Chapter 3
HIRING, MANAGING AND TRAINING OFFICE STAFF

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

n. Monitoring Training Plans

3.08   Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Certification

a. Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC)

b. Endorsement of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC)

Appendix K. Signed MOUs

Appendix AI. VRC, EC, VREO and AVREO Position Descriptions and Position Announcements

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

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

Websites: https://www.usajobs.gov/
                      https://vaww.portal.va.gov/SITES/VRWKM/pages/home
                      .aspx
                      https://www.tms.va.gov/
                      http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/EPSS.htm#
                      http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/
                      http://hvnc.gdit.com/lc/
                      https://www.ttande.org/vbawidgetsdashboard/content/new
                      _vre_proration_calculator/index.html
                      http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/CRC.htm

3.03   General Information on Office Staffing

a. Policy on Maintaining Proper Levels of Staffing

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (VREO) must maintain proper levels of staffing to fill immediate and forecasted needs. The 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 a 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 https://www.usajobs.gov/, 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

The staffing requirements and position descriptions for VREO, Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (AVREO), VRC and Employment Coordinator (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.

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. Recruiting Qualified Candidates

The VREO requests a certificate for qualified candidates from 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 https://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).

c. 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.

d. 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)

- 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/Servicemembers for initial evaluation appointments

- File documents

- Prepare Counseling/Evaluation/Rehabilitation (CER) folders

- Process Generated Eligibility Determinations (GED)

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   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 performance standards are located in Appendix AI, VRC, EC, VREO and AVREO Position Descriptions and Position Announcements), 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.

3.06   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 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. VR&E Officer Responsibilities

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. VR&E Service Responsibilities

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 employee

3.07   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 VR&E Service staff 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. VR&E Job Support Tools

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. The VR&E Job

Support Tools portal on the Training tab under Training Links on the KMP provides the following to assist VR&E staff members in the performance of their duties and tasks:

1. Medical Electronic Performance Support System (MEPSS)

    The MEPSS, otherwise known as C&P Medical EPSS, is designed to provide immediate, online access to specific medical and disability information that VR&E staff need in order to make an entitlement decision and provide case management services. MEPSS allows the user to search for vocational impediments and common functional limitations by using the VOCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS tab.

2. Appeals Process Electronic Performance Support System (Appeals EPSS)

    The purpose of the Appeals Process Electronic Performance Support System is to provide a standardized and procedurally correct guidance tool for the following VR&E positions:

    (a) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer (VREO)

    (b) VREO designee, to include:

    - Assistant VREO

    - Counselor in Charge

    - Other professional staff member, as designated by the VREO

    - Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC)

    The Appeals Process EPSS also provides numerous appeals process-specific resources, such as a glossary, VA forms and letters, sample templates, manual citation and references, helpful links and interactive PDF flowcharts.

3. Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer Electronic Performance Support System (VREO EPSS)

    The purpose of this system is to complement the information found in M28R, Part VIII, Section A, Chapter 4 that covers the purpose and requirements of the Workload Management Plan. As stated in M28R.VIII.A.4.05.a, "The development of this report is required by OFO and VR&E Service. The plan must be completed in the first month of each year."

The VREO will use the EPSS as a guide to develop a Workload Management Plan in accordance with M28R.VIII.A.4.

4. VRC Gateway

The VRC Gateway tab contains six duties to assist a VRC in pre-evaluation activities, evaluation and planning, rehabilitation plan development, case management, employment assistance, and closure activity completion tasks. The VRC Gateway provides access to both EPSS and resources that have been designed to assist in performing a variety of tasks.

5. BDN Guide

The BDN Guide tab is a job aid that provides guidance on how to access, log in, and use the Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) system. The Guide also explains how to perform the following tasks:

- Award Processing

- Award Troubleshooting

- Extension to Entitlement

- Retroactive EAA

- GED Processing

- Updating CAST Screen with Employment Information

- Disallowance

6. VREO Job Aids

The VREO Job Aids tab provides a collection of standalone, on-demand job aids to assist the VREO at all levels in accomplishing their workload. These job aids are organized by functional areas, e.g. Staffing, Workload Management, Communication and Resource Management.

Job aids include:

- Step-by-Step: A sequence of steps for a linear procedure

- Flowchart/Decision Table: Steps and guidance for the completion of a task based on Yes-No and If-Then conditions

- Worksheet: Forms and templates with steps and guidance for a

process, with spaces to be filled in by the user

- Reference Table: Information to complete the task without steps or decision making

7. Employment Resources

The Employment Resources tab contains lessons materials for ECs and VRCs to use to conduct employment workshops with Veterans or to use individually with a Veteran during or prior to the job search phase.

The link to the VR&E Job Support Tools portal is available on the KMP under Training.

e. Training Performance Support System (TPSS)

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 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 often allows a student to "test out" of the course. The TPSSs are located in TMS.

f. 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 https://www.tms.va.gov/ or to the KMP under Training.

g. 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

h. 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 VBA. The examination takes approximately four hours to complete and 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. 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#.

i. 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

j. 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 http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/, National Training Curriculum (NTC). Also, see the VBA Learning Catalog at http://hvnc.gdit.com/lc/, Curriculum, and select VR&E.

k. Prorating Training Hour Requirements

The VR&E Curricular Requirement Proration Tool allows RO Training Managers (TM)/TMS Administrators and VREO/AVREOs to calculate the number of training hours that are needed for the FY based on a hire date for new employees or if a staff member requests an extended leave. Upon entering the dates or the number of months on leave, the tool will then generate the number of prorated training hours needed for the FY based on the number of hours initially required by the NTC for the FY. This user-friendly application requires minimal input from the TM and removes the need for manual calculations. The results are immediate and provide the TM with confidence when tracking progress in these situations. The VR&E Curricular Requirement Proration Tool is available at https://www.ttande.org/vbawidgetsdashboard/content/new _vre_proration_calculator/index.html.

l. 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.

m. 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.

n. 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.

3.08   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 VRCs 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 certification and its maintenance on the VR&E Training website at http://vretraining.vba.va.gov/CRC.htm or on the KMP Training tab, Training Internet Site.