

VA ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORICAL PROJECT
Office of the Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration (006)

Executive Summaries

Office of Administration (03)

Modernization of VA Headquarters Building

This Prospectus-level project began in 1987 and was a joint partnership between VA and the General Services Administration. Total cost was \$57 million and was completed within budget and virtually within its original completion schedule. Project involved total replacement of all building systems and all new interior office space. Renovation was completed in 1996 and now houses approximately 2300 VA employees.

VA Transit Benefit Program

Executive Order 13150, dated April 21, 2000, encourages employees, through direct subsidies and pre-tax benefits, to commute by means other than single occupancy motor vehicles. The VA program is in place, and over 5,000 employees VA-wide have submitted applications for benefits. Transit media distribution began the week of September 25, 2000.

Office of Human Resources Management (05)

The Office of Human Resources Management implemented 5 significant initiatives ranging from implementation of a new Human Resources Information System; the Welfare to Work Presidential initiative; to the establishment of a national partnership council.

- HR LINK\$ and Shared Service Center (SSC), a major initiative jointly undertaken by the offices of the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration and the Assistant Secretary for Management began in FY 1995. Will make available VA-wide new technologies to support HR and payroll programs. The SSC, located in Topeka, Kansas, will provide centralized processing of majority of VA's HR/payroll informational and transaction activities. Initiative implements certain provisions of Executive Order 13011, "Federal Information Technology."
- VA has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Welfare to Work Presidential initiative since its inception in 1997. As of 7/10/00, VA had hired 1,502 WTW participants, far exceeding original goal of 800 new employees by the close of FY 1998. VA's efforts were recognized by receipt of Vice-President's Hammer Award in September 1999.

- To comply with requirements of 1994 law, the Whistleblower protection initiative begun in 1997 promotes environment where employees feel free to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Congressional interest in issue; GAO recently reviewed VA's efforts to increase employee awareness of Whistleblower Protection Act protections.
- In September 1993, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12871 "Labor-Management Partnerships." In response to the Executive order, representatives of VA and VA's five major unions began discussion in November 1993, to develop a framework for a national level labor-management partnership. The VA National Partnership Council (VANPC) aims to foster the goals of the National Performance Review to increase efficiency and economy of operations, by pre-decisional involvement and the sharing of information in order to find solutions to problems. The VANPC meets quarterly to discuss major departmental issues and provide a forum to address concerns about program or policy changes before decisions are made.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) policy on Flexible Workplace Arrangements (flexiplace) was signed by the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration and implemented in June 1997. VA's flexiplace policy authorizes home-based telecommuting, community-based telecommuting, mobile and virtual offices, as well as other appropriate flexiplace assignments. A recent ad hoc survey on the use of telecommuting in VA showed that approximately 500 employees, both in the field and in VA Headquarters are participating in some type of flexiplace assignment.

Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity (06)

Reorganization of the Office of Equal Opportunity

A reorganization of the Office of Equal Opportunity in 1998 reaffirmed the function supporting equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies and programs, and the discrimination complaints processing function was transferred to a newly established organization named as the Office of Resolution Management. The Office of Equal Opportunity was renamed as the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity (DM&EEO) in year 2000. The new focus on achieving work force diversity was clearly visible in the new title of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity. The Deputy Assistant Secretary redirected resources to support program activities that will increase the awareness of and promote the

acceptance of diversity and EEO. This Office will stay focused primarily on complaints prevention in this large Cabinet-level agency.

VA Implementation of Executive Orders

- Executive Order 12876 White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The Department made education assistance payments to eligible veterans, dependents, reservists and service members attending HBCUs to assist them in defraying the cost of tuition and associated fees. Additionally, VA made payments to HBCUs through formula driven awards, referred to as reporting fees. These fees are paid to HBCUs to cover administrative costs for processing reports and certifications required by Title 38 U.S.C., Section 3684[c], in the administration of VA educational assistance programs. The total amount of reporting fees awarded varies from year to year at each educational institution, based on the number of veterans and eligible beneficiaries enrolled.

The Student Career Experience Program allows undergraduates and graduate students to gain valuable work experience, training and education in high-demand career fields based on mutual agreements between VA and academic institutions. HBCU students complete their education to become physical therapists, physician assistants, health care administrators, registered nurses, social workers, and other health care professionals.

The Office of Research and Development allocates funding to support the Research Training Initiative for HBCUs. In FY 1997, efforts were undertaken to stimulate greater interest in the Research Training Initiative, to enhance the attractiveness of the Initiative for potential applicants, and to solicit applications from HBCUs that had not previously participated. Applications are now reviewed by a panel of scientists who are experts in the applicant's field of study and are close to the latest information within the field of research. The inclusion of many scientists in the review process ensures that several members of the research community, rather than a select few, make a group judgment of the applicant's research. As the result of refining improved outreach efforts, awards were made to two HBCUs -- Paul Quinn College and Spelman College -- that had not previously participated in the Initiative. In addition, awards were made to Florida A&M University and Meharry Medical College.

- Executive Order 12900 White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans

VA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) in October 1996. Since 1996,

VA sponsored 235 HACU interns in positions throughout the Department, and 5 interns accepted full time positions.

