



Sierra Veterans Research and Education Foundation



EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

Revision 9 – December 2019



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
CONTACT INFORMATION	5
EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION	6
Hiring Requirements	6
Reference Checks	7
Medical Examination/Information	7
Employment of Relatives (Nepotism)	7
Separate Employers	7
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS	8
Classifications of Employees	8
Work Week and Scheduling	8
Rest and Meal Periods	8
Overtime and Time Reporting	9
Compensation	9
Performance and Compensation Reviews	9
Bonus Pay	9
Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)	10
Termination of Employment	10
Exit Interviews	10
Former Employee References	10
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	11
Retirement Plan	11
Life/Health/Dental Benefits	11
Unemployment Insurance	11
Workman’s Compensation Insurance	11
Annual Leave and Sick Leave	11
Advanced Leave	12
Bereavement Leave	12
Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)	13
Military Leave	13
Holidays	13



Jury Duty	14
Court Appearances.....	14
Voting.....	14
EMPLOYEE SERVICES.....	15
Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)	15
Personal Information and Personnel Records	15
Sexual and Other Harassment	16
Whistleblower Protections	16
Protection from retaliation	16
Problem Resolution.....	17
Communications	17
Facilities.....	17
Employee Parking:	17
Personal Mail:	17
Personal Possessions:	17
Email and Computer Access:.....	17
Long Distance Phone Calls:	18
VA Food Services:.....	18
EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES	19
Education and Training	19
Attendance and Tardiness	19
Conflict of Interest	20
Confidential Information.....	20
Patient Confidentiality:	20
Client Confidentiality:	20
Employee Confidentiality:.....	20
Alcohol and Drug Abuse.....	20
Smoking Policy	21
Standards of Conduct and Discipline	21
Dress Code	21
Housekeeping	21
EMPLOYEE SAFETY	22



Safety of Employees.....	22
Accidents and Safety Reports	23
Snow/Inclement Weather.....	23
IN SUMMARY	23



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Sierra Veterans Research and Education Foundation (SVREF) Employee Handbook is to summarize the policies and procedures that affect you as an employee. Please take the time to read the handbook, and during your employment, refer to it when you have questions. Note changes and updates as they are posted and distributed.

This Handbook contains a summary of our employment policies and procedures. It revokes and supersedes any prior summaries or statements of employment policies and procedures and will control in case of any inconsistency with other written materials or unwritten practices.

This handbook is designed to be an evolving document that will be revised and updated as necessary. We will keep you advised of changes in policies and procedures through notices posted on the SVREF shared drive and circulation of revised pages and/or newer editions.

This handbook is not your only source of information on employment-related issues. Although this will usually be the best place to start in finding answers to questions, you may have questions that it does not answer. In such cases, you should talk with your supervisor, the administrative staff of SVREF or the Executive Director of SVREF.

This handbook is not a contract of employment. We hope that our employment relationship with you will be ongoing and rewarding; however, your employment is “at will” and may be terminated at any time, with or without cause, by either you or us. No one at SVREF has the authority to enter into any agreement for employment for a specified period, or to make any other representations or agreement inconsistent with this policy, unless it is in writing and signed by the Executive Director.

Any questions that arise should be directed to the administrative staff at SVREF.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Executive Director: Jeremy Alltop, Jeremy.alltop@va.gov or Executive Assistant, Laura Fettuccia, laura.fettuccia@va.gov Room C3338, Bldg. 1 (775) 326-2795



EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

The SVREF Executive Director must approve all new hires before any agreement of employment is made or any paperwork is processed. Principal Investigators (PI) wishing to hire must meet with the Executive Director to discuss all aspects of the hiring process, including employee qualifications and salary negotiations.

Hiring Requirements

Applicants for employment by SVREF will not be hired without a completed employment packet. This packet needs to be completed prior to the first day of employment. This will include, but is not limited to:

- Optional Application for Federal Employment – OF 612.
- Current Curriculum Vitae.
- IRS Form W-4, a copy of which will be sent to the State of Nevada to comply with the New Hire Reporting requirements.
- Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9. The Form I-9 is to be signed by the authorized SVREF official.
- A written request for hire originated by the PI and approved by the Executive Director of SVREF.

All SVREF employees must secure status as a **Without Compensation (WOC) Employee** to work at the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS). WOC status awards the employee of SVREF some of the benefits and responsibilities of employment at the VASNHCS. This will require the following forms, as applicable:

- Optional Application for Employment – OF 612 **and** the Declaration for Federal Employment (Optional Form 306).
- VA Form 10-2850 – Application for Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists and Optometrists.
- VA Form 10-2850a – Application for Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists.
- VA Form 10-2850b – Application for Residents
- VA Form 10-2850c – Application for Associated Health Occupations.
- Fingerprint Form
- VASNHCS Facility Identification Badge Request Form
- Rules of Behavior (Contractor) and Rules of Behavior (VA)

Please be aware that fingerprints will be obtained, and a thorough Federal background investigation must be completed on all employees.

