

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Psychologist, GS-180, in VA.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Psychologist Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Appendix G18, in its entirety. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the Office of Human Resources Management Web site. Significant changes include:
 - a. Adds another educational option for applicants who obtained a doctoral degree between 1951 and 1978 from a regionally-accredited institution with a dissertation primarily psychological in nature.
 - b. Adds allowance for those hired by the Veterans Health Administration prior to June 6, 2016 based on re-specialization program are considered to have fully met the educational requirements prior to June 6, 2016.
 - c. Modifies the Grandfathering Provision.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5005
5. **RECISSIONS:** VA Handbook 5005/87, Part II, Appendix G18, dated June 6, 2016.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

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

FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE: PART II APPENDIX G18
EFFECTIVE DATE: FEBRUARY 7, 2018

**PSYCHOLOGIST
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0180
Veterans Health Administration**

1. COVERAGE. The following are requirements for appointment as a psychologist in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Psychologists are Licensed Independent Providers who engage in professional and scientific work which relates to behavior, capacities, personality, interests, emotions and mental disorders. These requirements apply to all VHA psychologists in the GS-0180 series, including those assigned to VA medical centers, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), free-standing VA Outpatient Clinics, Veterans Outreach Centers, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) offices, the VHA National Center for Organization Development and VHA Central Office. This work may include any of the following: providing professional clinical services, conducting research, carrying out education and training activities, carrying out program evaluation activities, clinical consultation, supervision and administration.

2. AUTHORITIES.

- a. [P.L. 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010;](#)
- b. [38 U.S.C. § 7401, Appointments in Veterans Health Administration;](#)
- c. [38 U.S.C. § 7402, Qualifications of appointees;](#)
- d. [38 U.S.C. § 7403, Period of appointments; promotions;](#)
- e. [38 U.S.C. § 7405, Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments and without-compensation appointments;](#)
- f. [38 U.S.C. § 7407, Administrative provisions for section 7405 and 7406 appointments.](#)

3. BASIC REQUIREMENTS. The basic requirements for employment as a VHA psychologist are prescribed by Public Law 96-151 codified in 38 U.S.C. § 7402. To qualify for appointment, all applicants for the position of psychologist in VHA must meet the following:

- a. **Citizenship.** Be a citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3.g, this part.)

b. Education

(1) Have a doctoral degree in psychology from a graduate program in psychology accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA), the Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS), or the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) at the time the program was completed. The specialty area of the degree must be consistent with the assignment for which the applicant is to be employed. For the purpose of meeting this requirement, the term “specialty area” refers to the specific specialty areas recognized by the accrediting body and not to specific job duties that might require special skills. Currently, APA accredits doctoral programs in the specialty areas of clinical psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, or combinations of two or more of those areas. PCSAS accredits doctoral programs in psychological clinical science. CPA accredits doctoral programs in clinical psychology, counseling psychology, clinical neuropsychology, and school psychology. There are no job assignments in VHA that require the skills of a school psychologist; therefore, an applicant with a degree in the specialty area of school psychology is not eligible for appointment. Strictly for the purpose of determining eligibility for appointment as a psychologist in VHA, there is no distinction between the specialty areas (with the exception of school psychology).

OR

(2) Have a doctoral degree in any area of psychology and, in addition, successfully complete a re- specialization program (including documentation of an approved internship completed as part of the re- specialization program) meeting both of the following conditions:

(a) The re-specialization program must be completed in an APA or a CPA accredited doctoral program; and,

(b) the specialty in which the applicant is retrained must be consistent with the assignment for which the applicant is to be employed.

NOTE: *The applicant must provide an official transcript and/or certificate documenting the completion of the re-specialization program, which includes completion of an APA or CPA internship. [Psychologists who have successfully completed a re-specialization program as described above and who were employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs prior to the implementation of this standard are considered to have fully met the educational requirements of these qualification standards.]*

[OR

(3) Have a doctoral degree awarded between 1951 and 1978 from a regionally-accredited institution, with a dissertation primarily psychological in nature.]

AND

(4) Internships

(a) Have successfully completed a professional psychology internship training program that was accredited by APA or CPA at the time the program was completed and that is consistent with the assignment for which the applicant is to be employed.

OR

(b) New VHA psychology internship programs that are in the process of applying for APA accreditation are acceptable in fulfillment of the internship requirement, provided that such programs were sanctioned by the VHA Central Office Program Director for Psychology and the VHA Office of Academic Affiliations at the time that the individual was an intern;

OR

(c) VHA facilities that offered full-time, one-year pre-doctoral internships prior to PL 96-151 (pre- 1979) are considered to be acceptable in fulfillment of the internship requirement;

OR

(d) Applicants who completed an internship that was not accredited by APA or CPA at the time the program was completed may be considered eligible for hire *only* if they are currently board certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology in a specialty area that is consistent with the assignment for which the applicant is to be employed. (**NOTE:** *Once board certified, the employee is required to maintain board certification.*)

[OR

(e) Applicants who have a doctoral degree awarded between 1951 and 1978 from a regionally- accredited institution with a dissertation primarily psychological in nature may fulfill this internship requirement by having the equivalent of a one-year supervised internship experience in a site specifically acceptable to the candidate's doctoral program. If the internship experience is not noted on the applicant's official transcript, the applicant must provide a statement from the doctoral program verifying that the equivalent of a one-year supervised internship experience was completed in a site acceptable to the doctoral program.

