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CHAPTER 712. EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

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EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. SCOPE

This chapter prescribes policies and instructions concerning employee associations and other employee groups of similar purpose or nature in the VA, regardless of the name given the organization. While credit unions come within this category, they are subject to the special provisions of paragraph 9, rather than the other provisions of this section.

2. REFERENCES

- a. Chapter 250, "Personnel Management in Agencies," Federal Personnel Manual.
- b. Chapter 711, Labor-Management Relations; MP-5, Part I.
- c. 12 U.S.C. 1751-1775.

3. POLICY

a. The VA recognizes that voluntary, cooperative activities by employees to meet their mutual needs or interests, to serve their common welfare, or to make their relationships and their employment more pleasant can contribute substantially to a favorable work environment. The VA therefore looks with favor on such activities, and on democratically constituted associations and similar groups voluntarily formed for those purposes. Subject to the provisions of this chapter, an employee association or similar group may engage in any activity in the interest of employees, of the general type of those described in paragraph 4 but not limited to those specifically mentioned therein, that its membership wishes to take up.

b. VA officials and employees, in their official capacities, will not represent the VA in any activity or function which is held in a facility which segregates the races or excludes minority group participation.

4. TYPICAL ACTIVITIES

Typical of the activities appropriate for an employee association or similar group are athletic, recreational, entertainment, social or cultural activities; employee newspapers; welfare or emergency assistance funds; group insurance other than Government-provided plans; and concessions (such as for vending machines) which they may properly be authorized to operate. These services are treated in more detail elsewhere in this manual.

5. EMPLOYEE ASSOCIATIONS AND SIMILAR GROUPS

The typical organization of this nature is composed of or open to all VA employees in an installation. The payment of nominal dues may be a requirement of membership. As a usual thing it is called an employee association, and engages in several activities or is formed for several specific or for general purposes. In such case, its individual activities may be carried on directly by the association itself or by

subordinate groups therein. Then there may be groups formed for a limited purpose, either in the absence of a typical association or separate from an existing one. This chapter applies to all such groups as well as the typical associations, even though references hereinafter are only to associations.

6. MANAGEMENT-ASSOCIATION RELATIONSHIPS

a. Employee associations and their interests are essentially private matters and their activities are private activities. Yet associations are composed entirely of VA employees and are closely identified with the VA. The relationship between an association and local management is therefore a cooperative one, based on mutual recognition of each other's interests, responsibilities, rights, and limitation.

b. Local management consults with associations or employees wishing to start one, on their request, and makes available advisory assistance on such questions as organization, constitution, bylaws, finance, recreation, and publications. If there is sufficient evidence of employee interest, it is appropriate for management to help start an association or activity to meet a clear need. The human resources office will usually represent management in dealing with associations.

c. The VA gives encouragement, assistance, recognition, and privileges to employee associations because of their services to employees and their benefits to employee welfare and morale. At the same time, certain safeguards are to be observed because the VA is affected by the acts of its employees and is concerned with their welfare and morale.

7. GENERAL LIMITATIONS

a. The activities of an employee association shall be compatible with applicable laws, regulations, VA and station policies, and good community relations.

b. No use may be made of the name, sponsorship, facilities or activity of the VA by or for any employee association or recreational organization practicing discrimination based on race, creed, color or national origin.

c. The activities will not be represented, directly or implied, as official activities of the VA. The association's name, membership cards, and publicity will be such as to make this clear.

d. No funds appropriated to the VA will be used for any of their activities.

e. Restrictions on the use by employees of VA recreational facilities and equipment, given elsewhere in this manual, shall include the use by associations.

f. Employee associations will not be recognized for the purpose of presenting or considering individual personnel matters, grievances, or appeals.

8. PRIVILEGES AND STANDARDS

a. As long as an association is constituted and operated in accordance with the standards listed below, it will not only be given encouragement and cooperation but will be authorized to:

(1) Conduct meetings or activities outside working hours on VA premises in accordance with arrangements with the Human Resources Officer or other appropriate administrative official:

(2) Publicize its activities by the use of bulletin boards and by circularizing employees.

(3) Exercise such other privileges which will not add any expense to the Government or interfere with the regularly assigned duties of employees or with the VA's services to veterans.

b. The standards for an association to be given such privileges are that:

(1) It is democratically organized and operated and all employees in the area for which it is established are eligible for membership at their option.

(2) It provides full opportunity for all members to elect those who conduct its affairs, and elections are held at sufficiently frequent intervals to permit membership control. In addition, the typical association usually will have a constitution and bylaws.

(3) It has a financial audit of its funds made annually by a qualified person or persons not a part of the association management, and furnishes the station head a copy of the audit report.

(4) Full information about it is supplied its members.

(a) If there is a constitution and bylaws, each member will be furnished copies of these documents including all changes. This may be done by periodic publication.

(b) Members will be currently informed on its activities.

(c) An annual and adequate financial report will be prepared and will either be posted on all bulletin boards or otherwise effectively brought to the attention of all members.

(5) If there is a constitution and bylaws, copies thereof and of changes therein shall be supplied the installation's human resources office. Copies of activity and financial reports will also be supplied the human resources office.

(6) The association must recognize that the VA has a legitimate concern with its operations, and provide local VA management with a reasonable opportunity to discharge its responsibility.

9. CREDIT UNIONS

a. The credit union is one of the employee organizations looked upon with favor, particularly whenever employees are interested in organizing and operating one. Credit unions are to be chartered either under State law or under the Federal Credit Union Act, 12 U.S.C. 1751-1775. This act is administered by the National Credit Union Administration. Advice and assistance with respect to the organization or operation of credit unions may be secured either from the appropriate State agency or from the National Credit Union Administration.

b. In accordance with the provisions of 12 U.S.C. 1770, VA installations may allot space for the transaction of credit union business. In addition, credit unions may be permitted (1) to transact business during working hours, provided there is no interference with the performance of the employees' official duties; (2) to publicize their activities through the use of bulletin boards and by circularizing individual employees; (3) to make incidental use of office equipment; and (4) to exercise such other privileges as will not entail any expense to the Government or disruption of the official activities of the office or station. The human resources management office will usually represent management in dealing with credit unions.