

ASVET MEMORANDUM NO. \_\_\_\_\_

TO: ALL VETS STAFF

FROM: ESPIRIDION (AL) BORREGO

SUBJECT: Policy on Diversity

**I. PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this memorandum is to transmit VETS' policy on diversity. Diversity has been defined as "the increase in possibilities, creativity, and energy inherent in a population of different race/ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and other characteristics."

The need for diversity is clear. We must make full use of our recruitment opportunities to strengthen workforce diversity. This can be accomplished through the development and maintenance of relationships with diverse recruitment sources, effective hiring authorities and programs which would also include veterans as a part of this very diverse workforce.

**II. BACKGROUND:**

Secretary of Labor, Alexis M. Herman, has stated that one of her major goals for the Department of Labor (DOL) is to foster equal opportunity workplaces throughout the nation. She believes, and I concur, that the Department of Labor should be a model employer "that not only preaches but practices inclusiveness, fairness, and the participation of all employees in all facets of the Department." She has further stated that she is "committed to ensuring that each and every opportunity that arises at DOL for hiring and advancement is at the reach of all qualified individuals, without regard to their race, ethnicity, gender, age, or disabling condition."

In October of 1997 Secretary Herman established a Diversity Task Force, composed of senior level officials. This Task Force was "to assess the status of diversity in DOL, to identify issues and challenges that may arise in achieving the goals, and to make recommendations on what improvements are needed to achieve greater diversity and equal employment opportunity in the Department."

The members of the Diversity Task Force solicited input and comments from employees, managers, union officials, and special interest groups of employees within and outside the Department. They also reviewed current data on representation rates, by agency and DOL-wide, including major occupations and various grade levels, and data on accessions, separations, and promotions.

Secretary Herman requested that the report of the Task Force be submitted to her no later than January 31, 1998. On February 6, 1998, the Department released An Equal Opportunity Workplace - Recommendations of the Secretary of Labor's Diversity Task Force to be distributed by agencies to all employees. The Task Force concluded that there were four (4) core issues to be addressed: commitment to diversity, especially by managers; career progress and development opportunities; full use of recruitment opportunities to strengthen workforce diversity; and additional services and enhanced communication. There were 44 agreed upon recommendations to address the four (4) core issues. These recommendations were grouped under five (5) overarching recommendations:

1. Communicate our values
2. Be accountable
3. Expand growth opportunities, and encourage employee self-development
4. Improve recruiting
5. Include and inform

After review, Secretary Herman approved the recommendations of the Task Force. Agency heads were then to develop and submit to the Secretary by May 15, 1998, individual Agency Action Plans to implement the report's recommendations.

On February 4, 1998, VETS submitted to the Department its Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) Plan. On May 15, 1998, VETS submitted to the Department its Equal Opportunity Plan of Action. Copies of these documents are attached to this memorandum. The VETS' plan has been approved by the Department.

### **III. POLICY:**

VETS is fully committed to supporting the Secretary's goal of fostering equal opportunity workplaces throughout the nation. We concur with and support her desire to make DOL a model employer that not only preaches but practices inclusiveness, fairness, and the participation of all employees in all facets of the Department. Diversity and equal employment opportunity are critical elements in both of the above endeavors. VETS' policy will be to take aggressive, appropriate steps to assure that all avenues are explored and implemented that will allow us to achieve full compliance with our targeted recruitment priorities and to assure that all employees have equal employment opportunities.

American veterans are as diverse a segment of the population as we could possibly wish for. They bring with them different skills, knowledge, ethnic viewpoints, and work experiences that benefit us all. We should avail ourselves of this wonderful opportunity to learn and appreciate their diversity. We must always remember that those veterans we are here to serve made both personal and professional sacrifices to protect the freedom and security of our Nation that we all

cherish. Therefore, VETS policy includes the guarantee that all veterans are provided appropriate and expeditious assistance that will allow them the opportunity to enhance and enrich their lives.