NOTE: *Psychologists who meet the requirements of this revision and who were employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs prior to the implementation of this standard are considered to have fully met the requirements of this qualification standard.]*

c. **Licensure.** Hold a full, current, and unrestricted license to practice psychology at the doctoral level in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or the District of Columbia.

(1) **Exception.** Non-licensed applicants who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements may be given a temporary appointment as a "graduate psychologist" at the GS-11 or GS-12 grade under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405 [(c)(2)(B)] for a period not to exceed two years from the date of employment on the condition that such a psychologist provide care

only under the supervision of a psychologist who is licensed. Failure to obtain licensure during that period is justification for termination of the temporary appointment.

(2) **Loss of Credential.** A psychologist who fails to maintain the required licensure must be removed from the occupation, which may result in termination of employment. At the discretion of the appointing official, an employee may be reassigned to another occupation if qualified and if a placement opportunity exists.

d. Board Certification and Loss of Credential

(1) **Board Certification.** Persons hired to psychology positions in the VHA who completed an internship that was not accredited at the time the program was completed must be board certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology in a specialty area that is consistent with the assignment for which the applicant is to be employed. The board certificate must be current and the applicant must abide by the certifying body's requirement for continuing education.

(2) **Loss of Credential.** Once board certified, psychologist must maintain a full, valid and unrestricted board certification to remain qualified for employment. A psychologist who fails to maintain the required board certification must be removed from the occupation, which may result in termination of employment. At the discretion of the appointing official, an employee may be reassigned to another occupation if qualified and if a placement opportunity exists.

e. Grandfathering Provision. [All persons employed in VHA as a psychologist on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including positive education (i.e., degree and internship requirements) and licensure/certification that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation.

(1) Employees grandfathered under this provision for this revision may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or changed to lower grade within the occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the journey level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions or beyond the assignment currently held for those being grandfathered to assignments above FPL.]

(2) Psychologists who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their temporary appointment extended or be reappointed on a temporary or permanent basis until they fully meet the basic requirements of the standard.

(3) Psychologists initially grandfathered into this occupation who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure that meet all of the basic requirements of this qualification standard must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

[NOTE: If psychologists who are grandfathered under this provision leave the occupation, the

employee loses protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the occupation.]

f. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

g. **English Language Proficiency.** Psychologists must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3j.

4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Creditable Experience

(1) **Current Professional Psychology Practice.** To be creditable, psychological work experience can be obtained through paid or non-paid employment providing psychological work or through participating in a supervised postdoctoral psychology training program (i.e., fellowship or residency). Psychological work experience must have occurred after the doctoral degree was obtained and must have required the use of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics associated with current professional psychology practice. "Professional psychology practice" includes but is not limited to the following psychology-oriented job duties: providing professional clinical services, conducting research, carrying out education and training activities, carrying out program evaluation activities, clinical consultation, supervision and administration.

(2) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable if it is post-doctoral experience as a professional psychologist directly related to the duties to be performed. Qualifying experience must also be at a level comparable to or exceeding professional psychology experience at the next lower level.

(3) **Part-time Experience.** Part-time experience is creditable according to its relationship to a full-time workweek. For example, a psychologist employed 20 hours per week, or on a half time basis, would receive one full-time workweek of credit for each two weeks of service.

(4) **Post-Doctoral Degree Fellowships.** Postdoctoral fellowships or residencies are training programs in an advanced area of clinical practice. Training as a fellow or resident is considered to be creditable experience on a year-for-year basis.

b. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates:

(1) Staff Psychologist, GS-11 (Entry Level)

(a) **Experience.** None beyond the basic requirements.

(b) **Assignment.** Staff psychologists at this level diagnose mental disorders, conduct psychological or neuropsychological assessments, treat mental disorders through a variety of

modalities, provide adjunctive interventions for treatment of medical disorders, and may conduct research. They may be assigned to any program area. Psychologists who are not licensed must practice under the close supervision of a licensed psychologist.

(2) **Staff Psychologist, GS-12 (Developmental Level)**

(a) **Experience.** At least one year of experience as a professional psychologist equivalent to the next lower grade level (GS-11). Psychologists who are not licensed must practice under the supervision of a licensed psychologist but with less intense supervision than at the GS-11 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to apply a wide range of professional psychological treatments or assessment methods to a variety of patient populations.

