MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE (VSR)
PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
(Excluding Pension Management Center and Public Contact VSRs)

The following constitutes an agreement between the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration (Agency) and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), AFL-CIO, National VA Council (NVAC) #53, (Union) regarding changes to performance standards for VSR.

This is to provide for the implementation of the National standard. The parties also agree to gather statistical data throughout the Transformation process to ensure the effectiveness of the standard. The pertinent articles from the Master Agreement that relate to this agreement include, but are not limited to, Articles 27, 37, 43, 47, and 66, and applicable laws.

1. This Agreement was initiated, in accordance with Article 47 of the Master Agreement between Agency and Union, following receipt by the Union of notification of changes to national performance standards on July 25, 2012.

2. In accordance with Article 27, Section 1 (A), the parties are committed to providing quality customer service. Accomplishment of the Department's mission is intended to be achieved within an environment that both recognizes the interdependence of employee contributions and promotes teamwork. Improvement in Department performance will be sought by analyzing work processes and correcting systemic problems and/or revising processes, as appropriate.

3. The purpose of the performance appraisal is to provide a framework to ensure honest feedback and open, two-way communications between employees and their supervisors (or other rating officials). Accomplishments of objectives are intended to be achieved within a teamwork environment. The employee performance appraisal and its application will be fair, equitable, reasonable and within the scope of the employee's position description.

4. Performance standards as applied under the appraisal system will emphasize employee development; overall employee skills and contributions; and recognize employee contribution to achievement of the Agency's mission. The standards as applied under the appraisal system are a performance management tool rather than a disciplinary tool; they will be based on duties contained in the employee's position description. Performance standards and elements to the maximum extent feasible shall be reasonable, realistic, attainable, and sufficient under the circumstances to permit accurate measurement of an employee's performance (Article 27, Section 5 (C)). Performance standards will clearly describe how the employee's performance will be measured. When quality, timeliness, and/or output are expressed in a standard, there must be a clear means of assessing whether objectives have been met.

5. An OFO letter will be prepared, accompanied by a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). The FAQ will be prepared and presented to the VBA AFGE Mid-Term Bargaining Committee prior to release for purposes of pre-decisional involvement.

6. Prior to implementation, local management will communicate and provide written national performance standards and conduct group meetings to address employee questions and concerns to all affected employees. The local union will be invited to attend the meetings.

7. As the critical element of Timeliness is based on the locally established workload management plan, the Agency will ensure the workload management plan has been communicated to employees and will identify the elements in the plan for which the VSRs are responsible. The local workload management plan will be provided to employees and local union electronically. If the workload management plan is revised, an electronic copy will be provided to employees and the local union.

8. The Agency will continue to gather statistical data following implementation of this standard. Data will be provided to the VBA AFGE Mid-Term Bargaining Committee on a monthly basis for 6 months, then continuing quarterly for a period of 6 months until after final implementation of current Transformation initiatives at all Regional Offices. The data will show, but is not limited to, aggregate employee output and quality data, by grade as it relates to the standard and by lane/team for each station.

9. The VBA AFGE Mid-Term Bargaining Committee will monitor and assess the implementation of the national performance standards. If there are concerns from the Union, the concerns can be elevated to the Mid-Term Bargaining Committee for consideration.

10. The Agency shall not hold employees accountable for factors or extenuating circumstances which affect performance that are beyond the control of the employee.

11. The parties agree that the minimum appraisal period is 90 days during which an employee must have consistently performed under communicated performance elements and standards that may result in a performance rating. For the purpose of this Agreement, management shall not issue a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for a period of 90 days subsequent to implementation of the performance standards to allow for continued monitoring and assessment. Both parties recognize the size of change brought about by organizational Transformation. Local management is encouraged to consider this and analyze data prior to placing an employee on a PIP.

12. Employees on a PIP at the time of implementation of the new standards may continue to be assessed for the duration of their PIP period under the existing (old) performance plan.

13. If an employee requests a discussion with his/her rating official in writing to discuss his/her performance, it will be scheduled in a timely manner.

14. Employees will be provided with appropriate notice of errors, including corrective action required. The Agency will consider the type(s) of errors called, timeliness of notice to the employee, and employee's opportunity to remedy errors. All changes in working procedures must be communicated to employees before they can be charged with errors.

15. Where a critical element is not applicable to the employee's assigned duties, the rating official may mark the element as "not applicable" on the Performance Appraisal Program (VA Form 0750), Actual Achievement, Section C, instead of "fully successful" so that the element does not affect the employee's Overall Rating, Section D.

16. Deductible time is addressed in the performance plan. This list is not exhaustive as there may be other reasons for deductible time to be considered by local management.

17. The Agency will ensure that affected employees are trained on the VETSNET Operations Reports (VOR) or any applicable application used for Workload Management. The appropriate deductible time will be granted for management-approved training.

18. Employees will be provided notice of all training requirements. Any updates and/or new additions will be timely communicated to the employee. Employees will be provided a training schedule as referenced in the performance plan. The Agency is responsible for ensuring that all employees receive the training necessary for the performance of the employees' assigned duties (Article 37, Section 1(A)).

19. The parties agree to comply with Article 47.

20. If either party is made aware of impact and implementation issues, the parties agree to discuss the issues and work to mutually resolve them. Union concerns will be elevated to the VBA AFGE Mid-Term Bargaining Committee for consideration. The Agency agrees to renegotiate on impact and implementation issues 6 months subsequent to implementation of the standard.

21. Management will provide a copy of the MOU to each local president upon receipt.

For the Agency

For AFGE-NVAC

Date: 11/1/12