

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: May 30, 2014

From: Executive Director Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)
(00SB)

Subj: Waiver Request For National Veterans Small Business Conference (NVSBC) 2014

To: Acting Secretary (00)

1. **Purpose:**

- a. The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) requests your approval of a waiver to conduct the National Veterans Small Business Conference (NVSBC) in Atlanta, GA on December 9-11, 2014, in accordance with current Department of Veterans Affairs Conference Handbook, 0632, OMB, and Congressional policies and guidelines. On November 1, 2013, you approved partial funding for the planning phase of the NVSBC for \$920,000.00, out of the estimated total of \$1,898,000.00, to enable planning for the event to proceed, with the expectation that the remainder (\$978,000.00) be requested in this final waiver. Prior approval is included at Tab 6. As part of the planning process, we have identified savings that reduce the estimated cost to \$1,648,444.00.
- b. We also request you approve a name change for the event to "National Veterans Small Business Engagement in order to more accurately reflect the nature and primary objective of the event. This issue is addressed in more detail in paragraph 11 and in Attachment A: Proposed Name Change for NVSBC.

2. **Background:**

- a. The National Veterans Small Business Conference (NVSBC) 2014 is the fourth in a series of annual events that provide Veteran-Owned Small Business Owners (VOSB) improved access to VA, Federal, and Commercial Procurement Decision Makers (PDM's). This event enables VA to clearly demonstrate its commitment to its priority goal of "Access" and its strategic objective of improving Veteran economic security. In addition to the direct benefits to the VA mission from engaging with VOSB, VA also demonstrates its leadership in support of Veteran economic opportunities, by bringing Procurement Decision Makers (PDM) from other federal and state agencies, as well as from large commercial firms with needs that can be met by small

businesses. This event provides an exceptional opportunity for VOSBs to build the relationships necessary to create business opportunities.

- b. The National Veterans Small Business Conference is part of VA outreach to Veteran-Owned Small Businesses in accordance with Public Law 95-507, the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, which defines procurement set-asides and provides maximum practicable opportunities in its acquisitions to small businesses. The Small Business Act directs that small businesses receive a fair portion of federal procurement through vigorous action on the part of federal departments and agencies. Under the authority of the Act, VA provides vendor counseling sessions, participates in events targeting the small business community and provides other training and business development outreach to small business owners. Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999, expanded existing programs and provided new assistance programs for Veterans who own or operate small businesses. The law mandated that agencies provide information to Veteran-Owned firms on what each agency is purchasing or could purchase, and directs VA to expand outreach to educate Veterans not yet in business about self-employment opportunities.
- c. **Goals and Objectives:** The ultimate goal of the NVSBC is to enable "procurement ready" VOSBs to add value to the mission of VA by obtaining procurement awards. This Conference provides an opportunity for VOSBs to discuss potential opportunities directly with a large number of PDMs as well as with potential small and large business partners. A survey of Veteran businesses that participated at the 2012 National Veterans Small Business Conference held in Detroit revealed that this event generated positive feedback for the majority of the small businesses in attendance. A survey of VOSBs in attendance at the 2013 NVSBC in St. Louis stated that 67.8% respondents said the conference allowed them to make connections with Government PDM's where they were previously unsuccessful and nearly 33% made new connections with large commercial customers. Direct access of VOSBs to VA PDM's is a critical factor supporting VA's mission and efforts to meet its socioeconomic goals.

3. Justification:

- a. In order for VA to meet its socioeconomic procurement goals, VA PDM's must be aware of VOSBs that can add value to VA missions, gain access to VOSBs to understand their capabilities, and connect with them in order to mitigate the perception of risk associated with doing business with a VOSB.
- b. While other alternatives can be used to promote awareness, past experience shows there is no substitute for direct, face to face access and the development of relationships between VOSBs and PDMs in order for VOSB to mitigate the perception of risk and to encourage VA PDM to pursue procurements that contribute to our socioeconomic goals. The conference

provides exceptional opportunities for VOSBs to demonstrate they can add value to VA requirements. A face-to-face event facilitates the relationship development associated to successful partnerships where a large number of VOSBs are able to meet with a large number of PDMs in a short period in order to enable information exchange and collaboration, while building the knowledge and relationships necessary to reduce the perceived risks associated with contracting with VOSBs.

- c. This is the premier federal government event enabling Veteran-Owned Small Businesses to maximize opportunities to achieve the access needed to effectively compete for and win federal contracts. Alternative methods have been used to help VOSBs to become procurement ready, but they were not successful in providing the kinds of interactions that are essential for VOSB to demonstrate to PDM that they can add value to the VA mission. While we have utilized small local and regional events to connect VOSB with VA PDM, a national event provides this event maximizes opportunities for a large number of VOSB and PDMs to connect in a short period of time and enables us to more effectively attract other federal agencies and commercial buyers as they will be exposed to a large population of VOSB.
- d. PDMs will discuss acquisition forecasts, the vision and direction of their offices, as well as specific needs during business requirement sessions. Executive and senior leaders will outline their vision for VA acquisitions at senior leader roundtables. Networking roundtables, Dining with Decision Maker luncheons, networking breakfasts and receptions, as well business exhibits will enable VOSBs to engage, network, share ideas, discuss business requirements, identify procurement opportunities and understand program direction at VA, other government agencies, and with private sector partners.
- e. The 2013 NVSBC event hosted over 3,700 participants and offered the opportunity for VOSBs to connect with more than 500 PDMs from federal agencies and private industry at more than 2,200 "Direct Access" networking activities.
- f. The 2014 NVSBC will expand on the success of the previous events. We will continue to refine the use of technology that enables participants to enhance connections by maximizing the number of contacts. In 2013, participants recorded more than 46,000 connections.

4. Business Case Analysis:

- a. **Cost Justification:** On November 1, 2013, the Secretary approved \$920,000.00 for planning and site visits. We now seek the balance of \$728,444.00. The total cost of the 2013 NVSBC was \$1,525,668.00. The original estimate for total costs of 2014 NVSBC was \$1,898,000.00. We were able to reduce the original estimate to \$1,648,444.00 through site

selection, reduction in non-essential personnel, and pursuing a new planning contract. While the original estimate was reduced, the 2014 conference is estimated to cost more than the 2013 event due primarily to anticipated increases in travel costs and registration fees. An estimate of 2014 costs is outlined in more detail in *Attachment 4: Conference Cost Estimate*. All expenditures are legally permissible in support of VA mandated mission to conduct outreach in support of VOSBs. All expenditures comply with *Volume XIV Chapter 10, VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Conference Planning*.

- b. **Planning/No-Cost Contracts:** The NVSBC uses a fixed price for planning and a "No-cost" contract for the implementation of the event. The planning contract includes marketing, web site development, registration, site selection, event logistics planning, negotiations with venue, and schedule development and coordination. Since the actual execution is a no cost contract, the remainder of the costs is borne by registration and booth fees paid by participants, to include VA attendees. As the event's main objective is to promote "direct access" PDMs to small business owners, and to increase return on investment, we are focusing attendance on those PDMs who have regional or enterprise requirements, as they will be most relevant to the largest number of VOSBs.
- c. **Number and Type of Attendees:** We seek to attract more than 4,000 business participants together with 400 VA officials, 6 support staff, 200 officials from other federal agencies, and more than 60 commercial customers. We expect to increase our return on investment by selecting PDM with requirements relevant to the largest number of VOSB, and recruiting VOSB that have relevant capabilities, thus enabling participants to connect with the largest number of opportunities in a short time. PDMs will be able to conduct extensive market research, consistent with the Federal Acquisition Regulations, more quickly and efficiently than if they met with individual firms on an ad hoc basis over an extended period of time. We also seek to increase return on investment by matching PDMs who have requirements (Buyers) with the VOSBs capabilities (Sellers) prior to the event so all participants can most effectively use their time at the conference to have discussions with relevant partners. We will eliminate those PDMs with only local requirements and will connect them to local vendors at local events that will not require travel. By partnering with public and private organizations that assist VOSBs to become procurement ready prior to the NVSBC, we expect to attract a larger number of relevant, procurement ready firms, and to promote more competition, which in turn reduces procurement costs.
- d. **Duration:** The NVSBC will last three days to enable participants to engage in multiple contacts and to increase the opportunities for meaningful connections. The length of the event also enables VA PDMs to learn

whether there are enough VOSBs make procurement set-asides cost-effective. In addition to the primary objective of providing access, the conference also enables VA agencies to conduct training for staff attending the event at a low marginal cost by adding instruction to the schedule for VA staff on the days prior to or following the event. In 2012 and 2013, VHA reduced their training costs for VHA acquisition staff by taking advantage of their presence at the conference to conduct training the day after the conference ended.

e. **Major Activities:** We propose the following major activities:

- 1.) Government Business Requirements Sessions (300)
- 2.) Networking Receptions (2)
- 3.) Commercial Industry Requirements Sessions (100)
- 4.) Exhibits (400)
- 5.) Dining with Decision Maker networking sessions at Luncheons (1,200)
- 6.) Networking Roundtables (1,800)
- 7.) Executive and Senior Leader Roundtables (20)
- 8.) Training Sessions for VA and Commercial partners to improve procurement readiness of VOSB (80)

5. **Cost Mitigation Efforts:**

a. Although our goal is to increase return on investment, rather than merely to reduce costs, we have undertaken a number of cost mitigation efforts. We are restricting attendance to VA PDMs who procurement requirements that are relevant to firms beyond their local area. The use of a no cost contract for the NVSBC will reduce costs to VA. Event expenses covered under the no cost contract are funded by hotel concessions, venue food and beverage guarantees, booth fees and registration fees paid by all participants. Sponsorship packages will be permitted only after coordination and approval by VA OGC. As a result, VA expenditures for the NVSBC are limited to fixed price planning costs, travel and registration fees for VA participants, and exhibit fees for VA organizations hosting booths. VA will not fund the cost of non-VA speakers or PDM, and training will be provided to VOSBs at no cost to VA. Other Cost Savings/Cost Avoidance measures follow:

- 1.) **SWAG:** There are no gifts, trinkets, memorabilia, or commemorative items. VA will not emboss any items. Sponsor may provide items based on their sponsor package at no cost to VA only after review and approval by VA OGC.
- 2.) **Per Diem:** All federal government participants will be notified that they may not claim per diem for meals provided to them at the NVSBC.
- 3.) **Food and Beverage:** The NVSBC contractor will stipulate that all provision of food and light refreshments will be in compliance with federal policy and regulations.

- 4.) **Entertainment:** There will be no entertainment activities (videos, music, motivational speakers, etc.) included in the NVSBC.
- 5.) **Hotel Costs:** We have asked hotels to provide rooms on a per diem basis.
- 6.) **Planning:** This year our internal staff is doing more of the planning functions that were done last year by the event planner contractor, resulting in more cost-effective long range planning.
- 7.) **VA Integrated Operations Center (IOC):** This year we recommend that VA IOC manpower be reduced. The proximity of Atlanta allows senior leadership to be back in DC within a two hour flight if need be for emergency purposes.

b. **Advanced Planning:** Advanced planning leads to better collaborative negotiations with partners and mitigates costs. By planning in advance, we will reduce the risk of problems due to the application of technology associated with the event and enhance the quality of collaboration by attracting procurement ready VOSBs and PDM with small business relevant requirements. In particular we seek to expand the use of use engagement management software to match VOSB to PDM prior to the event, so that VA PDM can be assured of meeting procurement ready VOSB.

c. **Focus selection of VA Procurement Decision Makers and expand Commercial Partners Participation at no cost to VA:** We will seek to mitigate costs by restricting the VA participants to those with the most relevant opportunities for small businesses. By bringing those with the best opportunities we will increase our ROI by attracting more small business. Adding commercial buyers and PDM from other federal agencies will increase benefits to VOSB without adding costs to VA.

6. **Location:** The site assessment for the event has been completed. Based on feedback from 44 potential venues, and site visits to six cities (Denver, Atlanta, Reno, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Dallas), we recommend that the 2014 NVSBC be held in Atlanta, GA, December 9-11, 2014. For a detailed assessment of the venues, and rationale for the selection of Atlanta, see Attachment B: Site Comparison.

