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### Chapter 3 HIRING, MANAGING AND TRAINING OFFICE STAFF

#### 3.01 Introduction

Hiring and managing professional, efficient staff members are primary components of successful vocational rehabilitation programs. This chapter contains guidance and requirements for hiring and managing office staff, to include general information, information on management, supervisory, and support staff positions, and case management positions. It also includes information on national performance standards, training and staff development, and counselor certification maintenance. Statutory and regulatory references are provided throughout this chapter.

#### 3.02 References and Resources

Law: 38 U.S. Code (U.S.C.) 3118

Regulations: 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 21.380  
38 CFR 21.382

Websites: [www.usajobs.gov/](http://www.usajobs.gov/)  
[www.va.gov/about\\_va/mission.asp](http://www.va.gov/about_va/mission.asp)  
[www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/21guides.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/21guides.asp)  
[vawww.portal.va.gov/SITES/VRWKM/pages/home.aspx](http://vawww.portal.va.gov/SITES/VRWKM/pages/home.aspx)  
[www.ms.va.gov/](http://www.ms.va.gov/)  
[www.va.gov/NCOD](http://www.va.gov/NCOD)

VA Form (VAF): VAF 28-0521, Application for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Maintenance

#### 3.03 General Information on Office Staffing

##### a. Policy on Maintaining Proper Levels of Staffing

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Division must maintain proper levels of staffing to fill immediate and forecasted needs.

The VR&E Officer (VREO) requests additional staff from the Director of the Office of Field Operations (OFO) through their Regional Office (RO) Director, who is responsible for office staffing. Requests for staffing are based on Resource Allocation Models (RAMs), which indicate how available resources are distributed, including Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and General Operating Expenses (GOE) contract money. The VREO can hire up to the RAM FTE

allotment, but may need special permission if using RAM FTE allotments for positions other than VRCs. If more than the RAM FTE is needed, the VREO must submit an impact paper through his/her chain of command requesting more FTEs.

b. Types of Staffing Activities

Staffing activities include identification, recruitment, and selection of professional and support staff under the provisions of CFR 38 21.380 and other applicable laws and regulations, such as the Veterans’ Recruitment Appointment.

c. Process for Staffing an Office

The table below describes the process for identifying and filling positions in an RO:

Stage	Who Is Responsible	Description
1	VREO	Submits staffing requests to the Director of OFO through his/her RO Director based on resource allocation models
2	Director, RO; Area Field Director	Approves the staffing request.
3	Human Resources (HR)	Advertises the position using the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) website <a href="http://www.usajobs.gov">www.usajobs.gov</a> , and screens eligible applicants. Certificates may be obtained through the OPM Qualification Standards Operating Manual, and/or Delegated Examining Unit (DEU), Jackson, MS.

3.04 Management, Supervisory and Support Staff Positions

a. Staffing Requirements and Position Descriptions for Management, Supervisory, and Support Staff Positions

Position descriptions and staffing requirements for management, supervisory, and administrative staff positions vary depending on the size of the RO. Each VR&E Division is managed by a VREO. However, the number of support staff members varies depending on the size of the RO and the number of Veterans it serves.

In a small RO, the VREO may not have an assistant and may have to perform the duties an Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer

(AVREO) would perform. In a large RO, an AVREO may be expected to perform some of the VREO's duties. In some ROs, additional supervisory positions (known as a Supervisory VRC or SVRC) may be authorized to reduce the ratio of employees to supervisors, or to provide direct management support to large out-based locations.

b. Benefits of Having Qualified Support Staff

The availability and quality of support staff (Program Specialists) can significantly influence the overall performance of the VR&E Division. The main benefit of appropriate support assistance is to relieve Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) and Employment Coordinators (ECs) from time-consuming but necessary tasks that personnel in support positions can more efficiently perform. The assistance from qualified support staff allows VRCs and ECs to devote more time to work demands that constitute their principal duties.

c. Job Function Categories for Support Staff

Counseling and Evaluation Support:

