



Department of Veterans Affairs

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, & Access (I-DEA)

Action Plan

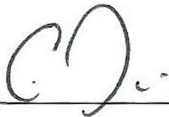
September 2021

Version 1

APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

Approval of this document signifies approval of the work completed by the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA) Task Force from April 1, 2021, to July 30, 2021. This document serves as a four-year Action Plan for VA and a close-out report for the I-DEA Task Force.

Acceptance of this document signifies the continued commitment to carrying on the implementation of the I-DEA Task Force's recommendations, enclosed herein, and the enduring dedication to improving I-DEA within.



Christopher Diaz
Deputy Chief of Staff & White House Liaison
Chair, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Task Force

Table of Contents

Approval and Acceptance	ii
Executive Summary	1
Background	3
Overview	4
1. Mission Statement	4
2. Purpose	4
3. Objectives	4
4. I-DEA Task Force Guiding Principles.....	4
Methodology.....	5
5. Workgroups	5
6. Strategic Opportunities	5
Accomplishments	7
Recommendations	9
Considerations	18
Transition Plan	19
Priorities	20
Change Management Plan (CMP)	21
Conclusion	27
Appendix A. Community Partners Interviews	28
Appendix B. Framework for Creating an Institutional Access Point.....	29
Appendix C. Data Set/Articles	30
Appendix D. Change Management Plan Blueprint.....	33
Appendix E. Task Force Members and Project Management Support.....	43
Appendix F. Roadmap.....	44
Appendix G. Influencers Diagram	46

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On April 1, 2021, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough (SECVA) chartered an 18-member Task Force to elevate and identify strategic opportunities across VA's vast ecosystem of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA). The I-DEA Task Force conducted a 120-day enterprise-wide review from April through June 2021 that focused on the following four (4) objectives:

- Redefine VA's approach and establish best practices for I-DEA in accordance with requirements outlined in Executive Order (E.O.) 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government* and EO 14035, *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*.
- Examine existing policies, programs, trainings and strategic communications for workforce and Veterans' initiatives to align with VA's strategic mission, goals and objectives on I-DEA.
- Define and leverage data to inform and utilize the data to identify barriers, gaps and risks.
- Design institutional access points and strategic partnerships to support underserved communities.

The I-DEA Task Force accomplished several quick wins toward equality, including raising the Pride flag at VA Central Office for the first time; initiating the rulemaking process to modify the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to expand VA's gender affirming care and benefits package for Veterans; and engaging with community partners to identify best practices and lessons learned. More accomplishments are discussed later in this document.

The I-DEA Task Force developed 20 recommendations for VA to consider over the next four (4) years, 2021-2025. The SECVA's four foundational principles of advocacy, access, outcomes and excellence, in addition to I-CARE Values, played a key role in the development of the recommendations. The recommendations are proactive, share the burden with underserved communities, embody accountability, and cultivate jointness across VA to create a holistic and integrated VA mission and strategy for I-DEA.

1. Approve and integrate the definitions of I-DEA into organizational philosophy.
2. Build trust with conscious outreach and create new institutional access points for underserved communities.
3. Promote the cultural transformation of I-DEA from Field to VA Central Office (VACO).
4. Conduct VA Stand-down to address I-DEA related topics for VA workforce and Veterans we serve.
5. Design new programming and engagement strategies to conduct outreach to underserved communities.

6. Develop a VA I-DEA Dashboard.
7. Develop a workforce plan to integrate I-DEA into hiring, position management, talent development and executive coaching.
8. Recruit at and review VA's partnerships with Minority-Serving Institutions.
9. Leverage VA benefits and services to increase financial equity for underserved communities.
10. Evaluate institutional symbols, mottos, expression of values displayed and used by VA to ensure inclusiveness and diverse representation.
11. Conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the creation of an I-DEA Office and a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) position reporting directly to the Office of Secretary of VA (OSVA).
12. Add sexual orientation, gender identity and preferred pronouns across VA systems, including VBA's dataset and VHA's medical record.
13. Revamp VA's communications strategy to appeal to and become representative of underserved communities.
14. Review training and resources centered on I-DEA to ensure alignment with core principles of cultural competency and humility.
15. Provide support for and track reports of discrimination-based trauma.
16. Strengthen Federal Advisory Committees (FAC) and mandate report on I-DEA initiatives.
17. Examine feasibility of creating "Know your Rights" Training.
18. Operationalize VA's findings from 200-day equity assessment in accordance with E.O. 13985.
19. Stand up I-DEA Sub-Council to elevate visibility and sustain efforts at the OSVA level.
20. Conduct feasibility assessments on I-DEA Action Plan recommendations by January 1, 2022.

At the conclusion of the I-DEA Task Force, SECVA will decide the ownership and implementation of the I-DEA Action Plan. The I-DEA Task Force recommends ownership transition to an I-DEA Sub-Council within the VA Governance Structure.

BACKGROUND

The current organizational structure and decentralized execution of diversity and inclusion efforts across VA have created a significant opportunity to refocus these efforts and ensure equity in the delivery of health care, services and benefits. Successive executive actions from the Biden-Harris Administration have placed a renewed focus on VA's strategic approach to serving Veterans, employees and their families from underserved communities, as women and ethnic diversity characterizes the fastest growing sub-populations within the Veteran community. Systemic inequality, which pervades all aspects of American society, makes the availability of VA health care and benefits particularly important to minority Veterans who have higher levels of unemployment and are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-minority Veterans.¹

On January 20, 2021, President Joseph Biden signed E.O. 13985. Subsequent executive actions have signaled a new strategic approach from the Biden-Harris Administration, seeking to move the Federal government closer to providing equal opportunity to all services and benefits. It is a strategic imperative that VA identifies possible inequities in the delivery of benefits and services, and better understand how to embed equity in the Department's service to historically marginalized and underserved communities.

In harnessing the momentum of the Biden-Harris Administration, Secretary McDonough chartered an 18-member Task Force to elevate and identify strategic opportunities across VA's vast ecosystem of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA). Members represent the large swath of diverse voices at VA, from VA Central Office to the Field levels. This Task Force is charged with examining existing policies, programs and infrastructure that constitute I-DEA and produce recommendations that will chart a four-year course of action for I-DEA at VA. These recommendations will signal symbolic, substantive and enduring actions for VA to pursue as a result of the 120-day enterprise-wide review. The I-DEA Task Force conducted an extensive review to provide concrete recommendations to eliminate barriers and create access points for underserved communities, thereby ensuring all VA employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors have equitable treatment and experiences when interacting with VA.

¹ Office of Data Governance and Analytics. (2017). *Minority Veteran Report: Military Service History and VA Benefit Utilization Statistics*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Veterans Affairs.

OVERVIEW

1. Mission 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.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the VA I-DEA Action Plan is to produce recommendations to approach, implement and embed I-DEA over the next four (4) years. The I-DEA Task Force conducted an extensive review to provide actionable recommendations, which seek to eliminate barriers and create access points for underserved communities, thereby fundamentally advancing equity for employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. VA deserves an aspirational whole-of-agency I-DEA strategy that matches the scope of challenges and strategic opportunities we face.

3. Objectives

The I-DEA Task Force conducted a 120-day enterprise-wide review that focused on the following four (4) objectives:

- Redefine VA's approach and establish best practices for I-DEA in accordance with requirements outlined in E.O.s 13985, 14035 and any other subsequent relative E.O.s.
- Examine existing policies, programs, trainings and strategic communications for workforce and Veterans' initiatives to align with VA's strategic mission, goals and objectives on I-DEA.
- Define and leverage data to inform and utilize the data to identify barriers, gaps and risks.
- Design institutional access points and strategic partnerships to support underserved communities.

4. I-DEA Task Force Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are a critical aspect of sustainable change and help describe the future philosophy. These guiding principles were the compass that set the direction for the Task Force when creating the recommendations.

1. **Be proactive** by deliberately and consciously embedding I-DEA into the institutional memory and organizational culture (**I-CARE + I-DEA**).
2. **Share the burden** of inequity with underserved communities: employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.
3. **Be accountable** by accepting the responsibility to improve the services we offer and embody excellence.
4. **Cultivate jointness** across VA to create a holistic and integrated VA mission and strategy for I-DEA.

METHODOLOGY

5. Workgroups

The I-DEA Task Force launched four workgroups to assess the current state of I-DEA within VA (See Figure 1 below). Stemming from our guiding principles, the Task Force designed the workgroups around four key components: Community Partners; Internal Partners; Strategic Communications; and Measures and Metrics. Key engagements with Community Partners provided necessary insights for the Task Force to consider and incorporate when developing recommendations. Understanding and providing comprehensive data allows VA to establish baselines, benchmarks and a vision for the Department's future. In addition, consistent and thoughtful messaging is critical to ensure that inclusive and symbolic communication mediums are used in alignment with industry best practices and strategies (e.g., raising of the Pride flag over VACO).

Figure 1: Overview of each of the four workgroups.

