

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To issue Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy regarding employee development.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive sets forth policies previously contained in numerous other issuances. No substantive changes have been made.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Human Resources Development Service (053), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Labor Relations.
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOK:** VA Handbook 5015, "Employee Development."
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** Refer to the Transmittal Sheet for VA Directive 5001, "General Introduction and Administration."

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

John A. Gauss
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

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Assistant Secretary for Human
Resources and Administration

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this directive is to issue Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy on employee development.

2. POLICY

a. **General.** It is the policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs to promote effective mission accomplishment and employee development. The continued ability of VA to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of America's veterans and their families depends in large part on the extent to which it can recruit, develop, and retain competent employees. Our ability to do this in part depends on the extent to which we can provide opportunities for training, growth, and development for all employees. A successful training program requires a constant assessment of changing customer needs and a commitment of sufficient resources.

b. **Delegation of Training Authority.** Except as specified in subparagraph c below, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs training approval authority is delegated to Administration Heads, who may further delegate to appropriate levels within their organization. Administration Heads or designees who have delegated authority must:

- (1) Ensure that training is mission related (5 CFR 410.101);
- (2) Systematically assess organizational, occupational, and individual training needs;
- (3) Hold supervisors accountable for assessing the most efficient and effective means or medium for meeting mission related learning and developmental needs of employees;
- (4) Establish training plans to ensure that all employees appointed as supervisors, managers, or executives are provided basic leadership training;
- (5) Ensure that the following mandatory training is conducted:

(a) **Computer Security.** The Computer Security Act of 1987, Pub. Law 100-235, and 5 CFR 930.301-30 requires periodic computer security training that spells out the department's policy, procedures, and employee role and responsibility in computer security.

(b) **Ethics.** 5 CFR 2638.703 (a) requires that each new agency employee be provided within 90 days of his/her entrance on duty, the ethics materials specified in 5 CFR 2638.703 (b).

(c) **Executives, Managers, and Supervisors.** 5 CFR, part 412 requires that all employees who are appointed as supervisors, managers, or executives are provided leadership training appropriate to their positions.

(6) Ensure that established procurement methods are used when hiring training vendors or procuring off-the-shelf training programs;

(7) Ensure that the selection of employees for training is made without regard to race, religion, national origin, sex, political preference, color, marital status, age, disabling condition, sexual orientation, parental status and with proper regard for their privacy and rights set forth in 5 U.S.C. 2302(b);

(8) Ensure that training facilities and curriculum are accessible to employees with disabilities;

(9) [Funding for Academic Degree Training: Section 1331(a) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 amends the provisions of 5 USC 4107 by expanding the authority of an agency to pay for or reimburse employees for the cost of academic degree training.

(a) This authority may be exercised when such training contributes:

1. To significantly meeting an identified agency, administration, or staff office training need that is consistent with VA's Strategic Plan;

2. To solving an identified agency staffing problem;

3. To accomplishing goals in VA's Strategic Human Capital Management Plan; and

4. To a planned, systemic, and coordinated program of professional development.

(b) This authority does not change existing VA policy pertaining to employees appointed under title 38 USC. VA officials may seek additional authority under title 38 USC to expand the provisions of this change to title 38 employees.

(c) This authority may not be exercised:

1. For the sole purpose of providing an employee an academic degree or as a means for qualifying for a position that requires an academic degree; or

2. On behalf of any employee occupying or seeking to qualify for:

a. A noncareer appointment in the Senior Executive Service;

b. Appointment to any position that is excepted from the competitive service because of its confidential policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character.

(d) This authority is delegated from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, and Deputy Assistant Secretaries or their designees. They may further delegate this authority to VISN, MSN, and VBA area directors. This authority may not be further delegated.

(e) Prior to implementing this authority, VA officials in implementing offices will establish a system of records, and develop written plans and procedures for:

1. Accounting of funds spent for academic degree training and the number of employees and types of programs enrolled in or completed;
2. Ensuring competitive procedures for selecting employees for academic degree training are consistent with the requirements of 5 CFR 335.103(b)(3) and part 300, subpart A of this chapter;
3. Ensuring institutions awarding an academic degree are accredited by a nationally recognized body, as recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; and
4. Certifying how such training will meet VA training needs, resolve an identified VA staffing problem, or accomplish a VA goal in the VA Strategic Human Capital Management Plan.

(f) VA Officials exercising this authority will ensure that employees selected to benefit from this provision are required to sign a continued service agreement prior to beginning the training.]

(10) Consider professional conferences as training when the announced purpose of the educational or instructional conference meets all the other conditions of 5 CFR 410.404.

c. Presidential Appointee Training

(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs will authorize all training for VA officials appointed by the President. This authority may not be further delegated to a subordinate. The decision to provide training to the Secretary will be deferred to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The provisions of 5 CFR 410.302 (b) (1) and EO 11895 will be followed.

(2) Requests for training for Presidential appointees will be processed through the office of the Director, Human Resources Development Service. The request will include:

(a) A completed SF 182. This will be submitted at least 10 working days prior to the start of the training;

(b) A statement justifying the training and describing how the official will apply it during his or her term of office; and

(c) A description of the training, its location, vendor, cost, and duration.

d. Contributions or Awards. The provisions of 5 CFR 410.502 and guidance from VA Ethics Office will be followed. The authority to authorize VA employees to accept cash or in kind services for training is delegated to administration and staff office heads.

e. Continued Service Agreements (CSA) 5 CFR 410.309. Each administration and staff office head will develop policies that protect the interests of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The policies will require each employee to sign a CSA before training begins. The minimum Departmental standard for requiring a CSA is courses that are 40 hours in length and cost at least \$500.00. Administration and staff office heads may develop policies that are more restrictive. Each administration and staff office head will establish written procedures for recovering costs and written procedures for waivers associated with failure to complete required service of their employees' agreements.

f. **Repayment of Training Costs.** In accordance with 5 CFR 410.405, VA employees who fail to complete training for which VA incurs a cost will be required to repay all training costs (less salary and other compensation). Waiver procedures for repayment of training costs will be determined by each administration.

g. **Training Records.** In accordance with 5 CFR, part 410, each Administration Head is required to be able to account for training paid for by appropriated funds. This includes training plans, activities, and expenditures. Each Administration Head will determine the manner, format, and length of time in which to maintain such records. Periodic requests for VA department-wide data and reports from OPM will be submitted through and coordinated by the Human Resources Development Service.

h. **Training Outside the United States.** 5 CFR 410.302 (f) requires that agencies obtain U.S. State Department advice before assigning an employee who is stationed in the continental limits of the U.S. to training outside the continental U.S. that is provided by a foreign government, international organization, or instrumentality of either. The staff proponent for coordinating assistance with the Department of State is the Human Resources Development Service.

i. **Documentation**

(1) **General.** Administration Heads will maintain training records in accordance with 5 CFR 410.701, National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA's) "General Record's Schedule 1, Civilian Personnel", Part 29, Training Records, and OPM's "Guide to Personnel Record Keeping", 1998. Training documents are not to be maintained as permanent records in the employee's personnel folder.

