Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

VA HANDBOOK 5005/110
Transmittal Sheet
May 14, 2019

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS), GS-0601, occupation, appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) and 38 U.S.C. § 7405 (a)(1)(B).

2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this issuance replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing Appendix G42. The revised standards are effective on the date of this publication; however, no action may be taken by the Human Resources Officer to convert or promote employees until training and guidance is received on the implementation of the standard. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the Office of Human Resources Management website. Significant changes include:

   a. Adds Definitions.

   b. Adds additional certification of Assistive Technology-Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists.

   c. Deletes paragraph 2f, "Non-Certified BROS Hired Temporary" as an exception to the certification requirements.

   d. Revises the language for Loss of Credential to clarify that the provisions of 38 USC 7402(f) apply to all certifications currently or previously possessed.

   e. Revises the knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) for the GS-11 grade level.

3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.

4. **RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.

5. **RESCISSIONS:** VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G42, dated July 22, 2011 and June 15, 2010.

CERTIFIED BY:

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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 the revisions made to this qualification standard.

FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE: PART II APPENDIX G42
EFFECTIVE DATE: May 14, 2019

BLIND REHABILITATION OUTPATIENT SPECIALIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD GS-0601 Veterans Health Administration

1. **COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment as a Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). This standard applies to all VHA BROS positions. BROS are professionals who have been cross-trained to provide outpatient services in blind/low vision rehabilitation[,] including orientation and mobility, communication and daily living, low vision therapy, technology and computer access and manual skills. The work requires the application of knowledge of the concepts, principles, and practices of blind and vision rehabilitation[,] and the use of assessments, therapies, and technology to improve the independent function, quality of life and adjustment for patients who are blind or visually impaired. BROS evaluate patients by interviews, tests, and measurements[.] [] [BROS] use such findings solely and/or as a part of an interdisciplinary team to develop and implement blind and vision rehabilitation programs for individual patients. Instructional activities are directed toward achieving therapeutic objectives for patients who are blind and visually impaired in effective literacy and communication skills, orientation to and management of the environment, safe ambulation and travel, manual skills, proficiency and understanding in activities of daily living, pursuit of a vocation and vocational skills, and adjustment to visual [impairment].
   NOTE: *See Blind Rehabilitation Specialist (BRS) qualification standard, which includes Visual Impairment Service Team (VIST) Coordinator.*

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. DEFINITIONS.

a. **Journey Level.** The BROS initial performance level for this qualification standard is the GS-11 grade level. The full performance level for BROS is the GS-12 grade level.

b. **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must demonstrate possession of the knowledge, skills[,] and abilities associated with current blind and vision rehabilitation practice as outlined in the current scope and standards of practice[,] for blind and vision rehabilitation. One or more of the following may have evidenced this:

(1) The equivalent of one year of active practice. Active practice means paid/non-paid employment (VA or Non-VA) as a BRS or BROS.

(2) Academic course work leading to an advanced degree in blind or vision rehabilitation[,] or related therapeutic intervention program.

c. **Quality of Experience**. The work to be credited is at a level comparable to BROS experience at the same or next lower grade level than the grade level being considered for placement.

d. **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a professional BROS is credited according to its relationship to the full-time work week. For example, a BROS would receive one week of full-time credit for each two weeks of half-time work.

e. **Content Specialty.** Specialized content areas of blind and vision rehabilitation include, but are not limited to: orientation and mobility, low vision therapy, vision rehabilitation therapy, manual skills, technology, and computer access for people who are visually impaired, and case-management for disability resulting from blindness.

4. BASIC REQUIREMENTS.

a. **Citizenship.** 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 3g, of this part.)

b. **Education and Experience**

(1) The individual must have earned:

(a) A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a major field of study in blind or vision rehabilitation, [or a closely] related program in rehabilitation, special education, family and consumer science education, technology, and industrial arts education;
OR,

(b) A master's degree from an accredited college or university with a major field of study in blind or vision rehabilitation, [or a closely] related program in

rehabilitation, special education, family and consumer science education, technology, and industrial arts education;

OR,

(c) A bachelor's [or master's] degree from an accredited college or university (without a major field of study as outlined in (1)(a) and (b) above) and obtained a certificate from an accredited college or university in the core curriculum in orientation and mobility, vision rehabilitation therapy, assistive technology for blind and visually impaired individuals, or low vision therapy. This education must have included supervised practice; and

(d) Completion of one year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the BRS, GS-9 grade level;

OR,

(e) Three (3) years of progressively higher-level graduate education leading to a doctoral degree in blind rehabilitation or a directly related field.

(2) Foreign graduates must have proof of a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university (or foreign equivalent, as verified through an independent credential evaluation company), with a specialization in blind rehabilitation.

c. **Certification. Required at all levels.**

(1) Applicants must possess at least one active, current, full, and unrestricted certification to be eligible for appointment.

(2) An applicant who has, or ever had his/her certification suspended, restricted, limited, or issued/placed in a probationary status may be appointed only in accordance with the provisions in Chapter 3, Section B, Paragraph 16 of this part. An applicant who has or has ever had a certification revoked or terminated for cause, or voluntarily relinquished such certification after being notified in writing by the State of potential revocation or termination for cause, is ineligible for employment and must be removed from the GS-0601 series. This applies even if the applicant possesses one or more valid certifications or registration (38 U.S.C. § 7402(f)).

NOTE: *The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP) administers [four (4)] certification programs: Low Vision Therapy, Orientation, and Mobility, [Certified Assistive Technology Instructions Specialist] and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. They may then use the designation for the certification they hold (as listed in subparagraph (2)) below:*

(3) BROS who provide the following services must obtain and maintain one certification at the GS-11 grade level and two certifications at the GS-12 grade level granted by ACVREP as follows:

(a) Orientation and mobility training - Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS®).
(b) Communication and daily living therapy - Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (CVRT®).