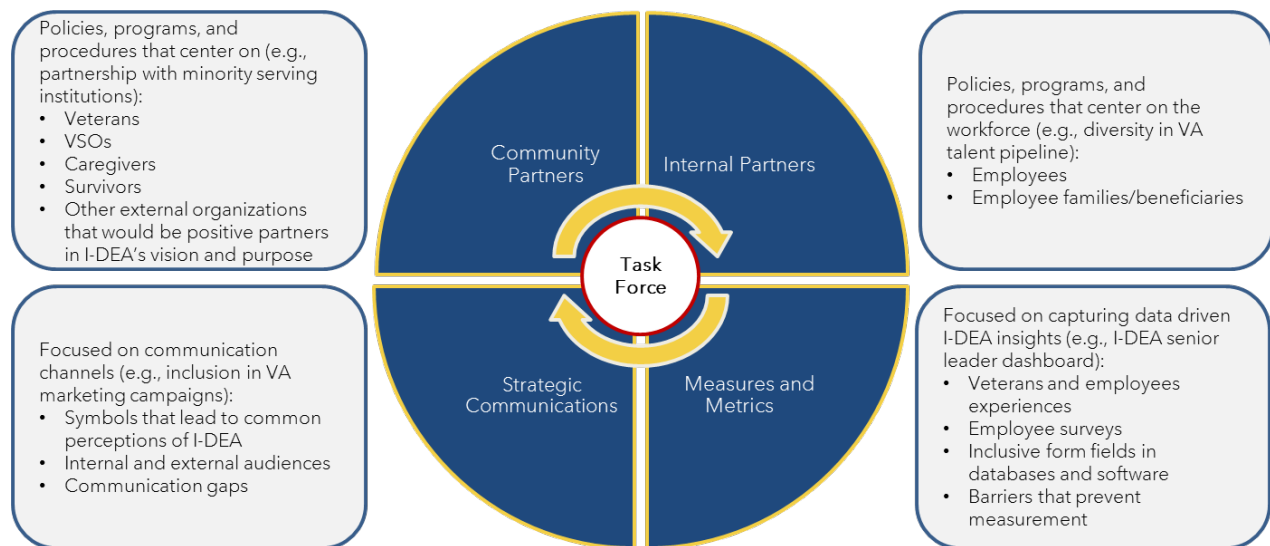


Figure 1 I-DEA Task Force Workgroups

6. Strategic Opportunities

6.1. Community Partners (CP)

Engaging with partners and experts outside of VA is essential to gaining a more robust understanding of lessons learned and best practices for I-DEA. This valuable information will be instrumental in an enterprise-wide change. Outside advocates and subject matter experts (such as Veteran Service Organizations (VSO), non-governmental organizations (NGO), businesses, academia and congressional partners) have a responsive relationship with Veterans. This relationship provides a strong knowledge base of Veterans' unique needs and offers VA an opportunity to learn from these partners. The community partners with whom the Task Force engaged comprised

professional associations and other stakeholders who have historically partnered with VA who experienced the inequity in question. The CP workgroup evaluated I-DEA from the lens of those partnerships.

VA has a substantial amount of informal and formal partnerships with organizations that represent underserved communities. The Task Force leveraged the Veterans Experience Office (VEO) to develop a focus-group questionnaire to capture meaningful insights across all interactions. These partnerships provided comprehensive insights from across the communities and demographics that VA serves. Upon capturing key insights, the CP workgroup assessed barriers that exist in transitioning an insight into a feasible recommendation. Community partners were essential to sparking new ideas and refining perceptions of how to best serve Veterans and employees, which led to credible recommendations.

6.2. Internal Partners (IP)

Focusing inward is an integral part of effective change. Diversity is a strength, and the VA workforce should be an accurate representation of its customers. To support the trust of the workforce and VA, the IP workgroup focused on the employee experience and the steps necessary to foster an environment where inclusivity and equity are woven into the fabric. As a result, VA is taking deliberate steps to change how the Department reinforces I-DEA throughout the workforce.

VA is reimagining how to integrate best practices from community partners to shape VA's future workforce. The IP workgroup assisted the Department with a holistic analysis of current regulations, policies, and initiatives. The workgroup evaluated current initiatives to identify barriers that may exist in career progression for employees that represent underserved communities. Additionally, the workgroup analyzed the current state of racial and ethnic disparities in the VA workforce, with an emphasis on diversity in the talent pipeline.

The Department must show VA employees through long-lasting and sustainable change that VA cares about them, respects and desires their talents and skillset, and wants them to bring their whole self to work. Conscious I-DEA in the VA workforce encourages unique perspectives and a posture of thinking that will allow true growth enterprise-wide.

6.3. Strategic Communications (SC)

Communication enables people to deliver critical information effectively. Language allows people to connect on a deeper level and understand each other's experiences. Communication can be heartfelt and impactful, yet alienating and exclusive. Strategic communications recognized the value in explicit and implicit symbols, which are imperative to ensure all Veterans, specifically those from underserved communities, feel included, valued and empowered. A genuinely transformative culture is necessary for sustained change. The shift begins with prioritizing and encouraging proactive conversations about diversity and equity. The conversation must also be inclusive of all cultural backgrounds and experiences and not focus on a specific demographic.

The SC workgroup evaluated I-DEA from the lens of communication. It is not enough to use different wording to describe essential and sensitive topics; communication with a human-centered approach showcases the need to shift how we talk about I-DEA. The SC workgroup recognized that diversity and inclusion initiatives are often unsuccessful when it lacks a deliberate strategy. The SC workgroup evaluated existing communication campaigns, marketing strategies and symbols in an effort to orient VA's communication pathways to best reach Veterans, the VA workforce, and particularly members from underserved communities. The workgroup recognized that an essential component to communicate VA's perspective on I-DEA was to establish linkages between I-DEA and the institutional memory of the I-CARE values and principles. The workgroup focused on the value of symbols and their role in advancing a sense of inclusion and belonging for underserved communities. Using thoughtful and purposeful engagement of internal and external stakeholders, the SC workgroup focused on connecting and understanding the values that underpin I-DEA and connecting it to I-CARE to ensure a sustained change of foundational and core values.

6.4. Measures and Metrics (M&M)

Operationalizing I-DEA metrics can inform future decisions and ensure accountability. The ability to make data-driven and evidence-based decisions are essential to sustainable change. The M&M workgroup evaluated I-DEA from a data-focused perspective to support this effort. This necessitated an enterprise-wide analysis of what I-DEA metrics are currently being captured. The M&M workgroup evaluated what I-DEA metrics should be captured for VA to understand the current state, and the workgroup identified what critical gaps exist that could influence decision-making from across VA including VACO. The M&M workgroup reviewed and analyzed existing data (e.g., VA Trust Scores, global AES metrics, D&I data, and VBA utilization data). M&M workgroup used this information to support the other workgroups to identify the necessary metrics to include in their recommendations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Between April 1, 2021 and July 30, 2021, the I-DEA Task Force accomplished the following:

Accomplishments
✓ First time in Department History raised the PRIDE flag at VACO.
✓ Initiated rulemaking process to modify the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to expand VA's gender affirming care and benefits package for Veterans.
✓ Reviewed current metrics from employee and Veterans' surveys.
✓ Effective Oct 1, 2021, Veterans Experience Office (VEO) Trust Surveys will include questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.
✓ Added new capabilities in Veterans Signals (VSignals) to capture experience of underserved populations.

Accomplishments
✓ Engaged with over 20 community partners to identify best practices and lessons learned to develop VA's IDEA efforts. (See Appendix A)
✓ Established first-ever PRIDE Employee Resource Group (ERG) and finalizing ERG for Federal Women's Program.
<p>✓ Drafted and disseminated critical messaging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SECVA All Employee Messages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heritage Months (Black History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Women's History Month) ○ Derek Chauvin guilty verdict ○ PRIDE month recognition ○ Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention – White Ribbon Pledge ○ Juneteenth • Blogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tulsa Race Massacre Remembrance • Videos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander Hate • Purple Patch Visit
✓ Embedded I-DEA into VA Strategic Plan FY22-28.
✓ Rescinded HRL 0601-17. VA Central Office (VACO) Human Resources Service (COHRS) Dress Code Guidance.
✓ Worked with Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) to develop an all-employee message from VA Senior Leadership on I-DEA and a press release announcing the I-DEA Task Force.
✓ Finalized VA's Mission Statement on I-DEA.
✓ Partnered with the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to develop I-DEA performance metrics.
✓ Added Veteran status to the All-Employee Survey data dashboard.
✓ Consulted with Labor Unions to inform them on I-DEA and to prepare to garner their perspectives on ways for VA to improve diversity and inclusion for employees.
✓ Made I-DEA Needs Assessment readily available at a VA Medical Center (MC) level or any smaller organization so they can make use of this (e.g., program offices, medical centers, etc.).
✓ VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program.
✓ Developed Framework for creating Institutional Access Points (See Appendix B)

Table1 Accomplishments

RECOMMENDATIONS

The I-DEA Task Force was charged with identifying recommendations to improve I-DEA throughout VA. The Task Force identified 20 recommendations which include ways to accomplish the recommendations. The Task Force suggests that VA implement the following recommendations over the next four (4) years, 2021-2025.

1. **Approve and integrate VA's definitions of I-DEA into organizational philosophy.**

The Task Force recognized that to develop recommendations, VA had to define what these terms meant for VA and connect them to I-CARE core values, characteristics and customer experience principles. VA should integrate the principles of I-DEA into the fabric of our mission for our employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. The principles will create an inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible environment, especially for those from underserved communities. The definitions outlined below will need to be codified within VA policy and/or Directives. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends adopting the following definitions:

- *Inclusion:* Every individual who enters a VA facility must feel safe, included and valued. VA will treat all employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors with dignity, integrity and respect by encouraging an environment free of harassment and discrimination. Fostering a culture of inclusion, specifically for marginalized and underserved communities, ensures that VA and its employees will act without prejudice or bias.
- *Diversity:* VA strives to leverage the strength and uniqueness that defines our Veteran population, our VA workforce and our country. VA welcomes all Veterans from underserved communities, including women, Veterans of color, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) Veterans. Diversity is a key driver of growth and innovation that leads to developing new ideas and perspectives and must be embodied across VA.
- *Equity:* VA strives to understand systemic barriers to opportunity with a goal of providing everyone, including those who belong to underserved communities, with fair access to health care and benefits. VA will evaluate the intersectionality of systemic inequities and address institutional barriers to outcomes for Veterans and employees.
- *Access:* VA increases access by proactively embedding opportunities and creating institutional pathways for all by eliminating and reducing inequities. VA will create accommodations and modifications to promote equitable opportunities, including providing access to home care and educational opportunities, training and jobs worthy of Veteran's skills and service.
- *Underserved communities:* The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, unique challenges, and geographic communities, who have been systemically and institutionally denied a

full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social and civic life. VA recognizes this term includes Black, Hispanic and Latino, or Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women; individuals who face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, including pregnancy status and including LGBTQ+ persons; persons with disabilities; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; persons who may face employment barriers based on older age; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise at-risk of persistent poverty, homelessness or inequality.

