



# Department of Veterans Affairs Deployment Lifecycle Guide

*for Human Resources  
Professionals*



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## **You are important to VA.**

As a Human Resources (HR) professional, you are an advocate for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Military Service Members and their supervisors. Your role in the Deployment Lifecycle is to support the service member and ensure the workforce is able to support the VA mission while the service member is deployed by coordinating closely with the supervisor.

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A: Pre-deployment Session Guide

## Deployment Lifecycle

Each branch of service has its own terms for the process Military Service Members go through when they are called to perform military service.

The VA for Vets program defines the process as five phases:

- **Employment & Readiness**  
Begins initially when service members are hired by VA and ends when they receive written or verbal orders to perform military service.
- **Pre-deployment**  
Starts when service members receive orders or notification to perform military service and ends when they depart from VA to their deployment assignment.
- **Deployment**  
Starts when service members depart from VA to perform military service and ends when they complete active duty.
- **Post-deployment**  
Begins when the service members start the military out-processing procedures and initiates the transition back to VA employee status and ends when they return to VA employment.
- **Reintegration**  
Begins when service members complete active duty and ends when they determine they are fully integrated back into the VA workforce.



### Your Role in the Deployment Lifecycle

This roles matrix defines when you, the service member, and his or her supervisor should be involved to ensure a standardized approach throughout the deployment lifecycle.

## Exhibit 1 – Roles Matrix

Employment & Readiness Key Activities	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Sign <i>VA for Vets Letter of Agreement</i>	●	●	
Create or revise <i>Transition Plan</i>	●	●	
Take Employment & Readiness lesson of USERRA Web-based Training (WBT)	★	●	●
Pre-deployment Key Activities	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Inform VA supervisor, preferably in writing, of upcoming deployment	●		
Enter deployment date in the Case Management System (CMS)	●		
Verify deployment date has been entered in the CMS		●	
Initiate <i>Request for Personnel Action, SF 52</i>		●	
Use <i>Pre-deployment Advisor</i>	●		
Participate in HR pre-deployment session (using results from <i>Pre-deployment Advisor</i> )	●		●
Update medical, dental, life and long-term care insurance information	●		
Complete <i>Transition Plan</i>	●	●	
Meet to discuss staffing		●	●
Process <i>Request for Personnel Action, SF 52</i>			●
Take <i>Leading the Way WBT</i>		●	
Take Pre-deployment lesson of USERRA WBT	★	●	●
Deployment Key Activities	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Communicate with deployed service member as agreed upon		●	●
Take Deployment lesson of USERRA WBT		●	●
Post-deployment Key Activities	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Inform VA of upcoming return to employment	●		
Revise <i>Transition Plan</i>		●	
Initiate <i>Request for Personnel Action, SF 52</i>		●	
Process <i>Request for Personnel Action, SF 52</i>			●
Meet to discuss staffing		●	●
Revisit <i>Leading the Way WBT</i> and webcasts on effective communications		★	
Take Post-deployment lesson of USERRA WBT	★	●	●
Reintegration Key Activities	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Recognize the service member's service to our country		●	●
Use <i>VA for Vets Career Center</i> to update resume	★		
Provide information on leave and benefits options			●
Update medical, dental, life and long-term care insurance information	●		
Take Reintegration lesson of USERRA WBT	★	●	●
VA for Vets Annual Training	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Take <i>Introduction to USERRA WBT</i>	●	●	●
Take <i>Supervising throughout the Deployment Lifecycle WBT</i>		★	
VA for Vets On-boarding Training	Military SM	Supervisor	HR
Take <i>Effective Communications with Military Service Members</i> instructor-led training		●	

★ Optional activity but recommended

## Employment & Readiness



During this phase, the supervisor and the service member are discussing and signing the *VA for Vets* Letter of Agreement (LOA). After they have signed the LOA, the supervisor will send you the original, which you will need to set up a deployment folder for the service member then file the LOA in the deployment folder. The purpose of the LOA is to foster and promote more effective communication between the service member and his or her supervisor for supporting their rights and responsibilities under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

### *USERRA Training*

The *VA for Vets* program has developed an online USERRA training that is customized for HR professionals and organized by the phases of the deployment lifecycle. Review the Employment & Readiness lesson of the USERRA training. You can access the online training on the *VA for Vets* website from any computer with Internet access at any time.



## PRE-DEPLOYMENT



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) understands that having a service member called up for active military duty service can affect the service member's benefits and leave, which may cause concerns for the service member. Our goal is to help you minimize those concerns by providing you the key activities you will want to undertake before the service member deploys.