2. Ability to design and implement effective treatment strategies.

3. Ability to incorporate new clinical procedures.

4. Ability to conduct research activities, such as designing and implementing clinical research projects (staff psychologists with specified research job duties).

5. Ability to perform basic research tasks of scholarship and research execution within the context of an established research team, including research participant relations, research documentation, data acquisition, maintenance, and collaboration.

(c) **Assignment.** Staff psychologists at this level diagnose mental disorders, conduct psychological or neuropsychological assessments, treat mental disorders through a variety of modalities, provide adjunctive interventions for treatment of medical disorders, and may conduct research. They may be assigned to any program area.

(3) **Staff Psychologist, GS-13 (Full Performance, Level)**

(a) **Experience.** At least two years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-12 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of, and ability to apply, professional psychological treatments to the full range of patient populations.

2. Ability to provide professional advice and consultation in areas related to professional

psychology and behavioral health.

3. Knowledge of clinical research literature.

(c) **Assignment.** This is the full performance level for staff psychologists. At this level, psychologists are licensed to practice independently in the provision of psychological services, consulting with peers and supervisors as appropriate. They may be assigned to any VHA program and setting, such as inpatient or outpatient medicine, primary care, surgery, mental health, neurology, rehabilitation medicine, geriatrics, Compensation and Pension, Vet Centers, and the VHA National Center for Organization Development. Psychologists diagnose mental disorders, conduct psychological or neuropsychological assessments, treat mental disorders through a variety of modalities, and provide adjunctive interventions for treatment of medical disorders. Among the modalities provided are individual, family, and group psychotherapies and other interventions such as behavioral health and community interventions. Psychologists consult with medical center staff on a wide variety of patient care issues. Staff psychologists may be involved in program evaluation, teaching, training, and research activities.

(4) **Psychologist Clinician Investigator, GS-13**

(a) **Experience.** At least two years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-12 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to apply advanced professional psychological treatments to the full range of patient populations.

2. Ability to provide professional advice and consultation in areas related to professional psychology and behavioral health.

3. Knowledge of clinical research literature and fluency in scientific information discovery.

4. Knowledge of and ability to apply structured scientific paradigms to research involving existing protocols and established scientific methods, including knowledge of research design and analysis as applied to their area of expertise, that has resulted in recognition at the local and regional level and that is developing into national recognition (e.g., speaking at national conferences and/or publishing in nationally-distributed scientific journals).

5. Ability to perform essential research tasks of scholarship and research execution, including research participant relations and management, research documentation, data acquisition and maintenance, human subjects protection, budget oversight, supervision of project staff, and collaboration.

6. Ability to formulate results within a scientific framework and organize scientific reporting.

7. Knowledge of methods and ability to increase the basic research skills of others via research mentoring.

(c) **Assignment.** The psychologist clinician investigator devotes a majority of the time allocated to his/her job duties to research responsibilities in addition to providing clinical services. These research responsibilities can include grant funded research as well as research development or program-related research that may or may not be grant funded. The psychologist clinician investigator may function as the principal investigator on grant(s) or assume significant supporting roles (e.g., co-investigator, study psychotherapy lead, lab management, and complex grant project management) within funded research programs. They publish articles in peer-reviewed professional literature, present findings at major regional or national scientific meetings, and may attain substantive, non-adjunctive academic appointments at the affiliated university (usually at the rank of Assistant Professor or its institutional equivalent). Other responsibilities may include membership on local research service committee and/or boards, such as Research and Development (R & D) Service, Health Services Research and Development (HSR & D) Service, or Institutional Review Boards (IRB), serving as reviewers for peer-reviewed journals, serving on VA scientifically-driven expert panels (e.g., consensus panels to develop care guidelines based on empirical data), and serving as grant reviewers for VA and non-VA research.

(5) Psychologist Clinician Investigator, GS-14

(a) **Experience.** At least three years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of, and ability to apply, appropriate scientific methods in the design and execution of basic and applied research.

2. Ability to coordinate work across multiple settings.

3. Ability to convey scientific concepts and methodological principles to individuals with diverse levels of technical expertise.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Psychologist Clinician Investigators have achieved significant professional recognition by making published scientific contributions to research projects with potential for substantial impact. In addition to active involvement in peer-reviewed research and other peer review activities as noted above, this recognition must be demonstrated by attainment of at least three of the following: multiple publications in peer-reviewed professional literature; a consistent record of presentation of findings at

national scientific meetings; attainment of an academic appointment at an affiliated medical school or local university, usually at the rank of associate professor or equivalent; or responsibility for multiple funded research projects with evidence of sustainability. Examples include but are not limited to psychologists assigned to research programs at the local, VISN or National level, including Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Care programs (MIRECCs), Centers of Excellence (CoEs), the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or similar research-focused settings. Psychologist clinician investigators are actively involved as principal investigators or co- principal investigators in peer-reviewed VA, National Institutes of Health (NIH), or comparably rigorous intramural or extramurally funded research programs. Psychologist Clinician Investigator responsibilities include peer review activities for VA and non-VA research, such as grant review for VA or NIH proposals, local research service committees or boards (such as R&D Service, HSR&D Service, or IRB), and service as a consulting editor (i.e., on an editorial board) for peer-reviewed journals.