(c) Low vision therapy - Certified Low Vision Therapists (CLVT®).

[(d) Assistive technology - Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist (CATIS®)].

d. **Loss of Credential.** Once certified, a BROS must maintain a full, valid, and unrestricted independent certification[(s)] to remain qualified for employment. Loss of certification[(s)] will result in removal from the BROS occupation and may result in termination of employment.

[ ]

e. **Grandfathering Provision.** All BROS employed in VHA in this occupation 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 and certification(s) that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:

(1) Such employees may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or changed to lower grade within the occupation.

(2) Employees 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) Employees initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain additional education and/or certification(s) that meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard must maintain the required equivalent credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

(4) If a BROS who was retained under this provision leaves 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.** [Candidates who are not proficient in written and spoken English will not be appointed to serve in a direct patient-care capacity in VHA under the authority of 38 U.S.C. chapters 73 or 74. See Chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5a, this part.]

5. **GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATIONS.** In addition to the basic requirements, the following criteria must be used when determining the appropriate grade assignment of candidates. **NOTE:** *Appointments of BRSs at the [ ] GS-9 grade level is made in accordance with Appendix G41 (Blind Rehabilitation Specialist Qualification Standard). The only grade levels for BROS positions are the GS-11 and GS-12 grade levels as stated below.*

a. **BROS, GS-11 (Entry level)**

(1) **Experience.** [None beyond the basic requirements.]

(2) **Certification.** Candidates must meet the certification requirements in subparagraph 2c above (at least one certification from ACVREP).

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

(a) Knowledge and understanding of highly specialized complex evaluations and diagnostic tests and procedures of blind/vision rehabilitation.

(b) Ability to properly assess a wide variety of patients having multiple disabilities to make recommendations for blind/vision rehabilitation therapeutic interventions.

(c) [Skill in development and writing of a] blind/vision rehabilitation plan that includes evaluation information from multiple disciplines with observable, measurable goals and that identifies specific outcomes.

(d) Knowledge of teaching methods and learning principles.

(e) Ability to employ interventions, unusual motivational techniques, and coordinate treatment with other professionals to achieve outcomes of the rehabilitation plan.

[(f) Skill in recommending appropriate blind/vision rehabilitation prosthetic devices for patients within scope of practice, making adaptations and modifications as required.

(g) Ability to plan, direct, and distribute work assignments to volunteers, assistants, interns, and/or BRSs at lower grade levels and perform assigned mentoring duties for staff, students, and interns.]

(4) **Assignment.** Individuals in this assignment serve in a developmental capacity as the BROS at a medical center[,] or an outpatient clinic[,] and in patients' homes and communities. BROS are responsible for decision-making and [ ] independent care under the direction of their supervisors and the Blind Rehabilitation National Consultant for their region. Individuals in this assignment serve as a member of a specialty care team. At the GS-11 level, BROS[s] will receive training and oversight from the Blind Rehabilitation National Consultant for their regions.

[**NOTE***: Upon hire, GS-11 BROS are required to obtain a 2nd certification from ACVREP within 2 years of the initial appointment date to demonstrate journey mastery in two specialty areas and to become a GS-12 BROS. Failure to do so will result in removal from the BROS occupation and may result in termination of employment.]*

b. **BROS, GS-12 (Full Performance Level)**

(1) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, completion of a minimum of 1 year of experience equivalent to the GS-11 grade level [is required.]

(2) **Certification.** Candidates must meet the certification requirements in subparagraph 3c above. BROS at the GS-12 grade level must achieve two ACVREP certifications to demonstrate full mastery in two areas of blind rehabilitation.

(3) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).** In addition to meeting the KSAs at the GS-11 grade level, the candidate must fully demonstrate all [of] the following KSAs:

(a) Skill to independently develop, plan, and administer complex treatment programs.

(b) Ability to act as a subject matter expert in the blind/vision rehabilitation field[,] and as consultant, supervisor[,] and/or mentor in evaluating and treating patients in specialty or program areas.

(c) Ability to coordinate, motivate, and effectively manage staff and/or committee members to include organizing work, setting priorities, and delegating tasks and responsibilities.

(d) Ability to disseminate appropriate information through various media as a consultant or mentor.

(e) Skill in interpersonal relationships in dealing with patients, employees, other team leaders, managers, and other stakeholders.

(f) Ability to identify team group dynamics, objectively observe, and modify behaviors.

(g) Ability to apply decision-making principles to adjust programs on a day-to-day basis, to develop short[-]term and long[-]range goals, and to plan for future utilization of resources.

(4) **Assignment.** Individuals in this assignment may serve as the only BROS at a medical center[,] or an outpatient clinic[,] or in patients' homes and communities, and are responsible for independent decision-making and independent care. Individuals in this assignment may serve as a member of, or as [a] consultant to a specialty care team[,] such as the Polytrauma System of Care. BROS will demonstrate mastery abilities in two of the blind/vision rehabilitation specialty areas: orientation and mobility, low vision

therapy, vision rehabilitation therapy, and assistive technology [ ] for blind and visually impaired individuals. BROS will also demonstrate advanced skill in the practice of the other content specialties in blind rehabilitation, e.g., computer training and manual skills. At the GS-12 grade level, BROS practice independently, seeking support from the Blind Rehabilitation Service National Consultant for the region when necessary.

NOTE: *GS-13 grade level and above. Assignments as Supervisory BRS, National Program Consultant, Assistant Chief, and/or Service Chief are filled as BRS ([See] Blind Rehabilitation Specialist qualification standard).*

6. DEVIATIONS.

a. An approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for an employee whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignment, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

b. Under no circumstances will the educational or certification requirements be waived.

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

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)