### Deployment Notification

When you have been informed that a service member has received deployment orders for extended military service of 30 days or more, you should do the following:

- Check the service member's deployment file for a signed *VA for Vets* Letter of Agreement.
- Schedule a pre-deployment session with the service member.
- Encourage employee to use the *Pre-deployment Advisor* before the session.
- Use the *Pre-deployment Session Guide* at the pre-deployment session.
- Schedule a meeting with the supervisor to discuss staffing needs.
- Remind the supervisor to submit a *Request for Personnel Action, SF 52*.
- Review online USERRA training.
- Process *Request for Personnel Action, SF 52*, when the service members begins leave without pay (Absent-Uniform Services)

**Note:** Ensure that you enter code 961 to update the service member's status to Absent-Uniform Services.



### VA for Vets Letter of Agreement

The *VA for Vets* Letter of Agreement (LOA) is between the service member and his or her supervisor. The purpose of this agreement is to promote effective communication between the supervisor and service member to support the rights and responsibilities under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). If the service member's deployment file does not have a signed LOA, remind the supervisor that he or she needs to discuss and sign the LOA with the service member. You may download a copy of the LOA from *VA for Vets* website.

### ***Pre-deployment Advisor***

The Pre-deployment Advisor is an online tool that assists the service member in examining his or her benefit needs. The Pre-deployment Advisor helps the service member by asking questions about his or her coverage needs in health care, dental and so forth. Based on the answers the service member provides, the Pre-deployment Advisor determines the best benefit choices for the service member and his or her family. These results can be printed.

### ***Pre-deployment Session***

The pre-deployment session is a meeting where you and the service member discuss his or her compensation package (benefits and leave use). The VA for Vets program has developed a *Pre-deployment Session Guide* for you to use during the session. The guide provides an outline of the topics that you should discuss with service members who are getting ready to deploy for extended military service of 30 days or more. You may download a copy from VA for Vets website or go to Attachment A of this document to make a copy of the *Pre-deployment Session Guide*.

### ***Supervisory Meeting and Personnel Action***

Schedule a meeting with the supervisor to discuss future staffing requirements that will allow the organization to continue meeting VA's mission while the employee is deployed. When scheduling the meeting, encourage the supervisor to use the Transition Plan as a basis for determining the need for specific skills.

At the meeting, review the differences between short-term and temporary employment options. Remind the supervisor to submit a *Request for Personnel Action*, SF 52, for the deploying service member as soon as possible so that you can process the request.

### ***USERRA Training***

The VA for Vets program has developed an online USERRA training that is customized for you and organized by the phases of the Deployment Lifecycle. Review the Pre-deployment lesson of the USERRA training. You can access the training on the VA for Vets website from any computer with Internet access at any time.

### ***Pre-deployment Checklist for Human Resources Professionals***

VA has created a concise checklist that lists the tasks you need to complete after you have been informed that a service member has a deployment assignment. The VA Pre-deployment Checklist for Human Resources Professionals is available on the VA for Vets website.

## Exhibit 2 - Pre-deployment Checklist for HR Professionals



## Pre-deployment Checklist Human Resources Professionals

This checklist is intended to assist Human Resources (HR) offices in providing information and services to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee, who is also a Military Service Member and his or her supervisor as the service member prepares for military deployment. For more details, see the Pre-deployment section of the *VA Deployment Lifecycle Guide for HR Professionals* on the VA for Vets website (<http://VAforVets.VA.gov>).

**Directions:** Complete each activity on this checklist. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the activity when completed.

### 1. Review service member rights under USERRA

- Access *USERRA for HR Professionals* training on the VA Talent Management System (TMS)
  - o Review the Employment & Readiness and Pre-deployment lessons

### 2. Prepare for pre-deployment session with service member

- Review the *Pre-deployment Session Guide* on the VA for Vets website
- Set up a deployment folder for the service member
- Encourage service member to complete Pre-deployment Advisor
- Check the service member's deployment folder for a signed *VA for Vets Letter of Agreement* between the supervisor and the service member; if none exist, contact the supervisor for a copy

### 3. Conduct Pre-deployment session with service member

- Provide information on the protections provided by USERRA
- Use the *Pre-deployment Session Guide* to communicate key information about leave, benefits and compensation to the service member
- Sign the *Pre-deployment Session Guide* at the end of the session
- Obtain service member's signature on the *Pre-deployment Session Guide*
- Provide a photocopy to the service member and file the original in the service member's deployment folder
- Make sure the service member is aware of the services provided by VA for Vets coaches:
  - o Phone: 1-855-VA4VETS (1-855-824-8387)
- Provide the service member with several of your business cards and/or HR point of contact

### 4. Seek to obtain an agreement about communicating with the service member while he or she is on military deployment

- Agrees with continued communications while on deployment; define the type of communication; obtain contact information for the service member while he or she is deployed

**OR**

- Does not want to be contacted while on military deployment

### 5. Discuss staffing options with the service member's supervisor

- Discuss supervisor's coverage needs
- Review differences between short-term and temporary employment options

### 6. Process *Request for Personnel Action, SF 52*

- Process *Request for Personnel Action, SF 52*, when the service member begins leave without pay (Absent-Uniform Services)
- Ensure code 961 is entered when service member status changes to Absent-Uniform Services

## DEPLOYMENT



During this phase, the priority of the service member is to fulfill his or her military mission.

