

STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Human Resources Specialist, General Schedule (GS)-0201, by [The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022](#) (PACT Act), P.L. 117-168 § 903(a)(1).
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. This establishes the Human Resources Specialist, GS-0201, qualification standard under P.L. 117–168. This standard is effective on the date of this publication. The effective date for implementation of the standard is February 26, 2023. Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059) will coordinate implementation guidance. Revised text is contained in [brackets]. This qualification standard will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, which is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and [VA Publications website](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (05), Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing, dated April 15, 2002.
- 5. RESCISSION:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

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DISTRIBUTION: Electronic only

NOTE: This transmittal page accompanied the former VA Handbook 5005, Staffing publication. It is provided for reference to highlight the establishment of this qualification standard.

HUMAN RESOURCES SPECIALIST
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0201
Department of Veterans Affairs

AUTHORITY: This is a qualification standard developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) under [The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022](#) (PACT Act), P.L. 117–168, that applies to positions in VA. For VA, this qualification standard is mandated for use for all Human Resources (HR) Specialists, GS-0201 positions and replaces VA’s use of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) General Schedule Administrative and Management qualification standard for this occupation. The effective date for implementation of the standard is February 26, 2023.

- 1. BACKGROUND.** VA is the second largest Federal agency and is comprised of VA Central Office, three Administrations (Veterans Health Administrations (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and National Cemetery Administration (NCA)) and various Staff Offices. VA employs over 400,000 individuals who collectively and collaboratively provide medical, benefit and burial services and assistance to our Nation’s Veterans and their beneficiaries.
 - a. HR Specialists serve within the human capital framework of VA. They are appointed in the title 5 competitive or title 5 excepted service, depending on the type of appointment. HR Specialists help organizations achieve their goals by providing a lifecycle of administrative, strategic and consultative services to organizations. HR Specialists support employees throughout their employment journey, from recruitment to separation. HR Specialists also provide managers with the tools needed to oversee their workforce. Services provided include technical guidance and support with staffing, pay, benefits, leave, retirement, employee relations, labor relations, development, compliance and other functional areas of work. HR Specialists also provide services to potential candidates (applicants) and the work they do ultimately impacts the level of care and services that our employees provide to Veterans and their beneficiaries.
 - b. VA is unique as it encompasses a comprehensive Federal health care system. VA’s health care system requires the services of clinicians, professionals and other support workers to meet the needs of customers. VA HR Specialists differ from other Federal HR professionals because they must possess a working knowledge and understanding of three distinct personnel systems (title 5, hybrid title 38 and title 38) to appoint or effect other actions for employees serving in clinical, professional and support occupations. VA HR Specialists must also navigate multiple and complex labor agreements to ensure activities and personnel actions comply with applicable contracts.

- c. This qualification standard is required by Section 903(a) of [The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022](#), or The PACT Act, signed on August 10, 2022. Section 903 ensures the most qualified and effective HR Specialists are hired, developed and retained to provide the best service to VA employees, potential employees, supervisors, managers and executives to maximize the quality of service to our Nation's Veterans and their beneficiaries.

2. DUTIES. HR plays a critical role in the strategic planning of VA. HR Specialists combine customer centric approaches with the interdisciplinary functions of an HR Office to provide various administrative services to the Department's internal and external customers. HR Specialists possess the qualifications, HR knowledge and technical skills essential to consult, advise and provide management with guidance, recommendations and solutions to support VA's workforce. HR's internal customers include employees, managers, HR professionals and other organizational leaders. External customers include candidates (or applicants), other agencies/departments, businesses, contractors, universities, etc. These services include drafting and interpreting policy and procedures, as well as properly utilizing various HR systems to their fullest capabilities. The exact work performed depends on the general or specialty functional area to which the HR Specialist is assigned. All assignments require the ability to communicate with customers and skill to provide customer service, research and consultation/advisory services.

- a. Required competencies for HR Specialists include strong problem-solving skills and creative thinking to resolve employee issues; ability to effectively communicate with people at all levels of an organization; excellent verbal and written communication skills; outstanding interpersonal relationship skills; strong analytical skills; good judgement and decision-making abilities; attention to detail and organization skills; an ability to handle confidential information discreetly and with sensitivity; a thorough working knowledge of HR laws, regulations and policies; knowledge of and ability to use computers and HR information systems platforms; ability to multitask and prioritize effectively; and flexibility and adaptability skills to adjust to workplace changes.
- b. The HR Specialist works within their appropriate specialty (or functional) area to research matters and apply problem-solving skills and creative thinking when appropriate. This standard covers non-supervisory, lead and supervisory HR positions in various specialty areas (to include any combinations) as follows: classification, compensation (pay), employee relations, human resources information systems (HRIS), labor relations, worklife and benefits, performance management, recruitment and placement (staffing), workers' compensation, reasonable accommodation, technical review (oversight), quality assurance and HR development.