DATE	LOCATION
Dec 9 – Dec 11, 2014	Atlanta, GA

7. **Estimated Cost:** The overall estimated costs for the NVSBC are summarized below. For comparison purposes, we also show the costs for 2013. The 2014 estimates are based on acceptance of our recommendation to hold the event in Atlanta, GA. Use of other venues would increase costs. The non-travel cost increases are due to slight anticipated increases in registration fees and booth fees. Due to the nature of the no-cost contract, the contractor determines these fees, so we can only estimate

them at this time. The increase in the travel cost estimate is due primarily to anticipated increases in airline tickets, lodging, parking and per diem.

Training Event Title	Number of VA employees	Number of Support Staff	Non-Travel Cost	Travel Cost	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
NVSBC 2014	400	6	\$334,500.00	\$480,424.00	\$833,520.00	\$1,648,444.00	\$4,060.21
NVSBC 2013	420	19	\$264,691.00	\$424,104.00	\$836,873.00	\$1,525,688.00	\$3,476.37

8. **Risk Assessment:** Listed below are major risks identified:

Risk	Mitigation
Site availability	Completed site visits to six sites. Met with key personnel controlling convention center and hotel space. Delays in approval could jeopardize access to venue.
Inability to attract Federal PDMs due to competing priorities and budget restrictions.	Earlier requests for agency support and demonstrate ROI. Moved event from 4 th quarter to 1 st quarter of FY in response to concerns of PDM regarding need to focus on procurement processing in 4 th quarter.
Not attracting VOSBs	Early marketing of attendance by PDM
Insufficient procurement ready VOSBs	Partner with PTAC, SBA, MBDA and other development organizations to ID and develop procurement ready VOSB prior to event.
Competing events reduce attendance	Researched and avoided major competing events such as Annual Association meetings (AUSA, Navy League, AFA, DCIA); DOL; SBA
Insufficient/incomplete marketing and planning that focused on VA objectives	Shifted the strategic communications and event planning to internal OSDBU staff

9. **Budget Reviews and AAR:** To ensure effective oversight, coordination, and synergy, we will continue to use the Executive Steering Committee consisting of senior executives from all relevant VA organizations to review planning and coordinate activities. All NVSBC budgets will be briefed to the Executive Steering Committee (to include CCO and RCE) prior to the NVSBC. Actual event costs will be briefed by program managers to the ESC and to VA senior leadership as part of the After Action

Report (AAR) process, along with an assessment of the extent to which the NVSBC accomplished its goals. We will brief the Secretary on final budget, and execution ninety days prior to event, to ensure we have met his intent, and addressed risks.

10. Participation of VA Executive Leadership: We propose that The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (SECVA) attend the NVSBC for 10 hours split between two days; and the Chief of Staff and Undersecretaries attend to show senior leadership commitment to this important outreach effort, as in past years. For notional schedules, see Attachment C: Proposed Schedule for Executive Leadership. Actual schedules will be determined in coordination with the Executives to facilitate their engagement. Atlanta has a VAMC, VBA regional office, VISN HQ and a National Cemetery in the metropolitan area, so participation in the NVSBC could be combined with visits to local facilities.

11. Proposed Name Change for National Veterans Small Business Conference: For the last three years VA has used the term "National Veterans Small Business Conference" to refer to this event. Use of this term has created some concern as it does not accurately reflect the true nature of this important outreach effort. The central purpose of the event is to enable VOSBs to gain direct access to Federal and commercial procurement opportunities. While there are a number of training activities, the main attraction for VOSBs is that it gives most VOSBs the most opportunities to "engage" directly with the largest number of potential customers on a more extensive and extended basis than they can at a typical conference. In order to more accurately reflect the nature and purpose of the event, we recommend changing the name of the event to "National Veterans Small Business Engagement." See Attachment A: Proposed Name Change of NVSBC for detailed discussion and analysis.

12. I am available at your convenience to answer questions and to discuss this proposed event.


Thomas J. Loney

Attachments

- A – Proposed Event Name Change for NVSBC
- B – Site Comparison Decision Matrix
- C – Proposed Executive Leadership Schedule

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: July 10, 2014

From: Under Secretary for Benefits

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-1 Training in FY 2015
(VAIQ #7479611)

To: Acting Secretary

1. In accordance with the existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Veterans Benefits Administration requests your approval of a waiver to implement centralized, face-to-face Challenge training classes in October 2014 through November 2014. The Challenge training session will cost in excess of the maximum allowable expense of \$500,000.
 - a. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
 - 1) The execution of this conference is subject to the availability of FY15 funds. If FY15 funds are not available, this request will be canceled
 - 2) VBA uses the VBA Training Academy for this required training
 - 3) Conference participation is limited to required attendees
 - 4) This conference is necessary for the training of 113 VBA Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) and 100 Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs)
2. Purpose: The purpose of this training is to provide technical training to newly hired VSRs and RVSRs of Regional Offices across the country. The training will provide fundamental information vital to the employees' ability to process disability claims with accuracy and precision. RVSRs will be trained to rate at least one (1) case per day with a 90% accuracy rating. VSRs will be trained to develop 1.5 cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating or promulgate three (3.0) cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating. The Challenge program is a national technical training curriculum that provides new Veterans Service Center employees with the skills they need to function effectively in their positions as VSRs or RVSRs. Challenge provides hands-on training with computer applications and advances the new employees through progressively more challenging practice claims. All new employees handle practice claims and actual "live" claims just as they will when they return to their home stations. Challenge training is a critical element of providing employees the skill sets necessary to achieve the standards of delivering compensation benefits to Veterans. Challenge training is a key initiative in VBA and a critical component in achieving our transformation goals for improved service delivery.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-1 Training in FY 2015

3. Goals and Objectives: Upon the conclusion of the resident portion of Challenge training:

- Newly hired Veterans Service Representatives will develop 1.5 cases per day at 94% accuracy or promulgate 3.0 cases per day at 94% accuracy;
- Newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives will demonstrate mastery by rating at least one simple (one-to-two issue) claim per day at 90% accuracy;
- Employees serving as instructors gain valuable teaching and mentoring experience that improves training within regional offices, and raises the standard of excellence among journey-level employees.

4. Justification:

a. **Challenge training accelerates proficiency in new employees.**

(1) Challenge training is required to teach newly hired employees the basics of their job. Challenge training is a proven program designed to establish in seven weeks employee skill levels that previously took six to eight months to achieve. On completion of Challenge training, employees complete 150 percent more claims per day in their first six months, with a 30 percent increase in accuracy, when compared to early student performance under the previous program.

(2) During first quarter of FY 2013, VBA initiated a new pilot to deliver prerequisite training and knowledge-based, lecture-oriented lessons using technology for virtual delivery for 16 newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives. These students attended four weeks of resident training beginning January 2013. The quantity and accuracy of their work during training will be compared to the results of the centralized training model to determine if a partially virtual training solution is feasible in FY 2014-2015.

(3) To maximize efficiency and minimize costs, VBA conducts all required Challenge training at the only VA/VBA Training site designed for this training; the VBA Training Academy in Baltimore Maryland.

b. **Face-to-face Challenge training is required for effective student and instructor interaction.**

(1) Challenge training emphasizes evaluation of student learning through pre- and post-tests; introductory skill practices using mock cases; closely supervised, actual work using live cases; and immediate feedback from experienced instructors. Challenge training has achieved dramatic results due to the adult learning principles built into the training methods. Challenge training builds teamwork among learners and instructors, and enhances standardization across the 56 regional offices.

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(2) Students from geographically dispersed regional offices benefit from direct, face-to-face interaction as they learn; because the students are seeking the same skill sets and enter training at similar skill levels. Practical application with live cases is integrated throughout the curricula. The students' work is reviewed and nationally standardized instructors provide feedback immediately after completion, so students become accustomed to having their work critiqued to assure accuracy.

(3) The personnel selected as instructors are highly experienced, journey-level employees, recommended by their regional office leaders and prepared with standardized training provided by Compensation Service. In the face-to-face Challenge training environment, the instructors gain substantial practice in teaching difficult topics and guiding the work effort of others. Their direct interaction with instructors from other regional offices improves standardization, provides a grass roots opportunity to collaborate on complex issues and to learn techniques they might otherwise never learn. Their face-to-face interaction with other instructors further benefits VBA by improving consistency across regional offices.

(4) Face-to-face Challenge training is required to achieve the interaction described above, and because it is proven to achieve the desired performance results.

5. Business Case Analysis:

a. **Challenge costs are effectively constrained.**

(1) VBA conducted an analysis of the student population, and the availability and suitability of training facilities. VBA has successfully implemented Challenge training at the VBA Training Academy in the past, while assuring standardization of training because we send nationally standardized instructors to the academy, and provide close oversight by Compensation Service course managers. Our analysis revealed:

- The student population for Challenge 2015-1 is spread across several regional offices. The student population requires training in one of two curricula.
- Sending all employees to a VBA facility significantly decreases costs associated with training space as the VBA facility can adequately accommodate the number of trainees and support staff.
- Travel cost estimates are divided into three distinct traveler groups: Admin Support Staff, VRS, and RVSR Travelers for a more accurate overall cost estimate.

(2) Use of existing government facilities, rather than commercial training facilities, leverages sunk costs of existing facilities. The classrooms are outfitted with suitable classroom equipment including computers connected to the VBA network and already loaded with relevant computer applications.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-1 Training in FY 2015

(3) The VBA Training Academy is our premier Challenge training location because of the experienced support infrastructure in place. Over 200 Challenge students can be accommodated simultaneously, and instructor standardization oversight can be accomplished across multiple classrooms by a single course manager for each curriculum. Using our VBA Training Academy facilities reduces the overall cost of each Challenge session.

b. Challenge training provides substantial return on the investment.

(1) The productivity of a Challenge graduate in their first six months is 50% higher when compared against graduates of the earlier training programs. Challenge 2015-1 will train 213 students. Conducting Challenge Training presents an excellent cost avoidance opportunity.

(2) Other versions of this training – including shorter, in-person classes and a piloted, web-based class – have not proven to effectively meet the training goals and objectives based on measured production and accuracy results.

(3) Our analysis concludes that the distributed model for face-to-face training in Challenge 2015-1 effectively constrains costs and provides substantial return on the investment.

6. The proposed dates and location for the FY 2015-1 Challenge training session is:

TIME	POTENTIAL LOCATIONS
October 6, to November 14, 2014	VBA Training Academy, Baltimore, MD.

- Internet based training will be held from September 2 – October 3, 2014
- a. The Challenge 2015-1 classroom training session will occur with:
 - 255 participants
 - o 213 students, 6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor, and 35 instructors based in Baltimore
 - 220 participants will travel to the VBA Training Academy:
 - o 7 personnel (6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor) support both the VSR and RVSR classes and travel from 10/06/2014 to 11/14/2014
 - o 113 VSRs – class travel dates – 10/06/2014 to 11/14/2014
 - o 100 RVSRs – class travel dates – 10/14/2014 to 11/07/2014

7: By using the Baltimore VBA Training Academy, VBA will use only government facilities and support staff for this event. Expected costs are for student, instructor, and support staff travel, and for classroom supplies. Hotel costs include only lodging rates, and will be equal to or less than the GSA rate. Estimated airfares, local transportation costs and supplies are included in the estimate. No "logo", SWAG, food, light refreshments, AV equipment or

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-1 Training in FY 2015

entertainment items or services will be purchased. All attendees will be informed that no per diem can be claimed for any meals provided at government expense.

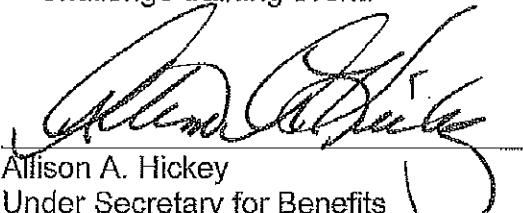
a. Total Cost Breakdown for Average Cost per Participant (Students/Instructors/Support). A separate VA Form 10008b for VSR, RVSR, Support Staff and combined costs is provided.

