



Pre-Deployment Session Guide

HR Professionals



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Deployment Session Guide for Human Resources (HR) Professionals

This guide provides an outline of the topics that Human Resources (HR) professionals should discuss with Servicemember employee who are preparing to mobilize for extended military service of 30 days or more.

Directions: Complete each activity prior to a scheduled pre-deployment session. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the activity when completed.

- Contact the Servicemember employee to arrange a convenient time to meet.
- Let the Servicemember employee know that they are welcome to bring a spouse, other family member or friend to the session.
- Ensure the Servicemember employee has contacted their local D&R Regional Manager
- Review the Servicemember employee's benefits.
- Review the TSP Fact Sheet Publication: TSP Benefits That Apply to Members of the Military Who Return to Federal Civilian Service (3/2002) at <https://www.tsp.gov/PDF/formspubs/oc95-5.pdf>.
- Obtain blank copies of the following forms:
 - *FEHB Authorization to Release Information*
 - *FEDVIP Authorization to Release Information*
 - *LTC Authorization to Release Information*
 - *FSAFEDS Authorization to Release Information*
 - Beneficiary forms (FEGLI, retirement deductions, unpaid compensation, TSP on hand)
- Obtain a copy of the USERRA poster from the *VA for Vets* website.
- Review available HR professionals and Supervisors (Pre-Deployment tools on the *VA for Vets* website.
- Review the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about military leave at <http://www.opm.gov/faqs/topic/payleave/?cid=f24794b1-dc27-41d8-b4e0-255cefc2c817>.
- Ensure that the Servicemember employee's supervisor has initiated a *Request for Personnel Action*, SF 52.

DURING A PRE DEPLOYMENT SESSION

Directions: Discuss each item with the Servicemember employee. Place a check mark in the box provided next to the item as it is discussed.

Job Protection

- Provide the Servicemember employee with a copy of the USERRA poster and ask if they have any questions about their USERRA rights. Be sure the Servicemember employee understands their reinstatement rights as they pertain to the length of the deployment.
- Inform the Servicemember employee that USERRA training is available on the Talent Management System (TMS) the course number is 897931
- Inform the Servicemember employee that they do not have to resign from their position to perform active military duty. However, if their cumulative active military duty exceeds five (5) years, they may be separated from their position within the federal government.

Leave

- Military Leave

The Servicemember Employee has military leave they would like to use.

Number of days/hours: _____

Date(s): _____

Time(s): _____

Note: A Servicemember employee may carry over a maximum of 15 days of military leave into a new fiscal year (FY). Therefore, a Servicemember employee may potentially have a total of 30 days to use in any one FY. In addition, Servicemember employees whose military duty spans two FYs may use up to 45 days of military leave at one time.

- 22 Days of Military Leave (5 U.S.C. 6323(b))

The Servicemember employee is entitled to use 22 additional workdays per calendar year when he or she:

- Performs military duties in support of civil authorities in the protection of life and property, or
- Performs full-time military service because the Servicemember employee is called to active duty in support of a contingency operation service.

Inform the Servicemember employee that if they elect to use the 22 days of military leave, they are entitled to receive the greater of civilian or military pay, but not both. The Servicemember employee civilian pay will be reduced by the amount of military pay for the days that they use military leave. The Servicemember employee must provide a copy of their active duty orders and military pay documentation (Leave and Earning Statement – LES) to the HR office to claim this entitlement.

- Annual Leave

The Servicemember employee wants:

___ accumulated annual leave to remain to their credit.

___ a lump monetary sum for the balance of their accumulated annual leave.

__ to use part of their accumulated annual leave; number of days/hours: _____.

Active Duty Military Leave Without Pay (ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES)

The Servicemember wants to be placed on ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES, beginning _____ (the first civilian day following military leave, annual leave, compensatory time and /or credit hours).

Inform the Servicemember employee that they earn and use leave on an hourly basis. This means that for each pay period during the leave year when their total accumulated hours of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES equals 80, and each 80-hour increment of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES thereafter during the leave year, they will not accrue annual and sick leave in that pay period. ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES hours in excess of 80, if any, in that same pay period will be carried over to the next pay period. Carryover hours will be combined with ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES hours in the next period to determine whether they accrue annual and sick leave during that pay period. This process will be repeated every pay period each leave year.

Inform the Servicemember employee that they earn and use leave on a daily basis. This means that for each pay period during the leave year when the total accumulated days of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES equals 14, and each 14-day increment of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES thereafter during the leave year, they will not accrue annual and sick leave in that pay period. ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES days in excess of 14, if any, in that same pay period will be carried over to the next pay period. Carryover days will be combined with LWOP days in the next period to determine whether they accrue annual and sick leave during that pay period. This process will be repeated every pay period each leave year.

