

## EMPLOYEE LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding employee development.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook sets forth mandatory VA procedures on employee development. This change establishes procedures for the reimbursement of continuing professional education expenses for full-time, board certified physicians and dentists. The pages in this issuance replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5015. Revised text is contained in [brackets]. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5015 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Strategic Human Capital Planning Service (053), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5015, Employee Development.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

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**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY  
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c. **Use of This Handbook.** This handbook is designed to aid VA employees at all levels in clarifying their roles and responsibilities for learning and professional development. It establishes the framework of procedures to meet the intent of GETA and the Federal Workforce Flexibilities Act of 2004. The administration of VA learning and professional development programs will be aligned with and responsive to meeting VA's mission requirements and long-term strategic goals. This handbook does not include every possible situation for making policy-based decisions. Managers, training officers and staff should be flexible and innovative in administering these procedures within the stated intent of law and regulation.

## 2. AUTHORITIES

a. Authority to approve training: Executive Order 11348, as amended by Executive Order 12107, Title 5 U.S.C. § 4103; 5 CFR § 410.210(b) and 410.302(a)(3)(b)(1).

b. Authority to pay for professional credentials: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, Public Law 107-107, §1112; Title 5 U.S.C. § 5757.

c. Authority to pay for academic degree training:

(1) Department of Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107-296, § 1331(a); Title 5 U.S.C. § 4107;

(2) 68 Fed. Reg. 35265, 35269-35270 (June 13, 2003).

d. Authority for training program management:

(1) Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004, section 201;

(2) Executive Order No. 11348, as amended by Executive Order 12107;

(3) 5 U.S.C. § 4103; 5 CFR § 410.201(a) and (c).

e. Authority to accept contributions, awards, and payments from non-government organizations incident to training: 5 CFR Section 410.502(b).

[f. Authority to reimburse continuing professional education expenses for full-time, board certified physicians and dentists: Title 38 U.S.C. §§ 7411 and 7421.]

## 3. LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

a. In order for VA to accomplish its strategic goals and missions our employees must participate in continuous learning and develop professionally. Planning for training and development starts with understanding the VA Strategic Plan. Employees must clearly understand how what they do on a day-to-day basis contributes to the success of their organization and to accomplishing the goals of VA. Managers and supervisors at all levels must clearly understand that just as their work requirements and objectives must be linked to the strategic goals of VA, learning and professional development programs must be linked and add value to organizational performance, objectives, and goals. The High Performance Development Model (HPDM) is the core competency model for VA. Information on the HPDM can be found at <http://vaww.va.gov/hpdm>. (Appendix C, "Training Evaluation")

b. Inadequate performance may indicate a need for training. However, managers should not assume that training is the only solution to a performance problem. There are usually other non-training factors



(1) Credentials of employees occupying or seeking to qualify for appointments in any position that is excepted from the competitive service because of the confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character of the position.

(2) VA will not pay for credentials or licenses that are necessary to meet basic qualifications requirements when an individual is applying for a position.

d. Each administration and staff office head is delegated the authority to determine if and how this provision will be implemented in their respective organizations.

#### **[9. REIMBURSEMENT OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION EXPENSES FOR FULL-TIME, BOARD CERTIFIED PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS**

a. In accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7411, full-time, board certified physicians and dentists appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred, up to \$1,000 per year, for continuing professional education.

b. Reimbursable continuing professional education expenses are defined as course fees, course supplies, transportation, meals and incidental expenses, and/or lodging expenses incurred by a covered physician or dentist to attend mandatory or optional training. Tuition or course fees paid directly to a vendor by VA are considered reimbursed expenses. See Appendices G and H of this handbook for additional guidance.

c. In order to qualify for reimbursement under 38 U.S.C. § 7411, employees must have continuing professional education events properly approved in accordance with their facility education and training policies and procedures **prior to** their participation in the event.

d. Reimbursement may exclude continuing education expenses for off-site education and training that is substantially similar to on-site facility education and training offered at no cost to the employee.

e. At a minimum, eligible employees must submit the following documentation when requesting reimbursement after participation in a pre-approved event:

(1) Copies of payment receipts or comparable documentation of expenses and a travel voucher (if applicable); and,

(2) Evidence of attendance at approved continuing professional education program or activity, e.g., certificate of attendance or course completion.

f. Facility directors will establish procedures for the application and approval of reimbursable continuing education expenses for covered employees.