- Administer, score and record test results and inventories (such assistance is limited to instruments requiring little or no special training to administer)
- Obtain, sort and catalog occupational literature and other materials related to vocational counseling
- Compile data for reports either manually or using a computer
- Prepare and send appointment letters to Veterans for initial evaluation appointments
- File
- Prepare Counseling/Evaluation/Rehabilitation (CER) folders
- Process General Entitlement Decision (GED)

Rehabilitation Training Support:

- Prepare forms for entrance and reentrance into training

- Check that courses taken conform to the program outlined in the school catalog and advise VRC of any discrepancies found
- Obtain course grades and alert VRC to failing or marginal performance
- Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with staff members at the various training institutions where Chapter 31 Veterans are enrolled
- Process vouchers and awards, to include Revolving Fund Loans (RFL) Employment Adjustment Allowance (EAA) and subsistence allowance

### 3.05 Staffing and Position Descriptions

#### a. Staffing Requirements and Position Descriptions for the VREO, AVREO, VRCs, and ECs

The staffing requirements and position descriptions for VREO, AVREO, VRC and EC positions vary depending on the size of the RO and the number of Veterans it serves (see Appendix AI, VRC, EC, VREO and AVREO Position Descriptions and Position Announcements). In some offices, VRCs and ECs may also be referred to as case managers, and may perform a variety of administrative duties or employment activities. In a larger RO, these duties may be assigned to support staff members.

#### b. Recruiting Qualified Candidates

The VR&E Officer requests a certificate for qualified candidates from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) DEU. The DEU obtains the qualifications for each position, and provides the list to the hiring manager so that he/she can screen the applicants. Candidates can be hired nationally through [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov), external sources (Troops to Counselors program and college recruiting) or through a special hiring authority (for more information on special hiring authorities, see M28R.VI.A.8).

### 3.06 VR&E Division Performance Standards and Evaluations

The Director of VR&E Service, in collaboration with the OFO and area field directors, develops the VR&E Division's performance standards. Some performance standards are nationally developed (VRC, EC, VREO and AVREO), while the performance standards for a Program Specialist are developed locally.

The RO Director is responsible for evaluating the performance of the VR&E Division. He/she evaluates the VREO, which reflects overall division

performance. The VREO, AVREO and sometimes the SVRC evaluate individual employee performance.

### 3.07 Training and Staff Development

#### a. Overview

VR&E Service is responsible for providing a program of ongoing professional training and development for staff to ensure that rehabilitation services for Veterans with disabilities are provided in accordance with the most advanced knowledge, methods, and techniques available.

#### b. Background Information

VR&E Service demonstrates an emphasis on training by:

1. Establishing a VR&E training team located at VA Central Office (VACO)
2. Identifying core training requirements for RO positions
3. Developing and conducting centralized initial and refresher training programs
4. Monitoring RO training plans to ensure core training requirements are met
5. Establishing a VRC Skills Certification Program

#### c. Scope of Training

In conjunction with Employee Development and Training (ED&T), VR&E Service provides training delivery systems through the Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS), Talent Management System (TMS), located in the Knowledge Management Portal (KMP) under Training at <https://vawww.portal.va.gov/SITES/VRWKM/pages/home.aspx>

The scope of training at each VR&E Division is to supplement training provided by VR&E Service, and to adequately prepare local staff to successfully carry out their daily tasks. VR&E Divisions should identify staff development needs, fulfill VBA core annual technical training requirements, plan and implement an appropriate staff development program to meet those needs, guide development of Individual Development Plans (IDP), and provide periodic in-service training.