Excused Absence

When the Servicemember employee returns to Federal civilian service, they are entitled to five consecutive days of excused absence (paid time off) when they return from 42 or more days of consecutive active military service in connection with Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or any other operation subsequently established under Executive Order 13223.

When the Servicemember employee notifies their federal employer of the date they intend to return to duty, the five days of excused absence should be granted before they resume their duties. If the Servicemember employee has already returned to duty, they may request to use the five days of excused absence at a mutually agreeable time. The excused absence cannot be used on an intermittent basis after returning to duty and may be used only once per 12-month period.

Compensation

- Inform the Servicemember employee that when performing active military duty their compensation will be based on the terms of their military pay grade. The Servicemember employee will not receive compensation from their employer unless they elect to use military leave, annual leave or compensatory time or are entitled to reservist differential.

If the Servicemember employee elects to take the lump-sum annual leave option and returns to civilian employment before the end of the period covered by the lump sum, they will be required to repay all the remaining days or hours of work that the lump-sum payment covered.

The Servicemember employee may be entitled to reservist differential if their military pay is less than their civilian pay with their federal employer. The Servicemember employee must provide a copy of their active duty orders and military Leave and Earnings Statements (LES) to claim reservist differential.

Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB)

<http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/>

- <http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/>The Servicemember employee wants to terminate FEHB coverage and have it reinstated upon their return to work.

Inform the Servicemember employee must notify HR in writing that they desire to terminate FEHB coverage. Otherwise, their FEHB coverage will continue and they may be responsible for the premiums.

- The Servicemember employee elects to continue FEHB coverage.

Inform the Servicemember employee that they should always notify both the FEHB and TRICARE about the dual coverage during deployment so that both health plans can properly coordinate benefits. This is extremely important for covered family members, since the FEHB will pay first before coordinating with TRICARE for possible additional payment. This may save family members some out-of-pocket expenses.

Provide the Servicemember employee with a copy of the appropriate form, i.e., BC/BS, GEHA, *Authorization to Release Information* form. They can complete this form by naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. This form can then be faxed to the appropriate FEHB plan. This eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information. This is especially beneficial for a spouse trying to finalize claims on him- or herself and/or covered children.

If the Servicemember employee has family members who will remain covered under the FEHB plan, you may want to provide the Servicemember employee with a copy of the Benefit Plan Booklet for the appropriate health plan.

- The Servicemember employee is being called to active duty that does not support a contingency operation and wants to continue FEHB coverage.

Inform the Servicemember employee that they can continue their health insurance for up to 24 months while in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. For the first 12 months, the Servicemember employee will be responsible for only the Servicemember employee's portion of the premiums. For the remaining 12 months, the Servicemember employee will be responsible for their portion and the government's portion plus a 2 percent administrative fee. This means the Servicemember employee will pay 102 percent of the cost that must be paid currently. The 24-month period will begin on the date their active duty service begins.

- The Servicemember employee is being called to active duty in support of a contingency operation and wants to continue FEHB coverage.

Inform the Servicemember employee that their federal employer will pay the Servicemember employee's share of the premiums for up to 24 months while in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. The 24-month period will begin on the date their active duty service begins. Please note that if, at any time, they receive pay during their deployment, the FEHB premiums will be deducted from their salary. For example, if the Servicemember employee elects to use their 15-day military leave entitlement beginning on October 1st of the next fiscal year, because the Servicemember employee is in a paid status, FEHB premiums will be deducted.

Note: Servicemember employees may not continue health insurance coverage under FEHB beyond the 24-month period. However, at the end of the 24 months, the Servicemember employee has a 31-day extension of coverage and the option to convert to an individual policy offered through their health insurance plan.

If the Servicemember employee is participating in premium conversion, the Servicemember employee has 60 days from the start of their unpaid leave of absence to waive participation or cancel their FEHB coverage. If the Servicemember employee does not terminate participation in premium conversion within the 60-day limit, the Servicemember employee cannot cancel their FEHB, except during the annual FEHB open season or 60 days after another qualifying event.

Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)

<http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/>

- Tell the Servicemember employee that their FEGLI coverage (if enrolled) will continue at no cost to him or her for up to 12 months in a nonpay status and will then terminate with an automatic 31-day extension of coverage and right to convert to an individual policy.

Based on a law effective January 28, 2008, the Servicemember employee may elect to continue their FEGLI coverage for an additional 12 months of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES. During the additional 12 months of FEGLI coverage, the Servicemember employee must pay the Servicemember employee's and the agency's share of premiums for basic coverage and the full premium for any optional coverage for which they are enrolled. There is no agency contribution for the additional 12 months.