(2) **Policy.** It is departmental policy that the administration and staff heads are delegated authority to determine the form and manner of training records, as they consider appropriate. However, the records of training events must be readily retrievable, and will, at a minimum, include:

- (a) Each attending employee's name, title, series, and grade;
- (b) The title, date, duration, provider, and location of the training;
- (c) The approving official;
- (d) The costs of the training as described in 5 CFR 410.406.

(3) **Continued Service Agreements.** (see paragraph 2e.) Copies of the Continued Service Agreements will be maintained in a form and manner determined by the administration and service heads until the agreed-upon service time has been completed. Waivers for such agreements will also be maintained.

(4) **Exceptions.** Administration and staff heads may request an exception to the provisions of General Records Schedule. If such records are approved, the VA organization will maintain a copy of SF 115 submitted to and approved by NARA.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their employees have the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform their assignments. Each supervisor is also expected to provide appropriate resources to promote employee development and learning.

b. Employees are primarily responsible for their own learning and development.

c. The Human Resources Development Service (053), Office of Human Resources Management [and Labor Relations], is responsible for oversight of VA training policy.

4. REFERENCES

- a. 5 CFR, parts 410 and 412.
- b. 5 U.S.C., chapter 41.
- c. OPM Training Policy Handbook (HRD 97-01).
- d. Federal Acquisition Regulation.
- e. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) General Records Schedule.
- f. Executive Order (E.O.) 11348 as amended by E.O. 12107, providing for the further training of Government employees.
- g. E.O. 11895, Delegating Authority of the President to Designate Individuals Appointed by the President to Receive Training.
- h. E.O. 13111, Using Technology to Improve Training Opportunities for Federal Government Employees.
- i. E.O. 13160, Nondiscrimination on The Basis of Race, Sex, Color, National Origin, Disability, Religion, Age, Sexual Orientation, and Status as a Parent in Federally Conducted Education and Training Programs.
- [j. Federal Register, June 13, 2003.
- k. Homeland [Security Act of 2002, section 1331.]

EMPLOYEE LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To issue Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding employee development.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook sets forth mandatory procedures previously contained in numerous other issuances. Substantive changes have been made to handbook.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Human Resources Development Service (053), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Labor Relations.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5015, Employee Development.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VA Handbook 5015, Employee Development, April 15, 2002. Refer to the Transmittal Sheet for VA Handbook 5001, General Introduction and Administration.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

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EMPLOYEE LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

a. Overview of VA's Employee Learning and Professional Development Policy:

(1) Employee learning and professional development are essential to meet the long-term goals of the VA Strategic Plan and the VA Learning Strategy. In the Government Employees Training Act (GETA) of 1958, Congress stated that it is in the public interest for the government to sponsor programs to train employees in skills, knowledge, and abilities that will help them perform their official duties. In GETA, Congress required agencies to set up these training programs.

(2) VA will design or participate in programs that lead to:

(a) Improved public service;

(b) Dollar savings;

(c) Development and retention of a highly skilled and efficient workforce;

(d) Reduced employee turnover;

(e) Reasonably uniform administration of training, consistent with the missions of VA Administrations and staff offices; and,

(f) Fair and equitable treatment of Government employees with respect to training.

(3) The Federal Workforce Flexibilities Act of 2004 requires Federal agencies to regularly evaluate and modify training programs or plans in order to promote a more strategic approach to agencies' integration of training programs into overall mission accomplishment and to provide specific training to develop managers as part of a comprehensive management succession program. The Act adds the requirement that each agency, on a regular basis, evaluate each of its training plans or programs as to how that plan or program accomplishes or effectively promotes the agency's specific performance plans and strategic goals. Agencies will modify those training plans or programs, as needed, to ensure that they continually meet and support specific agency established goals. Under the Act, agency heads, in consultation with Office of Personnel Management (OPM), must establish a comprehensive management succession program that includes training of employees to develop managers. This program will include training for managers on actions, options, and strategies managers may use to address mentoring employees, improving employee performance and productivity, conducting performance appraisals, and unacceptable performance.

b. **What This Handbook Covers.** This handbook amplifies 5 C.F.R. part 410 on training and 5 C.F.R. Part 412 on supervisory development. It establishes VA policy to support those activities. This handbook covers all employees except medical and dental residents, trainees, and students in medical support programs (38 U.S.C. 7401 and VHA Manual M-8, "Academic Affairs," Pt. IV, Ch. 2). Together with 5 C.F.R. Parts 410 and 412, provides answers to most general questions about VA training programs and training policy.

c. **Use of This Handbook.** This handbook is designed to aid VA employees at all levels in clarifying their roles and responsibilities for learning and professional development. It establishes the framework of procedures to meet the intent of GETA and the Federal Workforce Flexibilities Act of 2004. The administration of VA learning and professional development programs will be aligned with and responsive to meeting VA's mission requirements and long-term strategic goals. This handbook does not include every possible situation for making policy-based decisions. Managers, training officers and staff should be flexible and innovative in administering these procedures within the stated intent of law and regulation.

2. AUTHORITIES:

a. Authority to approve training: Executive Order 11348, as amended by Executive Order 12107, Title 5 U.S.C. § 4103; 5 C.F.R. § 410.210(b) and 410.302(a)(3)(b)(1).

b. Authority to pay for professional credentials: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, Public Law 107-107, §1112; Title 5 U.S.C. § 5757.

c. Authority to pay for academic degree training:

(1) Department of Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107-296, § 1331(a); Title 5 U.S.C. § 4107;

(2) 68 Fed. Reg. 35265, 35269-35270 (June 13, 2003).

d. Authority for training program management:

(1) Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004, section 201;

(2) Executive Order No. 11348, as amended by Executive Order 12107;

(3) 5 U.S.C. § 4103; 5 C.F.R. § 410.201(a) and (c).

e. Authority to accept contributions, awards, and payments from non-government organizations incident to training: 5 C.F.R. Section 410.502(b).

3. LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

a. In order for VA to accomplish its strategic goals and missions our employees must participate in continuous learning and develop professionally. Planning for training and development starts with understanding the VA Strategic Plan. Employees must clearly understand how what they do on a day-to-day basis contributes to the success of their organization and to accomplishing the goals of VA. Managers and supervisors at all levels must clearly understand that just as their work requirements and objectives must be linked to the strategic goals of VA, learning and professional development programs must be linked and add value to organizational performance, objectives, and goals. The High Performance Development Model (HPDM) is the core competency model for VA. Information on the HPDM can be found at <http://vaww.va.gov/hpdm>. (Appendix C, "Training Evaluation")

b. Inadequate performance may indicate a need for training. However, managers should not assume that training is the only solution to a performance problem. There are usually other non-training factors

that can affect individual or organizational performance: lack of clear roles, lack of resources, and lack of clear performance objectives are just a few of these factors. Managers must ensure that training is the appropriate method to improve performance before committing funds to it. Assessing training needs should be a continuous part of planning for employee learning and professional development. (Appendix B, "Training Needs Assessment")

c. Managers and supervisors at all levels should consider how business processes impact performance outcomes at the individual and organizational level. Learning and professional development in VA should not be independent of other processes, such as workforce planning, changes in information technology, organizational realignments, competitive sourcing, or acquisition planning. All of these forces will impact the content and manner of short and long range planning for employee learning and professional development.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. **Overview.** Executives, managers and supervisors are responsible for administering employee learning and professional development. Employees are responsible for acquiring the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their current and anticipated official duties and applying what they learn to their work assignments.

b. **Delegated Training Authority:** The Secretary of VA has the primary authority to exercise training law and policy. The Secretary has delegated training authority for VA to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. This authority is further delegated as follows:

(1) Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials are authorized to pay for academic degrees for employees appointed under Title 5 United States Code. This authority may be redelegated to the facility level or organizational equivalent. No further delegations are authorized.

