiences may involve combinations of intermittent travel and distance learning strategies. An employee awarded EEL may request to use EEL in a continuous period or in some other pattern (e.g., one day per week or one week per month) up to the awarded amount within two years of the initial use.

EEL cannot be used solely to prepare employees for promotion to a higher-grade or higher paid position. Other authorities may be applicable to promotion-potential education, including the use of service agreements when appropriate. While EEL should not have as its primary purpose to prepare employees for promotion to higher grade, the fact that employees are improving skills within their chosen career domain with potential to improve career progression should also not disqualify them from receiving due consideration for their individual EEL applications.

Activities eligible for consideration under this directive must include one or more of the following three categories:

- a. Pursuit of new knowledge, skills, or abilities that promote VA's mission of clinical care, education, research, or emergency preparedness by improving employee and organizational performance.
- b. Experiential and participatory learning at VA or non-VA medical facilities, laboratories, research, educational or other institutions (including for the delivery of lectures) of relevance to VA and the professional duties of the individual.
- c. Pursuit of a formal course of instruction that promotes VA's mission by improving employee and organizational performance, under the auspices of an accredited college, university, or comparable learning institution and which is not primarily intended to alter the career role of the employee.

APPENDIX B

EMPLOYEE ELIGIBILITY

1. Employees are eligible for EEL after the completion of six calendar years of employment in VA, regardless of whether such employment was full-time or part-time. The amount of EEL awarded is dependent on the time served during VA employment. VA time served may be shorter than 72 months if a person has worked part-time during the 6-year eligibility period. Time served as a trainee, whether paid or in a without compensation (WOC) status, is not creditable toward this eligibility. EEL may not exceed 1 year in the first 10-year period of employment and in each subsequent 10-year period of continuous or non-continuous service in VA.

2. The maximum amount of EEL that may be approved is based on the length of time in service to VA. For those who have completed at least six years (72 months) of full time VA employment, the maximum amount of allowable EEL is six months administrative paid leave and six months either drawn from the employee’s accrued annual leave or as LWOP. For individuals with less than full time status, approved EEL will be based upon the following scale:

Table 1: Educational Leave Award Determination for Employees With At Least 6 Years VA Employment

Full Time Equivalent Months of Service in Prior 6 Years	Maximum Hours of EEL at Full Pay	Maximum Hours of Annual Leave and LWOP Combined
72	1040	1040
60-71	867	1213
48-59	693	1387
33-47	520	1560
24-32	347	1733
12-23	173	1907
1-11	0	0

3. The following examples are provided for clarification on how the scale will apply:

- a. An individual with 5-year full-time VA employment is not eligible since the individual does not have a total of 72 months, or six calendar years of VA service.

b. An individual with 3-year full-time VA employment of 80 hours/pay period (2080 hours/year) and 3-year part-time employment at 40 hours/pay period (1040 hours/year or 50%) is eligible to apply (has six calendar years with VHA), and falls into the 48-59 months category (three years full-time time 12 months equals 36 months; three years at 50% is the equivalent of six months per year time three years equals 18 months; total of 54 months) and would be eligible for a maximum of 693 hours EEL at full pay and a maximum of 1387 hours annual leave and LWOP combined.

c. An individual with six years part-time VA employment at 32 hours/pay period (832 hours per year or 40%) is eligible to apply and falls into the 24-35 months category (six years at 40% is the equivalent of 4.5 months per year, times six years equals 29 months) and would be eligible for a maximum of 347 hours EEL at full pay and a maximum of 1733 hours annual leave and LWOP combined.

APPENDIX C

EXCLUSIONS

1. This directive addresses only the employee's time and leave. The payment under EEL only applies to direct compensation and does not address payment by the agency for other expenses associated with activities approved under this authority, including tuition, fees, books, travel expenses, or any other expenses. This directive does not address other special or formal training programs such as long-term training in upward mobility, scholarship programs or sabbatical leave authorized under 5 U.S.C. § 3396. This directive is not applicable to an activity determined to be for the sole benefit of the participating employee. A benefit must accrue to VA from the EEL.

2. If foreign travel approval is being sought in conjunction with EEL, the employee must be on a duty status approved through EEL rather than administrative or annual leave. The employee is responsible for appropriate use of an official government passport while in duty status and personal passport while in non-duty status.

3. Duty status travel may be approved as part of the EEL request. However, VA will not provide reimbursement for transportation, lodging, per diem and other expenses associated with such travel so such travel must be entered into official travel systems as "no cost" travel.

4. EEL is not an employment benefit or employee right. The approval of EEL requests is at the discretion of the approving official based on the needs of the organization. The organization may consider a variety of factors, including but not limited to the ability to grant time away from duties, the need for certain occupational skills, current staff shortages and coverage, employee performance or conduct, applicant ineligibility and other factors.

APPENDIX D

EMPLOYEE PAY DURING EXTENDED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE

1. An individual is remunerated at the pay they were assigned at the time the EEL was granted, whether they were working part-time or full-time. For this policy, a part-time employee with EEL will continue to be paid at the assigned part-time rate. For example, if an employee is serving on a 60 hours per pay period appointment, the amount of pay during the approved EEL will continue at 60 hours per pay period. **NOTE:** *“Pay” for EEL for physicians and dentists, whether on full or part-time assignments, is paid in accordance with 38 U.S.C. 7431, and includes base pay, market pay and performance pay components. Full pay can include performance pay only if the specified performance elements were achieved during the applicable compensation period, including the effort performed during the EEL.*
2. A part-time employee may not be appointed to full-time status merely for the purpose of pursuing EEL.
3. Pay for EEL may include retention incentives as described in VA Directive 5007, Pay Administration, at the discretion of the official responsible for the retention incentive determination.

