

VA DIVERSITY COUNCIL

2011 BIENNIAL REPORT



The Inaugural Report from the VA Diversity Council to the
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



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VA DIVERSITY COUNCIL



MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Over the past few years, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made great strides in promoting and supporting a high-performing organizational culture through the establishment of a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment. VA's leadership, however, identified the need to strengthen the foundation needed to support VA's transformation into a 21st century Cabinet-level agency. As diversity was seen as integral to the transformational effort, leadership sought to establish a body that was charged with ensuring that diversity and inclusion policies and practices were institutionalized and integrated at all organizational levels. The VA Diversity Council (VADC) was established from this need.

This is the inaugural biennial VADC report prepared for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and includes the Council's mission, history, and other details; chronicles the Council's 2010-2011 achievements; and lays out the Action Plan which will guide the VADC in its future activities.

We would like to thank each of VA's Administrations, our union partners, and our affinity group stakeholders for their invaluable participation on this Council and for their continued support in infusing the principles of diversity and inclusion throughout VA as we strive for 21st century excellence in service to our Veterans!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John U. Sepúlveda".

John U. Sepúlveda
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration
VADC Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Georgia Coffey".

Georgia Coffey
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Diversity and Inclusion
VADC Co-Chair



COUNCIL MISSION

The VADC serves as an independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion. The Council comprises representatives from each of the Department's major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders. It serves as a communications link between the workforce and leadership and as a forum to share best practices, consider new initiatives, monitor progress, leverage resources, and provide accountability in the area of organizational diversity and inclusion. The VADC also ensures that diversity and inclusion considerations are integrated throughout VA's strategic planning efforts, business practices, and organizational components.

COUNCIL HISTORY

On October 5, 2007, then-Acting Secretary for Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield announced the establishment of the "VA Diversity Advisory Council" in accordance with the Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2006-2011.

The initiative did not gain momentum until early 2009 when a new title was adopted and the charter was finalized. The VA Diversity Council, the first VA-wide body devoted to diversity matters, was a strategy contained in the new VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. On March 23, 2010, Secretary Shinseki distributed a memo adopting the new charter and the VADC was officially launched.

In 2010 and 2011, the Council met and, among other notable activities, it convened Screening and Judging Committees for the Secretary's new Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program established to recognize exemplary accomplishments in each of the three goal areas reflected in the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan: (1) create a diverse, results-oriented, high-performing workforce that reflects the Veterans and communities we serve by identifying and eliminating barriers to equal opportunity, (2) cultivate a flexible and inclusive work environment that enables full participation through strategic outreach and retention, and (3) facilitate outstanding customer service and stakeholder relations by promoting cultural competency, accountability, education, and communication.

In 2011, the Council established five committees to focus on specific areas of interest that have emerged from the Council's quarterly meetings. These committees report their recommendations and advice to the VADC for full deliberation and discussion:

- 1) Diversity and Inclusion Communications Committee: to communicate any messages from the VADC throughout VA as the Council sees fit and to create and communicate diversity and inclusion messages on behalf of the Council.
- 2) Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Report Committee: to assist with the update of VA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and to



coordinate the compilation of VA-wide information to report in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report every fiscal year.

- 3) Emerging Issues in Diversity and Inclusion Committee: to consider emerging issues in the area of diversity and inclusion both internal and external to VA and procure the services of the National Center for Organization Development to study perceptions of fairness and empowerment in the VA Workforce and the Senior Executive Service (SES) on the basis of race, ethnicity, and gender (REG).
- 4) Disability Committee: to examine issues and challenges related to people with disabilities in the workforce and educate the workforce accordingly.
- 5) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Committee: to address LGBT issues affecting the VA workforce and the Veterans we serve, particularly in light of the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and its impact on policies, practices, and protections; and to educate the workforce on related issues.

COUNCIL STRUCTURE

VA's Office of Human Resources and Administration, working through its Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), provides basic financial and administrative support for the Council which meets on a quarterly basis. VADC meetings are generally open to all interested VA parties, in the interest of full inclusion and transparency. The voting members of the VADC include senior executive level representatives from each of VA's Administrations, the major Staff Offices, and leaders from each of VA's five unions: the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Association of Government Employees, the National Federation of Federal Employees, Service Employees Union International, and National Nurses United. The assigned Union representative may be a retired VA employee.

Voting VADC members and their designees have access to the heads of and are spokespersons for their organizations. When these members or their designees are called to vote on VADC matters, each organization has one vote. Nonvoting members include representatives of VA employee resource groups (ERGs) that are structured or chartered to address VA business or employee matters. The seven ERGs currently represented on the VADC include the VA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Program, the VA Disability Program, the VA Federal Women Program Chapter, the VA Blacks in Government Chapter, the VA Federal Asian Pacific American Council Chapter, the VA Hispanic Association, and the VA American Indian/Alaska Native Program.

The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion serve as Process Owners and Co-Chairs of the VADC and may exercise a single combined vote as a tie breaker.