3. COVERAGE. The requirements in this standard are for appointment and position changes for the HR Specialist occupation in VA. These requirements apply to all HR Specialists in the GS-0201 series.

4. EXCLUSIONS.

- a. HR liaison positions, personnel psychologists, equal employment opportunity specialists and other positions that include HR-related work that are not classified in the HR Specialist, GS-0201 series are excluded from this qualification standard.
- b. HR Assistant, GS-0203, positions are excluded from this qualification standard.
- c. This standard does not cover positions in the Senior Leader (SL) or Senior Executive Service (SES) who have specialized qualification standards and are responsible for the oversight and direction of human resources management and human capital functions.

5. BASIC REQUIREMENT. To qualify for the HR Specialist position, candidates must meet the following basic requirements as described in one of the following methods:

a. Merit-Based Method, b. Education-Based Method or c. Training-Based Method:

a. **Method 1: Merit-Based Method.** The Merit-Based Method allows for a candidate to meet the basic requirement by possession of the following specialized experience:

Method 1: Merit-Based Method

The candidate must possess one year of specialized experience requiring knowledge of and/or skill in applying basic HR concepts, laws, principles, policies, methods, practices and/or HR systems. Such experience may be gained in administrative, professional, technical or other responsible work positions in the public (i.e., Government or military) or private sector. This experience must be equivalent to at least the GS-4 level of the Federal Government.
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OR

b. **Method 2: Education-Based Method.** The Education-Based Method allows for a candidate to meet the basic requirement by possession of the following:

Method 2: Education-Based Method

Successful completion of bachelor's degree (or higher).

OR

- c. **Method 3: Training-Based Method.** The Training-Based Method allows for a candidate to meet the basic requirement by possession of the following: Six months of general experience, equivalent to at least the GS-4 level of the Federal Government, requiring knowledge of and/or skill in applying laws, regulations, rules, principles, policies, methods, practices, supporting customers, communicating in writing and/or verbally and using various computer systems and office equipment in administrative, professional, technical or other responsible work positions, plus the possession of one of the four training criteria.

Method 3: Training-Based Method

Training 1: Successful completion of at least 12 credit hours of college-level (associate degree or higher level) course work in any of the following types of fields, majors or programs or those closely related as evidenced by the course or programs: HR (general), HR development, HR management, business, business management/administration, industrial relations, labor relations, industrial psychology, organizational psychology, organizational development, management, organizational behavior, pre-law/law, legal studies, health care management/administration, public administration, public policy, human services, leadership and humanities.

Training 2: Successful completion of at least four formal training courses in HR. The focus of these HR courses will be in areas or those closely related to general HR, Federal HR, private sector/corporate HR or HR management. These courses must be offered through VA (i.e., Talent Management System courses), Federal agencies/departments (i.e., OPM Federal Human Resources Institute) or through external organizations (i.e., HR Certification Institute (HRCI®) Learning, HR University or Management Concepts). For the purpose of this standard, formal means interactive (online or in-person) training that includes communication between the participants and/or the instructor. Successful completion is evidenced by documentation of successful completion by the training organization.

Training 3: Successful completion of a formal certificate program in any of the areas (or related areas) listed in [Training 1 \(above\)](#) or those closely related as evidenced by the course or programs. A formal certificate program for the purposes of this standard means a series or set of courses that provide a foundational or advanced knowledge. The courses must have been provided by an accredited college, university, organization or company and must have required assignments and/or other course work. Examples of providers include, but are not limited to, Purdue University, Global Cornell University (i.e., eCornell) or Wharton School. Successful completion is evidenced by documentation of completion by the training organization.

Training 4: Current professional HR certification through the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), HRCI®, International Public Management Association (IPMA) (or Public Sector HR Association (PSHRA)), American Society for Health Care Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA) or an organization or company that has a formal structure and is nationally recognized by the profession.

