



Department of Veterans Affairs
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY
WASHINGTON DC 20420

NOV 25 2003

Mr. Ron Sanders
Associate Director for Strategic
Human Resources Policy
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW, Room 6500
Washington, DC 20415-9000

Dear Mr. Sanders:

Enclosed is the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) response to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) survey for the Third 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. Please accept my sincere apology for the lateness of this report.

VA's achievements provided in Point 1 under "Education and Training Support" are for Fiscal Year (FY) 2002. VA's FY 2003 achievements will be forwarded under separate cover by the end of January 2004.

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 the opportunity to gain valuable, personally rewarding work experience with VA. The Program also provides an effective vehicle for outreach and recruitment to strengthen diversity in VA. Of the 87 interns who participated in the 2002 Summer Internship Program (41 in Washington, DC, and 46 in VA field facilities), 65 were HACU interns. Of the 65 students, VA hired 5.

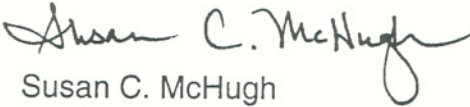
This report details additional benchmarking efforts and priorities for eliminating Hispanic underrepresentation. For example, Veterans Health Administration's support of Hispanic-Serving Institutions during FY 2002 totaled \$38,389,776, nearly 5 percent of the education and training budget.

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Mr. Ron Sanders

Questions regarding this report may be addressed to Jose Marrero, Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity, at (202) 501-2100.

Sincerely yours,


Susan C. McHugh
Acting

Enclosure

Department of Veterans Affairs

Response to OPM Survey for Third 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 207,239 permanent employees in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003. Of that number, 13,383 were Hispanic Americans, compared to 12,812 in FY 2002. 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 12,032 Hispanic American permanent employees in FY 2003, compared to 11,481 in FY 2002.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides education and financial benefits and services to the veteran population and their dependents through 58 VA regional offices. VBA employed 749 Hispanic American permanent employees in FY 2003, compared to 745 in FY 2002.

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) provides burial benefits to veterans and eligible dependents through 120 national cemeteries nationwide. NCA employed 139 Hispanic American permanent employees in FY 2003.

Further, 463 Hispanic Americans were employed in various departmental positions in FY 2002.

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 benchmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) was signed in December 1996. The MOU 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 HSI students the opportunity to gain valuable, personally rewarding work experience with the Nation's largest health care system. The program provides VA an effective tool for outreach and recruitment to strengthen the Department's diversity.

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

VHA's support for students at HSIs during FY 2002 totaled \$38,389,776. This is nearly 5 percent of its education and training budget of \$786,029,000 (\$437,812,000 in stipends, or direct costs; and \$348,217,000 in indirect costs). The average stipend cost per paid trainee is estimated at \$19,856. There is no stipend associated with "without compensation" (WOC) trainees. The average indirect cost for each WOC trainee is estimated at \$4,576.

2. Provide employment information to students, faculty, and the Hispanic community. VBA has developed an array of recruitment tools to be used by human resources (HR) and management officials to design effective programs that attract desirable job candidates. These tools include:

- Recruitment brochure
- Recruitment trifold handout

- Instructions on establishing recruitment teams
- Training for recruitment team members
- Recruitment reference guide for HR and management officials, and
- Web site for VBA recruitment.

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, 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.

VBA regional offices participated in jobs fairs and career days at local colleges and universities with strong Hispanic representation. In addition, regional offices participated in local Federal Executive Board Diversity Council events designed to reach out to the Hispanic community. These types of programs enable VA to increase the pool of qualified Hispanic applicants when recruiting for vacancies.

NCA recruiting outreach focused on getting the word out to potential applicants through veterans service organizations, women's organizations, and special emphasis groups including Hispanic Americans. NCA continues to work on educating cemetery directors and supervisors on steps to improve Hispanic recruitment efforts. Recruiting and retaining of a qualified, diverse workforce is addressed in NCA's National Workforce Succession Plan. NCA supports the HACU Internship Program and distributes job announcements to HACU.

NCA uses special hiring authorities to employ Hispanic Americans. The hiring authorities used include the Outstanding Scholar Program, Veterans Readjustment Act, 30 Percent or More Disabled Veterans, and Chapter 31 Disabled Eligible.

VA Placement Service

The national advertising and outreach activities that generate interest in VA as an employer necessitate having a central point of contact for processing and maintaining applications. The Placement Service accepts applications from qualified health care professionals (Title 38 and hybrid Title 38), inventories the applications, and forwards the applications to medical centers, upon request. The Placement Service

is accessible by a toll-free telephone number and via the Internet at <http://www.vacareers.com>. The major features of the service include:

- Online application capability,
- Online job vacancy listing, and
- Electronic application referral to VA facilities.

Advertising

The VHA Health Care Staff Development and Retention Office (HCSDRO) manages a contract 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 (for example, Hispanic Network, Journal for Minority Medical Students, Hispanic Nurse Newsletter, Hispanic Annual Handbook, and Hispanic Healthcare International). The advertising budget is approximately \$1.6 million.

3. Use the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program for recruiting, converting, and advancing Hispanic college graduates.

The PMI 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. The Office of Marketing and Recruitment staff participated in the 2003 Presidential Management Intern Job Fair sponsored by OPM. VA conducted more than 175 interviews and responded to questions about the Department.

4. Participate in the HACU National Internship Program (HNIP). HNIP provides students an opportunity to earn academic credit and gain an enhanced appreciation of VA as an employer of choice. Of the 87 interns who participated in the 2002 Summer Internship Program, (41 in Washington, DC, and 46 in VA field facilities), 65 were HACU interns. Of the 65 students, VA hired 5. VA commits more than \$500,000 annually to sponsor partnerships with minority-serving institutions such as HACU and HSIs.

