



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION  
WASHINGTON DC 20420

AUG 25 2004

Mr. Ron Sanders  
Associate Director for Strategic  
Human Resources Policy  
U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
ATTN: Hispanic Report  
Center for Talent and Capacity Policy  
Division for Strategic Human Resources Policy  
1900 E Street, NW (Room 6500)  
Washington, DC 20415-9000

Dear Mr. Sanders:

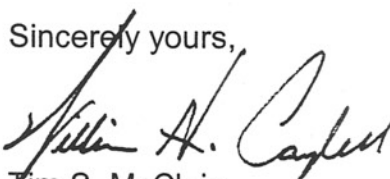
Enclosed is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) response to the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) survey for the Fourth Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government. This report was prepared in compliance with Executive Order 13171, Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government and the Hispanic Employment Initiative Nine-Point Plan.

VA's approach for improving Hispanic representation includes continued implementation of the benchmark Memorandum of Understanding with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) signed in 1996. The HACU Internship Program affords students attending Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) the opportunity to gain valuable, personally rewarding work experience with VA. This Program also provides an effective vehicle for outreach and recruitment to strengthen diversity in VA. Of the 86 interns who participated in VA's 2004 National Summer Internship Program, 66 were HACU interns. VA commits more than \$1 million annually to sponsor partnerships with minority-serving institutions such as HACU and HSIs.

This report details additional benchmarking efforts and priorities for eliminating Hispanic underrepresentation. For example, Veterans Health Administration's education and training support of HSIs during FY 2003 totaled \$39,817,837, nearly 5 percent of its education and training budget.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Wanda J. Jones, Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity, at (202) 501-2089.

Sincerely yours,

  
for Tim S. McClain  
Acting

Enclosure

## **Department of Veterans Affairs**

### **Response to OPM Survey for Fourth Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) strongly supports Executive Order 13171, Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government, and the Hispanic Employment Initiative Nine-Point Plan. The following brief description of VA's organizational structure provides a context for describing the support given to Hispanic employment initiatives.

VA is the largest non-military Cabinet-level department in the Federal Government, employing a workforce of 212,046 permanent employees as of July 31, 2004. Of that number, 14,102 were Hispanic Americans, compared to 13,383 last year – representing a 9.4 percent increase. VA provides health care, education and financial benefits, and memorial services for veterans via three Administrations, described below.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA), with 163 VA medical centers (VAMCs) nationwide, manages the largest integrated health care system in the United States. VHA employed 12,729 Hispanic American permanent employees this year.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides education and financial benefits and services to the veteran population and their dependents through 57 VA regional offices (VAROs). VBA employed 740 Hispanic American permanent employees this year.

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) provides burial benefits to veterans and eligible dependents through 120 national cemeteries nationwide. NCA employed 139 Hispanic American permanent employees this year.

In addition, 494 Hispanic Americans were employed in various staff office positions throughout VA this year.

#### **A. VA's activities and accomplishments in implementing the Hispanic Employment Initiative Nine-Point Plan**

The following is a synopsis of VA's support of the Hispanic Employment Initiative Nine-Point Plan; each numbered item corresponds to the items in the Nine-Point Plan:

## **1. Support and implement the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans**

VA strongly supports the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans through such initiatives as youth outreach, conference participation, and education and training support.

### Outreach

VA's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), signed in December 1996, provides the framework to foster mutually supportive relationships and the development of initiatives to increase employment and educational opportunities in VA for students of HACU-member schools and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). The HACU National Internship Program affords Hispanic students the opportunity to gain valuable, personally rewarding work experience with the Nation's largest health care system. The program provides VA with an effective tool for outreach and recruitment to strengthen the Department's diversity.

In FY 2003, 83,115 (25,359 paid and 57,756 without compensation (WOC)) students received all or part of their clinical training in VA health care facilities in affiliation with over 1,000 institutions of higher education. Of these 1,000 institutions, 39 are designated as historically Hispanic colleges or universities. These 39 affiliations resulted in 4,013 (1,120 paid and 2,893 WOC) students receiving part of their required clinical education in a VA facility.

The Puerto Rico National Cemetery participated in two outreach programs with the Puerto Rico Military Officers' Association and the Puerto Rico American Legion Ladies' Auxiliary.

### Conferences

VA participates annually as an exhibitor at minority outreach conferences and conventions (for example, the National Association of Hispanic Nurses Conference and the HACU Annual Conference). These exhibits are a valuable resource for increasing awareness of employment opportunities and outreach to the Hispanic community and veterans organizations.

### Education and Training Support

- Student Educational Employment Program (SEEP) – This year, VHA's SEEP program supported 312 students, of which 19 were Hispanic students at a cost of \$93,000.
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities National Internship Program (HNIP) -This year, 35 VA field facilities and VA Central Office participated in

HNIP. The annual budget for this program is approximately \$500,000. VHA hired 55 HNIP interns in FY 2004.

