

Training Managers/Training Coordinator

National Conference Call Minutes

July 28, 2015

2 – 3:30 PM Eastern Time

Agenda items:

- Ariadna Crawford: Network Card Activity Discussion
- Gina Laudato: Fiduciary NTC Progress Report information, PMDB training, and VALU course offerings
- Carrie Johnson: Skills Certification discussion and Q&A
- J.D. Dominick: LEAD 2016 Announcement

Christy Chesnut (Camber Corp., in support of TT&E)

Christy welcomed everyone and briefly went over the agenda for the call.

Ariadna Crawford

Network Card Activity Discussion

Data collected from the network card activity, conducted during the TM symposium in May, will be shared during the coming months showing what EDT is doing with the information to help TMs enhance their community of practice.

Ariadna presented slides to recap the intent of the exercise and what will be done with the information collected.

- The exercise was intended to evaluate TMs' situational awareness and ensure they have the information needed to assist in their day-to-day activities.
- Some interesting data is currently being analyzed, and the results will be available next month.
- Additional input may be requested from the TMs in order to compile a master network card to distribute to the group.

Question: *By any chance when we have future calls, will you be asking for agenda ideas from the TMs?*

Response: Yes – we will be contacting the TMs starting in August.

Gina Laudato

Fiduciary NTC Progress Report information, PMDB training, and VALU course offerings

Gina presented slides reviewing:

- Fiduciary NTC Progress Reports
- PMDB Training
- VALU Course Offerings

The slides can be reviewed on the VBA Schoolhouse. Highlights include:

Fiduciary NTC Reports

- Reports are compiled from the information provided by TMs listing those in a technical position (FEs, LIEs, and FSRs), their prorated hours, experience level, and class they are assigned to. Please be sure your records are completely up to date.
- The 3rd quarter reports are coming soon. If you have any questions about that report please send an email to the Fiduciary Training Mailbox.
- P&F can also provide instruction on how to run ad hoc reports if TMs need information between quarterly reports.

Question: *Can TMs get copies of the NTC reports too?*

Response: Yes we will make sure that we do that for quarter three and from here on out.

PMDB Training

- Prevention and Management of Disruptive Behavior (PMDB) is a new training series that belongs to VHA's Workplace Violence Prevention Program.
- It is available to FEs.
- The program includes four different levels, the first three of which are mandated for all FEs, both trainee and experienced.
- Part 1 and 2A are web-based courses and can be found in TMS and should be completed by 9/30/2015.
- Part 2B and 3 are VHA instructor-led courses taught by PMDB certified instructors at the hospital and should be completed by 12/31/15.
- All 4 courses will be automatically added to the TMS learning plans for all FEs in the appropriate class in TMS. Please verify class assignments, which can be found in FL 14-15.
- FEs will have to search and register for the instructor-led class offerings. If you have any trouble determining the closest location, please send an email request and we can help contact the PMDB coordinator at the nearest hospital.
- FEs can volunteer to become certified PMDB instructors.

VALU course offerings

- Per FL 14-15, all Fiduciary technical positions have at least 10 mandated training hours. The remaining hours can be filled by station-selected training to round out the 80 hours. The station-selected training can include:
 - Any item from the VBA Learning Catalog
 - Any Skillsoft course available on the VALU website 24x7 Learning page
 - Any VALU course from the VALU Course Catalog

J.D. Dominick

LEAD 2016 Announcement

After postponing the current year's Executive Week and subsequently postponing LEAD 2016 to support the VBA national claims surge initiatives, the official solicitation letter should be going out next week, and applications will be due by **August 28, 2015**. As with LEAP, there will be an information session. Please watch for an event invitation within the next two weeks.

J.D. will no longer be the LEAD program manager as he is transitioning to the LEAP program. The new PM of LEAD will be Cheryl Davis. Cheryl is coming from the VA Acquisitions Academy. Until the transition is complete, please refer questions about the LEAD application process to J.D.

