

**APPENDIX G18. PSYCHOLOGIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-180
Veterans Health Administration**

1. COVERAGE. The following are requirements for appointment as a psychologist in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Psychologists engage in professional and scientific work which relates to behavior, capacities, traits, interests, and emotions. These requirements apply to all VHA psychologists in the GS-180 series, including those assigned to VA medical centers, Community-based Outpatient Clinical (CBOCs), Vet Centers, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) offices, the VHA National Center for Organizational Development and VHA Central Office. This work may include any one or a combination of the following: providing professional clinical services, conducting research, carrying out education and training activities, clinical consultation, supervision, and administration.

2. BASIC REQUIREMENTS. The basic requirements for employment as a VHA psychologist are prescribed by: Public Law 96-151 codified in Title 38, U.S.C. § 7402. To qualify for appointment, all applicants for the position of psychologist in VHA must meet the following:

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)

b. Education

(1) Have a doctoral degree in psychology from a graduate program in psychology accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). The specialty area of the degree must be consistent with the assignment for which the applicant is to be employed.

AND

(2) Have successfully completed a professional psychology internship training program that has been accredited by APA. Exceptions: (1) new VHA psychology internship programs that are in the process of applying for APA accreditation are acceptable in fulfillment of the internship requirement, provided that such programs were sanctioned by the VHA Central Office Program Director for Psychology and the VHA Central Office of Academic Affiliations at the time that the individual was an intern and (2) VHA facilities who offered full one-year pre-doctoral internships prior to PL 96-151 (pre-1979) are considered to be acceptable in fulfillment of the internship requirement.

(c) **Licensure.** Hold a full, current, and unrestricted license to practice psychology at the doctoral level in a State, Territory, Commonwealth of the United States (e.g., Puerto Rico), or the District of Columbia.

Exception. The Secretary may waive the requirement of licensure for an individual psychologist for a period not to exceed 2 years from the date of employment on the condition that such a psychologist provide care only under the supervision of a psychologist who is so licensed. Non-licensed psychologists who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements may be given a temporary appointment as a graduate psychologist under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405 (a) (1) (D). Failure to

VA HANDBOOK 5005
PART II
APPENDIX G18

obtain licensure during that period is justification for termination of the temporary appointment. This may result in termination of employment.

(d) **Loss of Credential.** An employee in this occupation who fails to obtain licensure/certification/registration within the required time frame, or who fails to maintain the required licensure/certification/registration must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.

For occupations which require an active credential (licensure/certification/registration) at all grade levels, at the discretion of the appointing official, an employee may be reassigned to another occupation for which he/she qualifies if a placement opportunity exists. For occupations which require an active credential (licensure/certification/registration) in assignments above the full-performance level only, at the discretion of the appointing official, an employee may remain at an appropriate lower grade level in the occupation when both of the following apply: the credential is not a requirement and a placement opportunity exists.”

(e) **Grandfathering Provision.** The following is the standard grandfathering policy for all Title 38 Hybrid qualification standards. Some of these provisions may not apply to this occupation. Please carefully review the qualification standard to determine the specific education and/or licensure/certification/ registration requirements that apply to this occupation.

All persons employed in VHA in this occupation on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including positive education and licensure/certification/registration that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements required in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:

(1) Such employees in an occupation that does not require a licensure/certification/registration, may be reassigned, promoted, or demoted within the occupation.

(2) Such employees in an occupation that requires a licensure/certification/registration, may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or demoted within the occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the journey level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions.

(3) Such employees in an occupation that requires a licensure/certification/registration only at higher grade levels must meet the licensure/certification/registration requirement before they can be promoted to those higher grade levels.

Employees who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their temporary appointment extended or be reappointed, on a temporary or permanent basis, until they fully meet the basic requirements of the standard.

Employees initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure/certification/registration that meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

If an employee who was retained in an occupation listed in 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) under this provision leaves that occupation, the employee loses protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the occupation.

(f). **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

(g) **English Language Proficiency:** Psychologists must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5a, this part.

3. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Definitions

(1) Creditable Experience

(a) **Current Professional Psychology Practice.** To be creditable, the experience must be post-doctoral degree and must have required the use of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics associated with current professional psychology practice. Creditable post-doctoral degree experience can be obtained through employment as a psychologist or through participating in a supervised post-doctoral psychology training program. This may be evidenced by one or both of the following:

1. Active professional practice. Active professional practice means paid/non-paid employment as a professional psychologist.

