

Agency Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA) Strategic Plan 2022

Agency Name: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

State of the Agency:

On February 9, 2022, Secretary McDonough delivered [VA's Human Infrastructure Plan](#), which included VA's commitment to I-DEA principles into hiring; position and talent management; and ensuring VA is a welcoming workplace for all employees – and that VA reflects the strong, diverse country we serve.”

VA's highest priorities are our three core responsibilities which are as follows:

1. Provide all Veterans timely, world class health care; 2. Ensure that Veterans and their families have access to the benefits they have earned; and 3. Honor Veterans with a final resting place that is a lasting tribute to their service and sacrifice.

In April 2021, Secretary McDonough launched the I-DEA Task Force with a workgroup dedicated to evaluating current regulations, policies and initiatives to identify hiring and advancement barriers for employees from underserved communities. The I-DEA Task Force produced the [I-DEA Action Plan](#) to capture enterprise recommendations focused on human infrastructure to be implemented over 4 years. A key accomplishment and symbol of inclusion was raising the Pride flag outside VA Central Office in June 2021 during Pride month. VA is committed to following up symbols with action. As such we are refocusing our human infrastructure efforts through the lens of I-DEA grounded in evidence-based enterprise policymaking, oversight and deliberate implementation. Our vision statement is clear. VA is transforming its human infrastructure capabilities to advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities we serve – employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors – and cultivates equitable access to care, benefits and services for all.

VA can fulfill those responsibilities by creating a high-performing workforce embodied by our diversity, purposefully embracing inclusion and empowering all employees to perform to their highest potential. We have taken steps to hire a Chief Diversity Officer to oversee this mandate and report directly to Deputy Secretary Remy. We are in the process of leveraging our unique customer experience capability grounded in human centered design to re-evaluate VA's mission statement to embody our core values and is inclusive of the diverse Veterans we serve. We have established a governance body called the *I-DEA Sub-council* to advance policy and initiatives centered on I-DEA in human capital; accessibility in VA facilities; and engagement with labor partners. VA is firmly focused on improving the employee experience; data collection and analytics; inclusivity; and creating a safe workplace for employees.

Successful Initiatives/Programs

VA I-DEA Sub-council

- The I-DEA Sub-council is comprised of dedicated subject matter experts and representatives from across VA Administrations and Staff Offices. The sub-council is currently assessing the 20 recommendations from the [I-DEA Action Plan](#). Half of those recommendations are focused on integrating I-DEA into our human infrastructure capabilities.

VA Sub-council on Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention/ Survivor Care and Support (SHAP/SCS)

- SHAP/SCS is organized to support activities related to sexual harassment; sexual assault prevention; survivor care; and support efforts. It creates a forum to unify agency efforts across four workstreams: proactive culture, accountability, survivor care and support, and strategic engagement. It accelerates progress and implements specific requirements and policies to inform the development of new or revised policies, as needed.
- A sub-council workgroup was stood up by the Secretary to evaluate VA policies and procedures to eliminate sexual assault and harassment in VA facilities. More specifically, the workgroup is charged with developing an action plan for addressing changes at all levels of VA to reduce harassment and sexual assault, and developing standardized media for VA, Veterans Service Organizations and other stakeholders to use in print and on the internet to reduce sexual assault and harassment, and developing bystander intervention training for Veterans.

Employee Experience

- VA has several initiatives underway focused on Employee Experience. We incorporated survey questions for employees to measure inclusion within the [All-Employee Survey \(AES\)](#) framework to better understand inclusion across the enterprise.
- VA is offering new ways for employees to provide feedback through pulse surveys as part of the Government-wide “Employee Voice” pilot initiative and is launching [Employee Signals](#) (ESignals), a continuous listening measurement channel to drive employee experience improvements. Employee-centric projects and ESignals, integrate Human-Centered Design as a core methodological component to capturing and analyzing insights, elevating the voice of the employee and developing tools to improve the employee experience.
- VA established one Employee Resource Group - [PRIDE VA](#).
- VA reconstituted the Employee Engagement Council and revised the charter to establish Labor and Management co-chairs.

Workforce Barrier Analysis

- The Workforce Barrier Analysis workgroup seeks to identify and eliminate barriers to leadership advancement and professional development. The group concluded an analysis on the outreach and recruitment of Hispanic employees in the VA and will soon begin an analysis on employees with disabilities and employees with targeted disabilities.
- VA has also partnered with a federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) to analyze the lack of diversity among the Department's Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. FFRDCs are academic, corporate and nonprofit organizations owned by the Federal Government but operated by contractors to augment VA's research and development capabilities.

Inclusion and Accessibility

- VA recently submitted the annual Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP) Accomplishment Report and Certification.
- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is conducting a pilot program to include pronouns in email headers and in the global address list.
- VA automated the forms that employees complete to update their disability status. This provides better information into the types of disabilities that the workforce has and informs considerations regarding the types of accommodations that may be required.

