

EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE: To establish specific direction, guidance and procedures for administering and operating the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) at the Durham Veterans Affairs Health Care System (DVAHCS).

2. POLICY: DVAHCS Leadership and Managers will support the EISP by providing information to VA employees to receive educational assistance under EISP. This information includes the application and selection processes for employees, the funding allocation processes, and the specific initiatives within the EISP such as the National Nursing Education Incentive (NNEI) Scholarship and the VA National Education for Employees Program (VANEED) (Attachment G). VHA Directive 1426.01 supersedes this policy and all applicants must adhere to all these guidelines. Definitions related to this policy are included in Attachment A.

3. ACTION:

a. An open continuous announcement is available in the facility's electronic education resources.

b. Employees who are interested and eligible (Attachment B) to participate in the EISP are encouraged to apply. Each candidate must contact the Durham VA HCS Scholarship Coordinator/designee at the time of their interest to discuss academic goals, application requirements and the application process. Each candidate must submit a complete EISP application packet to the Program Coordinator by specified deadline. This includes a completed EISP Applicant Statement (Attachment C).

c. The DVAHCS Selection Committee will review and evaluate the applications. They will prioritize and recommend applicant selections to the Director and Associate Director of Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive (ADPCS/NE) based on the funding priority levels (Attachment D). The selection process is based on the Workforce Strategic Planning Committee Annual Report of current and anticipated local and national VA occupational shortages and/or locally difficult to recruit and retain occupations, or specialties within occupations, which will be eligible for consideration of EISP awards. Selections will be made in accordance with merit principles and without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity, transgender status, sexual orientation and pregnancy), age, marital or parental status, disability, genetic information or political affiliation. Recommendations will be made based on criteria in Attachment E and sent forth to Scholarships and Clinical Education Office, a division of the VHA Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) office.

d. A decision to award an EISP scholarship cannot be finalized until an official contract is first signed by the applicant and then accepted and signed by the Under Secretary for Health or designee. In addition, scholarships are awarded based on availability of funds from the Scholarships and Clinical Education Office (S&CE), a division of the Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) Office.

e. The EISP scholarship recipient will maintain an acceptable level of academic standing and complete a specified period of obligated service upon completion of the program.

f. Failure to complete the program or service obligation will result in participant liability resulting in financial penalties (Attachment F).

g. EISP and NNEI recipients will attend classes/training during non-duty time. Authorized Absence (AA) will not be granted. Those enrolled in VANEPP are required to attend classes/training according to the school's schedule and in compliance with VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019

4. RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. **Facility Directors** – Facility Directors are responsible to ensure local-level EISP implementation and management is consistent with VHA Directive 1426.01, and for ensuring that local policies and procedures related to this Directive are developed and implemented in accordance with labor obligations.

b. **Nurse Executive** – The Nurse Executive/designee is responsible for effective management of the nursing initiatives within the EISP. This includes establishing a RN coordinator for the NNEI and EISP participants in nursing academic programs and ensuring scholarship applicant recommendations for nursing is consistent with the facility work force strategic plan.

c. **Program Coordinator** – The Program Coordinator is responsible for implementing EISP, NNEI, and VANEPP locally; maintaining and providing EISP and NNEI application packages and all appropriate supporting documentation; ensuring educational programs meet required standards; provide assistance and guidance to employees during the application process; and review applications for submission to the Selection Committee. In addition to managing all aspects of administration locally, the Program Coordinator will also coordinate program functions and services with the WMC office, Human Resource Management Service, Fiscal Service, and communicate needs and responses to and from applicants.

d. **Selection Committee** – The Selection Committee has the responsibility for defining and publishing local selection criteria; reviewing and evaluating applications; and prioritizing and recommending preliminary applicant selections to the Facility Director (based on priority levels defined in the VHA Directive and on the individual facility's staffing needs). The Program Coordinator schedules and facilitates a Selection Committee meeting to review applications. The Selection Committee is comprised of the Program Coordinator and representatives from the Human Resource Management Service, Equal Employment Opportunity department, Fiscal Service, Hospital Education, Nursing Education and the Union, if applicable.

e. **Employee/Participant** – The employee / participant is responsible for completing and submitting a correct EISP or NNEI application packet, including all required supporting documentation to the Program Coordinator; reading, understanding, signing and satisfying all requirements of the EISP agreement; reporting educational progress and communicating any change impacting the terms of the agreement to the Program Coordinator. Changes may include, but are not limited to, change in employment status, change in education plan or status and name change. Other responsibilities include insuring the facility EISP Program Coordinator has access to educational or training institution official transcripts and documents required to assess the participant's academic standing, status and progress at the conclusion of each academic session (semester or quarterly). The participant must also continue to meet or exceed

performance requirements of current VA position. EISP participants must complete the service obligation for their first VHA scholarship award before submitting an application packet to the local EISP Program Coordinator for a second scholarship award. The employee/participant is also responsible for meeting the requirements for service obligation and submitting the final official transcript from the academic institution to the Program Coordinator within 90 days of completing the academic program. The transcript must include the degree or certificate conferred and date thereof. If the participant is seeking to transfer facilities, they are responsible for notifying the hiring authority of the gaining VA facility of participation in the scholarship program and ensuring compliance with scholarship program requirements can be met prior to transferring.