Note: The Servicemember employee must complete the Employee Notice and FEGLI election form, *Extension of Coverage When Called to Active Duty*, to make the election for the additional 12 months of coverage. This form must be returned to HR before the end of the Servicemember employee's initial 12 months of ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES. The Servicemember employee must make arrangements with their local payroll office for the payment of these premiums while they are mobilized, since the Servicemember employee cannot pay them when they return to duty under the Servicemember employee's restoration rights.

If the Servicemember employee decides to resign from Federal service because of deployment, the Servicemember employee's FEGLI coverage will continue at no cost for up to 12 months, or until 90 days after their military service ends, whichever date comes first, and will then terminate with a 31-day extension of coverage and right to convert to an individual policy.

- Inform the Servicemember employee that, within 60 days after the date of notification of deployment, they may elect Basic, (if not enrolled in FEGLI), Option A and Option B (up to a maximum of 5 multiples physical). They can make this election on the SF 2817 (either hard copy from HR or electronic version from the OPM website). It would be to the employee's advantage to either add FEGLI and/or max out the amount of eligible FEGLI, since VA will pay the premium for up to 12 months in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status.
- Encourage the Servicemember employee to verify that beneficiary data are up-to-date. If the Servicemember employee is unsure, recommend that they complete new forms.

Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)

<http://www.tsp.gov>

- Ask the Servicemember employee if they have a TSP loan from their uniformed service TSP account. If yes, tell the Servicemember employee that the TSP loan payments will be suspended for the entire period of their active military service, and loan payments will resume when they return.
- Ask the Servicemember employee if they have a TSP loan from a civilian TSP account. If yes, tell the Servicemember employee that their loan payments will stop because they come from payroll deductions. Also inform the Servicemember employee that they cannot make payments on that loan from their military pay. However, they may continue to make loan payments by sending a personal check or money order to the TSP along with a TSP Loan Payment Coupon.
- Ask the Servicemember employee if they would like their loan payments suspended until they return to work. If yes, submit Form TSP-41, *Notification to TSP of Non-pay Status*, for the Servicemember employee. Submission of this form will suspend the Servicemember employee's loan payments until they return to work. Ask for the TSP loan number:
_____.
- Inform the Servicemember employee that if they still have an outstanding TSP loan from their civilian TSP account upon return from active duty, they should request that HR to prepare and submit a second TSP-41 to inform TSP of a return to pay status. Tell the Servicemember employee that they are responsible for reviewing their Leave and Earnings Statement and ensuring that correct loan payments are submitted on time.
- Inform the Servicemember employee that they may make retroactive contributions and elections to their TSP account. Within 60 days of the Servicemember employee's restoration to duty, the Servicemember employee will need to contact HR to indicate their desire to make retroactive TSP contributions and elections. Your federal employer will make up missed agency contributions for eligible FERS Servicemember employees.

The Servicemember employee's retroactive contributions and elections will be reduced if the Servicemember employee contributed to TSP as a military Servicemember employee while on active duty. The Servicemember employee is responsible for providing all Leave and Earnings Statements if TSP contributions were made while on active duty.

- Encourage the Servicemember employee to verify that beneficiary data is up-to-date. If the Servicemember employee is unsure whether the data is up-to-date, recommend that they complete new forms.

Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP)

<http://www.benefeds.com>

- Explain that the Servicemember employee must pay FEDVIP in order for benefits to remain in effect while the Servicemember employee is in an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. Tell the Servicemember employee to contact FEDVIP at 1-877-888-3337 to ensure they have the correct billing address to which to send bills. (FEDVIP will send bills if there are no payroll deductions to pay the premiums.)
Note: Premiums paid by Direct Bill are not pretax.
- Review dental plans for orthodontia waiting periods to determine if it may impact family members at home. Tell the Servicemember employee that if the dental plan is dropped while they are deployed, and there are family members who will need orthodontia treatment, they may have to start the waiting period all over again.
- Provide the Servicemember employee with a copy of the FEDVIP *Authorization to Release Information* form. The Servicemember employee can complete this form, naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. This form can then be faxed to FEDVIP. This eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information. (This is especially beneficial for a spouse who is trying to finalize claims on him- or herself and/or covered children.)
- If the Servicemember employee chooses to cancel their FEDVIP, they can cancel 31 days before or 60 days after the date of deployment by calling BENEFEDES at 1-877-888-3337 or TTY 1-877-889-5680. Inform the Servicemember employee that when they return from military duty, they can elect to enroll in FEDVIP within 60 days after their orders end.

Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP)

<https://www.ltcfeds.com/>

- Explain that the Servicemember employee must pay long-term care (LTC) for benefits to remain in effect while the Servicemember employee is in an LWOP status. Tell the Servicemember employee to contact FLTCIP at 1-800-582-3337 to ensure FLTCIP has the correct billing address to which to send bills.
Note: LTC will send bills if there are no payroll deductions to pay the premiums.
- Provide the Servicemember employee with a copy of the FLTCIP *Authorization to Release Information* form. The Servicemember employee can complete this form, naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. This form can then be faxed to LTC. Tell the Servicemember employee that this eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information regarding LTC.