2. Build trust with conscious outreach and create new institutional access points for underserved communities.

Improving access and outcomes starts with reducing barriers that underserved communities may face as they utilize VA benefits and services. Institutional access points will embed opportunities and create institutional pathways for underserved communities to explore entrepreneurship/partnership opportunities, entry into VA's senior leadership talent pipeline and access to VA's services. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Proactively conduct outreach to underserved communities through focused marketing campaigns.
- Analyze existing data and/or conduct more studies to better serve underserved communities and to build trust.
- Integrate the experiences of Veterans and employees from underserved communities into VA's I-DEA strategy.
- Review demographic data of peer specialists to determine the share of representation from underserved communities and add peer specialists in Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and National Cemetery Administration (NCA).
- Identify disparities in tools and resources VA provides that impact underserved communities (e.g., technology, language, transportation).
- Collaborate with strategic partners (e.g., private industry, non-profit) to communicate VA services to underserved Veterans, family members, caregivers and survivors.
- Create a Senior Executive Service (SES) talent pipeline for underserved applicants to become VA employees by cultivating new partnerships with minority-serving professional organizations.
- Broker non-traditional access points with minority-serving colleges and universities, faith-based organizations, etc., to increase Veteran utilization of VA services.

- Increase collaboration with Capitol Hill to facilitate information sharing between minority-serving caucuses and VA.

3. Promote the cultural transformation of I-DEA from the Field to VACO.

All individuals coming into VA should adhere to a standardized definition of respect, honor and fair treatment. A broader transition must occur within VA's organizational culture where I-DEA is embodied symbolically and substantively. Sustainable change must occur horizontally and laterally across the Department. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Establish an honor code or ground rules that all people must follow when inside VA facilities or receiving/providing VA services.
- Create a consultation plan with labor union partners to address claims of discrimination and mistreatment.
- Redefine how I-DEA is incorporated into New Employee Orientation and connected to a resource portal.
- Institute a voluntary I-DEA capstone project into VA leadership development programs.
- Explore crowd sourcing innovative programs and techniques from the field (e.g., "Shark Tank," hack-a-thon).

4. Conduct VA Stand-down to address I-DEA related topics for VA workforce and Veterans we serve.

The Task Force recommends establishing a 30-day timeframe for VA facilities to conduct a one-day Stand-down to facilitate discussions around I-DEA topics. The purpose of this Stand-down is to address such topics as unconscious biases, microaggressions, overt racism and cultural competency and humility within VA workforce. Additionally, VA should identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups within the workforce. VA should explore a facilitation program and tools to implement the Stand-down. VA should review existing AES data to inform the creation of tools to facilitate conversations around I-DEA. The Task Force acknowledged the importance of creating data-driven tools to facilitate a VA Stand-down.

5. Design new programming and engagement strategies to conduct outreach to underserved communities.

Based on more than 20 Community Partners engagements, the Task Force captured valuable insights that informed how VA conducts outreach activities. VA must conduct outreach by leveraging the institutional access points of Community Partners to communicate with underserved communities. The Task Force acknowledges the need for VA to create stronger relationships with Native/Tribal Governments and mission-

centered VSOs by increasing collaboration and information sharing. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Strengthen outreach programs for VA Field offices to interface with local underserved communities.
- Build repository of existing outreach with VA's Community Partners to determine critical gaps in VA engagement to underserved communities.
- Incorporate cultural and language competency into outreach services catered to underserved communities.
- Partner with the Alaskan Native Council to improve service for rural Alaska Native Veterans.

6. Develop a VA I-DEA Dashboard.

VA must create a dashboard displaying critical I-DEA measures and metrics to give a snapshot of VA's I-DEA common operating picture and a quarterly and annual basis. This embeds a mechanism of accountability and transparency for leaders across VA. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Create senior leader dashboard to identify and report common metrics.
- Identify new ways to integrate I-DEA business lines into existing governance structure.
- Create a survey for Community Partners to grade VA's service.
- Generate transparency metrics on I-DEA to include in the Trust Report.

7. Develop a workforce plan to integrate I-DEA into hiring, position management, talent development, and executive coaching.

Leveraging the insights from community partners, the Task Force learned that I-DEA should be integrated into workforce planning and human capital. The Task Force recognized that possible gaps exist in talent development for underserved communities. VA should review existing learning and development (L&D) programs for the workforce, as well as partner with external institutions to ensure all employees have equal access to resources and opportunities to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that will improve their performance on the job. Additionally, VA should utilize recommendations from the Field to develop a Supervisors Guide that can assist front-line supervisors when adopting I-DEA in their individual organization and carrying out the Change Management Plan (see Appendix D). To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Develop a plan to scale Diversity and Inclusion offices enterprise-wide that focus on policies, programming, and engagement centered on employees from underserved communities.

- Review mentorship programs and development opportunities and offer mentors incentives to guide employees from underserved communities.
- Institute exit interview procedures for employees leaving the organization that includes questions centered around I-DEA.
- Create a pipeline for employees from underserved communities to attain leadership positions starting at the GS-13 level, in addition to partnering with minority-serving institutions to create a pathway to employment into the VA workforce.
- Track race, gender and ethnicity data to better understand demographic breakdown within leadership development programs.
- Examine relationship between leadership development programs and employee advancement.
- Operationalize VEO's journey maps focused on employee experiences from underserved communities.
- Design I-DEA hiring toolkit with utilization tracking.
- Develop and scale Supervisors Guide on I-DEA for front-line VA personnel.
- Review Talent Management System (TMS) training on hiring practices to integrate I-DEA into the process.
- Determine plan to develop and potential to scale ERG program.

8. Recruit at and review VA's partnerships with Minority-Serving Institutions.

The Task Force recommends VA increase the workforce's diversity by partnering with and recruiting employees from minority-serving institutions. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Create access points for the VA Workforce to become more diverse, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISI), and other Minority-Serving institutions, to include institutions serving persons with disabilities.
- Leverage community partnerships for best practices on promotion and advancement opportunities for underserved employees to advance into senior leadership positions.

9. Leverage VA benefits and services to increase financial equity for underserved communities.

VA benefits and services are instruments that can create financial equity for all Veterans. VA leverages programs to help with job training, resume development and home loan guarantees for Veterans. Ensuring supplier diversity and strategic training

opportunities are ways to ensure financial equity for VA's partners. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Review utilization rates data on who participates in the Veteran Readiness and Employment Program (VR&E) and home loans.
- Re-commission the Office of Health Equity's VBA compensation and pension study to examine possible demographic disparities.
- Attract and grow a diverse supply base and ensure fairness in contract awards.
- Track and measure supplier diversity across underserved communities.
- Explore grant-making partnerships and create grant-making training opportunities for underserved communities.

10. Evaluate institutional symbols, mottos, expression of values displayed and used by VA to ensure inclusiveness and diverse representation.

Employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors should feel welcome and safe upon entering VA facilities and cultural symbols, mottos, and expressions of value are impactful on Veteran experiences. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Conduct a review of VA spaces, facilities, relics, which are offensive to underserved communities and assess cultural sensitivity (e.g., VA facilities named after Confederate sympathizers).
- Construct cemetery marker at Fort Sam Houston to commemorate Black soldiers wrongfully executed after Houston Riot in 1917.
- Assess artwork, statues, artifacts, etc., displayed at VA facilities to ensure inclusion and cultural sensitivity.
- Establish partnership with the National Veterans Art Museum and National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) to acquire and preserve artworks that depict a true representation of the Veteran community.
- Establish a program to track holdings of artifacts depicting stories of Veterans from diverse and underserved communities and facilitate the exchange of these artifacts to be exhibited across the country.

11. Conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the creation of an I-DEA Office and a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) position reporting directly to the OSVA.

The Task Force acknowledged from a series of engagements with VA's Community Partners that an office of this type should report directly to the SECVA. The Internal Partners workgroup raised questions about whether the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI) receives enough executive-level visibility. The Task Force debated the possibility of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion becoming a stand-alone office to focus on achieving equity for underserved communities and

advancing VA's inclusion efforts. To address VA's organizational posture, the Task Force's recommendation is to review and align our posture with best practices from the industry.

- ORMDI should be separated into two offices to disconnect the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) endorsement from I-DEA efforts. Informed by Community Partners and E.O. 14035, VA should analyze the feasibility of standing up the Office of Diversity and Inclusion as a stand-alone entity.
- Develop Proactive Culture workstream within the Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Survivor Care and Support sub-council.
- Assistant Secretary for HRA/OSP conduct a needs-based assessment to determine the necessity for a CDO no later than September 28, 2021.

12. Add sexual orientation, gender identity, and preferred pronouns to VBA's dataset and Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) medical record.

VA lacks appropriate data collection tools and techniques for the LGBTQ+ community. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and preferred pronouns should be collected and shall include nonbinary options. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Ensure Veteran and employee preferences on their title and/or pronouns are accurate and consistent across the Department.
- Review current training for employees on Veterans' preferred pronouns.

13. Revamp VA's communications strategy to appeal and become representative of underserved communities.

Refresh VA's communications strategy and/or campaign to target and be more appealing to underserved communities. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Centralize VA Communication to create one data source for communication information.
- Establish guidelines for VA marketing efforts to quantify how outreach efforts are reaching Veterans, including those from underserved communities.
- Create a marketing campaign to promote VA as a leader in I-DEA.
- Institute guidance that ensures diversity within commercials to reaffirm that VA is a safe and trusted place for underserved communities.
- Represent VA at conferences, conventions and community events to target underserved communities.

- Publicly recognize diverse staff contributions through an enterprise-wide spotlight campaign.

14. Review training and resources centered on I-DEA to ensure alignment with core principles of cultural competency.

The Task Force recognized how essential it is to create opportunities where I-DEA informs all components of training. From senior leader diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) coaching and professional development to new employee orientation, exposing the VA workforce to suggested techniques around I-DEA is integral to fostering cultural competency. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Explore potential partnerships with external DE&I coaches geared toward senior leaders.
- Develop mandatory training for employees centered on providing care and services to LGBTQ+ beneficiaries to enhance the customer experience and promote equitable access to VA services.
- Review training materials and work with Employee Education System (EES) to develop facilitation tools around I-DEA.
- Set clear guidance to create an optional space for the use of pronouns in signature blocks.

