



*(January 15, 2016)*

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

**Alma L. Lee**  
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: OPM Releases New Employee Engagement Guidance –**  
**Federal Times**  
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The Office of Personnel Management is looking for agency management to take a larger role in employee engagement, releasing new guidance on how to evaluate performance.

In a Jan. 12 letter, OPM acting director Beth Cobert [outlined “Performance Management Plus”](#) a plan to move beyond annual employee evaluations alone and getting managers more active in engaging with their employees.

“We know from countless studies and case histories that employees feel most empowered and enabled to succeed and grow when supervisors involve them in continuous dialogue on: position expectations; alignment of position responsibilities and agency mission; progress toward achieving expectations; and areas of strength or needs for improvement,” she said in the letter.

So the Performance Management Plus plan recommends strategies like “light check-ins” where managers carry brief and regular meetings to touch base on needs and priority, timely feedback incorporating numerous stakeholders and opportunities for coaching and development.

Cobert said that current regulations allow for agencies to improve employee engagement practices by focusing on establishing work expectations, continued performance monitoring and rewarding performance.

“We have the right tools and structure to promote merit-based management and accountability to the American people,” she said. “We also need to make sure we use those tools, in the way their use was intended, to improve organizational effectiveness in the accomplishment of agency goals.”

As an example, Cobert cited OPM's new Senior Executive Service Performance Appraisal System Certification Process, which the agency debuted on Oct. 1 and was developed through cross-agency planning.

The SES appraisal system allows OPM to certify agency appraisal and reward structures for senior executives, and Cobert said the new guidance allows agencies to design their own engagement plans under the umbrella of Performance Management Plus.

The Performance Management Plus guidance comes a day after Cobert [sent additional guidance on the policies](#) that prevent favored hiring of political appointees to career positions, a practice called political burrowing, especially in an election year.

The guidance included how to handle appointments and rewards during 2016, including policies for converting noncareer SES employees to the competitive service.