Note: *Applicant at time of application to scholarship program must have a record of employment that demonstrates a high likelihood that the participant will be successful in completing the education and training, and employment in such a field. Should a participant receive less than satisfactory performance evaluations or disciplinary/adverse action of any kind prior to beginning the service obligation period, the participant will be terminated from the program.*

f. **Human Resources Management Service (HRMS)** – HRMS will identify and publish a list of locally difficult to recruit and retain occupations, or specialties within occupations, which will be eligible for consideration of EISP awards. This list must match with the VA facility or VISN Workforce Succession Strategic Plan and be updated periodically as needs change. HRMS will maintain a copy of the official executed EISP agreement in the employee's official personnel folder; maintain a copy of the notification from WMC regarding the completion of degree program and commencement of the service obligation period; provide Program Coordinator with relevant information related to program participants; enter new scholarship participants in HR Smart; verify an employee's status in the EISP as part of the employee clearance of station procedures, and collaborate with financial management officer and the Program Coordinator to appropriately process any employee-participant who has outstanding obligations under the EISP; and properly advising participants of their financial liability resulting from a voluntary personnel action, including resignation, retirement, change in occupation, change from Title 38 or Hybrid 38 position to a Title 5 position, and conversion to part-time status during the service obligation period. These actions constitute a breach of the participant's service obligation and EISP agreement, and financial liability will be assessed accordingly.

g. **Fiscal Service** – Fiscal Service will maintain a copy of the executed agreement in the appropriate file and ensure that award payments made to facility participants do not exceed the lesser of either the funding authorized by WMC or the amounts participants actually paid for the authorized education. Receipts and other appropriate documentation are used to validate the amount of funds disbursed to each participant. Fiscal Service will also provide relevant scholarship fiscal information about EISP participants to the EISP Program Coordinator as needed and review, validate and sign any reviews required by Scholarship and Clinical Education.

5. REFERENCES: VHA Handbook Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019.

6. RESPONSIBILITY: The Associate Director, Patient Care Services/CNE (118) is responsible for the contents of this Health Care System Memorandum.

7. RESCISSION: Medical Center Memorandum 558-18-118.8, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, May 2018.

8. RECERTIFICATION: This Health Care System Memorandum will be recertified on or before the last day of October 2022.

RECOMMEND APPROVAL:

Marri M. Fryar 380928

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Date: 2019.12.03 11:31:34 -05'00'

MARRI "NICKI" FRYAR

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PAUL S. CREWS, MPH, FACHE
Director, Durham VA Health Care System

Attachments: Definitions (A)

Employee Incentive Scholarship Program Eligibility and Applicant Requirements

(B)

DVAHCS EISP Applicant Statement (C)

DVAHCS Employee Incentive Scholarship Program Funding Priority Levels (D)

DVAHCS Selection Criteria for Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (E)

Participant Liability (F)

VA National Education for Employee Program (VANEEP) (G)

VA National Education for Employees Program (VANEEP) Learning Plan Memo (H)

Attachment A

DEFINITIONS

- 1. Acceptable Level of Academic Standing.** An acceptable level of academic standing means the level at which a participant may continue to attend school under the standards and practices of the school at which a participant is enrolled in a course of study for which an EISP scholarship was awarded.
- 2. Acceptance Agreement.** An acceptance agreement is a signed legal document between VA and an EISP participant which specifies the obligations of VA and the participant.
- 3. Amendment.** An amendment is a change to the originally approved application agreement, or any subsequently approved program modification.
- 4. Annual Enrollee Progress Review (Annual Report).** The Annual Enrollee Progress Review (Annual Report) is a yearly report completed by VA facilities and submitted to Scholarships and Clinical Education (S&CE) in which the VA facility validates each participant's progress, current status, and funding distributed to or on behalf of the participant.
- 5. Applicant.** An applicant is a VHA employee who has applied but has not been approved to participate in EISP.
- 6. Bill of Collection.** The bill of collection is a document, detailing the amount and purpose of a debt and is issued by a VA facility to an employee who has incurred a financial liability. A bill of collection is issued as part of a VA facility's notification of indebtedness. **NOTE:** *VA Debt Collection Standards are located at <https://www.va.gov/finance/policy/pubs/volumeXII.asp>.*
- 7. Bridge Program.** An EISP-sponsored academic bridge program provides concurrent movement along a degree path, whereby students complete coursework across two-degree levels to achieve the higher degree level, without conferring the intermediate degree.
- 8. Course Completion Date.** The course completion date is the date on which a participant in EISP completes the participant's course of education or training under EISP. **NOTE:** *Completion of the course of education or training will result in the educational institution officially conferring the participant with a degree or certification.*
- 9. VA facility.** For purposes of this policy, unless otherwise clearly specified, a VA facility is any VHA entity participating in EISP and is subject to the program criteria contained within this directive.
- 10. Full-time Coursework.** A participant is considered full-time: (1) In the case of undergraduate work, if the participant is taking 30 semester hours per undergraduate school year; and
(2) In the case of graduate coursework, if the participant is taking 18 semester hours per graduate school year.
- 11. Obligated Service.** Obligated service means the period of time after the EISP participant's course completion and during which the participant is employed by VHA in the full-time clinical practice of the participant's profession, or a health care position in the occupation for which the

