

Department of Veterans Affairs
Fiscal Years 2004-2006 Agency's Comprehensive 3-Year Plan to
Implement Executive Order 13270 on Tribal Colleges and
Universities

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mission is to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion. As a customer-focused organization, VA will continue to support Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) as established in Executive Order 13270 to ensure that Native Americans have access not only to health care and benefits, but also to training, educational, and employment opportunities. VA, through its Administrations and Staff Offices, will provide the following support to TCUs during the next three years:

A. Annual Performance Indicators and Measurable Objectives Reflected in the Department's Annual Budget in Support of TCUs.

VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Health Care Staff Development and Retention Office (HCSDRO), has requested an overall budget increase for the next three years. If funds are approved, HCSDRO will be able to expand its media advertising to reach Native American high school and college students and their local communities through such means as magazine ads, media campaigns, on-line services, and public service announcements.

VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides educational assistance payments to eligible veterans, dependents, reservists, and service members enrolled in approved educational programs at TCUs and other institutions of higher learning. The payments help defray the cost of tuition and fees.

VBA's projection for educational assistance payments to veterans and other eligible persons attending TCUs during FY 2004 through FY 2006 are as follows:

Direct Institutional Subsidies (in thousands):

FY 2004 - \$2,749
FY 2005 - \$2,812
FY 2006 - \$2,874

Student Tuition Aid, Scholarships, and Other Aid (in millions):

FY 2004 - \$1,795,352
FY 2005 - \$1,851,007
FY 2006 - \$1,895,431

In addition to the above-mentioned subsidies and aids, VBA will make payments to TCUs and other educational institutions in formula-driven awards referred to as "reporting fees." The fees are paid directly to TCUs and other schools to

cover administrative costs for processing reports and certifications required by Title 38 USC § 3684[c] in the administration of VA's educational assistance programs. The total reporting fees vary from year to year at each educational institution, as they are based on the number of veterans and eligible beneficiaries enrolled.

B. VA's Efforts to Increase the Capacity of TCUs to Compete Effectively for Available Grants, Contracts, Cooperative Agreements, and Other Federal Resources.

VHA's HCSDRO has requested additional funding that will enable limited expansion of internship support. HCSDRO currently supports Native American outreach through three different initiatives:

- (1) The Student Educational Experience Program (SEEP);
- (2) The Washington Internship for Native Students (WINS) operated by American University in Washington, DC; and
- (3) The Native American Leadership Program operated by The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars.

The latter two programs provide a valuable, unique opportunity for Native American college students to live, study, and intern in Washington, DC.

VHA's HCSDRO has traditionally included TCUs in SEEP internships. Although only six VA medical facilities were able to participate in Fiscal Years 2001-2002 due to limited funding, VHA will continue to support this program and seek expansion opportunities.

Increased funding will also provide opportunities to enhance other VHA educational programs such as the VA Learning Opportunity Residency Program. It will also add three new initiatives available to Native Americans: the VA Nursing Education for Employees Program, the VA Cadet Nurse, and the VA Nursing Education Faculty Programs. The VA Cadet Nurse program may be especially appealing to Native American candidates, and VA will make a concerted effort to reach these students during FY 2004-2006.

Under the auspices of VHA's Office of Academic Affairs (OAA), medical center leaders will be encouraged to create affiliations with TCUs and increase minority participation in VA health professions clinical training programs. This will be accomplished through system-wide conference calls and links on OAA's Web site to a listing of minority-serving universities. VHA will continue to encourage affiliations with minority-serving colleges and universities and will provide stipends to its students.

VHA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) has established three new mentoring programs that will expand research opportunities for Native Americans and increase funding for TCUs by providing research and training opportunities to Native Americans from high school to the midcareer faculty level. The mentoring programs are:

- **Mentored-Minority Research Enhancement Coordinating Center -** Supports institutional collaborations between VA and minority-serving institutions (Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities). Collaborations involve students and faculty from minority-serving institutions partnering with a cadre of mentors from VA. This program will fund up to 12 centers at a cost of \$300,000 a year for 4 years.
- **Mentored-Minority Supplemental Program** (individual, one-on-one training) - Provides applied training in VA-funded research projects for underrepresented minorities. Summer semester, and one- to two-year awards will be presented. This program will fund up to 30 awardees annually.
- **Mentored-Minority Early Career Enhancement Program** (individual, one-on-one training) - Offers a supportive career path for mentored-minority researchers in VA (provides full salary for three years to minority Title 38 physicians, Title 5 clinicians, nonclinical Ph.D. students, or recent Ph.D. graduates). Upon completion, ORD expects awardees to remain in VA and pursue additional training opportunities offered by the Research Scientist and Career Development Programs. This program will fund up to 12-15 awardees for 3 years at an estimated total cost of \$150,000 per awardee.

To further support Executive Order 13270, VBA will continue to support the WINS Program. Every effort will be made to place WINS interns in VBA offices to enhance their experience in the Federal sector and encourage them to consider VA for employment.

VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is committed to support at least two Native American interns annually. It will develop and implement an outreach program for job fairs near TCUs and their communities, and it will provide two grants in the approximate amount of \$4,500 each for TCU students during FY 2004.

VA Central Office (VACO) staff offices will continue to support internship opportunities through the WINS Program. By October 2003, VA is expected to sign a partnership agreement with the American Indian Science and Engineering Society. This partnership will further the educational opportunities of Native

Americans. In addition, VACO staff will continue to support the Native American community through outreach efforts at local and national pow wows and at National observances (e.g., Veterans Day at the National Mall).

C. Access to High-Quality Educational Opportunities for Economically Disadvantaged Indian Students, Consistent With the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

In support of educational opportunities for the economically disadvantaged consistent with the *No Child Left Behind Act*, NCA plans to establish a program with local Native American communities to improve relationships between VA and community schools. The program will reach kindergarten through grade-12 classrooms, providing ongoing public affairs outreach programs such as the *Early Reading First* program. NCA will also implement "Plant a Tree" programs at VA cemeteries during the next three years, educating local Native American and Alaskan Native school children about the cemeteries and the veterans lying within them.

VA fully supports Executive Order 13270 and will continue to encourage wide participation of TCUs in VA-sponsored programs.