(6) Psychology Program Manager, GS-14

(a) **Experience.** At least three years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Ability to organize work, set priorities, delegate tasks, and meet multiple deadlines.
2. Knowledge of and ability to utilize evidence based practices and clinical practice guidelines appropriately and ability to guide staff in using these tools.
3. Ability to deal effectively with individuals or groups.
4. Skill in managing and directing the work of others to accomplish program goals and objectives.
5. Ability to translate management goals and objectives into well-coordinated and controlled work operations.
6. Ability to establish and monitor production and performance priorities and standards.
7. Ability to analyze organizational and operational problems and to develop and implement solutions that result in sound operation of the program.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Psychologist program managers have broad program management responsibilities for a specific program or programs that are designed

to deliver specialized, complex, highly professional services that are important program components of the facility and that significantly impact the health care provided to Veterans. Programs include but are not limited to addiction, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health intensive case management (MHICM), mental health compensation and pension examination (C&P) programs, Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Centers, inpatient mental health, residential rehabilitation, domiciliary, palliative care, neuropsychology, and internship and postdoctoral fellowship training programs; management of an off-campus site; psychology program oversight and coordination throughout the facility and its affiliated clinics as a psychology executive, typically at lower complexity facilities. Decisions made by the Program Manager affect staff and other resources associated with the programs managed and are made while exercising wide latitude and independent judgment. The type of program managed and scope of responsibility are critical aspects of the assignment at this level. Responsibilities include operation and management of key clinical, training, research, or administrative programs to include full responsibility for managing the day to day activities of those programs. Responsibility may include supervision of staff but is not required. Psychologist Program Managers are responsible for strategic planning to ensure the provision of high quality services to meet the needs of the Veterans being served and planning, and developing and implementing short- and long-term goals and objectives consistent with the program's strategic plan. They have oversight of administrative and programmatic resources and deploy those resources in support of the program needs. They develop and implement programs, policies, and procedures to meet program goals, VHA policy and external accreditation requirements, and monitor outcomes using data-driven quality assurance processes, and implement strategies for improvement based on data analysis.

(7) Psychologist, GS-14 (Assistant Chief)

(a) **Experience.** At least three years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-13 gradelevel.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to utilize evidence based practices and clinical practice guidelines appropriately and ability to guide staff in using these tools.

2. Ability to provide professional advice and consultation in areas related to professional psychology and behavioral health.

3. Ability to organize work, set priorities, delegate tasks, and meets multiple deadlines.

4. Ability to supervise and manage subordinate employees effectively.

5. Skill in interpersonal relationships, including conflict resolution.

6. Ability to establish and monitor production and performance priorities and standards.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Psychologist Assistant Chiefs serve as full assistant to a Service Chief, share the full scope of delegated managerial responsibilities, and serve as the Acting Service Chief in the absence of the Service Chief. They make decisions that affect staff and other resources with wide latitude of control and independent judgment. They may be delegated full administrative and clinical responsibility for planning and directing the staff assignments in a variety of clinical settings. They encourage professional development, create an environment of learning, and serve as a mentor to staff. Examples include but are not limited to assignment to a clinical service, such as a Psychology Service, Mental Health Service, or other clinical or research service area. Within that service, they may be assigned to specific program areas and may be involved in program evaluation and research activities. Psychologist Assistant Chiefs are responsible for the supervision, administrative management, and direction of the program services assigned to them. The Psychologist Assistant Chief may assure compliance with accrediting agency and regulatory requirements, may monitor staff performance, and may develop and implement programs based upon Veterans' needs and current research findings. Duties include but are not limited to resolving staff conflicts which might interfere with the delivery of services, identifying continuing education and training needs, and other clinical and administrative responsibilities to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied. They may interview candidates for positions, recommend appointments, advancements, or disciplinary actions when appropriate. They may develop position descriptions and functional statements and are responsible for professional and administrative management of an assigned area. They may make selections, assign personnel, and serve as a mentor to help employees develop their full potential. The Psychologist Assistant Chief maintains interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish medical center goals and fosters and maintains community contacts. They may develop and initiate new treatment programs and may develop policies and procedures. Psychologist Assistant Chiefs independently provide psychological services at all levels of complexity and consult with peers and supervisors as appropriate.