scholarship was awarded. See 38 U.S.C. 7674(a) for additional information.

12. Onsite Program Review. The Onsite Program Review is conducted at the VA facility by Workforce Management Consulting (WMC) staff and used to evaluate key aspects of administering EISP at the local level.

13. Participant. A participant is a VHA employee whose application to EISP has been approved by VA, and whose agreement (i.e., acceptance agreement) has been accepted by VA.

14. Replacement Salary. Replacement salary is additional funding provided to the VA facility if a participant's full-time education or training detrimentally affects staffing levels and the continuity of care. Replacement salary covers the cost of hiring a new staff member (typically on a temporary basis) to carry out the duties and responsibilities of a participant while the participant is pursuing full-time education or training. This additional funding is not included in the educational expenses of the participant.

15. Scholarship. A scholarship is a monetary award that covers all or part of the cost of a participant's tuition and reasonable educational expenses (e.g., registration, allowable fees, books, materials, and supplies). There are limitations on the amounts of coursework, funding, and time to complete an academic program that may be authorized for an EISP participant. See 38 U.S.C. 7673 for additional information.

16. School Year. School year means all or part of the 12-month period that starts on the date the participant begins school as a full-time or part-time student.

17. Service Commencement Date. The service commencement date is the date on which a participant in EISP begins the period of obligated service.

18. Unconditional Acceptance. Unconditional acceptance is defined as the applicant having met and completed all requirements and conditions required for entry into the specific academic program, and the applicant has been accepted or enrolled into the specific academic program for which scholarship funding is being requested.

19. Virtual Program Review. The Virtual Program Review is the remote validation of VA facility or program office compliance with individual components of EISP through the submission of requested documents to the S&CE office.

Please reference VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019 for additional information.

Attachment B

**Employee Incentive Scholarship Program Eligibility and
DVAHCS Applicant Requirements**

1. Current permanent full-time or part-time DVAHCS employee who has been continuously employed with the VA for not less than one (1) year as of the date on which the employee submits an official application for the EISP, and remains in said position without time limitation, for the duration of the scholarship-funded education program.
2. Continuing student in good standing or unconditionally accepted for enrollment as a full-time or part-time student in a specified field of education or training that is deemed necessary to meet the goals of the VA's Health Care System. Letter of acceptance or documentation of enrollment in good standing must be signed by the Dean of the school or Director of the academic program.
3. Agree to incur a contractual obligation as specified in the **VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program Procedures, September 16, 2019**. This includes a service obligation after completing the course of study outlined in the scholarship application. A full-time student incurs a service obligation of three (3) years regardless of the amount of education received under EISP. Part-time students incur a a service obligation of a minimum of one (1) year and maximum of three (3) years, prorated based on the number of credit hours per year.
4. Not currently completing service obligation for previously awarded VA scholarship nor obligated under any federal educational programs to perform service after completion of the course of education or training. Awards authorized to Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP) participants may be in addition to assistance available to EISP, NNEI, and VANEPP participants. However, if an employee is in a service obligation period associated with EISP, NNEI, or VANEPP, they are not eligible for EDRP as a retention incentive until the EISP service obligation has been fulfilled. **NOTE:** See VHA Directive 1021, *Education Debt Reduction Program, dated May 31, 2012*.
5. At least satisfactory rating on last two proficiency reports and with no disciplinary action. *An employee who is approved for a scholarship award and subsequently receives or is subject to a sustained formal disciplinary or adverse action, or who receives a performance rating of less than "fully successful," or a proficiency rating of less than "satisfactory" prior to beginning his or her service obligation period, may be terminated from the scholarship program*
6. Demonstrate leadership accomplishments at the unit or service level plus record of performance that indicates a high likelihood the employee will be successful in completing the education and employment in noted field
7. Supervisor and Service Chief memo of support, and commitment to hire if applicable, that document a record of employment that demonstrates a high likelihood the employee will be successful in completing the academic program and in employment in noted field.