15. Provide support for and track reports of discrimination-based trauma.

Discrimination-based trauma should include race-based discrimination and other types of discrimination. Employees and Veterans must have support for the trauma they experience to prevent and/or address possible mental health concerns. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends:

- Expand the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to include counseling services centered on discrimination-based trauma.

16. Strengthen Federal Advisory Committees (FACs) and mandate report on I-DEA initiatives.

The Task Force recognizes the need for an increase in diversity in FAC membership, information-sharing between FACs, and awareness/transparency of FACs and their governance. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Establish a review process to oversee effectiveness of FAC and determine if FACs are still needed.
- Establish an annual forum for FACs to share ideas.
- Create and implement a plan to recruit more diversity in FACs.

- Develop a cadenced report to increase transparency of outcomes or recommendations from the FACs.

17. Examine feasibility of creating “Know your Rights” training for Veterans.

The Task Force engaged with the White House Domestic Policy Council to determine opportunities to use and expand the scope of VHA’s Veterans Justice Outreach Program. Currently, the Veterans Justice Outreach Program focuses on assisting justice-involved Veterans. The Task Force recognizes the need for VA to partner to provide training to employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors on how to best respond during and after injustice. A potential “Know Your Rights” training could offer Veterans an opportunity to understand how to interact with external entities and offer examples of where to turn for assistance.

18. Operationalize VA’s findings from 200-day equity assessment in accordance with E.O. 13985.

The Task Force recommends VA address challenges and inequities identified in the 200-day equity assessment. The resolution plan identified by VA’s assessment should include evaluating new policies, regulations or guidance that may be necessary to advance equity in agency actions and programs. Embedding equity into VA operations requires a sustained effort to evaluate inequity in VA’s programs and services. This should include any additional and necessary financial investments to improve the delivery of VA programs for all.

19. Stand up I-DEA Sub-Council to elevate visibility and sustain efforts at OSVA level.

The Task Force recognizes that an enduring governance body is necessary for successfully implementing the recommendations and sustaining the cultural transformation of I-DEA at VA. To accomplish this, the I-DEA Task Force recommends the following:

- Review Diversity & Inclusion in VA Council’s (DIVAC) current design and evaluate possible updates to the governance structure in alignment with the Sub-Council. The Task Force recognized the integral role of DIVAC in collaborating across the Department on I-DEA initiatives and activities. However, its current makeup is not aligned with current Presidential Executive Orders (ref. 13985 and 14035).
- Evaluate manpower and resources needed to successfully create I-DEA Sub-Council.
- Implement the Transition Plan recommended in the I-DEA Action Plan.

20. Conduct feasibility assessments on I-DEA Action Plan recommendations by January 1, 2022.

To assess the strengths, weaknesses and feasibility concerns of each recommendations, the Task Force suggests that VA conduct feasibility studies (e.g., cost-benefit analysis).

CONSIDERATIONS

The I-DEA Task Force considered the following ideas or suggestions. The I-DEA Task force suggests that VA revisit these as the recommendations are implemented. Many of these considerations are not stand-alone recommendations. Instead, they are cross-cutting themes that apply to all recommendations and should be incorporated into the future Implementation Plan.

- **Ensure equal access to VA resources.** To improve access, explore if all locations and communities have the same access to resources. Identify resource deserts and develop an outreach plan to ensure access for underserved communities.
- **Consider religious and nonreligious minorities.** Consider an individual's diversity characteristics when evaluating their health (e.g., health risks for Jewish minorities which are often overlooked).
- **Consider the stigma of mental health** and how to reduce or circumvent the stigma.
- **Increase leadership support for the White Ribbon Campaign and other initiatives.** Opening individuals' mindsets on any topic related to I-DEA will increase openness for all I-DEA topics.
- **Use plain language at all levels.** Some Veterans call VA and do not understand because the employee uses a dialect that is unfamiliar or uses large, complex vocabulary. (Unfriendly for Veterans who do not have English as a first language.)
- **Focusing on minorities will benefit everyone.** When we focus our efforts on improving services for underserved communities, our services become better for the everyone.
- **Establish safe spaces for communication.** VA should create safe channels of communication to engage with underserved communities. These channels and forums must be safe spaces. For example, in a room with men and women Veterans combined, men may be more likely heard. Focus groups with distinct audiences would enable everyone's voice to be heard.
- **Gather and review demographic data of peer specialists to determine the share of representation from underserved communities across administrations and add peer specialists in VBA and NCA.** Peer specialists should be from underserved communities, so Veterans from underserved communities have someone they can relate to in VA. This should be a similar model to how peer specialists are used in mental health. Mental health peer specialists have experienced mental health and can relate to the Veteran who is experiencing mental health challenges. Peer specialists serve in a variety of ways including explaining services and what to expect, what to tell their doctor, and other things such as what they'll be getting from VA in the mail.

Additionally, there were many considerations that the I-DEA Task Force considered based on news articles and datasets that were available at the time the Task Force was in place. Many of these considerations are listed in [Appendix C](#) for reference. These

considerations contributed to the recommendations listed within this plan. Future events and consideration may further shape the recommendations and the way they should be implemented, and the Task Force acknowledges that I-DEA improvement will continue to evolve over time. Responsible parties assuming ownership of these recommendations should continue to adapt and improve them, within the spirit within which they were intended, to be highly effective and impactful for the organization.

TRANSITION PLAN

From April 2021 through July 2021, the Task Force developed actionable recommendations and recommended a long-term governance structure within VA. After the 120 days, the Task Force offered that VA translate the recommendations into a sustainable governance structure.

The I-DEA Action Plan and the I-DEA Task Force's work are a starting point, and it will take VA approximately four (4) years to fully implement the recommendations. The I-DEA Task Force concluded on July 30, 2021; however, the work does not. Therefore, for an enduring change, the I-DEA Task Force recommends that an I-DEA Sub-Council be created to oversee the implementation of the 20 strategic recommendations and sustain the efforts of the I-DEA Task Force.

It is expected that as VA acts on the recommendations of the Task Force, new recommendations will form. The I-DEA Action Plan lays the groundwork for strengthening VA as a leader in I-DEA across the Federal government without an end date. The Task Force concluded with the following three options to sustain the momentum of I-DEA: 1. Establish a Sub-council; 2. Launch an Integrated Project Team (IPT); 3. Extend the Task Force an additional 30-days.

The Task Force proposed that the transition of the I-DEA Action Plan should occur in three main phases, each with its specific goals and objectives (see Figure 2 below). Several Task Force members leaned toward the creation of a Sub-Council, with the three phases (Phase 1 – Charter and Workstreams; Phase 2 – Feasibility Assessments; and Phase 3 – Implementation Plan) to transition outlined in the following flow chart.

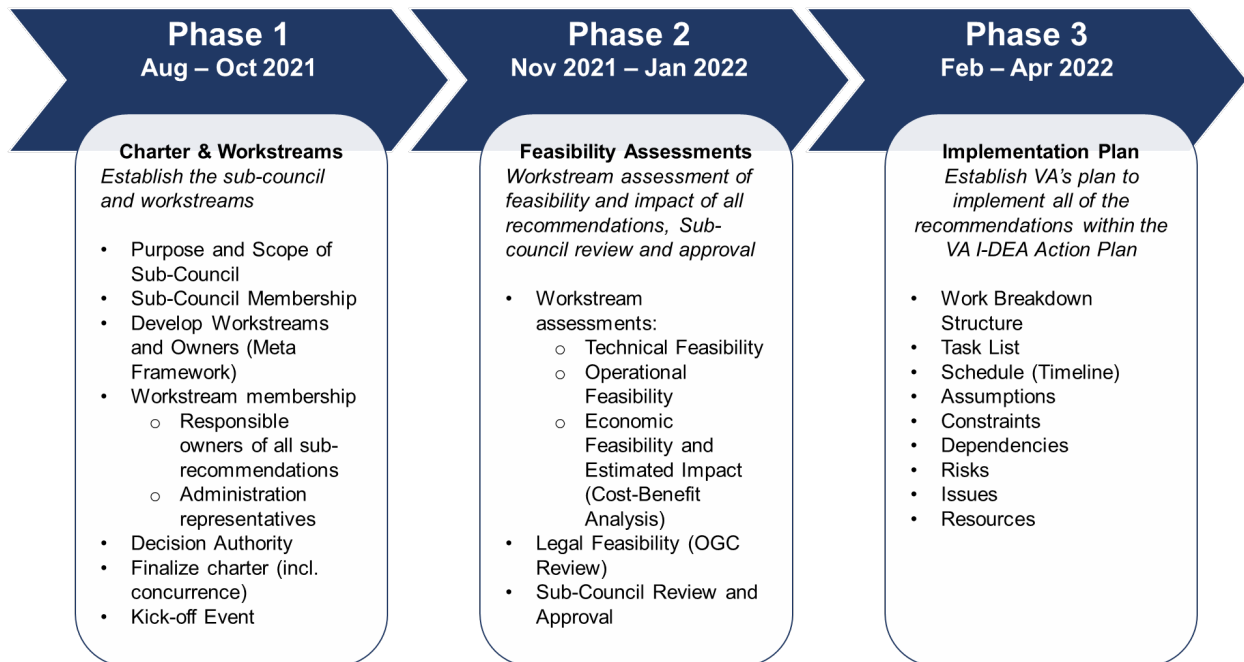


Figure 2 Transition Plan - Phased Approach

After Phase 3, the I-DEA Sub-Council can implement recommendations from the I-DEA Action Plan. The established workstreams from Phase 1 will report on implementation progress monthly to the I-DEA Sub-Council. In addition, it is proposed that the I-DEA Sub-Council report to the Evidence-Based Policy Council (EBPC) and brief as needed through the VA Operations and Executive Boards.

PRIORITIES

The Task Force was bold and ambitious with the recommendations given to promote I-DEA throughout VA. However, these goals are achievable and will require time to realize. Therefore, the Task Force established a suggested timeline and prioritized the recommendations.

The suggested timeline is framed for when the recommendations should begin. The recommendations may take longer than the four years that the I-DEA Action Plan suggests. Each recommendation was evaluated and divided into two priority timelines VA should focus on: within the first year and between years two through four. Each recommendation is essential, but the first-year priorities are those the Task Force feels should be addressed immediately.

