

VETS Manual Series, Volume III
Human Resources Management
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3.1 Overview of this Human Resource Management Volume

This volume provides relatively brief topical narratives and hyperlinks to related policy or procedure documents of importance to human resources managers within the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS).

The primary intent of the authors and editors of this volume is to help the managers and supervisors of this Agency's most valued assets--the staff who do the work of the agency--to succeed. This volume is not intended to replace the broad and deep repositories of information and guidance available from DOL and OPM sources. It offers some practical "how to" guidance in various commonly-encountered aspects of human resource management, and directs the VETS user to the related in-depth documents available on-line from those other sources.

3.1.1 Human Resources Management in DOL

Under the broad authority delegated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Department of Labor administers its human resources management activities in accordance with Title 5 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) and Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). For an overview of the Department's Human Resource Program, go to: http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DPR/Chapter250.htm.

VETS' principal partners in human resource management activities are the specialists in the Human Resource Centers maintained by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management (OASAM) in each DOL Regional Office and in the National Office.

3.1.1.1 Supervisor's Toolbox

Virtually all of the guidance materials prepared by DOL especially to help supervisors in the Department be successful in their human resource management activities are compiled in one place called the "Supervisor's Toolbox," at <http://www.labornet.dol.gov/supervisorstoolbox/supervisorstoolbox.htm>.

3.1.2 VETS Workforce Planning and the VETS Hiring Process

Through the annual performance budget process, VETS, like every other agency in the DOL is allocated a specific number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions to carry out the agency's mission. In VETS the FTE level includes all of the careerist and political positions in the field, National Office, and Office of the Assistant Secretary.

Annually, during the budget formulation and execution processes, VETS leaders re-consider the FTE allocations to the various components of the agency, e.g., the N.O. divisions, the six regions, the states, and make decisions based on projected mission-critical workloads. In VETS, due to a variety of factors, the FTE allocations are relatively stable from year-to-year.

The OPM is responsible for promulgating Federal policies and procedures governing Federal hiring practices, and it provides extensive guidance materials through its web site (see http://fehb.opm.gov/Strategic_Management_of_Human_Capital/fhfrfc/default.asp), but when VETS has a vacancy to fill it must rely upon the OASAM HR Center to carry out many of the procedures involved in the process. (See http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DPR/Chapter337.htm.)

There are many ways to fill jobs, some of them involving special means to facilitate the employment of certain categories of veterans. While it is advantageous for VETS managers and supervisors to be conscious of these special hiring authorities and processes, OASAM HR Center staff members do most of the bureaucratic work involved in the hiring process.

But of course it is the VETS manager or supervisor who is responsible for making the selection(s) of new employees, and for enabling a new employee to continue past the probation stage (i.e., the first year) into career conditional status and later into full careerist status, and for promoting an individual employee to a higher level position.

No matter what position is being filled, selecting the right person for the job is the most important human resource decision that a VETS manager makes. The next most important is deciding, when the time comes, whether or not that person's performance has proved that he or she should be enabled to remain in the agency with career-conditional or full careerist status.

3.1.2.1 VETGuide

Since VETS also has some program responsibilities related to the veterans' preference statute applicable to most Federal jobs, VETS managers and supervisors should be aware of the various aspects of the statute applicable to the employment of veterans in the Federal government. The most comprehensive source of information available from OPM is the VETGuide, which can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/employ/veterans/html/vetguide.asp>.

3.1.2.2 Special Appointment Authorities for Veterans

Guidance related specifically to three types of special recruitment/selection avenues available only to veterans: Veterans Recruitment Appointments (formerly called Veterans Readjustment Appointments), non-competitive appointments of 30% (or greater) disabled veterans, and Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) appointments may be found at

https://www.opm.gov/Strategic_Management_of_Human_Capital/fhfrc/FLX02020.asp.

3.1.2.3 Veterans'/Disabled Veterans' Preference

Explanation of the basic principles and eligibilities for "veterans' preference" in competitive hiring situations may be found at http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/eir-veterans_preference.htm.

3.1.2.4 Rehabilitation Act Requirements

Explanation of the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 related to the hiring of individuals who have disabilities is found at http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/eir-employing_people_with_disa.htm.

3.1.2.5 Affirmative Action

The basic goal of the DOL program is to increase employment of women, persons with disabilities, minorities, and disabled veterans. An overview of the DOL approach to achieving that goal may be found at http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS4PersonnelManagement/dlms4_0400.doc

3.1.3 *Prohibited Personnel Practices and Ethics Guide*

Explanations of all of the things managers and employees may not do!