8. Substantiate at least 2.5 GPA in all previous academic coursework as well as prerequisite courses for the program to which they are applying (minimum GPA subject to change per WMC guidelines). VANEED applicants must have a minimum of 3.0 GPA in the required college, program specific or pre-requisite course work.
9. The scholarship application approval and subsequent funding is based on the successful completion of courses listed as completed, or scheduled to be completed, prior to the start of the scholarship. Failure to complete these courses by the start date of the scholarship sponsored courses may result in amendment of the program start date.
10. Have not previously participated in the EISP and breached their obligations or agreement for any reason, even if a waiver of liability was granted.
11. Pursuing preparation for a position that has been deemed 'hard to recruit' and retain, as specified in the VHA Directive 1426.01 and by the facility's HRMS and Medical Center Director.
12. Degree programs that allow a student to confer the intermediate degree prior to, or without completing, the terminal degree, will not be approved.
13. All academic institutions shall be accredited by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the professional accrediting body identified in the VA qualification standards as required (without waiver) for the occupation in which the participant will be appointed, assigned, or retained. All Nursing programs must be fully accredited, without restriction, by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

Please reference VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019 for additional information.

Attachment C

DVAHCS EISP Applicant Statement

Name _____ Date _____

Applicant Statement of Intent: This narrative is an important part of your DVAHCS Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) application. The quality of the Applicant Statement of Intent is crucial in the selection criteria as it provides the Selection Committee a first-hand example of your writing skills and your ability to present ideas in a clear, logical and coherent manner. Your Statement of Intent provides the Committee with your personal perspective on your professional contributions, strengths/weaknesses, current skills and abilities, prior experiences, and aspirations. Consider this your opportunity to communicate with the Selection Committee members about your professional background and reasons, at this point in your career, for pursuing your degree through the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program. Please submit the DVAHCS EISP Applicant Statement of Intent in a 12-font, typed, and double-spaced pages addressing EACH of the following questions in detail.

1. **Discuss your clinical and academic strengths and weaknesses.**
2. **List three characteristics you possess that make you an effective employee and describe how you apply these characteristics in work settings.**
3. **Define your short-and long-term goals and describe how you expect to EISP to help you meet these goals.**
4. **How do you plan to meet the demand from your work, school, and personal responsibilities?**

Attachment D

DVAHCS Employee Incentive Scholarship Program Funding Priority Levels

Scholarships are awarded based on availability of funds from the Scholarships and Clinical Education Office (S&CE), a division of the Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) Office. An employee approved for the Employee Incentive Scholarship award may receive funds to cover the full or partial cost of tuition and related expenses. Partial funding refers to those awards that exceed the maximum funded amount where the participant would have to pay the remaining costs.

Scholarship awards are prioritized to allow as many participants as possible to obtain education or training in specified health care disciplines for which recruitment or retention is difficult. VA medical facilities exercising direct patient care responsibilities will receive preference in funding priority. S&CE will provide program guidance to VA facility Directors in an effort to help them assess the value and appropriateness of using EISP to address local staffing needs.

Funding allocations are approved based on the following descending priority order:

(1) EISP. Applicants enrolled in: (a) Academic programs which provide the minimum education for entry level into the occupation. **NOTE:** For entry into RN (0610 series), priority will be given to applicants enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs;

- (b) Clinical master's degree programs;
- (c) Clinical doctorate programs; and
- (d) Master's degree programs related to their occupation.

(2) NNEI. Applicants enrolled in: (a) RN (0610 series) enrolled in BSN programs;

- (b) RN (0610 series) enrolled in master's degree in nursing programs;
- (c) RN (0610 series) enrolled in nursing doctorate programs; and
- (d) RN (0610 series) enrolled in master's or doctorate programs related to nursing.

(3) EISP and NNEI. Applicants enrolled in or accepted to other educational or training programs deemed critical to VHA's mission. **NOTE:** S&CE periodically reviews and refines funding criteria consistent with VISN and local needs, and overall VHA goals.

Please reference VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019 for additional information.