#### **10.] FOREIGN TRAVEL IN CONJUNCTION WITH APPROVED TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

a. Agencies may approve employee requests to attend training and exchange activities outside of the continental United States. These include activities that promote the sharing of ideas, developing skills, and fostering mutual understanding and cooperation among nations. The activities may be directly or indirectly funded by US government funds or non government private organizations.

b. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Facility directors or equivalent and VACO staff office heads may approve employees to attend these training activities. The Secretary and Deputy Secretary are delegated authority to authorize foreign travel of VACO employees. The Under Secretary for Health, the Under Secretary of Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs are delegated authority to authorize or approve foreign travel of VHA, VBA and NCA employees. VHA and VBA field facility directors are delegated authority to authorize or approve travel to Canada and Mexico, and for travel to other foreign countries, the directors have approval authority when no appropriated travel funds are involved. Foreign travel, except to Canada or Mexico, involving appropriated travel funds must be approved by the appropriate Under Secretary. Request for foreign travel by VHA or VBA Central Office staff and field facility directors require approval by the appropriate Under Secretary. (MP- part II, ch. 2, appendix A) Appendix E contains specific instructions for the minimum requirements for data collection for employees participating in foreign travel in conjunction with approved training activities. Administration and staff offices may impose additional requirements for data collection.

## **[11.] ACCEPTING CONTRIBUTIONS AND AWARDS FROM NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS INCIDENT TO TRAINING**

a. Section 4111 of Title 5 U.S.C. states: “To the extent authorized by regulation of the President, contributions and awards incident to training in non-government facilities, and payment of travel, subsistence, and other expenses incident to attendance at meetings, may be made to and accepted by an employee, without regard to section 209 of title 18, if the contributions, awards, and payments are made by an organization determined by the Secretary of the Treasury to be an organization described by section 501(c)(3) of title 26 which is exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of title 26.” Travel payments and contributions towards expenses for non government sponsored training or meetings are restricted and require prior approval from a delegated VA official. Guidance on the policy for payment of travel expenses from non-federal sources is contained in 41 CFR chapter 304 as well as VA policy MP-1, part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3 (j), and the Office of General Counsel (OGC) website: <http://vaww/gc.va.gov/ethics>. The Web site location for 41 CFR is: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/cfrassemble.cgi?title=200441>. The delegated official may authorize in writing, employees to accept a contribution or award (in cash or in kinds) related to training or to accept payment (in cash or in kind) of travel, subsistence, and other expenses incident to attendance at meetings if in the delegated official’s judgment the following conditions are met: The contribution, award, or payment is not a reward for services to the organization prior to the training or meeting; and acceptance of the contribution, award, or payment:

- (1) Would not reflect unfavorably on the employee’s ability to carry out official duties in a fair and objective manner;
- (2) Would not compromise the honesty and integrity of Government programs or of Government employees and their official actions or decisions;
- (3) Would be compatible with the ethics on Government Act of 1978 as amended; and
- (4) Would otherwise be proper and ethical for the employee concerned given the circumstances of the particular case.

b. Delegated officials are strongly encouraged to consult with their local ethics officials before approving such awards.

**[12.] TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS.** The requirements for establishing training and professional development plans are found in section 4103(a) of Title 5 U.S.C. and Executive Order 11348.

(a) Managers and supervisors should review their organization's training plans annually. These plans should clearly state employee training assessments, priorities, and costs. Significant alterations made to training rules, regulations or VA's mission may require an interim change to an organization's training plan. Any and all formal training events that are directly related to the participant's job function and responsibilities must be documented in a written training plan. At a minimum, the training plan should include:

(1) The central performance objectives of the organization;

(2) Brief explanation of the training course or event's relation to the organization's mission or strategic goal;

(3) The projected number of participants to be enrolled in the training course or event; and

(4) The projected cost of the training course/event, including the provider or vendor name.

b. Managers, supervisors, and executives should have written professional development plans. All full time, non-supervisory employees should have a professional development plan.

c. Where feasible, organizations should establish Individual Learning Accounts (ILA). An ILA is a base amount of resources expressed in terms of dollars or hours or both that are set aside for an employee to use for his or her learning and development. These accounts may include money, time off, supervised independent study on duty time, or a combination of these. The employee may use his or her account to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly relate to the employee's official duties. (See [www.OPM.gov](http://www.OPM.gov) for a detailed explanation.)