	Number of VA employees	Non-travel Cost (Supplies)	Travel Costs	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
Support Staff	7	\$11,877*	\$74,036	0	\$85,913	
VSR Class	113	*	\$1,195,144	0	\$1,195,144	
RVSR Class	100	*	\$696,150	0	\$696,150	
Total	220	\$11,877*	\$1,965,330	0	\$1,977,207	\$8,987

* Supply costs are listed in the "Support Staff" VA Form 10008b, the cost of supplies by class (pro-rated based on the number of employees attending) is: VSR: \$6,301; RVSR: \$5,576.

8. Both the **VA Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Proposed Checklist for Conference Certifying Officials** and **Department of Veterans Affairs Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Request Guidance** were used in the planning of this event. The Administration Conference Certifying Official (CCO) has reviewed and signed off on the attached Conference Certification Form prior to my signature below.

9. I am available at (202) 461-9300 should you wish to further discuss this proposed Challenge training event.


Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits

July 10, 2014

Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: JAN 20 2015

From: Under Secretary for Benefits

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-5 Training in FY 2015
(VAIQ #7480162)

Thru: Deputy Secretary

To: Secretary

1. In accordance with the existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Veterans Benefits Administration requests your approval of a waiver to implement centralized, face-to-face Challenge training classes in June 2015 through August 2015. The Challenge training session will cost in excess of the maximum allowable expense of \$500,000.
 - a. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
 - 1) The execution of this conference is subject to availability of FY15 funds. If FY15 funds are not available, this request will be cancelled.
 - 2) VBA uses the VBA Training Academy for this required training
 - 3) Conference participation is limited to required attendees
 - 4) This conference is necessary for the training of 113 VBA Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) and 100 Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs)
2. Purpose: The purpose of this training is to provide technical training to newly hired VSRs and RVSRs of Regional Offices across the country. The training will provide fundamental information vital to the employees' ability to process disability claims with accuracy and precision. RVSRs will be trained to rate at least one (1) case per day with a 90% accuracy rating. VSRs will be trained to develop 1.5 cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating or promulgate three (3.0) cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating. The Challenge program is a national technical training curriculum that provides new Veterans Service Center employees with the skills they need to function effectively in their positions as VSRs or RVSRs. Challenge provides hands-on training with computer applications and advances the new employees through progressively more challenging practice claims. All new employees handle practice claims and actual "live" claims just as they will when they return to their home stations. Challenge training is a critical element of providing employees the skill sets necessary to achieve the standards of delivering compensation benefits to Veterans. Challenge training is a key initiative in VBA and a critical component in achieving our transformation goals for improved service delivery.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-5 Training in FY 2015

3. Goals and Objectives: Upon the conclusion of the resident portion of Challenge training:

- Newly hired Veterans Service Representatives will develop 1.5 cases per day at 94% accuracy or promulgate 3.0 cases per day at 94% accuracy;
- Newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives will demonstrate mastery by rating at least one simple (one-to-two issue) claim per day at 90% accuracy;
- Employees serving as instructors gain valuable teaching and mentoring experience that improves training within regional offices, and raises the standard of excellence among journey-level employees.

4. Justification:

a. **Challenge training accelerates proficiency in new employees.**

(1) Challenge training is required to teach newly hired employees the basics of their job. Challenge training is a proven program designed to establish in seven weeks employee skill levels that previously took six to eight months to achieve. On completion of Challenge training, employees complete 150 percent more claims per day in their first six months, with a 30 percent increase in accuracy, when compared to early student performance under the previous program.

(2) During first quarter of FY 2013, VBA initiated a new pilot to deliver prerequisite training and knowledge-based, lecture-oriented lessons using technology for virtual delivery for 16 newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives. These students attended four weeks of resident training beginning January 2013. The quantity and accuracy of their work during training will be compared to the results of the centralized training model to determine if a partially virtual training solution is feasible in FY 2014-2015.

(3) To maximize efficiency and minimize costs, VBA conducts all required Challenge training at the only VA/VBA Training site designed for this training; the VBA Training Academy in Baltimore Maryland.

b. **Face-to-face Challenge training is required for effective student and instructor interaction.**

(1) Challenge training emphasizes evaluation of student learning through pre- and post-tests; introductory skill practices using mock cases; closely supervised, actual work using live cases; and immediate feedback from experienced instructors. Challenge training has achieved dramatic results due to the adult learning principles built into the training methods. Challenge training builds teamwork among learners and instructors, and enhances standardization across the 56 regional offices.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-5 Training in FY 2015

(2) Students from geographically dispersed regional offices benefit from direct, face-to-face interaction as they learn; because the students are seeking the same skill sets and enter training at similar skill levels. Practical application with live cases is integrated throughout the curricula. The students' work is reviewed and nationally standardized instructors provide feedback immediately after completion, so students become accustomed to having their work critiqued to assure accuracy.

(3) The personnel selected as instructors are highly experienced, journey-level employees, recommended by their regional office leaders and prepared with standardized training provided by Compensation Service. In the face-to-face Challenge training environment, the instructors gain substantial practice in teaching difficult topics and guiding the work effort of others. Their direct interaction with instructors from other regional offices improves standardization, provides a grass roots opportunity to collaborate on complex issues and to learn techniques they might otherwise never learn. Their face-to-face interaction with other instructors further benefits VBA by improving consistency across regional offices.

(4) Face-to-face Challenge training is required to achieve the interaction described above, and because it is proven to achieve the desired performance results.

5. Business Case Analysis:

a. **Challenge costs are effectively constrained.**

(1) VBA conducted an analysis of the student population, and the availability and suitability of training facilities. VBA has successfully implemented Challenge training at the VBA Training Academy in the past, while assuring standardization of training because we send nationally standardized instructors to the academy, and provide close oversight by Compensation Service course managers. Our analysis revealed:

- The student population for Challenge 2015-5 is spread across several regional offices. The student population requires training in one of two curricula.
- Sending all employees to a VBA facility significantly decreases costs associated with training space as the VBA facility can adequately accommodate the number of trainees and support staff.
- Travel cost estimates are divided into three distinct traveler groups: Admin Support Staff, VRS, and RVSR Travelers for a more accurate overall cost estimate.

(2) Use of existing government facilities, rather than commercial training facilities, leverages sunk costs of existing facilities. The classrooms are outfitted

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-5 Training in FY 2015

with suitable classroom equipment including computers connected to the VBA network and already loaded with relevant computer applications.

(3) The VBA Training Academy is our premier Challenge training location because of the experienced support infrastructure in place. Over 200 Challenge students can be accommodated simultaneously, and instructor standardization oversight can be accomplished across multiple classrooms by a single course manager for each curriculum. Using our VBA Training Academy facilities reduces the overall cost of each Challenge session.

b. Challenge training provides substantial return on the investment.

(1) The productivity of a Challenge graduate in their first six months is 50% higher when compared against graduates of the earlier training programs. Challenge 2015-5 will train 213 students. Conducting Challenge Training presents an excellent cost avoidance opportunity.

(2) Other versions of this training – including shorter, in-person classes and a piloted, web-based class – have not proven to effectively meet the training goals and objectives based on measured production and accuracy results.

(3) Our analysis concludes that the distributed model for face-to-face training in Challenge 2015-5 effectively constrains costs and provides substantial return on the investment.

6. The proposed dates and location for the FY 2015-5 Challenge training session is:

TIME	POTENTIAL LOCATIONS
June 29, 2015 to August 7, 2015	VBA Training Academy, Baltimore, MD.

* Internet based training will be held from May 26 – June 26, 2015

a. The Challenge 2015-5 training session will occur with:

- 255 participants
 - o 213 students, 6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor, and 35 instructors based in Baltimore
- 220 participants will travel to the VBA Training Academy:
 - o 7 personnel (6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor) support both the VSR and RVSR classes and travel from 06/29/15 to 08/07/15
 - o 113 VSRs – class travel dates – 06/29/15 to 08/07/15
 - o 100 RVSRs – class travel dates – 07/13/15 to 08/07/15

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-5 Training in FY 2015

7. By using the Baltimore VBA Training Academy, VBA will use only government facilities and support staff for this event. Expected costs are for student, instructor, and support staff travel, and for classroom supplies. Hotel costs include only lodging rates, and will be equal to or less than the GSA rate. Estimated airfares, local transportation costs and supplies are included in the estimate. No "logo", SWAG, food, light refreshments, AV equipment or entertainment items or services will be purchased. All attendees will be informed that no per diem can be claimed for any meals provided at government expense.

a. Total Cost Breakdown for Average Cost per Participant (Students/Instructors/Support). A separate VA Form 10008b for VSR, RVSR, Support Staff and combined costs is provided.

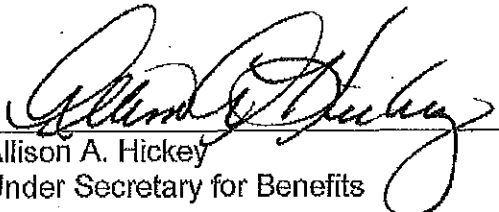
	Number of VA employees	Non-travel Cost (Supplies)	Travel Costs	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
Support Staff	7	\$11,877*	\$75,205	0	\$87,082	
VSR Class	113	*	\$1,214,015	0	\$1,214,015	
RVSR Class	100	*	\$732,750	0	\$732,750	
Total	220	\$11,877*	\$2,021,970	0	\$2,033,847	\$9,245

* Supply costs are listed in the "Support Staff" VA Form 10008b, the cost of supplies by class (pro-rated based on the number of employees attending) is: VSR: \$6,301; RVSR: \$5,576.

8. Both the **VA Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Proposed Checklist for Conference Certifying Officials** and **Department of Veterans Affairs Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Request Guidance** were used in the planning of this event. The Administration Conference Certifying Official (CCO) has reviewed and signed off on the attached Conference Certification Form prior to my signature below.

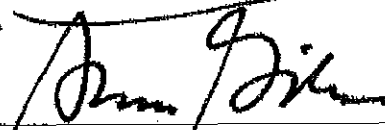
Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-5 Training in FY 2015

9. I am available at (202) 461-9300 should you wish to further discuss this proposed Challenge training event.


Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits


JAN 20 2015
Date

Recommend Approval/Disapproval


Sloan D. Gibson
Deputy Secretary

1/28/15
Date

Approve/Disapprove


Robert A. McDonald
Secretary

1/30/15
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: SEP 23 2014

From: Under Secretary for Benefits

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-2 Training in FY 2015
(VAIQ #7479615)

Thru: Deputy Secretary

To: Secretary

1. In accordance with the existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Veterans Benefits Administration requests your approval of a waiver to implement centralized, face-to-face Challenge training classes in January 2015 through February 2015. The Challenge training session will cost in excess of the maximum allowable expense of \$500,000.
 - a. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
 - 1) The execution of this conference is subject to the availability of FY15 funds. If FY15 funds are not available, this request will be cancelled.
 - 2) VBA uses the VBA Training Academy for this required training
 - 3) Conference participation is limited to required attendees
 - 4) This conference is necessary for the training of 113 VBA Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) and 100 Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs)
2. Purpose: The purpose of this training is to provide technical training to newly hired VSRs and RVSRs of Regional Offices across the country. The training will provide fundamental information vital to the employees' ability to process disability claims with accuracy and precision. RVSRs will be trained to rate at least one (1) case per day with a 90% accuracy rating. VSRs will be trained to develop 1.5 cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating or promulgate three (3.0) cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating. The Challenge program is a national technical training curriculum that provides new Veterans Service Center employees with the skills they need to function effectively in their positions as VSRs or RVSRs. Challenge provides hands-on training with computer applications and advances the new employees through progressively more challenging practice claims. All new employees handle practice claims and actual "live" claims just as they will when they return to their home stations. Challenge training is a critical element of providing employees the skill sets necessary to achieve the standards of delivering compensation benefits to Veterans. Challenge training is a key initiative in VBA and a critical component in achieving our transformation goals for improved service delivery.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-2 Training in FY 2015

3. Goals and Objectives: Upon the conclusion of the resident portion of Challenge training:

- Newly hired Veterans Service Representatives will develop 1.5 cases per day at 94% accuracy or promulgate 3.0 cases per day at 94% accuracy;
- Newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives will demonstrate mastery by rating at least one simple (one-to-two issue) claim per day at 90% accuracy;
- Employees serving as instructors gain valuable teaching and mentoring experience that improves training within regional offices, and raises the standard of excellence among journey-level employees.