#### d. Responsibilities of VR&E Divisions

The VREO at each RO is responsible for staff development and training, to include but is not limited to the following:

1. Monitoring and reporting training and staff development activities
  2. Reviewing local performance data
  3. Identifying performance gaps
  4. Identifying local training needed to improve performance
  5. Identifying available training resources
  6. Developing training plans
  7. Requesting assistance to obtain or develop training material
  8. Notifying VR&E Service of major training needs
  9. Requesting CRC credit from VR&E Service on behalf of staff members
  10. Promoting mentor relationships with less experienced VRCs and ECs
  11. Providing new staff comprehensive training in a timely manner
  12. Providing frequent refresher training to experienced staff
  13. Allowing opportunities for staff members to attend professional training outside of the RO
- e. Responsibilities of VR&E Service

VR&E Service provides oversight of RO training plans and develops relevant centralized training products. VR&E Service is responsible for the following training initiatives:

1. Reviewing national performance data
2. Identifying performance gaps
3. Identifying training needed to improve performance
4. Identifying available training courses/modules/materials

5. Developing new training
  6. Providing training or training materials
  7. Reviewing training results
  8. Developing core training requirements for all VR&E positions
- f. Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Required Training

VR&E Divisions are notified regarding when VA/VBA mandatory courses will take place through a VBA letter issued to their respective RO Director. The RO Director may add other mandatory training requirements.

- g. Reimbursement for Training and Development Courses Outside of the VA

Training funds at the RO level must be requested by a proposal submitted to the VREO. Training budgets are determined and managed by the RO Director. The VREO is usually given a budget by the RO Director, which is typically small. The VREO determines where, to whom and how the training funds are allocated. Approved training outside of the VA is usually covered by a purchase order.

Employees desiring to take training outside of the VA should consult with their VREO for guidelines on reimbursement, and must take the following steps:

1. Research the course and make sure that it is not already available on TMS.
2. Send an email to the VREO with the following:
  - (a) Name of the course
  - (b) Location of the course
  - (c) Cost of the course
  - (d) Duration of the course
  - (e) If applicable, whether or not the course qualifies for CRC credit (see 3.09 f. in this Chapter)

(f) How the course will benefit the counselor

**3.08 Providing Training and Staff Development**

**a. Policy for Providing Training and Staff Development**

VR&E shall provide a program of ongoing professional training and development for staff of the VR&E Service engaged in providing rehabilitation services under Chapter 31. The objective of such training shall be to ensure that rehabilitation services for Veterans with disabilities are provided in accordance with the most advanced knowledge, methods, and techniques available for the rehabilitation of Veterans (see CFR 38 21.382). As a result, knowledge and skills should be maintained and upgraded on an ongoing and systematic basis. At a minimum, in-service training must be provided annually and meet the core requirements for each position.

**b. Areas for Training and Development**

The areas in which training and development activities may be provided to enhance staff skills include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Evaluation and assessment
2. Medical aspects of disability
3. Psychological aspects of disability
4. Counseling theory and techniques
5. Personal and vocational adjustment
6. Occupational information
7. Placement processes and job development
8. Special considerations in rehabilitation for people with severe disabilities
9. Independent Living (IL) services
10. Resources for training and rehabilitation
11. Utilization of research findings and professional publications
12. Administration of rehabilitation and counseling services

13. Professional ethics
14. Rehabilitation philosophy and history

c. Interagency Coordination for Planning and Providing Training

To plan and provide training for personnel, VR&E Service may coordinate with the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the Department of Labor (DOL) Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). The VR&E Division coordinates training with state employment offices as outlined in the local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DOL-VETS, VR&E and their individual state employment service (see Appendix K to view Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) between DOL-VETS and VR&E).

d. Resources for Providing Training and Development

To carry out training and development activities for VR&E staff, VA may conduct training through an in-service program or other on-site training; employ the services of consultants; write grants or make contracts with public and private agencies, including institutions of higher learning to conduct workshops and training activities; and authorize individual training at institutions of higher learning and appropriate facilities.

VR&E uses two electronic training resources:

1. Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS)

EPSS offers comprehensive, step-by-step instructions for carrying out a VRC's major job duties. For new counselors, EPSS is designed as a first-line performance support tool, complementing the traditional mentoring they receive from journeyman counselors. EPSS can also offer support to journeyman counselors for infrequently performed tasks.