2. A full, current, and unrestricted license.

(b) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable if it is post-doctoral degree experience as a professional psychologist directly related to the duties to be performed. Qualifying experience must also be at a level comparable to professional psychology experience at the next lower level.

(c) **Part-time Experience.** Part-time experience is creditable according to its relationship to a full-time workweek. For example, a psychologist employed 20 hours per week, or on a ½ time basis, would receive 1 full-time workweek of credit for each 2 weeks of service.

(2) **Post-Doctoral Degree Fellowships.** Post-doctoral degree fellowships are training programs in an advanced area of clinical practice. Training as a fellow may substitute for creditable experience on a year-for-year basis.

b. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates:

(1) GS-11

(a) **Experience.** None beyond the basic requirements.

(b) **Assignment.** Staff psychologists at this level diagnose mental disorders, conduct psychological and/or neuropsychological assessments, treat mental disorders through a variety of modalities, and

provide adjunctive interventions for treatment of medical disorders. They practice under the close supervision of a licensed psychologist.

(2) **GS-12**

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the basic requirements at the GS-11 level, at least 1 year of experience as a professional psychologist equivalent to the next lower grade level. Individuals assigned as GS-12 psychologists may be in the process of obtaining licensure at the independent practice level. If unlicensed, the individual must be supervised by a licensed psychologist and the experience and supervision must meet the standards for psychology licensure. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

1. Knowledge of, and ability to apply, a wide range of professional psychological theories and assessment methods to a variety of patient populations.

2. Ability to develop coherent treatment strategies.

3. Ability to incorporate new clinical procedures.

(c) **Assignment.** At the GS-12 level, unlicensed psychologists practice under the supervision of a licensed psychologist, but with less need for consultation than at the GS-11 grade level. They may be assigned to any program area.

(3) **GS-13**

(a) **Licensure.** Hold a full, current, and unrestricted license to practice psychology at the doctoral level in a State, Territory, Commonwealth of the United States (e.g., Puerto Rico), or the District of Columbia.

(b) **Experience.** In addition to the experience requirements at the GS-12 level, at least 1 additional year of experience as a psychologist equivalent to the next lower grade level. In addition the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

1. Knowledge of, and ability to apply, advanced professional psychological theories and techniques to the full range of patient populations.

2. Ability to provide professional advice and consultation in areas related to professional psychology and behavioral health.

3. Knowledge of clinical research literature.

4. For supervisory assignments:

a. Ability to provide supervision in areas related to behavioral health and social services provision in order to accomplish the organizational goals and objectives.

b. Ability to provide fair, principled and decisive leadership for a work environment that promotes shared accountability.

(d) **Assignments.** This is the full performance level for staff psychologists. At this level psychologists are licensed at the doctoral level to practice independently in the provision of psychological services consulting with peers and supervisors as appropriate. They are assigned to any VHA program and setting, including inpatient or outpatient medicine, surgery, mental health, neurology, rehabilitation medicine, geriatrics, Vet Centers, and the VHA National Center for Organizational Development.

1. **Staff Psychologists** diagnose mental disorders, conduct psychological and/or neuropsychological assessments, treat mental disorders through a variety of modalities and provide adjunctive interventions for treatment of medical disorders. Among the modalities provided are individual, family, and group psychotherapies, and other interventions such as biofeedback, psychological hypnosis, and environmental interventions. They consult with medical center staff on a wide variety of patient care issues. Staff psychologists may be involved in program evaluation and/or research activities.

2. **Supervisory Psychologists.** At this level supervisory psychologists typically have collateral supervisory duties primarily for non-professional staff, although a small number of professional staff may be supervised as well (i.e., less than three). Supervisory psychologists at this level may be assigned to any program area and may be involved in program evaluation and/or research activities. At this level, supervisory psychologists independently provide psychological services at all levels of complexity and consult with peers and supervisors as appropriate.

(4) **GS-14**

(a) **Licensure.** Hold a full, current, and unrestricted license to practice psychology at the doctoral level in a State, Territory, Commonwealth of the United States (e.g., Puerto Rico), or the District of Columbia.