Attachment E

DVAHCS Selection Criteria for Employee Incentive Scholarship Program

1. Meet program eligibility and candidate requirements (Attachment B)
2. Complete and correct application packet submitted six (6) weeks prior to the start of each Application Cycle (March 1 – 31 and October 1 – 31)
3. Number of hours left to complete degree.
4. Completed EISP Applicant Statement. (Attachment C)
5. Satisfactory attendance record in current position.
6. Annual performance evaluation and rating in current position.
7. A completed academic Plan of Study accompanied by the school's list of required courses and credit hours plus proof of required costs.
8. Documentation of support and a commitment to hire from the facility Director if the employee is requesting an EISP or NNEI award for any of the following: non-clinical degree for clinical staff; non-clinical master's degree for clinical staff; programs resulting in initial licensure; advance practice nursing degree to prepare a nurse to be a NP or CNS; or doctorate degree not required for entry in practice. The documentation must describe how the degree will benefit the DVAHCS.
9. Adequate available funding from WMC

Please reference VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019 for additional information.

Attachment F

Participant Liability

- 1) **Liquidated Damages.** A participant in EISP, other than a participant described under paragraphs 14.d. and 14.g. of this appendix, who fails to accept payment, or instructs the educational institution in which the participant is enrolled not to accept payment, in whole or in part, of a scholarship award under the acceptance agreement entered into under EISP is liable to the United States for liquidated damages in the amount of \$1,500. Such liability is in addition to any period of obligated service or other obligation or liability under the acceptance agreement. See 38 U.S.C. 7675(a). **NOTE:** Participants who sign the Agreement and do not use the funds for any reason are subject to the liquidated damages liability.
- 2) **Liability During Course of Education or Training.** Except as provided in paragraphs 14.d. and 14.g. of this appendix, a participant in EISP will be liable to the United States for the amount that has been paid to, or on behalf of the participant, under the acceptance agreement, if the participant:
 - (1) Fails to maintain an acceptable level of academic standing in the educational institution in which the participant is enrolled as determined by the educational institution under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of VA;
 - a. Is dismissed from the educational institution for disciplinary reasons;
 - b. Voluntarily terminates the course of education or training in such educational institution before completing the education or training;
 - c. Fails to become licensed to practice medicine, osteopathy, dentistry, podiatry, or optometry in a State, fails to become licensed as a registered nurse in a State, or fails to meet any applicable licensure requirement in the case of any other health-care personnel who provide either direct patient-care services or services incident to direct patient-care services, during a period of time determined under regulations prescribed by the Secretary; or
 - d. Fails to maintain employment as a VA employee while enrolled in the course of education or training being pursued by the participant as a VA employee. Employment in a time-limited appointment (e.g., positions without compensation and other time-limited appointments) does not constitute VA employment for the purpose of this liability provision.

See 38 U.S.C. 7675(b). **NOTE:** *Liability under paragraph 14.b. is in lieu of any service obligation arising under a participant's agreement.*

1) Liability During Period of Obligated Service.

- a. Except as provided in paragraphs 14.d. and 14.g. of this appendix, if a participant in EISP breaches the agreement by failing for any reason to complete the period of obligated service (including failure to accept an appointment to a full-time position in the occupation for which the EISP award prepared the participant, or in the case of NNEI participants failure to accept an appointment to a full-time 0610 occupation code series position), the United States is entitled to recover from the participant an amount equal to the amounts of all award funds paid to the participant, plus interest, multiplied times three, and prorated for months of service completed under the period of obligated service. See 38 U.S.C. 7675(c).

b. The amount the United States shall be entitled to recover from the participant is determined in accordance with the following formula: $A=3\Phi((t-s)/t)$. (3) In such formula:

(1) "A" is the amount the United States is entitled to recover.

(2) " Φ " is the sum of the amounts paid under EISP to or on behalf of the participant; and the interest on such amounts which would be payable if at the time the amounts were paid, they were loans bearing interest at the maximum prevailing rate, as determined by the Treasurer of the United States.

(3) "t" is the total number of months in the participant's period of obligated service, including any additional period of obligated service.

(4) "s" is the number of months of such period served by the participant.

NOTE: *A participant's voluntary change in employment status, such as voluntary resignation, retirement, change in occupation, change from a Title 38 or hybrid Title 38 position to a Title 5 position, or conversion to part-time status during the participant's period of service obligation, constitutes a breach of the participant's service obligation under the program and the participant's EISP service agreement; therefore, the participant will incur a financial obligation in accordance with this paragraph.*

2) Limitation on Liability for Reductions-In-Force. Liability does not arise under paragraphs 14.b.(5) or 14.c. in the case of a participant if the participant fails to maintain employment as a VA employee due to a staffing adjustment. See 38 U.S.C. 7675(d).

3) Period of Payment for Damages. Any amount of damages which the United States is entitled to recover under information provided in this paragraph must be paid to the United States within the 1-year period beginning on the date of the breach of the agreement. See 38 U.S.C. 7675(e).

4) Collection of Debt. Any amounts owed to VA as the result of participant liability described in this paragraph must be collected in accordance with the policy and procedures set forth in VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XII, Debt Management. This guidance can be found on the VA Office of Finance Website located at <https://www.va.gov/finance/policy/pubs/volumeXII.asp>.