The total number of VBA Hispanic employees enrolled in training programs this year varied for each VARO. The highest enrollment reported was at the Phoenix VARO, which was 12 percent of its total employees.

## **2. Provide employment information to students, faculty, and the Hispanic community**

### Community Outreach

As part of the Department's community stakeholders partnering efforts, VA participated in Hispanic conferences and job fairs sponsored by the following: HACU, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE). The VA Recruitment Bulletin was distributed to conference attendees, providing current information about vacancy announcements VA-wide.

### VA's Placement Service

VA's national advertising and outreach activities that generate interest in VA as an employer necessitated having a central point of contact for processing and maintaining applications. VA's Placement Service accepts online applications from qualified health care professionals (Title 38 and hybrid Title 38), inventories the applications, and electronically forwards the applications to medical centers with matching vacancies. VA's Placement Service is accessible by a toll-free telephone number and via the Internet at <http://www.vacareers.com>.

### Advertising

VHA's Health Care Staff Development and Retention Office (HCSDRO) contracts with a professional advertising agency that places recruitment advertisements on the internet and in professional journals and other publications, develops Public Service Announcements for radio and television, and creates other outreach materials such as recruitment brochures and pamphlets. Regular print media and online advertising placements include publications that target minorities; i.e., *Hispanic Network*, *Journal for Minority Medical Students*, *Hispanic Nurse Newsletter*, *Hispanic Annual Handbook*, and *Hispanic Healthcare International*. The advertising budget is approximately \$2.2 million.

VBA has developed recruitment tools that are used by human resources and management officials in designing effective programs to seek out desirable candidates. These tools include:

- Recruitment brochures
- Recruitment tri-fold handouts
- Instructions on establishing recruitment teams
- Training for members of recruitment teams
- Reference guide for human resources and management officials
- Web site for VBA recruitment
- VBA representation at job fairs and other related programs to provide current Federal employment opportunities for Hispanics

In addition to the above, VBA's vacancy announcements are posted throughout state and local college and university career placement offices.

This year, VA's Office of Marketing and Recruitment staff created an Hispanic Service Institute. The staff maintains an electronic distribution list and forwards recruiting information to Hispanics. In addition, HSIs are included on the distribution list to receive VA's marketing and recruitment CD ROM.

### **3. Use of the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program for recruiting, converting, and advancing Hispanic college graduates**

The PMF Program affords VA an opportunity to attract outstanding individuals from a wide variety of academic disciplines that have an interest in and commitment to a career in the analysis and management of public policies and programs. By drawing graduate students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, VA has access to a continuing source of trained men and women to meet the future challenges in support of VA's mission. VA's Office of Marketing and Recruitment participated in the 2004 Presidential Management Fellows Job Fair sponsored by OPM. VA conducted over 175 interviews.

### **4. Participate in the HACU National Internship Program**

The HACU National Internship Program provides students an opportunity to earn academic credit and gain an enhanced appreciation of VA as an employer of choice. Of the 66 HACU interns who participated in this year's Summer Internship Program, 22 were employed in Washington, DC, and 44 in VA field facilities. This year, the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity sponsored a tour of the Baltimore VAMC, VARO and national cemetery which provided the Washington, DC, interns a broader perspective of VA's overall mission. VA commits more than \$1 million annually to sponsor partnerships with minority-serving institutions such as HACU and HSIs.



**5. Use the flexibilities of the Student Employment Program to bring Hispanic students into the agency's shortage category occupations, as well as other occupations**

The Student Educational Employment Program (SEEP) provides minority students the opportunity to work at VA before they make career choices. VHA's SEEP Program has almost exclusively targeted cooperative work-study partnerships with minority-serving institutions such as HACU. This program helps ensure that VA's workforce better reflects the diversity of the veteran population that it serves. In addition, SEEP helps VHA address under representation in shortage-category permanent occupations. The annual budget for this program is \$1.5 million. VA also provides a summary of centralized educational assistance programs in support of key career development opportunities, as noted in item 7 below. This year, there were 312 SEEP students, of which 19 were Hispanic Americans.

**6. Develop mentoring programs to motivate young people to pursue higher education and Federal careers**

VA signed an Interagency Agreement with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland, in August 2002. The agreement was part of VA's Youth Initiative Program to provide career exploration opportunities for disadvantaged and minority students. The program provides high school students job-readiness workshops, one-on-one mentoring with CMS and VA staff, job-shadowing experiences, and paid summer work at VA and CMS. The Baltimore RO participated in the program and mentored six Hispanic students this year.

VBA participates in the Federal Executive Board-sponsored volunteer program in which employees volunteer one full day at local schools sharing their work experiences and encouraging Hispanic students to pursue Federal careers.

NCA employees mentor HACU interns in the Washington, DC, area; and Puerto Rico National Cemetery employees mentor college students to provide growth, development, opportunity and direction for students in preparation for Federal employment.