EPSS is located on the KMP under Training at  
<https://vaww.portal.va.gov/SITES/VRWKM/pages/home.aspx>

2. Talent Management System (TMS)

TMS is a state-of-the-art online training and employee development system that allows VA employees to:

- Search and register for courses from an extensive online course catalog
- Track professional development through a single, integrated database
- View courses they have already taken and those they intend to take in the future
- Access mandatory classes as prescribed by VR&E Service

To access TMS go to [www.tms.va.gov](http://www.tms.va.gov) or the KMP under Training.

e. Identification of Staff Development Needs

To identify staff development needs, the VREO may perform the following functions:

- Conduct regular technical supervision and quality reviews with the staff
- Review individual VRC's counseling techniques during counseling sessions
- Conduct group discussions with the staff to identify pertinent needs and determine the priorities to be assigned to them
- Hold conferences with individual staff members to identify particular professional development needs
- Prepare, review, and update VRC Staff Development Inventories

f. VRC Skills Certification Examination

The VRC Skills Certification Examination is an internal professional-level examination that is designed to improve service delivery to Veterans and the public, while identifying knowledge gaps to assist in the development of standardized training to improve the quality and effectiveness of the VBA. The examination takes approximately four hours to complete. It consists of a Situational Judgment section and a Technical Knowledge section. Employees are required to take the test until certification is achieved. Although this test is required, it will not impact an employee's performance appraisal or promotion potential. Once the counselor passes the examination he/she will become a Certified Veterans Rehabilitation Counselor.

VR&E Service encourages VRCs to prepare for the skill certification test by utilizing the existing job aids, such as EPSS and the KMP. General

information regarding the VR&E Skills Certification Test can be found in the KMP under Training.

g. VR&E Training Plan

The VREO prepares the VR&E training plan at the beginning of each fiscal year for concurrence by the RO Director. The plan must include training for each of the core areas and core technical training requirements (see Core Annual Technical Training Requirements 3.09.h), and at least seven of the 12 areas of training and development listed in 3.08.b. It also must include the means through which training and development activities will be accomplished, such as in-service training, training in conjunction with other VA elements, or with other state and federal agencies. It also must include:

- A review, at least yearly, of the training needs of each employee in the Division
- Development of the means through which such training will be provided
- The frequency of in-service training meetings
- The estimated costs for travel related to training

h. Core Annual Technical Training Requirements

- Experienced VREO and AVREO (GS 13/14): 40 hours, plus 20 hours a year of refresher training for Contract Officer Representative (COR) certification (CORs are required to complete 40 hours of refresher training every two years to maintain certification)
- New VREO and AVREO (GS 13/14): 160 hours (includes 40 hours of initial COR certification training)
- Experienced VRC (GS 11/12): 55 hours, plus 20 hours a year of refresher training for COR certification (CORs are required to complete 40 hours of refresher training every two years to maintain certification)
- New VRC (GS 9/11/12): 100 hours (includes 40 hours of initial COR certification training)
- Experienced EC (GS 11/12): 50 hours
- New EC (GS 9/11/12): 60 hours

- Experienced Service Administrative Support, Program Specialist (GS 7/9/11): 18 hours
- New Service Administrative Support, Program Specialist, (GS 7/9/11): 24 hours

For specific training requirements, see the VR&E training website at [vretraining.vba.va.gov/](http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/), National Training Curriculum (NTC) for current training protocols.

i. Local Technical Training

VR&E Service provides training that meets some of the VR&E Core Annual Technical Training Requirements through national conferences, satellite broadcasts, online courses, and other media. VR&E Service also expects VREOs to implement local training based on “train-the-trainer” courses, and utilize other VA and community resources to develop and implement local training that addresses performance gaps, changes in legislation, and other training needs.

j. Developing an Individualized Development Plan (IDP) for Employees

While formal IDPs are optional, employees should be encouraged to develop an IDP. The VREO should assist, when possible, in providing resources for the employees and providing guidance to meet their IDP goals.

k. Monitoring Training Plans

The VREO monitors the Division training plan, ensuring that identified needs are met. VR&E Service monitors all VR&E Division training plans.

l. 180 Degree Assessment

The 180 Degree Assessment is a tool that allows the assessment participant to seek feedback from persons with whom she/he works. The participant may choose respondents that include his/her supervisor(s), manager(s), customers, and peers. The respondents answer behavioral questions about how they see the participant in the work world and how they would prefer the participant to behave. The participant receives a feedback report in which the gaps between actual and preferred behaviors are highlighted. The gaps can help the participant focus on improvement or development targets. All feedback is reported in an aggregate, anonymous fashion, except for the information given by the participant’s supervisor.

