

October 5, 2020

VALOR PROGRAM SOP

Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Washington, DC 20420

VALOR PROGRAM SOP
Transmittal Sheet
October 5, 2020

**VA LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES RESIDENCY (VALOR) PROGRAM
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP)**

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) implements the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Learning Opportunities Residency (VALOR) program.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENT: This SOP sets forth the policy for VHA to implement a recruitment program that allows outstanding college students an opportunity to develop skills necessary for employment retention at approved VA medical facilities.

3. RELATED ISSUES: None.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Workforce Management and Consulting Office (WMC/10A2A4) program office is responsible for the contents of this SOP. Questions may be addressed to VHAVALORSupport@va.gov.

5. RESCISSIONS: None.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This VHA SOP is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of October 2023. This VHA SOP will continue to serve as a national VHA policy until it is recertified.

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Chief Officer
Workforce Management and Consulting

NOTE: *All references herein to VA and VHA documents incorporate by reference subsequent VA and VHA documents on the same or similar subject matter.*

DISTRIBUTION: Emailed to the VALOR Coordinators Distribution List on October 28, 2020.

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VA LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES RESIDENCY (VALOR) PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) SOP implements the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Learning Opportunities Residency (VALOR) program and provides specific direction and standards related to the operation of VALOR within VHA. The purpose of VALOR is to provide an opportunity for outstanding college students to develop clinical competencies at an approved VA medical facility and serves as a recruitment tool to encounter students before they enter the VA workforce.

AUTHORITY: 38 U.S.C. 7405.

2. BACKGROUND

As the Nation's largest integrated health care delivery system, VHA workforce challenges mirror those of the health care industry. VHA remains fully engaged in a fiercely competitive clinical recruitment market and, therefore, faces similar challenges as our private sector counterparts. VA student programs are a critical part of VA's succession plan and a key source of candidates for critical hybrid Title 38 and Title 38 occupations. VALOR serves as a recruitment and retention program to encounter students before they enter the VA workforce. VALOR provides salary dollars and opportunities for outstanding students to develop understanding, confidence and competencies while working at an approved VA health care facility.

3. POLICY

It is VHA policy that the Office of Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) establish and implement VA medical facility VALOR programs. All VA medical facilities participating in VALOR are subject to the program criteria set forth in this SOP, unless otherwise specified.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Chief Officer, Workforce Management and Consulting.** The Chief Officer, Workforce Management and Consulting is responsible for ensuring overall VHA compliance with this SOP.

b. **Director, Scholarships and Clinical Education.** The Director of Scholarships and Clinical Education (S&CE) determines the strategic direction and effectiveness of the VALOR program annually. The Director, S&CE is responsible for:

(1) Allocating adequate resources to implement, manage, and administer the VALOR program;

(2) Evaluating the impact of VALOR including systematic measurement and program oversight from a national level;

(3) Reviewing and approving suspension recommendations submitted by VALOR Program Manager for a VA medical facility in VALOR for its failure to comply with program requirements.

c. **VA Medical Facility Director.** Each VA medical facility Director is responsible for:

(1) Committing to hire qualified Registered Nurses or Medical Technologist VALOR students in the completion occupation in accordance with the VA policy and procedures. These procedures should consider any internal recruitment and bargaining unit agreements which must be satisfied prior to consideration of VA student program candidates;

(2) Implementing and managing the VA facility-level VALOR program consistent with this SOP;

(3) Endorsing students' participation in the VALOR program.

d. **VA Learning Opportunities Residency Program Manager.** The VALOR Program Manager determines VA medical facility compliance with VALOR program requirements. The VALOR Program Manager is responsible for:

(1) Maintaining a list of approved VA medical facilities selected for participation in the VALOR program annually;

(2) Reviewing VA medical facility proposals and supporting documentation and approving or disapproving VALOR sites;

(3) Conducting coordinator and participant surveys annually to assess the effectiveness of administration of VA medical facility VALOR programs;

(4) Recommending to the Director, S&CE the suspension of a VA medical facility participation in VALOR for failure to comply with virtual and on-site program review requirements; and

(5) Conducting VALOR Coordinator training throughout the year to ensure new coordinator knowledge and competencies.

e. **VA Medical Facility VA Learning Opportunities Residency Program Coordinator.** The VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinator is responsible for:

(1) Submitting an initial proposal to the VALOR Program Manager and resubmitting a proposal every five years in accordance with VALOR Program Procedures (see Appendix A);

(2) Coordinating recruitment, selection, and coding of VALOR students with Human Resources personnel;

(3) Submitting all required program documents to VA medical facility Director for endorsement;

(4) Coordinating training of VALOR students with VALOR Preceptors;

(5) Submitting initial and quarterly reports as required;

(6) Submitting documentation for virtual and on-site program reviews per Appendix C as required; and

(7) Coordinate hiring and placement of VALOR students with appropriate recruitment staff by reviewing direct hiring authorities and utilizing Title 38 flexibilities.

