



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Acquisition and Logistics
VA Acquisition Academy



LEADERSHIP

KNOWLEDGE

EXCELLENCE

QUALIFICATION

RESULTS

HOLISTIC TRAINING

INNOVATIVE

CUSTOMIZED

CERTIFICATION

BUSINESS IMPACT

Acquisition is a mission-critical asset that is integral to the execution of all federal agency programs. Done well, it results in the proper exercise of the federal government's fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayer and better mission outcomes for the American people. In Fiscal Year 2013, discretionary contract spend across the entire federal government was more than \$400 billion. With so many dollars at stake, not to mention critical products and services for the public, federal agencies must ensure they have a well-trained acquisition workforce to carry out this mission-critical function.

At the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), we recognize the value of training and are committed to developing a world-class acquisition workforce through our award-winning VA Acquisition Academy (VAAA), located in Frederick, Md. Established in 2008, the VAAA develops and delivers acquisition training to meet the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Federal Acquisition Certification requirements for contracting personnel, program/project managers, and contracting officer's representatives (CORs). In addition, we offer training for the supply chain and facilities management workforces--integral members of the acquisition team. While meeting OMB certification requirements is a critical component of our training, it is our holistic approach to career development that goes far beyond "check-the-box" training. The VAAA's unique training offerings and customized delivery result in our students being **well qualified** to carry out the acquisition function.

Initially created to serve VA acquisition professionals, VAAA trainings are now available to other government agencies. VAAA courses and programs are offered on an open-enrollment basis, to individuals or groups, and can be tailored and delivered to organizations anywhere throughout the U.S. In addition, we offer a variety of learning modalities including facilitated virtual delivery where participants are connected from remote locations, face-to-face instruction, and online self-paced learning to meet the different learning needs of students. We design all of our offerings to deliver high quality learning programs with consideration to organizational budget constraints, the need to minimize time away from the office, and travel restrictions.

Through our strategically-sourced contracting vehicles for curricula design/development and course delivery, as well as our own in-house contracting, program management, and instructional systems design expertise, we are able to build customized training and tailor "best value" solutions for VA employees and other federal agencies. With students coming from multiple agencies, our model promotes information sharing to enrich the learning experience for all.

About the Academy

The VAAA's five schools provide much more than certification training. We train the entire acquisition team to include contracting professionals, program and project managers, contracting officer's representatives, facilities managers, and supply chain managers and logisticians. Using a competency-based, experiential learning model, the academy provides a consistent approach and methodology. Our schools include:

- Acquisition Internship School (AIS)
- Program Management School (PMS)
- Contracting Professional School (CPS)
- Supply Chain Management School (SCMS)
- Facilities Management School (FMS)

Through well-established stakeholder engagement approaches and our learning standards and evaluation framework, all of our offerings are developed, delivered, and evaluated to ensure they deliver results that improve how the acquisition system works.

While traditional acquisition training programs often target specific audiences only, we are expanding our offerings to include more team-based developmental opportunities where contracting, program, legal, finance, and even industry will participate in learning experiences together. We have found that developing a common understanding of the process, an appreciation and respect for each other's roles, and the lines of demarcation between each to maintain the integrity of the process, makes the acquisition system work better. Look for these new cross-training offerings in FY 2015 in addition to a significant expansion of curricula in all schools including continuous learning point (CLP) classes in our Contracting Professional School.

Acquisition Internship School

The award-winning Acquisition Internship School (AIS) offers two tracks that are available to VA and other federal agencies. The cohort-based models focus on entry-level interns, create career-lasting networks, and lay a solid foundation for what it takes to be successful in the acquisition business. This approach allows interns to leverage and share the vast knowledge and expertise within the federal government acquisition community and apply innovative practices to help perform the acquisition function more effectively and efficiently.

Both tracks, the Acquisition Intern Program (AIP) and Warriors to Workforce Program (W2W), are competency-based and include a holistic curriculum focused not only on technical contracting,

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but also skills including communication, program management, writing, leadership, creative thinking, risk management, and interpersonal competencies. The AIS received the prestigious Chief Acquisition Officers Council (CAOC) Team Acquisition Excellence Award in 2009 and again in 2013. The CAOC Award recognizes teams or individuals that have demonstrated excellence in federal acquisition management.

Acquisition Intern Program (AIP)

This two-year track includes formal instruction, our unique experiential learning lab skill-building workshops, business competency development, and on-the-job training (approximately 70 percent of the program time) interspersed throughout the entire program. Other elements of the program include field trips, guest speakers to share industry insights, and mission service projects to increase employee engagement and sense of purpose. Interns graduating from the program satisfy all training requirements necessary to be eligible for Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting (FAC-C) Levels I and II.