If the SVREF employee is to engage in direct patient care activities, the securing of WOC status requires verification of professional credentials for nurses and obtaining of clinical privileges from the VASNHCS for physicians and ARNPs. For verification of current license(s) nurses must contact Nursing Education at X1496 to set up an appointment. Physicians and ARNPs need to contact the Credentialing Coordinator at X1779 for license verification and clinical privileging. No patient contact is allowed until license verification by Nursing is complete or clinical privileges are granted by the VASNHCS. Equivalent permission and/or clinical privileging must be obtained from other institutions if such work is to be performed at these sites.



A new SVREF employee who is not conducting patient care activities should submit for WOC status by providing the necessary completed documents to the SVREF Administrative Office. When SVREF employees work at the VASNHCS or at other institutions, they are required to follow the host institutional policies relating to personal conduct, safety and the conduct of research activities.

Reference Checks

Satisfactory reference checks are a condition of employment. The hiring SVREF supervisor is responsible for verification of the applicant's background and credentials. Prior to making an offer, the hiring SVREF supervisor should contact at least two of the applicant's references. Areas that may be discussed include: job knowledge, work habits, productivity, independent thinking, attendance and motivation.

Medical Examination/Information

Certain medical information and/or examinations are required by the VASNHCS for SVREF employees working within the VASNHCS. A TB titer is required at the beginning of employment and annually thereafter. If you have a positive result, a chest x-ray may be required. You are also required to provide recent documentation of required immunization and furnish this information to Employee Health. If you do not have this documentation, these immunizations may be arranged for you.

Employment of Relatives (Nepotism)

Federal ethics rules apply to the hiring of relatives of SVREF or Without Compensation (WOC) employees working on VA research or education. While SVREF may hire the relative of an employee under specific circumstances, in no instance will an employee, either SVREF employed or WOC; be hired if the person to be employed is in the same center and/or under the supervision of that employee's relative.

Separate Employers

SVREF employees are not University or Federal employees but may work side by side with employees of the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and the VASNHCS. Work policies of these employers differ slightly from SVREF policies. All persons who are paid wages and salary directly from SVREF are employees of SVREF. If questions arise in the course of your employment because of differences in treatment of employees, please refer these questions to the SVREF Administrative Office. SVREF employment policies will apply to your appointment, not the policies of the VASNHCS or the University of Nevada.



EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Classifications of Employees - SVREF has the following classifications for employees.

1. *Full-Time Employee*: An employee who is hired to work 40 hours per week. Full-time employees with an appointment expected to continue for 12 months or more are eligible for all SVREF benefits.
2. *Part-Time Employee*: An employee who is hired to work less than 40 hours per week. Part-time employees who regularly work 20 hours or more per week, and whose appointment is expected to continue for 12 months or more, are eligible for all or some SVREF benefits (see Benefits section).
3. *Intermittent Employee*: An employee who is hired to work on an intermittent or as-needed basis. These employees are not eligible for any SVREF benefits.
4. *Temporary Employee*: An employee who is hired with the expectation that he or she will be needed for a specified period of less than 12 months. Temporary employees are not eligible for every SVREF benefit but may be eligible for leave accrual (see Benefits section).
5. *Exempt Employee*: An employee who is paid on a salaried basis and who regularly works in certain executive, administrative, or a professional position as defined by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is an exempt employee. Exempt employees are paid on a salary for completion of their job and are not eligible for overtime.
6. *Nonexempt Employee*: An employee, whether paid on a salaried or hourly basis, who is covered under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Nonexempt employees are eligible for overtime pay and certain rest and meal breaks (see below).

Most SVREF employees are nonexempt. Each employee's status under FLSA will be determined upon hiring. See SVREF for any questions regarding your status.

Work Week and Scheduling

For payroll and accounting purposes, the work period begins at 12:01 a.m. Sunday and ends at midnight the following Saturday. Each employee may have a different work schedule. SVREF may establish other work days or work weeks for individual employees or certain positions.

The supervisor establishes work schedules for each position. Employees are expected to work all the hours and days assigned. Requests for scheduling changes or for days off must be made ahead of time and approved by the employee's supervisor.

Rest and Meal Periods

All nonexempt employees receive a 15-minute paid rest break for each 4 hours of working time. Ideally, a break will occur near the midpoint of each 4-hour work period, but the supervisor will approve scheduling. Break periods should not be used to extend a lunch period, work overtime, arrive or leave early.

Nonexempt employees working more than five hours in a day are required to take a meal break two to five hours into their shift. The normal meal break is a 30-minute unpaid period. Employees who work 3 or more hours beyond an 8-hour shift will have an additional unpaid meal period before or during the overtime period.