Before the service member deploys, you should have made an agreement about whether he or she wants to be contacted by you while deployed. Make sure you

maintain the trust you have with the service member by following through on that agreement.

Also, if the service member should contact you, you should respond within 24 hours with the answer to his or her question or provide a note about when you'll have an answer.



### *USERRA Training*

The VA for Vets program has developed an online USERRA training that is customized for you and organized by the phases of the Deployment Lifecycle. Review the Deployment lesson of the USERRA training. You can access the training on the VA for Vets website from any computer with Internet access at any time.

### *Deployment Checklist for Human Resources Professionals*

VA has created a concise checklist that lists the job-related actions you need to complete after the service member has been deployed. The VA Deployment Checklist for Human Resources Professionals is available on the VA for Vets website.

## Exhibit 3 - Deployment Checklist for HR Professionals



## Deployment Checklist Human Resources Professionals

This checklist suggests activities that you should complete once the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee, who is also a Military Service Member, has deployed. For more details, see the Deployment section of the *VA Deployment Lifecycle Guide for Human Resources Professionals* on the VA for Vets website (<http://VAforVets.VA.gov>).

**Directions:** Complete each activity on this checklist. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the activity when completed.

**1. Review service member rights under USERRA**

- Access *USERRA for Human Resources Professionals* training on VA Talent Management System (TMS)
  - o Review Deployment lesson

**2. Communicate with service member, if agreed upon during the pre-deployment phase**

- Set up a reminder on your calendar to communicate with the service member
- Send the employee a short “thinking of you” email that reminds the service member that you are available if he or she has any questions or concerns

## POST-DEPLOYMENT



Your role in this phase is to prepare for the service member to return to his or her job at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

### *Reemployment and the Military Service Member*

A Military Service Member is eligible for protections under USERRA reemployment rights if he or she has been absent from his or her position of employment because of service in the uniformed services.

Service in the uniformed services means the performance of duty on a voluntary or involuntary basis in a uniformed service, including:

- Active duty (including activated Guard and Reserve members)
- Active duty for training
- Initial active duty for training
- Inactive duty training
- Full-time National Guard duty
- Absence from work for an examination to determine fitness for duty
- Funeral honors duty performed by National Guard or Reserve members

For the service member to have reemployment rights following a period of service in the uniformed services, the service member must meet the five eligibility criteria. The service member must have:

1. Held a civilian job
2. Informed his or her supervisor and/or Human Resources (HR) that he or she was leaving the job for service in the uniformed services
3. Not have exceeded the five-year period of military service not covered by USERRA (see 38 U.S.C. 4312(c) (1 -4))
 

**Note:** Many types of duty, such as training and contingency operations, are exempted from the five-year limitation.
4. Been released from military service under "honorable conditions"
5. Reported back to his or her supervisor and/or HR in a timely manner or have submitted a timely application for reemployment. Timely is defined as:
  - 1–30 consecutive days of military service, report the next scheduled work day
  - 31–180 consecutive days of military service, apply within 14 days after completion of service
  - 181 or more consecutive days of military service, apply within 90 days after completion of service

## **USERRA Training**

The VA for Vets program has developed online USERRA training customized for HR Professionals and organized by the phases of the deployment lifecycle. Review the Post-deployment lesson of the USERRA training. You can access online training on the VA for Vets website from any computer with Internet access at any time.

## **Notification from Military Service Member of Return to VA Position**

When you are notified that a service member will be returning to his or her VA position, you should tell the service member that:

- A job is waiting for him or her when he or she returns.
- He or she should visit the VA for Vets website (<http://VAforVets.VA.gov>) for post-deployment resources.
- He or she should contact a VA for Vets coach by phone at 1-855-824-8387 for post-deployment support.
- He or she should contact HR to update benefits, if applicable.

Once you have replied to the service member, you need to:

- Determine whether or not the service member is entitled to five days of excused absence. If entitled, confirm that the five days of excused absence has been scheduled. This is important so that you know when to process the *Request for Personnel Action*, SF 52, for return to duty.
- Remind the supervisor to generate a *Request for Personnel Action*, SF 52 for the service member  
**Note:** When you process the *Request for Personnel Action*, SF 52, ensure that you change the Absent-Uniform Services code from 961 to 962. Updating the code generates a time card for pay upon the service member reinstatement to VA.