2010-2011 ACHIEVEMENTS

In its first two years of existence, the VADC established its infrastructure and successfully executed operations in accordance with the aims articulated in its charter. The launch of the VADC was cited as one of the “best practices” leading to VA being ranked as one of the top two Federal agencies for diversity in DiversityInc’s Top Federal Agencies for Diversity for 2010. The following highlights some of the Council’s accomplishments since 2010:

1) COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

The Council embarked on the challenging process of increasing awareness on diversity and inclusion matters and promoting outreach strategies with program leaders and stakeholders. VA now has a common diversity and inclusion dialogue shared among its senior leaders that can then be disseminated throughout VA. To that end, the Council accomplished the following activities:

- Established a VADC web page to post meeting agendas, minutes, and presentations to promote transparency and public access. This site also houses the VADC charter and current roster list: <http://www.diversity.va.gov/council>.
- Promoted the activities of VA’s employee resource groups such as the Federal Asian Pacific American Council and the Society for American Indian Government Employees.
- Addressed the Partnership for Public Service survey results regarding disparate perceptions of empowerment based on gender in VA and contracted a study to examine the issues and make recommendations for improvement.
- Received briefings on annual White House Initiative plans and reports, including the White House Initiative on Women and Girls.
- Received a presentation on VA’s Hispanic Employment Outreach Plan and promulgated strategies to enhance targeted outreach in this area.
- Received an update on the enhanced Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities and the National Diversity Internship Program to increase diversity in the VA recruitment pipeline.
- Provided updates on VA’s and the Administrations’ workforce diversity status.
- Presented VA’s new Diversity Index and Inclusion Index developed by ODI as a means of measuring diversity and inclusion in the Department and voted to implement these indices throughout VA, and included them in VA’s EEO and Diversity Executive Dashboard.

2) POLICY ISSUES

The Council has proactively engaged, promoted, and made recommendations in the following policy areas involving diversity and inclusion:



- Promulgated the Secretary's 2010 and 2011 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Diversity, and No FEAR Policy Statement.
- Received a briefing on VA's Corporate Senior Executive Management Office (CSEMO) initiatives addressing diversity in the SES and discussed policy options to address potential barriers to diversity.
- Presented VA's Management Directive 715 EEO Plan and Report and Diversity State of the Agency briefing.
- Promoted VA's new EEO, Diversity, and Conflict Management SES Performance Element and briefed executives on strategies for meeting and exceeding the performance expectations.
- Promulgated the Secretary's two percent goal of hiring people with disabilities, in alignment with Executive Order 13548, and briefed on the centralized fund for reasonable accommodation administered by ODI.

3) EDUCATION AND COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

The Council engaged in the following activities to increase education and cultural competency in the VA workforce:

- Promoted and enforced the VA's Mandatory EEO, Diversity, and Conflict Management Training for the 417 SES and Title 38 executives and 27,000 managers and supervisors VA-wide.
- Received a briefing on and promulgated information on cultural competency in health care training.
- Received training and promulgated information on emerging LGBT issues.
- Distributed the Veterans Health Administration's and the Office of Personnel Management's "Guidance Regarding the Employment of Transgender Individuals in the Federal Workplace."
- As a result of a briefing on pay grade disparities and career bottlenecks in the workforce, the Council recommended the creation of a Career Pathways initiative, a comprehensive career mapping and development program for VA designed to: enable employees to increase their skill sets to better prepare for future roles; send a clear message that VA is committed to employee development and advancement; help employees understand the connections between everyday work to long-term aspirations; and facilitate powerful personal and professional development. This recommendation led to the recent kick-off of the MyCareer@VA initiative by the VA Learning University.

ACTION PLAN

As the VADC moves into its third year of operation under the charter, it will increase its efforts and engagement in driving the diversity and inclusion initiatives essential for VA meet its commitment to 21st century excellence. The Council will take a prominent role in updating the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan in accordance with the President's new Executive Order on Establishing a Government-wide Diversity and



Inclusion Initiative, to ensure that VA stays in the vanguard of diversity and inclusion practices in the public sector. This commitment must come from top leadership and the Council.

In order to meet this commitment, the VADC proposes to adhere to the following Action Plan in FY 2012 and beyond:

- Update the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan within 120 days of the publishing of the Government-wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan in accordance with the new Executive Order Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce. (Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Report Committee)
- Resurvey VA employees to update their REG and disability status for workforce analysis purposes. (Disability Committee)
- Expand a VA-wide diversity and inclusion communications and shared accountability campaign to all corners of VA to emphasize the business case for diversity and inclusion in VA and underscore the importance of a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace to VA as a 21st century organization. (Diversity and Inclusion Communications Committee)
- Collaborate with CSEMO and ODI to further examine the impact of SES Candidate Development Program policies on the diversity of the SES cadre. This may include examining adverse impact analyses conducted by ODI on those selection processes and making recommendations to the Secretary for improvements, including expanding outreach by announcing all SES opportunities (Emerging Issues in Diversity and Inclusion Committee)
- Explore the creation of a formal LGBT Special Emphasis Program VA-wide to address emerging issues resulting from legislative changes impacting this group. (LGBT Committee)

RECOMMENDATION

The VA Diversity Council recommends approval of the FY 2012-13 Action Plan as described above.

Approval:

Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Date

VA DIVERSITY COUNCIL



VADC MEMBERS

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John U. Sepúlveda

Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (HR&A)

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