5. Use the flexibilities of the Student Educational 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. The program helps ensure that VA's workforce better reflects the diversity of the veteran population that it serves. Further, SEEP helps VHA address underrepresentation in shortage-category permanent occupations. The annual budget for this program is \$1.5 million. In addition, VA provides a summary of centralized educational assistance programs in support of key career development opportunities, as noted in item 7, below.

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, on August 6, 2002. The agreement was part of the VA's Youth Initiative Program to provide career exploration opportunities for disadvantaged and minority students. The program provided 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 majority of the students were of Hispanic heritage.

VA has standing partnerships with HACU, the Inter-American College of Physicians and Surgeons, and NAHFE. VHA designates approximately \$2 million annually to sponsor partnerships with minority-serving institutions and special initiative programs.

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 leaders in VA and to provide an enrichment of their career development through an intense leadership training experience. The program's general goals are to:

- a. Identify unusually fine leadership talent in VA;
- b. Expand the participants' leadership skills and provide them with the opportunity to become acquainted with VA's top leaders and to develop keener insight into the internal and external forces which affect VA;
- c. 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 the Department of Veterans Affairs and to public service in its broadest sense.

The Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) – VA's SESCO 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 in VA's SES Candidate Development Program, three were Hispanic Americans. Program participants prepare an individual development plan with their mentors. Successful candidates can be approved by the Office of Personnel Management as eligible for placement into the SES.

VHA Efforts

Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) - EISP enables VHA to award scholarships to VA employees pursuing degrees or training in Title 38 and hybrid Title 38 health care disciplines in which recruitment or retention is difficult. Scholarship awards may not exceed the equivalent of three years of full-time education, and award amounts are prorated for part-time students. HCSDRO administers this program with an annual budget of \$10 million.

National Nursing Education Initiative (NNEI) - NNEI, a component of the EISP, provides education scholarships to registered nurses. The Initiative helps to ensure that the Department's nurses are prepared to provide the highest quality of health care to veterans across a full range of clinical practice roles. The scholarship award limits are the same as for the EISP. The annual budget for this centralized VHA program is \$10 million.

Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP) - This program helps recently appointed employees in shortage category Title 38 and hybrid Title 38 health care disciplines to reduce the interest and principal on government and commercial loans obtained to fund their health care education. EDRP awards are limited to loans that cover the cost of education that qualified them for the particular health care positions to which they were appointed. Program participants may receive education debt reduction payments for one to five years. Payments are limited to a maximum of \$6,000 for the first year, \$8,000 for the second year, and \$10,000 for the third, fourth, and fifth years. Funding for the EDRP is drawn from the EISP budget.

VA Learning Opportunity Residency (VALOR) Program - The VALOR Program is a VA-sponsored honors program for junior- and senior-year baccalaureate-level nursing students. It provides learning opportunities that include classroom experiences, competency-based clinical practice with qualified registered-nurse preceptors, and participation in nursing-focused clinic conferences. The students are compensated for their participation in this program, which helps VA recruit high-quality, entry-

level nurses at a time when enrollment in nursing schools is declining. The annual budget for this program is approximately \$1.7 million.

Executive Career Field (ECF) Candidate Program – The ECF Candidate Program was established in VHA to identify and train future Federal leaders. Two groups of approximately 50 candidates were selected in FY 2002, with sufficient diversity to help ensure that the candidates for Senior Executive Service (SES) would reflect the diversity of the population VHA serves.

VBA Efforts

VBA continues to work on improving Hispanic representation in the workforce by participating in the Federal Executive Board-sponsored volunteer program. Employees volunteer at local schools, sharing personal work experiences and encouraging Hispanic Americans to pursue Federal employment. In addition, VBA regional offices implement upward mobility programs that help Hispanic American employees acquire the necessary skills to be eligible for promotions.

VBA developed its initial workforce report in March 2003. Key occupations and leadership were analyzed for historical trends and key employment indicators. This report will assist VBA in planning and measuring achievements to address workforce needs, such as staff skills and diversity. It is expected to be a highly useful tool, the results of which can be reported in future years.

VBA offered two training programs: the Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) Program and the Assistant Director Development Program (ADDP). Hispanic employees were selected for the programs:

- LEAD – 2 in a class of 30
- ADDP – 2 in a class of 14

NCA Efforts

In November 1997, VA established a formal partnership agreement with the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE). NCA continues to support the partnership objectives to promote VA as an excellent source of employment opportunities and to provide career development training to enhance job effectiveness and career progression. NCA uses the Individual Development Plan (IDP) to help employees identify needed performance-related training. It also provides management with a roadmap for meeting those needs. NCA provides staff incentives including training opportunities; internal mobility development for certain cemetery positions; quality of life/workplace

programs such as tuition assistance; transportation subsidies; and expeditious handling of workplace disputes in order to provide a stable work environment for employees.

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 recognized 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 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 for FY 2003.

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 is a synopsis of 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 identified 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 allowed facilities to post vacancies on the Department's Intranet at <http://vhacoweb1.cio.med.va.gov/careers>. This system minimized the loss of the Teletype System that was previously used to share vacancy announcements among facilities.

Equal Employment Opportunity Programs - Many VA field facility circulars 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. As of March 2003, VA employed 23 Hispanic students at a cost of over \$212,000.

During FY 2002, VACO Headquarters and more than 50 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 among VA's Hispanic population.

Youth Initiatives - VBA field stations participated in the Youth Initiative Program headed by the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. The partnership includes students from local high schools. 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. Additionally, field stations participated in job fairs and career days at local colleges and universities with strong Hispanic representation.

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 is monitored at every level of the organization.