First Year Priority

- ✓ Approve and integrate VA's definitions of I-DEA into organizational philosophy.
- ✓ Build trust with conscious outreach and create new institutional access points for underserved communities.
- ✓ Promote the cultural transformation of I-DEA from Field to VACO.

- ✓ Stand up I-DEA Sub-Council to elevate visibility and sustain efforts at OSVA level.
- ✓ Design new programming and engagement strategies to conduct outreach to underserved communities.
- ✓ Develop a VA I-DEA Dashboard.
- ✓ Develop a workforce plan to integrate I-DEA into hiring, position management, talent development and executive coaching.
- ✓ Recruit at and review VA's partnerships with Minority-Serving Institutions.
- ✓ Evaluate institutional symbols, mottos, expression of values displayed and used by VA to ensure inclusiveness and diverse representation.
- ✓ Conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the creation of an I-DEA Office and a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) position reporting directly to the OSVA.
- ✓ Add sexual orientation, gender identity and preferred pronouns, especially to VBA's dataset and Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) medical record.
- ✓ Revamp the VA communications strategy to appeal and become representative of underserved communities.
- ✓ Review training and resources centered on I-DEA to ensure alignment with core principles of cultural competency.
- ✓ Operationalize VA's findings from 200-day equity assessment in accordance with E.O. 13985.
- ✓ Conduct feasibility assessments on I-DEA Action Plan recommendations by January 1, 2022.

Second Year (and Beyond) Priority

- ✓ Conduct VA Stand-down to address I-DEA related topics for VA workforce and Veterans we serve.
- ✓ Provide support for and track reports of discrimination-based trauma.
- ✓ Strengthen Federal Advisory Committees (FAC) and mandate report on I-DEA initiatives.
- ✓ Examine feasibility of creating "Know your Rights" Training.
- ✓ Leverage VA benefits and services to increase financial equity for underserved communities.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN (CMP)

The Task Force realized that change is not easy. There is a need for a Change Management Plan for offices to integrate I-DEA successfully and seamlessly into their organizational culture for sustainable change. Change management is an approach to prepare, support and help individuals within an organization during transformation. To be successful, an agency must guide and transition each individual to the desired future state. I-DEA is often part of an individual's core belief system, making change more complicated than a typical change within an office. A deliberate CMP increases the success rate and sustainability of change.

I-DEA must be a conscious effort interwoven into a core and foundational cultural transformation. Change must first be accomplished within VA and its employees before successfully implementing change for Veterans. Reviewing programs and policies is just the beginning of the change. VA must carefully center the discussion around I-DEA to ensure complete adoption into the fabric of the organization. These discussions may be uncomfortable, as people must critically evaluate themselves and their potential unconscious biases about race, gender stereotypes, gender identity and sexual orientation. Unconscious or implicit bias can shape social behavior and decision-making. To successfully move forward on a true path of healing, these perceptual understandings and realities with demographically dissimilar people must be recognized and addressed directly.

To support this cultural transformation and successfully integrate the principles of I-DEA throughout the fabric of VA, successful change management must be supported and integrated on all levels. Once an issue is known, it is up to everyone in an organization to solve. This CMP will provide a blueprint for each office to create an approach to interweave I-DEA into common practice and part of their office culture.

Additionally, change management should be incorporated into the implementation plans for each of the recommendations in this I-DEA Action Plan. Responsible owners and collaborators should use this change management plan and the CMP Blueprint in [Appendix D](#) to craft their CMPs.

1. Vision

VA must integrate the principles of I-DEA into the fabric of our culture for employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors and create an environment that is inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible to all to support and create sustainable change.

2. Purpose

Successful change management drives the fruitful adoption and usage of change within the culture and fabric of an organization. Equitable agencies outpace their competitors by respecting their team members and customers' unique needs, perspectives, and potential. As a result, agencies that focus on I-DEA earn deeper trust and more commitment from their employees. The I-DEA CMP will help the change management process, offering resources to achieve I-DEA with the maximum positive benefits and efficiencies to support and sustain the impact of a cultural transformation within VA.

3. Intended Outcome

VA created actionable recommendations that are the foundation of the upcoming transformation. These recommendations will guide VA for the next four years and transform the culture within VA to influence how employees, Veterans, families, caregivers and survivors receive their earned services and benefits.

A CMP will help organizations or offices successfully implement and advocate for change. A CMP reduces the impact on employees and allows for consistent

communication surrounding the change. The Task Force recommends that VA offices across administrations develop a CMP that aligns with the recommendations outlined in the I-DEA Action Plan.

4. Potential Risks/Issues

Without a comprehensive and enterprise-wide change management approach, VA will be challenged to deliver equitable world-class services and care to Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. In addition, VA runs the risk of receiving diminished trust scores from its Veteran population. As well, VA may miss strategic opportunities regarding talent development for current and future employees. VA must approach I-DEA and change management by defining the purpose clearly and ensuring the principles cascade down from headquarters to the Field.

5. Change Management Principles

Enterprise-wide transformation involves several moving pieces, from programmatic and training changes to cultural shifts. Change management considers how people will accept and adapt to the evolution and improves the chances that change will be successful and enduring.

To assist with this transformative change management process, this CMP recommends using the ADKAR Model (see Figure 3 below). This acronym describes the five elements that people must consider and implement for change to be successful. There are five building blocks in the ADKAR Model: Awareness; Desire; Knowledge; Ability; and Reinforcement. It is important to remember that I-DEA may be a new concept to some. Effective implementation of change management practices will be critical in creating a culture of change. The ADKAR Model can assist in successfully applying effective change management.

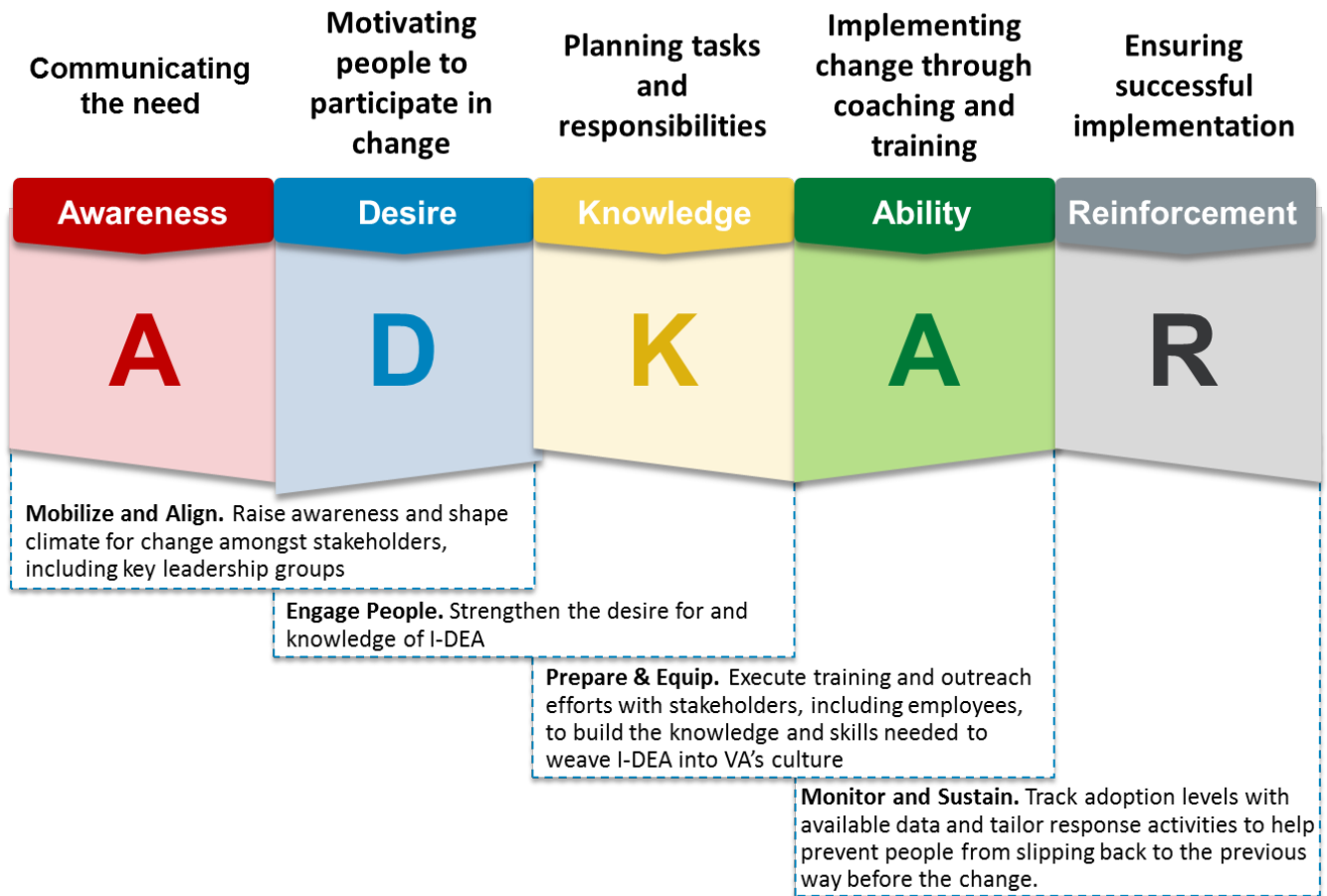


Figure 3 ADKAR Model

Awareness: Creating an understanding of change.

Before cultural transformation occurs, VA leadership should signal a top-down approach in support of change practices. This knowledge typically comes from consistent, clear and concise communication and education. Information given about the change must highlight and emphasize the “why.” This approach creates a reference point to ensure messaging is impactful.

Examples of potential exercises, discussions and strategic communication required for this element are as follows:

- Office-wide discussions that encourage internal reflection of unconscious and implicit bias.
- Discussion and examinations of office culture and an individual’s role in creating the workplace culture.
- Ensuring the office communication is inclusive and diverse by strategically and intentionally examining verbal and visual messaging (language used in workplace communications and considering photographs and artwork displayed).
- VA must examine and ensure consistent hiring practices, diverse hiring panels, hosting orientations that showcase the diverse workforce, and inclusive training.