- 6. GRANDFATHERING PROVISION.** HR Specialists, GS-0201, employed in VA on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements required in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:
- a. HR Specialists who are grandfathered into the GS-0201 occupational series may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance level of a career ladder, promoted to a higher grade or changed to a lower grade within the occupation.
 - b. HR Specialists who are grandfathered into the GS-0201 occupational series can be placed in a lead, supervisory or managerial position through an appropriate position change without meeting the basic requirements required in this standard but must meet the grade level requirements.
 - c. HR Specialists who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of this qualification standard may not be extended or reappointed on a temporary or permanent basis until they fully meet the basic requirements of this standard.
 - d. HR Specialists serving on an appointment that leads to noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service may be extended on that appointment or converted to the competitive service without meeting the basic requirements of this standard, but they must meet the grade level requirements.
 - e. HR Specialists who are grandfathered under this provision that leave the occupation lose protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the occupation.
- 7. GRADE LEVEL QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS.** In addition to meeting the basic requirement of this standard in [paragraph 5.](#), an applicant's background must demonstrate that the applicant can successfully perform the duties of the position. Creditable education and specialized experience are described in [paragraph 8.](#), Evaluating Creditable Education and Specialized Experience. For more information, use this with supplemental occupational information described in [paragraph 9.](#), Supplemental Occupational Information for the HR Specialist, GS-0201, Qualification Standard.
- a. **Positions at the GS-05 through GS-11 grade levels.** For the GS-05 through GS-11 grade levels, candidates must possess the creditable education, specialized experience or a combination of creditable education and specialized experience to qualify for the specific grade level. When an applicant possesses partial amounts of creditable education and specialized experience, follow the instructions on combining education and experience in the [OPM General Schedule Operating Manual](#) to determine if the candidate meets the grade level.

Grade Level	Creditable Education		Specialized Experience
GS-05	None above the meeting a basic requirement method as described in paragraph 5 .		
GS-07	One full year of graduate level education	OR	One year equivalent to at least GS-05
	OR Superior Academic Achievement (S.A.A.)		
GS-09	Master's or equivalent graduate degree	OR	One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least GS-07
	OR		
	Two full years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to such a degree		
	OR LL.B. or J.D., if related		
GS-11	Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree	OR	One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least GS-09
	OR		
	Three full years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to such a degree		
	OR LL.M., if related		

a. **Positions at the GS-12 through GS-15 grade levels.** For the GS-12 through GS-15 grade levels, candidates must possess either Criteria 1 - graduate degree and specialized experience or Criteria 2 - specialized experience to qualify for the specific grade level. At these grade levels, candidates must fully meet or exceed either Criteria 1 or Criteria 2 meaning it is not appropriate to combine Criteria 1 and Criteria 2 to qualify candidates. At these grade levels, applicants cannot qualify on the basis of education only. Education may be considered along with experience to determine if the applicant meets the knowledge, skills or abilities (KSAs)/competencies required for the position as described in Criteria 1. Creditable education and specialized experience are described in in [paragraph 8.](#), Evaluating Creditable Education and Specialized Experience.

(1) **Impact of Time-in-Grade Restrictions.** Unless excluded from coverage under 5 C.F.R. Part 300, Subpart F, current (and some former) Federal

employees must meet time-in-grade requirements to qualify for the grade level through Criteria 1: graduate degree and specialized experience.

Grade Level	Criteria 1: Graduate Degree and Specialized Experience	OR	Criteria 2: Specialized Experience
GS-12	Graduate level degree or higher and three years of progressive specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-09 grade level	OR	One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least GS-11
GS-13	Graduate level degree or higher and three years of progressive specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-11 grade level	OR	One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least GS-12
GS-14	Graduate level degree or higher and three years of progressive specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-12 grade level	OR	One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least GS-13
GS-15	Graduate level degree or higher and three years of progressive specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-13 grade level	OR	One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least GS-14

8. EVALUATING CREDITABLE EDUCATION AND SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE.

To evaluate a candidate's education and specialized experience for determining grade level use the following guidance:

- a. **Creditable Education.** Creditable education for the GS-07 through GS-15 grade levels must be at the level described in [paragraph 7](#). Grade Level Qualifications Requirements. Creditable education, as defined by OPM, is education above the high school level completed in a U.S. college, university or other educational institution that has been accredited by one of the accrediting agencies or associations recognized by the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education. Foreign education is applied in the same manner as outlined in the [OPM General Schedule Operating Manual](#).

- (1) **Superior Academic Achievement (S.A.A.).** The S.A.A. provision is an educational achievement based on class standing, grade-point average or honor society membership. The full provision is described in the [OPM General Schedule Operating Manual](#).

(2) **Educational Courses and Programs.** Successfully completed courses and programs (bachelors level or higher) in HR, HR development, HR management, business, business management/administration, industrial relations, labor relations, industrial psychology, organizational psychology, organizational development, management, organizational behavior, pre-law/law, legal studies, health care management/administration, public administration, public policy, human services, leadership and/or humanities are qualifying programs for the GS-07 through GS-15 grade level requirements. When recruiting for HR positions, HR Offices can credit other educational courses and programs for meeting the grade level qualification requirements through the job analysis process.

b. **Creditable Experience.** Creditable experience is specialized experience that demonstrates the application of HR management knowledge, concepts and principles and the performance of work in one or more of the HR specialty areas. This experience may be obtained in the public sector, private sector or military (see Quality of Experience section below). This experience must be equivalent to Federal service in terms of difficulty and complexity of duties. Skills obtained from these experiences are cumulative, which means that as an employee progresses in their career, skills acquired at lower levels remain applicable as new skills are added.