5. VALOR PROGRAM PROPOSALS

The VALOR program proposal is used by the VALOR Program Manager to evaluate the current recruitment and retention need at the VA medical facility level. Please see Appendix B for additional VALOR proposal guidelines. Proposals to become an approved VALOR site are submitted by VA facility VALOR Program Coordinators by the last workday of December annually.

a. Proposals to renew as an approved VALOR site must be submitted by VA facility VALOR Program Coordinators by September 30th and every five (5) years thereafter.

b. Proposals must contain:

(1) Evidence of a recruitment or retention need;

(2) Student, Preceptor, and Program evaluation tools;

(3) Number of students requested;

(4) Clinical Instructor Profile form for the VA medical facility Program Coordinator;

(5) The VA medical facility Director's endorsement;

(6) Clinical or Didactic Education Plan; and

c. Recruitment or retention plan for VALOR graduates.

d. The VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinator is notified by the VALOR Program Manager of approval or disapproval, and an expiration date will be provided, if approved.

6. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

a. To participate in VALOR, a VA medical facility must have:

(1) A nurse, or medical technologist (as appropriate) with a master's degree to serve as the VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinator.

(2) Education and clinical resources to provide seminars, conferences, and other activities to support the objectives of the program.

(3) A nurse or medical technologist (as appropriate) with a bachelor's degree and a minimum of three (3) years of experience after residency to function as preceptors for the students (the same preceptor is expected to precept the student throughout the experience);

(4) Evidence of recruitment/retention needs based on the VA medical facility's Workforce Succession Plan and vacancy or turnover rates.

b. To participate in VALOR, a student must:

(1) Be able to complete 400 hours as a VALOR student at a VA medical facility.

(2) Be a United States citizen and meet applicable qualification requirements at the time of entry in the VALOR program.

(3) Not be under a service obligation to any federal, state, or private institution or be a recipient of any federal scholarship that incurs a service obligation to another organization. Must not be obligated to work for another institution following graduation and intend to work for VHA.

(4) Must not be a VHA employee.

(5) Have completed the final semester or quarter of the junior year in a National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS) baccalaureate, or generic equivalent Medical Technologist program for medical technology students, an Accreditation Commission for Education (ACEN), Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) of the American Association of College of Nursing (AACN) accredited baccalaureate or generic equivalent nursing program for nursing students.

7. APPOINTMENTS AND PAY

a. VALOR program students will be appointed under 38 USC 7405 at a per annum training rate equal to 80 percent of the actual salary rate established for January of the current calendar year for:

(1) Nurse I, Level 1, Step 1 for nursing VALOR students;

(2) GS 7, Step 1 for medical technologist VALOR students at the facility.

(3) Students appointed in the previous calendar year (if applicable) and continue in the VALOR program in the next calendar year will be paid at the rate established for the current calendar year.

(4) For HR Smart purposes, the following standardized Job Codes must be utilized for VALOR students:

- 309881 – Externally Funded Student Nurse Technician
- 204659 – Facility/Locally Funded Student Nurse Technician
- 219343 – Externally Funded Student Medical Technologist
- 219342 – Facility Funded Student Medical Technologist

(5) The standard Fund Control Point (FCP) established is 2417. Do not use 2417 for locally funded VALOR students.

b. VALOR students will be paid their regular straight time base rate. VALOR students do not receive any additional premium pay for working on legal holidays, off tours, and on weekends. These students will receive their straight time pay for time off if relieved or prevented solely because of a legal holiday.

c. As trainees, VALOR students may not be assigned to compressed work schedules except when rotating with an assigned preceptor working through a pre-assigned compressed work schedule.

d. VALOR students are entitled to accrue annual and sick leave in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 6301-6312. VALOR students on intermittent appointments are not entitled to leave accruals. An employee whose current employment is limited to less than 90 days is entitled to annual leave only after being employed for a continuous period of 90 days without a break in service. After completing the 90-day period, the employee is entitled to be credited with the leave that would have accrued.