Carrie Johnson

Skills Certification discussion and Q&A

Carrie presented a series of slides to provide a better understanding of the Skills Certification requirements and the test process. The slides covered the following information:

- Skills Certification Requirements as established in Public Law 110-389, section 225 and Article 67 of the Master Agreement.
- Skills Certification Field Leads for each test
- Skills Certification Process (Item development)
- Skills Certification Schedule
- Eligibility for Skills Certification Tests
- VSR Eligibility (VSRs hired under Full Performance Level GS 11)
- PIP/Performance Standards
- Re-Certification Requirement
- Preparing for the test
- Test Feedback
- Skills Certification Future

The following questions were addressed during and after the presentation.

Question: *Will they have had to pass the certification test as a GS-10 to apply for a GS-11 promotion?*

Response: Passing the VSR test is not a requirement listed in the posting for a Senior VSR (GS-11). If a VSR (GS-10) who has not taken or passed the VSR test applies for and is hired as a Senior VSR, that person would then be required to take the Senior VSR test and would not be required to go back and pass the VSR test.

Question: *Is the GS-10 test the same thing as the VSR Skills Cert test?*

Response: Yes

Question: *What about for the DRO position? I once read that the RVSR needed to be certified in order to apply for the DRO.*

Response: That question would need to be directed to HR. Kathy Smith-Sasse added that many of the references for certification are on the TMRC website.

Question: *Who is the new HR contact to replace Joshua?*

Response: Lindsay Rodysill from the Lincoln RO.

Question: *How do you decide the amount of questions per test? Many RVSRs and DROs complain about the amount of questions per session. They claim the amount of time is not sufficient to answer all of the complex questions posed on the test.*

Response: *There are about 100 to 120 questions on each test. Not all questions are scored; some are pilot questions. An analysis done after each test cycle shows the majority of test takers use less than the time allotted to complete the test.*

Question: *"Why take the test if I won't get fired?" (they'll call in sick) or "Since there is no incentive to do well, why even try my best on the test?" Also there are others who take less than hour to take each section.*

Response: There is currently no penalty or incentive in place for Skills Certifications failure or success. Future plans for Skills Certification do include remedial training for those who do not pass the test, followed by reassessment of skills and competencies. If the individual still does not pass, VBA will "take appropriate personnel action". At this time VBA is still defining what that action will be.

Question: *How are the item comments used that are entered by the test participants?*

Response: The comments go directly into a database and are analyzed. Useful information and concerns are incorporated into the item writing workshops.

Question: *If the test is 3 hours, why is the time used against the test taker when they make a comment on the feedback?*

Response: Considering the majority of the testers are not using the allotted time, this is likely not a big concern.

Question: *If they give feedback on their concerns about the amount of questions, do you use that info?*

Response: We will take a look at that, but there is not a single factor alone that determines the number of questions on the test. There are industry standards that guide the number of questions required to make it a legally defensible and justifiable certification test.

Question: *Can we get a copy of the test so we can review the test and understand what the correct answers are?*

Response: We are not able to release the questions to the field. Since it is a lengthy process to develop new questions, they are often reused on subsequent administrations of the test.

Question: *A lot of people do the test fast to get it over with. Do you analyze the passing rate with the amount of time taken to complete the test?*

Response: Yes we do and have recently started to dive a little deeper into that as well. Please share the message that this is an important part of what we do so please take the test seriously.

Question: *On the email we received for the VSR skills cert test on July 6, 2015, why doesn't it address VSRs hired under the GS-10 performance standard?*

Response: We actually sent an addendum on 7/8 that addresses GS-10s. VSRs hired in the full performance level GS-10 position are also required to sit for the VSR Certification Test.

Question: *If a person does poorly on the test or fails it, will they be allowed remedial training and an opportunity to retake the test? What is the remedial process, if any?*

Response: There is TMS training available prior to taking the test for the first time and resources include a certification readiness guide and prep tests with sample questions. Future plans for Skills Certification include remedial training for those who do not pass the test, followed by reassessment of skills and competencies.