(2) Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials may authorize VA employees to accept contributions, awards, and payment from non-Government organizations incident to training. They may delegate this authority to facility directors or organizational equivalent. No further delegations are authorized.

(3) Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials are authorized to approve employee training requests. They may re-delegate this authority to first level supervisors. The Secretary retains authority to approve training for Presidential appointees.

(4) Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials are authorized to pay expenses for VA employees appointed under Title 5 United States Code and Hybrid Title 38 to obtain professional credentials.

(5) Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials are authorized to establish, manage, and evaluate training plans and programs, for training employees by, in, and through Government and non-Government facilities. They may re-delegate this authority to facility directors, or organizational equivalent. No further delegations are authorized.

c. **The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration:**

- (1) Serves as VA's Chief Human Capital Officer;
- (2) Serves as principal advisor to the Secretary on VA employee training and professional development matters;
- (3) Reviews VA training policies and programs to assess their effectiveness in promoting the achievement of the Agency's mission and goals;
- (4) Develops and advocates a culture of continuous learning to attract and retain employees with superior abilities; and
- (5) Leads Department-wide efforts to develop legislative, policy, and other initiatives to ensure, on behalf of the Secretary, that VA establishes, budgets for, operates, maintains and evaluates plans and programs for training agency employees.

d. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management and Labor Relations:

- (1) Develops training policy, procedures, and accountability policies and procedures to ensure mission-related training and development is integrated into agency VA strategic planning;
- (2) Evaluates the annual assessment of training needs done by those to whom training responsibility is delegated;
- (3) Conducts periodic programmatic reviews;
- (4) Ensures compliance with record keeping requirements as prescribed by regulations (5 C.F.R. 410.701 and 410.302(d), 410.311, 410.406, 410.503, and 410.602);
- (5) Ensures there are procedures in place that will enable VA to report its plans, expenditures and activities to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM);
- (6) Ensures the maintenance of records of training plans, expenditures, and records of training activities; and
- (7) Monitors overall agency progress in meeting Department training and development goals.

e. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials:

- (1) Implement, oversee, and ensure accountability for the policies contained in this handbook within their organizations;
- (2) Establish priorities for training and professional development within their organizations;
- (3) Monitor and evaluate progress toward meeting workforce planning and diversity training goals and developing recommendations for changes;
- (4) Ensure adequate funding and commitment to training and development initiatives identified as critical to their organizations;

(5) Assess organizational, occupational, and individual training needs at the national, regional, and field organization levels annually, considering the VA Strategic Plan. Funding for VA learning and development activities will be based on assessments that demonstrate that training or education will improve individual or organizational performance. VA learning and development activities will be based on a systematic analysis of organizational requirements that define the skills and abilities required to achieve VA missions now and in the future;

(6) Evaluate annually how well learning and development activities meet the short and long term goals of the VA;

(7) Ensure that there are mechanisms to account for how appropriated funds are spent on employee training and development;

(8) Ensure that approved procurement methods are used when hiring training vendors or procuring off-the-shelf training programs;

(9) Ensure that the selection of employees for training is made without regard to race, religion, national origin, sex, political preference, color, marital status, age, disabling condition, sexual orientation, parental status and with proper regard for employee privacy and rights set forth in 5 U.S.C. 2302(b); and

(10) Ensure that training facilities and curriculum are accessible to employees with disabilities

f. **The Dean, Veterans Affairs Learning University (VALU):** The Dean is the principal advisor to the Deputy Secretary on linking employee learning and professional development to VA strategic goals. The Dean provides departmental level direction on

(1) E-Learning;

(2) VA Learning Management System (VALMS); and

(3) The VA Knowledge Network.

g. **Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology (IT):**

(1) Supports operation of the (VALMS) and related on-line learning applications for the VA Information Technology (IT) network; and

(2) Provides input on strategic issues of long-range planning for VA training and professional development, considering how current and future technologies impact learning management

h. Supervisors:

(1) Periodically identify present and future training needs of their organizational unit and their employees;

(2) Develop a plan to accomplish necessary training to include making time available for training;

(3) Encourage self-development activities of employees; ensure ongoing learning and professional development for themselves; and

(4) Discuss with their employees the types of self-development activities that will assist them in achieving their career objectives. If the supervisor does not feel prepared to discuss a specific question concerning career development, the supervisor should refer the employee to a source which can help: Human Resources Management Offices, employee education officials, central office program offices, Human Resources Development Service, Employee Education System (EES - VHA), Employee Development and Training Office (EDT – VBA) or the Health Care Staff Development and Retention Office.

i. **Employees:** Employees have an important role in their own learning and professional development. They share responsibility with their supervisors for identifying training needs in relation to job requirements and for identifying sources for meeting those needs. Employees also have primary responsibility for self-development activities beyond those required by their jobs. It is the supervisor and employee's shared responsibility to create a professional development plan.

5. TYPES OF TRAINING

a. VA provides its employees with several types of training. Some is general training provided to most employees; some is of a much more limited nature and is provided only as the individual situation warrants; some is designed to help employees perform their present duties; some is designed to help them prepare for future assignments. Depending on the circumstances, training may be provided at the direction of management or at the request of the employee. Supervisors and employees must understand the various types of training if they are to make full use of training programs. The types of developmental activities include: Classroom, e-learning, rotational/development/assignments, special projects, and self-study.

b. **Mandatory Training for all Federal Employees:** VA Officials must ensure that training mandated by Federal regulations is offered and attended within 90 days of appointment, annually as appropriate, or as part of continuing professional development.

(1) **Computer Security:** The Computer Security Act (1988) and Federal regulations (5 C.F.R. § 930.301-305) require the head of each agency provide initial, continuing, and refresher training at the awareness level, policy level, implementation level, and performance level for executives, program and functional managers, information resources managers, security and audit personnel, automated data processing management, operations, and programming staff, and end users. The Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology will prescribe the content and manner of this training for VA employees.

(2) **Ethics:** 5 C.F.R. § 2638.703(b) requires that each new employee receives an initial ethics orientation within 90 days of entering service. Employees required by 5 C.F.R. § 2634 to file public financial disclosure reports and VA contracting officers are required to receive annual training. The

Office of General Counsel for VA will determine the frequency, content, and manner of ethics training for VA employees

(3) **Executive, Managers, and Supervisors:** Federal regulation (5 C.F.R. § 412.103) requires agencies to systematically develop executives, managers, supervisors, and candidates for these positions. Agency programs must provide for:

- (a) Initial training for incumbents based on the results of needs assessments;
- (b) Continual learning experiences so that the individual achieves the mastery level of proficiency for his or her current management level positions; and
- (c) Systematic development of candidates for higher management levels, including OPM approved formal Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Programs.
- (d) VA Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP): Will be planned, administered, and monitored by the Director, Human Resources Development Service, Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations. The program will meet the requirements of 5 C.F.R. Part 412, for an OPM approved program.