(b) **Experience.** At least 1 year of professional psychologist experience equivalent to the next lower grade level, and must fully meet the KSAs for that level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following professional KSAs and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment specific KSAs designated by an asterisk (*):

(c) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

1. **Psychology Program Manager.** Psychologist program managers have broad program management responsibilities which include the operation and management of key clinical, training, or administrative programs. The size of the medical center, program managed, and scope of responsibility are grade determining. Examples include (but are not limited to) managers of addiction, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health intensive case management (MHICM), partial hospitalization, residential rehabilitation, domiciliary, palliative care, neuropsychology, and internship and post-doctoral

fellowship training programs; psychology program oversight and coordination as a psychology executive; and program oversight and coordination as Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Education, ACOS for Research, etc.

Responsibilities include development and implementation of programs, policies, and procedures; oversight of administrative and programmatic resources; and monitoring of outcomes using a data-driven quality assurance process. Decisions made affect staff and other resources associated with the programs managed and are made while exercising wide latitude and independent judgment. Such programs deliver specialized, complex, highly professional services that are important program components of the medical center and significantly impact the health care provided to veterans.

Psychologist program managers that serve as psychology executives have full responsibility for oversight of the professional practice of psychology to ensure the highest quality of psychological care provided to veterans throughout the facility and its affiliated clinics. This responsibility also includes ensuring that all psychologists in the facility and its affiliated clinics meet the requirements of this qualification standard.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Ability to organize work, set priorities, delegate tasks, and meet multiple deadlines.

*(2) Skill in managing and directing the work of others to accomplish program goals and objectives, and ability to devise ways to adapt work operations to new and changing programs, staffing, and budget requirements, etc.

*(3) Ability to translate management goals and objectives into well-coordinated and controlled work operations.

*(4) Ability to establish and monitor production and performance priorities and standards.

(5) Knowledge of, and ability to appropriately utilize, evidence based practices and clinical practice guidelines and ability to guide staff in using these tools.

(6) Ability to deal effectively with individuals or groups representing widely divergent backgrounds, interests, and points of view.

*(7) Ability to analyze organizational and operational problems and to develop and implement solutions that result in sound operation of the program.

2. Psychologist Clinician Investigator. Psychologist clinician investigators are actively involved as principal investigators or co-principal investigators in peer-reviewed VA, National Institutes of Health (NIH), or comparably rigorous intramural or extramurally funded research programs. Responsibilities include peer review activities for VA and non-VA research, e.g., grant review for VA or NIH proposals, local research service committees and/or boards, such as Research and Development (R&D) Service, Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) Service, or Institutional Review Board (IRB), and service as a consulting editor for peer-reviewed journals.

Psychologist clinician investigators have achieved significant professional recognition by making scientific contributions to research projects with potential for substantial impact. In addition to active involvement in peer-reviewed research and other peer review activities as noted above, this recognition must be demonstrated by attainment of at least 3 of the following: multiple publications in peer-reviewed professional literature; a consistent record of presentation of findings at national scientific meetings; attainment of an academic appointment at the affiliated medical school or local university, usually at the rank of associate professor or equivalent; and responsibility for multiple funded research projects.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Knowledge of, and ability to apply, appropriate scientific methods in the design and execution of basic and applied research.

*(2) Ability to coordinate work across multiple settings.

*(3) Ability to convey scientific concepts and methodological principles to individuals with diverse levels of technical expertise.

3. Supervisory Psychologist. Individuals designated as supervisory psychologists have supervisory responsibility for subordinates. Supervisory psychologists also have line and staff authority for resource allocations within the area of responsibility and ensure the efficient operation of the organizational unit. Examples of assignments in this category include (but are not limited to) chief of psychology, chief of a patient care service line, or department or division director. Responsibilities include supervision of staff, professional management, and administrative responsibilities that are complex in scope and that constitute a significant component of the medical center. Decisions are made exercising wide latitude and independent judgment.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Ability to effectively supervise and manage subordinate employees.

*(2) Skill in assessing qualifications and abilities of current and prospective employees.

*(3) Ability to develop productivity standards appropriate to each service provided and each venue.

(4) Skill in interpersonal relationships, including conflict resolution.

(5) Ability to deal effectively with individuals or groups representing widely divergent backgrounds, interests, and points of view.

*(6) Skill in working collaboratively with other disciplines and supervisors.

4. Psychologist Leadership Positions at the VISN or National Level Assignments. Leadership positions at the VISN or national level are characterized by their scope, level of complexity, significant impact on VHA mission, significant importance to the VISN, etc. Examples of such assignments include (but are not limited to): VISN liaison for mental health, associate chief of service at the national level, associate program manager at the VISN or national level, etc.