Training and Learning

- The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) hosted the Virtual Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Access Conference with over 2,000 participants consisting of EEO Program Managers, Directors, supervisors and others during fiscal year (FY) 2021. The conference provided information to ensure EEO personnel had the knowledge, skill, and ability to affectively advise, and give guidance to leadership and appropriate EEO services.
- VA developed a new mandatory Harassment Prevention and Accountability training course in VA's Talent Management System (TMS) (VA 45224), required for completion by all employees within 90 days of hire and annually thereafter. VA also revised the EEO, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Training for all executives, managers and supervisors (VA 45049) and mandated training completion within 90 days after launch and biennially thereafter.
- Virtual interactive vendor-led bystander intervention training was provided to VHA employees across the field. Updated mandatory harassment prevention training for all employees to include bystander intervention techniques was also provided.
- VHA transitioned to a universal application methodology for leadership development programs to deemphasize reliance of essay-based frameworks and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has experimented with

anonymizing applications for leadership programs by removing demographic information.

Equal Employment Opportunity

- The diversity and inclusion (D&I) staff conduct thorough, accurate and effective field audits of the EEO programs in field offices. Technical Assistance Review (TAR) evaluate the VA’s EEO and D&I program infrastructure and organizational impact and ensure that progress is made to achieve model EEO and D&I program status. To achieve this goal, the EEO Commission (EEOC) requires that periodic reviews be conducted throughout the organization. The review framework was transitioned to a virtual platform due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; creating a virtual methodology which allowed the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) to perform 10 TARs per year, an increase from 6 held in FY 2021.

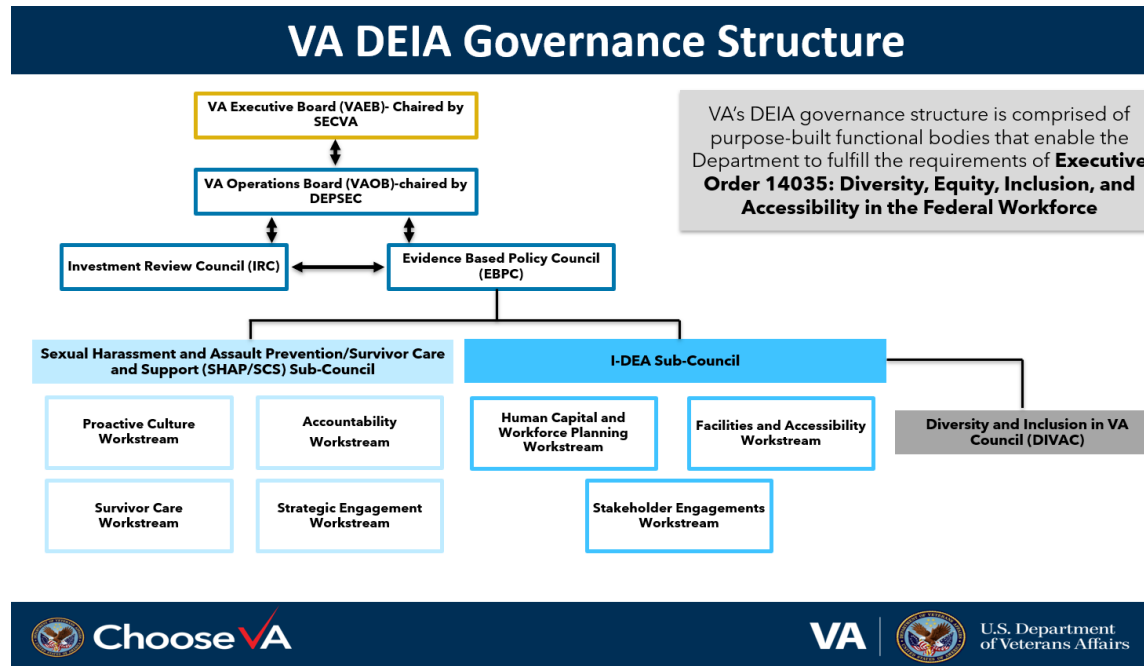
Challenges

- Infrastructure (Organizational/Governance)
 - Limited bench strength and budgetary considerations make it imperative to seek economies of scale when designing the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) governance structure across the Department.
 - The approval process for staffing new I-DEA-related roles takes a considerable amount of time and requires that Administrations and Staff Offices rely on existing staff members to fulfill these responsibilities as collateral/ancillary duties.
- Resources
 - Ensuring that all VA Administrations and Staff Offices have dedicated resources to carry out I-DEA initiatives.
 - Data collection, especially with respect to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer plus (LGBTQ+) employees, is heavily reliant on existing Office of Personnel Management (OPM) forms which often do not provide the level of detail that would enable VA to perform more in-depth analysis.
- Human Infrastructure
 - There is a lack of diversity in the SES talent pool.
 - The inability to de-identify applicants on the USA Staffing job portal limits VA’s ability to scale promising practices related to applicant anonymization, which aims to reduce recruitment bias.

Include Information About Components within the Agency Not Covered by this Agency I-DEA Strategic Plan, as applicable:

Not applicable

I-DEA Implementation Team:



Chief Diversity Officer:

Identify Chief Diversity Officer (CDO)	The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (SECVA) has approved the creation of the CDO position that will report directly to the Deputy Secretary.
<i>If not currently established, what steps have been or will be taken to fill the role</i>	VA is coordinating with the White House Presidential Personnel Office to source and recruit candidates for this position.