(8) Psychologist, GS-14 (Service Chief)

(a) **Experience.** At least three years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Ability to organize work, set priorities, delegate tasks, and meets multiple deadlines.

2. Knowledge of and ability to utilize evidence based practices and clinical practice guidelines appropriately and ability to guide staff in using these tools.

3. Ability to deal effectively with individuals or groups.
4. Skill in managing and directing the work of others to accomplish program goals and objectives.
5. Ability to translate management goals and objectives into well-coordinated and controlled work operations.
6. Ability to establish and monitor production and performance priorities and standards.
7. Ability to analyze organizational and operational problems and to develop and implement solutions that result in sound operation of the program.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The Psychologist Service Chief manages a stand-alone Service, Product Line or Service Line. They typically have line and staff authority for resource allocations within the area of responsibility, and ensure the efficient operation of the organizational unit. Decisions are made exercising wide latitude and independent judgment. They have broad and overall responsibility for the service-level department and full responsibility for clinical practice, program management, education, human resource management and supervision for the service, as appropriate. They autonomously manage substantive parts of specialized, complex, professional services which significantly impact the care provided to Veterans. They provide leadership with objective, independent assessments and recommendations for policy, operational and administrative issues and initiatives requiring decision and action. Examples include but are not limited to discipline-specific programs (typically in the role of Psychology Service Chief) or the overall system of mental health programs (typically in the role of Associate Chief of Staff for Mental Health), typically at lower level complexity facilities such as level 2 (medium complexity) or level 3 (low complexity). The Service Chief has overall responsibility for planning, assessing, and evaluating programs to ensure coordination between care delivered by the program and overall delivery of health care within the facility. They interpret a wide variety of data and process data related to program planning and the specialized needs of the Veteran, the service, and the medical center. They assure compliance with accrediting agency and regulatory requirements and assure corrective action is initiated as needed. Service Chiefs ensure policies or issues have been fully coordinated, vetted, and staffed. They advise leadership on policy implications, key issues, and relationships to both internal and external interest groups, and recommend courses of action. They maintain interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish medical center goals. Service Chiefs coordinate and negotiate resolutions to complex problems. They may prepare special reports and responses, Congressional responses, briefing papers, issue briefs, and decision papers for the medical center leadership, which may be highly sensitive, confidential, and of a complex nature as requested. They are responsible for professional and administrative management of an assigned area which may include budget execution. Service Chiefs develop policies and procedures and may develop performance standards, position descriptions and functional

statements. They conduct performance appraisals and perform other clinical and administrative responsibilities related to management of staff to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied. They may set training objectives and delegate responsibilities to subordinate sections.

(9) Psychologist, GS-14 (VISN Manager)

(a) **Experience.** At least three years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to understand and communicate existing policies and regulations.
2. Knowledge of and ability to utilize resource materials as well as ability to develop new materials when needed.
3. Ability to relate to individuals at many different levels both within and external to the organization.
4. Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing with a group of professional staff.
5. Ability to provide information about policy to various stakeholders or audiences in a useable and understandable manner.
6. Ability to develop and recommend new or revised policies that are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The VISN Manager at this level directs program-specific mental health, behavioral health, or other patient care or administrative program or programs at the VISN level. The administrative or technical work is of substantial difficulty, and responsibilities are significant. Individuals at this level have delegated authority to determine long range work plans and assure that implementation of the goals and objectives is carried out for the programs. VISN Managers may be responsible for VISN level management and oversight of one or more mental health programs across the VISN. Examples include but are not limited to any of the range of specific specialty programs, such as addiction therapy or PTSD, within mental health services, organizational development programs, or system redesign programs. The Psychologist VISN Manager serves as the program official, advisor, and analyst for the programs for which they are responsible. They develop and implement the organizational vision for those programs and provide leadership, consultation, and operational guidance in compliance with established regulations, policies,

and procedures. The incumbent applies specialized knowledge of health care and management for planning, organizing, and directing services. Duties include but are not limited to: responsibility for implementing national initiatives for the care and treatment of Veterans; educational programs; program evaluation; quality assurance; policy and procedure formulation for the programs; and providing guidance at the individual program level for facility implementation. They develop policy and procedures related to delivery of services and may provide reporting and data analysis of performance outcomes at the local and VISN level. Incumbent may provide field support through mentoring activities and tracking of outcome trends. They resolve policy implementation issues with appropriate field leaders and may serve as consultants to other management officials in the field or VISN. They coordinate and complete action items from VA Central Office and may author and coordinate white papers and issue briefs as clarification documents, providing technical expertise.