### **[13.] SOURCES OF TRAINING**

a. **Overview.** All employees may obtain training from various sources, both governmental and non-governmental. The decision as to which source to use will depend on considerations of cost, convenience, and quality. (See VHA Manual M-8, "Academic Affairs," pt. IV ch. 2 for additional policies affecting VHA employees.)

#### **b. Government Sources**

(1) **Department of Veterans Affairs.** VA offers a variety of training and should be the first source considered by an employee when seeking training. VA training is generally less expensive and much more likely to be department-specific. All employees with training responsibilities should be aware of these offerings within VA. Often, cooperative-training arrangements can be made between field facilities or between services within a field facility. Other VA sources include: the VHA Employee Education System, the VA Knowledge Network, the VBA Office of Employee Development and



Training which includes the VBA Academy, and the Health Care Staff and Retention Office. Several VA organizations regularly schedule and conduct training:

(a) VA Learning Online (VALO) is a Web-based campus that contains courses that VA employees can access from their desk top computers at work or home. College courses, personal development courses, and information technology are just a few of the offerings at VALO at [www.vcampus.com/valo](http://www.vcampus.com/valo) or [vaww.va.gov/valu\\_lrn](http://vaww.va.gov/valu_lrn).

(b) VA Knowledge Network uses digital satellite technology to broadcast multiple channels of learning and communication programming directly to VA work stations and classrooms. Programs on the network may be found using the VA Learning Catalog on the VA intranet at <http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/>.

(c) Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations and other VACO components.

(d) Field facilities (Designated Education Offices), Human Resources Management Offices and the various services or divisions, and other continuing education units administered by VA.

(e) Once fully implemented, the VALMS will be the single on-line entry point for all VA conducted education and training programs.

(2) **The Office of Personnel Management.** OPM conducts interagency training at its Management Development Centers, the Federal Executive Institute, and on its on line learning portal “USA Learning” (formerly Golearn) at [www.usalearning.gov](http://www.usalearning.gov). This site offers a number of free and for fee courses.

(3) **The Graduate School, U.S. Department of Agriculture** offers a variety of classroom and distance learning opportunities at [www.grad.usda.gov](http://www.grad.usda.gov)

(4) **Interagency Training.** VA facilities are encouraged to provide for cooperative training efforts with other agencies. VA facilities may, in turn, make their training available to other Federal agencies provided that this does not interfere with VA’s mission and there is no substantial cost to VA or there is reimbursement for additional costs.

c. **Non-Government Sources.** Employees may take training from non-government sources if the following conditions are met:

(1) Adequate training is not reasonably available by, in, or through a Government facility;

(2) The training is the most practical and least costly to the Government; and

(3) The non-government facility does not discriminate based on race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or status as a parent.

#### [14.] SELECTION OF TRAINEES

a. All VA executives, managers, and supervisors must ensure that VA employees and other individuals who participate in VA-conducted education and training programs are not discriminated

against based on race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or status as parent. (See also Appendix D, “Requesting Training.”)

b. Individuals may file a complaint if they feel they have been discriminated against. Employees and non-employees may file complaints under the provisions of Executive Order 13160. The complaint must be filed within 180 days of the incident. Remedies under the provisions of the Executive Orders are limited to non-monetary, equitable relief. Refer all complaints by employees to the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Resolution Management, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420. Complaints of discrimination filed by non-employees who participate in VA-sponsored training will be forwarded to the appropriate Administration or staff office for processing. Further details of the complaint processing procedures under Executive Order 13160 may be obtained through the Office of Resolution Management or the Department of Justice Web site: [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov).

c. Training and Promotional Opportunities. When the primary purpose of training is to prepare employees in the competitive service (including Veterans Readjustment Act employees) for advancement or such training is required for promotion, selection for the training must be made under competitive procedures. 5 C.F.R. § 410.307(b). Consult the local Human Resources Management Office for details.