<http://www.opm.gov/ovrsight/proidx.asp>

<http://labornet.dol.gov/html/How-to-Keep-Out-Of-Trouble.htm>.

<http://www.osc.gov/documents/pubs/rights.htm>

3.1.3.1 Harassing Conduct

Harassment is not acceptable conduct. In the DOL, harassing conduct is defined as: any unwelcome verbal or physical conduct based on any characteristic protected by law when (a) the behavior can reasonably be considered to adversely affect the work environment, or (b) an employment decision affecting the employee is based upon the employee's acceptance or rejection of such conduct.

DOL policy does not require that a pattern of such behavior be proved by a complainant. A single utterance or other presentation of an ethnic, racial or sexual slur or epithet that offends an employee may be grounds for a finding of misconduct by the guilty employee and subsequent disciplinary action.

Explanations of the DOL policy, rules and procedures are at http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/harassing_conduct_in_the_workp.htm

3.1.4 DOORS - DOL Online Opportunity Recruitment System

A brief overview of the system used for all vacancy announcements is found at http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/SupervisorAids/Supervisor21.htm.

3.1.4.1 Managers Guide to DOORS.

Detailed guidance specially prepared for managers may be found at <http://www.labornet.dol.gov/supervisorstoolbox/PDFs/ManagersGuidetoDOORS.pdf>.

3.1.5 WebPARs (People Power)

How do VETS managers and their OASAM partners initiate and manage just about all personnel actions? The answer is, through the Web-based Personnel Action Request system. To become familiar with WebPARs see the basic information used in the training sessions for users at <http://www.peoplepower.dol.gov/webpar/hrms4/documents/training/slideshows.jsp> and <http://peoplepower.dol.gov/webpar/hrms4/documents/training/trainingMaterials.jsp>.

3.1.6 Performance Management – What is “Performance Management?”

From Performance Management - A Briefcase Book, by Robert Bacal (McGraw-Hill)

Performance management is an ongoing communication process, undertaken in partnership, between an employee and his or her immediate supervisor that involves establishing clear expectations and understanding about:

- the essential job functions the employee is expected to do
- how the employee's job contributes to the goals of the organization
- what "doing the job well" means in concrete terms
- how employee and supervisor will work together to sustain, improve, or build on existing employee performance
- how job performance will be measured

The OPM handbook (at www.opm.gov/perform/WPPDF/2002/HANDBOOK.PDF) describes performance management as a systematic process composed of five key components:

- Planning work and setting expectations
- Continually monitoring performance
- Developing the capacity to perform
- Periodically rating performance in a summary fashion
- Rewarding good performance

The Merit Systems Protection Board published a study that includes some recommendations to supervisors regarding managing performance that one may read: [Merit Systems Protection Board report - 'The Power of Federal Employee Engagement'](#).

3.1.6.1 Performance (Management) Plans

A good employee Performance Plan clearly states all of the standards indicative of successful performance of each significant element of the job encumbered by the subject employee.

Performance standards for individual employees must be objective and measurable. In order to develop and implement a Performance Plan that is objective and measurable, a supervisor or manager must recognize the difference between describing activities to be performed by an employee, and describing the results expected from an employee's performance.

Describing activities to be performed is the critical task when writing a position description; describing the results expected in measurable and objective terms is the critical task when writing personnel performance standards.

The OPM Handbook on Performance Management (hyperlinked above) defines three types of elements,

- critical elements, (Page 8)
- noncritical elements, and (Page 9)
- additional performance elements (Page 10)

but current DOL policy is that only critical elements are to be included in individual Performance Plans.

A critical element is an aspect of the subject job that is so important that failure to meet the performance standards for the element obligates the supervisor to commence formal performance improvement actions with the employee. An employee may eventually be demoted or removed for failing to meet the requirements established for a critical element.

DOL offers an extensive guide to supervisors at <http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/manager-guide-perf-stds.htm>.

3.1.6.2 How do you address accomplishments rather than activities in a Performance Plan?

The principle to keep in mind when writing performance standards is that a “standard” clearly states or indicates the results expected of the individual’s performance of specific work activities. So, rather than describing the work activity itself, a “standard” refers specifically to the outcome(s) expected to come out of the work activities included within each element of the job. For example, “standards” will describe specific products or services and the quality, quantity, or timeliness of those products or services expected of the employee.

