

CONGRESSIONAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR VA EMPLOYEES

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish a Congressional Fellowship Program within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:** This Directive sets forth policies and responsibilities for a Congressional Fellowship Program within VA, including the application criteria selection process, and training.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA, 009) is responsible for VA Congressional Fellowship Program policy and will review the policy on an annual basis. Any recommendation for modifications to the VA Congressional Fellowship Program policy must be sent to the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs for consideration, concurrence, approval, and issuance.
4. **RELATED HANDBOOK:** None.
5. **RESCISSION:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

/s/
Melissa S. Glynn, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary
for Enterprise Integration

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

/s/
Brooks D. Tucker
Assistant Secretary
Office of Congressional
and Legislative Affairs

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CONGRESSIONAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR VA EMPLOYEES

1. **PURPOSE.** This Directive establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for a Congressional Fellowship Program within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
2. **SCOPE.** VA's Congressional Fellowship Program provides opportunities for employees of the Department to learn the workings of the legislative branch of the federal government and serve in a position that capitalizes on the education and experience gained. Employees will acquire an in-depth understanding of the legislative process that will help VA interact more effectively with Congress. The VA Congressional Fellowship Program is the exclusive means of providing Congressional Fellowships for VA employees. VA Administrations and Staff Offices may not participate in other Fellowships or training programs that involve sending employees to Congress to work on the staff of a Member or committee. The length of the Fellowship is 12 months.
3. **POLICY.** This Directive applies to the Congressional Fellowship Program managed and overseen by the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA).
 - a. A Fellowship is defined as an assignment in which selected VA employees may work away from the Department of Veterans Affairs for a specified time, not to exceed 12 months, to gain education and experience of value to VA and the gaining administration or staff office. The person serving in the Fellowship shall be known as a "Fellow." VA continues to pay normal pay and benefits to the Fellow while assigned to the Fellowship
 - b. Employees selected for a Fellowship shall be assigned to the staff of a VA oversight committee or appropriations subcommittee, staff of a Member of a VA oversight committee or appropriations subcommittee, the staff of the House or Senate Majority or Minority Leader, or the staff of the Speaker of the House. The duties of the Fellowship varies depending on the legislative and policy agenda of the specific assignment.

4. CRITERIA:

- a. The Fellowship should meet the employee's professional development requirements and should be in recognition of the employee's outstanding performance.
- b. Participation in this Fellowship requires employees be in a career or career conditional (permanent) appointment. Employees of VA Central Office and at VA field activities are eligible to participate in the Congressional Fellowship Program.
- c. Employee must have been rated at least fully successful in their last performance appraisal.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

- a) The Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs (Assistant Secretary) shall:
 1. Maintain oversight of the Congressional Fellowship Program.
 2. Evaluate applications and select VA employees for Congressional Fellowships, while ensuring the selection of employees is made without regard to race, religion, national origin, sex, political preference, color, marital status, age, disabling condition, sexual orientation, parental status and with proper regard for their privacy and rights set forth in 5 U.S.C. 2302(b). Evaluation and selection of candidates may be conducted by a delegee selected by the Assistant Secretary.
 3. Conduct training for Congressional Fellows, to include a briefing regarding standards of conduct restrictions and issues likely to arise in conjunction with political activity and other congressional activities. This training may be conducted by a delegee selected by the Assistant Secretary.

6. APPLICATION PROCESS. Congressional Fellowship applications shall be submitted to the Assistant Secretary for approval annually, and shall include at a minimum:

- a) Personal statement consisting of one-page, 250 words or less, indicating how the employee's skills and abilities apply to the program's purpose.
- b) Written supervisory approval to participate in the VA Congressional Fellowship Program.

- c) Resume not exceeding two pages.
- d) One or two letters of recommendation.

Applicants for the Fellowship will be notified of receipt of their application. After the applications have been reviewed, select candidates will be invited to an interview with a selection committee. The selection committee will recommend candidates for selection to the Fellowship to the Assistant Secretary. Successful candidates will be given the opportunity to accept a Fellowship; unsuccessful candidates will be notified if they were not selected.

7. REFERENCES. 5 CFR Part 410; VA Directive 5015; VA Handbooks 5005 and 5015.