Finally, VETS' diversity in employment is intimately related to delivery of services to our veteran clients. A diverse workforce assures that our staff is able to address some of the problems our veteran clients may encounter because of their culture or background, or better understand the appropriate solutions to difficulties they may face. VETS understands the advantages of having veterans serve veterans and the commitment that brings to our jobs. This concept can also be applied to the goal of being a diverse workforce, that has the same commitment to help a diverse veteran population.

#### **IV. GUIDANCE AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

VETS Diversity Plan of Action follows the five (5) overarching recommendations which Secretary Herman approved. Following are actions to be taken by VETS to assist us in complying with the approved recommendations:

1. Communicate our values

Provide the diversity plan to all employees; issue VETS policy and expectations; and discuss expectations with employees.

2. Be accountable

Include diversity efforts in both managers and employees (following consultation with unions) elements and standards and promote use of the Diversity Toolkit (when available) by all employees. Establish activities and/or training to address rewards and workplace values for employees.

3. Expand growth opportunities, and encourage employee self-development

Establish Individual Development Plans for employees; request funds necessary to train employees in core competencies; set aside funds to enable adequate training for employees; open all vacancies to full open competition for positions in which underrepresentation exists; and identify underrepresentation for VETS positions by group and distribute list to RAVETs. Seek opportunities to develop employees through cross-agency assignments, when possible, and continue to utilize teams and committees to provide some internal cross-training. Explore ways in which to provide more mentoring opportunities for managers and employees. Provide employees with information on the availability of services provided by the Career Assistant Centers (CAC) nationwide and encourage them to take advantage of the CAC services.

#### 4. Improve recruiting

Ensure all selecting officials know where underrepresentation exists; monitor presence of members of underrepresented groups applying and in certificates; and assure all selecting officials are aware of their responsibility to request from the Job Service diverse referrals for vacancies. VETS has identified underrepresentation in females and minorities and has developed recruitment methods/sources to address and correct the issue (see attached FEORP Plan). Explore ways to expand use of the Public Employment Service as a means of recruiting for vacancies. Continue to utilize the VRA authority and other flexibilities in identifying and hiring eligible applicants.

#### 5. Include and inform

Distribute DOL Diversity Report to all employees. Distribute copies of the Secretary's recommendations to all employees, along with the FEORP and affirmative action plan.

In conclusion, all employees in VETS, regardless of position held, have a responsibility in helping VETS and the Department meet our diversity and equal employment opportunity objectives. Supervisors and managers have responsibility for providing diversity and equal employment opportunities as part of their everyday duties. Employees must also assume responsibility by taking charge of their careers by maximizing training and career development, and by continually broadening their knowledge and skills. In addition to structured training and career development classes, valuable and new information can be obtained through cross-training, working on projects in teams, learning other duties and responsibilities through details, and/or assisting co-workers in varying new assignments. Lifelong learning, whether through educational institutions or through self improvement courses, can provide rewarding opportunities to gain new or enhance current knowledge and skills. Diversity in the workforce naturally brings with it employees with different perspectives, knowledge, skills, viewpoints, and work experiences. We should take every opportunity to appreciate and learn to tolerate individual differences. Much can be learned on a day to day basis through interactions with co-workers.

VETS has some unique statutory requirements with respect to hiring that other agencies do not have which may narrow promotional opportunities for some individuals. However, we are able to provide employees with training and development opportunities for positions both within and outside of VETS. All employees should make a commitment to pursuing these opportunities.

We have been fortunate in already completing some of the identified milestones. I hope that each of you will look forward as enthusiastically as I do to the challenges and opportunities facing us as we move ahead in this important endeavor.

VETS has been pursuing for some time a path that will earn us recognition as a "world class

organization”. Diversity can be an excellent tool and element in achieving this admirable goal. Each of us plays an important role and should take pride in his or her contributions towards making VETS a “world class organization”, for today and for years to come.

**INQUIRIES:** Should you have any questions or comments regarding the information contained in this memorandum they should be directed to Mr. Hary Puente-Duany, Director of the Office of Agency Management and Budget. He may be reached at 202/219-8421 or through E-Mail.

Attachments: VETS Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) Plan  
VETS Equal Opportunity Plan of Action