An overview of the collaboration between Agency I-DEA Teams and Component I-DEA Teams, including cross-functional processes used to develop this plan:

VA ensured a collaborative approach in developing the I-DEA Strategic Plan by leveraging to following governance bodies which are connected through the Evidence-based Policy Council (EBPC) and reports to the VA’s Secretary:

- **Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA).** The I-DEA Sub-council solidifies VA’s enduring commitment to embracing the incredible diversity that defines Veterans and the employee population. The I-DEA Sub-council will accomplish this by implementing a holistic and integrated mission on I-DEA. The I-DEA Sub-council is Veteran and employee-facing, and offers a forum for

members to collaborate and recommend appropriate courses of action to operationalize the strategic recommendations. The Sub-Council has a specific workstream dedicated to I-DEA in human capital and workforce planning.

- **SHAP/SCS Sub-council.** SHAP/SCS is charged with organizing and supporting the required activities related to sexual harassment and sexual assault prevention and survivor care and support efforts. This includes requirements as part of legislation and other sources and aspirational goals that support VA's vision in creating an inclusive atmosphere for all we serve. In addition, this Sub-council creates a forum to unify Agency efforts, accelerate progress in implementing specific requirements and policies and inform the development of new or revised policies, as needed.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Veterans Affairs Council (DIVAC).** The DIVAC serves as an internal forum to address D&I issues impacting VA's workforce. The council does not operate as a public forum. The council provides independent recommendations to VA leadership on policies, programs and initiatives relating to VA workforce diversity and organizational inclusion. It also serves as a communication link between the VA workforce, subcomponent VA organizations and the VA leadership. It also serves as a clearing house on D&I training, resources and best practices within the Department.

Agency I-DEA Strategic Plan Governance Structure and Team:

<p>Leadership involved to champion and advance I-DEA (at the agency and component level)</p>	<p>SECVA created the I-DEA Sub-council to serve as the governance body for the I-DEA initiative. The Sub-council is chaired by the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) and co-chaired by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion. The Sub-council reports to EBPC, which is chaired by the Senior Advisor to the Secretary.</p>
<p>Cadence of leadership engagement</p>	<p>The I-DEA Sub-council meets biweekly, but reports to EBPC on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis.</p> <p>The five workstreams that make up the I-DEA Sub-council meet weekly and are as follows: Action Plan Recommendations; Executive Orders and Presidential Memorandums; Human Capital and Workforce Planning; Stakeholder Engagement; and Facilities and Accessibility.</p>
<p>Mechanism of quarterly review by agency head</p>	<p>As stated above, the I-DEA Sub-Council reports to EBPC on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis.</p>

	<p>Also, a SECVA Special Assistant has an I-DEA related portfolio; is an active member of the I-DEA Sub-Council; and regularly reports to SECVA.</p>
<p>Plan for integration of I-DEA into decision-making, governance, mission and goals</p>	<p>I-DEA is being integrated and hardwired into VA decision-making, governance, mission, core values and goals through continuous and enterprise-wide efforts in assessing the 20 recommendations and 68 sub-recommendations of the I-DEA Action Plan . The initiative is being centralized to ensure equity in the delivery of health care, benefits and other services.</p> <p>The I-DEA Sub-council is currently assessing the 20 recommendations and 68 sub-recommendations that resulted from the I-DEA Action Plan. These recommendations showcase the multi-year effort and the strategic I-DEA initiatives where VA will focus its effort.</p>
<p>Team members and structure (<i>at agency and component level</i>)</p>	<p>The I-DEA Sub-Council has representation from each VA Administration and Staff Office. As previously stated the five sub-council workstreams are as follows: including Action Plan Recommendations; Executive Orders and Presidential Memoranda; Human Capital and Workforce Planning; Stakeholder Engagement; and Facilities and Accessibility.</p>
<p>Governance: How team will work together</p>	<p>The I-DEA Sub-council reports directly to EBPC. EBPC is chaired by the Senior Advisor to the Secretary, and the vice-chair is the Chief of Staff for the Office of Enterprise Integration. The EBPC reports to the Veterans Affairs Operations Board (VAOB), which is chaired by the Deputy Secretary. VAOB reports directly to the VA Executive Board, which is chaired by the SECVA. Each Council has representation from leadership from each Administration and Staff Office.</p> <p>The I-DEA Sub-council meets bi-weekly in an open forum, to report on progress that resulted from weekly focused discussions held with subject matter experts (SME) across the enterprise. SMEs gather in 5 separate workstreams to discuss the 20 recommendations and 68 sub-recommendations in established intervals. In addition, the workstreams discuss resources, policies, on-going actions, impacts, training and full-time equivalent. The I-DEA Sub-council will continue to work together to find areas of operations that intersect across business lines and work together towards embedding equity into the fabric of VA.</p>

I-DEA Budget:

Below are highlights of some of VA's I-DEA related resource requests for the FY 2023 budget.