5) Termination from Scholarship Program without Liability. Liability does not arise in the case of a participant who is terminated by S&CE or a VA facility from the scholarship program as a result of having received a less than satisfactory performance evaluation, a sustained disciplinary or adverse action of any kind prior to the beginning of the participant's period of service obligation, and if the participant's actions do not trigger any of the liability provisions set forth in paragraph 14.a. or 14.b. of this appendix. Termination under this this provision requires the preapproval of the Under Secretary for Health or designee.

6) Requests for Waiver or Suspension of Financial Liability or Service. In certain circumstances, a participant may seek a waiver or suspension of the obligated service or financial liability incurred under this program or agreement by written request to the Under Secretary for Health or designee. Appendix D provides directions for requesting a waiver and provides waiver processing procedures.

Please reference VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019 for additional information.

Attachment G

VA National Education for Employees Program

1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

a. The Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) helps the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) meet its need for qualified health care staff by requiring scholarship recipients to complete a service obligation at a VA facility after graduation and completion of licensure or certification for which the EISP was awarded. The VA National Education for Employees Program (VANEEP) is a policy-derived initiative within EISP.

b. Under VANEEP, the VA facility allows the employee to accelerate their degree completion by attending school full-time and continuing to receive their base salary. The scholarship provides educational funds to cover the cost of tuition, books, and certain fees; and provides replacement salary funds to the VA facility which assists the VA facility in covering critical staffing needs in the participant's absence.

c. VANEEP recognizes that it is extremely difficult for individuals to meet the rigorous demands of entry-level clinical education programs while maintaining full-time employment. When a participant is unavailable to perform critical duties while pursuing education or training under EISP, replacement salary may be used to help prevent disruption to health care operations. Therefore, the intent of this program is to promote successful completion of clinical education programs and fulfillment of the service obligation period in a VA clinical position for which recruitment and retention is difficult.

d. Employees must be accepted for or enrolled as a full-time student, in an eligible academic program which has a clinical or practicum requirement, and will result in first-time licensure, certification, or registration in the occupation.

e. VA facility participation and employee recommendations for participation in VANEEP are based on VA facility prioritization of occupations for which recruitment and retention are difficult and in conjunction with the priorities established by the VA facility Workforce Succession and Strategic Plan.

f. VA facilities recommending employees for participation in VANEEP must commit to hiring the employee in the scholarship-sponsored occupation upon completion of the academic program and licensure or certification.

g. The occupation for which VANEEP funding is requested must be included in the VA facility's open and continuous announcement for EISP.

h. VA facilities using VANEEP are required to maintain local policies and procedures governing the administration and operation of VANEEP.

2. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

a. The applicant eligibility follows EISP procedures as outlined in Appendix A of this directive. Additionally:

(1) Employees who received a previous scholarship award using VANEED are not eligible for a second award under VANEED. **NOTE:** *Employees who receive EISP scholarships other than VANEED scholarships are eligible for a second award, provided that they have completed the service obligation period required by the first award.*

(2) Employees currently licensed or registered in a Title 38 or hybrid Title 38 occupation who wish to obtain an advanced or additional degree in that same occupation are not eligible for VANEED.

(3) The employee must submit evidence of being accepted for or enrolled as a full-time student in a school and academic program, which meets the accreditation standards for the occupation, and be within 2 academic years of completing the degree requirements, or within 1 academic year of completing the vocational diploma.

(4) Applicants for initial licensure or certification degree programs requesting participation in VANEED must have a minimum of a 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale in the required college, program specific, or pre-requisite course work.

(5) Applicants must identify a mentor who is a VA employee and knowledgeable about the participant's course of study. The mentor cannot be a peer. The participant must contact their assigned mentor at least monthly throughout the program.

b. As part of the local selection process, the applicant must meet local selection criteria including management input and a VA facility performance-based interview.

3. VA FACILITY SUBMISSION OF VANEED APPLICATIONS

a. The EISP Program Coordinator will submit the following supporting documentation as indicated on the EISP Application Checklist:

(1) VA facility endorsement approved by the VA facility Director indicating endorsement of the employee's application for participation in VANEED with a commitment-to-hire upon successful program completion.

(2) VANEED Replacement Salary Forecast Worksheet:
<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAWMCHRDRP/SCE/NS/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.*

(3) Salary scale for the replacement salary request.

(4) Transcript of past academic coursework indicating at least a cumulative GPA of

3.0 in required program specific prerequisite courses within the past 5 years. In cases where transcripts of past academic course work are not available, VA facilities must submit evidence of the criteria used to determine the VA facility recommendation.