The differences between writing a job description of a work activity and writing performance standards are illustrated in the following comparative example:

Job description: “A current inventory list is maintained of all accountable property within the area of responsibility. The inventory is periodically reconciled against the regional inventory log, and discrepancies are identified and resolved.”

Performance standard: “The requirements of this element are met when:

- An accurate inventory of all accountable property is maintained at all times.
- The inventory is reconciled quarterly with the regional inventory log, and discrepancies are identified to the DVET within three work days following the end of the review.
- Timely and appropriate actions to resolve discrepancies are completed within the time frame specified by the DVET.”

3.1.6.3 How do you develop a Performance Plan that establishes elements and standards that lead to organizational goal achievement?

The OPM Handbook describes an eight-step process for creating Performance Plans (beginning on page 24). As the Handbook states, each step in the eight-step process builds on the previous step.

In VETS, most of the agency's goals relate either to services provided directly by VETS staff or by staff of affiliated agencies or organizations to VETS' customers. So, many of the "elements" in VETS field staff Performance Plans relate to the various customer service program operations, e.g., USERRA, the grants programs, the Transition Assistance Program, et cetera. And, most of VETS goals have been related to specific DOL strategic goals, as required by DOL policy.

A Fully Successful or equivalent standard, (in DOL, "Meets") must be established for each critical element. The Fully Successful standard identifies the level of performance below which performance is either "Needs Improvement" or "Fails," or above which ("Exceeds"), special recognition may be warranted.

When creating a Performance Plan for a subordinate employee, the supervisor has to determine what data will be needed to appraise the employee's performance, how to collect the data for each performance element, which source the data should come from, and whether to collect all the data or just a sample. He or she also has to determine when to collect the data, who should collect it, and who should receive it. It's a good idea to try to design feedback processes that give employees feedback automatically.

OPM recommends that a supervisor use the following list of questions to evaluate each Performance Plan that he or she intends to establish:

- Are the critical elements truly critical? Would failure in the critical element mean that the employee's overall performance is not acceptable?
- Is the range of acceptable performance clear? Are the performance expectations quantifiable, observable, and/or verifiable?
- Are the standards attainable? Are expectations reasonable?
- Are the standards challenging? Does the employee need to exert a reasonable amount of effort to reach a fully successful performance level?
- Are the standards fair? Are they comparable to expectations for other employees in similar positions? Do they allow for some reasonable margin of error?
- Are the standards applicable? Can the appraiser(s), i.e., the Rater (immediate supervisor) and Reviewer (second-level supervisor) use the standards to appraise performance? Can the appraiser(s) manage the data collected through the measurement process?
- Will employee(s) understand what is required?

- Are the elements and standards flexible? Can they be adapted readily to changes in resources or objectives?
- Is the “Meets” standard exceedable? Is it possible for an employee’s performance to exceed it in a measurable way?

3.1.6.4 How do you write standards that support program goals if the program is conducted by another entity, such as a grantee?

VETS is a grantor agency (e.g., the State Jobs for Veterans grants and the competitively awarded grants), and a direct service agency (e.g., the USERRA program), so the majority of VETS field staff engage in work activities in which the degree of control over program results varies considerably.

Whereas a VETS staff member responsible for handling a USERRA claim has a relatively high level of control or influence on the outcome of that claim with regard to the program measure(s) (e.g., timeliness of case disposition), that same staff member may also be responsible for grant oversight and technical assistance duties. Clearly the employee’s level of control or influence on the grant program outcomes (e.g., the “entered employment rate”) is relatively less than in the USERRA program situation.

A performance standard for the grant oversight and/or technical assistance element(s) of a typical VETS field staff member may be unfair if it is interpreted to mean that in order for the VETS staff member to “meet” his or her standard the grantee(s) must attain or surpass the program goals set for the grantee(s).

One way to construct a performance standard for a grant oversight and/or technical assistance element that supports attainment of the grant program goals and challenges the VETS staff member while also being fair is to include a clause in the standard related to the program goals, but making attainment by the grantee of the goals an optional measure within the standard, e.g.:

Performance Standard: For an overall rating of “meets” for this element, the incumbent must meet no less than 10 of 12 requirements listed below; requirements #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11 must be among the 10 met.

