

(3) A full curriculum vitae.

(The Office of Management and Budget has approved the information collection requirement in this section under control number 2900-0879)

[81 FR 66820, Sept. 29, 2016, as amended at 82 FR 4795, Jan. 17, 2017; 88 FR 13034, Mar. 2, 2023]

#### § 17.644 Selection of participants.

(a) *Selection criteria.* In evaluating and selecting participants, VA will consider the following factors:

(1) The applicant meets all of the eligibility criteria in § 17.642 and has submitted a complete application under § 17.643;

(2) The strength of the applicant's letters of reference;

(3) The applicant is in good to excellent standing in the residency program, as determined from the Program Director letter of reference;

(4) The applicant demonstrates a strong commitment to VA's mission and core values;

(5) The applicant has personal career goals that match VA needs (*i.e.*, to work with patients suffering from traumatic brain injury, substance abuse, or post-traumatic stress disorder);

(6) The applicant expresses a desire to work at a location that matches with VA needs; and

(7) The applicant does not have any identifiable circumstances relating to education, training, licensure, certification and review of health status, previous experience, clinical privileges, professional references, malpractice history and adverse actions, or criminal violations that would adversely affect the applicant's credentialing process.

(b) *Selection.* VA will select not less than 10 individuals who meet the requirements of this section to participate in the program for the repayment of educational loans for each year in which VA carries out the program.

(c) *Notification of selection.* VA will notify applicants that they have been selected in writing. An individual becomes a participant in the PREL once the participant submits and VA signs the acceptance of conditions.

[81 FR 66820, Sept. 29, 2016, as amended at 82 FR 4796, Jan. 17, 2017]

#### § 17.645 Award procedures.

(a) *Repayment amount.* (1) VA may pay not more than \$30,000 in educational loan repayment for each year of obligated service.

(2) An educational loan repayment may not exceed the actual amount of principal and interest on an educational loan or loans.

(b) *Payment.* VA will pay the participant, or the lending institution on behalf of the participant, directly for the principal and interest on the participant's educational loans. Payments will be made monthly or annually for each applicable service period, depending on the terms of the acceptance of conditions. Participants must provide VA documentation that shows the amounts that were credited or posted by the lending institution to a participant's educational loan during an obligated service period. VA will issue payments after the participant commences the period of obligated service. Payments are exempt from Federal taxation.

#### § 17.646 Obligated service.

(a) *General provision.* A participant's obligated service will begin on the date on which the participant begins full-time, permanent employment with VA in the field of psychiatric medicine in a location determined by VA. Obligated service must be full-time, permanent employment and does not include any period of temporary or contractual employment.

(b) *Duration of service.* The participant will agree in the acceptance of conditions to serve for an obligated service period of 2 or more calendar years.

(c) *Location and position of obligated service.* VA reserves the right to make final decisions on the location and position of the obligated service.

#### § 17.647 Failure to comply with terms and conditions of participation.

(a) *Participant fails to satisfy obligated service.* A participant of the PREL who fails to satisfy the period of obligated service will be liable to the United States, in lieu of such obligated service, for the full amount of benefit they expected to receive in the agreement, pro-rated for completed service days.

(b) *Repayment period.* The participant will pay the amount of damages that the United States is entitled to recover under this section in full to the United States no later than 1 year after the date of the breach of the agreement.

#### CHAPLAIN SERVICES

#### § 17.655 Ecclesiastical endorsing organizations.

(a) *Purpose.* This section establishes the eligibility requirements that an ecclesiastical endorsing organization must meet in order to provide ecclesiastical endorsements of individuals who are seeking employment as VA chaplains or seeking to be engaged by VA under contract or appointed as on-facility fee basis VA chaplains under 38 U.S.C. 7405. Acceptance of an ecclesiastical endorsement by VA does not imply any approval by VA of the theology or practices of an ecclesiastical endorsing organization, nor does it obligate VA to employ the endorsed individual or any other member of the organization.

(b) *Definitions.* The following definitions apply to this section:

(1) *Ecclesiastical endorsement* means a written statement addressed to VA and signed by the designated endorsing official of an ecclesiastical endorsing organization certifying that an individual is in good standing with the faith group or denomination and, in the opinion of the endorsing official, is qualified to perform the full range of ministry, including all sacraments, rites, ordinances, rituals, and liturgies required by members of the faith group. Ecclesiastical endorsement is a condition of employment as a VA chaplain. An individual must obtain and maintain a full and active ecclesiastical endorsement to be employed as a VA chaplain.

(2) *Ecclesiastical endorsing official* means an individual who is authorized to provide or withdraw ecclesiastical endorsements on behalf of an ecclesiastical endorsing organization.

(3) *Ecclesiastical endorsing organization* means an organization that meets the eligibility requirements of paragraph (c) of this section and has been properly designated as an endorsing organi-

zation in accordance with paragraph (e) of this section.

(c) *Eligibility to serve as an ecclesiastical endorsing organization.* An ecclesiastical endorsing organization must meet the following requirements before such organization can endorse an applicant for VA chaplaincy:

(1) Be organized and function exclusively or substantially to provide religious ministries to a lay constituency and possess authority to both grant and withdraw initial and subsequent ecclesiastical endorsements;

(2) Have tax-exempt status as a religious organization or church under the Internal Revenue Code, section 501(c)(3);

(3) Agree to abide by all Federal and VA laws, regulations, policies, and issuances on the qualification and endorsement of persons for service as VA chaplains;

(4) Agree to notify VA in writing of any withdrawal of an existing ecclesiastical endorsement within ten days after the date of such withdrawal;

(5) Provide VA the documents stated in paragraph (d) of this section;

(6) Notify VA in writing within 30 days of any change of the name, address or contact information of the individual that it designates as its ecclesiastical endorsing official; and

(7) An ecclesiastical endorsing organization that is part of an endorsing organization by which its members can be endorsed cannot become a separate endorsing organization without the written permission of the larger endorsing organization.

(d) *Request to designate ecclesiastical endorser.* In order for an ecclesiastical endorsing organization to be recognized by VA such organization must submit the following:

(1) A complete VA form that requests the designation of an ecclesiastical endorsing official;

(2) A copy of an Internal Revenue Service document verifying that the organization currently holds a section 501(c)(3) exempt status as a church for Federal tax purposes from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) (note “church” is used by the IRS not to denote a belief system, but to distinguish