4. Justification:

a. **Challenge training accelerates proficiency in new employees.**

(1) Challenge training is required to teach newly hired employees the basics of their job. Challenge training is a proven program designed to establish in seven weeks employee skill levels that previously took six to eight months to achieve. On completion of Challenge training, employees complete 150 percent more claims per day in their first six months, with a 30 percent increase in accuracy, when compared to early student performance under the previous program.

(2) During first quarter of FY 2013, VBA initiated a new pilot to deliver prerequisite training and knowledge-based, lecture-oriented lessons using technology for virtual delivery for 16 newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives. These students attended four weeks of resident training beginning January 2013. The quantity and accuracy of their work during training will be compared to the results of the centralized training model to determine if a partially virtual training solution is feasible in FY 2014-2015.

(3) To maximize efficiency and minimize costs, VBA conducts all required Challenge training at the only VA/VBA Training site designed for this training; the VBA Training Academy in Baltimore Maryland.

b. **Face-to-face Challenge training is required for effective student and instructor interaction.**

(1) Challenge training emphasizes evaluation of student learning through pre- and post-tests; introductory skill practices using mock cases; closely supervised, actual work using live cases; and immediate feedback from experienced instructors. Challenge training has achieved dramatic results due to the adult learning principles built into the training methods. Challenge training builds teamwork among learners and instructors, and enhances standardization across the 56 regional offices.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-2 Training in FY 2015

(2) Students from geographically dispersed regional offices benefit from direct, face-to-face interaction as they learn; because the students are seeking the same skill sets and enter training at similar skill levels. Practical application with live cases is integrated throughout the curricula. The students' work is reviewed and nationally standardized instructors provide feedback immediately after completion, so students become accustomed to having their work critiqued to assure accuracy.

(3) The personnel selected as instructors are highly experienced, journey-level employees, recommended by their regional office leaders and prepared with standardized training provided by Compensation Service. In the face-to-face Challenge training environment, the instructors gain substantial practice in teaching difficult topics and guiding the work effort of others. Their direct interaction with instructors from other regional offices improves standardization, provides a grass roots opportunity to collaborate on complex issues and to learn techniques they might otherwise never learn. Their face-to-face interaction with other instructors further benefits VBA by improving consistency across regional offices.

(4) Face-to-face Challenge training is required to achieve the interaction described above, and because it is proven to achieve the desired performance results.

5. Business Case Analysis:

a. **Challenge costs are effectively constrained.**

(1) VBA conducted an analysis of the student population, and the availability and suitability of training facilities. VBA has successfully implemented Challenge training at the VBA Training Academy in the past, while assuring standardization of training because we send nationally standardized instructors to the academy, and provide close oversight by Compensation Service course managers. Our analysis revealed:

- The student population for Challenge 2015-2 is spread across several regional offices. The student population requires training in one of two curricula.
- Sending all employees to a VBA facility significantly decreases costs associated with training space as the VBA facility can adequately accommodate the number of trainees and support staff.
- Travel cost estimates are divided into three distinct traveler groups: Admin Support Staff, VRS, and RVSR Travelers for a more accurate overall cost estimate.

(2) Use of existing government facilities, rather than commercial training facilities, leverages sunk costs of existing facilities. The classrooms are outfitted

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-2 Training in FY 2015

with suitable classroom equipment including computers connected to the VBA network and already loaded with relevant computer applications.

(3) The VBA Training Academy is our premier Challenge training location because of the experienced support infrastructure in place. Over 200 Challenge students can be accommodated simultaneously, and instructor standardization oversight can be accomplished across multiple classrooms by a single course manager for each curriculum. Using our VBA Training Academy facilities reduces the overall cost of each Challenge session.

b. Challenge training provides substantial return on the investment.

(1) The productivity of a Challenge graduate in their first six months is 50% higher when compared against graduates of the earlier training programs. Challenge 2015-2 will train 213 students. Conducting Challenge Training presents an excellent cost avoidance opportunity.

(2) Other versions of this training – including shorter, in-person classes and a piloted, web-based class – have not proven to effectively meet the training goals and objectives based on measured production and accuracy results.

(3) Our analysis concludes that the distributed model for face-to-face training in Challenge 2015-2 effectively constrains costs and provides substantial return on the investment.

6. The proposed dates and location for the FY 2015-2 Challenge training session is:

TIME	POTENTIAL LOCATIONS
January 5, 2015, to February 13, 2015	VBA Training Academy, Baltimore, MD.

- Internet based training will be held from November 10, 2014 – January 2, 2015.

a. The Challenge 2015-2 training session will occur with:

- 255 participants
 - 213 students, 6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor, and 35 instructors based in Baltimore
- 220 participants will travel to the VBA Training Academy:
 - 7 personnel (6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor) support both the VSR and RVSR classes and travel from 01/05/15 to 02/13/15
 - 113 VSRs – class travel dates – 01/05/15 to 02/06/15
 - 100 RVSRs – class travel dates – 01/20/15 to 02/13/15

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-2 Training in FY 2015

7. By using the Baltimore VBA Training Academy, VBA will use only government facilities and support staff for this event. Expected costs are for student, instructor, and support staff travel, and for classroom supplies. Hotel costs include only lodging rates, and will be equal to or less than the GSA rate. Estimated airfares, local transportation costs and supplies are included in the estimate. No "logo", SWAG, food, light refreshments, AV equipment or entertainment items or services will be purchased. All attendees will be informed that no per diem can be claimed for any meals provided at government expense.

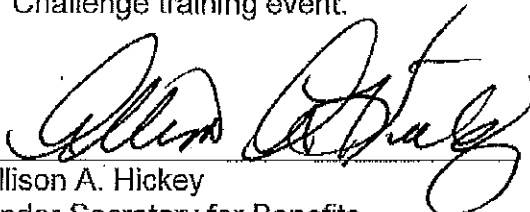
a. Total Cost Breakdown for Average Cost per Participant (Students/Instructors/Support). A separate VA Form 10008b for VSR, RVSR, Support Staff and combined costs is provided.

	Number of VA employees	Non-travel Cost (Supplies)	Travel Costs	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
Support Staff	7	\$11,877*	\$64,754	0	\$76,631	
VSR Class	113	*	\$881,569	0	\$881,569	
RVSR Class	100	*	\$614,550	0	\$614,550	
Total	220		\$1,560,873	0	\$1,572,750	\$7,149

* Supply costs are listed in the "Support Staff" VA Form 10008b, the cost of supplies by class (pro-rated based on the number of employees attending) is: VSR: \$6,301; RVSR: \$5,576.

8. Both the **VA Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Proposed Checklist for Conference Certifying Officials** and **Department of Veterans Affairs Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Request Guidance** were used in the planning of this event. The Administration Conference Certifying Official (CCO) has reviewed and signed off on the attached Conference Certification Form prior to my signature below.

9. I am available at (202) 461-9300 should you wish to further discuss this proposed Challenge training event.


Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits

9/23/2014
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: JAN 17 2015

From: Under Secretary for Benefits

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-3 Training in FY 2015
(VAIQ #7479616)

Thru: Deputy Secretary *[Signature]*

To: Secretary

1. In accordance with the existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Veterans Benefits Administration requests your approval of a waiver to implement centralized, face-to-face Challenge training classes in February 2015 through March 2015. The Challenge training session will cost in excess of the maximum allowable expense of \$500,000.
 - a. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
 - 1) Due to the Continuing Resolution, budget concerns, and recent changes to the VA Conference Program, VBA is unable to meet the new 70 day deadline for submission of this package.
 - 2) VBA uses the VBA Training Academy for this required training
 - 3) Conference participation is limited to required attendees
 - 4) This conference is necessary for the training of 113 VBA Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) and 100 Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs)
2. Purpose: The purpose of this training is to provide technical training to newly hired VSRs and RVSRs of Regional Offices across the country. The training will provide fundamental information vital to the employees' ability to process disability claims with accuracy and precision. The Challenge program is a national technical training curriculum that provides new Veterans Service Center employees with the skills they need to function effectively in their positions as VSRs or RVSRs. Challenge provides hands-on training with computer applications and advances the new employees through progressively more challenging practice claims. All new employees handle practice claims and actual "live" claims just as they will when they return to their home stations. Challenge training is a critical element of providing employees the skill sets necessary to achieve the standards of delivering compensation benefits to Veterans. Challenge training is a key initiative in VBA and a critical component in achieving our transformation goals for improved service delivery.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-3 Training in FY 2015

3. Goals and Objectives: Upon the conclusion of the resident portion of Challenge training:

- Newly hired Veterans Service Representatives will develop 1.5 cases per day at 94% accuracy or promulgate 3.0 cases per day at 94% accuracy;
- Newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives will demonstrate mastery by rating at least one simple (one-to-two issue) claim per day at 90% accuracy;
- Employees serving as instructors gain valuable teaching and mentoring experience that improves training within regional offices, and raises the standard of excellence among journey-level employees.

4. Justification:

a. **Challenge training accelerates proficiency in new employees.**

(1) Challenge training is required to teach newly hired employees the basics of their job. Challenge training is a proven program designed to establish in seven weeks employee skill levels that previously took six to eight months to achieve. On completion of Challenge training, employees complete 150 percent more claims per day in their first six months, with a 30 percent increase in accuracy, when compared to early student performance under the previous program.

(2) During first quarter of FY 2013, VBA initiated a new pilot to deliver prerequisite training and knowledge-based, lecture-oriented lessons using technology for virtual delivery for 16 newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives. These students attended four weeks of resident training beginning January 2013. The quantity and accuracy of their work during training will be compared to the results of the centralized training model to determine if a partially virtual training solution is feasible in FY 2014-2015.

(3) To maximize efficiency and minimize costs, VBA conducts all required Challenge training at the only VA/VBA Training site designed for this training; the VBA Training Academy in Baltimore Maryland.

b. **Face-to-face Challenge training is required for effective student and instructor interaction.**

(1) Challenge training emphasizes evaluation of student learning through pre- and post-tests; introductory skill practices using mock cases; closely supervised, actual work using live cases; and immediate feedback from experienced instructors. Challenge training has achieved dramatic results due to the adult learning principles built into the training methods. Challenge training builds teamwork among learners and instructors, and enhances standardization across the 56 regional offices.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-3 Training in FY 2015

(2) Students from geographically dispersed regional offices benefit from direct, face-to-face interaction as they learn; because the students are seeking the same skill sets and enter training at similar skill levels. Practical application with live cases is integrated throughout the curricula. The students' work is reviewed and nationally standardized instructors provide feedback immediately after completion, so students become accustomed to having their work critiqued to assure accuracy.

(3) The personnel selected as instructors are highly experienced, journey-level employees, recommended by their regional office leaders and prepared with standardized training provided by Compensation Service. In the face-to-face Challenge training environment, the instructors gain substantial practice in teaching difficult topics and guiding the work effort of others. Their direct interaction with instructors from other regional offices improves standardization, provides a grass roots opportunity to collaborate on complex issues and to learn techniques they might otherwise never learn. Their face-to-face interaction with other instructors further benefits VBA by improving consistency across regional offices.

(4) Face-to-face Challenge training is required to achieve the interaction described above, and because it is proven to achieve the desired performance results.