Women's Health - Peer Specialists. VHA Mental Health and Suicide Prevention is requesting \$26.7 million to hire approximately 327 women peer specialists in the VA health care system across FY 2023 and FY 2024 in relation to Section 5206 of Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (Megabus Act). Section 5206 of the Megabus Act calls for VHA to determine the VA health care system's current capacity to have women peer specialists available to provide peer support services to women Veterans in mental health and non-mental health care programs where the women Veterans are receiving their health care services. Following the completion of the women peer specialist staffing capacity assessment report, the legislation also requires that the results of the assessment be used to develop and submit to Congress a staffing improvement plan to hire additional women peer specialists.

Women's Health – Women's Health Innovation and Staffing Enhancement (WHISE) Initiative. VA is strategically improving services and access for women Veterans. As such, VA is requesting \$134.2 million to address the growing number of women Veterans who are eligible for health care. The WHISE initiative, by providing funds to VA medical centers, will enhance women's health programs through the hiring of new staff and purchasing equipment specific for women's health care. The special purpose funding will support these new women's health positions for 3 years out, building the core staff required to support the influx of women Veterans.

I-DEA and Interagency Initiatives

VA participates and has representation in the following Intra-agency policy councils (IPC) that provide a platform for all Federal agencies to come together:

Executive Order (EO) 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity And Support for Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government" - Equity Procurement IPC
EO 13988, "Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation" - Gender Markers Policy IPC
EO 1403, "Advancing Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders" - White House Initiative on Asian American, Native Hawaiians & Pacific Islanders IPC
EO 14041, "White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities" - Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) IPC
EO 14058, "Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery To Rebuild Trust In Government" and President's Management Agenda Priority Area II – Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs serves as co-lead of this Priority Area along with

Deputies from United States Department of Agriculture and General Services Administration.

The focus on human-centered design and understanding the needs of all population's government serves to provide better experiences supports the spirit and intent of IDEA-related EOs and initiatives.

Agency Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan

I-DEA Vision Statement

To advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities we serve – employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors – and cultivates equitable access to care, benefits and services for all. It is our vision that VA is the leader in public service in creating a high-performing workforce by capitalizing on its diversity, purposefully embracing inclusion and empowering all employees to perform to their highest potential.

Goal 1: Inclusion

VA's inclusive work environment is free from all discrimination, retribution or harassment and all employees feel safe and empowered to be their authentic selves.

Goal 2: Diversity

VA builds a diverse, high-performing workforce reflective of all segments of society and values all aspects of human diversity.

Goal 3: Equity

VA eliminates barriers to EEO at all levels and in all occupations to advance equity for employees.

Goal 4: Accessibility

VA will institute physical and technological solutions to empower all employees to advance the Department's mission.

GOAL 1: Inclusion	
Priority/Goal	VA's inclusive work environment is free from all discrimination, retribution or harassment and all employees feel safe and empowered to be their authentic selves.
Strategies	Commit to establishing safe workplaces: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultivate an engaged organization that leverages diversity and empowers all contributors.• Treat all VA employees with the dignity and respect they deserve regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Commit to improving data collection and analytics:

- Expand technical assistance reviews conducted in field organizations.
- Explore the inclusion of LGBTQ+ voluntary self-identification in VA's personnel data collection forms in both applicant flow and on-boarding processes.
- Work with Office of Personnel Management on policy considerations concerning name changes associated with gender expression /gender identities.
- Develop a VA directive that provides guidelines for collecting, maintaining and reporting data to preserve the integrity of the process.

VA is committed to take actions to advance Inclusion in the workplace such as:

- Improve equitable access to employee services and medical/health benefits, update employee identification standards; expand availability of non-binary facilities and practices including the expansion of gender marker and pronoun usage that respect transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary employees; and mitigate barriers to security clearances.

Improve I-DEA Training and Learning by:

- Providing EEO, Harassment Prevention and Accountability training for all employees.
- Delivering LGBTQ+ cultural competency, unconscious bias, gender diversity and other relevant D&I trainings to VA workforce.
- Deliver custom I-DEA training with increasingly complex / challenging topics and that provides employees with the ability to customize their learning experiences.

Increase access to resource groups for Employees:

- Support participation in special emphasis programs (SEP), employee affinity and resource groups; expand SEPs to focus on new, emerging aspects of diversity (multigenerational; LGBTQ+; religious, etc.).
- Foster a culture of work/life balance where meeting mental and physical health is just as important as meeting mission by implementing work/life flexibilities (wellness, telework, flexible work schedules) as appropriate, and utilize multiple tools to recognize and reward hard work for outstanding performance annually and special acts going above and

	<p>beyond so that our employees will feel valued, appreciated, and satisfied at work.</p> <p>Improve professional development and increase opportunities for advancement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting participation in SECVA’s Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and in the Secretary’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program.
<p>Actions</p>	<p>Establish safe workspaces by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing organizational climate assessments in Administrations and Staff Offices experiencing high workplace conflict/per capita complaints/employee grievances. • Completing the concurrence process for and distributing the Harassment Prevention Program (HPP) Handbook (VA Handbook 5979), which provides specific role and responsibilities for agency officials to include managers, supervisors, contractors and employees. • Establishing a process to conduct compliance reviews on the status of the Administration and Staff Office HPP in adherence to VA Directive 5979. • Collaborating with internal VA resources from each Administration and Staff Office to establish a collateral-duty Fact Finder Program that will provide initial and refresher training for the Collateral Duty Fact Finder Cadre Program thus providing truly neutral parties to investigate harassment allegations at local facilities. • Coordinating Department-wide policy and program development and implementation activities recommended by SHAP/SCS. • Evaluating institutional symbols, expression of values, artwork, etc. displayed and used by VA to ensure inclusiveness and diverse representation, and publishing the Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Stalking in the Workplace Policy. <p>improve data collection and analytics through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing with virtual technical assistance reviews to assist facilities in striving to attain a model EEO program. • Working across the enterprise and with Federal stakeholders to identify legal considerations in implementing voluntary self-identification of LGBTQ+ status in recruitment and on-board data collection.