Coordinate with his or her supervisor to discuss whether the service member will be returning to the position he or she held prior to deployment or to a comparable job on the supervisor's current staff or another staff. Also, if applicable, remind the supervisor about the service member's five days of excused absence and how it applies in this situation.

### **Five Days of Excused Absence**

For the service member to be entitled to five days of excused absence, the service members must have:

- Been called up to support the war on terror
- Served for 42 or more consecutive days
- Not used five days of excused absence for this purpose within the previous 12 months

## **Post-deployment Checklist for Human Resources Professionals**

VA has created a concise checklist that lists the job-related actions you need to complete after you have been informed that a service member will be returning to VA. The VA Post-deployment Checklist for Human Resources Professionals is available on the VA for Vets website.

## Exhibit 4 - Post-deployment Checklist for HR Professionals



## Post-deployment Checklist Human Resources Professionals

This checklist suggests activities that you should complete once you have been notified that a deployed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee, who is also a Military Service Member, is in the process of returning to VA. These activities are recommended to ease the service member's transition from active duty to civilian employment at VA. For more details, see the Post-deployment section of the *VA Deployment Lifecycle Guide for Human Resources Professionals* on the VA for Vets website (<http://VAforVets.VA.gov>).

**Directions:** Complete each activity on this checklist. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the activity when completed.

**1. Review service member rights under USERRA**

- Access *USERRA for Human Resources Professionals* training on VA Talent Management System (TMS)
  - o Review Post-deployment lesson

**2. Discuss staffing options with the service member's supervisor**

- Discuss supervisor's coverage needs to determine if the service member is returning to same position

**3. Confirm and process personnel action**

- Confirm that five days of excused absence have been scheduled (if entitled)

**4. Communicate with service member**

- Send the service member a short email that:
  - o Reminds the service member that you are available if he or she has any questions or concerns
  - o Reiterates the anticipated date of his or her return to VA

## REINTEGRATION:



More often than not service members return to VA emotionally stressed and anxious over the changes that have taken place in the workplace.

You will need to coordinate closely with the service member so that his or her transition back into civilian employment is as smooth as possible.

### ***One Week Before Service Member Returns to VA***

Send an email to your service member welcoming him or her back, along with a “thank you” note for his or her service. See the *VA for Vets* Welcome Home toolkit for Welcome Back and Thank You templates.

In the email message, encourage him or her to:

- Contact you with any questions about benefits
- Update his or her resume with the new skills acquired while deployed using the *VA for Vets* Career Center
- Visit one or more of the top 10 reintegration support resources from the *VA for Vets* website
- Reach out to a *VA for Vets* coach for one-on-one reintegration support. Provide the *VA for Vets* coach’s contact information in the email:
  - Phone: 1-855-VA4VETS (1-855-824-8387)

### ***Request for Personnel Action, SF 52***

When you receive the Request for Personnel Action, SF 52 from the supervisor, ensure that you change the Absent-Uniform Services code 961 to 962. This will generate a time card for pay upon the service member reinstatement to VA.

### ***Service Member Returns to VA***

Within the first week that the service member returns to VA, you should send an email asking if he or she has any questions or concerns about health insurance or other benefits and if everything is going well. If the service member has concerns that are not HR-related (feeling overwhelmed or stressed), refer the service member to a *VA for Vets* coach. The *VA for Vets* coach offers one-on-one reintegration support. Provide the *VA for Vets* coach’s contact information:

- Phone: 1-855-VA4VETS (1-855-824-8387)

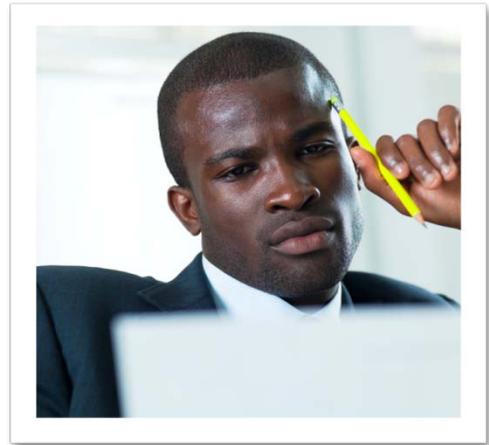
If the service member is exhibiting signs of extreme distress, refer him or her to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or medical provider.

## ***USERRA Training***

The VA for Vets program has developed online USERRA training customized for HR Professionals and organized by the phases of the deployment lifecycle. Review the Reintegration lesson of the USERRA training. You can access online training on the VA for Vets website from any computer with Internet access at any time.

## ***Reintegration Checklist for Human Resources Professionals***

VA has created a concise checklist that lists the job-related actions you need to complete after you have been informed that a service member has notified VA that he or she will be returning. The VA Reintegration Checklist for Human Resources Professionals is available on the VA for Vets website.