5. Business Case Analysis:

a. **Challenge costs are effectively constrained.**

(1) VBA conducted an analysis of the student population, and the availability and suitability of training facilities. VBA has successfully implemented Challenge training at the VBA Training Academy in the past, while assuring standardization of training because we send nationally standardized instructors to the academy, and provide close oversight by Compensation Service course managers. Our analysis revealed:

- The student population for Challenge 2015-3 is spread across several regional offices. The student population requires training in one of two curricula.
- Sending all employees to a VBA facility significantly decreases costs associated with training space as the VBA facility can adequately accommodate the number of trainees and support staff.
- Travel cost estimates are divided into three distinct traveler groups: Admin Support Staff, VRS, and RVSR Travelers for a more accurate overall cost estimate.

(2) Use of existing government facilities, rather than commercial training facilities, leverages sunk costs of existing facilities. The classrooms are outfitted

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-3 Training in FY 2015

with suitable classroom equipment including computers connected to the VBA network and already loaded with relevant computer applications.

(3) The VBA Training Academy is our premier Challenge training location because of the experienced support infrastructure in place. Over 200 Challenge students can be accommodated simultaneously, and instructor standardization oversight can be accomplished across multiple classrooms by a single course manager for each curriculum. Using our VBA Training Academy facilities reduces the overall cost of each Challenge session.

b. Challenge training provides substantial return on the investment.

(1) The productivity of a Challenge graduate in their first six months is 50% higher when compared against graduates of the earlier training programs. Challenge 2015-3 will train 213 students. Conducting Challenge Training presents an excellent cost avoidance opportunity.

(2) Other versions of this training – including shorter, in-person classes and a piloted, web-based class – have not proven to effectively meet the training goals and objectives based on measured production and accuracy results.

(3) Our analysis concludes that the distributed model for face-to-face training in Challenge 2015-3 effectively constrains costs and provides substantial return on the investment.

6. The proposed dates and location for the FY 2015-3 Challenge training session is:

TIME	POTENTIAL LOCATIONS
February 2, 2015 to March 20, 2015	VBA Training Academy, Baltimore, MD.

- Internet based training will be held from January 5, 2015 – January 20, 2015

a. The Challenge 2015-3 training session will occur with:

- 255 participants
 - o 213 students, 6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor, and 35 instructors based in Baltimore
- 220 participants will travel to the VBA Training Academy:
 - o 7 personnel (6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor) support both the VSR and RVSR classes and travel from 02/02/15 to 03/20/15
 - o 113 VSRs – class travel dates – 02/02/15 to 03/13/15
 - o 100 RVSRs – class travel dates – 02/23/15 to 03/20/15

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-3 Training in FY 2015

7. By using the Baltimore VBA Training Academy, VBA will use only government facilities and support staff for this event. Expected costs are for student, instructor, and support staff travel, and for classroom supplies. Hotel costs include only lodging rates, and will be equal to or less than the GSA rate. Estimated airfares, local transportation costs and supplies are included in the estimate. No "logo", SWAG, food, light refreshments, AV equipment or entertainment items or services will be purchased. All attendees will be informed that no per diem can be claimed for any meals provided at government expense.

a. Total Cost Breakdown for Average Cost per Participant (Students/Instructors/Support). A separate VA Form 10008b for VSR, RVSR, Support Staff and combined costs is provided.

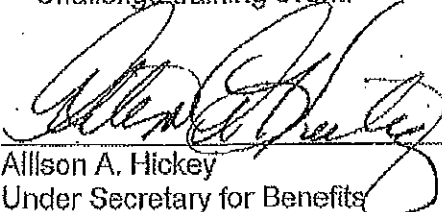
	Number of VA employees	Non-travel Cost (Supplies)	Travel Costs	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
Support Staff	7	\$11,877*	\$75,247	0	\$87,124	
VSR Class	113	*	\$1,130,282	0	\$1,130,282	
RVSR Class	100	*	\$685,250	0	\$685,250	
Total	220	\$11,877*	\$1,890,779	0	\$1,902,656	\$8,748

* Supply costs are listed in the "Support Staff" VA Form 10008b, the cost of supplies by class (pro-rated based on the number of employees attending) is: VSR: \$6,301; RVSR: \$5,576.

8. Both the VA Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Proposed Checklist for Conference Certifying Officials and Department of Veterans Affairs Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Request Guidance were used in the planning of this event. The Administration Conference Certifying Official (CCO) has reviewed and signed off on the attached Conference Certification Form prior to my signature below.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-3 Training in FY 2015

9. I am available at (202) 461-9300 should you wish to further discuss this proposed Challenge training event.


Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits


JAN 7, 2015
Date

Recommend. Approval/Disapproval


Sloan D. Gibson
Deputy Secretary

1/15/15
Date

Approve/Disapprove


Robert A. McDonald
Secretary

1/17/15
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: JAN 20 2015

From: Under Secretary for Benefits

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-4 Training in FY 2015
(VAIQ #7480154)

Thru: Deputy Secretary

To: Secretary

1. In accordance with the existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Veterans Benefits Administration requests your approval of a waiver to implement centralized, face-to-face Challenge training classes in April 2015 through May 2015. The Challenge training session will cost in excess of the maximum allowable expense of \$500,000.
 - a. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
 - 1) The execution of this conference is subject to the availability of FY15 funds. If FY15 funds are not available, this request will be cancelled.
 - 2) VBA uses the VBA Training Academy for this required training
 - 3) Conference participation is limited to required attendees
 - 4) This conference is necessary for the training of 113 VBA Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) and 100 Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs)
2. Purpose: The purpose of this training is to provide technical training to newly hired VSRs and RVSRs of Regional Offices across the country. The training will provide fundamental information vital to the employees' ability to process disability claims with accuracy and precision. RVSRs will be trained to rate at least one (1) case per day with a 90% accuracy rating. VSRs will be trained to develop 1.5 cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating or promulgate three (3.0) cases per day with a 94% accuracy rating. The Challenge program is a national technical training curriculum that provides new Veterans Service Center employees with the skills they need to function effectively in their positions as VSRs or RVSRs. Challenge provides hands-on training with computer applications and advances the new employees through progressively more challenging practice claims. All new employees handle practice claims and actual "live" claims just as they will when they return to their home stations. Challenge training is a critical element of providing employees the skill-sets necessary to achieve the standards of delivering compensation benefits to Veterans. Challenge training is a key initiative in VBA and a critical component in achieving our transformation goals for improved service delivery.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-4 Training in FY 2015

3. Goals and Objectives: Upon the conclusion of the resident portion of Challenge training:

- Newly hired Veterans Service Representatives will develop 1.5 cases per day at 94% accuracy or promulgate 3.0 cases per day at 94% accuracy;
- Newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives will demonstrate mastery by rating at least one simple (one-to-two issue) claim per day at 90% accuracy;
- Employees serving as instructors gain valuable teaching and mentoring experience that improves training within regional offices, and raises the standard of excellence among journey-level employees.

4. Justification:

a. **Challenge training accelerates proficiency in new employees.**

(1) Challenge training is required to teach newly hired employees the basics of their job. Challenge training is a proven program designed to establish in seven weeks employee skill levels that previously took six to eight months to achieve. On completion of Challenge training, employees complete 150 percent more claims per day in their first six months, with a 30 percent increase in accuracy, when compared to early student performance under the previous program.

(2) During first quarter of FY 2013, VBA initiated a new pilot to deliver prerequisite training and knowledge-based, lecture-oriented lessons using technology for virtual delivery for 16 newly hired Rating Veterans Service Representatives. These students attended four weeks of resident training beginning January 2013. The quantity and accuracy of their work during training will be compared to the results of the centralized training model to determine if a partially virtual training solution is feasible in FY 2014-2015.

(3) To maximize efficiency and minimize costs, VBA conducts all required Challenge training at the only VA/VBA Training site designed for this training; the VBA Training Academy in Baltimore Maryland.

b. **Face-to-face Challenge training is required for effective student and instructor interaction.**

(1) Challenge training emphasizes evaluation of student learning through pre- and post-tests; introductory skill practices using mock cases; closely supervised, actual work using live cases; and immediate feedback from experienced instructors. Challenge training has achieved dramatic results due to the adult learning principles built into the training methods. Challenge training builds teamwork among learners and instructors, and enhances standardization across the 56 regional offices.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-4 Training in FY 2015

(2) Students from geographically dispersed regional offices benefit from direct, face-to-face interaction as they learn; because the students are seeking the same skill sets and enter training at similar skill levels. Practical application with live cases is integrated throughout the curricula. The students' work is reviewed and nationally standardized instructors provide feedback immediately after completion, so students become accustomed to having their work critiqued to assure accuracy.

(3) The personnel selected as instructors are highly experienced, journey-level employees, recommended by their regional office leaders and prepared with standardized training provided by Compensation Service. In the face-to-face Challenge training environment, the instructors gain substantial practice in teaching difficult topics and guiding the work effort of others. Their direct interaction with instructors from other regional offices improves standardization, provides a grass roots opportunity to collaborate on complex issues and to learn techniques they might otherwise never learn. Their face-to-face interaction with other instructors further benefits VBA by improving consistency across regional offices.

(4) Face-to-face Challenge training is required to achieve the interaction described above, and because it is proven to achieve the desired performance results.

5. Business Case Analysis:

a. **Challenge costs are effectively constrained.**

(1) VBA conducted an analysis of the student population, and the availability and suitability of training facilities. VBA has successfully implemented Challenge training at the VBA Training Academy in the past, while assuring standardization of training because we send nationally standardized instructors to the academy, and provide close oversight by Compensation Service course managers. Our analysis revealed:

- The student population for Challenge 2015-4 is spread across several regional offices. The student population requires training in one of two curricula.
- Sending all employees to a VBA facility significantly decreases costs associated with training space as the VBA facility can adequately accommodate the number of trainees and support staff.
- Travel cost estimates are divided into three distinct traveler groups: Admin Support Staff, VRS, and RVSR Travelers for a more accurate overall cost estimate.

(2) Use of existing government facilities, rather than commercial training facilities, leverages sunk costs of existing facilities. The classrooms are outfitted

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-4 Training in FY 2015

with suitable classroom equipment including computers connected to the VBA network and already loaded with relevant computer applications.

(3) The VBA Training Academy is our premier Challenge training location because of the experienced support infrastructure in place. Over 200 Challenge students can be accommodated simultaneously, and instructor standardization oversight can be accomplished across multiple classrooms by a single course manager for each curriculum. Using our VBA Training Academy facilities reduces the overall cost of each Challenge session.

b. Challenge training provides substantial return on the investment.

(1) The productivity of a Challenge graduate in their first six months is 50% higher when compared against graduates of the earlier training programs. Challenge 2015-4 will train 213 students. Conducting Challenge Training presents an excellent cost avoidance opportunity.

(2) Other versions of this training – including shorter, in-person classes and a piloted, web-based class – have not proven to effectively meet the training goals and objectives based on measured production and accuracy results.

(3) Our analysis concludes that the distributed model for face-to-face training in Challenge 2015-4 effectively constrains costs and provides substantial return on the investment.

6. The proposed dates and location for the FY 2015-4 Challenge training session is:

TIME	POTENTIAL LOCATIONS
April 6, 2015, to May 22, 2015	VBA Training Academy, Baltimore, MD.

- Internet based training will be held from March 2, 2014 – April 3, 2015.

a. The Challenge 2015-4 training session will occur with:

- 255 participants
 - 213 students, 6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor, and 35 instructors based in Baltimore
- 220 participants will travel to the VBA Training Academy:
 - 7 personnel (6 claims support staff and 1 supervisor) support both the VSR and RVSR classes and travel from 04/06/15 to 05/22/15
 - 113 VSRs – class travel dates – 04/06/15 to 05/15/15
 - 100 RVSRs – class travel dates – 04/27/15 to 05/22/15

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-4 Training in FY 2015

7. By using the Baltimore VBA Training Academy, VBA will use only government facilities and support staff for this event. Expected costs are for student, instructor, and support staff travel, and for classroom supplies. Hotel costs include only lodging rates, and will be equal to or less than the GSA rate. Estimated airfares, local transportation costs and supplies are included in the estimate. No "logo", SWAG, food, light refreshments, AV equipment or entertainment items or services will be purchased. All attendees will be informed that no per diem can be claimed for any meals provided at government expense.

a. Total Cost Breakdown for Average Cost per Participant (Students/Instructors/Support). A separate VA Form 10008b for VSR, RVSR, Support Staff and combined costs is provided.

