

A VALUABLE RESOURCE

The HR Academy is your source for learning, collaboration and support.



Volunteers Needed for Focus Groups

HR Academy is always looking for ways to improve. We are seeking volunteers to participate in a series of focus groups to inform future programs. The focus groups are your opportunity to share what you think we do well, how we can improve, and the types of learning you'd like to see. Each focus group will be about an hour. Your participation will be confidential, and any feedback provided will not be attributed to you.

If you're interested in helping shape HR Academy's future, please participate in one of these focus groups. For more information including focus group dates, times, and how to register, please contact, Kimberly Jackson, HR Academy Communications Lead, via email at kimberly.jackson6@va.gov.

We Love to Hear from You!

We are excited to announce that the annual Employee Engagement Questionnaire is now open. This questionnaire allows us to collect feedback to help identify and address specific learning and training needs for the coming year. The results from the questionnaire are combined with other data such as the Competency Gap Assessment results, to help guide the development of training curriculum and new programs. It also helps HR Academy allocate resources to the areas of highest priority.

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THE HR ACADEMY CONNECTION

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

JULY 2013

HR HIGHLIGHTS

HR Highlights helps keep you abreast of the latest news and trends in the HR community. It contains timely and relevant information that you can use in your role as an HR professional. This month, we focus on what's next in VA's performance management cycle.

The Performance Management Cycle - What's Next?

By the end of June, most VA managers and staff should have completed their mid-cycle performance discussions. The mid-cycle discussion is an opportunity for managers and staff to revisit roles, responsibilities and expectations. It's also a chance for managers to review their staff's performance objectives to see if they're on track to meet or exceed them, or to make adjustments.

As HR professionals, we should remind managers of the following:

- If discussions with a staff member result in adjustments to their performance plan or objectives, the manager should implement the changes and make sure the plan is approved.

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Boot Camp Update: Interview with Samia L. Wiley!

The HR Academy Connection sat down with Samia L. Wiley, HR Academy's Training & Evaluation Manager, to discuss the innovative training program, HR Academy Boot Camp. She gave us a behind the scenes look at Boot Camp's origins, shared her thoughts on why this unique course offering is effective, and what's on the horizon for future boot camps.

HRA Connection: Ms. Wiley, thank you for taking the time to talk to us about HR Academy Boot Camp. We've prepared a few questions for you, so let's begin. How did HR Academy come up with the concept for this unique program?

Samia Wiley: Thank you for having me and please, call me Samia. To answer your question, we created HR Academy Boot Camp because we saw that VA's new HR professionals needed to receive foundational HR training from the

beginning of their career. Boot Camp sets them up for success right from the start.

HRA Connection: Boot Camp sounds like it would be of interest to many people and there have already been two Boot Camp cohorts. How many applications did you receive for each cohort?

Samia Wiley: The HR Academy Training team is thrilled with the amount of interest Boot Camp received. For the first Boot Camp cohort, we received close to 200 applications. Then, we received approximately 120 applications for the second Boot Camp cohort.

HRA Connection: Are there any plans for additional Boot Camp cohorts?

Samia Wiley: Due to the high demand we'd like to launch a third Boot Camp cohort early in FY14.

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HR Academy Boot Camp ...continued

HRA Connection: Now that you've completed two cohorts are you able to say which phases of Boot Camp have been the most effective or important for the participants?

Samia Wiley: We've received very positive feedback on the Boot Camp program. The training is designed so that each course and phase builds on the previous one, which culminates in a final week of demonstrated learning. For that reason, I'd say there isn't one phase that's any more important than another.

HRA Connection: What makes Boot Camp different from HR Academy's other learning programs?

Samia Wiley: I think the two biggest differences are that it's a 5-month intensive training program instead of an individual training course and all of the learning takes place in a virtual environment. Participants are required to attend all training courses within the HR Academy Boot Camp and are eligible for graduation upon completion of all course content. Blackboard Collaborate™ is the virtual learning platform that we use to facilitate HR Academy Boot Camp, which saves money. Instructors and participants no longer have to travel for courses, but are still able to communicate and collaborate with one another.

HRA Connection: Can you share some of the challenges you've experienced during the two Boot Camp cohorts and how they were resolved?

Samia Wiley: As I mentioned, HR Academy Boot Camp is a virtual training program, so many of our challenges centered on participants adjusting to using Blackboard Collaborate™ for the first time. That challenge was resolved as participants became more familiar and comfortable with using the platform.

“*We created HR Academy Boot Camp because we saw that VA's new HR professionals needed to receive foundational HR training from the beginning of their career.*”

HRA Connection: Based on what you've learned from the initial Boot Camp experience, does HR Academy have any plans to modify or enhance the program?