Warriors to Workforce Program (W2W)

Developed as a separate three-year track for our wounded warriors, this program was established to help our nation's heroes meet the college education requirements (24 business credits) for entry into the contract specialist career field. This track also offers peak performance training, focused on managing mental, emotional, and physiological responses to perform at peak levels under pressure and stress. The program provides significant support to our Veterans with service-connected disabilities and leverages GI Bill benefits so that interns' primary focus is on their academic studies. Through this model, our interns to-date have achieved an impressive grade point average of 3.5 and are performing exceptionally well on the job. Additionally, with the strong transition support we provide, the VA is experiencing impressive retention rates of greater than 95 percent. After successfully completing year one, W2W graduates transition into the AIP two-year track. Other disciplines beyond contracting are also available in areas such as cyber security, program management, and information technology.

Contracting Professional School

Going well beyond certification, we believe our offerings help our students earn the distinction of being recognized as **qualified** contracting professionals. The Contracting Professional School (CPS) provides students with the core courses necessary to obtain Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting (FAC-C) Levels I, II, and III. In addition to the core courses, the school offers specialized tracks and elective offerings in areas such as strategic sourcing, federal appropriations law, Lean Six Sigma, and best value source selection to help meet the 80 continuous learning points (CLPs) required every two years to maintain certification, as well as customized courses to meet targeted training needs.

New CPS course offerings coming in Fiscal Year 2015 and beyond will provide significant career development opportunities for the mid-level acquisition workforce to include cross-functional training opportunities and classes focused on helping develop the business and operational skills needed to mature organizational capability. In other words, training will focus on what it takes to more efficiently and effectively manage and lead world-class acquisition organizations. Significant a-la-carte courses will be offered as well as opportunities to participate in a cohort-based Mid-Level Contracting Fellows Program.

The school incorporates civilian case studies and examples in training to increase relevance and strengthen the theory-to-practice connection. CPS staff members have significant operational contracting experience, enabling the VAAA to offer high quality training at a lower cost than what agencies would otherwise typically incur. Since its opening, the school has trained thousands of acquisition professionals, including students from other government agencies.

Facilities Management School

The Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act (FBPTA), Public Law 111-308, imposes training and reporting requirements on agencies to ensure that the federal government has a well-trained and competent facilities management workforce. To that end, the VAAA established the Facilities Management School (FMS) to train personnel on the entire facilities management life-cycle including program planning,

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construction, operations and maintenance, and disposal for more than 1,000 VA health care, cemetery, and benefits facilities across the nation.

In compliance with FBPTA, FMS offerings focus on the following core competencies: building operations and maintenance, energy management, sustainability, water efficiency, safety (including electrical safety), and building performance measures.

Using the same competency-based, theory-to-practice training model employed across the VAAA enterprise, the FMS provides training that addresses both technical and business competencies needed to perform the facilities management function. Occupational disciplines included in the VA's facilities management workforce include: chief engineer, energy engineer, biomedical engineer, safety specialist, environmental engineer, fire protection engineer, project manager, planner, construction manager, and design manager.

Training is conducted primarily at the VAAA, but can be delivered in multiple locations throughout the U.S., as well as via virtual or online delivery. Open to other federal agencies, the FMS offerings can help ensure FBPTA compliance but more importantly, that the facilities management workforce has the proficiency and skill necessary to effectively manage and operate federal facilities.

Program Management School

As critical members of the acquisition team, having well-trained project and program managers and contracting officer's representatives (CORs) is a fundamental responsibility of the federal government and vital to mission success. The ability to deliver projects on time and within budget demands specialized training and skill development based on best practices.

The Program Management School (PMS) delivers training that satisfies OMB's Federal Acquisition Certification in Program/Project Management (FAC-P/PM) and Contracting Officer's Representative (FAC-COR) initial and re-certification requirements, and helps mature this capability so that agencies can achieve better mission outcomes. PMS has trained thousands of students, including employees from other government agencies. PMS-trained students have contributed to significant cost savings across government programs.

While our FAC-P/PM and FAC-COR offerings are helping VA meet OMB-mandated certification requirements and mature the department's PM capability, it is all of our services we provide that distinguish us from other training institutions.

As a Program Management Institute (PMI) Registered Education Provider, our material is recognized to meet the training requirements for PMI's Program Management Professional certification.

**PMI
Registered
Education Provider
and ACE Accreditation
distinguish our
offerings from
the rest**

The PMS curriculum has also earned American Council on Education (ACE) accreditation, which means that our students may apply courses taken through VAAA PMS to their college or university undergraduate degree. The school takes modular and blended learning approaches that reduce travel and time away from the office while maintaining high quality training and career development for agency program/project managers and CORs.