**7. Promote participation of Hispanic employees in career development programs**

VA administers the following centralized educational assistance programs that provide career development opportunities for Hispanic Americans:

Leadership VA (LVA) – LVA is designed to identify 70 rising leaders in VA and to enrich their career development through an intense leadership training experience. The program's goals are to:

- Identify unusually fine leadership talent in VA;
- Expand the participants' leadership skills by having them become acquainted with VA's top leaders and develop a keener insight into the internal and external forces which affect VA; and
- Provide for an exchange of information and viewpoints which will broaden personal and professional perspectives and lay a foundation for a network of VA leaders who share a deep commitment to VA and to public service in its broadest sense.

The 2004 LVA program includes two Hispanic employees.

Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) – VA's SESCO DP offers individuals a structured approach to prepare for an SES position. The program provides intensive developmental experiences for people who are judged to have high potential for assuming executive responsibilities. Of the 16 candidates participating in the recently completed 2002 program, three were Hispanic.

Executive Career Field (ECF) Development Program – VHA's ECF Development Program grants participants a variety of developmental opportunities, including mentoring and continuous assessment activities, targeted at aligning personal and corporate growth. Through this approach, VHA establishes an effective method for leadership succession including achievement of diversity goals in the executive ranks. This year, 156 employees participated in the ECF Program; of those, seven employees were Hispanic.

VBA Career Development Programs – In FY 2004, VBA offered two career developmental programs. The Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) Program selected two Hispanic employees out of a class of 28 and the Assistant Director Development Program (ADDP) selected two Hispanic employees out of a class of 13.

**8. Assess agency needs for full-time, part-time, or collateral Hispanic Employment Program (HEP) Managers and ensure that HEP Managers are integral members of the agency's management team**

VA fully supports the need for full-time, part-time, and collateral-duty HEP Managers. The Administrations and their field facilities are required to have HEP Managers who are vital members of VA's outreach programs to the Hispanic community and veterans as well as integral members of the management team.

**9. Incorporate these activities into the agency's annual Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) accomplishment report to OPM**

VA recognizes the need to invest in programs that support students' academic excellence and provide much needed knowledge and skills for success in the workplace. Section B, below, identifies VA's "best practices" which align with the

Annual Performance Plan under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) to accomplish goals through measurable efforts that include participation and support of senior executives and managers and partnerships with other organizations. Additionally, VA's best practices in support of Hispanic Employment Initiatives are incorporated into the annual FEORP accomplishment report.

**B. VA's top practices in strategic human capital management and planning that best help improve the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Hispanics**

The following are VA's top practices in strategic human capital management and planning that support Hispanic employment issues:

Executive Committee – The Executive Steering Committee on Hispanic Employment identifies program initiatives and activities that enhance the Employment of VA Hispanic Americans in VA.

VHA Vacancies Database – HCSDRO established a nationwide VA vacancy announcement system that allows facilities to post vacancies on the Department's Intranet at <http://vhacoweb1.cio.med.va.gov/careers>.

Equal Employment Opportunity Programs – Many VA facility directives set forth station policies, procedures, and responsibilities for establishing and maintaining Equal Employment Opportunity Programs. Additionally, performance plans for management and supervisory staffs contain an element that supports diversity and equal employment opportunities in candidate selection.

Student Employment – Student Career Employment Program (SCEP), a component of SEEP, has been used in the VA health care system to strengthen partnerships with minority-serving institutions and VA medical centers. SCEP enables high school, undergraduate, and graduate students to gain valuable work experience and training in high-demand health care career fields. This year, VA employed 19 Hispanic students at a cost of over \$93,000.

In FY 2004, VA Central Office and more than 30 VA medical centers participated in the HNIP. These student work experiences help lay the foundation for future VA employment and increase the likelihood of improving representation in VA's Hispanic employee population.

Stay-in-School Programs – The objective of this initiative is to introduce minority high school students to the Federal Government and mentor high-risk students who are endangering their chances of completing high school and/or attending college. Field facilities participated in job fairs and career days at local colleges and universities with strong Hispanic representation.

Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Program – The IPA Program provides for the temporary assignment of personnel between the Federal Government and state and



local governments, colleges and universities, Indian tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations. VA is currently providing the National Association for Hispanic Federal Executives one full-time GS-13 Hispanic employee to serve on a two-year IPA with their organization. This employee is providing guidance on Hispanic issues that will be beneficial to the Federal Government and the private sector.

**C. How these practices align with VA's Annual Performance Plan under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA):**

One of the Enabling Goals of the VA Strategic Plan is to "deliver world-class service to veterans and their families by applying sound business principles that result in effective management of people, communications, technology, and governance." Objective E-1 under this goal is to "recruit, develop, and retain a competent, committed, and diverse workforce that provides high-quality service to veterans and their families." Toward this end, VA has undertaken numerous activities to recruit, train, and retain Hispanic Americans. The activities are itemized under the appropriate headings of OPM's Nine-Point Plan above. Progress toward accomplishing these objectives continues to be monitored at every level of the organization.