(4) **Supervisory Training:** Supervisory training is a top priority of VA. Each VA Central Office (VACO) component and field facility will schedule training to ensure supervisors are trained adequately, not only in the technical requirements of their position but also in the common knowledge and abilities needed in all supervisory positions. Each Administration and Staff Office is encouraged to assess the need for supervisory training tailored to their specific mission. Employee survey data typically demonstrate the critical importance of the relationship between an employee and his/her supervisor. Problems or dissatisfaction with the relationship are a leading cause for employee turnover. Supervisory training should include the following competencies:

- (a) Ability to assess personnel regulations and practices affecting the supervisor's job, for example, merit principles and prohibited personnel practices;
- (b) Knowledge of recruitment, classification and position management flexibilities;
- (c) Ability to motivate and lead subordinates;
- (d) Knowledge of planning and scheduling work for employees;
- (e) Ability to rate/appraise performance;
- (f) Ability to handle disciplinary problems;
- (g) Ability to mentor employees and improve employee performance and productivity;
- (h) Knowledge of leave administration;
- (i) Knowledge of labor relations regulations;

(j) Ability to use Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mediation; and knowledge of Diversity/EEO;

(k) Ability to use effective interpersonal skills; and

(l) Ability to understand generational differences.

(5) **General Employee Privacy Awareness Training:** 45 U.S.C. § 164, Security and Privacy, requires that each Federal agency affected by this policy to train all members of its workforce on the policies and procedures with respect to protected health information as appropriate and necessary to carry out their functions. Title 45 further requires that agencies document this training. The Office of Cyber and Information Security, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology will determine the content and manner of this training.

(6) **Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act:** Public Law 107-174, requires each Federal agency to provide to its employees such training regarding the rights and remedies applicable to such employees under this law. The Office of Resolution Management, (08) and the Employee Relations Service, (051A) will determine the content and, manner of this training for VA employees.

(7) **Information of the U.S. Constitution:** § 111 Title 1, of the Fiscal Year 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Pub. L. 108-447), enacted into law on December 8, 2004 requires the head of each Federal agency or department each year to:

(a) Provide each new employee of the agency or department with educational and training materials concerning the United States Constitution as part of the orientation materials provided to the new employee; and

(b) Provide educational and training materials concerning the United States Constitution to each employee of the agency or department each year.

(c) Information may be found at www.constitutionday.us. and www.usalearning.gov/coursecatalog (type “constitution” in the search box.)

(8) **Safety, Occupational Health, and Fire Protection:** All employees should receive appropriate training in safety, occupational health, and fire protection, as set forth in VA Directive 7700.

(9) **Equal Employment Opportunity:** Managers and employees must receive enough training to ensure that they understand, support, and implement the equal employment opportunity program. 42 U.S.C. 2000e – 16 (b) 1997.

c. **Other Training:**

(1) **On-The-Job Training (OJT).** All employees should be helped to acquire the knowledge, skills, abilities, habits, and attitudes needed to perform their assigned work and to develop and maintain satisfactory working relationships with supervisors and fellow employees.

(2) **Security Training for VA Employees Working Overseas:**

(a) All VA employees transferring to an overseas location under Chief Mission Authority and those personnel requesting country clearance to perform extended temporary duty (TDY defined as more than 30 days at an overseas location) must complete security training before they travel. A four day course, "Serving Abroad for Families and Employees," is mandatory for VA employees and highly recommended for their eligible family members. The Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) conducts this training.

(b) Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials will approve this training. Employees will submit a funded SF-182 to the FSI registrar.

(3) **Prevention of Sexual Harassment and the Discrimination Complaint Process:** New employees will receive this training within 60 days of entering service. All employees will receive a minimum of two hours refresher training every two years.

(4) **New Employee Orientation:** Managers should ensure that all new employees are oriented to the VA, to their specific working situations and, if needed, to the Federal civil service. This orientation should take place in three stages within the first 90 days of service: when employees are appointed, when they report to their place of work and after a period of adjustment. Scheduling and conducting the orientation is a joint responsibility of the operating Human Resources Office and the employee's supervisor. The orientation should cover but is not limited to the following subjects:

- (a) Mission of VA, the facility, and the organizational units;
- (b) Description of duties and performance standards;
- (c) Responsibilities of employees;
- (d) Salary and benefits (leave, insurance, retirement, etc.);
- (e) Employee safety;
- (f) Equal Employment Opportunity policies and programs;
- (g) Labor-management agreements;
- (h) Training, development and advancement opportunities;
- (i) Position classification, job grading, pay policies; and
- (j) Administration specific classification, job grading, and pay policies;

(k) Knowledge of the U.S. Constitution.

6. PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEE TRAINING

a. The Secretary of will authorize all training for VA officials appointed by the President. A list of current Presidential Appointees to VA may be obtained from the Office of Executive Resources (052). This authority may not be further delegated. The decision to provide training to the Secretary will be deferred to OPM.

b. Process requests through the Executive Resources Service (052) to include:

(1) A completed SF 182. This will be submitted through the Office of Executive Resources, (052), at least 10 working days before the training starts;

(2) A statement justifying the training and describing how the official will apply it during his or her term of office; and

(3) A description of the training, its location, vendor, cost, and duration.

7. FUNDING FOR ACADEMIC DEGREE TRAINING

a. Section 1331(a) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 amends the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 4107 by expanding the authority of an agency to pay for or reimburse employees for the cost of academic degree training. This authority may be exercised when such training helps:

(1) Significantly meet an identified agency, administration, or staff office training need that is consistent with VA's Strategic Plan;

(2) Solve an identified agency staffing problem;

(3) Accomplish goals in VA's Strategic Human Capital Management Plan; and

(4) Provide a planned, systemic and coordinated program of professional development.

b. This authority does not change existing VA policy about employees appointed under Title 38 U.S.C. for the Health Professionals Education Assistance Program. VA officials may seek additional authority under title 38 U.S.C. to expand the provisions of this change to Title 38 employees. Academic Degree training for Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 health care professions is addressed in VHA Handbook 1020.1, National Nursing Education Initiative.

c. VA officials may not use this authority:

(1) For the sole purpose of providing an employee an academic degree or as a way to qualify for a position that requires an academic degree;

(2) On behalf of any employee occupying or seeking to qualify for a non-career appointment in the Senior Executive Service; or

(3) For appointment to any position that is excepted from the competitive service because of its confidential policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character.

d. This authority is delegated from the Secretary to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. It is further delegated to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials and Deputy Assistant Secretaries or their designees. They may further delegate this authority to the facility level or organizational equivalent. This authority may not be further delegated.

e. VA officials exercising this authority will ensure that employees selected to benefit from this provision are required to sign a continued service agreement before beginning the training. (See paragraph 15 “Continued Service Agreements.”)

f. Before implementing this authority, VA officials in implementing offices must establish a system of records, and develop written plans and procedures for:

(1) Accounting for funds spent for academic degree training and the number of employees and types of programs enrolled in or completed;

(2) Ensuring competitive procedures for selecting employees for academic degree training are consistent with the requirements of 5 C.F.R. 335.103(b)(3) and part 300, subpart A of this chapter;

(3) Ensuring institutions awarding an academic degree are accredited by a nationally recognized body, as recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; (See Appendix G “Rules for Determining VA Funding for Higher Education”); and

(4) Certifying how this training will meet VA training needs, resolve an identified VA staffing problem, or accomplish a VA goal in the VA Strategic Human Capital Management Plan.

g. This authority does not restrict existing policies for funding individual college courses.