The assessment generally takes about a half-hour to complete. Once the responses are collected, the participant should receive his/her results within four weeks. The results of the assessment belong to the participant, and should only be used for the participant's development as a leader. The decision to share the results of the assessment rests solely with the participant. The results of the assessment are not tied to the participant's performance appraisal.

After the participant receives his/her results, he/she will have the opportunity to work with a coach who will assist in designing his/her Personal Development Plan (PDP). A PDP allows the participant to target two or three focus areas of development, and then track his/her goals over time.

Staff can find more information on the assessment or sign up to take it, by contacting the VHA National Center for Organization Development (NCOD) at [www.va.gov/NCOD](http://www.va.gov/NCOD)

### 3.09 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Certification

#### a. Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC)

The CRCC is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities by:

- Promoting quality rehabilitation counseling services to individuals with disabilities through the certification of rehabilitation counselors
- Providing leadership in advocating for the rehabilitation counseling profession

CRCC sets the standard for quality rehabilitation counseling services through its internationally recognized certification program. CRC and CCRC (Canadian Certified Rehabilitation Counselor) designations indicate a higher level of specialized education and training, a thorough understanding of key competency standards based on current practices in the field, adherence to the Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors, and an ongoing commitment to continuing education.

#### b. Endorsement of the CRCC

VR&E Service endorses the objectives of the Commission, encourages VR&E staff members to participate in the certification process, and provides training that meets CRCC guidelines and a significant number of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for certification maintenance.

c. How Certification Is Obtained/Maintained

In order for a VRC to become certified, he/she must pass the CRC examination. The examination consists of 175 multiple-choice questions administered during an allotted 3½ hours within an eight-day testing window. Candidates should set aside four hours, which includes time for check-in, instructions, and a practice session on the computer in order for candidates to become familiar with the computer system.

The certification examination is comprised of questions across 10 knowledge domains underlying rehabilitation counseling. Additionally, each of the 10 domains are further defined into subdomains. The titles of the domains are as follows:

1. Assessment, Appraisal, and Vocational Evaluation
2. Job Development, Job Placement, and Career and Lifestyle Development
3. Vocational Consultation and Services for Employers
4. Case Management, Professional Roles and Practices, and Utilization of Community Resources
5. Foundations of Counseling, Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice, Theories, Social and Cultural Issues, and Human Growth and Development
6. Group and Family Counseling
7. Mental Health Counseling
8. Medical, Functional, and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability
9. Disability Management
10. Research, Program Evaluation, and Evidence-Based Practice

To maintain the CRC designation, counselors must renew their certification every five years via continuing education or re-examination. Certification may be maintained through participation in continuing education courses or by retaking and passing the certification examination

NOTE: Staff may request reimbursement for the cost of the exam after passing it. Reimbursement is subject to available funding.

d. Authority to Grant Certification Maintenance Credits

VR&E Service has authority to grant certification maintenance credits for VA staff development training to VRCs who are certified by CRCC.

e. CRCC Standards of Approval for CEUs

1. Purpose

The purpose of the training program must be clearly defined in terms of expected outcomes.

2. Focus

Training program focus must be to increase the knowledge or skill in the practice of rehabilitation counseling in one or more of the following areas:

- Rehabilitation philosophy, history, structure, and laws
- Medical aspects of disability
- Psychological aspects of the disability(ies)
- Ethics and decision-making
- Occupational information and the world of work
- Counseling theory and techniques
- Community organization and resources
- Placement processes and job development
- Psychology of personal and vocational adjustment
- Evaluation and assessment
- Ability to use research findings and professional publications
- The delivery of rehabilitation services

- Independent Living rehabilitation

3. Duration

In-service training must be no less than one contact hour in duration, which is equivalent to one clock hour spent in an approved program, excluding coffee breaks, social hours, and luncheons/dinners.