1. Analyses of grant modification proposals and/or initial applications are complete with respect to review requirements, e.g., agency-approved checklists.
2. Analyses of grant mod proposals and/or initial applications are presented to the DVET within established time frames.

3. Requests for technical assistance from grantees or grant applicants are properly recorded.
4. Technical Assistance provided to grantees is accurate and timely with respect to fiscal and programmatic rules/guidelines applicable to the subject grant.
5. All post-award reports required of the respective grantees under the various grant programs are tracked to see that suspense dates are met. Deviations are promptly identified and referred to DVET for action.
6. Reports are reviewed for completeness and adherence to applicable guidelines. Deviations are identified and referred to DVET for action.
7. Analyses provided to DVET regarding program outcomes achieved by grantees are timely.
8. Analyses regarding program outcomes reflect proper comparisons to grant goals, performance measures and special assurances.
9. Findings from on-site evaluations or desk audits of grantee operations (LV/DV, HRVP, TAP, etc.) reflect thorough understanding of applicable policies and regulations.
10. Complete reports of findings from on-site evaluations or desk audits of grantee operations and any recommendations are presented to the DVET no later than ten days following completion of the review.
11. Liaison efforts result in the effective partnering between or among grantees and the creation of other appropriate linkages of benefit to the target groups served by VETS' grantees.
12. Performance targets for the common measures are met or exceeded by the grantees.

Note: The sample element and related standards above might be considered by some staff, in some circumstances, to be inclusive of too many aspects of grant management. If so, the element could be divided into two, for example by separating performance requirements into pre-award and post-award elements of grant management.

3.1.6.5 Guiding Principles for Performance Measurement

Probably the most important thing a supervisor needs to do is to strive to measure what is important – *which may not be the same as what is easy to measure* – regarding an employee's performance.

That may require constructing a performance standard for each critical element of the job that involves multiple measures of the various qualitative and quantitative aspects of the element. And almost certainly it will require teamwork by the employee and supervisor to devise appropriate measures for each element of the job.

3.1.6.6 Principles Regarding Feedback to Employees

Effective, frequent, and timely feedback addressing employee performance on elements and standards is an essential component of a successful performance management program.

Feedback works best when it relates specifically to particular elements and standards, and is timely. People respond better to information presented in a positive way. Present accurate, factual, and complete feedback; it is more effective when it both reinforces what the employee did right and also identifies what the employee needs to do in the future if he or she is to receive a better rating for a specific element of the job.

3.1.6.7 Specific DOL Progress Review Requirements

Each Agency Head is required to ensure that performance feedback is provided to each employee during the appraisal period. A formal progress review must be held at least once during the appraisal period, and under normal circumstances is expected to be done no later than 120 days before the end of the rating period. This review—which may be done orally--must include areas of critical competencies requiring improvement and feedback on sustaining positive performance. At a minimum, during this progress review, employees will be informed orally of their performance relative to the elements and standards in their Performance Plans. The rating official and the employee will certify (by signing) on the Performance Plan form (which is also the appraisal form) that the progress review was held.

In VETS the expectation is that employees who are in the probation stage (i.e., first year after initial appointment) or in the career conditional stage will receive a written progress report 120 days before the date that those respective career-status periods end. It is imperative, therefore, that supervisors ensure that those employees receive their signed Performance Plans in time to ensure that that expectation regarding timely progress assessments may be met.

3.1.6.8 Performance Appraisals: Who Gets Rated, and When?

All DOL employees are supposed to have a twelve-month performance rating period beginning on October 1 and ending on September 30. Supervisors are expected to establish (through discussion of and joint signing of) individual Performance Plans for each employee at the beginning of the rating period,

and to complete an appraisal of each employee within 30 days after the end of the cycle.

An appraisal cycle does not actually begin until the supervisor and employee have signed a Performance Plan and the Plan is signed by the second-level supervisor, i.e., the Reviewer. At a minimum, appraisals must cover a 90-day period of performance.

In the event that a change in supervisors occurs during the fiscal year, or a new employee begins work after the start of the fiscal year, VETS' expectation is that a new Performance Plan will be signed by the employee and the Rater and Reviewer within 30 days of the date of the change of supervisor or start date of the new employee.

The entire body of DOL guidance regarding performance appraisals may be found at www.labornet.dol.gov/html/eir-performance_ratings_-_guid.htm.