8. FUNDING FOR PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

a. VA may pay for expenses for employees to obtain professional credentials. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials may approve funding for professional credentials for employees appointed under Title 5 and Hybrid Title 38 employees and must ensure that the provisions of Public Law 107-107 below are met. For the purposes of this policy this funding may be authorized for employee development purposes. Payment for credentials is not an employee entitlement or benefit.

b. VA may pay for:

(1) Expenses for employees to obtain professional credentials, including expenses for professional accreditation, State-imposed and professional licenses, and professional certifications; or

(2) Examinations to obtain those credentials. An employee may request reimbursement of expenses for the examination after successfully passing it.

c. VA may not pay for:

(1) Credentials of employees occupying or seeking to qualify for appointments in any position that is excepted from the competitive service because of the confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character of the position.

(2) VA will not pay for credentials or licenses that are necessary to meet basic qualifications requirements when an individual is applying for a position.

d. Each administration and staff office head is delegated the authority to determine if and how this provision will be implemented in their respective organizations.

9. FOREIGN TRAVEL IN CONJUNCTION WITH APPROVED TRAINING ACTIVITIES

a. Agencies may approve employee requests to attend training and exchange activities outside of the continental United States. These include activities that promote the sharing of ideas, developing skills, and fostering mutual understanding and cooperation among nations. The activities may be directly or indirectly funded by US government funds or non government private organizations.

b. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Facility directors or equivalent and VACO staff office heads may approve employees to attend these training activities. The Secretary and Deputy Secretary are delegated authority to authorize foreign travel of VACO employees. The Under Secretary for Health, the Under Secretary of Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs are delegated authority to authorize or approve foreign travel of VHA, VBA and NCA employees. VHA and VBA field facility directors are delegated authority to authorize or approve travel to Canada and Mexico, and for travel to other foreign countries, the directors have approval authority when no appropriated travel funds are involved. Foreign travel, except to Canada or Mexico, involving appropriated travel funds must be approved by the appropriate Under Secretary. Request for foreign travel by VHA or VBA Central Office staff and field facility directors require approval by the appropriate Under Secretary. (MP- part II, ch. 2, appendix A) Appendix E contains specific instructions for the minimum requirements for data collection for employees participating in foreign travel in conjunction with approved training activities. Administration and staff offices may impose additional requirements for data collection.

10. ACCEPTING CONTRIBUTIONS AND AWARDS FROM NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS INCIDENT TO TRAINING.

a. Section 4111 of Title 5 U.S.C. states: “To the extent authorized by regulation of the President, contributions and awards incident to training in non-government facilities, and payment of travel, subsistence, and other expenses incident to attendance at meetings, may be made to and accepted by an employee, without regard to section 209 of title 18, if the contributions, awards, and payments are made by an organization determined by the Secretary of the Treasury to be an organization described by section 501(c)(3) of title 26 which is exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of title 26.” Travel payments and contributions towards expenses for non government sponsored training or meetings are restricted and require prior approval from a delegated VA official. Guidance on the policy for payment of travel expenses from non-federal sources is contained in 41 CFR chapter 304 as well as VA policy MP-1, part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3 (j), and the Office of General Counsel (OGC) website: <http://vaww/gc.va.gov/ethics>. The Web site location for 41 CFR is: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/cfrassemble.cgi?title=200441>. The delegated official may authorize in writing, employees to accept a contribution or award (in cash or in kinds) related to training or to accept payment (in cash or in kind) of travel, subsistence, and other expenses incident to attendance at meetings if in the delegated official's

judgment the following conditions are met: The contribution, award, or payment is not a reward for services to the organization prior to the training or meeting; and acceptance of the contribution, award, or payment:

(1) Would not reflect unfavorably on the employee's ability to carry out official duties in a fair and objective manner;

(2) Would not compromise the honesty and integrity of Government programs or of Government employees and their official actions or decisions;

(3) Would be compatible with the ethics on Government Act of 1978 as amended; and

(4) Would otherwise be proper and ethical for the employee concerned given the circumstances of the particular case.

b. Delegated officials are strongly encouraged to consult with their local ethics officials before approving such awards.

11. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS. The requirements for establishing training and professional development plans are found in section 4103(a) of Title 5 U.S.C. and Executive Order 11348.

(a) Managers and supervisors should review their organization's training plans annually. These plans should clearly state employee training assessments, priorities, and costs. Significant alterations made to training rules, regulations or VA's mission may require an interim change to an organization's training plan. Any and all formal training events that are directly related to the participant's job function and responsibilities must be documented in a written training plan. At a minimum, the training plan should include:

(1) The central performance objectives of the organization;

(2) Brief explanation of the training course or event's relation to the organization's mission or strategic goal;

(3) The projected number of participants to be enrolled in the training course or event; and

(4) The projected cost of the training course/event, including the provider or vendor name.

b. Managers, supervisors, and executives should have written professional development plans. All full time, non-supervisory employees should have a professional development plan.

c. Where feasible, organizations should establish Individual Learning Accounts (ILA). An ILA is a base amount of resources expressed in terms of dollars or hours or both that are set aside for an employee to use for his or her learning and development. These accounts may include money, time off, supervised independent study on duty time, or a combination of these. The employee may use his or her account to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly relate to the employee's official duties. (See www.OPM.gov for a detailed explanation.)

12. SOURCES OF TRAINING

a. **Overview.** All employees may obtain training from various sources, both governmental and non-governmental. The decision as to which source to use will depend on considerations of cost, convenience, and quality. (See VHA Manual M-8, “Academic Affairs,” pt. IV ch. 2 for additional policies affecting VHA employees.)

b. **Government Sources:**

(1) **Department of Veterans Affairs.** VA offers a variety of training and should be the first source considered by an employee when seeking training. VA training is generally less expensive and much more likely to be department-specific. All employees with training responsibilities should be aware of these offerings within VA. Often, cooperative-training arrangements can be made between field facilities or between services within a field facility. Other VA sources include: the VHA Employee Education System, the VA Knowledge Network, the VBA Office of Employee Development and Training which includes the VBA Academy, and the Health Care Staff and Retention Office. Several VA organizations regularly schedule and conduct training:

(a) VA Learning Online (VALO) is a Web-based campus that contains courses that VA employees can access from their desk top computers at work or home. College courses, personal development courses, and information technology are just a few of the offerings at VALO at www.vcampus.com/valo or vaww.va.gov/valu_lrn.

(b) VA Knowledge Network uses digital satellite technology to broadcast multiple channels of learning and communication programming directly to VA work stations and classrooms. Programs on the network may be found using the VA Learning Catalog on the VA intranet at <http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/>.

(c) Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations and other VACO components.

(d) Field facilities (Designated Education Offices), Human Resources Management Offices and the various services or divisions, and other continuing education units administered by VA.

(e) Once fully implemented, the VALMS will be the single on-line entry point for all VA conducted education and training programs.