Overtime and Time Reporting

Nonexempt employees will be paid at an overtime rate when they work in excess of 40 hours per week for SVREF. The employee's supervisor must authorize any overtime work in advance. The overtime rate is one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for all hours worked over 40 hours in one work week. Vacation and sick leave hours do not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime.

All overtime must be calculated prior to the supervisor signing the time sheet and before submitting the time sheet to the SVREF Administrative Office.

Accurate records of the hours worked ensure that you will be paid correctly. The employee is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the information on his or her records. Each employee must fill out and sign a time sheet for the actual hours worked and submit it with a valid signature of the employee's supervisor. Falsification of timesheet(s) may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Compensation

Employees of SVREF are paid on a biweekly basis. Pay periods are concurrent with those existing at the VASNHCS. Payday is the Friday following the end of the pay period. These pay periods will be communicated to you upon hire, and a listing of them is available from the SVREF Administrative Office.

Paychecks will be issued by electronic transfer to the financial institution designated by the employee. The employee may request to be paid in the form of a physical check if electronic direct deposit is not possible or desired.

Deductions from your paycheck are required for the following: FICA (Social Security), Medicare, and Federal Income Tax. Other deductions require your authorization. Examples of such deductions include your voluntary retirement plan contributions.

A Leave and Earnings Statement is provided to you for each pay period. Please open it and review it upon receipt, along with any correspondence enclosed.

Performance and Compensation Reviews

Principal Investigators regularly evaluate the performance of their research staff and discuss, with each employee, both superior performance and inadequate performance or problems as they occur. Pay increases for meritorious work may be considered but are not assumed and, of course, are strongly determined by availability of funds. The Executive Director evaluates the performance of support personnel. SVREF encourages Principal Investigators to review the compensation of each of their employees at the beginning of each calendar year.

Bonus Pay

Supervisors may on occasion request that a bonus be paid to an employee who has exceeded expectations, persevered difficult times, or otherwise deserves recognition for a job well done. Bonus pay is not a regular occurrence at SVREF and should not be expected by the employee nor promised by the supervisor.



Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

As an employee of SVREF, you may receive, in January of each year, a COLA that is equivalent to the Cost of Living Adjustment received by employees of the VASNHCS. Cost of Living Adjustments are not automatic; they are dependent on current funding and fiscal considerations of SVREF. Generally, to be considered for a COLA, you must have been continuously employed by SVREF for more than 6 months, that is, since before July 1 of the previous year.

Termination of Employment

In order to maintain the staffing flexibility that is essential to the successful management of SVREF, as well as to protect the options of each employee, it is understood that the employment relationship with us is "at will." Either employer or employee can terminate it, with or without cause, at any time. The provision of benefits does not constitute a promise that employment will last one year or longer. No agreement inconsistent with this policy is valid, unless it is in writing and signed by the Executive Director.

An employee who is leaving will be informed of any rights to continued benefits coverage and will be mailed the pertinent information. The employee's final paycheck will be paid on the next scheduled payday. The employee must turn in all keys, badges, lab coats with cards, and other property of SVREF or the VASNHCS prior to his or her departure. You must complete the VASNHCS employee clearance form prior to leaving.

If you voluntarily terminate your employment, please try to give at least two weeks' notice to your supervisor, stating the reason for the resignation.

Exit Interviews

Your supervisor and/or SVREF may choose to conduct an exit interview with you if your employment is terminated. The purposes of an exit interview may include:

- reviewing the reasons for the termination, layoff, or resignation; and
- reviewing financial arrangements, including the amount of your final paycheck, and similar items.

Former Employee References

Should SVREF receive a request from a potential employer regarding a current or previous SVREF employee, SVREF administrative staff will confirm dates of employment, positions held and final rate of pay. Additional information may be shared with prospective employers on a case-by-case basis. Former employees can facilitate the sharing of additional information by signing authorizations to release information to their prospective employers. SVREF, however, reserves its rights to share information concerning former employees whenever it determines the requester has a legitimate need to know information about a former employee.



EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Retirement Plan

SVREF employees can participate in an Internal Revenue Code Section 403(b) retirement plan. Eligible employees are those employees who regularly work at least 20 hours per week (or 40 hours biweekly) and who are expected to continue their SVREF employment for at least 12 months. Eligible employees may enroll in the plan at any time; there is no waiting period. New employees receive information about the plan when they are hired; existing employees should contact the SVREF Administrative Office for information about the plan.

An eligible employee may elect to contribute any amount that does not exceed 5% of his or her gross biweekly wages or salary. The amount designated by the employee will be withheld from the employee's pay and paid by SVREF into the plan following each pay day. This reduction plan should be submitted to SVREF about a month prior to the effective date of the requested change.