#### [15.] PROCUREMENT OF TRAINING

a. An agency may “pay, or reimburse an employee for necessary expenses” incurred in connection with approved training. The head of an agency determines which expenses constitute necessary training expenses under 5 U.S.C. § 4109.

b. VA may pay for all or part of expenses related to individual training events and/or professional development, to include tuition reimbursement for individual college courses. Funds for these activities may come from appropriated or other program accounts. The process of paying for training products and services is an issue of procurement approval procedures. Refer to Appendix D, “Requesting Training” for a detailed explanation.

#### [16.] CONTINUED SERVICE AGREEMENTS (CSA)

a. Before attending training an employee subject to VA’s continued service agreement must sign an agreement to continue in service after training is completed. The period of service will be equal to at least three times the length of the training. With a signed agreement, the agency has a right to recover training costs, except pay or other compensation, if the employee voluntarily separates from Government service. An example of a CSA can be found at section G “Employee’s Agreement to Continue in Service” of SF182, “Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training.”

b. When VA pays for employee learning and professional development it expects to get a reasonable return on the investment from the employee in terms of service and performance, despite the fact that employee training and development is a necessary business expense. Except for the cases below, VA officials may decide when a continued service agreement will be required. VA employees must have a continued service agreement when:

- (1) The employee is approved for academic degree training;

(2) The employee is approved for a training event or series of training events that cost over \$2,500 per fiscal year and/or the training event or series of events exceed 160 classroom, simulation, e-learning, or OJT hours; or

(3) The employee is approved for payment for training to obtain professional credentials or payment for the credential itself, when costs exceed \$2,500 per fiscal year. The minimum amount of required continued service for payment for a professional credential is one year.

c. Before exercising their authority for 15 b.(1) – (3), VA officials must establish written procedures for requiring a continued service agreement and waiver of recover procedures.

d. If an employee leaves government service due to no fault of the employee, the employee is not liable to repay training cost.

e. If an employee transfers to another agency, the payment agreed to under the CSA may not be required unless the official authorizing the training notifies the employee before the effective date of the entrance into the service of the other agency that payment will be required. (5 U.S.C. 4108)

**[17.] DOCUMENTING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

a. Organizations shall maintain a record of the payments made for travel, tuition, fees and other necessary training expenses for 5 years.

b. The requirement for maintaining training records applies to both manual and automated systems. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials must insure that essential training data elements described below are readily available for their use and to respond to oversight inquiries from the General Accountability Office, (GAO), the Office of Management and Budget, (OMB), OPM, and Congress. Individual employee training records shall not be maintained in an employee’s official personnel folder.

c. Required Training Data Elements:

(1) **Employee Data.** Each Administration and Staff Office is required to maintain the following minimum essential training data elements for each employee’s learning event and professional development program:

- (a) Employee’s name
- (b) Employee’s social security number
- (c) Center
- (d) Grade
- (e) Occupational series
- (f) Manager/supervisor’s name

- (g) Organization
- (h) Cost of event/ program
- (i) Type of Training
- (j) CSA Required – y/n

**(2) Learning Event Data**

- (a) Event name
- (b) Training delivery method (classroom, e-learning, OJT, etc.)
- (c) Cost
- (d) Start date
- (e) End date
- (f) Location of training
- (g) Name of provider
- (h) Name of training facility
- (i) Number of hours
- (j) Number of credit hours
- (k) Number of Continuing Education Units (CEU)
- (l) Certification (y/n)
- (m) Continued Service Agreement: (CSA) y/n
- (n) Degree

**[APPENDIX G. EXAMPLES OF REIMBURSEMENT OF  
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION EXPENSES FOR  
FULL-TIME, BOARD CERTIFIED PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS**

Under 38 U.S.C. § 7411 and paragraph 9 of this handbook, full-time, board certified physicians and dentists appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred, up to \$1,000 per year, for continuing professional education. Reimbursable continuing professional education expenses are defined as course fees, course supplies, transportation, meals and incidental expenses, and/or lodging expenses incurred by a covered physician or dentist to attend mandatory or optional training. Tuition or course fees paid directly to a vendor by VA are considered reimbursed expenses. These examples illustrate which expenses may be reimbursed in a variety of situations.