Samia Wiley: Yes, absolutely. We're always looking for ways to improve our training programs, and HR Academy Boot Camp is no exception. Currently, we are exploring some ideas for future Boot Camp programs targeted to specific VA occupations. So we encourage everyone to stay tuned and check the HR Academy Boot Camp webpage for the most up-to-date information.



HRA Connection: It sounds like there's some exciting things coming soon. As you continue to develop and refine HR Academy learning programs, how will you use what you've learned from HR Academy Boot Camp?

Samia Wiley: We've taken away a number of lessons learned from our two cohorts. The HR Academy team intends to use these lessons learned to both improve current training programs as well as explore new training opportunities.

HRA Connection: We appreciate you taking time to talk to us. We have one final question for you. After completing HR Academy Boot Camp, how can HR professionals continue to reinforce what they've learned?

Samia Wiley: We encourage all of our HR Academy Boot Camp graduates to apply what they've learned in their day-to-day work. They should also explore some of the more advanced training opportunities available through HR Academy to continue building the skills they gained from Boot Camp.

HRA Connection: Thank you again Samia for taking the time to share some of your insights from HR Academy Boot Camp. We look forward to hearing more from you about the next Boot Camp cohort as well as HR Academy's other learning opportunities. We hope you'll come back and talk to us in the future. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Samia Wiley: Thank you. It was my pleasure. I just want to remind everyone to visit the [HR Academy Boot Camp](#) webpage for information about the next cohort. If you're interested in our other learning opportunities, visit the [HR Academy Learning](#) webpage for information about upcoming courses, as well as the [Course Calendar](#) for detailed course information and to register for a course.



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The Performance Management Cycle - What's Next? ...continued

- The revised plan must be approved and in place at least 90 days prior to the employee's end-of-cycle review.

As we near the end of the performance management cycle, remind managers and staff to keep the lines of communication open. Encourage everyone to continue dialogue throughout the year. Staff should regularly ask questions and share their thoughts on their performance, especially if their mid-cycle discussion results in an adjustment to their performance objectives.

It's also a good time to encourage all VA employees to periodically review their Individual Development Plan (IDP). Reviewing the IDP helps to track how they're doing on their goals and prepare for discussions with their manager at the end of the performance period. Several career planning tools are available within VA that provide guidance on training and career development opportunities. These tools can help employees advance their VA careers. HR professionals can visit HR Academy's [Career Mapping](#) page for more information or register for the [Career Planning Workshop](#) course. Employees in other roles looking for similar formal training and education can visit the [MyCareer@VA site](#) for more information. By using these tools, employees can identify VA jobs that match their specific interests and skill set, and learn the knowledge, skills and developmental activities required for that job.

In the [January 2013 issue](#), we discussed "The Performance Management Cycle – Keys to Success". One of our recommended keys to success was for managers and employees to keep a record of their achievements throughout the performance cycle. Doing so helps employees and managers demonstrate what they've achieved and what they need to accomplish, to better write



their self-assessments. Now that we are past the midpoint of the performance cycle, encourage managers and staff to review their records of achievement and make sure they are up-to-date in preparation for writing end-of-cycle self-assessments. If for some reason they haven't started keeping track, encourage them to start either by journaling, saving emails or keeping hard copies of their work products.

Helping managers and staff remember to keep the lines of communication open, to make sure that their performance plans are current, and to keep an ongoing record of their achievements throughout the performance management cycle helps VA achieve our mission to support our Veterans.

We Love to Hear from You...continued

We encourage you to take the questionnaire to share your thoughts and help us improve. It only takes 15 minutes and your responses are completely confidential. To take the survey visit this [link](#) and input "academy" as the password.

We would also like to share that last November, HR Academy asked you to participate in the Competency Gap Assessment. We are reviewing the data to identify trends and competency gaps. Some of the competencies reviewed in this year's survey include guiding/influencing, planning/time management, attention to detail, change management, and IT application. We'll use the data to determine future training priorities. We're also creating a plan for communicating the survey results to you. It's important that you know the results, and understand what they mean for you. Stay tuned for more information, and thank you again for your continued support in helping us identify and meet your training needs.

Virtual Learning Update

- Registration for HR Academy's Summer 2013 virtual curriculum is now open.
- Registration for three NEW virtual course offerings – Category Rating, Determining Service Computation Dates, and Position Management will open in late August or early September.

Visit the [Course Calendar](#) webpage to see when these and other courses will be offered. Classes fill up quickly, so don't miss your opportunity – register TODAY!

Please remember that registering for a course is a commitment to attend and complete all required coursework. If you find that you are unable to fulfill this requirement, you will have until four days before the close of course registration to withdraw from the course through TMS.

In addition, if you receive an incomplete in a course, you must retake the course in its entirety to receive credit. For more information read the [Course Registration and Attendance Policy](#).



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