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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 United States 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 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC). 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 (VRA).

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 the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (VREO), Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (AVREO), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) and Employment Coordinator (EC)

Position descriptions and staffing requirements for management, supervisory, and support 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 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 the Program Support Specialist (PSS) can significantly influence the overall performance of the VR&E Division. The main benefit of appropriate support assistance is to relieve VRCs and 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

1. Counseling and Evaluation Support:

- Administer the computer-based CareerScope skills assessment (for more information on CareerScope, see M28R.IV.B.4.03.d)
- 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 Generated Eligibility Determinations (GEDs)

2. 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 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (VREO), Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (AVREO), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) and Employment Coordinator (EC)

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 VREO requests a certificate for qualified candidates from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Delegated Examining Unit (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 PSS 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. Administering the VRC Skills Certification Examination

#### 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), Training Performance Support System (TPSS), and Talent Management System (TMS) located in the Knowledge Management Portal (KMP) under Training at <https://vaww.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 Veterans Benefits Administration (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 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (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

(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 the 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. Performance Support Systems
  - a. Training Performance Support System (TPSS) modules are constructed to be training events: students who match the target audience are assigned in TMS and take the course. Courses may be structured to be taken individually and/or part of group during an Instructor-led Web-based Training (IWT) Session. Courses are designed to support both initial training for a job position and for advanced training for journey-level students. Valid and reliable pre-tests and post-tests are always available to allow measurement of skill acquisition for each student. Additionally, pre-tests can be utilized to measure current knowledge, as a passing score on a pre-test allows a student to "test out" of the course.

- b. Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS) modules are utilized on-the-job and are designed to assist the job performer in completing the tasks of the job accurately and consistently. An EPSS can consist of short tutorials, guided questioning sequences, job task flows, video clips, job aids, checklists, and scaffolded information made available to the performer. EPSS modules are tools designed to be used by the VRC as if he/she were working an actual case.

The link to the VR&E Job Support Tools Portal is available on the:

- KMP at the VR&E Training Website  
<https://vaww.portal.va.gov/SITES/VRWKM/pages/home.aspx> and,
- VR&E Training Website at  
<http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/EPSS.htm#>

## 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 exam until certification is achieved. Although the exam is required, it will not impact an employee's performance appraisal or promotion potential. Once the VRC passes the examination he/she will become a Certified Veterans Rehabilitation Counselor.

The intent of the VRC Skills Certification Examination is to improve delivery of services to the public, improve the productivity and effectiveness of VBA, cut costs, and advance public interests. It does not substitute or equate to the CRC examination sponsored by the CRCC. The VA acknowledges that the VA Skills Certification Examination is an internal professional-level examination, and does not replace or lessen the importance of the national CRC examination and other related professional credentials. The VBA, and specifically VR&E, acknowledges the professional status of the VRC position.

VR&E Service encourages VRCs to prepare for the VRC Skills Certification Examination by utilizing the existing job aids that are available on the VR&E Training Website: <http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/EPSS.htm#>

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. 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 by Position and Experience
- Experienced VREO, AVREO and Supervisory VRC (GS 13/14): minimum 40 hours, plus 40 hours every two years to maintain Contract Officer Representative (COR) certification.
  - New VREO, AVREO and Supervisory VRC (GS 13/14): minimum of 80 hours (includes 60 hours of VR&E New Manager Training or Initial Supervisor's Training and 40 hours of initial COR certification training)
  - Experienced VRC (GS 11/12): minimum 40 hours, plus 40 hours every two years of refresher training to maintain COR certification based on local VREO assignment
  - New VRC (GS 9/11/12): 80 hours
  - Experienced Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) Counselor (GS 11/12): 40 hours
  - New Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) Counselor (GS 9/11/12): 80 hours
  - Experienced VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Counselor (GS 11/12): 40 hours
  - New VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Counselor (GS 11/12): 80 hours
  - Experienced EC (GS 11/12): 40 hours
  - New EC (GS 9/11/12): 70 hours
  - Experienced Program Support Specialist (PSS) (GS 7/9/11): 18 hours
  - New Program Support Specialist (PSS) (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). Also, see the VBA Learning Catalog at <http://hvnc.gdit.com/lc/>, go to Curriculum and select VR&E.

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.

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 Canadian Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CCRC) 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 Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (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.

Staff can find more information on the certification and its maintenance through the VR&E training website at <http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/CRC.htm>.