## Exhibit 5 - Reintegration Checklist for HR Professionals



## Reintegration Checklist Human Resources Professionals

This checklist is intended to assist Human Resources (HR) offices in providing information and services to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee, who is also a Military Service Member and his or her supervisor as the service member prepares to return to VA from military deployment. For more details, see the Reintegration section of the *VA Deployment Lifecycle Guide for HR Professionals* on the *VA for Vets* website (<http://VAforVets.VA.gov>).

**Directions:** Complete each activity on this checklist. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the activity when completed.

### 1. Review service member rights under USERRA

- Access *USERRA for HR Professionals* training on VA Talent Management System (TMS)
  - Review Reintegration lesson

### 2. Contact the service member

- Welcome the service member back and say “thank you” for his or her service
- Verify that service member benefits or compensation concerns have been addressed (example: any adjustments to health insurance or other benefits)
- Ensure Absent-Uniform Services code change from 961 to 962 generating a time card for pay upon service member reinstatement to VA service
- Encourage the service member to update his or her resume using the *VA for Vets* Career Center
- Provide the top 10 resources from the *VA for Vets* website
- Provide the *VA for Vets* coach’s information:
  - Phone: 1-855-VA4VETS (1-855-824-8387)

# Attachment A: Pre-deployment Session Guide

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# Pre-deployment Session Guide

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HR Professionals

November 6, 2011

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This guide provides an outline of the topics that Human Resources (HR) professionals should discuss with service members who are getting ready to deploy for extended military service of 30 days or more.

### PRIOR TO A PRE-DEPLOYMENT SESSION

**Directions:** Complete each activity prior to a scheduled pre-deployment session. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the activity when completed.

- Contact the service member to arrange a convenient time to meet.
- Let the service member know that he or she is welcome to bring a spouse, other family member or friend to the session.
- Review the service member's benefits.
- Review the TSP Fact Sheet Publication: TSP Benefits That Apply to Members of the Military Who Return to Federal Civilian Service (3/2002) at <http://www.tsp.gov/forms/oc95-5.pdf>.
- Obtain blank copies of the following forms:
  - *FEHB Authorization to Release Information*
  - *FEDVIP Authorization to Release Information*
  - *LTC Authorization to Release Information*
  - *FSAFEDS Authorization to Release Information*
  - Beneficiary forms (FEGLI, retirement deductions (2), unpaid compensation, TSP on hand)
- Obtain a copy of the USERRA poster from the *VA for Vets* website.
- Review the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about military leave at <http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/WorkLife/Leave/MilitaryLeave.doc>.
- Ensure that the service member's supervisor has initiated a *Request for Personnel Action*, SF 52.

## DURING A PRE-DEPLOYMENT SESSION

**Directions:** Discuss each item with the service member. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the item as it is discussed.

### Job Protection

- Provide the service member with a copy of the USERRA poster and ask if he or she has any questions about his or her USERRA rights. Be sure the service member understands his or her reinstatement rights as they pertain to the length of the deployment.
- Inform the service member that USERRA training is available on the VA Talent Management System (TMS).
- Tell the service member that he or she does not have to resign from his or her position to perform active military duty. However, if his or her cumulative active military duty exceeds five (5) years, he or she may be separated from his or her position at VA.

### Leave

- Military Leave

The service member has military leave he or she would like to use.

Number of days/hours: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Time(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** A service member may carry over a maximum of 15 days of military leave into a new fiscal year (FY). Therefore, a service member may potentially have a total of 30 days to use in any one FY. In addition, service members whose military duty spans two FYs may use up to 45 days of military leave at one time.

- 22 Days of Military Leave (5 U.S.C. 6323(b))

The service member is entitled to use 22 additional workdays per calendar year when he or she:

- Performs military duties in support of civil authorities in the protection of life and property, or
- Performs full-time military service because the service member is called to active duty in support of a contingency operation service.

Inform the service member that if he or she elects to use the 22 days of military leave, he or she is entitled to receive the greater of civilian or military pay, but not both. The service member's civilian pay will be reduced by the amount of military pay for the days that he or she uses military leave. The service member must provide a copy of his or her active duty orders and military pay documentation (Leave and Earning Statement – LES) to the HR office to claim this entitlement.

- Annual Leave

The service member wants:

\_\_\_ accumulated annual leave to remain to his or her credit.

\_\_\_ a lump monetary sum for the balance of his or her accumulated annual leave.

\_\_\_ to use part of his or her accumulated annual leave; number of days/hours: \_\_\_\_\_.

Active Duty Military Leave Without Pay (ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES)

The service member wants to be placed on ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES, beginning \_\_\_\_\_ (the first civilian day following military leave, annual leave, compensatory time and /or credit hours).