Federal Flexible Spending Account (FSAFEDS)

<http://www.fsafeds.com>

- Provide the Servicemember employee with a copy of the FSAFEDS Authorization to Release Information form. Tell the Servicemember employee that they can complete this form, naming an individual (usually a spouse or parent) who is eligible to receive information from the plan when they call. The form can then be faxed to FSAFEDS (1-866-643-2245 toll free; or 1-502-267-2233 outside the United States). This eliminates the need for a family member to submit copies of paperwork and power of attorney to obtain information.
- Inform the Servicemember employee that they may arrange to prepay their allotments before entering an ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status. The prepayment amount would be added to their normal payment. This means that their biweekly deductions would be increased based on the amount they specify to prepay.

If the Servicemember employee does not prepay before their ABSENT-UNIFORM SERVICES status, their FSA will be frozen, and they will not be eligible for reimbursement for any expenses incurred during that period until the plan year ends or until the Servicemember employee returns to their job and begins making allotments again. When the Servicemember employee returns, their allotments will be made on a catch-up basis. If doubling the amount is not enough to catch up by the end of the plan year, the Servicemember employee's allotment will be increased proportionately over the pay dates remaining in the plan year, or they may pay the allotments directly on an after-tax basis.

- If the Servicemember employee has a balance in their Health Care Flexible Savings Account (HCFSAs) or Limited Expense Health Care Flexible Savings Account (LEX HCFSAs) and believes they might not be able to incur enough eligible expenses to deplete the account, rather than forfeit those funds (remember the use-or-lose rule for FSA accounts), the Servicemember employee can have their balance refunded to him- or herself. This new feature is for Qualified Reservists only under the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act. The HEART Act (Public Law No. 110-245) contains tax benefits and incentives for individuals in military service. Section 114 of the HEART Act allows qualified reservists to receive a taxable distribution of their unused HCFSAs—also known as a qualified reservist distribution (QRD). FSAFEDS adopted Section 114 of the HEART Act, effective January 1, 2009. Tell the Servicemember employee that the drawback is that the distribution will be taxable wages and that they give up their ability to submit eligible expenses for the remainder of the benefit period.
- If the Servicemember employee decides to resign their FSA will terminate as of the date of their separation. There are no extensions. However, for the Servicemember employee's health care account, they may submit claims with dates of service from the effective date through separation date. For the Servicemember employee's dependent care account, they may submit claims for the entire plan year.
- Tell the Servicemember employee to contact FSA benefits counselors at 1-877-372-3337 if they have additional questions regarding FSA.

Return to VA Civilian Employment

- Inform the Servicemember employee that they should inform HR of their date of return to employment.
- Remind the Servicemember employee that you will work together to arrange a seamless transition back into the workforce and to get the Servicemember employee's benefits in place.

HR Point of Contact

- Provide the Servicemember employee with several copies of your business card and/or HR point of contact so that he or she, as well as family members, has a point of contact in the event they have any questions or need to speak to someone from their HR department. Tell the Servicemember employee that they may contact you about concerns with continuation of benefits coverage.

Note: If the Servicemember employee contacts you while on active duty, make sure you contact them within 24 hours with an answer or state that you will respond to them shortly with an answer.

Servicemember employee Contact Information (while on Active Duty)

- Mailing address

Ask the Servicemember employee if they will be changing mailing addresses as a result of their mobilization. The Servicemember employee may need to update their records with the new address.

- Email address

Obtain an email address that the Servicemember employee will use while on active duty. Most Servicemember employees will provide both a military and a personal email address should you desire to establish contact.

Servicemember Employee Contact Information (while on active duty):

| | | | |
|----------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Address: | _____ | Phone | _____ |
| | _____ | Number: | _____ |
| | _____ | Email Address: | _____ |

In Case of Emergency, Contact:

| | | | |
|---------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Name: | _____ | Relationship: | _____ |
| Address | _____ | Phone | _____ |
| | _____ | number: | _____ |
| | _____ | Email address: | _____ |

Miscellaneous

- Provide the Servicemember employee with copies of all submitted documentation. Tell the Servicemember employee that they should provide a family member or friend with copies of all submitted documentation.

- Explain to the Servicemember employee that they should ensure a family member(s) or a friend(s) knows their branch of service, rank, unit, company or battalion name, Social Security Number, last known military location, military unit contact person(s), and contact information. Also, recommend to the Servicemember employee that they consider preparing a power of attorney, particularly including employment issues and benefits.

By signing, you confirm that you have been counseled on each item in this guide and that you understand your options for leave and benefits.

Servicemember Employee

Date

By signing, you confirm that you have counseled the mobilizing Servicemember employee on each item in this guide.

HR Professional

Date