

HUMAN RESOURCES QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Leveraging Hiring Flexibilities To Recruit & Appoint VA Health Professions Trainee Program Graduates To Hybrid & Title 38 Occupations

(Prepared by VHA Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC), HR Policy & Programs 5/5/16)

1. Question: We have posted a USAJOBS vacancy position open to VA internal candidates for a Social Worker position and have satisfied our internal bargaining unit requirements. The selecting official now wants to hire an upcoming graduate from a VA training program. Do we have to post an external vacancy announcement on USAJOBS since the trainees are not regular VA employees and are considered external candidates?

Answer: No. External vacancy announcements are not a requirement for Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 vacancies, and there is no requirement to post these announcements on USAJOBS. The HR Specialist can easily work with the selecting official to identify the upcoming VA training program graduates or former graduate candidates either from your station or from other VHA facilities and select from that applicant pool, as appropriate.

2. Question: Are USAJOBS vacancy announcements required in order to insure all Veterans get a chance to apply for openings before we consider a VA trainee for a Social Worker position? Don't we have to do this before we hire one of our upcoming graduates for a Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 vacancy?

Answer: No. USAJOBS vacancy announcements are not a requirement for Hybrid Title 38 or Title 38 vacancies. The flexibilities to noncompetitively appoint VA trainees into VHA positions has not diminished, even with recent Veterans' preference changes to Hybrid Title 38. Once local bargaining unit agreements related to internal VHA employees are met, there is no requirement to post a "general public" type announcement of any kind to hire into Hybrid and Title 38 occupations. See attached HRML 05-14-05 which describes specific flexibilities for the Hybrid occupations when hiring trainees.

3. Should we or do we need to have an RN vacancy identified before we convert an SNT to a GNT? It is not always possible to give the vice up front when we convert an SNT to a GNT for a particular unit. We are concerned we may lose great new grads because there are not technically vacancies, although Nursing is always under the budgeted FTEE.

Answer: A GNT will typically count towards FTEE/authorized position on a unit. If FTEE/a vacant position is not available for placement, it is recommended that HR and the Selecting Official collaboratively work with the Nurse Executive, Director, Fiscal Officer, local Resources Committee, etc., to see if overceiling options exist, if a particular unit doesn't have the vacant FTEE, or if there are other options for placement on other units before the SNT loses interest in VHA. The goal is always to try and fully utilize flexibilities in hiring trainees into positions for which they were trained.

4. Just to be clear, the AFGE Master Agreement indicates all Title 38 bargaining unit positions will be announced facility wide. There are no exceptions listed. Should GNTs be selected from an announcement? We have a process of identifying our best qualified candidates and this would, in most cases, not be a new grad, so without the flexibility we will not be able to reach the GNTs. Any suggestions or other interpretations?

Answer: Once internal bargaining unit processes/requirements are met, any external hiring may occur with or without any type of external vacancy announcement, as appropriate. If the selecting official determines he/she is not going to select an internal candidate and local bargaining unit processes are met, the selecting official can choose to select a GNT or any other candidate, as appropriate, with or without an announcement. In some cases, the selecting official may have a particular unit/assignment/tour that may not be a good fit for a GNT....but in many cases, there are numerous opportunities at any VA for GNT appointments. If the GNT was trained at the VA, the ultimate goal is to try to retain these potential applicants.

5. Question: Can we announce an external vacancy announcement on USAJOBS that limits the area of consideration to current VA trainees or past graduates of VA trainee programs? This is for Hybrid Title 38 positions. What happens if one of the trainees is a preference eligible Veteran.

Answer: Yes, Hybrid Title 38 provides great flexibility to post external vacancy announcements to target this pool of candidates as an area of consideration. A vacancy announcement may limit the area of consideration to individuals who have completed or will soon complete the appropriate VA trainee program. If in the pool of trainee candidates, one of the trainees is a preference eligible Veteran, then appropriate Veterans' preference rules apply. If an upcoming graduate is selected, he/she may be tentatively committed to employment contingent upon successfully completing the program and requirements for

appointment to the permanent position. Note that most occupations will allow temporary appointment as a graduate technician pending appropriate licensure, registration or certification if upon graduation this requirement has not been achieved. See VA Handbook 5005 for specific guidelines on graduate technician appointments.

6. Question: Where and how do VHA Nursing SNT and Valor's fit in this "VHA Trainee Program"? Are they viewed in the same category as OAA funded trainees that are actually on our roles?

Answer: VA SNTs and Valor students are VHA trainees. All VHA trainees whether in funded or non-funded roles are an excellent source of candidates.

7. Question: Would the Area of Consideration be to all US Citizens with an additional clarification in the WHO MAY Apply Section of also being a VHA MSW Trainee (or Psychology Trainee/Post Doc Fellow) i.e. US Citizens & Current VHA MSW Trainee?