(10) Psychologist, GS-14 (National Manager)

(a) **Experience.** At least three years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to understand and communicate existing policies and regulations.
2. Knowledge of and ability to utilize resource materials as well as ability to develop new materials when needed.
3. Ability to relate to individuals at many different levels both within and external to the organization.
4. Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing with a group of professional staff.
5. Ability to provide information about policy to various stakeholders or audiences in a useable and understandable manner.
6. Ability to develop and recommend new or revised policies that are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Psychologist National Managers at this level direct specific mental health, behavioral health, or other patient care, administrative or organizational development program or programs. The administrative or technical work is difficult in nature, and responsibilities are considerable. Responsibilities include but are not limited to: authority to determine long range work plans and assure that implementation of the goals and objectives are carried out; serve as consultants to other management officials at

the field, VISN, or national level; serve as key program official, advisor and analyst for their programs of assignment; develop and implement their program's vision across VHA. Psychologist National Managers provide leadership, consultation, and operational guidance in compliance with established external agencies and policies and procedures within psychology service. They are responsible for the management and planning of national initiatives having a high degree of visibility and a significant impact on healthcare services and delivery. Examples include but are not limited to mental health or other clinical or administrative programs at the national level (including managers within specific programs and Technical Assistance positions). The incumbent applies specialized knowledge of health care and management for planning, organizing and directing national initiatives in the care and treatment of Veterans, educational programs, program evaluation, quality assurance, and policy and procedure formulation. They develop national policy and procedures related to delivery of care including VHA directives, handbooks, and manuals, training guides, information letters, clinical practice guidelines, standards and criteria for the programs they are responsible for. They provide field support through mentoring and consultative activities as a technical expert and monitor and track outcome trends. They may plan initiatives in a myriad of assignments that cross multiple organizational lines as well as federal and state agencies. They resolve policy implementation issues with appropriate VA Central Office, VISN, regional, and facility field leaders or external review organization representatives. They may collaborate and coordinate services with other Federal and State agencies, external professional organizations, program offices and services within VHA. Psychologist National Managers may provide consultation at the individual program level for facility implementation.

(11) Senior Psychologist Program Manager, GS-15

(a) **Experience.** At least four years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-14 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Skill in managing and directing the work of large, complex organizational units and in applying effective management practices.

2. Skill in persuasion, negotiation, and motivation to negotiate multiple program policies.

3. Skill in interpersonal relationships in dealing with employees and other managers using advanced consultation and problem solving skills.

4. Skill in the application and analysis of measurement tools to systems issues.

5. Ability to balance responsibilities in a complex environment and to work with great autonomy; ability to set priorities and delegate tasks, meet multiple deadlines, analyze complex organizational problems; and ability to develop and implement effective solutions

for those problems.

6. Ability to assess need for basic and complex services across multiple programmatic contexts.

7. Ability to coordinate the efforts of multiple program elements across a complex system.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Psychology Program Managers at the GS-15 level generally manage large, complex programs in Complexity Level 1 (High Complexity) facilities, or in facilities of lesser complexity levels that have large psychology or mental health services. Responsibilities may include supervision. Senior psychologist program managers have very broad responsibility for multiple programs or have responsibility for a large service organization that is of considerable scope, size, and complexity. Programs include but are not limited to addiction, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health intensive case management (MHICM), mental health compensation and pension examination (C&P) programs, Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center, inpatient mental health, residential rehabilitation, domiciliary, palliative care, neuropsychology, and internship and postdoctoral fellowship training programs; managers of an off-campus site; psychology program oversight and coordination as a psychology executive; and program oversight and coordination for education programs (typically seen in roles such as ACOS for Education) or research programs (typically seen in roles such as ACOS for Research). Responsibilities include strategic planning to ensure the provision of quality services to meet the needs of the Veterans being served, development of short- and long-range goals and plans; development and implementation of policies and procedures to ensure that plans are carried out and goals are met; management of administrative and programmatic resources; and monitoring outcomes using data-driven quality assurance processes. Decisions affect staff and other resources associated with the programs managed; decisions are made exercising very wide latitude and independent judgment. They have oversight of administrative and programmatic resources and deploy those resources in support of the program needs. The programs managed are substantial and deliver specialized, complex, highly professional services, significantly impacting the health care provided to Veterans. Senior Psychologist Program Managers have full responsibility for oversight of the professional practice of psychology in medical centers or health care systems and ensure the highest quality of psychological care provided to Veterans throughout the facility and its affiliated clinics.

(12) **Senior Psychologist Clinician Investigator, GS-15**

(a) **Experience.** At least four years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-14 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Ability to translate national research goals or priorities into specific scientific project activities of significant complexity and sufficient sustainability.

2. Ability to create, organize, manage, and maintain high quality (e.g., funded, peer reviewed) research programs independently.

3. Knowledge of budget control procedures that include funding from multiple sources which may vary annually.

4. Skill in managing and directing the work of large, complex research projects and in applying effective management practices.

5. Skill in persuasion, negotiation, and motivation to negotiate multiple program requirements.

6. Skill in interpersonal relationships in dealing with employees and other managers using advanced consultation and problem solving skills.