GS-14 psychologist leadership positions direct a mental health, behavioral science, other patient care program component at the VISN or national level or direct organizational development at the national level. Leadership positions at the VISN or national level are graded at the GS-14 level when the duties and responsibilities are such that they are of substantial importance to the overall functioning of the VISN or national program. Duties are exercised with wide latitude, autonomy, and independence. The administrative or technical work is of substantial difficulty and responsibilities are significant. Individuals at this level have delegated authority to determine long range work plans and assure that implementation of the goals and objectives is carried out. They may serve as consultants to other management officials in the field, VISN, or national level. Incumbents typically report to managers of the overall program at the next higher level of supervision.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Knowledge of, and ability to understand and communicate, existing policies and regulations.

*(2) Ability to provide information about VISN or national policy to a wide variety of audiences in a useable and understandable manner.

*(3) Ability to develop and recommend new or revised policies that are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

(4) Knowledge of, and ability to utilize, resource materials as well as ability to develop new materials when needed.

(5) Ability to relate to individuals at many different levels both within and external to the organization.

(6) Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing with a diverse group of professional staff.

NOTE: Some psychologists (generally those who are GS-14 program managers and supervisory psychologists) are assigned duties and responsibilities at the VISN or national level that are at a higher level of technical and administrative complexity than their facility-level responsibilities. In these cases, the higher level duties must be of significant scope and complexity, and must be of critical importance to the VISN or national program. If such higher-level assignments comprise 25 percent or more of the individual's overall duties and responsibilities, these assignments would be grade controlling at the higher, i.e., GS-15, level.

(5) GS-15

(a) **Licensure.** Hold a full, current, and unrestricted license to practice psychology at the doctoral level in a State, Territory, Commonwealth of the United States (e.g., Puerto Rico), or the District of Columbia.

(b) **Experience.** At least 1 year of professional psychologist experience equivalent to the next lower grade level, and must fully meet the KSAs for that level. In addition, the candidate must

demonstrate the following professional KSAs and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment specific KSAs designated by an asterisk (*).

(c) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

1. Senior Program Manager. Senior psychologist program managers have very broad responsibility for multiple programs or have responsibility for a large service organization that is of considerable scope, size, and complexity. Examples of positions are similar to those listed under the GS-14 program manager heading, but at the GS-15 level, the size, scope, significance and impact are greater. GS-15 senior psychologist program managers have oversight for programs that have 10 or more professional staff.

Responsibilities include development of short and long range goals and plans; development and implementation of policies and procedures to ensure that plans are carried out and goals are met; administrative and programmatic resource management; and monitoring outcomes using a data-driven quality assurance process. Decisions made affect staff and other resources associated with the programs managed and are made exercising very wide latitude and independent judgment. The programs managed are substantial program components that deliver specialized, complex, highly professional services and significantly impact the health care provided to veterans.

Senior psychologist program managers have full responsibility for oversight of the professional practice of psychology in large medical centers, generally with many psychologists, and ensure the highest quality of psychological care provided to veterans throughout the facility and its affiliated clinics. This responsibility includes ensuring that all psychologists in the facility and its affiliated clinics meet the requirements of this qualification standard.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Skill in managing and directing the work of large, complex organizational units and in applying effective management practices.

*(2) Ability to balance responsibilities in a complex environment and to work with great autonomy; ability to set priorities and delegate tasks, meet multiple deadlines, analyze complex organizational problems; and ability to develop and implement effective solutions for those problems.

(3) Skill in persuasion, negotiation, and motivation to negotiate multiple program policies.

(4) Skill in interpersonal relationships in dealing with employees and other managers using advanced consultation and problem solving skills.

*(5) Ability to assess need for basic and complex services across multiple programmatic patient care venues.

*(6) Ability to coordinate the efforts of multiple program elements across a complex system.

(7) Skill in the application and analysis of measurement tools to systems issues.

2. Senior Psychologist Clinician Investigator. Senior psychologist clinician investigators perform assignments at the highest level of investigative independence involving complex research programs and/or multi-site/center trials. Responsibilities include active involvement as principal investigators for peer reviewed VA, NIH, or comparably rigorous intramural or extramurally funded research programs, high-level peer review activities for VA and non-VA research (e.g., membership on standing scientific review panels for VA or NIH proposals), and service as editor or associate editor of major peer-reviewed journals, service on scientific advisory boards (R&D, HSR&D, NIH, etc.).