Federal Acquisition Certification for Program/Project Managers (FAC-P/PM) Training

Satisfying training requirements for FAC-P/PM Levels I, II, and III, the FAC-P/PM curriculum is designed around an agency/organization-neutral best practice program management framework -- Enterprise-Program/Project Management. This approach allows a trainee to learn best practices that will lead to success in any organization. The curriculum includes competency assessment, classroom and online learning, coaching and mentoring, and on-the-job qualification development. The training is designed so participants can apply knowledge and new skills to their work immediately, resulting in immediate impact on program and project performance.

Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer's Representative (FAC-COR) Training

VAAA currently offers FAC-COR Level II training through a 32-hour virtually-facilitated class, held for four hours per day for eight days, eliminating travel and reducing time away from the office. The course is instructor-led, highly-engaging, and interactive; is structured to accommodate students in all time zones; provides the knowledge and skills needed to properly execute the COR responsibilities such as acquisition planning, market research, and contract performance management; utilizes the latest in gaming technology; and, provides a toolkit of checklists, examples, and references for later use.

Coming in FY 2015, the PMS will offer courses that will satisfy OMB training requirements for FAC-COR Levels I, II, and III.

Performance Excellence

Coming in FY 2015 and geared to cross-functional training for program/project managers, contract specialists/officers, legal, budget, and industry, PMS offerings will include opportunities to bring the entire acquisition team together to learn how to optimize performance of the acquisition system. Course offerings will cover topics like critical thinking in source selection, market intelligence, meaningful discussions, and many others.

Program Management Team Workshops

Program Management (PM) Team Workshops are a unique training initiative, custom-designed for program leaders and project managers overseeing mission-critical programs and/or project investments.

The workshops isolate and address program management impediments that are negatively impacting cost, schedule, performance, or customer satisfaction; develop artifacts in support of the program/project; and develop a plan to revitalize the program/project and get it back on track. Areas of focus include: work breakdown structure, program requirements, integrated master schedule, acquisition package, risk management plan, and other critical management disciplines. At the conclusion of each workshop, which range from one to four days in length, program managers receive the actual artifacts for their specific program developed by the team with expert guidance and hands-on assistance from VAAA program management practitioners.

The value to the government includes:

- consistent management disciplines/processes/artifacts that have been learned, applied and implemented wholly by an entire program/project team that directly and immediately improves a performance impediment;
- a sustainable process improvement that is repeatable across other programs and program teams; and,
- an improved framework for federal leadership to enhance transparency and oversight of program management performance.

If your program or project has at least 10 members on the team and needs an assessment or a kick-start, consider the Program Management Team Workshop.

The Project Management Fellows Program

The Project Management (PM) Fellows Program is an accelerated and selective professional development initiative for aspiring mission-critical program managers to immediately address agency PM challenges. It is designed to alleviate PM workforce shortages by accelerating the development of technical, PM, general business, and leadership skills within a specific career field. Throughout the 15-month experience, PM fellows participate in a combination of classroom and structured on-the-job training, allowing them to immediately apply new skill sets to organizational challenges in real time. It provides an immediate return on investment, reducing time to competency through training and application of PM skills. Open to other government agencies as well, this program is sure to help your succession planning efforts to build a strong program management capability within your organization.

Supply Chain Management School

Having a well-trained supply chain management workforce that knows how to establish and leverage strategically-sourced contracts can reduce discretionary contract spend, minimize administrative operating costs to the agency, and deliver what the patient, warfighter, or other end user needs when they need it. The Supply Chain Management School (SCMS) trains and prepares the supply chain and logistics workforce in a graduated curriculum from the entry level logistician to mid-level professionals to the senior supply chain executive.

Current offerings include Principles of Inventory Management, Strategic Sourcing, and other foundational courses that are critical to understanding the elements and importance of standardized, cost-effective, and streamlined federal supply chains. The SCMS will significantly expand its curriculum in FY 2015.

Open to other
government
agencies!

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Creating a Department of Veterans Affairs for the 21st Century

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is to serve America's Veterans and their families with dignity and compassion, and to be their principal advocate in ensuring they receive medical care, benefits, social support and lasting memorials in recognition of their service to this nation.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is the second-largest cabinet agency with more than 300,000 employees serving the nation's more than 22 million Veterans with a variety of programs.

VA manages 151 VA Medical Centers, more than 800 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, nearly 300 Vet Centers, 57 Regional Offices, and 131 National Cemeteries.

About one-quarter of the nation's population is potentially eligible for VA benefits and services because they are Veterans, family members, or survivors of Veterans.

The 80,000 square-foot VA Acquisition Academy in Frederick, Maryland, located within a 50-mile radius of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, provides a state-of-the-art facility that enables face-to-face, facilitated virtual delivery, or online training to enable collaborative and interactive learning throughout the U.S.

The VAAA's vision is to be the career development academy of choice that prepares, enables, and inspires higher performing acquisition professionals and organizations for better mission results.



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