7. Ability to balance responsibilities in a complex environment and to work with great autonomy; to set priorities and delegate tasks, meet multiple deadlines, analyze complex organizational problems; develop and implement effective solutions for those problems; and assess need for basic and complex services across multiple programmatic contexts.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety, and must be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Senior psychologist clinician investigators perform assignments at the highest level of investigative independence involving complex research programs or multi-site trials. Their contributions substantially advance the field of psychology and are often internationally recognized. They have a substantial number of peer-reviewed publications and have a consistent record of presenting their findings at national or international scientific meetings. Research Psychologists may be assigned to research programs at the local, VISN or National level, including Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Care programs (MIRECCs), Centers of Excellence (CoEs), the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or similar research-focused settings. Responsibilities include active involvement as principal investigators for peer reviewed VA, NIH, or comparably rigorous intramural or extramural funded research programs, high-level peer review activities for VA and non-VA research (e.g., membership on standing scientific review panels for VA or NIH proposals), service as editor, associate editor, or action editor of major peer-reviewed journals, and service on national scientific advisory boards for Federal funding agencies (e.g., VA, Department of Defense, NIH), Federally-funded scientific and translational research centers (e.g., NIH research centers, VA centers of excellence) and large-scale national research consortia in Federal or non-federal realms. Characteristic of the senior psychologist clinician investigator position is recognition at the national and international level for scientific excellence. In addition to high level involvement in peer-reviewed research and other peer review activities, this recognition must be demonstrated by attainment of at least four of the following: an extensive publication record in the nationally

recognized peer-reviewed professional literature; a consistent record of presentation of findings at national and international scientific meetings; recognition by VA or NIH as a senior career scientist or its equivalent (e.g. Senior Research Career Scientist); an academic appointment at a VA-affiliated medical school or local university at the rank of Full Professor or equivalent; or full responsibility for direction of a complex research program, multi-site trial, or multiple funded research projects.

(13) Senior Psychologist, GS-15 (Service Chief)

(a) **Experience.** At least four years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-14 level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Ability to supervise and manage a large group of professional staff effectively.

2. Skill in interpersonal relationships, including conflict resolution and ability to work collaboratively with supervisors from other units.

3. Ability to accurately apply the qualification standards, assesses the potential of current and prospective employees, and promotes their professional development.

4. Ability to develop appropriate productivity standards for professional staff, often across multiple program lines.

5. Knowledge of the goals and objectives of the medical center and VISN and ability to communicate these to subordinates.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Senior Psychologist Service Chief at the GS-15 level generally manages programs in Complexity Level 1 (High Complexity) facilities or in facilities of lesser complexity levels that have large psychology or mental health programs. They are responsible for all professional, management, and administrative aspects of the service or organizational entity. Supervision and resource management involve major decisions, and work activities and supervision significantly affect the ability of staff to provide comprehensive services to Veterans. The service or organizational entity is a major component of the medical center and the services or programs supervised are highly professional, technical, and complex. Examples include but are not limited to discipline-specific programs (typically in the role of Psychology Service Chief), the overall system of mental health programs (typically in the role of Associate Chief of Staff for Mental Health), research programs (typically in the role of Associate Chief of Staff for Research), or education programs (typically in the role of Associate Chief of Staff for Education). Responsibilities include oversight of a large, complex organization that encompasses several component parts

integral to the functioning of the medical center or, alternatively, one large service or organization. They have broad and overall responsibility for a service-level organizational unit and have full responsibility for clinical practice, program management, education, human resource management, and supervision for the service. They autonomously manage substantive parts of specialized, complex, professional services which significantly impact the care provided to Veterans. They provide leadership with objective, independent assessments and recommendations for policy, operational, and administrative issues and initiatives requiring decision and action. They monitor work performance to ensure that requirements are satisfied; interpret and process a wide variety of data related to program planning and specialized needs of the Veterans, the service, and the medical center; ensure policies or issues have been fully coordinated, vetted, and staffed; advise leadership on implications, key issues, and relationships to interest groups (both internal and external) and recommend courses of action. They coordinate and negotiate resolutions to complex problems. They assure compliance with accrediting agencies and regulatory requirements and assure corrective action is initiated as needed. They are responsible for professional and administrative management of an assigned area which may include budget execution. They maintain interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish medical center goals. They may prepare special reports and responses, Congressional responses, briefing papers, issue briefs, and decision papers for the medical center leadership, which may be highly sensitive, confidential, and of a complex nature. They develop policies and procedures and may develop performance standards, position descriptions and functional statements. They monitor the clinical performance of staff, conduct performance appraisals, and perform other clinical and administrative responsibilities to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied. They may set training objectives for staff and delegate responsibilities to subordinate sections.