4. Content

Training programs must include a student evaluation component, such as evaluation of the training by program participants.

5. Accessibility

Programs and locations must be accessible.

f. Approval Process for CRC Credit

VR&E Service must ensure that all approved training programs and activities for which it has granted approval is offered or presented in a manner that is consistent with approval requirements. VR&E Service cannot issue approval numbers to any other vendors offering CEUs, unless the training is co-sponsored by VR&E Service.

Regardless of the category under which CEU is granted, the following requirements must be met prior to approval:

1. The program must be no less than one clock hour in duration. A clock hour is defined as 60 minutes of instruction time and excludes opening/closing remarks, coffee breaks, social hours, meals, etc.
2. The focus of the program must be to increase the participant's knowledge of or skill in the practice of rehabilitation counseling.
3. The purpose of the program must be clearly defined in terms of expected outcomes/learning objectives.
4. The program must include an evaluation component completed by the participants. This is an evaluation of the program's value – not an assessment of the participant's learning skills.

The following 15 areas constitute the domain focus areas that are appropriate for CEUs. To be approved, a program must clearly meet one of the 15 domain focus areas for continuing education.

1. Ethical Standards and Decision-Making Models for Rehabilitation Counselors
2. Career Counseling and Assessment
3. Job Development and Placement Services
4. Vocational Consultation and Services for Employers
5. Case and Caseload Management
6. Individual Counseling
7. Group and Family Counseling
8. Mental Health Counseling
9. Psychosocial and Cultural Issues in Counseling
10. Medical, Functional, and Environmental Aspects of Disabilities
11. Foundations and Professional Issues
12. Rehabilitation Services and Resources
13. Health-care and Disability Systems
14. Addictions Counseling
15. Clinical Supervision

VR&E Service is required to submit an annual report to the CRCC Office. Therefore, the cut-off date for submission of applications for CRC continuing education credits is every year by December 15, to ensure all training sessions are included in the annual report.

Local Training, Conferences, or Workshops:

If training is held in the regional office or field station, the station CRC Coordinator should submit the following documents to support the approval:

1. VA Form 28-0521, Application for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Maintenance Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service (see Appendix O, VA Forms), for each topic covered.
2. An agenda for training, indicating date(s), time allotted and instructor for each topic covered, and showing time allotted for breaks, meals, etc.
3. A blank copy of the evaluation tool used for feedback.
4. Actual attendance sheet(s). A typed list of names for those individual's requesting CEUs must be included

NOTE: Each individual training course requires the completion of VAF 28-0521.

If training is sponsored by VR&E Service or identified on the NTC, each station may request CEUs for all CRC attendees by submitting only the attendance sheet and evaluation tool. Include a typed list of names for those individuals requesting CEUs. If training is held as a conference, workshop, etc., satellite broadcast, or at VA facility, each station may request CEUs for all CRC attendees by submitting only the attendance sheet, agenda, evaluation tool, and VAF 28-0521 for the overall training event. VAF 28-0521 must be completed in its entirety and it must include the total number of hours for the entire training conference, workshop, etc. A VAF 28-0521 for each topic covered is not necessary.

It is preferred that CEU requests be scanned and emailed to: VAVBAWAS/CO/VR&E, or faxed directly to (202) 275-5122.

Requests may be forwarded by mail to:

CRC Continuing Education Coordinator  
VBA Central Office  
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service (28)  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

When the application packet is received, it will be approved, denied, or additional information to support your application will be requested. Upon receipt of all the required documents or request for certification, the Attendance Verification Form(s) will be sent by email to the VREO or designated field CRC Coordinator for distribution to the CRC training attendees.

NOTE: The counselor must promptly submit his/her requests to VACO, Attendance Verification Form(s) to CRCC, and retain a copy for his/her records. VR&E Service cannot assume responsibility for gathering personal records.

g. Submission of Annual Report to the CRCC

VR&E Service must submit an annual report and a letter to the CRCC that assures adherence to their standards no later than January 31 every year for programs approved during the prior calendar year.