VA and the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE) signed a partnership agreement in 1997. In 1999, VA and NAHFE co-sponsored Hispanic Federal Executive Summit II with the Office of Personnel Management and President's Management Council to address Hispanic under-representation in senior positions throughout Federal government.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) San Juan, Puerto Rico, along with the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) School of Medicine have an exemplary HSI program. VA's Research & Development Service operated the facility's Center for Hispanic Studies, which has affiliations in research related to Hispanics with VAMC Miami, Florida, and Miami University. VAMC San Juan, Puerto Rico had institutional and programmatic affiliation agreements with the Schools of Dentistry, Allied Health, Public Health, Pharmacy, and Nursing. VAMC San Juan, Puerto Rico, also had programmatic affiliations with other approved medical schools in Puerto Rico -- Ponce Medical School and Universidad Central del Caribe Medical School. Twenty-one disciplines have residents in the Independent Teaching Program at VAMC San Juan, Puerto Rico.

At the 1997 HACU 11th Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, the VA's Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs conducted a workshop entitled "Veterans' Education Benefits: Montgomery GI Bill". She discussed how educational institutions could partner with VA to reach and encourage Hispanic veterans to use their benefits within ten years of military separation in order to achieve their educational objectives.

- Executive Order 13021 White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU)

DM&EEO is working with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) to develop a MOU that will provide the cooperative framework for VA and AIHEC to develop and establish mutually supportive programs to increase employment and educational opportunities for the Native American community.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Healthcare Staff Development and Retention Office (HCSDRO) administers the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) that allows undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to gain valuable work experience, training and education in high-demand career fields, based on agreements between VA and academic institutions.

The Washington Internships for Native Students (WINS) program administered by American University, Washington, DC, is another VA supported internship program. WINS participants attend an intense academic program and work

experience for nine weeks gaining skills and knowledge to take back to their communities. VA sponsored 15 WINS since the program began in 1999.

The Veterans Benefits Administration will continue refining its educational assistance payment database to accurately reflect the amount of educational benefit payments to Native American veterans attending TCUs under the Montgomery GI Bill or the amount of funding fees paid directly to TCUs. Another VA goal is to contribute toward the education and training of TCU students in more than 40 different health-care professions. Funding support is provided to medical and dental residents, physician and dentist fellows, and students in 27 various health-care program areas.

- Executive Order 13125 Increasing Participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Federal Programs (AAPI)

VA participates in and supports the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) annual Congressional Seminar National Leadership Training Conferences. DM&EEO and FAPAC are working on a Partnership Agreement to develop and establish mutually supportive programs to increase employment and educational opportunities for the AAPI community.

Since 1999, VA has supported the Okura Mental Health Leadership Program for Asian American and Pacific Islanders. VA's partnership with the Okura Foundation furthers the community leaders' understanding of how the VA impacts national health care, encourages collaborative partnerships between VA and community leaders in order to advance health care and human services for veterans and their families, and provides information about VA's employment opportunities.

- E.O. 13078 Increasing Employment of Adults with Disabilities

VA supports the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities' Workforce Recruitment Program and also serves on the planning committee for the Annual Perspectives on Employment of People with Disabilities Training Symposium. VA's strategic plan for the employment of people with disabilities includes a hiring goal 17,700 through October 2005. Additionally, VA has an employment goal of 1.97 percent of the total work force by the year 2004 for people with targeted disabilities.

President's Initiative on Race: One America in the 21st Century

The Department of Veterans Affairs participated in the President's Initiative on Race through the arrangement of forums with persons from the community who engaged in dialogue on race relations based on their own personal life experiences. There were several race relations forums conducted at the Department where top officials were invited to participate. The Department also

selected several employees who were asked to conduct forums in their communities. Feedback from these activities were reported back to the President's Initiative on Race.

Office of Security and Law Enforcement (07)

To improve its ability to maintain law and order and protect persons and property at Department facilities, VA initiated a program to arm its police force nationwide. Until the implementation of this program, VA police officers were not authorized to carry firearms while on duty at VA facilities. Additionally, to improve the Department's readiness to respond to national and local emergencies, VA has established its Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan in compliance with the Presidential Executive Orders and Decision Directives.

Office of Resolution Management (08)

Consistent with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) "Plan for Transformation: Reengineering the Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint Process" and Public Law 105-114, the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) was created to provide Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) discrimination complaint processing services to VA employees, applicants for employment and former employees. Complaint processing services include counseling, investigation, and procedural final agency decisions. ORM also provides compliance oversight functions on VA's Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA) final agency decisions, appellate Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) decisions, and matters relating to settlements, including breach of settlements. In addition, ORM administers and monitors the Department's External Civil Rights Program under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. ORM accomplishes these responsibilities through a nationwide network of twelve Field Offices employing nearly 280 full-time EEO professionals.

ORM goals are: (1) to further ensure the timely and accurate processing of complaints; (2) to further educate employees, to include executives, on the meaning of discrimination and employees' rights and responsibilities; (3) to ensure that employees, management and labor officials have a full appreciation for what is and is not appropriate for the complaint process; (4) to expand use of alternative dispute resolution, and (5) to ensure confidentiality, fairness, integrity and trust in the process.

Although the establishment of ORM and a new complaint process removes the designation as EEO officer from facility directors and headquarters executives, the fundamental set of expectations and responsibilities for VA executives continues to be: accountability for fostering a workplace free of discrimination, honoring diversity, minimizing systemic problems, empowering employees, promoting open communication, and demanding high standards of supervisory, management, and employee behavior.

Through eradicating discrimination within the Department, VA will further its corporate goals of ensuring that it creates and maintains a high performing workforce while maximizing wise use of taxpayer dollars.