Desire: Developing desire for change.

Simply communicating will not necessarily ensure that VA employees will desire change. Ensuring the workforce has a desire for change could potentially be the most challenging element of ADKAR. Ultimately, desire will be a personal choice, and it is up to an individual to want to be a part of the change. VA's workforce increasingly makes data-driven decisions. In creating a case for change, champions of change should make a compelling argument for adopting the suggested change. Change leaders should provide metrics with concrete examples and possible benefits and risks to adopting the requested change.

Leaders who sponsor change are critical influencers for employees. Leaders in the organization should become cheerleaders for change and should motivate employees to adopt change. Although the decision to change ultimately lies with the employee, leaders can influence early adopters for change, which will lead to many people making the change, which will be followed by late adopters. Leaders are crucial motivators for all employees, regardless of where they fall in the timeline of change. Leaders should lead by example and cheer for employees to make their own personal decision to change. Leaders are also responsible for combatting resisters of change. Motivation should start with positive incentives to change and may transition over time into negative consequences for lack of change.

Examples of how to increase desire for change are as follows:

- Offices should offer open and respectful discussions for those willing to reflect on their potential personal biases.
- Encourage active participation of the workforce in making changes and creating solutions to the organizational culture.
- VA leadership should take a proactive approach and management of resistance to change.
- Address fear of change by providing data on current workforce statistics and other metrics provided.
- Communicating organizational benefits of I-DEA.
- Discussions on the benefits of change and consequences of not changing, on both an organizational level and a personal level.

Knowledge: Increasing understanding of how to make the change.

Once the workforce is aware of what needs to change and has a desire to implement the transformation, champions of change must provide the knowledge of *how* to change. Individuals must know the goal of the change and what must happen to make the change happen. This element is not limited to formal training and education. It is also an in-depth understanding for the workforce of how they can use their skills and tools to make the change and how they would be impacted.

Incrementalism is typically used so as not to lead to resistance to change. I-DEA is a critical topic that may lead to faster-paced changes than some may approve. Ensuring that the awareness and desire elements are thoroughly completed are essential steps to allowing the workforce to see the cultural shift through everyday practice.

Examples of how to encourage knowledge-building are as follows:

- Conduct formal training on topics such as recognizing a person's own unconscious bias, cultural awareness training, skill-based diversity training to provide participants with practical skills on diversity interaction, etc.
- The leadership team must be willing to share information with the workforce. Trust is essential to the successful implementation of I-DEA.

Ability: Increasing confidence to make the change.

Knowing how to do something does not necessarily mean a person has the confidence to feel they can make a change. Increased skills and abilities will need to be tended to, offering support, patience and celebrating success. This element involves implementing the skills and tools that people have learned about I-DEA. Champions of change can act as coaches and mentors to guide the workforce on the successful implementation of change. During the ability element, it is critical that the workforce is granted open communication and plenty of resources to implement the new skills and behaviors.

Examples of how to increase confidence are as follows:

- Offices can offer mentorship programs to allow the champions of change to guide the workforce to sustainable change.
- Change Leaders must be willing to reevaluate and adjust the process as necessary to meet the needs of the workforce.

Reinforcement: Sustaining the change.

The intention of change is to make it long lasting. The change will not be sustained if the individuals begin to revert to old behaviors. I-DEA is a cultural transformation that can easily be dismissed without conscious effort to make long-lasting change. To fully embed new ways of doing things, success must be celebrated, and failures must be coached to understand the necessity for changed behaviors.

Examples of how to sustain the change are as follows:

- Conduct employee check-ins and surveys to assess any positive or negative workplace culture changes and ensure that employee feedback is addressed and integrated when possible.
- Monitoring progress with metrics and measures. Data-driven decisions and policies are standard and being able to quantify change will assist in further progress.
- Maintain open and honest dialogue about mistakes and celebrate successes.

6. Developing a Change Management Plan

[Appendix D](#) may be used as a CMP template by responsible owners of recommendations or leaders of administrations, organizations or programs where culture transformation is needed for I-DEA.

CONCLUSION

The I-DEA Action Plan was produced as an aspirational yet practical plan for conducting a cultural transformation across VA. While readers may get the urge to look back at what VA is currently doing on I-DEA, the purpose of this plan is to determine how VA can move forward over the next four years. An enduring commitment to I-DEA starts with a concerted and collaborative effort from everyone..

VA will carry out the spirit of this Action Plan in VA's delivery of health care, benefits and services to employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. This Action Plan embodies VA's commitment to I-DEA and dedication to excellence.

APPENDIX A. COMMUNITY PARTNERS INTERVIEWS

Date/Time of Interview	Community partner	Category
May 10, 2021 at 10 am ET	American G.I. Forum	VSO
May 10, 2021 at 10 am ET	National Alliance for Hispanic Health	Non-profit
May 13, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Blacks in Government (BIG)	Non-profit
May 13, 2021 at 1 pm ET	National Association of Black Veterans (NABVETS)	VSO
May 13, 2021 at 1 pm ET	LULAC Veterans Committee	VSO
May 20, 2021 at 2 pm ET	Dr. Theodore Johnson, author of "When the Stars Begin to Fall."	Academia
May 21, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Boston Consulting Group	Business
May 26, 2021 at 2 pm ET	National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators Board	State Gov't
June 2, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Minority Veterans of America	VSO
June 2, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Disabled American Veterans	VSO
June 2, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Jewish War Veterans of the USA	VSO
June 3, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Alaska Native Veterans Association	VSO
June 3, 2021 at 2 pm ET	Women's Veterans Taskforce	Hill
June 3, 2021 at 2 pm ET	Congressional Hispanic Staff Association	
June 9, 2021 at 10 am ET	National Pan-Hellenic Council (Divine Nine)	Academia
June 9, 2021 at 1 pm ET	Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest Indians	Tribal
June 9, 2021 at 3 pm ET	Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities	Academia
July 1, 2021 at 9:30 am ET	Bethany Coates , CEO & Founder of BreakLine Education	Non-Profit
July 1, 2021 at 9:30 am ET	Yai Vargas , Vice President Strategic Engagement and Initiatives, Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility / Founder & CEO of Latinista	Non-Profit
July 1, 2021 at 9:30 am ET	Victor LaGroon , Director, Strategic Partnerships & Alliances, Division of Health Equities, Department of Population, Beckman Research Institute	Non-Profit
Written response	National Congress of American Indians	Tribal

Table 2 Community Partner Interviews

APPENDIX B. FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING AN INSTITUTIONAL ACCESS POINT

The following framework was established by the I-DEA Task Force to outline the standardized process for creating an institutional access point with a community partner.

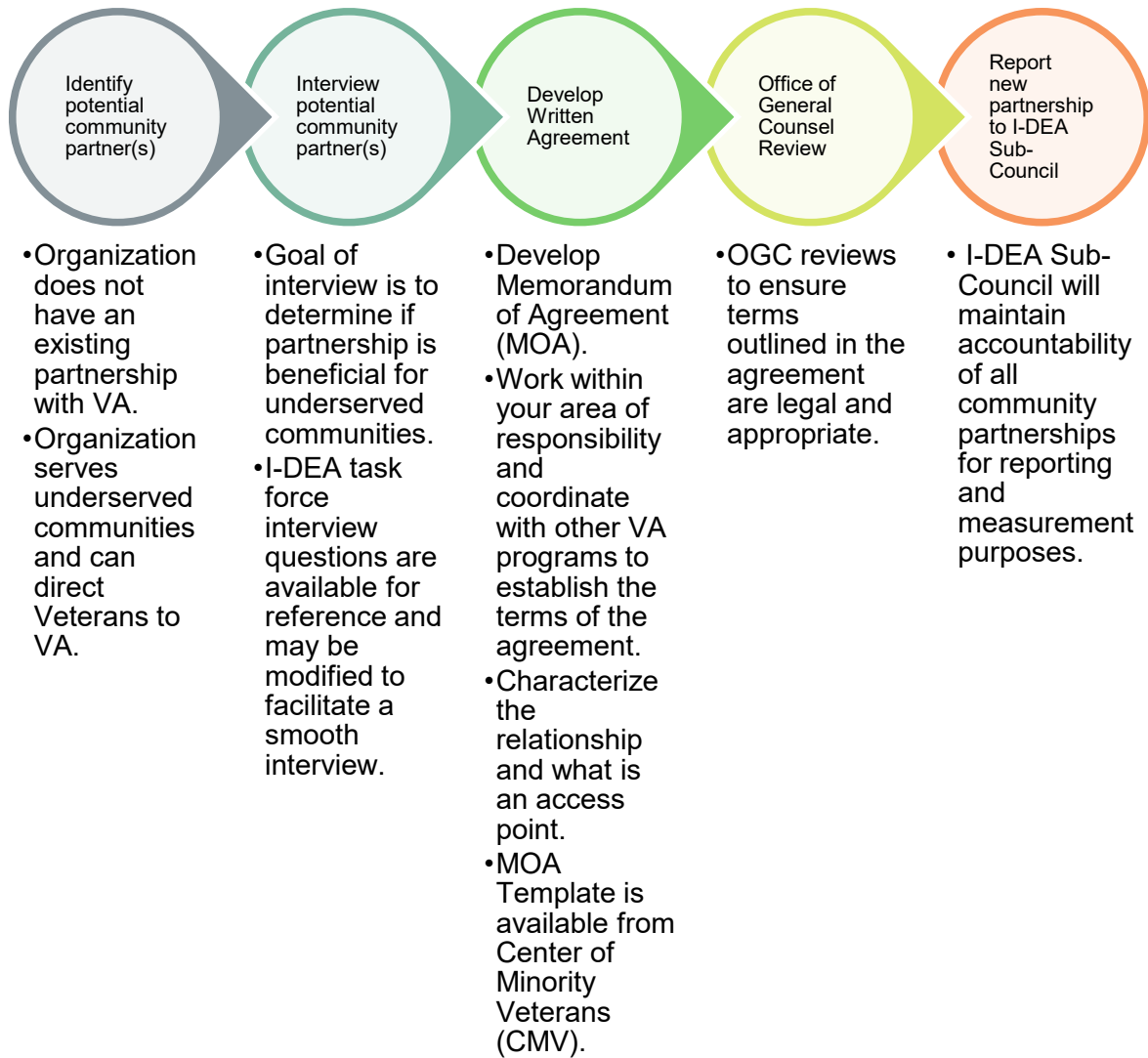












Figure 4 Institutional Access Points Process

APPENDIX C. DATA SET/ARTICLES

The articles and data sets below were considered by the I-DEA Task Force and contributed to the recommendations listed within the I-DEA Action Plan. Future events and consideration may further shape the recommendations and the way they should be implemented.