(1) Quality of Experience.

(a) **Public Sector.**

i **Federal Government.** Federal Government public sector experience is specialized experience gained in the Federal Government. It is the application of human capital and HR management principles and practices to ensure compliance with Federal statutes and in implementing regulations. This experience includes, but is not limited to, the recruitment of employees, training of employees, developing and maintaining HR management policies and strategies, renumeration of employees and the ongoing evaluation of employees in alignment to all Federal employment laws.

ii **Non-Federal Government.** Non-Federal Government public sector experience is specialized experience gained in state Government, local Government, public universities, etc. It is the application of human capital and HR management principles and practices that ensure compliance with Federal, state and local statutes and implementing regulations, as appropriate. This experience includes, but is not limited to, the recruitment of employees, training of employees, developing and maintaining HR management policies and strategies, renumeration of employees

and the ongoing evaluation of employees. Non-Federal Government public sector entities must follow appropriate Federal, state and local employment laws.

iii **Military.** Military public sector experience is specialized experience gained in the Department of Defense (DoD). It is the application of human capital and HR management principles and practices that ensure compliance with Federal statutes and implementing regulations. This experience includes, but is not limited to, assisting active-duty military personnel or armed service members in developing their DoD careers, providing promotion and future training information and including personnel support and assistance with regards to transfers, travel orders and salary details.

(b) **Private Sector.** Private sector experience is specialized experience gained in for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, private universities, and other non-Governmental industries. Private sector HR professionals focus primarily on financial performance and employee productivity for the purpose of increasing the company's profit margin. They establish HR management strategies and goals. Some professionals serve as strategic business partners or HR generalists providing a wide range of support and services in multiple HR specialty areas. Private sector entities must follow appropriate Federal, state and local employment laws. In some cases, they ensure compliance with international employment laws.

9. SUPPLEMENTAL OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION FOR THE HR SPECIALIST, GS-0201, QUALIFICATION STANDARD.

a. **Introduction.** The HR Specialist qualification standard is required by § 903(a) of The PACT Act, signed on August 10, 2022, by the President. Section 903 ensures the most qualified and effective HR Specialists are hired, developed and retained to provide the best service to VA employees, potential employees, supervisors, managers and executives to maximize the quality of service to our nation's Veterans and their beneficiaries. This supplemental paragraph is provided to create consistency in the application of the standard and to support VA in hiring quality HR Specialist professionals.

b. Classification of HR Positions.

(1) The HR Specialist position is an administrative occupation and follows a two-grade interval pattern. The full performance level (or journey grade level) is the highest or target grade in a position's career promotion track. The full performance level varies for each HR Specialist position and

depends on the specialty area(s), the organizational level and other factors.

- (2) Refer to OPM's [classification resources](#) to understand and appropriately establish the grading, titling and assignment of work for each HR Specialist position description (PD).

[c.] **VA HR Specialist Occupational Information.** To establish consistency in the quality of candidates for appointment and placement, review the HR occupational information provided for the following areas: (1) HR Specialty Area Information, (2) Organizational Levels of VA, (3) Types of Positions in VA and (4) Description of VA Worked Performed. The basic official title for this occupation is Human Resources Specialist. Use the basic title without a parenthetical specialty title as the official position title for those positions that include two or more specialized HR functions when none predominates or when there is no established specialty.

- (1) **HR Specialty Area Information.** HR Specialists are eligible for appointment to a position to perform work in one or in a combination of HR specialty areas as described. The parenthetical specialty areas in VA are defined as follows:
 - (a) **HR Specialist (Classification).** Knowledge of classification concepts, principles and practices related to structuring organizations, positions and determining the appropriate pay system, occupational grouping, title and pay level of positions.
 - (b) **HR Specialist (Employee Relations).** Knowledge of laws, rules, regulations, case law, principles and practices related to employee conduct, performance and dispute resolution and other areas such as reasonable accommodation.
 - (c) **HR Specialist (HR Development).** Knowledge of laws, rules, regulations, practices, employee development concepts, principles and practices related to planning, evaluating and administering organizational training, change management and career development initiatives.
 - (d) **HR Specialist (Information Systems).** Knowledge of HR management concepts, principles and practices related to identifying and analyzing HR processes, translating functional requirements into technical requirements and delivering and maintaining HR information systems.