(2) **The Office of Personnel Management:** OPM conducts interagency training at its Management Development Centers, the Federal Executive Institute, and on its on line learning portal “USA Learning” (formerly Golearn) at www.usalearning.gov. This site offers a number of free and for fee courses.

(3) **The Graduate School, U.S. Department of Agriculture** offers a variety of classroom and distance learning opportunities at www.grad.usda.gov

(4) **Interagency Training.** VA facilities are encouraged to provide for cooperative training efforts with other agencies. VA facilities may, in turn, make their training available to other Federal agencies provided that this does not interfere with VA’s mission and there is no substantial cost to VA or there is reimbursement for additional costs.

c. **Non-Government Sources.** Employees may take training from non-government sources if the following conditions are met:

- (1) Adequate training is not reasonably available by, in, or through a Government facility;
- (2) The training is the most practical and least costly to the Government; and
- (3) The non-government facility does not discriminate based on race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or status as a parent.

13. SELECTION OF TRAINEES

a. All VA executives, managers, and supervisors must ensure that VA employees and other individuals who participate in VA-conducted education and training programs are not discriminated against based on race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or status as parent. (See also Appendix D, “Requesting Training.”)

b. Individuals may file a complaint if they feel they have been discriminated against. Employees and non-employees may file complaints under the provisions of Executive Order 13160. The complaint must be filed within 180 days of the incident. Remedies under the provisions of the Executive Orders are limited to non-monetary, equitable relief. Refer all complaints by employees to the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Resolution Management, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. Complaints of discrimination filed by non-employees who participate in VA-sponsored training will be forwarded to the appropriate Administration or staff office for processing. Further details of the complaint processing procedures under Executive Order 13160 may be obtained through the Office of Resolution Management or the Department of Justice Web site: www.usdoj.gov.

c. **Training and Promotional Opportunities.** When the primary purpose of training is to prepare employees in the competitive service (including Veterans Readjustment Act employees) for advancement or such training is required for promotion, selection for the training must be made under competitive procedures. 5 C.F.R. § 410.307(b). Consult the local Human Resources Management Office for details.

14. PROCUREMENT OF TRAINING

a. An agency may “pay, or reimburse an employee for necessary expenses” incurred in connection with approved training. The head of an agency determines which expenses constitute necessary training expenses under 5 U.S.C. § 4109.

b. VA may pay for all or part of expenses related to individual training events and/or professional development, to include tuition reimbursement for individual college courses. Funds for these activities may come from appropriated or other program accounts. The process of paying for training products and services is an issue of procurement approval procedures. Refer to Appendix D, “Requesting Training” for a detailed explanation.

15. CONTINUED SERVICE AGREEMENTS (CSA)

a. Before attending training an employee subject to VA's continued service agreement must sign an agreement to continue in service after training is completed. The period of service will be equal to at least three times the length of the training. With a signed agreement, the agency has a right to recover training costs, except pay or other compensation, if the employee voluntarily separates from Government service. An example of a CSA can be found at section G "Employee's Agreement to Continue in Service" of SF182, "Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training."

b. When VA pays for employee learning and professional development it expects to get a reasonable return on the investment from the employee in terms of service and performance, despite the fact that employee training and development is a necessary business expense. Except for the cases below, VA officials may decide when a continued service agreement will be required. VA employees must have a continued service agreement when:

(1) The employee is approved for academic degree training;

(2) The employee is approved for a training event or series of training events that cost over \$2,500 per fiscal year and/or the training event or series of events exceed 160 classroom, simulation, e-learning, or OJT hours; or

(3) The employee is approved for payment for training to obtain professional credentials or payment for the credential itself, when costs exceed \$2,500 per fiscal year. The minimum amount of required continued service for payment for a professional credential is one year.

c. Before exercising their authority for 15 b.(1) – (3), VA officials must establish written procedures for requiring a continued service agreement and waiver of recover procedures.

d. If an employee leaves government service due to no fault of the employee, the employee is not liable to repay training cost.

e. If an employee transfers to another agency, the payment agreed to under the CSA may not be required unless the official authorizing the training notifies the employee before the effective date of the entrance into the service of the other agency that payment will be required. (5 U.S.C. 4108)

16. DOCUMENTING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

a. Organizations shall maintain a record of the payments made for travel, tuition, fees and other necessary training expenses for 5 years.

b. The requirement for maintaining training records applies to both manual and automated systems. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials must insure that essential training data elements described below are readily available for their use and to respond to oversight inquiries from the General Accountability Office, (GAO), the Office of Management and Budget, (OMB), OPM, and Congress. Individual employee training records shall not be maintained in an employee's official personnel folder.

c. Required Training Data Elements:

(1) **Employee Data:** Each Administration and Staff Office is required to maintain the following minimum essential training data elements for each employee's learning event and professional development program:

- (a) Employee's name
- (b) Employee's social security number
- (c) Center
- (d) Grade
- (e) Occupational series
- (f) Manager/supervisor's name
- (g) Organization
- (h) Cost of event/ program
- (i) Type of Training
- (j) CSA Required – y/n

(2) **Learning Event Data:**

- (a) Event name
- (b) Training delivery method (classroom, e-learning, OJT, etc.)
- (c) Cost
- (d) Start date
- (e) End date
- (f) Location of training
- (g) Name of provider
- (h) Name of training facility
- (i) Number of hours
- (j) Number of credit hours
- (k) Number of Continuing Education Units (CEU)

(l) Certification (y/n)

(m) Continued Service Agreement: (CSA) y/n

(n) Degree

GLOSSARY

1. Academic Degree Training: This is a specialized long-term development process. Its goal is to meet current and future shortfalls in specialized knowledge or training required to meet the mission or strategic goals of VA.
2. Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): A codification of the general and permanent rules published in the Federal Register by the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government.
3. Credentials: Professional accreditations, state-imposed and professional licenses and professional certifications.
4. High Cost Training: Training events and professional development programs that cost \$2,500.00 or more per fiscal year are high cost training events. Employees who attend multiple training events that total more than \$2,500 per fiscal year will be considered as having attended high costs training events. Example: Employee Jones attends 4 separate training events in a fiscal year that cost \$850.00 each. The total cost is \$3,400. This is high cost training.
5. High Performance Development Model (HPDM): Is an employee development model adopted for use VA wide. It contains six components: Core competencies, continuous learning continuous assessment, performance based interviewing, coaching and mentoring, and performance management.
6. Individual Learning Accounts (ILA): A base amount of resources expressed in terms of dollars or hours or both that are set aside for an employee to use for learning and development.
7. Law: Act of the United States Congress, usually signed by the President.
8. Learning Management System (LMS): An enterprise level software and hardware package designed to enable an organization to plan, deliver, and manage all learning events in the organization.
9. Long Term Training: For the purposes of this Handbook, long term training is any training that exceeds 160 hours of classroom instruction, simulation, OJT, or other learning event that is scheduled to exceed 160 hours of contact time. The events include but are not limited to certification training, re-certification training, retraining, or in-depth training in a specialized area such as labor relations, employee relations, or academic degree training.
10. Policy: General guidelines that regulate organizational behavior.
11. Professional Development: This is a long term process designed to prepare employees to gain in-depth knowledge and skills in their specialty to enable them to accomplish long term missions and strategic goals of the VA and to prepare the employees to become subject matter experts in their career fields.
12. Procedure: Methods of handling activities; more specific than policies.