Life/Health/Dental Benefits

Currently the SVREF does not offer life, medical or dental insurance plans for employees. Should this change, employees will be notified.

Unemployment Insurance

The Employers Insurance Company of Nevada will provide compensation for occupational illness or injury.

Workman's Compensation Insurance

SVREF employees are covered by unemployment insurance from the State of Nevada.

Annual Leave and Sick Leave

Full-time employees of SVREF earn 6 hours of annual leave and 4 hours of sick leave for each 2 weeks of employment. Part-time employees who regularly work 20 or more hours per week earn a prorated amount of leave. Annual leave and sick leave do not accrue on overtime.

Annual leave should be approved by the supervisor at least a week prior. However, supervisors may grant leave with shorter notice in some circumstances. Supervisors may consider workplace coverage in approving leave. Your supervisor must approve annual leave; unauthorized time off will not be paid.

SVREF encourages all leave-eligible employees to use their earned annual leave. Annual leave accumulates until it is used, but the accumulated amount cannot exceed the maximum that an employee can earn in one year, which is 156 hours for full-time employees and prorated amounts for part-time employees. See the table at the end of this section.

Sick leave may be accumulated without limit. Ordinarily sick leave can be taken by the employee as required for illness or accidents (or family health leave). Normally the employee's supervisor will authorize the use of sick leave for periods up to 3 days per week. For an absence of more than 3 days due to illness, the employee



may be asked to confirm the illness with a supporting statement from the employee’s personal physician. When possible, scheduling of sick leave for elective procedures should take into consideration the needs of the research project, though that should be a secondary consideration.

It is important to understand that wages and salaries (and leave) are paid out of time limited research grants; consequently, once the grant (or a continuation or new grant) ends, there are no funds available for making payments for unused leave. Therefore, SVREF has no provisions for paying an employee for unused leave.

Your leave balances are updated on the biweekly time sheet that you use to record your work hours each pay period. Once you have reached the accumulation limit for annual leave, you will not earn any more annual leave until you begin to use some of what you have accumulated. Therefore, it is prudent to check your annual leave balance regularly and try to schedule your use of it so that you do not accumulate the maximum allowed and find yourself in a “use or lose” situation.

ANNUAL AND SICK LEAVE EARNED PER BIWEEKLY PAY PERIOD

Hours Worked	Annual Leave		Sick Leave	
	Earned	Accrual Limit	Earned	Accrual Limit
40 – 52	3	78	2	No limit
53 – 59	4	104	2	No limit
60 – 66	4	104	3	No limit
67 – 79	5	130	3	No limit
80	6	156	4	No limit

Advanced Leave

Ordinarily, an employee must earn leave before it is taken. However, in extenuating circumstances, such as serious prolonged illness, the Executive Director may authorize up to six weeks of advanced sick leave and six weeks of advanced annual leave if **all** the following conditions are met:

- The Principal Investigator of the research project in which the individual is employed agrees to the arrangement;
- There are enough unobligated funds in that investigator's account to pay for the advanced leave; and
- There is a reasonable expectation that the employee will return to work for a sufficiently long period to pay back the advanced leave.

Advanced leave is not considered for an employee who has worked for SVREF less than six months. Employees who are in administrative support roles, rather than in research roles, must meet the same criteria, but in such cases, there must be enough unobligated overhead or indirect cost funds available to pay the advanced leave.

Bereavement Leave

An employee is permitted to use a reasonable amount of accrued sick or annual leave when an employee is absent due to the death a family member.



Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)

The Family and Medical Leave Act applies to all public agencies and private sector employers who employed 50 or more employees within a 75-mile radius in 20 or more work weeks during the current or preceding calendar year.

Because SVREF does not meet this requirement, the FMLA does not apply. However, if and when circumstances arise of a personal nature that would reflect FMLA categories, such as the birth, adoption or placement for foster care of a child; caring for the employee's spouse, child or parent with a serious health condition; or a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform at least one of the essential functions of his/her job, special accommodations may be made, if possible. Such situations should be discussed with your direct supervisor or the Executive Director of SVREF as soon as possible.

Military Leave

Employees who are required to attend annual military reserve training or other active military duty are granted leave with regular pay for up to 15 working days per year. Leave for additional military service may be taken as regular vacation or as unpaid leave. Employees who take military leave are entitled to return to their jobs as provided under federal and state laws. Employees should bring the orders to the attention of their supervisor on the first working day after receiving the notice. A copy of the orders must be supplied to the SVREF Administrative Office.

Holidays

SVREF observes the same paid holidays as does the VASNHCS. Part-time employees receive pay only for those holidays falling on work days in their scheduled tour of duty, and only for the number of hours which they would have been scheduled to work had the holiday not fallen on that date. Flexible Schedule employees are eligible for holiday pay. Intermittent employees and those who work an unscheduled number of hours per week or month are not eligible for holiday pay.