- (e) **HR Specialist (Labor Relations).** Knowledge of laws, rules, regulations, case law, principles and practices related to negotiating and administering labor agreements and providing guidance and consultation on a variety of labor relations matters.
- (f) **HR Specialist (Compensation).** Knowledge of compensation concepts, principles and practices, including pay and compensation flexibilities.
- (g) **HR Specialist (Performance Management).** Knowledge of performance management concepts, principles and practices related to planning, monitoring, rating and rewarding employee performance.

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[(h)] **HR Specialist (Employee Benefits).** The HR Specialist (Employee Benefits) work is described as follows:

- i Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to reasonable accommodation efforts supporting employees with appropriate physical or mental impairments to apply for positions and to perform essential job functions.
- ii Knowledge of HR worklife and benefits concepts, principles and practices related to retirement, insurance and other employee benefits programs.
- iii Knowledge of workers compensation concepts, principles and practices related to injury compensation program management, case management, reports and systems.

[(i)] **HR Specialist (Recruitment/Placement).** The HR Specialist (Recruitment/Placement) work is described as follows:

- i Knowledge of HR concepts, principles and practices related to staffing and talent management, identifying, attracting and selecting individuals and placing them into positions to address changing organizational needs.
- ii Knowledge of HR workforce and strategic planning concepts, principles and practices related to determining workload projections and current and future competency gaps to align human capital with organizational goals.

[(j)] **HR Specialist.**

- i Knowledge of HR concepts, principles and practices related to the systematic process of reviewing human capital management work products and determining if the products and services meet the specific quality assurance program requirements. This is what is referred to as quality assurance.

- ii Knowledge of HR concepts, principles and practices related to executing human capital management accountability and oversight programs; developing, monitoring and evaluating outcomes of human capital management strategies, policies, programs and activities; and conducting technical reviews of HR program assessments. This is referred to as technical review or oversight.

NOTE: Additional information on some of the above specialty areas can be found on OPM's [Assessment and Selection](#) page and the OPM's [HR Career Path](#) resources. These descriptions were used or adapted for VA's use.

[NOTE: Effective August 8, 2024, the Human Resources Specialist (Position Management) specialty area is removed from this qualification section to ensure it complies with proper classification standards and guidelines. See paragraph 9. c., VA HR Specialist Occupational Information.]

- (2) **Organizational Levels of VA.** VA HR Specialists serve at various levels of the organization to include the (a) Field, (b) Regional, (c) National levels or (d) HR Support Organizations. These organizational levels are described as follows:
 - (a) **Field.** The organization's local level. It encompasses those working at, in, or for a field facility, office or entity where the activities are reporting to and/or supporting the regional and national level including the sub-elements directly below the Department, including the Administrations. The field level carries out the operational functions and ensures consistency, quality and implementation of new initiatives for their assigned local organization. Organizational elements at the local level are responsible for complying with policy implementation. This level may include operational or transactional work that supports the local facility organization leadership and the employees assigned to carry out the work at the facility. HR Specialists in the field provide consultative support and carry out operational activities. These activities may include staffing (recruitment and placement), on-boarding, training (development), classification, pay administration, benefits, performance management and awards, employee relations and labor management administration.
 - (b) **Regional.** The organization's intermediate level. It encompasses those activities reporting to and/or supporting the national level including the sub-elements directly below the agency, including the

Administrations. It also encompasses regional level consolidated units and supports facility level operations by providing guidance and advice on consistency, quality and implementation of new initiatives. Organizational elements at the regional level are responsible for policy implementation for regional level organizations and verifying compliance by the field-level organizations. This level may include operational or transactional work, but such work is performed for the entire region as a centralized role.

- (c) **National.** The organization's highest level. It encompasses those activities reporting to and/or supporting the Secretary and/or Deputy Secretary including the sub-elements directly below the agency, including the Administrations. Organizational elements at the national-level are responsible for providing policy creation, interpretation and consultation for regional and field-level organizations. This level may include operational or transactional work, but such work is performed for the entire Agency as a centralized role. In practice, this level includes organizations headed by an Assistant Secretary or other Key Official or the headquarters functions for the Administrations (VHA, VBA and NCA). This level typically does not include operational or transactional work performed for a discrete customer, typically identified by servicing agreements or servicing assignments under which the work of the organizational element is limited to specific geographic or organizational sub-elements.
- (d) **HR Support Organizations.** The organization's HR support organizations and service centers. HR support organizations provide a specialized or unique HR service. Examples of a unique HR services include those provided by the delegated examining unit, HR Centers of Excellence, HR development and training centers, special recruitment teams and other special HR programs. These teams provide a specialized service for the entire Department, the sub-elements directly below the agency, including the Administrations or Staff Offices.