- 
- Inform the service member that he or she earns and uses leave on an hourly basis. This means that for each pay period during the leave year when his or her total accumulated hours of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES equals 80, and each 80-hour increment of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES thereafter during the leave year, he or she will not accrue annual and sick leave in that pay period. ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES hours in excess of 80, if any, in that same pay period will be carried over to the next pay period. Carryover hours will be combined with ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES hours in the next period to determine whether he or she accrues annual and sick leave during that pay period. This process will be repeated every pay period each leave year.

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- Inform the service member that he or she earns and uses leave on a daily basis. This means that for each pay period during the leave year when the total accumulated days of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES equals 14, and each 14-day increment of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES thereafter during the leave year, he or she will not accrue annual and sick leave in that pay period. ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES days in excess of 14, if any, in that same pay period will be carried over to the next pay period. Carryover days will be combined with LWOP days in the next period to determine whether he or she accrues annual and sick leave during that pay period. This process will be repeated every pay period each leave year.

 Excused Absence

When the service member returns to Federal civilian service, he or she is entitled to five consecutive days of excused absence (paid time off) when he or she returns from 42 or more days of consecutive active military service in connection with Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or any other operation subsequently established under Executive Order 13223.

When the service member notifies VA of the date he or she intends to return to duty, the five days of excused absence should be granted before he or she resumes duties. If the service member has already returned to duty, he or she may request to use the five days of excused absence at a mutually agreeable time. The excused absence cannot be used on an intermittent basis after returning to duty and may be used only once per 12-month period.

## Compensation

- Inform the service member that when performing active military duty his or her compensation will be based on the terms of his or her military pay grade. The service member will not receive compensation from his or her VA civilian position unless he or she elects to use military leave, annual leave or compensatory time or is entitled to reservist differential.

If the service member elects to take the lump-sum annual leave option and returns to civilian employment before the end of the period covered by the lump sum, he or she will be required to repay all the remaining days or hours of work that the lump-sum payment covered.

The service member may be entitled to reservist differential if his or her military pay is less than his or her civilian pay with VA. The service member must provide a copy of his or her active duty orders and military Leave and Earnings Statements (LES) to claim reservist differential.

## Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB)

<http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/>

- The service member wants to terminate FEHB coverage and have it reinstated upon his or her return to VA.

Tell the service member that he or she must notify HR in writing that he or she has terminated FEHB coverage. Otherwise, his or her FEHB coverage will continue and he or she may be responsible for the premiums.

- The service member elects to continue FEHB coverage.

Tell the service member that he or she should always notify both the FEHB and TRICARE about the dual coverage during deployment so that both health plans can properly coordinate benefits. This is extremely important for covered family members, since the FEHB will pay first before coordinating with TRICARE for possible additional payment. This may save family members some out-of-pocket expenses.

Provide the service member with a copy of the appropriate form, i.e., BC/BS, GEHA, *Authorization to Release Information* form. He or she can complete this form by naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. This form can then be faxed to the appropriate FEHB plan. This eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information. This is especially beneficial for a spouse trying to finalize claims on him- or herself and/or covered children.

If the service member has family members who will remain covered under the FEHB plan, you may want to provide the service member with a copy of the Benefit Plan Booklet for the appropriate health plan.

- The service member is being called to active duty that does not support a contingency operation and wants to continue FEHB coverage.

Tell the service member that he or she can continue his or her health insurance for up to 24 months while in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. For the first 12 months, the service member will be responsible for only the service member's portion of the premiums. For the remaining 12 months, the service member will be responsible for the service member's portion and the government's portion plus a 2 percent administrative fee. This means the service member will pay 102 percent of the cost that must be paid currently. The 24-month period will begin on the date the service member's active duty service begins.

- The service member is being called to active duty in support of a contingency operation and wants to continue FEHB coverage.

Tell the service member that VA will pay the service member's share of the premiums for up to 24 months while in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. The 24-month period will begin on the date the service member's active duty service begins. Please note that if, at any time, the service member receives VA civilian pay during his or her deployment, the FEHB premiums will be deducted from his or her VA salary. For example, if the service member elects to use his or her 15-day military leave entitlement beginning on October 1st of the next fiscal year, because the service member is in a paid status, FEHB premiums will be deducted.

**Note:** The service member cannot continue health insurance coverage under FEHB beyond the 24-month period. However, at the end of the 24 months, the service member has a 31-day extension of coverage and the option to convert to an individual policy offered through his or her health insurance plan.

If the service member is participating in premium conversion, the service member has 60 days from the start of his or her unpaid leave of absence to waive participation or cancel his or her FEHB coverage. If the service member does not terminate participation in premium conversion within the 60-day limit, the service member cannot cancel his or her FEHB, except during the annual FEHB open season or 60 days after another qualifying event.