The following days are holidays:

New Year's Day	Labor Day
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	Columbus Day
President's Day	Veteran's Day
Memorial Day	Thanksgiving Day
Independence Day	Christmas Day

If a holiday falls on a Saturday, the preceding Friday will be recognized as the holiday. If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday will be recognized as the holiday.

In order to receive holiday pay, you must:

- Have worked the last scheduled work day before and the first scheduled work day after the holiday, unless on approved absence (which includes annual and sick leave), and
- Normally be scheduled to work on the day in question if it were not a holiday.



If a holiday falls during your vacation, the holiday will not be considered a day of your paid annual leave. Only the non-holiday period will be charged to annual leave. A nonexempt employee who works on a holiday is paid for the hours worked as well as for the holiday.

Jury Duty

Performance of jury duty is part of a person's responsibilities as a citizen. Unless your job responsibilities require it, we will not ask or encourage you to request to be excused from or postpone a call to jury duty. If you are required to perform jury duty, you will be paid your regular pay up to a maximum of 10 days for regular full- or part-time employees. You will be expected to work your regular schedule on any day you are not required to be present in court.

In order to receive compensation during jury duty, you must provide us with a letter or other confirmation from the court clerk indicating the time you served and submit any compensation (check) you received for your jury duty.

Court Appearances

You may use annual leave to appear in court as a witness. You are responsible for notifying your supervisor immediately after receiving the summons to appear for a court appearance during scheduled work hours. A copy of this notice should be submitted to the SVREF administrative staff with your timesheet.

Voting

We encourage each employee to exercise the right to vote. In most situations, a person should be able to vote before or after work or by absentee ballot. If you are unable to vote during these times due to your work schedule, you may take up to 2 hours off work with pay to vote. You must request this time off in advance from your supervisor and must have a valid reason why you cannot vote by absentee ballot or during non-working hours. You will be expected to take the time off at the time of day that will require the least time missed from work, usually at the beginning or end of the work day.



EMPLOYEE SERVICES

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

SVREF is an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate against any person in any matter of employment based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam era or on any basis prohibited by federal, state or local law.

This policy applies to all staff levels within the organization and includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- recruiting and solicitation for employment;
- hiring, placement, promotion, transfer, and demotion;
- employment training or selection for training;
- pay rates, compensation, and benefits;
- termination

SVREF encourages men and women of minority status to apply for positions at all scientific and administrative levels.

Every employee has the right to work in surroundings that are free from all forms of unlawful discrimination. We will not engage in unlawful discrimination on any basis prohibited by local, state or Federal law. Please report any unlawful discrimination to the Executive Director of SVREF or the VASNHCS Human Resources Manager.

Personal Information and Personnel Records

Your personnel records are confidential. Occasionally, we receive requests for information from your personnel records as part of court proceedings or government activities. It is our policy to respond to all such requests to the extent that we are required to do so. We will generally provide only your job title, salary, and verification of employment dates.

When you move, change your telephone number, or have other changes in your personal information, please keep the SVREF Administrative Office informed of such changes so we may keep your personnel records accurate and up-to-date. It is your responsibility to see that we have your current address and phone number, so that we can communicate with you as needed.

You may review your personnel records at any mutually convenient time. If you wish to do so, please notify the administrative staff of SVREF so that a specific time may be scheduled when appropriate personnel will be available to answer your questions. Any concerns regarding the completeness or accuracy of the information contained in your files should be taken up with the SVREF administrative staff. Examination of personnel files will generally be limited to normal business hours.



Sexual and Other Harassment

SVREF expects all employees to accomplish their work in a professional and businesslike manner. Harassment of employees by fellow employees, supervisors, or non-employees in the workplace is a form of unlawful discriminatory behavior and is not permitted regardless of working relationship. Specifically forbidden is harassment based on sex, race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or engaging in protected activities, i.e., opposition to prohibited discrimination.

Harassment includes unsolicited remarks, gestures, or physical contact, display or circulation of written materials, e-mail or pictures derogatory to either gender or to racial, ethnic, or religious groups; or basing personnel decisions on an employee's response to sexually-oriented requests.

Engaging in any act which discriminates against another employee because of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, creed, marital or veteran's status, age, the presence of a disability or any other basis prohibited by local, state, or federal laws will not be tolerated. Sexual harassment is improper and illegal and is grounds for disciplinary action up to and including immediate dismissal.