Advance Inclusion in the workplace through actions such as:

- Leveraging the National Partnership Council, comprised of representatives from Administrations, Staff Offices and our five national unions, to advise the Secretary on initiatives impacting employees and promotes cooperative labor-management relations.
- Assessing the feasibility of adding sexual orientation, gender identity and preferred pronouns to Department-wide systems.
- Updating policy guidance to make the use of pronouns optional in employee display names across active directories.
- Continuing to actively participate on the Gender Marker IPC, to expand gender marker data collection and adopt the resulting whole-of-Government approach.

Improve I-DEA training and learning by:

- Implementing updated mandatory EEO, D&I and Conflict Management Training for all executives, managers and supervisors by end of FY 2022.
- Providing updated mandatory biennial Whistleblower Protection and No FEAR training for all managers and supervisors by the end of FY 2022.
- Incorporating broad-based D&I content in agency branding and communication strategies (media outreach, public awards, various communications tools and vehicles, strategic communications and web sites) and continue to maintain D&I content on the [diversity and inclusion](#) section of the ORMDI web site.
- Piloting a new learning environment, called the Learning Enablement and Analytics Platform, to cultivate a more cohesive training experience on harassment prevention.
- Establishing a platform for VA's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion toolkit developed to address sensitivity issues concerning race and equality.

Increase access to resource groups for employees by :

- Scaling the recently established PRIDE VA Employee Resource Group and update policies to support equitable treatment of LGBTQ+ employees.
- Enhancing child and elder care benefits, invest in employee assistance programs and encourage taking time during the day for resilience practices.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing more immediate ways to recognize employees, such as providing a four-hour time-off award for going above and beyond the call of duty throughout the past year. <p>Improve Professional Development and increase opportunities for Advancement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering with VA Administrations and Staff Offices to reaffirm timelines, participation, and alignment with ORMDI D&I Awards program.
Operational activities to measure progress (quarterly measures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute a monthly harassment bulletin that provides definitions of harassment and a brief list of the types of conduct that may constitute harassment. • Provide non-compliance notifications and compliance reports to Under Secretaries and other key officials on the status of the harassment prevention programs within their respective program areas. Programs not in compliance with this policy will be reported to SECVA quarterly. • Continue the monthly HPP Awareness Training and use VA's TMS to track employee participation. • Monitor the established process which allows any non-Department individuals (Veterans, visitors, caregivers, volunteers or visitors) to readily identify to whom and how to report incidents of harassment and sexual assault. • Monitor the process that makes it mandatory for any VA employee or contractor who witnesses harassment, sexual harassment or sexual assault within a facility of the Department to report the incident. • Submit a Congressionally Mandated Report annually on harassment and sexual assault incidents occurring in VA. • Provide a corrective action plan within 30 business days of receipt of the HPP Compliance Review Program Final Report.
Outcome measures (annual) to assess progress	<p>Safe workplace will be measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase overall Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) participation rate to 53% of total cases and resolution rate of informal EEO complaint rate to 50% by end of FY 2022. • Percent of SES/Leadership and supervisors with I-DEA outcomes in their performance goals. <p>VA is committed to improving data collection and analytics will be measured by ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a minimum of six TARs annually. • Conduct a minimum of 10 HPP Compliance reviews annually.

	<p>A measure of VA’s is commitment to take actions to advance Inclusion in the workplace will be gauged by responses to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AES Question: I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization. <p>Improvements to I-DEA Training and Learning are considered successful where VA :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves a 98% biennial completion rate of EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, and conflict management training for executives, managers and supervisors. • Achieves 98% biennial completion rate for Whistleblower Protection and No FEAR training for all employees. • Achieves 98% annual completion rate for Harassment Prevention and Accountability training for all VA employees and contractors. • Demonstrates an increased percentage of employees have completed I-DEA training in the last 12 months. • Shows the number of timely EEO and diversity policy statements issued by the VA Secretary annually. <p>An increase of access to resource groups for Employees will be evidenced by::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Number of I-DEA programs and events hosted and offered. <p>Measurement of improved professional development and increased opportunities for Advancement are shown through the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of nominations for Secretary’s Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and the Secretary’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program.
Responsible individuals or teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VHA • VBA • NCA • HRA/OSP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ORMDI ○ Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) ○ Labor Management Relations (LMR) ○ Corporate Senior Executive Management Office (CSEMO) • Office of Information & Technology (OIT) • Office of Acquisitions, Logistics and Construction (OALC)
Dedicated Resources, such as funding	<p>The following VA Organizations carry out I-DEA related initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ORMDI • Center for Minority Veterans (CMV)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center for Women Veterans (CWV) • Veterans’ Health Administration Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office (VHA DEI) • Veterans’ Health Administration Office of Health Equity (VHA OHE)
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Goal 2: Diversity