APPENDIX E

REQUESTS FOR EXTENDED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE

1. Employees who are requesting EEL must prepare an EEL justification document for review and approval by the approving official.
2. The document must include the following elements:
 - a. Proposed start and end dates of the activity.
 - b. Description of the proposed activity, including its relationship to the applicant's goals and VA's mission.
 - c. Location of the proposed activity (if foreign destination, requires separate approval for foreign travel per Financial Policy Volume XIV Travel Chapter 6, International Travel).
 - d. Curriculum or course of study.
 - e. Method of obtaining the instruction.
 - f. Documentation of support of proposed activity from the site hosting the proposed activity.
 - g. Amount of administrative paid leave, annual leave and leave without pay requested with justification of eligibility for these amounts. Years of part-time and full-time VA employment must be used to calculate eligibility.
 - h. Projection of the full pay amount that the employee will receive during requested administrative paid leave.
 - i. Plan for using the leave (e.g., whether the leave will be used as contiguous block of leave or will be used intermittently along with other duty status over a period not to exceed 2 years).
 - j. Whether any gifts, reimbursements, remuneration, or other considerations from non-federal sources are anticipated for funding any aspect of the proposed activity.
NOTE: Acceptance of such resources, including grants, from non-federal sources requires prior approval from VA Office of General Counsel's Ethics Specialty Team.
 - k. If the proposed activity is intended primarily to further research, whether a VA Career Development Enhancement Award (CDA), a description of which can be found at (<http://www.research.va.gov/funding/CDP.cfm>), must be sought in relation to the request for EEL.
 - l. Impact on current responsibilities and plan for covering such responsibilities during the proposed EEL.

m. Description of the expected results of the activity, including the contribution to the employee's goals and the organization's performance, and the projected contribution to VA's missions of patient care, education, research, or emergency preparedness, or other benefits to VA at the local, regional or national levels.

n. Plan for assessing whether the proposed results were achieved.

3. The EEL justification document should be routed for approval as follows:

a. For VA medical facility-based employees, the complete EEL justification document must be routed through the employee's supervisor, the Designated Learning Officer (DLO) and the facility Chief of Staff, if the leave affects clinical services, and the VA medical facility Director, who is the final approving official for such requests. Local procedures may require routing through additional individuals as determined by the Director. For example, a facility may require that research-oriented proposals be routed through the Associate Chief of Staff for Research or that proposals involving requests for accredited health professions education be routed through the Designated Education Officer/Associate Chief of Staff for Education.

b. For VHACO employees, the complete EEL justification document must be routed through the employee's supervisor to the VHACO Chief Program Officer/Executive Director, who is the approving official for VHACO EEL requests. Office procedures may require routing through additional individuals as determined by the specific VHACO Program Office.

c. The approving official may choose to obtain peer-review or other input to the EEL justification document to assist in their decision. Such assessments may draw upon input from persons or committees (e.g., Research and Development Committee) at that facility, within the VISN, or from others on an ad hoc basis. The Office of Research and Development can assist a facility in locating an ad-hoc reviewer for EEL requests related to research.

d. Investigators with actively funded VA research awards including Career Development Awards (CDAs) must obtain concurrence for the requested EEL from the Office of Research and Development (ORD) service(s) sponsoring the research award(s). Documentation of ORD Service level concurrence(s) must be included with the request for final approval of EEL to the facility medical center Director.

e. The approving official's assessment must generally include a review of an employee's preparation for the proposed activity, the likelihood of the activity being completed in the proposed timeframe and the likely benefit to the employee and the agency. Some questions to consider when evaluating the request might include:

(1) Why does the employee need to obtain this new knowledge, ability, or skill?

(2) How is this new knowledge? Is this a skill the employee does not have and cannot learn as part of their current role?

(3) How does it benefit the VA and the employee?

(4) How important is this for the VA?

(5) Has the employee adequately prepared for the proposed activity?

(6) Is there a detailed accounting of what they will learn, how and where?

(7) Is the timeline detailed?

(8) Is the timeline feasible and reasonable?

(9) What is the outcome/product from the activity and how will this be disseminated to VA?

f. Documentation of the approval process should include communication to the applicant indicating approval and if disapproved, a rationale for disapproval. Approval can be made contingent upon related VA procedures (e.g., an associated foreign travel request or an application for a CDA research award). Medical Center Directors are authorized to disapprove requests if employees' absence will negatively impact the operational mission. The official must approve or disapprove the request for EEL no later than 6 weeks from the date the request is submitted.

APPENDIX F

POST ACTIVITY REPORTING

1. A post activity report must be submitted to OAA within 30 days after completion of the EEL.
2. Exact dates of EEL.
3. Place(s) where the EEL was spent and key person(s) and institutions involved.
4. The stated objectives (paragraph 9) of the EEL and the extent to which they were accomplished. Narrative discussion must include unanticipated benefits that might have developed (either towards the employee's professional/personal development or VA mission), and unanticipated barriers that might have emerged which impaired the ability to achieve the intended purpose.
5. Whether a publication will result and status of the publication process, the publication and anticipated publication date, if applicable.
6. How the results of the stated objective(s) are to be applied to better patient care or otherwise benefit VA and the employee.
7. Additional comments as desired by either the employee or management.
8. A copy of the report should be kept locally as well as submitted within 30 days to VHA Office of Academic Affiliations. Reports are to be submitted using the following link: <https://apps.gov.powerapps.us/play/2ed3d717-5c03-4145-bf01-3d37890ed330?tenantId=e95f1b23-abaf-45ee-821d-b7ab251ab3bf>