Performance Appraisal Process Checklist

The Philadelphia OASAM Regional Office Human Resource Center issued the following list that outlines the steps (described in more detail above) in the process, from establishing elements and standards to concluding the annual appraisal of an individual employee.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESS CHECKLIST

- _____ Establish elements and standards on DL Form 1-384 (7/2003) for non-managers and supervisors; DL 1-382 (6/2004) for managers and supervisors.
- At least one performance element is aligned with agency and/or organizational strategic goals.
 - Performance standards are results-oriented and include measures of performance such as: timeliness, quantity, quality, and cost effectiveness.
- _____ Discuss the following with the employee face-to-face, if practicable:
- (a) Elements and standards.
 - (b) Expectations.
 - (c) Concerns of the employee.
 - (d) If more than one criterion in the standard, give employee relative importance of the criteria contained within the standard;

(e) Upon request, orally inform employee expectations for exceeding the standard

_____ Provide a copy of the performance plan to the employee. Allow up to:

--ten (10) work days for NCFLL bargaining unit employees;

--five work days for all other employees

to review and consider elements and standards and submit written comments. NCFLL bargaining unit employees may consult with a union representative during the ten (10) work day period.

_____ Employee and Rating Official sign/date form. Check appropriate blocks for inclusion or exclusion of written comments and forward the performance plan [and written comments if applicable] to the Reviewing Official.

_____ Reviewing Official considers employee comments, if any. If changes made to elements and standards, these changes need to be discussed with the employee. Reviewing Official signs/dates performance plan and returns to Rating Official. The appraisal period begins on the date the plan is signed by the Reviewing Official.

_____ Rating Official provides employee with a copy of their performance plan. Rating Official retains the original.

_____ Provide regular feedback throughout the appraisal period. Contact your Labor/Employee Relations Specialist for advice and guidance if the employee's performance fails to meet one or more standards at anytime during the appraisal period in order to place the employee on a performance improvement plan (PIP).

_____ Conduct a mid-term review no later than 120 days before the end of the appraisal period [end of appraisal period is normally September 30]. Orally inform employee of their performance relative to their elements and standards. Identify areas requiring improvement and provide feedback on sustaining positive performance. Employees in career ladder positions need to be provided information to assess their progress toward attaining a career ladder promotion. Include a discussion of any training and development needs of the employee.

_____ Employee and Rating Official sign/date performance plan to document the conduct of the mid-term review. If appraisal period is equal to or less than 120 days thereby precluding the conduct of a mid-term review the Rating Official should annotate the Mid-Term Progress Review Certification section of the performance plan indicating reason(s) why the mid-term review could not be conducted.

_____ Rating Official prepares the performance appraisal/rating and confers with the Reviewing Official to secure their approval of the tentative rating BEFORE discussing the appraisal with the employee – NO SIGNATURES OR DATES SHOULD BE AFFIXED TO THE FORM AT THIS TIME.

(a) Elements rated below or above meets require a written narrative

(b) Consider factors outside employee's control

"Unsatisfactory" summary ratings cannot be assigned without the prior implementation of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). Contact your Labor/Employee Relations Specialist for advice and guidance if the employee's summary rating is "Unsatisfactory" and you did not implement a PIP.

_____ Mark appropriate block for the rating assigned to each individual element.

_____ Mark appropriate block on page 2 of performance plan designating Purpose of Appraisal and check the element rating blocks to correspond to the rating assigned to each individual element.

_____ Rating Official meets face-to-face, to the extent practicable, with the employee to review accomplishments, problems and general performance during the appraisal period and discusses the tentative conclusions reached regarding the rating. This discussion needs to include information to assess their progress toward attaining a career ladder promotion.

_____ Employees have an opportunity to present their assessment of their work accomplishments and time to respond in writing to the Rating Official:

--NCFLL bargaining unit employees have up to ten (10) workdays

--All other employees have up to five (5) workdays

_____ Employee and Rating Official sign/date form. Check appropriate blocks for inclusion or exclusion of written comments and forward the performance plan [and written comments if applicable] to the Reviewing Official. Any written comments submitted by the employee must be attached to and retained with the performance appraisal form.

- Employees are not required to sign the completed appraisal form and if they elect not to the Rating Official must annotate the employee signature line such as "employee declined to sign."

_____ Forward the performance plan, whether or not the employee signed the form, to the Reviewing Official, along with any written comments submitted by the employee, for final approval.