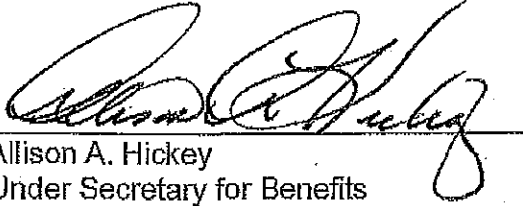
	Number of VA employees	Non-travel Cost (Supplies)	Travel Costs	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
Support Staff	7	\$11,877*	\$87,161	0	\$99,038	
VSR Class	113	*	\$1,214,015	0	\$1,214,015	
RVSR Class	100	*	\$732,750	0	\$732,750	
Total	220	\$11,877*	\$2,033,926	0	\$2,045,803	\$9,299

* Supply costs are listed in the "Support Staff" VA Form 10008b, the cost of supplies by class (pro-rated based on the number of employees attending) is: VSR: \$6,301; RVSR: \$5,576.

8. Both the **VA Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Proposed Checklist for Conference Certifying Officials** and **Department of Veterans Affairs Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Request Guidance** were used in the planning of this event. The Administration Conference Certifying Official (CCO) has reviewed and signed off on the attached Conference Certification Form prior to my signature below.

Subj: Request Waiver for VBA Challenge Session 2015-4 Training in FY 2015

9. I am available at (202) 461-9300 should you wish to further discuss this proposed Challenge training event.



Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits

JAN 20 2015
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: **AUG 13 2014**

From: Assistant Secretary for Operations, Security, and Preparedness (OSP) (007)

Subj: Request Waiver for The VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1509 in-residence
July 27 – September 18, 2015 (VAIQ 7510563)

To: Secretary (00)

Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)

1. In accordance with existing VA policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, OSP requests your approval of a waiver to conduct the VA Basic Police Officer Courses (BPOC) Class Number 1509, in-residence July 27 – September 18, 2015.

2. **Purpose:** The VA BPOC training is critical to preparing newly hired VA Police officers to serve at our medical centers nationwide. VA Police officers are expected to provide professional law enforcement services in a VA healthcare environment. The VA Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) is the only Federal provider for that type of specialized law enforcement training. The VA BPOC includes dynamic, intense, scenario and role play-based training which must be delivered face-to-face. Subjects include small arms training and qualification, defensive tactics, ground defense, expandable straight baton, chemical weapon (Oleo Capsicum Resin) and a myriad of other subjects which rely on physical skills. Of great importance is the 40 hours of behavioral science training VA Police officers receive which teach officers how to use verbal communications skills to de-escalate violent situations. Moreover, the VA LETC is highly regarded as it received Federal Law Enforcement accreditation in November 2011 from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation board (FLETA). LETC was praised by FLETA for an intense behavioral curriculum.

3. **Goals and Objectives:** Upon graduation from the VA BPOC newly assigned VA Police officers will:

- a. Have completed certification requirements to be appointed and serve as a VA Police officer in accordance with Federal law, Title 38, U.S.C., Section 902.
- b. Respond to and control various calls for service such as, active shooter, workplace violence, disturbances, customer service/assistance, etc.
- c. The training includes demonstration/performance training objectives as well as lecture.
 - The event is being conducted on government property which will eliminate the cost of training space and reduce lodging costs.
 - There are no outside presenters; all training is provided by LETC faculty.
 - This is strictly a training event with no entertainments, etc.
 - No food or refreshments are being provided.
 - There no expenses for SWAG of any kind. This is a training event.
 - There are no non-VA employees attending this training.

Request Waiver for The VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1509 in-residence
July 27 – September 18, 2015 (VAIQ 7510563)

- Actual total costs will be reported within 15 days of completion of the training event.
- An After Action Report (AAR) will be provided after the conclusion of the training event.

4. Justification:

a. Face-to-face, performance based skills training is necessary for the complex skills required as a Police officer.

(1) VA Police officers are required by Title 38, U.S.C., Section 902, to receive specialized training with particular emphasis on dealing in situations involving patients and other training as prescribed by VA Secretary. The VA LETC is the authorized provider of this specialized training.

(2) The 320 hour (8 week) BPOC provides VA Police officers with specialized training in Federal law enforcement and prepares them with the ability to deal with Veterans inflicted by traumatic brain injury (TBI), Post-traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal/homicidal ideations, and other critical crisis intervention and verbal de-escalation skills and techniques unique to a healthcare environment.

(3) Weapons and physical skills training and certification cannot be delivered through any other method. Weapon and physical skills training include but are not limited to: firearms, straight baton, OC spray, ground defense and recovery, defensive tactics, and graded practical (scenario-based) exercises.

b. Face-to-face training at the LETC ensures quality training by certified instructors, who deliver material developed by subject matter experts.

(1) The LETC Behavioral Sciences curricula was developed in concert with leading VA experts in TBI, PTSD and dealing with suicidal/homicidal veterans.

(2) VA LETC instructors undergo a formal instructor development course for initial and recurring certification.

(3) VA LETC instructors regularly attend technical and professional enhancement training as part of their annual Individual Development Plan. This training is specific to the skills and advanced knowledge required of our specialties in a healthcare environment.

5. Business Case Analysis:

a. VA BPOC costs are effectively constrained.

(1) The VA LETC is a franchise fund enterprise center which is commissioned to provide services to Federal customers. No other Federal training center has a program tailored to the unique needs of law enforcement in a healthcare environment.

(2) The tuition for the BPOC includes all meals and lodging. The LETC contracts meals with vendors and houses BPOC students on-station, at a 45 percent reduction as compared to local lodging and per-diem rates. Specifically, our lodging and meal cost per-student is \$4,648 for 56 nights. At local GSA rates the per-student cost would be \$8,227. The overall savings is \$214,740.00 per class.

Request Waiver for The VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1509 in-residence
July 27 – September 18, 2015 (VAIQ 7510563)

(3) Our facility is located on the grounds of the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS) and we have an agreement with CAVHS at a cost of \$7.09 per square foot versus the average GSA space lease of \$16.00 to \$30.00 per square foot, annually. This results in an approximate annual savings of \$1 Million to \$2.5 Million annually.

b. VA BPOC provides substantial return on the investment.

(1) All VA Police officers must successfully complete the BPOC before receiving their badge and credentials or being certified/authorized to perform any law enforcement duties. The knowledge, skills and abilities of a VA BPOC graduate are significantly increased when compared against a newly hired VA Police officer who has not attended the course. A newly hired and untrained VA Police officer in the GS-0083 job series costs Veterans Health Administration (VHA) tens of thousands of dollars in overtime, salaries and benefits, as the department cannot use the untrained officer to protect VA persons and properties, or perform any type of law enforcement duties until they successfully complete BPOC. The high quality, specialized training VA BPOC graduates receive, allows them to provide professional law enforcement and security services to protect and support the Veterans, staff, visitors, and infrastructures on VA property.

(2) As indicated in paragraph 4, face-to-face, performance-based skills training is necessary for the complex skills required as a VA Police officer. The VA BPOC training provides a unique, cost effective, and substantial return on the investment.

c. Impact on VHA & LETC if classes are not held.

(1) As a franchise fund enterprise center, the LETC receives no appropriated budget and rely on our training services and administrative product lines to meet expenses.

(2) VHA would not be able to ensure a safe and secure environment for Veterans, employees, contractors, and visitors at VHA healthcare facilities.

(3) If we are unable to continue to provide these services, we face the possibility of having to: (a) Discontinue sending instructors to certification or other professional enhancement training; (b) Cancel efforts to attain/maintain FLETA accreditation for programs or academy (This effort requires travel funds to support required processes); (c) Initiate a reduction in force, if unable to meet salary obligations; and (d) Potential of violating support contracts required to provide services and maintain facilities.

6. The proposed dates and location for the VA BPOC class is:

VA BPOC 1509

No.	Date	Location of Training
1	July 27, 2015 to September 18, 2015	VA Law Enforcement Training Center 2200 Fort Roots Dr. North Little Rock, AR 72114

The VA BPOC Class Number 1509 will have:

- 78 participants
 - 60 students and
 - 14 instructors, 2 OSLE employees = 16

Request Waiver for The VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1509 in-residence July 27 – September 18, 2015 (VAIQ 7510563).

7. All are VA employees and all training is conducted on government property.

Total Cost for BPOC 1509 Class = \$750,000.00

VA BPOC 1509

Total Cost Breakdown for Average Cost per Students / OSLE + (Instructors/Support)

VA BPOC Class # 1509	Participants (60 Students)	Instructors & Support (all costs captured in tuition) + 2 OSLE participants	Estimated Travel Cost (60 Students) plus 2 OSLE participants	Tuition (Includes all meals/lodging/staff salaries/facilities and ground transportation)	TOTAL TRAVEL COST & TUITION COST	Avg. Cost per Students + 2 OSLE Participants
	60	14	\$90,000	\$657,000	\$747,000	\$12,450.00
		2	\$3,000	0	\$3,000	\$1,500.00

8. Both the VA Hosted or Co-Hosted Conference Proposed Checklist for Conference Certifying Officials and Department of Veterans Affairs Hosted or Co-hosted Conference Request Guidance were used in the planning of this training event. The Administration Conference Certifying Official (CCO) has reviewed and signed off on the attached Conference Certification Form prior to my signature below.

9. I am available at (202) 461-4980 if you wish to further discuss this proposed training event.


Kevin T. Hanretta
Assistant Secretary - OSP

8/13/2014
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: January 15, 2015

From: Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

Subj: Request Approval to Implement the 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Dallas, TX
June 21 – 26, 2015

Thru: Deputy Secretary, *[Signature]*

To: Secretary

1. In accordance with existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs requests your waiver to implement the 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) in fiscal year (FY) 2015.

2. Purpose: The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is an annual rehabilitative wheelchair sports program co-presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). The partnership is defined in a Memorandum of Understanding, "MOU between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America – National Veterans Wheelchair Games" with the latest MOU revision occurring in June 2010. Through sports and recreation opportunities, the NVWG improves the independence and quality of life for Veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, multiple sclerosis and other neurological impairments. Veterans are exposed to a variety of wheelchair sports opportunities that reinforce the essential values of accomplishment, community involvement and camaraderie necessary for a fully adjusted, healthy life.

3. Goals and Objectives: The VHA Mission of honoring America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being is a core principle of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Through participation in this event, the values of "what are my possibilities" versus "what are my limitations" are reinforced in each Veteran. The NVWG represents a commitment to improving the health and independence of our Nation's most disabled Veterans that is unmatched by any other health care system.

a. The goals of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games are directly reflective of VHA's Vision of Care that is delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement. As part of the rehabilitative process in VA medical facilities across the country, VA rehabilitative therapists (Recreational Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, etc.) use the NVWG and associated adaptive sports programs to teach essential mobility, functional, and adaptation skills necessary for active and meaningful life activities.

These critical abilities (examples: strength, coordination, flexibility, adaptation, creativity and adjustment) transcend sports and are essential attributes for disabled Veterans to live functional and fulfilling lives.

b. Pre and post-assessments are conducted for all participating Veterans identifying their goals, the impact that participation in the NVWG has in their daily lives, and the opportunities for the NVWG to develop further strategies to reinforce healthy engagement in sports and recreation activities throughout the year. This information is used to expand and partner with rehabilitation programs for Veterans across the country as well as to make refinements in the NVWG to better serve Veterans in the future.

c. Consistent with the VHA strategic plan relating to providing Veterans personalized, proactive and patient driven health care, the NVWG has evolved over the years to include opportunities that further the promotion of wellness, health and disease prevention beyond the NVWG. A health expo and educational seminars for Veterans and VA therapists will be offered throughout the week. Examples include: My HealthVet on-site registration, a coach's forum and an athlete forum led by US Paralympic members. Additionally, members of national governing sports associations such as the United States Paralympic Committee, American Wheelchair Bowling Association, United States Table Tennis Association, Wheelchair and Ambulatory Sports USA, and others will be on-site to provide sport education and directly link Veterans to opportunities in their home communities.