NOTE: *If accepted into VANEED, these participants must maintain or exceed the minimum GPA set by the school to maintain an acceptable level of academic standing within the specific program for which VANEED was approved.*

b. VANEED deadlines will conform to general EISP deadlines.

4. REQUESTS TO CONVERT EISP PARTICIPANTS TO VANEED

a. VA facilities may submit requests to the Scholarships and Clinical Education office (S&CE) to convert existing EISP participants to VANEED participation which includes salary and benefits funding.

b. The participants must meet all other requirements noted in paragraph 2 of this appendix.

c. VA facilities must include a new Justification-of-Support/Commitment-to-Hire indicating VA facility awareness of participant's work schedule change.

d. The new Justification-of-Support/Commitment-to-Hire and Replacement Salary Forecast Worksheet will serve as the request for conversion, as described in paragraph 3.a.(1) of this appendix.

e. Amendment documentation is required for participants who have a change in the plan of study as a result of participating in VANEED. The amendment must include any revisions of the estimated completion date or redistribution of educational funds. Amendment requests submitted by the VA facility to S&CE must follow the procedures outlined in Appendix C.

5. FUNDING

a. Funding for VANEED is limited, centralized, and distributed by S&CE as specific purpose funds in a fair and impartial manner based on VHA workforce needs.

b. The employee receives full salary and payment for education costs up to authorized limits of EISP while attending school.

c. The VA facility where the VANEED participant is employed receives a maximum of \$40,000 salary dollars per year through EISP for replacing a student participating in a vocational diploma program and a maximum of \$51,000 salary dollars per year for replacing a student participating in an academic degree program. Replacement salary is limited to 12 months to support the completion of a vocational level program, and 24 months to support the completion of a degree programs (associate and above). See Replacement Assistance in Appendix A, paragraph 12.

d. Replacement salary for part-time employees approved for participation in VANEEP will be prorated based on employee's part-time work schedule at the time of application.

e. Replacement salary may not be used to provide for employee attendance in non-scholarship approved courses or courses previously covered under replacement salary.

6. PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

a. It is the participant's responsibility to ensure that all VANEEP sponsored degree or training requirements are met no later than 12 academic months after commencement of a vocational level program (such as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)), or no later than 24 academic months after commencement of a degree program (includes associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctorate degrees).

b. The participant must be enrolled in, and maintain, a full-time program of study while in the VANEEP program.

c. As a full-time student, the VANEEP participant works at the VA facility during significant breaks in the academic calendar.

d. Participants not enrolled in or maintaining a full-time program of study, as identified by the educational institution for the approved academic program, may be required to return to work.

e. The VA facility must include in local policies and procedures the participant's responsibility for notifying the EISP Program Coordinator of their progress in the program, plan of study changes, expected work schedule (including during school holidays), payment procedures (e.g., tuition and books) and timekeeping procedures (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, etc.).

f. While a VANEEP participant, successful completion of the EISP-sponsored education program is the participant's full-time VHA job. Therefore, VANEEP participants may not work overtime during the period of full-time class sessions.

g. At a minimum, the EISP Program Coordinator for VANEEP must confirm participant status in the educational program at the midpoint of each semester or quarter and at the conclusion of each semester or quarter. It is the responsibility of the VA facility to implement increased monitoring of participants if they appear in danger of failing the course(s).

h. The participant must provide grades to the EISP Program Coordinator for VANEEP no later than 2 weeks after completing each course.

i. The participant must maintain an acceptable level of academic standing in the approved academic program as determined by the school.

j. VANEEP participant program changes are processed in accordance with the amendment procedures covered in Appendix C. Additionally:

(1) VANEED participants must notify the EISP Program Coordinator for VANEED before making any changes to the participant's plan of study.

(2) The VANEED participant's plan of study may be revised, including extension of completion date, provided it falls within the 1 or 2-year limit, as appropriate. Additional replacement salary dollars will not be approved.

k. VANEED participants must remain at the VA facility for which their award was approved for the duration of their academic program.

7. SERVICE OBLIGATION PERIOD

The service obligation period for a VANEED participant is 3 years. The participant's service commencement date shall be in accordance with paragraph 13 of Appendix A.

8. LIABILITY OF VANEED PARTICIPANT

The VANEED participant will be liable for EISP funding as noted in paragraph 14 of Appendix A. The participant will not be liable for the salary and benefits funds provided to the VA facility for the participant's position.