(3) **Types of Positions in VA.**

- (a) **Trainee.** HR trainees serve in positions that prepare candidates with educational backgrounds or unrelated experience, but have little to no specialized experience, for careers in HR. These positions are in the title 5 (competitive or excepted) service and are typically classified in the -99 series or in entry level GS-0201 grades (i.e., GS-05 or GS-07). The positions may be appointed through special student or post graduate hiring programs such as the Pathways Programs or under other special authorities. Trainee assignments are purposely

designed to provide orientation, training and familiarization with the work processes of the occupational field and the specific job; reinforce and supplement previous experience and education; and allow the trainee to carry out progressively more difficult and responsible tasks. Through formal, on-the-job training and work assignments, trainees are developed to understand and apply personnel regulations and standard operating procedures to perform a wide variety of routine HR duties, relying on established guides. Trainee work assignments are subject to close supervision and review. They receive mentorship and assistance from higher level HR professionals (co-workers and supervisors) to complete assignments and to develop competencies. Trainees are not covered by this qualification standard.

- (b) **Specialist.** A HR Specialist is a HR professional who performs specialized HR duties within the HR Office and performs daily functions working closely with internal divisions such as payroll, benefits, training, compliance and others. Specific duties of a HR Specialist will vary from organization to organization and are related to the organizational scope and environment. The majority of HR Specialists have a broad knowledge of the majority or all HR specialty areas.
- (c) **Generalist.** A Generalist is a HR Specialist who is a HR professional that performs a variety of functional HR duties within the HR Office in multiple specialty areas and performs daily functions and works closely with internal divisions such as payroll, benefits, training, compliance and others. Specific duties of a HR Specialist will vary from organization to organization and are related to the organizational scope and environment. The majority of HR Specialists have a broad knowledge of the majority or all HR specialty areas.
- (d) **Lead.** The Lead is a HR professional who, on a regular and recurring basis, leads a team of HR employees in accomplishing work. Leads also participate in the work of the team by performing work that is of the same kind and level as the highest level of work accomplished by the team led. Leads coach, facilitate and mentor team members. They ensure the organization's strategic plan, mission, vision and values are communicated to the team. They articulate and communicate team assignments, projects and problems to be solved. They lead the team in identifying, distributing and balancing workload and tasks among employees. They train or arrange training. They monitor and report on status of work progress. They serve as a coach, facilitator and negotiator in coordinating team initiatives. They represent the team in dealing with the supervisor(s) and other leaders. They approve emergency leave. They resolve informal

complaints and refer formal grievances and appeals to the proper parties. They communicate the team consensus and recommendations to the supervisor on actions affecting team. They provide input on individual awards, rewards and recognition. Leads perform this work at least 25% of their duty time.

- (e) **Supervisor.** The HR Supervisor is a HR professional that exercises delegated supervisory and managerial authority on a recurring basis. HR Supervisors plan work to be accomplished by subordinates, set and adjust short-term priorities and prepare schedules for completion of work; assign work to subordinates based on priorities, selective consideration of the difficulty and requirements of assignments and the capabilities of employees. They evaluate work performance of subordinates and give advice, counsel or instruction on both work and administrative matters. HR Supervisors interview candidates for positions and recommend appointment, promotions, or reassignments. They resolve complaints and grievances and effect disciplinary measures, as appropriate, for their staff. They identify developmental and training needs and arrange training. They develop performance standards and find ways to improve production and increase quality of work. HR Supervisors accomplish work through technical and administrative direction of other subordinate positions and constitute a major duty occupying at least 25% of position's time.

(4) **Description of VA Work Performed.**

- (a) **Operations.** HR Specialists that perform work in the operational setting provide services on a wide range of personnel matters and issues. The operational function of HR consists of providing consultation and strategic recommendations to managers that include all or the majority of the various specialty areas. The operational structure of HR typically consists of an HR officer (HRO), assistant HRO (i.e., Deputy HRO), supervisors, team leaders, specialists and assistants. These HR Specialists support collaborative efforts with employee/labor partners. Operational functions ensure the implementation of policy, legislation and other regulatory guidance. Operational functions of HR also include any research, analysis, consultative and transactional work associated with these operational areas.
- (b) **Policy.** HR Specialists that serve in policy organizations perform work that requires comprehensive competencies in applying principles, laws and regulations to develop, research, interpret and apply standardized legal, regulatory and policy guidance. These HR Specialists provide authoritative advisory and consultative service on the full spectrum of HR functions or in a particular specialty area of

focus, depending on the role. HR Specialists performing this type of work are subject matter experts. They review and provide input on proposed legislative and regulatory changes. They also determine policy impact on the organization and interpret policy in relation to its operational impact. They draft legislative proposals, HR policies, interpretative guidance and other policy-related guidance.