8. VALOR REPORTS

a. **Initial and Quarterly Reports.** The initial report is used to input the student information into the Scholarship & Clinical Education database, validate information, and disburse funds for initial payments. The quarterly reports are used for tracking hours and payment purposes.

b. Upon receipt of the initial reports S&CE staff will validate:

- (1) Accreditation of the college or university;
- (2) The approved quantity of VALOR students;
- (3) Social Security Numbers (SSN); and work and personal email
- (4) The student's information is captured in the application management system.

c. The quarterly reports are submitted and should contain:

d. The VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinator will be notified by the VALOR Program Manager of any non-compliance.

e. Hiring information for all graduating students is validated in HR Smart at the end of the fiscal year.

9. VALOR VIRTUAL PROGRAM REVIEW

a. VALOR Virtual Program Reviews are used to validate VA medical facility compliance with VALOR as delineated in the VALOR Program SOP. Each selected VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinator must submit a response to the Virtual Program Review annually.

b. Selection of VA medical facilities for virtual program reviews will be at the discretion of the VALOR Program Manager.

c. VA medical facilities will be notified by memorandum of the virtual program review a minimum of 30 days in advance.

d. The memorandum will include:

(1) Purpose of the review;

(2) Required response and documents if applicable; and

(3) Response due date.

e. S&CE will review submissions and notify facilities of compliance, recommendations, if applicable, or non-compliance and the required corrective actions to meet compliance.

f. VA medical facilities will be allotted 60 days to submit to S&CE for approval, all responses and corrective actions for discrepancies identified because of the virtual program review.

g. VA medical facilities failing to meet submission requirements will be recommended for suspension by the VALOR Program Manager from participating in the VALOR program until discrepancies are corrected and approved by the Director, S&CE.

h. S&CE will share review findings with VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinators annually through use of the VALOR Quarterly Conference Call.

10. TRAINING

The following training is recommended for all VALOR Coordinators:

a. VALOR Coordinator Orientation. VALOR Coordinator Orientation provides local VALOR Coordinator with the training necessary to administer VALOR at the local

level. To ascertain scheduled training dates and to register for participation, contact the S&CE Office at VHAVALORSupport@va.gov.

11. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

All records regardless of format (paper, electronic, electronic systems) created in the requirements of this SOP must be managed per the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records schedules found in VA Records Control Schedule 10-1. If you have any questions regarding any aspect of records management, you should contact your facility Records Manager or your Records Liaison.

12. COORDINATOR AND PARTICIPANT SURVEYS

a. VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinator and VALOR participant surveys are used to assess the administration of VALOR at the VA medical facility level.

b. Selection of survey frequency, focus, and methodology must be at the discretion of the Director S&CE.

c. VA medical facilities will be notified by memorandum from the Director S&CE of the survey opening and closing dates a minimum of 15 days in advance.

d. S&CE will analyze survey results and share applicable findings or results with VA medical facility VALOR Program Coordinators as appropriate. Information shared with the field will be at the discretion of the Director S&CE.

13. REFERENCES

a. 38 USC 7405.

b. 5 U.S.C. 6301-6312.

VA LEARNING OPPORTUNITY RESIDENCY PROGRAM PROCEDURES

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) initiated the VA Learning Opportunity Residency (VALOR) program in the spring of 1990. This externship program provides opportunities for outstanding students to develop competencies in clinical nursing, and clinical laboratory science while working at an approved VA medical facility. Opportunities for learning include didactic or classroom experiences, competency-based clinical practice with a qualified preceptor, and participation in focused clinical conferences.

1. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

a. To request program participation, submit proposals to Scholarships and Clinical Education (S&CE) by December 29 of the current year. S&CE will notify VA medical facilities of their selection or non-selection as a program site by January 15 of the next year. Selected VA medical facilities are approved as program sites for 5 years. VA medical facilities not selected during an application or review cycle may reapply annually.

b. VA medical facilities may begin recruiting and appointing students after receiving approval as a program site from the Director, SC&E.

c. After filling the approved positions, VA medical facilities must immediately submit to S&CE an initial report using the application management system; if you are unable to fill any position(s), notify S&CE staff by no later than March 30. For subsequent reporting, the quarterly report form for this program is due on the 10th day following the end of each quarter. Reports should only be submitted via the application management system.