13. Professional Development Plan, (PDP) (sometimes called individual development plan (IDP)): A written document that outlines how an employee will improve current performance and or meet future anticipated performance requirements.
14. Regulation: Specific guidelines that regulate organizational behavior.
15. Short Term Training: These events are generally characterized as being narrow in subject matter, geared toward improving current performance and designed to build skills or knowledge aimed at meeting short to mid term mission requirements. They may also include events that meet the requirement for competency building.
16. Standard Form 182: Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training. This form is used to start the process of requesting and procuring training.
17. Training: "Training" means the process of providing for and making available to an employee, and placing or enrolling the employee in a planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum, subject, system, or routine of instruction or education, in scientific, professional, technical, mechanical, trade, clerical, fiscal, administrative, or other fields which will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency's mission and performance goals. (5 U.S.C. 4101)

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Purpose and Scope:

a. Annual assessment of organizational, occupational, and individual training needs. See section 303 of Executive Order.

b. Method. The method an agency uses to conduct training needs assessment shall meet the requirements of Title 5 U.S.C chapter 41, Executive Order 11348 and 5 C.F.R. §410.203.

c. Training needs assessment is the continuous process of ensuring learning and professional development activities are aligned with the stated objectives and strategic goals of VA and that learning and development are the appropriate tools to improve individual and organizational performance. These assessments focus on individual, organizational and occupational performance requirements. Training needs assessments include very informal approaches such as conversations with an employee to very formal, structured assessments involving one or more assessment techniques. Managers and supervisors are accountable for ensuring a sound basis for planning, programming, budgeting, and evaluating their training programs. The methods listed below are meant to be only examples of the many tools available to VA managers and supervisors to perform training needs assessments. Keep in mind that “training” may not be the method for improving performance. Most performance problems have multiple causes such as environmental factors, employee morale, role clarification, and organizational structure to name some of the most common contributing causes.

2. Methods:

a. Individual Training Needs Assessment: Most projected learning events are based on identified requirements from job related knowledge, skills, and abilities and organizational mission objectives. This assessment is focused on the individual employee, generally on immediate or short-term job performance results for routine duties. The need for training here most often can be determined by supervisors and employees from:

(1) Direct Observations of Performance

(2) Records and Reports

b. Occupational Needs Assessment: This assessment focuses on what skill requirements are needed to support organizational goals. This assessment is more complex than individual needs assessment and usually needs the collaboration between functional area supervisors and subject matter experts from local HR offices, OHRM, or OPM. This assessment focuses on mid to long-term performance objectives and is generally performed when career fields are validated. This assessment can be done through:

(1) Interviews with Business Line Managers

(2) Focus Groups

(3) Surveys

(4) Trend Analysis

c. Organizational Needs Assessment: Training needs at this level are derived from executive orders, Federal regulations, law, and VACO policy. This level of assessment examines what is required to accomplish the strategic goals of VA as it responds to veterans, Congress and other stakeholders. Its focus is long-term. These needs are determined at the highest level of VA leadership. They are specified and refined down from the Secretary through the agency from the Under Secretaries, the Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials.

TRAINING EVALUATION

1. Purpose and Scope:

- a. Purpose: 5 CFR 410.601, Evaluating Training, describes the requirement for training evaluations.
- b Reference: See Kirkpatrick, Donald L., Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels, Barrett-Koehler Publishing, San Francisco, CA, 1996.

REQUESTING TRAINING

1. Purpose and Scope:

a. Each agency shall maintain records of its training plans, expenditures, and activities as required in CFR. 410.302(d), 410.311, 410.406, 410.503, 410.602 and report its plans, expenditures and activities to the Office of Personnel Management at such times and in such form as the office describes.

b. VA must be able to account for public funds spent for employee learning and professional development. The process for accounting begins with a request for training or professional development. Each request for a training event or professional development must be preceded by a training needs assessment. (See Appendix B “Training Needs Assessment.”) After the content and method for training have been established, the following procedures should be followed:

2. Procedure: Each office is responsible for processing and tracking training requests. Once fully implemented VA wide, the VALMS will greatly simplify the process of requesting and approving training and professional development. Until the VALMS is implemented at VA organizations the following steps will be followed:

a. All requests for training resources must be approved before training can be procured.

b. Once training has been approved, supervisors, managers or other delegated officials can procure individual training and/or group training, using the purchase card and the SF-182. (Hard copy or electronic version)

c. The Purchase Card: All purchases made with the purchase card are subject to the Purchase Card Procedures set forth in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). Cardholders are required to adhere to the requirements of federal and department-wide specific procurement rules and are expected to exercise good business judgment in making purchase card purchases. If a vendor cannot be found that accepts the card, other methods of procurement may be utilized. The purchase card should be used to purchase any training which will require the completion of a continuing service agreement (CSA). When used for training, appropriate documentation must accompany the training request (SF 182).

d. “Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training” SF-182. This form is authorized for use to contract training and to certify payment of approved training expenses under the following conditions:

(1) The training cost of a single training event, program or instructional service does not exceed the simplified acquisition process dollar limit established by The Federal Acquisition Regulation;

(2) The cost is of fixed nature, i.e., price per student or price per course, program or service; and

(3) The program, course, or instructional service is off-the-shelf and no modification or development resulting in an increased cost to the government is needed to meet the organization’s needs.

e. The SF-182 will be used for all individual and group training which will require the completion of a continuing service agreement; and the approving official must concur on these requests.

f. The local budget office staff will certify all invoices for payment and/or consolidate purchase card statements.

g. Federal rules require that all training involving appropriated funds must be completed successfully. When completing individual training, a grade of "C" or better is considered successful completion for all college courses. Any employee who fails to complete a course successfully is personally responsible for reimbursement of all training costs associated with training to the local finance and accounting office. The approving official may waive collection of training costs when the circumstances are beyond the control of the employee.

FOREIGN TRAVEL IN CONJUNCTION WITH APPROVED TRAINING ACTIVITIES

1. Approval

- a. Employees appointed under title 38 U.S.C. will get approval from the Office of The Chief Academic Affiliation;
- b. Employees assigned to the Veterans Benefits Administration will get approval from the Office of Employee Development and Training;
- c. Employees assigned to the National Cemetery Administration will get their approval from the Director, Administration Service;
- d. Employees assigned to the major VACO Staff Offices will get their approval from their staff office heads; and
- e. All other employees will get their approval from their facility level director.

2. Data Collection. Organizations authorizing VA employees' foreign travel will, at a minimum, collect and maintain for five years, the following data elements:

a. Participant Data:

- (1) Name
- (2) Grade
- (3) Series
- (4) Administration or staff office
- (5) Foreign country visited
- (6) Purpose

b. Funding Data:

- (1) Amount of funds spent
- (2) The source of funds: Department/Agency/Appropriation, Other US Government Transfer, Foreign Government, US Private/Personal Sector, Foreign Private/Personal Sector.