Any employee who experiences conduct of this sort or feels that his or her work environment has become a hostile or offensive place to work, should immediately bring the matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, the administrative staff, the Executive Director or the Chairman of the Board of Directors of SVREF. Do not wait for the harassment to become severe or pervasive. Please be assured that your concerns will be investigated promptly and that you will not suffer retaliation for reporting them. SVREF will protect the confidentiality of any complainant to the extent possible. It is important to our organization that all claims of discrimination or sexual harassment be thoroughly reviewed and investigated and that appropriate steps be taken as necessary.

SVREF employees working as WOC employees at the VASNHCS should have Sexual Harassment training at the beginning of their employment with SVREF and every 2 years thereafter. You can complete this requirement in [Talent Management System \(TMS\)](#). The course is REN Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (TMS Module: VA 3534783).

Whistleblower Protections

SVREF encourages complaints, reports or inquiries about illegal practices or serious violations of the organization's policies, including illegal or improper conduct by SVREF itself, by its leadership, or by others on its behalf. Appropriate subjects to raise under this policy would include financial improprieties, accounting or audit matters, ethical violations, or other similar illegal or improper practices or policies.

Other subjects on which SVREF has existing complaint mechanisms should be addressed under those mechanisms, such as raising matters of alleged discrimination or harassment via human resources channels or matters of scientific misconduct via the VA or SVREF research misconduct channels, unless those channels are themselves implicated in the wrongdoing. This policy is not intended to provide a means of appeal from outcomes in those other mechanisms.

Protection from retaliation

SVREF prohibits retaliation against employees for making good faith complaints, reports or inquiries under this policy or for participating in a review or investigation under this policy. This protection extends to those whose



allegations are made in good faith but prove to be mistaken. SVREF reserves the right to discipline persons who make bad faith, knowingly false, or vexatious complaints, reports or inquiries or who otherwise abuse this policy.

Problem Resolution

If an employee has questions, complaints, or individual problems, he/she should discuss them with his/her supervisor first. If the employee does not feel comfortable in discussing the matter with his/her supervisor, or if the employee does submit the matter to the supervisor and the supervisor is not able to resolve the matter, the employee should submit the matter in writing to the Executive Director. If mutual agreement cannot be reached, the employee may bring it to the attention of the Chair of the Board. After due consideration, a decision will be made by the Executive Director or Chair Person as to the resolution of the issue. The decision of the Chair of the Board shall be final, and not subject to further review.

Communications

As your employer, we want to keep you well informed. Please help us accomplish this by keeping us up-to-date on your address and telephone number, and by reading all memos and announcements you receive.

General distribution e-mails are used for rapid dissemination of information. Bulletin boards are in the SVREF Administrative Office to keep you informed of various items of interest and used to communicate announcements and information required by law and other official postings.

Other information may be distributed through mailings to your home address, your mail stop at work or via e-mail. It is important that you read the information sent to you. If you are not receiving mailed information, contact SVREF.

Facilities

Employee Parking: Designated employee parking spaces are provided in the parking lot (2nd floor of parking garage) on a first-come, first-served basis and are governed by VASNHCS policy. These policies are available for review on the VASNHCS Intranet webpage. Some parking spaces are reserved for patients, carpools, disabled employees/visitors, and others. **Do not park in areas reserved for these uses.** Violations are reported to the Executive Director by the VASNHCS Police Section. Discipline for repeated violations will be handled administratively.

Employees may also park in the residential areas, but this parking is at your own risk. Always lock your car while it is parked. We do not assume responsibility for vehicles or their contents in these parking areas.

Personal Mail: You may not use SVREF's name, address, envelopes, or letterhead for personal correspondence, including correspondence of a political nature.

Personal Possessions: We do not assume responsibility for any theft or damage to the personal belongings of employees. Please lock office doors, desk or cabinets if you are leaving a room unoccupied.

Email and Computer Access: Email accounts and computer access are controlled by the VASNHCS. The SVREF administrative staff can supply the forms to fill out and direct you to the appropriate person. Specific guidelines for the use and security of VA information technology are provided in Employee Orientation and the



continuing education of employees. Be sure to lock your computer (windows key + L) and secure any sensitive information whenever you are away from your desk.

Long Distance Phone Calls: To place work-related long-distance phone calls, you must obtain a PIN from the Research Office.

VA Food Services: VASNHCS operates a cafeteria and retail store that SVREF employees may use. It is open for breakfast and lunch. For hours, call ext. 1194 or visit VASNHCS intranet page and read the hours posted.



EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Education and Training

All SVREF employees must complete all required VA trainings every calendar year. The number of required trainings to be completed by each employee is dependent upon your position and responsibilities. All completed training certificates must be submitted to the Research Administrative Office upon completion. Non-completion of these trainings and submission of completed certificates may result in a written reprimand. Continued non-compliance can be cause for immediate termination or suspension from your position.

SVREF employees who have TMS access must complete all required trainings in TMS. You will not be credited as completing these trainings unless you have done them through this system.