d. Appointment as a VALOR student will range from 3 to 12 months, with a minimum requirement of 400 hours. The VA medical facility may elect to request less than 400 hours if the affiliating school's curriculum does not allow a summer appointment of 10 weeks at 40 hours per week. While most students have the largest span of time off from school in the summer months, there are now schools with nontraditional schedules for students. VA medical facilities may apply for start dates other than May for students with rotating time off schedules. Based on the information in the quarterly report form, funds will be transferred to approved sites. All funding is subject to readjustment based on information provided in your quarterly reports. Funding of the VALOR program beyond September 30th is contingent on the availability of centralized funds.

e. Students will be appointed under Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7405 at a salary equal to 80 percent of the local VA medical facility's per annum salary rate for GS 7, Step 1 for the Medical Technologist, and Nurse I, Level 1, Step 1 for Nurses for the current calendar year.

f. Each approved program site is authorized to recruit and appoint the designated number of students per funding cycle (summer to the following summer months). The total number of students funded by S&CE includes continuing students from the previous year and new students. Additional VALOR students may be funded if requested with a justification addressing recruitment and retention difficulties for new graduate hires. Email requests for additional students to VHAVALORSupport@va.gov. If the number of additional positions requested and approved for a site exceeds the funding capabilities of S&CE, local VA medical facility funds may be used to support VALOR students.

g. VALOR pins and certificates for students will be sent to program administrators along with funding allocations. The template for VALOR certificates is on the VALOR SharePoint. Timeliness should be observed when awarding pins and certificates to students. Explain how they get their pins and ordering specs.

h. Former VALOR students may be hired at a salary rate above the minimum, based on superior qualifications such as documented outstanding performance in the VALOR program and/or number of hours completed as a VALOR participant.

2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

a. VA medical facility must have:

(1) A Master's prepared medical technologist or nurse to serve as the Program Coordinator;

(2) Education and clinical resources to provide seminars, conferences, and other activities to support the objectives of the program;

(3) Baccalaureate prepared nurse or medical technologist (GS 9 or above), to function as preceptors for students (the same preceptor is expected to precept the student throughout the experience); and

(4) Evidence of recruitment needs.

b. Students must:

(1) Have a minimum cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. The CGPA must be computed on post-secondary academic work taken within the past 3 years, or;

(2) Based on academic work accepted for credit towards the clinical laboratory science degree.

(3) While a student may have a grade of "C" in a specialty course, the cumulative GPA for their specialty courses may not be less than a 3.0. Only data on official transcripts should be used for determining grade qualifications.

(4) Be able to complete a minimum of 400 hours as a VALOR student in a VA facility.

(5) Be a United States citizen and meet applicable qualification requirements at the time of entry in the VALOR program.

(6) Upon notification by the local VA medical facility of selection as a VALOR program student, confirm acceptance with the local VA medical facility so that the employment process may be initiated;

(7) Selected students are expected to attend the required orientation and completed all mandatory training for trainees; and

(8) Not be under a service obligation to any Federal, state, or private institution, or be a recipient of any Federal scholarship that incurs a service obligation to another organization.

3. VALOR PROGRAM OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

a. VA Medical Facility.

(1) VA medical facilities retention rate will be evaluated annually to establish the approved quantities for future years. Those facilities that have less than a 60% retention rate can anticipate having their approved quantity number reduced. Those facilities that maintain a retention rate above 75% can request additional positions

(2) Funding of VALOR students per VA medical facility will be dependent on the VA medical facility's hiring of VALOR students and available VALOR funding for the current year. Thus, VA medical facilities requesting more than ten (10) participants will need to submit via e-mail a specific request for the number of VALOR participants. The quarterly reports will be used to determine the VA medical facility's hiring of VALOR students.

NOTE: *The number of approved students reflects the total of continuing students from the previous year and new students for the current year.*

(3) Submit an original proposal to become a VALOR program site to S&CE, no later than December 29th of the current year. See VA Learning Opportunity Residency Program Procedures (Appendix A).

NOTE: *Early submissions are encouraged for new programs. The program proposal must follow the guidelines in Appendix B. Reapplying to be a VALOR program site is required every five years to ensure no lapse in program.*

(4) Recruit candidates through contacts with schools or other appropriate organizations or groups.