Question: *If a GS-11 VSR passes the VSR Skills Cert in August 2015, will they be required to take the Sr. VSR Skills Cert Test, next year?*

Response: If a VSR passes the Skills Cert Test in August and is then promoted to Senior VSR, they do not have the 1 year waiting period and would be expected to take the next offering of the Senior VSR test.

Question: *If they become a GS-10 in March and the test is in July, are they required to take the test?*

Response: They are required to take the test within one year of reaching the journey level status as a GS-10 VSR, so they would not be required to take the test until the following March.

Question: *We asked and were told not to test someone on a PIP (new standard GS-10). Is that accurate?*

Response: I do not know the specifics of that situation; however, in general, if someone is on a PIP, they should still be testing.

Question: *I thought if they did not pass it in 3 tries they were a permanent GS-10 and would not be promoted to the GS-11?*

Response: Correct. If a VSR hired as Full Performance Level (FPL) GS-11 is not able to pass the certification test in three attempts, they would become a permanent GS-10.

Question: *Is there a master listing of everyone who has tested, when they tested, and whether they passed or failed? That would help to determine who needs to test.*

Response: We are in the process of trying to create something that is available nationally at a moment's notice for field use. In the meantime, we are working with our partners in OFO to provide a list of who we think potentially needs to take the test each time it is offered.

Question: *Are there any more positions being prepared for certification? AVSCMs, VSCMs, etc?*

Response: Not at this time.

Question: *The OFO Skills Certification website is very cumbersome. Are there plans to update it?*

Response: The Skills Certification website is maintained by Compensation Service. Please send suggestions for improvements. We are open to suggestions and look forward to your partnership in making Skills Certification even better.

Question: *Can we use the Cert Website to ensure we don't have more national sign-ups than we can handle? The last change request only afforded us a couple of hours to try to comply.*

Response: The registration is handled by OFO. I will take that back and share that concern with them.

Question: *Can you provide me with the first notification that informed everyone there would be remedial training if they missed or failed the test?*

Response: For Skills Certification, that is part of the public law; look at the article 67 section that discusses that (section 5, paragraph C, item 3). I would need to look into the notification regarding the consistency studies.

Question: *Can we integrate the Confidentiality Agreements and the Test Record sheets into the online testing portal?*

Response: Let me look into that to see if we have any options.

Question: *When will the FY 16 schedule be released?*

Response: We are in the process of getting ready for FY 16. The schedule should be released in October.

Question: *Many times these IDPs are not done and results are ignored. Can this be addressed with the VSC management staff in order for them to take these tests more seriously?*

Response: I can share that concern with OFO, but I encourage you to share information with the VSC as they may not be aware of that requirement in article 67.

Question: *Can you explain how you come up with and grade the situational judgment questions? Those seem to give employees the most difficulty.*

Response: The scale is from one to seven. The SMEs who write the question decide what the answer is as a group. Then they decide what level of effectiveness or ineffectiveness the response is from a VBA perspective. When employees are answering those questions, encourage them to think in terms of the overall VBA response, not what they would do at their unique RO. If the SMEs decide the correct response is six or "effective", and the employee

answers six, they receive full credit. If they answer five or seven they would receive partial credit.

Question: *How can we provide prep training for these types of questions outside of the prep tests example loaded on the Compensation Service website?*

Response: We are in the process of trying to link some of those situational judgment questions to actual training items.

Question: *Can you update the Skills Cert page to provide more information and serve as a guide for how VA uses Skills Cert so it at least makes sense to employees to take the test?*

Response: The Skills Cert page already has practice tests on the site for each one of the tests. A short interactive tutorial introduces them to the look of the test. There is also a blueprint for each test so they know what KSAs are included and what percentage of the test covers each KSA.

Question: *How can we get results from TMS item surveys? One of the coaches was asking for this info.*

Response: Christy Chesnut stated an evaluation results link is available on the Compensation Service Training Website, and each RO has its own password to access the results. Christy said the VBA Curriculum Support Team will contact Kathleen Boyle with the link and password for her RO.

There were no further questions.

The meeting closed at 3:30 PM

**The next TM/TC National Conference Call is Aug 25, 2015
2 – 3PM Eastern Time**