1. Privacy and HIPAA Training (TMS Module: VA 10203) – This is an annual training
2. VA Privacy and Information Security Awareness Rules of Behavior (TMS Module: VA 10176) – This is an annual training
3. Government Ethics Training (TMS Module: VA 3812493) – This is an annual training.

Website Link for TMS Learning:

<https://www.tms.va.gov/SecureAuth35/>

CITI Training: Good Clinical Practice (if applicable) & VA Human Subjects Protection to be completed by all staff involved in Research prior to participating and every three (3) years thereafter.

Website Link for CITI training:

<https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage/>

For Organization: Type in VA Reno 654

Please print the training certificate at completion (80% grade required)

Research personnel will be required to complete additional training specific to their role.

Attendance and Tardiness

Regular attendance is essential to your job performance. If you will be unable to report to work or will be late, you must let your supervisor know as soon as possible, and always before your scheduled starting time. If your supervisor is unavailable, leave a message on voice mail **and** notify the SVREF Administrative Office, stating your reason for being late or absent and a telephone number where you may be reached.

If your absence or tardiness is due to an emergency, please call in as soon as possible, or have someone call in for you. If you fail to report to work for three days without notification to your supervisor, you will be deemed to have voluntarily resigned your position. Attendance or tardiness problems, including failure to call in, may result in discipline up to and including termination.

For more information on leave, see section on Benefits.



Conflict of Interest

We expect employees to avoid situations that might cause their personal interests to conflict with the interests of SVREF or to compromise its reputation for integrity. A conflict of interest, or the appearance of one, occurs when you or a member of your immediate family uses your position with us for personal benefit through an investment, association, or business relationship that interferes with your ability to exercise independent judgment on our behalf.

Employees are discouraged from accepting meals or other gifts of more than a nominal value from salespeople, vendors, suppliers, or any other solicitors. Your supervisor may approve exceptions to this rule. Also refer to the separate section of this handbook on standards of conduct and discipline.

Confidential Information

Patient Confidentiality: As staff of a biomedical research organization, SVREF employees have access to highly personal and sensitive clinic information regarding its research subjects. SVREF staff must safeguard and hold confidential all such personal information and may gain access to or disclose it only for legitimate research purposes.

Client Confidentiality: All staff has a responsibility to recognize the special relationship of trust between SVREF and its clients who support its research activities. SVREF staff may gain access to or disclose proprietary business information only for legitimate research purposes. All proprietary business information about SVREF and its clients must be treated in a confidential manner.

Employee Confidentiality: All employment-related information about other SVREF staff members must be treated in a confidential manner. Employees may not gain access to or disclose such information without proper authorization.

Confidentiality is critical to SVREF's purpose and function. Any employee who violates it is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Abuse of alcohol or any other drug is a serious threat to both personal health and job performance. In accordance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988, SVREF has adopted the following drug-free workplace policy. All employees of SVREF are expected to comply with this policy as a condition of their employment.

The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of a controlled substance or alcohol is prohibited in the workplace. Violators are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Employees should determine with their physician or pharmacist whether any prescription drugs being taken might impair their ability to perform their jobs safely and effectively. If your performance might be so impaired, you should not report to work, and you should discuss the issue with your supervisor to determine whether some accommodation may allow you to perform the essential functions of the position safely and effectively.

Any employee convicted of a violation of a criminal drug statute, which occurred in the workplace, must notify the supervisor and the Executive Director of SVREF in writing within five days of the conviction. SVREF is



then required by law to notify all federal agencies providing funds to SVREF of the infraction within ten days after receiving notice from an employee.

In support of this policy, information is available on the Federal Employee Assistance Program (FEAP) website. As a VASNHCS WOC employee, you may participate in this program. It can assist you if personal problems, including alcohol or chemical dependency, have become a problem in your home or work environments.

Smoking Policy

Smoking by employees is permitted only during rest or meal periods and only in outdoor areas off VASNHCS property.

Standards of Conduct and Discipline

We expect each employee to contribute to the quality, professionalism and credibility of SVREF within the scope of his or her job responsibilities. Failure to meet this standard of performance may be the basis for adjustment in compensation or disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

We will take appropriate action based on the seriousness of the situation and the circumstances. Discipline less than termination may take the form of an oral warning, a written warning, probation, or suspension. Which of these options is chosen, or whether any of them is used prior to termination, will depend on the situation. Supervisors will evaluate the facts in consultation with the Executive Director, where appropriate.

In addition, 38 U.S.C. § 7366 (c)(2) requires that each employee must certify that he or she will comply with the federal laws and regulations applicable to Federal employees with respect to conflicts of interest. The Standards of Ethical Conduct are codified in 5 CFR Part 2635.