(5) Collaborate as appropriate with accredited schools or colleges to grant credit for participation in the VALOR program. If academic credit is awarded, a letter of endorsement from the Dean or Director of the affiliated school is required. A current Memorandum of Affiliation (i.e., Educational Program Agreement) with the participating school must be approved by the Medical Center Director and on file at the VA medical center.

(6) Review student applications, interview, and select the program participants. There are no travel funds available to reimburse VALOR students who wish to relocate for this experience.

(7) As facilities become aware of unsuccessful recruitment of VALOR students, notify S&CE staff by March 15 of the current year.

(8) Selected students are expected to attend new employee orientation and other educational opportunities as outlined in the approved program proposal. VALOR students may follow the preceptor's tour of duty including a compressed work week. Any work schedule outside of the customary work schedule for VALOR students (i.e. Saturdays only, once a month, etc.) must be approved by S&CE prior to the student's expected date of hire.

(9) The facility recruitment goal is to place 80 percent of VALOR students into permanent positions. Former VALOR students who become permanent employees may be hired at a salary rate above the minimum based on superior qualifications such as documented outstanding performance in the VALOR program and/or number of hours completed as a VALOR participant.

b. Students.

(1) Submit an application for Federal employment to the VA medical facility where the student wants to be a VALOR student.

(2) Submit a letter from the Dean or Director of the school to the or designee of the chosen VA medical facility. The letter should include a nomination of the student to the program, verification of enrollment as a full-time student (as defined by the school), successful completion of the junior year by May/June of the current year (or its equivalent for rotating schedules), and anticipated graduation within 1 year after entry into the VALOR program for nursing and medical technologist students.

(3) Students must submit a reference from a current faculty member.

(4) Upon notification by the local VA medical facility of selection as a VALOR program student, confirm acceptance with the local VA medical facility so the employment process may be initiated.

VALOR PROPOSAL GUIDELINES (add to AMS)

1. The proposal is to be no longer than five single-spaced typewritten pages.
2. The proposal is to include the following information:
 - a. Description of the VA medical facility's recruitment and retention difficulties. Examples of clinical areas include, but are not limited to:
 - (1) Ambulatory care/outpatient clinics,
 - (2) Medical and/or surgical,
 - (3) Critical care,
 - (4) Psychiatry,
 - (5) Operating room,
 - (6) Dialysis,
 - (7) Hospice,
 - (8) Spinal cord injury or rehabilitation,
 - (9) Hospital Based Home Care (HBHC),
 - (10) Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM),
 - (11) Nursing Home Care Units,
 - (12) Laboratory.
 - b. Identify facility vacancy rates, and top specialty (Nursing and Medical Technologist) shortage areas based on facility workforce succession plans.
 - c. Description of the VA medical facility clinical strengths in the unit(s) where Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Learning Opportunities Residency (VALOR) program students will be placed. Examples are: characteristics of patients using the services, staffing patterns, availability of qualified preceptors, and specific projects or studies being conducted in the clinical areas.
 - d. Outline of the didactic and clinical educational plan with statement of anticipated length of the program. This should include classroom and clinical objectives of each requested clinical placement area and an overview of rounds, continuing education courses clinical conferences or other related activities that would be available to VALOR students.

e. Evaluation plan for the VALOR program. This should include a sample of the tool that will be used to evaluate the students' satisfaction of the program, the students' perception of their clinical experiences while in the VALOR program (e.g., whether their educational experiences in the VALOR program are equal or superior to their other academic training), and the preceptors' perception of their role and of students' contribution to patient care.

f. Preceptor Training. Identify relevant training for the Preceptors to fulfill their roles.

g. Recruitment/Retention Plan for VALOR graduates.

h. Number of VALOR program students desired for each clinical unit.

i. Curriculum vitae for the program coordinator. Use VA Form 10-0105b, Clinical Instructor Profile form. The form is available on the VALOR SharePoint site at: <http://vaww.hrm.wmc.va.gov/SCE/VALOR/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

j. Letter of endorsement from the VA medical facility Director. If academic credit is awarded to the student, a letter of support must be included from the Dean or Director of the student's current school.

3. Additional Information/Mailing Address:

For additional information email VHAVALORSupport@va.gov

PROGRAM DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES

1. VALOR PROGRAM COORDINATORS

<http://vaww.hrm.wmc.va.gov/SCE/VALOR/default.aspx>

NOTE: This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.

2. VALOR NURSING & MED TECH DOCUMENTS & FORMS

<http://vaww.hrm.wmc.va.gov/SCE/VALOR/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

NOTE: This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.