Articles	PDF Version
<u>What Are Pronouns? Why Do They Matter?</u>	 What Are Pronouns_ Why Do They Matter.ç  What Are Pronouns_ Why Do They Matter.ç
<u>Structural barriers create stark racial divide in Americans' health</u>	 Structural barriers create stark racial divi  Structural barriers create stark racial divi  Structural barriers create stark racial divi
<u>Covid-19 And Gender Equality: Employers Can Help Women From Being Unfairly Punished For Challenges They Face</u>	 Covid-19 And Gender Equality_ Emp  Covid-19 And Gender Equality_ Emp
<u>Post-riot effort to tackle extremism in the military largely overlooks veterans</u>	 Post_Riot_Effort_to_Tackle_Extremism.pdf  Post_Riot_Effort_to_Tackle_Extremism.pdf
<u>CNN's Rick Santorum: “There isn't much Native American culture in American culture”</u>	 There isn't much Native American cultu










Articles	PDF Version
	 There isn't much Native American cultu
A cultural crisis in America's workplace	 A cultural crisis in America's workplaces  A cultural crisis in America's workplaces
Avoiding the Virtual Pitfall: Identifying and Mitigating Biases in Graduate Medical Education Videoconference Interviews	 Avoiding_the_Virtual_Pitfall.pdf  Avoiding_the_Virtual_Pitfall.pdf
Psychiatry Confronts Its Racist Past, and Tries to Make Amends	PDF unavailable
8 Actions That Help Black Colleagues Get Ahead At Work HuffPost Life	

Table 3 Articles Referenced

Data Sets	PDF Version
VA-Wide Trust Survey: Male & Female Veterans	 VA Wide Trust Survey Male and Fem  VA Wide Trust Survey Male and Fem  VA Wide Trust Survey Male and Fem
VA Customer Experience Cookbook	 VA-customer-experience-cookbook.pdf




Data Sets	PDF Version
	 VA-customer-experience-cookbook.pdf
LGBTQ+ Veterans Experience Brief Findings	 LGBTQ Veterans Exp Findings Brief 202105  LGBTQ Veterans Exp Findings Brief 202105

Table 4 Data Sets Referenced

APPENDIX D. CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN BLUEPRINT

This Change Management Plan (CMP) blueprint may be used as a template by responsible owners of recommendations or leaders of administrations, organizations, or programs where cultural transformation is needed for I-DEA.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is transforming the workplace culture to integrate the principles of inclusive, diversity, equity, and accessibility (I-DEA) into the fabric of its mission. Change in an organization is an essential and natural part of growth. Incrementalism has historically been a best business practice. This systemic transformation requires enterprise-wide changes to support a significant cultural shift and meaningful and impactful actions rather than merely symbolic. To successfully change the culture, this CMP Blueprint will allow offices to reflect on the areas necessary to make sustained changes.

Changes made are essential to create an environment where people feel they can be their whole selves in the work environment. VA will not take opportunities from anyone, rather provide the assurance that VA will provide equitable opportunities. The change felt may be uncomfortable initially, but long-lasting efforts often feel this way.

VA will integrate the principles of I-DEA into the fabric of our mission for employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors and create an environment that is inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible to all. The vision is that all employees will support the cultural transformation within VA.

- **Inclusion:** Every individual who enters a VA facility must feel safe, included and valued. VA will treat all employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors with dignity, integrity and respect by encouraging an environment free of harassment and discrimination. Fostering a culture of inclusion, specifically for marginalized and underserved communities, ensures that VA and its employees will act without prejudice or bias.
- **Diversity:** VA strives to leverage the strength and uniqueness that defines our Veteran population, our VA workforce and our country. VA welcomes all Veterans from Underserved communities, including women, Veterans of color, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) Veterans. Diversity is a key driver of growth and innovation that leads to developing new ideas and perspectives and must be embodied across VA.
- **Equity:** VA strives to understand inequities and give everyone, including those who belong to marginalized and underserved communities, what is required to enjoy a full, healthy life. VA will evaluate the intersectionality of systemic inequities and address institutional barriers to outcomes for Veterans and employees.
- **Access:** VA increases access by proactively embedding opportunities and creating institutional pathways for all by eliminating and reducing inequities. VA

will create accommodations and modifications to promote equitable opportunities, including providing access to home care and educational opportunities, training, and jobs worthy of Veteran's skills and service.

- **Underserved communities:** The term “underserved communities” refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, unique challenges, and geographic communities, who have been systemically and institutionally denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social and civic life. VA recognizes this term includes Black, Hispanic and Latino, or Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color. This definition also includes members of religious minorities; women; individuals who face discrimination based on sex, including pregnancy status and including LGBTQ+ persons; persons with disabilities; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; persons who may face employment barriers based on older age; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise at-risk of persistent poverty, homelessness or inequality. This CMP Blueprint may be used as a template by responsible owners of recommendations or leaders of administrations, organizations or programs where cultural transformation is needed for I-DEA.

1. Six Essential Questions (6EQ)

The 6EQs are one of the best places to start building your organizations' CMP because it helps outline the scope of the change and some of the impacts. The answers to these questions establish the foundation of the change planned for your organization. These 6EQs will help define the change that is desired. They are especially helpful in bringing awareness and possibly desire for change to occur.

Figure 5 below may be used to answer questions 5-6 above.

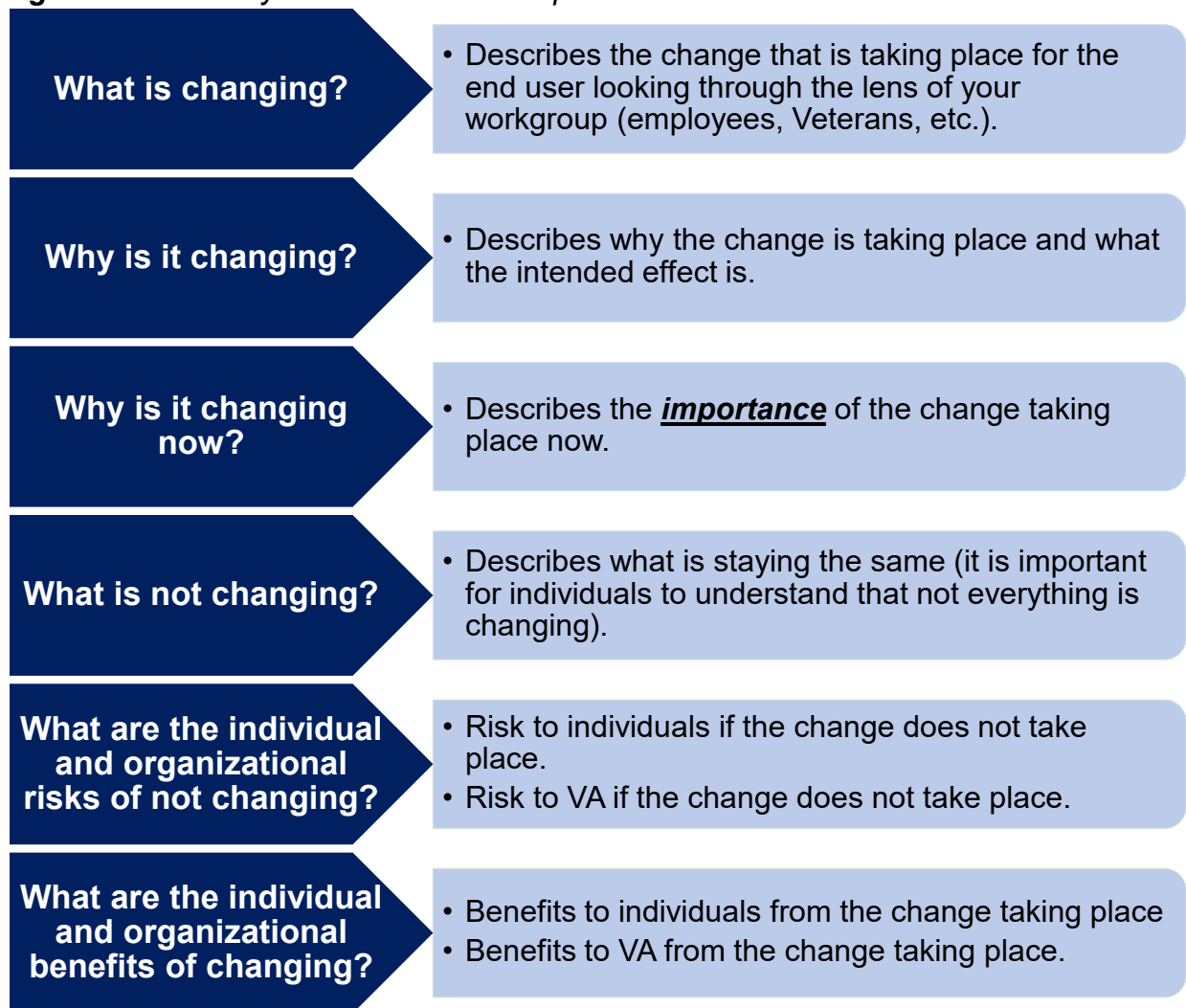


Figure 5 Six Essential Questions

To assist with answering the questions 5-6 above, use **Table 5** below.

	Risks of Not Changing	Benefits of Changing
Individual	•	•
Organizational	•	•

Table 5 Individual/Organizational Risks/Benefits of Change Table

2. Prepare your Change Management Team

Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of your change management team. Group composition will vary based on the needs of your location. Creating a team dedicated to the coordination and oversight of the change encourages accountability and ensures

follow-through on essential activities. These individuals should ideally have good communication and interpersonal skills, have business influence with those impacted by the change and believe in the value of the change.

