<u>SCO Best Practices</u>

Learn the alphabet – Working with the Department of Veterans Affairs requires a whole new language and one in which you must become proficient. Many things are called by one, if not two, names – and there is always an acronym. Learn the names, corresponding numbers, and acronyms to make your life easier. While working with students, do not forget that they may not be familiar with your jargon, so remember to define terms as you introduce them. Be patient with yourself and students. Learning a new language always takes time.

Know your resources – Knowing who to ask for help is key in processing. Do you have a VA-ONCE issue that needs to be addressed by your ELR? An approval that needs your SAA's attention? Or a student issue that can be solved by "Ask VA"? Make a list of who to contact, for which scenarios to contact each, and the most effective way to communicate. Knowing who to contact before you need help will make your job that much easier.

Communicate – Your job is an important one that takes great attention to detail. Concentration is key for a clean audit, and everyone's goal is a clean audit. It can cost your college millions of dollars if your programs lose VA approval. Communicate to your colleagues that benefits processing requires an "interruption-free zone." You cannot expect others to understand what you need to be an efficient and successful SCO unless you inform them. Empower yourself to block time on the calendar to process. If necessary, adjust your schedule to come in early or stay late.

Collaborate - Collaboration is important with those around campus whose work interacts with yours – the financial aid office, the registrar, one stop, the advising office, etc. When VA regulations change and therefore impact students, distill the information to a few main points and share with the appropriate offices. Always include action items and things to remember. Other departments don't need to know the history or the why behind the change, they simply need to know how it affects their work with VA education beneficiaries. Make updates brief, understandable and action-oriented. Ensure that others on campus know how to reach you with questions. Partners around campus are key in your work. Be sure to make them feel included in what you do, but not overwhelmed.

Attend training and continue learning – By law, an SCO is required to complete annual training. There are various ways to complete the training, so do so in the way that suits your learning style. Really tune in. Training can feel like one more thing to do on the endless to-do list, but focus, engage, and take time to soak it in. You will be a better SCO because of it.

Hire VA Work Study students – Not only are you giving students an opportunity for an on-campus job experience, but such students are likely to be invested in your efforts and may ease your job duties at no cost to your office. For example, such students could work as ambassadors on your behalf and talk to other student veterans peer-to-peer. They could assist you with the necessary tasks that take time – data entry, filing – that don't necessarily have to be handled by you. By

being part of your team, they can also be a reminder on those tough days of why you do what you do.

Stay organized – Initial certifications. Schedule changes. Tuition and fee submission. More schedule changes. Students are constantly in flux – and it is up to you to keep up. Determine how to keep it all organized and make it work for you.

Develop your flow – Processing benefits is an art. Everyone completes certifications according to the same rules, but in their own order and in the own way. Make a checklist of steps to complete. Create a workflow. Write down notes. Do what works for you, but be consistent.

Make friends – Work smarter, not harder.
- Data – Know who controls the data on campus and the format in which they like requests made. Knowing who to ask and how to ask for data will make life so much easier in the long run.
- Reports – Automate. Automate. Automate. It may take initial time and investment to create a report that meets your needs, but when you get it to work, that translates into time saved.
- Campus functional areas (SFA, Bursar, Admissions, etc.) – Get to know key people in the functional areas with which you collaborate. Know who you can call on when you need a favor. And remember to return the favor when needed.
- Get to know your other SCOs. Have a colleague who you can call in those times when you are presented with an unexpected or new situation. You need a sounding board, someone who is walking in your shoes and understands the frustrations and pressures.

Listen – You can get caught up in the day-to-day tasks, but take time to listen to your students. Listen to their stories. Ask questions. Learn who you are serving. Remember why you are doing what you do.