_____ Reviewing Official considers employee comments, if any. If changes made to rating, these changes need to be discussed with the employee by the Rating Official. Reviewing Official signs/dates performance plan and returns to Rating Official.

_____ Rating Official provides employee with a copy of their performance appraisal.

_____ Original performance appraisal, including comments if any submitted at the beginning and/or end, is forwarded to the Human Resources Office for scanning into the employee's e-OPF file.

3.1.6.9 Performance Improvement Actions

In DOL, because all elements set forth in an employee's Performance Plan are considered critical, if an employee fails to meet the performance standard for any element the supervisor is obligated by Federal rules to initiate actions to positively address the under-performance situation.

In VETS, the first step in such a situation that the supervisor should take is to inform his or her supervisor, the "Reviewer," of the under-performance situation. Typically in VETS this sort of circumstance results in advice being sought by VETS management from the appropriate OASAM Human Resources labor relations specialist to ensure that relevant DOL policies and procedures are understood before remedial actions are initiated.

The supervisor is obligated by Federal rules and DOL policy to formally counsel the employee about the under-performance. It is the supervisor's responsibility to clearly identify the area(s) of under-performance and ensure that the expectations stated or implied within the particular standard(s) are understood by the employee.

The counseling session should be a two-way communication so that the supervisor can ascertain whether or not there are reasonable actions he or she might take to assist the employee in rising to the acceptable level of performance.

A written record for both employee and supervisor should be made of the counseling session.

If after a reasonable period of time the employee's performance has not improved to the acceptable level, the supervisor is obligated to construct, with the involvement of the employee, a formal Performance Improvement Plan. This document becomes a compact between the employee and the supervisory levels that lays out in writing what the employee is expected to do to improve to the acceptable level of performance and what the agency will do to assist in that improvement plan. At this time, the employee will be formally put on notice what will be the consequence(s) of failure to attain the required level of performance.

Specific DOL guidance may be found at http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/eir-dealing_with_poor_performe.htm.

3.1.7 DOL Awards Programs

The DOL awards program is designed to improve Government operations by motivating and rewarding excellence by members of the workforce. Recognizing outstanding performance and achievement is an essential management responsibility critical to stimulating and sustaining high levels of proficiency and productivity. The Employee Recognition and Awards Program Handbook provides detailed information on the guidelines and criteria required for each award. VETS supervisors are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the array of awards and to make good use of them.

3.1.7.1 Forms to Use When Nominating Staff for DOL Awards:

Forms may be found at <http://labornet.dol.gov/html/forms.htm>.

3.1.8 Staff Training

The Department and VETS support the concept of "continuous learning." The fact that VETS field staff are widely dispersed rather than clustered in the

regional office cities adds significant cost factors to the challenge of providing appropriate training opportunities to all VETS employees.

3.1.8.1 Online Learning Opportunities

One major resource available to all VETS staff is the catalog of skills courses available on-line from the LearningLink web site at <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/learninglink/SkillSoftCatalog-Abridged.xls>.

There VETS staff can find a wide variety of courses, many of which can help staff attain or further develop skills useful in the work that they do.

Staff members must discuss and obtain supervisory approval prior to starting any on-line learning and development activity that takes place during duty hours.

Supervisors are encouraged to be proactive in

- Assuring that employees have the opportunity for learning and development that will enhance present job performance.
- Making decisions regarding scheduling and/or approving on-line time for employees to complete learning and development activities, and evaluating the results of such activities.

Unless specifically required by the supervisor, course work performed outside of normal duty hours is not considered "hours worked" and is, therefore, not compensable.

Employees are responsible for

- Discussing their learning and development needs with their Supervisors.
- Participating in planning for their development, including, where appropriate, the preparation of an Individual Development Plan (IDP).
- Requesting approval of on-line time for learning and development activities.
- Successfully completing and evaluating approved learning and development activities.
- Applying learning to current position in an effort to enhance and influence the organization.

To learn how to access and use the LearningLink site, go to <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/learninglink/>.

3.1.8.2 Individual Development Plan (IDP)

VETS supervisors are encouraged to work with the employees under their command to create and/or update individual development plans.

The form used for recording an IDP may be found at <http://www.labornet.dol.gov/regions/Documents/DL-1-80.pdf>.