Answer: Assuming this question is related to an external USAJOBS vacancy announcement, the vacancy announcement can include specifics about trainee candidates; however, vacancy announcements for external candidates are not a requirement and if the selecting official desires to select a current or upcoming VA training program graduate, there does not have to be a posted vacancy announcement on USAJOBS. If the selecting official chooses to post a USAJOBS vacancy announcement to all US citizens and wishes to include upcoming graduates in the candidate pool, HR may need to tailor the job announcement so the upcoming graduate criteria is included and trainees are not automatically excluded because they have not satisfied their program and/or the qualification standard requirements.

8. Question: Since most current VHA trainees are only going to qualify at the entry level grade (GS 9 for Social Workers & GS 11 or GS 12 for Psychologists), is the facility able to do a posting that focuses on the trainee applicant pool at the entry level grade of the occupational series versus having to do a multi graded posting? Can the posting be done with the grade of "00" similar to how we have to do the internal hybrid postings for VHA employees?

Answer: There are several recruitment/hiring options when the selecting official is interested in trainees. These include, but are not limited to (assuming any internal bargaining unit posting requirement has been met): Not posting an external/outside vacancy announcement and the selecting official selecting an upcoming or past graduate of a VA training program, posting a vacancy announcement targeting just VA trainees (upcoming graduates and current graduates), posting a vacancy announcement targeting everyone (all US citizens), which will include all qualified trainee program graduates, and include eligibility for those upcoming VA trainee program graduates who don't currently meet the full intent of the VA qualification

standard for the occupation but will upon graduation, etc. All grades should be reflected on any external vacancy announcement for positions up to the full performance level (or at just at the full performance level if the selecting official wishes to consider external candidates at that grade level) and a professional standards board will board the selectee, as appropriate, and recommend the appropriate grade/step.

9. Question: Do facilities issue the MSW trainees some type of Certificate of Completion? I'm asking because some of the trainees will have a SF 50 (to use as documentation of being a VA trainee) because some get a VA paid stipend but others do not (as they are without compensation). I'm wondering about the types of documentation that would be acceptable as proof of completing the MSW training at the VA and the types of documentation facilities are giving to the trainees.

Answer: Completion of a training program may be verified with the appropriate VHA training director/program. SF-50s may also be used as verification.

10. Question: Is there a program office in CO that keeps a listing of the current MSW trainees, Psychology Trainees, Post Doc Fellows that are in the medical centers nationwide? Perhaps that office can issue a list of eligible trainees (to include the trainees' resume, completed 102850 C application, etc). Is there an office in CO that could do recruitments that target the trainees during certain periods of the year (right before they graduate) and then issue a referral thru USA Staffing/Selection Manager to those facilities that express interest? What role (if any) does the Office of Academic Affiliations have in this process? Do they keep a list of trainees who are completing or have previously completed the training at the VA?

Answer: The VHA Healthcare Recruitment & Marketing Office (HRMO), in collaboration with the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), pioneered the agency's first standardized internal outreach initiative, Take A Closer Look at VA (TACLVA), to recruit Health Professions Trainees (HPT) following clinical training through VHA academic affiliates. Using attractive marketing emails, the initiative reaches HPTs while receiving their training at VHA facilities, providing them with information on the benefits of a long-term career serving Veterans. Candidates are connected directly with a VHA National Recruiter that can assist with the application process and address questions about career opportunities. There are currently over 221,000 current or former VA health professions trainees (HPTs) receiving quarterly e-mails with calls to action. Since its implementation, TACLVA has generated 603 employment leads (includes 159 Doctors of Medicine (MDs) and 360 other healthcare providers).

While the TACLVA program has a list of all trainees, this list does not include specific occupations. There are ongoing discussions regarding adding "occupational identifiers" to

these lists and providing lists to specific facilities. However, at this point, no final decision has been reached.

In the meantime, facilities are encouraged to work closely with their Designated Education Officers (DEO), clinical service line managers, and program directors to help identify trainees for recruitment. For more information about the TACLVA program, please contact James Marfield at james.marfield@va.gov.

11. Question: What about doing recruitment that is targeted to former VA trainees as well? For example – those who completed their VA training within the last 2 years. Is there guidance on that?

Answer: Once internal bargaining unit requirements are met in relation to internal VHA employee candidates, there are many options for hiring under Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38. In working in collaboration with the local HR, the vacancy may be filled with an external candidate using any method desired. The guidance for hiring external candidates to Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 positions is very generic and the processes and how and if vacancy announcements are posted are left to the discretion of the local appointing official, the HR Officer. This includes how to attract and consider upcoming or former graduates from VA trainee programs. If a selecting official wishes to focus on upcoming graduates or former graduates of VA trainee programs within the past two years, then he/she may focus their application pool on that area of consideration. Again, there is great flexibility under the authorities.

12. Question: Can you comment on challenges to non-competitive hiring (not posting announcements) of VA trainees to Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 positions? How do we defend these hires if challenged? Current employees as well as members of the general public may feel as if they didn't get an opportunity to be considered (because there was no posting done).

Answer: The flexibilities and ability to non-competitively hire a trainee into a Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 position are not new. These flexibilities do not negate the requirement for a selecting official and appointing official to follow fair hiring practices, to be ethical in these practices and to have nondiscriminatory employment outcomes.