All examples presuppose that an appropriate facility official has pre-approved the covered physician or dentist to attend a conference or training that will result in continuing professional education credits.

**Example 1:**

The course or conference fees are paid directly by VA.

The training location is within the commuting area of the employee's duty location

**Reimbursable Expenses:** None. Because the training is within the commuting area of the employee's duty location, lodging, meals and incidental expenses do not apply. Additionally, the course fees were paid directly by VA resulting in no out-of-pocket expense to the employee. However, the course fee paid on the employee's behalf is applied to the \$1,000 annual limit.

**Example 2:**

The employee paid the required course or conference fees.

The training location is within the commuting area of the employee's duty location.

**Reimbursable Expenses:** Course fees only. Because the training is within the commuting area of the employee's duty location, lodging, meals and incidental expenses do not apply.

**Example 3:**

The course fees are paid directly by VA.

The location of the training requires that the employee use air travel and hotel lodging.

**Reimbursable Expenses:** Transportation (airline ticket); lodging, meals and incidental expenses (taxi or shuttle, parking fees, etc.). Reimbursement will occur through VA's travel management system and be subject to the limitations therein. Additionally, the course fee paid on the employee's behalf is applied to the \$1,000 annual limit.]



**[APPENDIX H. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
REIMBURSEMENT OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION EXPENSES FOR  
FULL-TIME, BOARD CERTIFIED PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS**

**Q 1.** I am a full-time physician on a temporary appointment, am I eligible for reimbursement of continuing professional education (CPE) expenses?

**A 1.** No. The law provides for payment only to full-time, board certified physician and dentists appointed under Title 38 U.S.C. 7401(1). Only full-time, probationary (permanent) appointments are authorized under Section 7401(1). Temporary and part-time appointments are authorized under Section 7405, therefore, not included for reimbursement in Section 7411.

**Q 2.** I have a Ph.D. in a related medical related occupation, but am not a board certified physician or dentist. Am I eligible for reimbursement?

**A 2.** No. The law in Title 38 U.S. Code, Section 7411 provides for reimbursement to full-time, board certified physician and dentists only.

**Q 3.** I am a full-time, board certified physician. I pay for a subscription to a professional journal which provides for continuing education credit at an additional cost. May I claim this expense?

**A 3.** The additional costs related to the CEUs may be claimed but not the basic cost of the subscription.

**Q 4.** Are fees for licensure and/or certification required for my occupation reimbursable?

**A 4.** No. Licensure, certification, and degree costs for any minimum credential required in the qualification standard for your occupation are not eligible for reimbursement.

**Q 5.** Board certification is not required for my occupation, but I am certified. Is the fee for certification reimbursable in this situation?

**A 5.** No, the fee for certification process itself is not reimbursable. The costs for the required hours of continuing credits to qualify for re-certification are reimbursable.

**Q 6.** What are acceptable forms of proof of my expenditures for CPE expenses?

**A 6.** Copies of payment receipts or comparable documentation of expenses (e.g., e-ticket for airline ticket, hotel receipt, copy of credit card statement); a travel voucher (if applicable); and, evidence of attendance at approved continuing professional education program or activity (e.g., certificate of attendance or course completion).

**Q 7.** VA mandated I attend a National VA Conference, (e.g., Patient Safety, Mental Health, Telemedicine, etc.) that was needed for my assignment which cost more than \$1,000 and I received continuing medical education (CME) credits. Am I disqualified from receiving additional reimbursement for other CPE expenses for that fiscal year?

**A 7.** The law requires VA to reimburse full-time, board certified physicians and dentists up to \$1,000 per year for continuing professional education expenses. Your facility may reimburse you for additional expenses following approval of that expense and available funding. There is no requirement that claims for expenses beyond the \$1,000 for the applicable fiscal year be reimbursed.

**Q 8.** Registration and travel expenses are routinely funded from different cost centers and through different processes at my medical center. Is the \$1,000 for any combination of registration and travel expenses?

**A 8.** Yes. The total required reimbursement for all CPE expenses is limited to the \$1,000 for the respective fiscal year.]