More on supervisor and employee responsibilities pertinent to individual development plans can be found at: http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/dol_continuous_learning_policy.htm

3.1.8.3 National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI)

The NVTI was established in 1986 to further develop and enhance the professional skills of veterans' employment and training service providers throughout the United States. The school is funded by the VETS, and administered by the University of Colorado at Denver. Classroom training is conducted in Denver, Colorado and at selected regional sites in the U.S. and abroad. The Institute is the only one of its kind in the United States.

Most of the training courses offered by the NVTI are for non-federal staff, but three courses, basic USERRA, Investigator training, and VEOA (federal veterans' preference) are specifically for VETS staff. See information on the courses and how to apply at <http://www.nvti.cudenver.edu/home/homePage.htm>.

3.1.8.4 Tuition Assistance for Commercial Training Opportunities

In some circumstances, training for employees may be purchased by the agency from commercial vendors such as community colleges, trade schools, for-profit or not-for-profit agencies or organizations, et cetera. Some courses may be purchased and pursued through on-line offerings, such as the USDA's Graduate School, at <http://grad.usda.gov>. The availability of funds for such purchases is expressed in the annual budget execution guidance provided to regional offices, along with the procurement guidelines and authorities.

3.1.8.5 Mentoring

Mentoring is probably the most common mode of training used in VETS to help new employees and/or newly promoted employees acquire the knowledge and the skills they will need to be successful. Mentoring arrangements vary from region to region, due in part to geographic differences and cost considerations, but the basic concept is pairing of the new employee with one or more well regarded peer(s). Mentors serve as a job coach for specific aspects of the job.

3.2 Health and Safety

In the DOL, it is management's responsibility to ensure that the safety and occupational health provisions of the DOL - Local 12 of the American Federation of Government Employees (Local 12), AFL-CIO; DOL - National Council of Field Labor Locals (NCFL), AFGE, AFL-CIO; and, DOL, Office of Labor Management Standards - National Union of Labor Investigators, are met.

The complete explanation and description of the DOL safety and health program is found at:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS4PersonnelManagement/dlms4_0800.htm.

3.2.1 Self-study Guide for Supervisors

The link below takes you to a self-study guide for supervisors. The self-study guide takes an hour or less to review, and provides information regarding supervisors' and employees' responsibilities with respect to various aspects of health and safety in the workplace, including topics such as "hazard recognition and control," "indoor air quality," "workplace violence," workers' compensation," and "accident investigation and review."

http://labornet.dol.gov/html/Final_Self_Study_4.htm.

3.3 Time Accounting (People Time/People Power)

Before you get into the People Time system, you have to know all about it. Go here first: <https://www.peoplepower.dol.gov/about/PtQsGuide.pdf>.

This link will enable you to see the bigger picture about personnel record management in DOL. <http://www.peoplepower.dol.gov/>.

3.4 Leave Program

Annual leave, sick leave, military leave, family leave—guidance regarding every type of covered absence from work is here:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DPR/Chapter630.doc.

3.5 Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)

Every agency in DOL has a plan for coping with emergency situations, should they arise. Information is available at

<http://labornet.dol.gov/EMC/COOP.htm>.

Every Regional Office in VETS is expected to have a VETS-specific COOP for all of the VETS operations within the region.

3.6 *Dealing with Accidents, Medical Illnesses, or Deaths Affecting the Workplace*

Injuries from accidents and/or illnesses that result in long-term absences from work or the death of a colleague can have serious impacts on other VETS personnel, and also on program services to VETS customers.

Rules and procedures regarding leave applicable to various situations may be found through the Labornet link in the "Leave" section (#3.4) above. In section 3.2 above (Health and Safety), the Labornet links will enable a VETS supervisor to see what he or she is responsible for in terms of accident reporting. Properly carrying out the supervisory responsibilities regarding leave, or accident reporting has to be a high priority for the supervisor, for the benefit of the employee, his or her dependents, and also for the agency.

VETS supervisors are encouraged to maintain "emergency contact" information for each employee under his or her supervision who wishes to supply such information. Any such information volunteered by an employee must be kept confidential and secure. An employee may choose not to divulge such information to a supervisor, as it is solely the individual's choice whether or not, or how, or to whom to make such information available.

Giving bad news to a dependent or to colleagues is never an easy task, but occasionally it may be required of a supervisor. Before so doing, the supervisor may benefit by seeking advice from a counselor in the Employee Assistance Program (See 3.6.1 below).

Dealing compassionately with the affected people is only part of the supervisor's responsibility. He or she must also make prudent decisions based on the circumstances to ensure that vital customer services are carried out in a timely manner.