### **Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)**

<http://www.opm.gov/insure/life>

- Tell the service member that his or her FEGLI coverage (if enrolled) will continue at no cost to him or her for up to 12 months in a nonpay status and will then terminate with an automatic 31-day extension of coverage and right to convert to an individual policy.

Based on a law effective January 28, 2008, the service member may elect to continue his or her FEGLI coverage for an additional 12 months of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES. During the additional 12 months of FEGLI coverage, the service member must pay the service member's and the agency's share of premiums for basic coverage and the full premium for any optional coverage for which he or she is enrolled. There is no agency contribution for the additional 12 months.

**Note:** The service member must complete the Employee Notice and FEGLI election form,

*Extension of Coverage When Called to Active Duty*, to make the election for the additional 12 months of coverage. This form must be returned to HR before the end of the service member's initial 12 months of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES. The service member must make arrangements with his or her local payroll office for the payment of these premiums while he or she is away, since the service member cannot pay them when he or she returns to duty under the service member's restoration rights.

If the service member decides to resign from Federal service because of deployment, the service member's FEGLI coverage will continue at no cost for up to 12 months, or until 90 days after his or her military service ends, whichever date comes first, and will then terminate with a 31-day extension of coverage and right to convert to an individual policy.

- Inform the service member that, within 60 days after the date of notification of deployment, he or she may elect Basic, (if not enrolled in FEGLI), Option A and Option B (up to a maximum of 5 multiples physical). They can make this election on the SF 2817 (either hard copy from HR or electronic version from the OPM website). It would be to the employee's advantage to either add FEGLI and/or max out the amount of eligible FEGLI, since VA will pay the premium for up to 12 months in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status.
- Encourage the service member to verify that beneficiary data are up-to-date. If the service member is unsure, recommend that he or she complete new forms.

**Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)**

<http://www.tsp.gov>

- Ask the service member if he or she has a TSP loan from his or her uniformed service TSP account. If yes, tell the service member that the TSP loan payments will be suspended for the entire period of his or her active military service, and loan payments will resume when he or she returns to VA.
- Ask the service member if he or she has a TSP loan from a civilian TSP account. If yes, tell the service member that his or her loan payments will stop because they come from payroll deductions. Also inform the service member that he or she cannot make payments on that loan from his or her military pay. However, he or she can continue to make loan payments by sending a personal check or money order to the TSP along with a TSP Loan Payment Coupon.
- Ask the service member if he or she would like his or her loan payments suspended until he or she returns to VA. If yes, submit Form TSP-41, *Notification to TSP of Non-pay Status*, for the service member. Submission of this form will suspend the service member's loan payments until he or she returns to VA. Ask for the TSP loan number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Inform the service member that if he or she still has an outstanding TSP loan from his or her civilian TSP account when he or she returns from deployment, he or she should tell HR to prepare and submit a second TSP-41 to inform TSP of a return to pay status. Tell the service member that he or she is responsible for reviewing his or her Leave and Earnings Statement and ensuring that correct loan payments are submitted on time.
- Inform the service member that he or she may make retroactive contributions and elections to his or her TSP account. Within 60 days of the service member's restoration to duty, the service member will need to contact HR to indicate his or her desire to make retroactive TSP contributions and elections. VA will make up missed agency contributions for eligible FERS service members.

The service member's retroactive contributions and elections will be reduced if the service member contributed to TSP as a military service member while on active duty. The service member is responsible for providing all Leave and Earnings Statements if TSP contributions were made while on active duty.

- Encourage the service member to verify that beneficiary data are up-to-date. If the service member is unsure whether the data are up-to-date, recommend that he or she complete new forms.

**Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP)**

<http://www.benefeds.com>

- Explain that the service member must pay FEDVIP in order for benefits to remain in effect while the service member is in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. Tell the service member to contact FEDVIP at 1-877-888-3337 to ensure they have the correct billing address to which to send bills. (FEDVIP will send bills if there are no payroll deductions to pay the premiums.)  
**Note:** Premiums paid by Direct Bill are not pretax.
- Review dental plans for orthodontia waiting periods to determine if it may impact family members at home. Tell the service member that if the dental plan is dropped while he or she is deployed, and there are family members who will need orthodontia treatment, they may have to start the waiting period all over again.
- Provide the service member with a copy of the FEDVIP *Authorization to Release Information* form. The service member can complete this form, naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. This form can then be faxed to FEDVIP. This eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information. (This is especially beneficial for a spouse who is trying to finalize claims on him- or herself and/or covered children.)
- If the service member chooses to cancel his or her FEDVIP, he or she can cancel 31 days before or 60 days after the date of deployment by calling BENEFEDES at 1-877-888-3337 or TTY 1-877-889-5680. Inform the service member that when he or she returns to VA from military duty, he or she can elect to enroll in FEDVIP within 60 days after his or her orders end.

**Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP)**

<https://www.ltcfeds.com/>

- Explain that the service member must pay long-term care (LTC) for benefits to remain in effect while the service member is in an LWOP status. Tell the service member to contact FLTCIP at 1-800-582-3337 to ensure FLTCIP has the correct billing address to which to send bills.  
**Note:** LTC will send bills if there are no payroll deductions to pay the premiums.
- Provide the service member with a copy of the FLTCIP *Authorization to Release Information* form. The service member can complete this form, naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. This form can then be faxed to LTC. Tell the service member that this eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information regarding LTC.

**Federal Flexible Spending Account (FSAFEDS)**

<http://www.fsafeds.com>

- Provide the service member with a copy of the FSAFEDS Authorization to Release Information form. Tell the service member that he or she can complete this form, naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. The form can then be faxed to FSAFEDS (1-866-643-2245 toll free; or 1-502-267-2233 outside the United States). This eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information.
- Inform the service member that he or she may arrange to prepay his or her allotments before entering an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. The prepayment amount would be added to his or her normal payment. This means that his or her biweekly deductions would be increased based on the amount he or she specifies to prepay.

If the service member does not prepay before his or her ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status, his or her FSA will be frozen, and he or she will not be eligible for reimbursement for any expenses incurred during that period until the plan year ends or until the service member returns to his or her VA job and begins making allotments again. When the service member returns, his or her allotments will be made on a catch-up basis. If doubling the amount is not enough to catch up by the end of the plan year, the service member's allotment will be increased proportionately over the pay dates remaining in the plan year, or he or she may pay the allotments directly on an after-tax basis.

- If the service member has a balance in his or her Health Care Flexible Savings Account (HCFSA) or Limited Expense Health Care Flexible Savings Account (LEX HCFSA) and thinks he or she might not be able to incur enough eligible expenses to deplete the account, rather than forfeit those funds (remember the use-or-lose rule for FSA accounts), the service member can have his or her balance refunded to him- or herself. This new feature is for Qualified Reservists only under the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act. The HEART Act (Public Law No. 110-245) contains tax benefits and incentives for individuals in military service. Section 114 of the HEART Act allows qualified reservists to receive a taxable distribution of their unused HCFSA—also known as a qualified reservist distribution (QRD). FSAFEDS adopted Section 114 of the HEART Act, effective January 1, 2009. Tell the service member that the drawback is that the distribution will be taxable wages and that he or she gives up his or her ability to submit eligible expenses for the remainder of the benefit period.
- If the service member decides to resign from VA, his or her FSA will terminate as of the date of his or her separation. There are no extensions. However, for the service member's health care account, he or she can submit claims with dates of service from the effective date through separation date. For the service member's dependent care account, he or she can submit claims for the entire plan year.
- Tell the service member to contact FSA benefits counselors at 1-877-372-3337 if he or she has additional questions regarding FSA.

**Return to VA Civilian Employment**

- Inform the service member that he or she informs HR of his or her date of return to VA employment.
- Remind the service member that you will work together to arrange a seamless transition back into the workforce and to get the service member's benefits in place.

**HR Point of Contact**

- Provide the service member with several copies of your business card and/or HR point of contact so that he or she, as well as family members, has a point of contact in the event they have any questions or need to speak to someone from the VA HR department. Tell the service member that he or she may contact you about concerns with continuation of benefits coverage.

**Note:** If the service member contacts you while deployed, make sure you contact him or her within 24 hours with an answer or to inform him or her that you will get back to them shortly with an answer. If you do not know the answer to the question, find the answer. Also, never put a deployed service member on hold.

**Service Member Contact Information (while on Active Duty)**

- Mailing address

Ask the service member if he or she will be changing mailing addresses as a result of deployment. Often, the service member may be giving up his or her apartment while deployed and using a parent's address; the service member may need to update VA records with the new address.

- Email address

Obtain an email address that the service member will use while on military deployment. Most service members will provide both a military and a personal email address should HR ever need to make contact.

**Service Member Contact Information (while on active duty):**

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Case of Emergency, Contact:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Miscellaneous**

- Provide the service member with copies of all submitted documentation. Tell the service member that he or she should provide a family member or friend with copies of all submitted documentation.
- Explain to the service member that he or she should make sure a family member(s) or a friend(s) knows his or her branch of service, rank, unit, company or battalion name, Social Security Number, last known military location, military unit contact person(s), and contact information. Also, recommend to the service member that he or she consider preparing a power of attorney, particularly including employment issues and benefits.

*By signing, you confirm that you have been counseled on each item in this guide and that you understand your options for leave and benefits.*

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Service Member

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Date

*By signing, you confirm that you have counseled the deploying service member on each item in this guide.*

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HR Professional

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Date