Here is just one scenario of what might occur as an appropriate hiring practice. A particular station has 5 trainees graduating from a Pharmacy Residency program and all 5 are equal in training/specialty. One of the 5 upcoming graduates is a preference eligible Veteran. The 2 vacancies have already been posted internally to current employees in accordance with the local bargaining unit agreement and the selecting official has reviewed and fairly considered any internal qualified candidates and did not select an internal candidate. The selecting official now wishes to also consider local upcoming graduates who will finish their VA training program in the next couple months in the applicant pool. A fair approach at the local level

may be to advise the 5 graduates of the 2 job opportunities and ask those interested to apply by a certain deadline. All 5 apply for consideration and are found that they will be qualified upon graduation. The selecting official interviews all 5. The preference eligible Veteran is the first selected; the selecting official then selects what he/she considers the best qualified for the second position based on the interview and/or application package of the remaining candidates and selects a second trainee for the other vacancy. All candidates were treated equally and fairly. Veteran's preference was appropriately applied. This is just an example. It is important that the selecting official works collaboratively with the local HR experts.

13. Question: Why do we have to post jobs internally? Why do we make this so difficult? Why can't we just direct hire anyone we want since Title 38 allows this?

Answer: Part of being an employer of choice and retaining valuable staff, is to have opportunities for advancement and various assignments available to our own permanent employees – to grow from within. Many of our great successes come from our own employees advancing their career within VA. We also have to abide by local bargaining unit agreements.

14. Question: We have no internal candidates interested in a position, but we have a supply of external candidates – 50 qualified external candidates – that applied for previous announcements that we retained for future vacancies. Do all of those applicants who qualify at the entry grade level (as that is what the upcoming VA trainee program graduates will qualify for) have to be considered and thus Veteran preference applied to them (other than Psychologists and PTs in FY 2015) along with the upcoming VA trainee program graduates which would have the upcoming graduates most likely blocked from consideration?

Answer: The upcoming VA trainee program graduates may be considered prior to going to this separate source of candidates that have gathered at the local level as you have described in your question. If an upcoming graduate is selected, then he/she may be noncompetitively appointed under Hybrid or Title 38 procedures. If one of the upcoming graduates is a preference eligible Veteran, he/she would have priority over the other upcoming graduates being considered.

Don't make hiring VA trainees into Title 38 and/or Hybrid Title 38 occupations even more complex than how we hire trainees under Title 5. Although we have to adhere to the Graves verses VA/MSPB decision and apply Veterans preference to Hybrid occupations, as appropriate, VHA hasn't lost any flexibility when it comes to hiring trainees into Hybrid and Title 38 occupations.

15. Question: VA Handbook 5005 doesn't go into detail about how we should noncompetitively hire Title 38 or Hybrid Title trainees once they have finished their program. Can you provide some examples of how best to take advantage of this applicant pool once the internal processes have been satisfied? Some examples that show the actual process to follow, when we should announce and when we shouldn't, when to just let a selecting official consider one trainee verses the entire pool, etc.

Answer: The advantage of Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38 is the tremendous flexibility the local selecting official and HR have when it comes to hiring VA trainee program candidates into these occupations. Because of that flexibility, policy doesn't dictate a specific process for a local facility to use in the recruitment and hiring process. It really is a local decision and a collaborative effort to determine what should and should not happen to meet the end goal of filling the position and a selecting official's needs – even if the goal is to hire an upcoming graduate. As described in the previous answer to Question 12 in this Q&A document, there are various avenues to be considered depending upon the specific situation at the facility and the selecting official's needs. It may be that there is only one trainee at the facility in question that is graduating in June and that trainee can definitely be selected and tentatively committed to VHA employment contingent upon completion of the program and satisfying the requirements for appointment. There may be numerous trainees in a particular specialty that could be considered, and the selecting official wishes to interview and decide on the best fit for his/her organization. There may also be no local trainees and a desire by the selecting official to find out who is interested in his/her location from upcoming graduates nationwide. Also, some selecting officials desire to consider upcoming graduates as well as more qualified external candidates and will ask for an outside vacancy posting on USAJOBS to consider everyone.

Encourage the HR Specialists to meet and collaborate with selecting officials as soon as a vacancy is identified to assist with determining which course of recruitment and/or noncompetitive hiring initiative best suits the needs of the hiring manager.

16. Question: Since Pharmacists are not listed in the top five critical positions identified by VAOIG, are the Pharmacy trainees not included in the ability to hire directly into a permanent Pharmacist position? Don't we have to announce the position externally for the trainee to compete with everyone else and Veterans?

Answer: The VAOIG list identifies the top critical shortage occupations and does impact hiring practices when it comes to Veterans Preference (see HRML 05-15-01); however, this list does not change the hiring flexibilities that already exist in policy for all Hybrid Title 38 and Title 38 occupations. External announcements are not required. Pharmacist trainees can be hired into permanent Pharmacist positions without posting an external vacancy announcement. Selecting officials should work closely with their servicing HR Offices to take

the necessary steps when they wish to hire a trainee for any Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 occupation. It is a fairly easy process.