In circumstances wherein other staff is called upon to take on additional burdens, arrangements to compensate them appropriately must be made. While it is highly possible, given the nature of most VETS staff, that people will volunteer to work "over and above" in order to "cover" for a convalescing colleague, a supervisor must remember that he or she is obligated to ensure that all employees are justly compensated for the work they perform regardless of the circumstances.

3.6.1 Employee Assistance Program.

Traumatic events in or outside the workplace can have deleterious effects not only on the immediate victims, but on others as well. Counselors affiliated

with the DOL Employee Assistance Program may be able to help in such circumstances.

The EAP mission is not only to assist in traumatic circumstances; the counselors employed by the Program may also be of assistance to employees whose work performance is negatively affected by personal issues such as alcohol or drug dependency, financial or emotional distress, or family problems. Employees with such problems are encouraged by DOL to seek counseling through the EAP to help them mitigate or resolve personal issues that affect their job performance.

EAP counselors may also be of assistance to a supervisor who is having difficulty dealing with an employee whose job performance, attendance or conduct is not acceptable. While counselors may not divulge to an employee's supervisor personal information learned from an employee, they may be able to effect better communications between the employee and the supervisor and thus assist both employee and supervisor in pursuing appropriate courses of action to improve job performance, attendance or conduct. Supervisors are encouraged by DOL to consult with EAP professionals if they suspect that personal issues may be negatively affecting an employee's conduct in the workplace or job performance.

Information about the Employee Assistance Program can be found here:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/eap_program.htm

3.6.2 Workers Compensation Program

The specific guidelines for supervisory actions and documentation required in situations where an injury or illness apparently has arisen due to circumstances in the workplace are found at

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS4PersonnelManagement/dlms4_0200.htm

3.7 Labor Management Relations

To be successful, a supervisor must understand the principles and agreements applicable to labor-management relations.

3.7.1 Merit System Principles

The basic principles that are the foundation of all labor-management relations and human resource management policies and practices in the Federal Government are set forth in Section 2301, Title 5, of the U.S. Code. These principles not only set the parameters for the various statutory and policy-based procedures that govern human resource management, they also guide the articulation of the various elements of the collective bargaining agreements negotiated in the DOL between the unions representing employees and DOL management. A supervisor familiar with the basic merit

system principles will find it easier to understand the nuances of the myriad human resource management rules and procedures and collective bargaining agreement requirements that he or she must abide by.

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/SupervisorAids/Supervisor07.htm.

3.7.2 Collective Bargaining Agreements

To avoid inadvertent violations of the collective bargaining agreement that is applicable to his or her operation, a VETS supervisor must first be aware of who is included and who is not included in the "bargaining unit." A person need not encumber a "supervisory" or "management" position to be outside the bargaining unit, and an employee need not be a dues-paying union member in order to be in the "bargaining unit" and protected by the applicable agreement.

Fundamental aspects of the principles in DOL are found at:

<http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/eir-bargaining-unit.htm>

3.7.2.1 National Council of Field Labor Locals (NCFL)

Most of the VETS employees who are within a bargaining unit are covered by the NCFL bargaining agreement, because the "Local 12" agreement is applicable only to employees in the Washington, DC area offices.

One of the fundamental principles of this and other bargaining agreements is that management is required to consult with the designated union official(s) prior to making substantive changes to an employee's working conditions. Specific chapters in the bargaining agreement relate to different aspects that together comprise an employee's "working conditions."

Supervisors are encouraged to review and become familiar with the entire bargaining agreement, which can be found at:

<http://www.labornet.dol.gov/assets/applets/DOL-Agreement.pdf>

3.7.2.2 Local 12 (Washington, DC area offices)

VETS supervisors in the District, Virginia and Maryland should become familiar with the Local 12 bargaining agreement, found at:

<http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/DOL-Local-12-Agreement.htm>

3.8 *Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)*

3.8.1 EEO Complaint Program

Numerous Federal laws comprise the civil rights statute that confers protections to individuals against discrimination or reprisal on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, disability, color, sexual orientation, or parental status. VETS supervisors should be aware of the statute (see next section) and the complaint process.

Information is at:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS4PersonnelManagement/dlms4_0300.htm#331.

3.8.2 Employee and Supervisor Rights

Information about the EEO statute is at

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS4PersonnelManagement/dlms4_0300.htm#350.

END