- (c) **Consultants.** HR Specialists that are consultants provide advice, strategies and insight to leaders and customers on various aspects of HR to include policy implications, workforce implications and other labor-market impact. Consultants utilize knowledge of the business in which their customers work to provide relevant, quality HR advisory services. This work requires comprehensive competencies to successfully perform the analysis and consultative duties of the position providing strategic and operational technical HR advice and guidance to appropriate levels of managers, employees and other customers within and outside the organization. Consultants act as a liaisons and strategic advisors between hiring managers, employees and leadership. This work provides leaders and customers with guidance in regard to management activity that requires labor partner collaboration, bargaining, notification, etc. HR Specialists also provide resources and other efficient methods to align customers and leaders with servicing HR teams (i.e., Shared Service Unit services) such as employee/labor relations, recruitment and staffing, HRIS, etc. They attend strategic and informational meetings to ensure human capital functions align with leadership and VA goals.
- (d) **Leadership.** HR Specialists that serve in leadership perform work that requires the knowledge, skills and abilities to provide senior-level direction on HR management concepts, practices and innovation. HR Specialists performing this work serve as executive advisors and consultants to managers and high-level leaders. This work aligns human capital policies and practices with the overall mission of VA and its Administrations and Staff Offices. HR Specialists may have full delegated authority to lead an office of experts across a variety of functional areas. They work with integrated teams of professionals attending meetings, participating in projects and advising committees (comprised of professional experts, clinical leaders, fiscal leaders, etc.) to align human capital practices accordingly. They research and review reports, trends, etc. They establish and redirect methods of measurement of success for programs. This description does not fully encompass the roles of SL and SES positions.
- (e) **Program Management.** HR Specialists that are program managers lead, direct and administer a specific or multiple HR programs. The program(s) typically have a wide or broad impact (i.e., regional or

national). These HR Specialists seek to execute effective programming by providing creative solutions to program planning and problem solving. They manage resources (i.e., financial) and activities related to the program. These HR Specialists may or may not have supervisory responsibilities. They may lead teams. They serve on workgroup teams and work with individuals internal and external to the organization to plan, schedule and execute program activities. They monitor program effectiveness and maintain appropriate reports. These HR Specialists serve as the primary point of contact or subject matter experts for the program they manage.

- (f) **Strategic Business Partner (SBP).** HR Specialists that are SBPs (also referred to as Business Partners) perform a full range of HR assignments that include, but are not limited to, resolving employee conflicts, analyzing and benchmarking data, implementing HR policy and other HR specialty functions such as recruitment, employee relations and benefits. Also referred to as HR Business Partners or People Partners, SBPs typically pertain to small teams or individuals who all work collaboratively with managers of the organizations to carry out strategic management and key initiatives.
 - i SBPs serve as thought partners and sounding boards, providing advice and guidance to programs/departments on HR best practices. With a keen ability to navigate the organization and collaborate effectively, SBPs consult with employees of all levels coaching and guiding managers/leaders in a variety of people-oriented concerns. SBPs will have experience influencing leaders in a fast-paced environment and have the interpersonal savvy required to drive HR strategies in a complex workforce.
 - ii There are also levels of SBPs in the public and private sector which define levels of expertise such as SBP II or Senior SBP. SBPs work similarly to HR Specialists who are generalists but have some leadership aspects such as leading HR-related projects and deployments and provide change management leadership where needed.

[d.] **Qualification Tools.**

- (1) Qualification Tools Established Before Assessing Candidates for Basic Requirements and Grade Level Requirements.
 - (a) **Job Analysis.** The job analysis process is mandatory for all recruitment actions. The job analysis is the initial step of the recruitment process and serves as the foundation for all assessment and selection processes. The job analysis provides a full

understanding of the nature of the job, by examining the tasks performed in a job (i.e., position description), the KSAs or competencies required to perform those tasks and the linkage between the tasks and competencies. The job analysis is created by HR staff that works closely with the hiring official and/or subject matter expert to prepare a list of tasks and competencies required to perform the job successfully. Once the tasks and competencies are identified, the HR staff documents the job analysis process for future use.

- (b) **Using Competency Models.** Competency modeling enables HR staff to describe jobs in the same way, eliminating inconsistencies across agencies and HR functions (e.g., staffing, performance appraisal, training). As it pertains to employees, competency modeling identifies gaps between existing skills and required skills and tailors training programs to support bridging the gap. These competencies are identified through the job analysis process. When using competency modeling, HR Specialists must fully meet competencies and proficiencies identified at each grade level for promotion to that level and for advancement within the career ladder. To facilitate the career promotion process, employees being considered for promotion to the next level may be asked to describe specific duties and projects that helped them achieve the competencies required for promotion. All promotions are based on achievement of required competencies of training requirements and meeting individual performance expectations and objectives.