The 2015 NVWG highlights the long-term collaboration between VA and PVA at this event. The principle objectives of the NVWG are:

- (1) Improve the independence and quality of life of disabled Veterans through sports and recreation.
- (2) Assist in the care and treatment of Veterans with physical disabilities by partnering with VA's rehabilitation professionals.
- (3) Provide introductory and competitive wheelchair sports while exposing Veterans to sport organizations and pathways for opportunities available nationwide.
- (4) Increase community awareness of the capabilities and strengths of Veterans with disabilities.
- (5) Conduct outreach to Veterans by demonstrating the outstanding quality of VA rehabilitation programs and VA's commitment to serving our Nation's Veterans.

4. Justification: The goals of the NVWG are reinforced by the direct interaction between the estimated 620 Veterans, VA staff, PVA, sponsors and volunteers participating in the event. The NVWG is unique and serves the broad range of Veteran interests and capabilities.

The rehabilitative experience for each Veteran involved in the NVWG is dynamic, and it begins with the preparation for the event and continues through the execution and transition following the event. The primary focus throughout the process, by both VA and PVA, is to incorporate wheelchair sports into Veterans' lives on a recurring basis throughout the year to improve the health and quality of life for our Veterans.

5. Business Case Analysis: The VA North Texas Health Care System (NVHCS) requested to host the 2015 NVWG and no other VA facilities requested to host the event. Staff from VA and PVA visited the NVHCS to conduct a comprehensive evaluation to determine if the community possessed the necessary elements and resources (venues, hotel space, transportation, fundraising opportunities, volunteers and community support) to host an event of this size and scope. This evaluation found the NVHCS and Dallas community had all necessary elements to successfully host the event. In October 2013, the NVHCS established a Local Organizing Committee (LOC), including the Lone Star Texas Chapter of the PVA to organize the logistics necessary for the Dallas NVWG. As part of the planning process, a team from the Dallas LOC attended the 2014 NVWG in Philadelphia. They worked daily in each of their specialty areas to gain experience and knowledge necessary to host the event. Currently, Dallas has two staff members working full time on planning efforts for the NVWG. Additionally, more than 100 VA staff members are working, in addition to their regular duties, on numerous planning committees in preparation for the event.

We are also pursuing multiple strategies to reduce event appropriations such as community partnerships, sponsor recruitment and other cost-saving initiatives. We have applied for a Dallas Convention Center Bureau (DCCB) grant, which if approved, could decrease the Convention Center cost by an estimated 34% resulting in savings of approximately \$65,000. Confirmation of the DCCB Grant is expected in mid-FY2015. We are also partnering with VA centralized contracting officials in St. Louis on our major contracts, and are working with local officials to provide venues and Veteran transportation at or below market rates. The response from the Dallas local government and business community has been positive.

6. The proposed dates and location is:

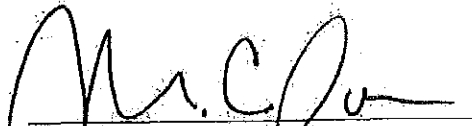
DATE	POTENTIAL LOCATION
June 21 – 26, 2015	Dallas, Texas

7. The overall proposed per event cost estimate is provided below:

	Number of employees	Support Staff	Non-Travel Cost	Travel Cost	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
2015 NVWG	120	0	\$613,260	\$256,740	*(Estimates) Veteran Transportation \$267,150 Venues \$212,022	\$870,000	Cost per Veteran: \$1,403 Cost per VA Employee: \$2,140

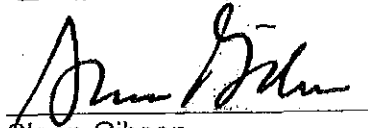
* Contractor Support Funds reflect costs for buses to transport Veterans to venues and convention center space. Costs are captured in Non-Travel Cost amount.

8. I am available at (202) 461-7500 should you wish to further discuss this proposed 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games.


 Maura C. Sullivan
 Assistant Secretary
 Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

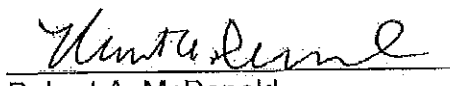
08 Jan 20/15
 Date

Recommend Approve/Disapprove


 Sloan Gibson

11/14/15
 Date

Approve/Disapprove


 Robert A. McDonald

1/15/16
 Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: **NOV 10 2014**

From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)

Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1504 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 006-7510269)

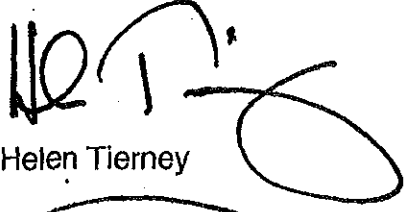
Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)

To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR on February 9 – April 3, 2015.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement (OSLE) employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package November 5, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on October 21, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.

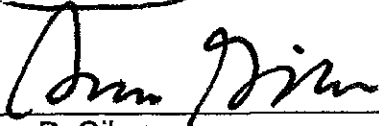
Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1504 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 006-7510269)

4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.



Helen Tierney

Recommend Approval/Disapproval



Sloan D. Gibson

11/12/14

Date

Approve/Disapprove



Robert A. McDonald

11/18/14

Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**


Memorandum

Date: September 24, 2014

From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)

Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1501
(VAIQ 7510412)

Thru: Deputy Secretary (001) 

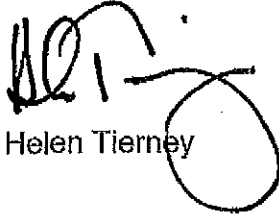
To: Secretary (00) 

1. The Office of Security and Preparedness (OSP) requests approval to conduct subject training in Little Rock AR from October 6 thru November 28, 2014.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants.
 - b. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - c. OGC concurred on the conference package on September 19, 2014.
 - d. CTRO received the request on August 19, 2014, which does not meet the 60-day timeframe requirement.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval of this conference.

Page 2


Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1501
(VAIQ 7510412)

4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.



Helen Tierney

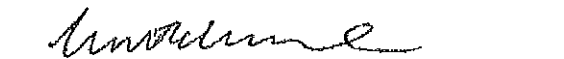
Recommend Approval/Disapproval



Sloan D. Gibson

9/24/14
Date

Approve/Disapprove



Robert A. McDonald

9/29/14
Date

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: **NOV 13 2014**

From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)

Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1506 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 007-7506748)

Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)

To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR on April 20 – June 12, 2015.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package November 10, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on October 21, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.
4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.



Helen Tierney

Recommend Approval/Disapproval


Sloan D. Gibson

11/14/14
Date

Approve/Disapprove


Robert A. McDonald

11/14/14
Date

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: **NOV 13 2014**

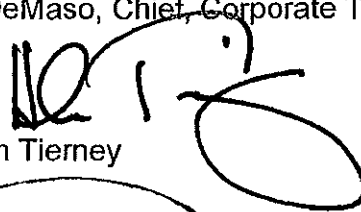
From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)

Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1508 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 010-7510524)

Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)

To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR on June 29 – August 21, 2015.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package November 10, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on October 21, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.
4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.


Helen Tierney

Recommend Approval/Disapproval


Sloan D. Gibson

11/14/14
Date

Approve/Disapprove


Robert A. McDonald

11/17/14
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

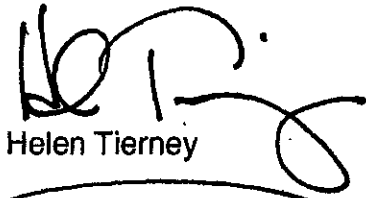
Memorandum

Date: NOV 10 2014
From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)
Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1503 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 005-7510234)
Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)
To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR on January 5 – February 27, 2015.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement (OSLE) employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package November 5, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on October 21, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.

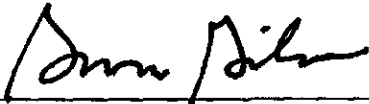
Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1503 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 005-7510234)

4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.



Helen Tierney

Recommend Approval/Disapproval



Sloan D. Gibson

01/12/14
Date

Approve/Disapprove



Robert A. McDonald

4/03/14
Date

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: JAN 20 2015

From: Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

Subj: Request Approval to Implement the 29th National Veterans Golden Age Games in Omaha, Nebraska, August 8-12, 2015

Thru: Deputy Secretary *Jim*

To: Secretary

1. In accordance with existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs requests your approval to implement 29th National Veterans Golden Age Games (NVGAG) in fiscal year (FY) 2015.

2. Purpose: The National Veterans Golden Age Games is an annual rehabilitative event that offers competitive sports and recreation for Veterans 55 years and older. The demographics of Veterans 55 and older are the largest (72%) served population of Veterans. The Games continue to serve as a showcase for the therapeutic value that wellness and fitness provide in the lives of older Veterans. The World Health Organization suggests physical inactivity accounts for 3.2 million deaths per year. Physical inactivity is a preventable risk factor for cardiovascular disease, hypertension and obesity.

3. Goals and Objectives: The NVGAG encourages VA patients over the age of 55 to make physical activity a central part of their lives, and supports VA's comprehensive recreation and rehabilitation therapy programs. VA research and clinical experience show that movement and exercise are particularly important to the health, recovery and overall quality of life for older people. As such, the Games fill a special need in the lives of older Veterans at VA health care facilities across the country.

Objectives:

- a. To provide a competitive sports experience for Veterans 55 years and older, thereby contributing to their physical, mental and emotional well-being.
- b. To improve all aspects of positive health for older Veterans in all VA facilities.
- c. Actively promote the importance of regular exercise on quality of life, health and wellness.
- d. Provide opportunities for older Veterans with physical and visual disabilities to compete in adaptive sports.
- e. To maintain public awareness of VA programs which promote health and wellness for older Veterans.
- f. Provide Veteran participants with information, strategies and coaching to improve their health and wellness year-round through partnering initiatives with VA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and VA's Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation.

4. Justification: The NVGAG provides opportunities for Veterans to compete in sports and recreational events. An active lifestyle is critical to promoting health and independence while preventing or delaying illness or disability. Each Veteran will participate based on rehabilitative and/or healthy living goals established at their VA Medical Center. The event involves hands-on coaching of skills and techniques, which is not possible in other than a face-to-face setting. Veterans surveyed at last year's NVGAG indicated that participation in the event resulted in:

- Increased Physical Strength
- Improved Outlook on Life
- Improved Self Esteem
- Increased Energy Level

A majority of respondents report that participation in the NVGAG motivates them to stay active through out the year, with more than half of respondents indicating they train and prepare for the NVGAG on a weekly basis. Veterans report the most important reasons for participating in the NVGAG include:

- Fitness
- Camaraderie
- Competition
- Keeping Active
- Improving Health

5. Business Case Analysis: VA launched the National Veterans Golden Age Games in 1985 and has held the event annually at different locations. Each year, a different VA Medical Center requests to host the event. In 2013, the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System submitted a proposal to host the Games in 2015. Following receipt of the proposal, in 2014, a NVGAG site selection committee met with officials from the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System and the Omaha Convention & Visitors Bureau to review the necessary infrastructure and resources (venues, hotels, transportation, fundraising potential, volunteers, and community support) to conduct an event of this magnitude. After a thorough review, the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System was determined to meet the host requirements and staff at the medical center began planning to host the event. As part of these plans, members of the 2015 NVGAG steering committee traveled to the 2014 NVGAG in Fayetteville, Ark., to work key assignments so they understand the scope and complexity of the event. These staffers have worked together with the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System senior leadership, community stakeholders, and others during the past year to prepare the 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games.

Back in 2005, the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System successfully hosted the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, another large-scale VA adaptive sport program for disabled Veterans. That year, the Omaha community rallied together and donated more than \$350,000 toward the Games and countless volunteer hours.

We expect to receive similar contributions and support of the 2015 NVGAG, which will reduce the projected amount of appropriated funds needed for this year's event.