RULES FOR DETERMINING VA FUNDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Purpose and Scope: VA may pay for the costs of college degrees for employees, may reimburse employees for tuition assistance, and may repay student loans for college degrees. Employees and supervisors must ensure that when permission is granted to obtain funding for a college degree that the degree is awarded from an institution accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

a. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has published a memorandum entitled *Strengthening Oversight of Use of Diploma Mill Credentials in the Federal Government*. This memorandum gives guidance on the types of circumstances of courses that may be funded by Federal agencies. The complete memorandum can be viewed at [www.opm.gov/Strategic Management of Human Capitol/2004/05-13-04Diplomamill.asp](http://www.opm.gov/Strategic%20Management%20of%20Human%20Capitol/2004/05-13-04Diplomamill.asp)

b. Four distinct categories of higher education were identified:

(1) **Conventional/Accredited:** Degree-granting schools that are accredited by accrediting institutions recognized by the Secretary of Education.

(2) **Non-Accredited/Pending Accreditation:** Schools that are not accredited by an accrediting institution recognized by DoED; but offer a curriculum for advanced learning similar to a conventional/accredited institution which enhance an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities for a position; and are in the process of seeking accreditation from an organization recognized by DoED and have received "pre-accreditation" or "candidate for accreditation" status. These schools are not accredited by an accrediting institution recognized by DoED but are in the process of seeking accreditation from an organization recognized by DoED and have received "pre-accreditation" or "candidate for accreditation" status. Based on information from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education, DoED, reaching this step in the accreditation process requires substantial review and a rigorous test, and that most schools reaching this position are accredited. Such schools must establish that their resources, facilities, financial conditions, faculty, and courses of study are rigorous and legitimate.

(3) **Non-Accredited/Other:** Schools that generally have a traditional curriculum but have chosen not to seek accreditation and thus do not qualify under criteria 1 or 2. In addition, foreign institutions that offer courses of study comparable to institutions accredited by organizations recognized by DoED fall in this group. These institutions may be accredited by appropriate organizations in their home country, but not by organizations recognized by DoED.

(4) OPM does not have the statutory authority, mission or capability of evaluating the quality of these programs. Without a fair and objective process to determine if the programs offered by these schools are equivalent to those that are fully accredited, or have received "pre-accreditation" or "candidate for accreditation" status, the human resources staff of the Executive Branch agencies cannot evaluate this education and determine whether it is qualifying for Federal employment purposes. Because we cannot evaluate these programs, at this time we are not in a position to determine whether training or education from "Non-Accredited/Other" schools meets the requirements set forth in law, regulation or policy for many of the activities described in this memorandum.

(5) ***Non-Qualifying***: Non-traditional schools that are not accredited by accrediting institutions recognized by the Secretary of Education and that may award degrees or certificates with little or no course work completed by the student. These institutions often award degrees based largely on an assessment of the student's life experience or cash payments and may translate those experiences into fraudulent curriculum transcripts, giving a false impression of a structured curriculum. Education is considered Non-Qualifying if it is determined that it is not equivalent in content to Conventional/Accredited higher education programs. This group includes diploma mills and organizations that simply sell counterfeit degrees, which would also fall into this category.

(6) Schools determined to be Non-Qualifying may or may not operate legally depending on State laws and their forming charter. In some instances, legal action has been taken to force these institutions out of operation and schools have been designated as "diploma mills."

(7) Based on the four categories of higher education defined (Conventional/Accredited, Non-Accredited/Pending Accreditation, Non-Accredited/Other, and Non-Qualifying), the applicability of each category to the following activities is explained below:

(a) Student Loan Repayment

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 4107 and 5379, OPM's policy limits student loan repayment to colleges and universities that are accredited by nationally recognized bodies (i.e., Conventional/Accredited).

(b) Academic Degree Training Programs

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 4107, OPM's policy limits sending employees for degree training to colleges and universities that are accredited by nationally recognized bodies (i.e., Conventional/Accredited).

(c) Employee Training/Training Reimbursement

Employee training is not specifically limited to Conventional/Accredited schools. 5 CFR 410.601 states only that the agency head shall evaluate training to determine how well it meets short and long range program needs by occupations, organizations, or other appropriate groups. The agency head may conduct the evaluation in the manner and frequency he or she considers appropriate. Consequently, training may be obtained from Non-Accredited/Pending Accreditation and Non-Accredited/Other schools if the training content meets the agency program needs. An agency may reimburse employees for all or part of the costs of the training or education. (5 USC 4109 (a) (2))

(d) Education to Meet Qualification Requirements

1. Under OPM's Operating Manual, "Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions," Section 4, education from degree-granting schools that are accredited by accrediting institutions recognized by the Secretary of Education satisfies degree or education requirements.
2. Degrees obtained from Non-Accredited/Pending Accreditation institutions may suffice if certain provisions are met. First, the school must fully meet the definition of Non-Accredited/Pending Accreditation. Employees or applicants can be required to provide written documentation of a school's status before the agency makes a judgment as to whether education is qualifying. This ensures that the course work is equivalent to conventional higher education programs of U.S. institutions.
3. OPM's education policy also details the provisions for assessing credits given for life experience under Other Education. The college or university must identify the course work area(s) or course(s) for which credit was given, and there must be a direct link between credit given and the course objective or syllabus. Life experience credit for courses that are not identified in the school's course catalog as part of the school's curriculum is not acceptable, unless the college or university is giving credit for course work that is a prerequisite for more advanced courses included in its curriculum.
4. OPM is revising and will issue changes to its handbooks, public information, and forms to clarify these issues. We are consulting with interested parties in this process. You will see changes in the following:

Activity	Consideration For	Conventional Accredited	Non-Accredited/ Pending Accreditation	Non-Accredited/Other	Non-Qualifying (includes Diploma Mills)
Student Loan Repayment	<i>Pay</i>	Yes	No	No	No
Academic Degree Training Program	<i>Training</i>	Yes	No	No	No
Tuition Reimbursement or Employee Training	<i>Training</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Position Qualification Requirements (including Student Educational Employment Programs (SEEP))	<i>Qualification (Eligibility for SEEP)</i>	Yes	Yes (No for SEEP)	No	No

2. POLICY GUIDANCE

Delegated Examining Operations Handbook
OPM Operating Manual, "Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions"
Training Policy Handbook (OPM web site)
HR Flexibilities (OPM web site)
Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) Initiative Training Data Elements
INV-020 - Questions and Answers About Background Investigations

3. OPM-CONTROLLED FORMS (Subject to publication and notice periods)

OF 612 - Optional Application for Federal Employment
OPM Form 1300 - Presidential Management Fellow Application
Standard Forms (SF) 85/85P/86 - Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive/Public Trust/National Security Position
OF 510 - Applying for a Federal Job
IS-15 - Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations
INV Form 43 - Investigation Request for Educational Registrar and Dean of Students Record Data

4. ADVICE TO THE PUBLIC AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

OPM.GOV

USAJOBS - Resume and Vacancy Announcement Builder
Resume Builder

5. VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT BUILDER

Educational and Training Provisions or Requirements Fact Sheet: Your Department or Agency should ensure that it is following this guidance immediately. If you have any questions, please have your Chief Human Capital Officer contact the Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability Division Deputy Associate Director assigned to your agency. OPM presented a half-day seminar on these issues on May 5 and 7. If there is sufficient interest, we will be happy to present additional seminars, in Washington, DC or, in coordination with you, at sites outside of Washington where sufficient attendance will be available.