(2) **Qualification Tools Used in Conjunction with the Qualification Standard.**

- (a) **Quality Ranking Factors (QRFs).** QRFs are KSAs or competencies that may be expected to significantly enhance performance in a position, but unlike selective factors (SFs), are not essential for satisfactory performance. Candidates who possess quality ranking factors can be ranked above those who do not, but no one can be rated ineligible solely for failure to possess a QRF. QRFs must be clearly supported by the position description and job analysis.
 - i QRFs are not screen out elements. This means that candidates who meet the QRFs may only be ranked (scored) higher in the quality category/candidate list of eligibles than those who meet them. Candidates who meet the minimum qualification requirements, but do not meet the identified QRFs, will continued to be considered for the position.

- ii Education can be used as a QRF consistent with title 5 U.S.C. § 3308 because the beneficial proficiencies identified can be attained either through education or experience. HR Specialists, in coordination with the hiring manager, should define in plain language the elements of a QRF in the job opportunity announcement (JOA) and specify that QRFs will be used to rank candidates.

(b) **Selective Factors (SFs).** Selective Factors (or selective placement factors) are KSAs or competencies in addition to the minimum requirements identified in the occupation's qualification standard that are necessary to successfully perform the duties of the job. SFs must be clearly supported by the position description and job analysis. SFs are screen out elements and as a result, are required to be held by the selectee at the start of a job. Candidates who do not possess the competencies within the SF will not meet minimum qualifications and will not be considered further for the position.

- i Generally, SFs identify specialized knowledge or background that cannot be learned during the position's initial acclimatization period. SFs are often related to proficiencies essential for performing the job. However, SF should not be narrowly tailored in scope to the point that it blocks competition and the eligibility of talented candidates (e.g., requiring certification granted by one VA Administration or other experience requirements so specific that only employees of that organization could meet it). SFs should not be used to screen candidates for a competency or level of proficiency that is wanted but not required. A preferred competency may only be used to sort candidates, not disqualify them.

- ii Additionally, SFs should not be used to establish an education requirement or used as a substitute for adequate assessment. Further, SF should not be used by organizations to avoid training new employees in competencies that can be easily learned as one starts the job.

- iii SFs that are required to meet minimum qualification requirements are distinguishable from QRFs in that QRFs identify beneficial competencies for performing the job but are not required to be successful.

- iv SFs, consistent with the PD, must be identified through the job analysis process before the position is advertised and the JOA must adequately communicate

the SF, associated KSAs and the evaluation criteria to potential candidates. HR Specialists should clearly define the essential competencies in a SF and properly articulate why they are necessary on the JOA.

(c) **Using Specialized Experience Gained in a Health Care Setting.**

HR experience gained in a health care setting can be used as qualifying specialized experience or, through proper job analysis, used to establish a QRF or SF. This may be especially beneficial for positions filled in the VHA or VA Central Office. HR work experience gained in a health care setting addresses many areas of concern in the health care industry, including ensuring that health care regulations are being met. The work supports administrative staff, clinicians and patients. Generally, this experience equips the applicant with the particular KSAs to perform HR-related duties of the position in a complex health care setting for customers and units delivering critical, comprehensive and varying health care services to a diverse or unique patient population.

(3) **Assessment Tools Used Concurrently or After Assessing Candidates for Basic Requirements and Grade Level Requirements.**

(a) **Roles of Assessment Tools.** Assessment tools are any tests or procedures administered to candidates to evaluate their job-related competencies, interests or fitness for employment. The accuracy with which applicant assessment scores can be used to forecast performance on the job is the tool's most important characteristic, referred to as predictive validity. Assessment tools must be firmly grounded in the duties of the position and allows candidates to identify their relevant experience.

(b) Executive Order 13932, [Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates](#), dated July 1, 2020, mandates the use of improved assessment practices for the purpose of evaluating relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies. Examples of assessment tools that are utilized to meet this mandate are cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, reference checking, tests (i.e., job knowledge, situational judgement), structured interviews and work samples. There are advantages to using multiple assessments through a multiple hurdle or progressive hurdle approach. VA's recruitment system, USA Staffing®, can also be used to administer assessments. More information about the assessment process can be found at www.opm.gov.

10. REFERENCES.

- a. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management website, www.opm.gov
 - (1) Position Classification Standards for White Collar Work
 - (2) General Schedule Operating Manual
 - (3) Career Path Guides
 - (4) Assessment and Selection
- b. Executive Order 13932, [Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates](#), July 1, 2020]

RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) (006), Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) (05), Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059)