Priority/Goal	VA’s builds a diverse, high-performing workforce reflective all segments of society and values all aspects of human diversity.
Strategies	<p>Improve data collection and analytics by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing the collection of voluntarily self-reported demographic data on VA employees. • Developing and maintaining a view of the pipeline of employees, by level, by race/gender/LGBTQ+/disability/etc., by Administration to highlight pain points for which interventions may be designed. • Collecting and proactively sharing data on where we lose diversity in the hiring process. Include metrics during the hiring process so there is transparency in the data. • Tracking and monitoring employees’ participation in career development and advancement programs in order to assess the diversity within these programs and ensure equal access to them. <p>Expand partnerships and recruitment to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse affinity organizations, professional associations and educational institutions to perform recruitment outreach focusing on promoting workforce diversity. <p>Improve professional development and increase opportunities for advancement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing applicant flow/adverse impact analyses of leadership development programs’ application and selection processes to identify barriers to leadership development. <p>Improve I-DEA Training & Learning by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating D&I themes in the curricula of all leadership development programs, including cognitive diversity.
Actions	<p>VA is committed to improving data collection and analytics by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring VA’s Diversity Index regularly, updating the methodology as appropriate, keeping leadership apprised of VA’s workforce diversity status, relative to the

	<p>Relevant/Civilian Labor Force and take necessary actions to address any observed issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering timely and accurate annual reports to external agencies EEOC Management Directive 715 Report; diversity reports to OPM as appropriate. • Maintaining employee pipeline view by race, ethnicity, gender and disability, and explore the creation of a similar pipeline view for LGBTQ+ to highlight pain points for which interventions may be designed. • Tracking race, ethnicity, gender and disability data to better understand the demographic breakdown within leadership development programs. • Monitoring representation of people with disabilities (PWD), and people with targeted disabilities (PWTD) in lower and higher-grade positions. <p>Expand Partnerships and Recruitment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing standard partnership agreement template and guidelines preapproved by the VA Office of General Counsel. • Continuing to adopt a Memorandum of Understanding with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and support LULAC's Federal Training Institute (FTI) activities that focus on students and young professionals. Through the Department's role as a joint venture partner, VA's Acting Departmental Hispanic Employment Program Manager will, as opportunities exist, collaborate with LULAC's Director of Federal Affairs, and others. on developing the LULAC FTI Partnership Senior Executive and Leadership Development Training Series. • Incorporating DEI questions into the hiring process and reference checks. • Increasing participation in national/local outreach and partnership events involving stakeholder/affinity organizations to as many virtual events as budget permits. • Educating applicants and hiring managers and Human Resource Specialists on noncompetitive hiring authorities and work with CWV, VBA and CMV to ensure that employment outreach programs focus on disabled, female, minority and multigenerational Veterans, spouses of Veterans and other groups with less than expected participation rates in the workforce. • Revising and renewing VHA Directive 1400.03, Educational Relationships, to encourage VA medical facilities to promote and develop new academic affiliations by eliminating any perceived barriers to establishing affiliate relationships with
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	<p>Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) when relationships already exist with non-MSI academic institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging relationships between VA medical facilities and HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions and other MSIs by annually updating the geo-mapping web application, developed by the Office of Academic Affiliations, which provides VA facilities with a resource that visually categorizes MSIs based on location, health profession education programs, status of VA affiliation, etc. • The Board of Veterans' Appeals is assessing its capacity to participate in National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP) in FY 2022 and will be engaging the six law schools at HBCUs to develop informational sessions on the attorney hiring process for the next round of recruitment. • Partnering with professional organizations that maintain contact with minority health care professionals' post-graduation, as many of the health care positions require more experienced and senior professionals. <p>Improve Professional Development and increase opportunities for Advancement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing processes to provide non-selected applicants with feedback (GS-13 and above). • Analyzing attrition and participation rates in leadership ranks and developing appropriate outreach and corrective strategies. • Ensuring diversity on interview panels and leverage best practices from other organizations. • Increasing participation of groups with low participation rates in recruitment and leadership development/mentoring program applicant pools by aggressively promoting and communicating leadership development and mentoring programs to all eligible employees (Aspiring Leaders, Leadership VA, SES Candidate Development Program, Technical Career Field programs). • Partnering with Blacks in Government and other organizations to prepare applicants for the hiring process (e.g., develop allyship). • Building a diverse talent pipeline for future senior leaders by evaluating and identifying individuals with the expertise and experience to lead now, lead soon or lead later. <p>Improve I-DEA training and learning by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating hiring managers, selection panels, awards panels, proposing and deciding officials on unconscious bias.
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<p>Operational activities to measure progress (quarterly measures)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report VA Diversity Index to leadership quarterly to gauge aggregate workforce diversity in VA. • Participate in a minimum of six national/local job fairs or events targeting outreach to groups with low participation rates, annually.
<p>Outcome measures (annual) to assess progress</p>	<p>VA commitment to improving data collection and analytics measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance against PWD (12%) and PWTD (2%) goals. <p>Expand Partnerships and Recruitment measured by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement scores by minority groups. <p>Measurement of improved professional development and increase opportunities for Advancement measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of employees who applied for professional development opportunities. • Percent of managers involved with mentoring programs. • Percent of employees selected for professional development opportunities. • Percent of employees who advance in their careers after participating in a development program.
<p>Responsible individuals or teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VHA • VBA • NCA • ORMDI • OCHCO • CMV • CWV • CSEMO • I-DEA Sub-Council
<p>Dedicated Resources, such as funding</p>	<p>The following VA Organizations carry out I-DEA related initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ORMDI • CMV • CWV • VHA DEI • VHA OHE