(14) Senior Psychologist, GS-15 (VISN Manager)

(a) **Experience.** At least 4 years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-14 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to communicate existing policies and regulations effectively.
2. Knowledge of and ability to utilize resource materials and to develop new materials when needed.
3. Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing with a group of professional staff and management officials who are often at the highest management levels.
4. Ability to develop and recommend new or revised policies that are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

5. Skill in leading senior management officials in policy development.

6. Ability to influence high level officials in adoption of and conformance to performance measures, monitors, and other policy guidelines.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The Senior Psychologist (VISN Manager) at this level direct a large, complex mental health, behavioral health, or other patient care or administrative program or may have responsibility for several large and complex programs at the VISN. The VISN Manager position is characterized by the scope and high level of complexity of their duties. They have the overall responsibility for implementing, planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, reviewing, evaluating, and improving the operations of their area of responsibility within the VISN. They provide overall leadership, guidance, and direction for their programs or services across the VISN. The Senior Psychologist VISN Manager exerts a major, significant, and VISN or VHA-wide impact on the overall functioning of the organizational entity. Assignments may include but are not limited to the system of mental health programs across the VISN (typically in the role of the VISN Chief Mental Health Officer); systems redesign programs, or organizational development programs. Responsibilities include overall planning, direction, and execution of the area of responsibility. Consultation is provided to high level officials in the field, at the VISN, and at VA Central Office (VACO). The incumbent applies specialized knowledge of health care and management for planning, organizing, and directing services. They provide guidance to the field regarding their area of responsibility and often act as a conduit of information between VACO and the field. They monitor and support VISN compliance with relevant VHA directives, handbooks, manuals, memoranda, policies, program guides, and information letters. They are responsible for implementing national policies and procedures, and they resolve policy implementation issues as they arise. They develop, implement, and lead team management groups to effectively accomplish goals, focus on customer needs, ensure and maintains quality, and accomplish the mission and vision. They develop and expand their area's capacities, responsiveness, and image within the VISN and community. They may author and coordinate white papers, issue briefs, and similar official documents. They provide leadership in their area of responsibility to the VISN management and to the field and develop or provide guidance in developing policies that are aligned with the network's goals. They may supervise subordinate positions assigned to their area.

(15) **Senior Psychologist, GS-15 (National Manager)**

(a) **Experience.** At least 4 years of experience as a professional psychologist, with at least one year equivalent to the GS-14 grade level.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of and ability to communicate existing policies and regulations effectively.

2. Knowledge of and ability to utilize resource materials and to develop new materials when needed.

3. Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing with a diverse group of professional staff and management officials who are often at the highest management levels.

4. Ability to develop and recommend new or revised policies that are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

5. Skill in leading senior management officials in policy development.

6. Ability to influence high level officials in adoption of and conformance to performance measures, monitors, and other policy guidelines.

(c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Senior Psychologist National Managers at this level direct a large, complex mental health, behavioral health, or other patient care or administrative program at the VA Central Office (VACO) level or may have responsibility for several programs at the VACO level. The National Manager position is characterized by the scope and high level of complexity of their duties. The administrative or technical work is of substantial difficulty, and responsibilities are significant. They provide overall leadership, guidance, and direction for their programs or services across the VHA. The Senior Psychologist National Manager exerts a major and significant impact on the overall functioning of the organizational entity and the impact is VHA-wide. Assignments include but are not limited to mental health or other clinical or administrative programs at the national level (including National Mental Health Director and Deputy Director positions or Senior Consultant positions), or research or education programs (such as the Mental Illness, Research, and Education Clinical Center). The incumbent applies specialized knowledge of health care and management for planning, organizing, and directing national initiatives in the care and treatment of Veterans, educational programs, program evaluation, quality assurance, and policy and procedure formulation. They direct large programs of substantial size and impact on VHA as a whole, and work cooperatively with other programs in VA in support of their strategic goals and objectives. They secure the resources necessary to implement their programs and to educate others. Responsibilities include overall planning, direction, and execution of the area of responsibility. Consultation is provided to high level officials in the field, at the VISN, and at VA Central Office (VACO). They provide guidance to the field regarding their area of responsibility and often act as a conduit of information between VACO and the field. They are responsible for developing and implementing national policies and procedures, and they resolve policy implementation issues as they arise. They plan initiatives in a myriad of assignments that cross multiple organizational lines as well as federal and state agencies. They may author and coordinate white papers, issue briefs, and similar official documents. They provide leadership in their area of responsibility to VACO management and to the field and develop or provide guidance in developing policies that are aligned with VHA's goals. They may develop performance standards, position descriptions and functional statements. They conduct performance appraisals and perform other clinical

and administrative responsibilities related to management of staff to ensure that the mission of the program is accomplished.

5. DEVIATIONS

a. The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for psychologists in VHA whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignments, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

b. Under no circumstances may the educational or licensure requirements be waived.

c. The placement of individuals in grade levels not described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, in VHA Central Office.

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)