9. REQUESTS TO CONVERT VANEED PARTICIPANTS TO EISP

a. VA facilities may submit requests to SC&E to convert VANEED participants to a basic EISP scholarship in situations where:

(1) The VA facility determines the participant is unable to meet the educational completion requirements within VANEED replacement salary limitations; or

(2) The participant fails to comply with established national or local policies and procedures required for participation in VANEED.

b. VA facilities must include an amendment request and memorandum endorsed by the VA facility Director specifying the reason for the conversion and requesting the discontinuance of replacement salary.

c. VA facilities must include a new Justification-of-Support/Commitment-to-Hire indicating VA facility awareness of participant's work schedule change, as described in paragraph 3.a.(1) of this appendix.

d. The participant must meet and maintain EISP eligibility requirements.

e. Requests to convert VANEED participants to EISP may be considered provided the requested change does not exceed the maximum length of participation delineated in paragraph 4 of Appendix A.

f. Participants approved to convert from VANEED to EISP will retain a 3-year service obligation.

Please reference VHA Directive 1426.01, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, September 16, 2019 for additional information.

Department of Veterans Affairs

Attachment H Memorandum

Date:

From: NNEI/EISP Coordinator

Subj: VA National Education for Employees Program (VANEED) Learning Plan

To:

The following requirements have been discussed and agreed upon as a VANEED/
Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) recipient.

1. Employee agrees to not be employed at any other institution as an LPN or Nursing Assistant for the duration of the program until successful licensure as LPN/ RN. The employee must remain at the Durham Health Care System for the duration of their academic program.
2. Employee agrees not to work Saturday or Sunday.
3. Employee will complete annual mandatory reviews/classes within deadlines. Information on these requirements will be reviewed monthly with NM. Performance appraisals and within grade increases continue as scheduled.
4. Employee will report academic progress monthly, by phone, email, or in person, to mentor, Nurse Manager, and NNEI/ EISP Coordinator by the 5th of each month while enrolled in the VANEED program. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action or termination from the scholarship program.
5. Employee will notify Chief Nurse/Medicine and Education/Nurse Manager (NM) of change of address, and other changes in status/contact information within 2 weeks of occurrence.
6. Employee will submit receipts for scholarship expenses for reimbursement/ payments to the facility's Scholarship Coordinator/designee within two weeks of bill receipt or incurring costs.
7. Tour of duty will be posted as AA (authorized absence) Monday – Friday 8:00am – 4:30pm.

8. Any school recess/closure that exceeds DVAHCS holiday schedules will have to be posted as annual leave (AL). For example: if school is closed each November for two days (Thanksgiving Day plus Friday), then one day must be scheduled as AL, because DVAHCS only has one day designated as a holiday. Employee will enter those leave requests in advance. If the VA holiday falls on a day that the school is in session, tour posting will be holiday excused.
9. Any school recess/break that exceeds three (3) working days will require the employee to report for duty 7:30a – 4:00p or 8:00a – 4:30p on their assigned unit during that break. For example, if the school is closed for a week (i.e., spring break), the employee will report for duty on their assigned unit for that week. The Nurse Manager/supervisor may approve AL at his/her discretion if the employee requests it in advance.
10. If employee fails to successfully pass a course, employee must notify the NNEI/EISP coordinator immediately. He/She is required to retake the course at their own expense without extension of contracted completion date of program.
11. If employee takes any courses to prepare for the licensure exam, it will be at the employee's expense and not covered by scholarship funds.
12. Employee will contact Chief Nurse/Medicine and Education/NM in advance of requesting any AL, Sick Leave (SL), etc.
13. Employee will request annual leave for following calendar year in accordance with Health Care System, service, and unit policy, and procedures.
14. Employee will remain on the emergency call-back cascade for the assigned unit.
15. Employee will remain in their current T&L number.
16. Employee agrees to complete academic program in twelve (12) months vocation/certificate programs (such as LPN) or twenty-four (24) months for a degree program (includes associate, bachelors, masters, doctorate degree programs). The employee's work assignment is to attend school and therefore is a full-time employee. If the employee is required to take a course during a summer session, the NNEI/EISP Coordinator may arrange for the employee to report to duty based on that course schedule.
17. Employee will register for and complete professional licensure exam no later than ninety (90) days after degree conferred. He/She will notify the NNEI/EISP Coordinator/NM/Mentor of the licensure exam date as soon as it is

known. Failure to pass licensure exam within 90 days of degree conferral may result in program breach and inability to qualify for new position.

18. Employee must be placed in the new position within 180 days of degree conferral.

a. Delays in participant becoming eligible for placement (degree conferral, licensure, certification, registration, etc) are addressed on a case-by-case basis by the facility's Scholarship Coordinator. These delays may result in a request to the Scholarship and Clinical Education office for extension or breach by the participant.

b. Delays in facility placement (boarding, position availability, leadership concurrence, participant acceptance, etc) are addressed on a case-by-case basis by the facility's Scholarship Coordinator. These delays may result in a request to the Scholarship and Clinical Education office for extension.

Employee

Date

Manager / Service Chief

Date

NNEI/EISP Scholarship Coordinator

Date