

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
Interim Certification MOU for FY 2006

The following constitutes agreement between Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, National VA Council #53. This MOU is only applicable for certification tests offered in FY 2006. The terms of the original MOU on Certification dated 2000 are still in effect. Upon completion of the certification tests offered in 2006, management and union will continue negotiations in accordance with the Federal Labor Management Relations Statute and The Master Agreement between DVA/AFGE, issues to include, but not be limited to, frequency of testing, and eligibility to test, in a good faith effort to reach an agreement on full implementation of the certification process.

1. Participation in the Certification Test will be voluntary. All eligible employees will be notified and given an opportunity to participate in each test offered.
2. No adverse action will be taken against an employee as a direct result of participating, or choosing not to participate, in the certification tests; nor will the results negatively impact eligibility to sit for certification in the future.
3. Eligibility for participation in Certification during FY 2006 includes current Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs), GS-996-10, organizationally aligned to the Veterans Service Center or Resource Center (cost centers 3040, 3041) regardless of the location or responsibilities; e.g. out-based, outreach, etc.
4. The GS-10 must have one year Time in Grade (TIG) in order to be promoted to GS-11. A GS-10 who will have accrued one year time in grade within 60 days of the date the test will be eligible to sit for the test, and if they pass, will be promoted once they have accrued the TIG.
5. The VSR must be meeting the local performance standards to be eligible to volunteer to participate, to take the test, and to receive the promotion if successful. VSRs must be meeting current local performance standards at the time of the test. Employees who are placed on a performance improvement plan (PIP) between the day of the test and the effective date for promotion (upon successful completion) will not receive a promotion until the employee is no longer on a PIP. Employees who are placed on a PIP subsequent to their initial authorization to sit for Certification and the actual date of the test will have the authorization rescinded.
6. Veterans Claims Examiners (VCEs), GS-996-11, in the Veterans Service Center, Resource Centers, or Appeals Management Center (cost centers 3040, 3041, or 3045), who are meeting local performance standards may also volunteer to participate in the May 2006 test. Successful VCEs will be eligible for the full \$500 bonus. GS-996-11 "authorizers" who pass certification and assume the full range of VSR duties will be trained in the areas where the individual has not previously performed the duties and/or received training
7. Management will provide VSR "Readiness Training" as specified in the VSR Readiness Training Curriculum, to VSRs who will be eligible for certification testing in 2006. A total of 20 hours will be provided to each eligible VSR.
8. If RO capacity will not allow all eligible VSRs/VCEs to take a test at the same time, then provisions will be made for a test to be given on multiple days at that office with this situation only counting as one test given.

9. Employees who have Time in Grade (TIG) and pass certification will be promoted the pay period following notification to their Regional Office. Employees who do not have TIG at the GS-10 level who pass certification will be promoted when TIG is met.
10. GS-996-11 VSRs or VCE “authorizers” who sit for certification and pass will move into the national GS-996 VSR position description and be subject to the national performance plan and local performance standards.
11. The procedures guiding administration of the test will be covered by the Test Administration Guide as developed by HumRRO and approved by VBA.
12. In order to pass the test, candidates must meet an overall score and a “Compensation” sub score.
13. Employees will receive written feedback concerning their test performance and also have the opportunity to discuss areas for improvement with their supervisor. The purpose of the feedback is to identify knowledge areas in which improvement is needed and direct employees to applicable references available for self-study and research. Written feedback will include:
 - Employee’s overall performance and performance in the area of Compensation. Performance will be described as “Pass” or “Fail”
 - Number of questions asked in each major area. Major areas are Compensation, Pension, Customer Service, Administrative Decisions, and Appeals.
 - Performance level in each major area as shown on a bar graph ranging from “Low” to “High”.
 - References for each missed question including applicable statutory, regulatory, and VBA Manual M21-1 citations, and other guidance such as User Guides. Manual references will include Part and Chapter and paragraph (ex. M21-1, Part III, Chapter 3.06).
14. The parties agree to post implementation bargaining with respect to information that the union is seeking concerning testing data information. It is further agreed that bargaining will commence when the Agency receives appropriate guidance concerning clarification of legal issues involving this matter.
15. A copy of this MOU shall be provided to Local AFGE Presidents by an appropriate management official upon receipt at the facility. The parties may negotiate locally on this subject provided it does not conflict, interfere with, or impair the implementation of this MOU and the Master Agreement.

/s/
William Carson

For Management

/s/
Alberta Franklin

For AFGE / NVAC

May 19, 2006
Date