Dress Code

Dress code is primarily based on the individual employee's job description. Overall, employees are expected to maintain a neat, clean, well-groomed appearance. It is requested that employees demonstrate the good taste necessary to maintain the appropriate business image. Safety regulations governing appropriate attire in research laboratories must be adhered to. An employee may be sent home if, in the supervisor's judgment, his/her dress or appearance is deemed inappropriate or violates VA safety regulations.

Housekeeping

SVREF is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace and atmosphere. Employees will be expected to maintain a high standard of neatness at their workstation, clinical use areas and in employee use areas. It is expected that no employee will display anything that would be considered inappropriate for a business setting.



EMPLOYEE SAFETY

Safety of Employees

Safety is everyone's business. SVREF functions within VASNHCS facilities and is committed to maintaining a healthy and safe workplace. We expect each employee to share this commitment. Specific safety matters that pertain to the employee's workstation will be covered by his/her supervisor. The employee is obligated to use any applicable protective equipment prescribed for his/her job. Your work place should be kept neat, clean and orderly. It is your responsibility to learn the location of all safety and emergency equipment, as well as the appropriate safety contact phone numbers.

The most critical elements in practicing safety are being careful and using common sense. Each employee should be continuously aware of his/her actions and environment to avoid dangerous situations. It is the responsibility of the employee to report any injuries or unsafe situations to his/her supervisor.

Employee safety depends on the safety consciousness of everyone. As a SVREF employee and a VASNHCS WOC employee, you are expected to take an active part in maintaining this environment. Always observe the special safety rules applicable in your work area, adhere to all safety instructions provided by your supervisor and use safety equipment where required. Each employee working in a laboratory will have available the *General Safety Manual Including Chemical Hygiene Plan*. Each employee should be aware of and have read the plan. Attendance at the mandatory training sessions is required for all SVREF employees.

SVREF or the VASNHCS will provide all safety equipment, and employees will be responsible for the reasonable upkeep of this equipment. Any problems with or defects in equipment should be reported immediately to the employee's supervisor and to the Research Office.

For further safety procedures and requirements, please refer to the *General Safety Manual Including Chemical Hygiene Plan*. Copies are available on the SVREF shared drive, in each laboratory and on the Research Office SharePoint site.

No minors (under 18) are allowed in the laboratories of the VASNHCS.

As an SVREF employee, you have a duty to comply with the safety rules of the VASNHCS; to assist in maintaining a hazard-free environment; to report any accidents or injuries, including any breaches of safety and to report at once to your supervisor any unsafe equipment, working condition, process or procedure.

Any employee who is not the injured or violating party may report safety violations or injuries anonymously to the Research Safety Committee. **NO EMPLOYEE WILL BE PUNISHED OR REPRIMANDED FOR REPORTING SAFETY VIOLATIONS OR HAZARDS.** However, any deliberate or ongoing safety violation or creation of a hazard by an employee is subject to disciplinary action by SVREF, up to and including termination.



Accidents and Safety Reports

You must notify your supervisor immediately if you are injured on the job. It is your supervisor's responsibility to help you evaluate the situation and assist you in obtaining appropriate medical assistance, should that be necessary.

You are an employee of SVREF and insured under Employers Insurance Company of Nevada. This insurance covers medical expenses and lost pay in cases of accidental injury or occupational illness on the job. In order to file for benefits you must complete the appropriate claim forms. These forms are obtained from your health care provider, who will initiate the claims process upon your request. You must bring the completed form back to the SVREF Administrative Office for approval. Please contact the claims department of Employers Insurance Company of Nevada with any questions regarding your claim.

As soon as practical, but in no case later than 24 hours following your injury or suspected injury, you must complete a VASNHCS accident report, available in the SVREF Administrative Office or through [VASNHCS Employees' Compensation Operations & Management Portal \(ECOMP\)](#), describing the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Failure to report the accident to SVREF may result in a claim denial. This accident report will improve our ability to help you obtain insurance benefits if you qualify for them.

Please note that this accident report form is an internal requirement of working at a VASNHCS facility and does not register a claim for workmen's compensation.

Snow/Inclement Weather

If there is snow or other inclement weather, SVREF will follow the closure decisions of the VASNHCS. Please listen to the radio or the TV broadcast to find out if the VASNHCS will be closed for all but essential personnel. Please use your best judgment in your decision to come to work or not. Do not put yourself at risk. Please call your supervisor or the SVREF Administrative Office to confirm or leave a message regarding your absence.

IN SUMMARY

We sincerely hope that this handbook has provided details of your employment that are useful and informative. During your employment, it may be necessary to refer to it when you have questions. We hope that your employment experience with SVREF will be rewarding, challenging and enjoyable. If this handbook still leaves you with unanswered questions or if further clarification is needed, please do not hesitate to talk to your supervisor, SVREF administrative staff, or the SVREF Executive Director.