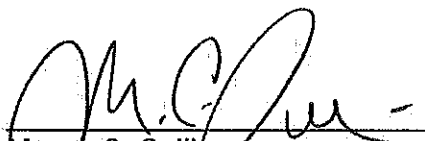
6. The proposed dates and location are:

DATES	LOCATION
August 8 – 12, 2015	Omaha, Nebraska

7. The overall proposed per event cost estimate is provided below:

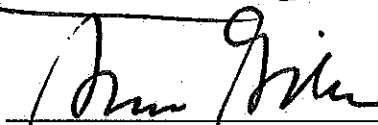
	VA employees	Support Staff	Non-Travel Cost	Travel Cost	Contractor Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
2015 NVGAG	130	N/A	\$515,662	\$234,338	N/A	\$750,000	Cost per Staff \$1803 Cost per Veteran \$938

8. I am available at (202) 461-7500 should you wish to further discuss this proposed 29th National Veterans Golden Age Games.


 Maura C. Sullivan
 Assistant Secretary
 Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs


20 Jan 2015
 Date

Recommend Approve/Disapprove


 Sloan Gibson

2/5/15
 Date

Approve/Disapprove


 Robert A. McDonald

2/5/15
 Date

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: NOV 13 2014
From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)
Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1507 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 009-7510497)
Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)
To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR on May 25 – July 17, 2015.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package November 10, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on October 21, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.
4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.


Helen Tierney

Recommend Approval Disapproval


Sean D. Gibson


Date

Approve Disapprove


Robert A. McDonald


Date

Memorandum

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Date: **NOV 13 2014**

From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)

Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1505 in-residence (CORK-VAIQ 007-7510462)

Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)

To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR on March 16 – May 8, 2015.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package November 10, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on October 21, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.
4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.


Helen Tierney

Recommend Approve Disapproval


Sloan D. Gibson

11/14/14
Date

Approve Disapprove


Robert A. McDonald

11/17/14
Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: **SEP 25 2014**

From: **Interim Under Secretary for Health**

Subj: **Request Waiver for Health Services Research Scientific Conference (#5373)**

Thru: **Deputy Secretary**

To: **Secretary**

1. In accordance with existing Department of Veterans Affairs Conference policies and guidelines, and all applicable statutes and regulations, the Office of Research and Development (ORD), Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D) requests your waiver to implement the Health Services Research Scientific conference in fiscal year (FY) 2015.

2. Purpose: The purpose of this Conference is for participants to learn about important research findings, as well as ongoing and planned research, in order to ensure continuous improvement and optimal delivery of healthcare for Veterans via the work conducted within the HSR&D research program. This will be accomplished through peer-reviewed, competitively-selected scientific presentations, interactive workshops, posters, and plenary sessions. In addition, participants will debate scientific methods for more effectively conducting VHA system-focused health services research and implementation projects to accelerate uptake of findings into clinical practice to improve healthcare delivery and to positively impact VA's transformational initiatives.

In order to take full advantage of having research, operations, and policy personnel together, the Conference will include research conducted under both the HSR&D and Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) programs. HSR&D researchers will learn from the experience of partner-oriented programs such as QUERI, while QUERI researchers will learn about new HSR&D research and new research partnerships, which may identify new programs/initiatives that are ready for spread across the VA healthcare system.

3. Goals and Objectives: "Performing research and development to enhance the long-term health and well-being of Veterans" is a major initiative in the VA Strategic Plan. Research is a designated VA high-priority performance goal and is embedded within VHA's vision statement. This Conference will serve VA's strategic goal of "providing optimal and accessible healthcare to our nation's Veterans" by presenting findings from rigorous HSR&D and QUERI studies on how to improve access, quality, and safety of VA healthcare – and how to spread innovation in a complex health system. The Conference will afford a mission-critical link between VHA leaders/policymakers and researchers so that management informs research, and research, in turn, develops

Subj: Request Waiver for Health Services Research Scientific Conference (#5373)

innovations and interventions that address important system needs that will improve the delivery and quality of care to Veterans. In keeping with VHA strategies that emphasize the education of future healthcare professionals, this Conference also will include a component that promotes unique training and collaborative opportunities for exceptionally talented young and advanced-level investigators and research scientists.

Through topic-focused symposia and practical, hands-on workshops, the Conference will educate researchers about cutting-edge research methods, implementation strategies, new data systems, and new health system initiatives. It also will bring together research collaborators and health system partners who will debate the latest research findings and implications for future research and practice on critical issues such as: access, performance measurement, mental health, Patient-Aligned Care Teams (PACT), post-deployment health, women's health, homelessness, and rural health. The Conference sessions will enhance research and management collaborations. Moreover, the conference will provide education and training to meet the significant need to increase the number of VA researchers who have experience with evaluating the implementation of new VA programs and testing new implementation strategies. An important Conference goal will be an increase in high-quality, high-priority, partner-aligned research that best meets the needs of Veterans and the VA healthcare system.

4. Justification: As a national VA research program, HSR&D is fully engaged with virtual strategies for learning and collaboration. For example, HSR&D facilitates more than 100 cyberseminars per year and countless teleconferences; we also have established several listservs, and connect with various stakeholders via the web and social media. Virtual options have been carefully considered, however, partnered research requires face-to-face interaction to inspire innovation, to build expertise and trust, and to conduct detailed discussions and other activities to enhance partner/researcher engagement.

A virtual component will be integrated into the conference format to expand participation in critical workshops and presentations. A Conference website will be developed to further enhance post-Conference reach.

Health services research is a dynamic science that requires multi-disciplinary interaction and collaboration to create new knowledge and evidence-based interventions aimed at improving Veterans' healthcare. This Conference provides the only face-to-face opportunity for VHA program leadership and researchers to come together and insure that policy is informed by evidence-based research – and research efforts are focused, productive, and responsive to the needs of the VA healthcare system. Effective attainment of mission-critical strategies will be significantly diminished without face-to-face interaction and engagement across disciplines that will be facilitated by this Conference. Moreover, new research would suffer without the natural brainstorming, debate, and collaboration that occur when researchers have in-person, cross-discipline, and cross-Center engagement. The essential collaboration and interaction that drive and strengthen scientific research programs and spawn new ideas cannot be accomplished without an opportunity for direct contact.

Subj: Request Waiver for Health Services Research Scientific Conference (#5373)

This scientific research Conference will consist of approximately 300 peer-reviewed, competitively selected, interactive presentations, workshops, and posters, the totality of which cannot be cohesively delivered solely via non face-to-face methods. Plenary sessions will present selected outstanding, high-impact research. Concurrent workshops will emphasize interactive group sessions featuring new research methods, debate on controversial research topics/methods, and discussion of future research priorities with health system partners. Poster sessions will allow researchers to discuss early findings with a large audience of fellow researchers and partners to strengthen research quality, value, and impact.

Attendance at the conference is estimated at approximately 505 people, including approximately five support staff. Travel dates are July 14 and July 17, 2015. All travelers will have completed mandatory travel card and ethics training as required by VA. Lodging taxes are included in estimated costs even if the Federal Government is tax-exempt in the host city because all travelers attending the conference may not hold a government-issued travel card.

5. Business Case Analysis: HSR&D invested over \$80 million in its research initiatives for FY15 to improve the health and care of Veterans. Relative to that commitment, this Conference represents a reasonable investment to ensure the success of these initiatives and to increase the impact of our other ongoing research. HSR&D strongly believes the expense is justified to obtain the huge return on investment of an educated and engaged community of researchers and program partners working together to improve access, quality, performance measurement, value, and efficiency. This Conference is an important opportunity for cross-center planning and problem solving, which will increase the efficiency and strategic value of the research funded by HSR&D and QUERI.

Because health services research is a dynamic science that requires multi-disciplinary interaction and collaboration to create new knowledge and evidence-based interventions, it is important to have appropriate representation from across the organization, programs, and disciplines. The estimate of 505 participants is based, in part, on the anticipated scientific abstracts being accepted for presentation at the conference following a competitive peer review. Approximately 150 researchers will serve as faculty to provide scientific presentations at the conference. These same presenters will also be fully engaged in all aspects of the conference as participants at other presentations and conference sessions. Approximately 350 additional participants from HSR&D and QUERI research centers, VHA leadership, other ORD services, and VHA Central Office Operational Program Offices, networks, and facilities will participate in conference sessions. Approximately 5 support staff will also be included.

To further maximize value, special interest groups, executive committees, a research center Directors' meeting, and numerous other programmatic meetings involving Conference participants will be held in conjunction with the Conference and scheduled around session times. Many of these meetings would otherwise be submitted as separate requests, requiring additional travel and contracting costs if approved.

Subj: Request Waiver for Health Services Research Scientific Conference (#5373)

Partnered research between HSR&D and VHA operational and policy leaders is a major focus of the Conference. Conducting the Conference in our recommended location of Washington, DC will better enable the essential attendance of VHA Central Office program partners, without the need to incur travel expenses for them to attend, recognizing that many of them would not be able to devote 3 days of travel in order to participate, due to their already full schedules. Alternate locations of Baltimore or Philadelphia will allow potential participation of VHA Central Office program partners, due to the proximity to Washington, DC, and opportunity to travel to the conference and back in one day. However, this will result in additional travel expenses that would not be incurred if the meeting were held in Washington, DC. Additional meeting costs of \$137,300 for meeting space and audiovisual equipment, as well as \$5,251 for printed materials have been included in the cost estimate. A search for government space was conducted, however, no facilities with the required general session and breakout space, and AV services necessary for this conference were available.

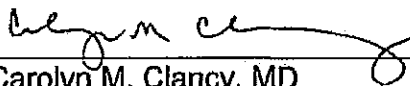
6. The proposed dates and location are:

DATE	POTENTIAL LOCATION
July 15 – 17, 2015	Washington, DC

7. The overall proposed per event cost estimate is provided below:

	Number of VA employees	Number of Support Staff	Non-Travel Cost	Travel Cost	Contract or Support	Total Cost	Cost per Participant
Health Services Research Scientific Conf	505	5 of 505 support staff 150 of 505 VA faculty	\$142,551	\$847,651.35	\$0	\$990,202.35	\$1,960.80

8. The Conference Certifying Official, Timothy J. O'Leary, MD, PhD, is available at (202) 443-5602 should you wish to further discuss this proposed Health Services Research Scientific Conference training event.


 Carolyn M. Clancy, MD
 Interim Under Secretary for Health

9/25/14
 Date

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date:

From: Assistant Secretary for Management (004)

Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1502 in-residence (VAIQ 7510191)

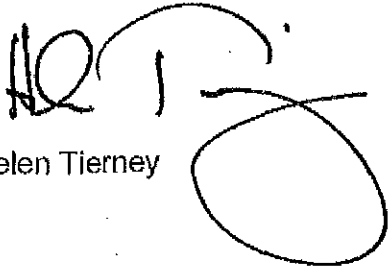
Thru: Deputy Secretary (001)

To: Secretary (00)

1. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness requests approval to conduct the subject conference at North Little Rock, AR, on October 20 – December 12, 2014.
2. The following details are for your review:
 - a. The estimated total cost of the conference is \$750,000.00 for 62 participants. There are 60 students and 2 Office of Security and Law Enforcement (OSLE) employees that are traveling and 14 Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) instructors that are not traveling.
 - b. Training is provided at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center.
 - c. There are no VA-funded gifts, memorabilia or commemorative items.
 - d. OGC concurred on the conference package October 8, 2014.
 - e. CTRO received the request on August 14, 2014.
3. I have reviewed this package thoroughly and recommend approval.


Subj: Conference Waiver – VA Basic Police Officer Course, Class Number 1502 in-residence (VAIQ 7510191)

4. If you have any questions, please call me or have a member of your staff contact Bill DeMaso, Chief, Corporate Travel and Reporting Office at (202) 461-5085.



Helen Tierney

Recommend Approval/Disapproval

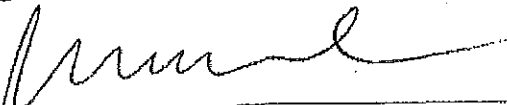


Sloan D. Gibson

10/14/14

Date

Approve/Disapprove



Robert A. McDonald

10/15/14

Date