Goal 3: Equity	
Priority/Goal	VA eliminates barriers to EEO at all levels and in all occupations to advance equity for employees.
Strategies	<p>Advance equity for employees by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the equitable use of agency policies, programs, survey tools and practices among VA employees to develop and implement action plans that build on strengths and address deficiencies in the organizational culture and drive process improvements across the Department and down into individual work groups. • Improving retention of PWTB. • Increasing utilization under the Schedule A hiring authority and improving timeliness of conversions. • Ensuring EEO is involved in the development of strategic plans and policies that pertain to recruitment and employment. <p>Increase engagement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting approaches that map and assess the employee experience (i.e., employee journey mapping). <p>Increase availability of paid Internships by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a dedicated internship talent team, and procuring and deploying modern outreach and recruitment tools to meet internship goals. <p>Improve professional development and increase opportunities for advancement by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that most VA positions have clear career paths that reflect opportunities for professional growth and provide employees with access to mentoring programs and career long learning. <p>Create financial equity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming more competitive in both rural and urban markets for hard-to-fill and specialized positions by working with Congress to set employee salaries using established pay ranges for every position based on the labor market, not on outdated or artificial caps or special salary rates.
Actions	<p>Advance equity for employees by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating triggers indicating that workplace policies, procedures or practices were having a negative impact on one or more protected EEO categories, with a focus towards identifying the root causes of those anomalies so that they can be addressed and eliminated, if possible.

- Continuing the “Identity Insights” project, which is examining the experience of eight identity groups (American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian American & Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic, Age (Baby Boomers), people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ and women) across six relationships (work, technology, place, people, organization, well-being).
- Continuing to leverage the Veteran Employment Program to provide employment readiness assistance and outreach to transitioning Service members, Veterans and military spouses to help VA become the employer of choice.
- Exploring the use of an anonymized process for the Senior Executive cadre to assess if the removal of personally identifiable data impacts the level of diversity achieved at the executive level.
- Designing a monthly “Ask Me Anything” forum with VA Senior Leaders and human resources Professionals program to offer career development activities that increase access to leadership.

Increase engagement by:

- Monitoring DEI metrics on the annual AES as a gauge of employee perceptions of the work environment. Please note that AES is mentioned below in following sections, but not here to establish it as part of the workforce data collection on engagement and perceptions of the work environment.
- Offering new ways for employees to provide feedback through pulse surveys as part of the Government-wide “Employee Voice” pilot initiative and leveraging the ESignals Survey platform as a continuous listening measurement channel to drive employee experience improvements.

Increase availability of paid Internships by:

- Improving VA clinical training opportunities for HBCU medical students and physician residents and identifying ways to expand internship programs.
- Implementing a system to identify and track WRP and NDIP interns in VA’s human resources information system.

Improve professional development and increase opportunities for Advancement by:

- Promoting the use of re-identified universal application instruments and data-informed rating processes for entry into national-level, competitive leadership development initiatives to mitigate selection bias observed through prior overuse of essay-based responses and education qualifiers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding leadership development learning options to include asynchronous, virtual formats to enhance resource access across VA occupations, geographical areas and leadership levels that may not have options for extended in-person training. • Including I-DEA content in leadership development programs to increase awareness and skills among rising and current leaders. • Administering annual career aspiration surveys to identify employees' career and development needs outside of supervisor nominations, allowing direct notification to aspiring talent when announcements of job openings and developmental programs become available. • Exploring options for centralizing the management of the student loan repayment program. <p>Create financial equity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the Federal minimum wage increases for approximately 9,700 employees to include housekeeping aids, food service workers, health aids and cemetery caretakers. • Working with Congress to obtain permanent approval, through the Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment Act to increase nurse and physician assistant pay to ensure we can quickly recruit and retain critical frontline employees in short supply. • Working with Congress to gain additional flexibility to ensure we have the tools to recruit, retain and relocate medical staff by removing the statutory cap on awards and bonuses; and allow lump sum payments of retention incentives prior to completion of the service agreement, which will allow VA to compete against employers offering higher salaries than the Federal pay system. • Modifying pay-setting policies and procedures to eliminate the requirement to provide prior salary to recommend a VA salary and seek OPM support/legislation where needed to implement this approach across all occupations.
Operational activities to measure progress (quarterly measures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an update on the barrier analysis that was completed on the VA Hispanic / Latino male and female populations. • Initiate a barrier analysis of the lack of diversity SES cadre. • Initiate a barrier analysis on the employee with disabilities population. • Develop "Identity Insights" heat map data visualizations to provide insight into challenges, needs, pain points and opportunity areas of frequency and intersectionality.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit VA's annual DVAAP Accomplishment Report and Certification. • Transition to E-Signals by the end of FY 2022 and ensure that there is coordination/alignment and complementarity between E-Signals and AES to provide the most valuable data possible to the organization.
<p>Outcome measures (annual) to assess progress</p>	<p>Advancing equity for employees is measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of involuntary separations. • Participation/upward mobility disparity ratings for employees from underserved communities across the General Schedule (GS) and Senior Executive Schedule. • The percent of hires made using various hiring authorities, to include Veteran Recruitment Appointment, Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998, Schedule A(u) hiring authorities, and military spouse non-competitive appointing authority. • The percent of hiring managers trained in inclusive hiring practices in the last 12 months. • Increases of on-board representation of Veterans to 35% of the workforce. <p>Increased engagement is measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of action plans implemented annually to address AES survey results. <p>Increased availability of paid Internships will be evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship of 10 WRP interns and 25 NDIP interns annually, budget permitting. • Convert 50% of WRP interns to career full-time equivalent positions annually. <p>Improved professional development and increased opportunities for advancement are measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion rates of career aspirations surveys. <p>Creation of financial equity will be demonstrated by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of housekeeping aids, food service workers, health aids, and cemetery caretakers who receive minimum wage increases.
<p>Responsible individuals or teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ORMDI • OCHCO • VHA • VBA • NCA

Dedicated Resources, such as funding	<p>The following offices do carry out I-DEA related functions and have existing resources to support the operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ORMDI • VHA DEI • CMV • CWV • VHA OHE
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Goal 4: Accessibility	
Priority/Goal	VA will institute physical and technological solutions to empower all employees to advance the Department's mission.
Strategies	<p>Advance equity for employees with disabilities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring compliance with sections 501, 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, by monitoring accessibility of program delivery, physical infrastructure and electronic/information technology and standardizing compliance review. • Blend in-person and remote work symbiotically in consideration of employee well-being and mission delivery. • Leverage technology to reduce need for an onsite presence while reducing the cost and time of administrative work where in alignment with the mission of the site. <p>Reasonable Accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a robust and supportive reasonable accommodation (RA) and Personal Assistance Services (PAS) Program. • Develop and institute policies and programs to ensure reasonable accommodations and accessibility across the Department.
Actions	<p>Advancing Equity for Employees with Disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor accessibility of program delivery, physical infrastructure and electronic/information technology and standardizing compliance review. • Work with OPM to develop a flexible, agile and resilient workforce in a future where work can be done anywhere. Guide employees through the evolving landscape by developing tools and resources focused on the “future of work.” Review all positions to determine where we can promote more telework and remote work. • Create a plan to evaluate a representative sample of VA facilities to develop general guidance for maximizing physical accessibility, beyond the existing requirements to comply with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and make

	<p>recommendations to assist with reasonable accommodations requests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take steps to ensure that VA employees are adequately notified of the procedure for filing complaints concerning accessibility barriers in Federal buildings with the Access Board. <p>Reasonable Accommodations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the Reasonable Accommodations VA Handbook 5975.1. • Deploy a new, user-friendly, state-of-the-art RA Management System that will provide Reasonable Accommodation Coordinators with the ability to truly perform end-to-end case management of RA and PAS requests. • Continue to report compliance with mandatory training for executives, managers and supervisors (TMS VA 45049) to include VA policy on RA for religious beliefs, practices and observances. • Include requirement of RA for religious beliefs, practices and observances remains in the Secretary’s Annual EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy Statement.
Operational activities to measure progress (quarterly measures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide RA/PAS training to both supervisors and management officials and employees to increase awareness of RA and PAS, VA-wide. • Streamline the RA/PAS process by utilizing one agency-wide system of record for tracking and monitoring requests in real-time. • Perform compliance review of physical and program accessibility standards in VA Administrations in collaboration with the OIT and OALC by end of FY 2022. • Educate employees via <i>Diversity@Work</i> and other publications on VA policy regarding RA for religious beliefs, practices and observances.
Outcome measures (annual) to assess progress	<p>Advancing Equity for Employees with Disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess progress of initial facility baseline assessment. <p>Reasonable Accommodations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratio of individuals trained to total workforce. • Timeliness of response to requests as well as tracking the timeframes to provide accommodations. • Process 90% of RA requests in accordance with established timelines as outlined in VA Handbook 5975.1 by the end of FY 2022.

<p>Responsible individuals or teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VHA • VBA • NCA • HRAOSP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ORMDI ○ OCHCO ○ LMR • CSEMO • OIT • OALC • Office of Construction and Facilities Management • RA Services Office, Administration Level National RA Consultants, RA Coordinators.
<p>Dedicated Resources, such as funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ORMDI • VHA DEI • CMV • CWV • VHA OHE