Senior psychologist clinician investigators have achieved significant national professional recognition for research excellence and major scientific contributions. In addition to high level involvement in peer-reviewed research and other peer review activities, this recognition must be demonstrated by attainment of at least 4 the following: an extensive publication record in the nationally recognized peer-reviewed professional literature; a consistent record of presentation of findings at national scientific meetings; recognition by VA or NIH as a senior career scientist, e.g. Senior Research Career Scientist; an academic appointment at the affiliated medical school or local university at the rank of Full Professor or equivalent; and full responsibility for direction of a complex, multi-program clinical service or multiply funded research projects.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Ability to balance responsibilities in an extremely complex environment and to work with great autonomy.

*(2) Ability to independently create, organize, manage, and maintain high quality research programs.

*(3) Knowledge of budget control procedures that includes funding from multiple sources and may vary annually.

3. Senior Supervisory Psychologist. Senior supervisory psychologists have supervisory responsibility for subordinates and are responsible for all professional, management, and administrative aspects of the service or organizational entity. Examples of positions are similar to those listed under the GS-14 supervisory psychologist heading, but at the GS-15 grade level, the size, scope, significance, and impact are greater.

Supervision and resource management involve major decisions, and work activities and supervision significantly impact the ability of staff to provide comprehensive services to veterans. The service or organizational entity is a major component of the medical center and the services or programs supervised are highly professional, technical, and complex. Responsibilities include oversight of a large, complex organization, always with 10 or more professional staff, that encompasses several component parts integral to the functioning of the medical center, or alternatively, 1 large service or organization. Decisions are made with very wide latitude and independent judgment.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Ability to effectively supervise and manage a large group of professional staff.

*(2) Ability to correctly assess qualifications and potential of current and prospective employees.

*(3) Ability to develop appropriate productivity standards for professional staff, often across multiple program lines.

(4) Skill in interpersonal relationships including conflict resolution and ability to work collaboratively with supervisors from other units.

*(5) Knowledge of the goals and objectives of the medical center and VISN and ability to communicate these to subordinates.

4. Psychologist Leadership Positions at the VISN or National Level. Senior leadership positions at the VISN or national level are characterized by their size, scope, and high level of complexity; have significant impact on the VHA mission; and are of significant importance to the VISN, etc. Examples of positions may be similar to those listed under the GS-14 Leadership positions heading; but, at the GS-15 grade level, the individual would have full responsibility for the program or programs and the size, scope, significance, and impact of the program(s) are greater. Psychologists at this level generally provide overall leadership, guidance, and direction for the VISN or national program or programs.

Directs a large, complex mental health, behavioral science, or other patient care program at the VISN or national level or may have responsibility for several programs at the VISN or national level. This level would include the Director of a national organizational development program. Psychologists in senior leadership positions at the VISN or national level will be graded at the GS-15 level when the duties and responsibilities exert a major and significant impact on the overall functioning of the organizational entity, i.e., the impact is VISN or VHA-wide. Duties are performed with wide latitude, exercising independent judgment and full, delegated autonomy. Responsibilities include overall planning, direction, and execution of the area of responsibility. The administrative or technical work is of exceptional difficulty and responsibility and consultation is provided to high level officials at the field, VISN, or national level.

a. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

(1) Knowledge of, and ability to effectively communicate, existing policies and regulations.

*(2) Ability to develop and recommend new or revised policies that are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

*(3) Skill in leading senior management officials in policy development.

*(4) Ability to influence high level officials in adoption of, and conformance to, performance measures, monitors, and other policy guidelines.

(5) Knowledge of, and ability to utilize, resource materials and to develop new materials when needed.

(6) Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing with a diverse group of professional staff and management officials who are often at the highest management levels.

NOTE: Although examples of titles are offered in each section throughout this Standard, there is little standardization of titles, or duties associated with those titles, across VHA and psychologists hold leadership responsibilities that are known by a wide variety of titles within their individual facility, VISN, or national program. Such titles are to be considered as subsumed within one of the assignments described provided that the responsibilities meet the corresponding grade determining criteria.

4. DEVIATIONS

a. The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for psychologists in VHA whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignments, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

b. Under no circumstances will the educational or licensure requirements be waived.

c. The placement of individuals in grade levels not described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, in VHA Central Office.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. §§ 7402, 7403.