The Change Management Team is on the ground level and will be a coordinated system of support for the successful implementation of the CMP. Table 6 below outlines the Change Management Network, describing the types of roles each office should consider for the Change Management Team. These include a Change Sponsor, Change Management Lead, Training Lead, Change Champions, Communications Lead and a Site Coordinator.

Role	Responsibilities
Change Sponsor	Leader who authorizes the change within an organization and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the change realizes intended benefits.
Change Management Lead	Assigned to assist with all change management tasks related to the system implementation.
Training Lead	Assigned to oversee all training efforts and logistics, specifically related to the implementation.
Communications Lead	Assigned to oversee all communications efforts across the office, specifically related to the implementation.
Change Champions	Assigned to assist staff with questions pertaining to IDEA. Act as liaisons between the leadership and employees. Assigned to review all Change Management deliverables.
Site Coordinator	Assigned to oversee and coordinate all aspects of the I-DEA implementation to the Field.

Table 6 Change Management Team Roles and Responsibilities

Using **Table 7**, carefully consider who should be on your Change Management Team. The people assigned will be responsible for the successful change management.

When considering who will be those champions, consider who will be the most prominent advocates for the change. In addition, consider what they bring to the table to support the change.

Change Leader	Title and Role	Responsibilities
[Name]	[Role]	[Responsibilities]
[Name]	[Role]	[Responsibilities]
[Name]	[Role]	[Responsibilities]

Table 7 Change Management Team

3. Develop Change Management Plans

The CMP Blueprint has five (5) sub-plans embedded. These sub-plans ensure the CMP contains all the key elements needed to help individuals transition from the current state to the future state and support flow through the change management process ADKAR (shown in Figure 6 below).

Awareness	Desire	Knowledge	Ability	Reinforcement
<i>Change Communication Plan</i>				
<i>Sponsor Roadmap</i>				
<i>Coaching Plan</i>				
		<i>Training Plan</i>		

Figure 6 ADKAR and CMP Blueprint Crosswalk

4. Change Communication Plan

Communicating what is changing clearly and concisely is one of the most critical aspects of the Blueprint. Clear communication prevents misunderstandings and allows the change to be fully understood by all. Understanding who is being communicated with, deciding the best methodology for each stakeholder, and when to communicate the message is crucial. Thinking thoroughly will prevent missteps and ensure the intended message is being provided. Using the template provided in Table 8 below, brainstorm what must be communicated, to whom, when and how your office must communicate the change.

This portion of the CMP Blueprint should be considered a fluid document. As potential issues arise, consider how leadership must communicate this and to whom.

Actions Requiring Communication	Change Leader Responsible	Intended Audience	Reason for Communication	Method of Communication	Date
Announcement of Change					
Initial Training					
Execution of Change					
Action					

Table 8 Change Communication Plan

5. Sponsor Roadmap

A primary sponsor is the leader who authorizes the change within an organization and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the change realizes intended benefits. The level of sponsorship required depends on the risk level of the change.

6. The ABCs of Sponsorship

A) Active and visible participation throughout the project

The role of active and visible participation for the primary sponsor was cited in the research more frequently than any other sponsor activity. Study participants identified a list of activities that constituted active and visible sponsorship—from championing the change and allocating the necessary funding to participating in change activities and supporting the team. Sponsors cannot disappear once they've attended the kickoff meeting for a project. Their sustained presence is necessary to build and maintain momentum for a change.

B) Build a coalition of sponsorship

Participants expressed the need for the primary sponsor to take the lead in building and maintaining a strong group of sponsors—or sponsor coalition—to help support the change. In addition, the primary sponsor must mobilize other key business leaders and stakeholders to advocate for the change and legitimize it in their part of the organization. A healthy coalition of sponsors is essential for changes that stretch across multiple functions within the organization.

C) Communicate support and promote the change to impacted groups

People impacted by change want to hear why a change is essential from a leader at the very top of their organization. Senior leaders are the preferred senders of messages about the business reasons for change and the risks or costs of not changing. An effective primary sponsor legitimizes the need for change within the organization and prioritizes change through direct engagement with impacted employees.

Develop tools and methodologies to help leaders identify impacted groups. Then, identify actions leaders can take to communicate with an organization about change effectively.

People impacted by change want to hear why a change is important from a leader at the very top of their organization. Senior leaders are the preferred senders of messages about the business reasons for change, as well as the risks or costs of not changing. An effective primary sponsor legitimizes the need for change within the organization and sets the prioritization of change through direct engagement with impacted employees.

Develop tools and methodologies to help leaders identify impacted groups. Identify actions leaders can take to effectively communicate with organization about change.

In **Table 9** below, brainstorm activities and strategies the sponsor will use to remain active and visible, build a coalition of sponsorship and communicate support.

Sponsor Actions and Strategies	
Active and visible participation	•
Build a coalition of sponsorship	•
Communicate support and promote the change to impacted groups	•

Table 9 Sponsor Roadmap

7. Coaching Plan

A coaching plan (see Table 10 below) is a tailored activity based on individual or site-specific needs. It will be incumbent on your organization’s leadership to identify one or more of the following to ensure an appropriate coaching structure.

- Provide local leaders with opportunities to pair with and coach the next level of leadership.
- Contact the I-DEA sub-council to identify available coaches within the organization.

Sponsor Actions and Strategies	
Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[Identify local coaches]</i> • <i>[Identify coaches available within the team responsible for implementing recommendations from the VA I-DEA Action Plan]</i>

Table 10 Coaching Plan

8. Training Plan

Training is necessary to develop and maintain a skilled workforce. Training is also essential in a constantly changing environment. Successful training will guide employees through the change journey, providing understanding and the skills to ensure long-lasting viability for the change.

As important as training is, providing the proper training associated with the change is equally as critical. During a transition in the workplace, the last thing that VA wants is for employees to feel the training is a waste of time. Using the template provided in Table 11 below, brainstorm the types of training necessary for successful change management. Consider the audience and the training outcomes to evaluate whether the training will be successful for your office. Training should be specific to the change, but also the work environment and culture.

Type of Training	Intended Outcome	Intended Audience	Training Location	Cost of Training	Dates

Table 11 Training Plan

9. Resistance Management Plan

Human tend to resist change because change creates uncertainty, anxiety and fear. Resistance is an expected and normal reaction to any significant change. Resistance management focuses on supporting staff members through the change process and minimizing the impact of resistance on staff members and the organization.

Categories of Resistance:

- Emotion – Fear, loss, sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration, depression, focus on self
- Disengagement – Silence, ignoring communications, indifference, apathy, low morale
- Work impact – Reduced productivity/efficiency, non-compliance, absenteeism, mistakes
- Acting out – Conflict, arguments, sabotage; overbearing, aggressive or passive-aggressive behavior
- Negativity – Rumors/gossip, miscommunication, complaining, focus on problems, celebrating failure
- Avoidance – Ignoring the change, reverting to old behaviors, workarounds, abdicating responsibilities
- Building barriers – Excuses, counterapproaches, recruiting dissenters, secrecy, breakdown in trust
- Controlling – Asking too many questions, influencing outcomes, defending current state, using status

Costs of Resistance:

- Delayed project or initiative
- Project abandonment
- Reduced productivity
- Greater absenteeism
- Loss of valued employees
- Added financial cost and failure risk for the initiative

- Inefficient processes
- Unachieved goals and poor outcomes
- History of change failures

Top 10 Tactics for Managing Resistance

1. Listen and understand objections
2. Focus on the “what” and let go of the “how”
3. Remove barriers
4. Provide simple, clear choices and consequences
5. Create hope
6. Show the benefits in a real and tangible way
7. Make a personal appeal
8. Convert the strongest dissenters
9. Demonstrate consequences
10. Provide incentives

Like risk, change agents should plan resistance ahead of time. Unexpected resistance may still occur but having a plan will increase your success.

Type of Resistance	Resistance Management Strategy	Responsible Person for managing resistance

Table 12 Resistance Management Plan

10. Analyzing and Measuring Success

Change must be carefully cultivated and actively maintained. Throughout the change management process, implementers should constantly assess success. A continuous evaluation loop of issues and successes and the necessary actions must be addressed and tracked. If there are areas for improvement or a best practice, they should be documented. This loop will help an organization with potential lessons learned and ensure successful implementation.

Using Table 13 below, captures the type of analysis conducted, the issues or successes, and any actions necessary.

Action Being Analyzed	Issues or Success	Description	Action Needed
<i>[Action]</i>	<i>[Choose one: Issue or Success]</i>	<i>[Describe the issue or success]</i>	<i>[Action needed, if any]</i>

Table 13 Change Management Analysis

APPENDIX E. TASK FORCE MEMBERS AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Task Force Members

Name	Title	Organization
Chris Diaz (Chair)	Deputy Chief of Staff / White House Liaison	OSVA
Jimmy Anderson (Facilitator)	Special Assistant / Deputy White House Liaison	OSVA
Dennis May	Acting Executive Director, Center for Minority Veterans	OSVA
Ray Kelley	Senior Advisor, VSO Liaison	OSVA
Elizabeth Estabrooks	Acting Executive Director, Center for Women Veterans	OSVA
Harvey Johnson	Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, Inclusion	ORMDI
Hansel Cordeiro	Executive Director for Investigations	OAWP
Shana Love-Holmon	Chief of Staff, Office of Enterprise Integration	OEI
Tahmika Jackson, JD	Special Counsel	OGC
Stephanie Birdwell	Director, Office of Tribal and Government Relations	OPIA
Melissa Bryant	Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs	OPIA
Barbara C. Morton	Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer	VEO
Cheryl Rawls	Executive Director, Outreach Transition and Economic Development	VBA
Lisa Thomas, PhD	Executive Director, Human Capital Management	NCA
Kameron Matthews, MD, JD, FAAFP	Assistant Under Secretary for Health, Clinical Services	VHA
Terry Allbritton	Director, VHA Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I)	VHA
Ryan Vega, MD	Executive Director, Center for Innovation	VHA
Tiffany Lange, PsyD	PRIDE, Clinical Implementation Lead	VHA, VAMC

Table 14 Task Force Membership

Project Management Support Team

Name	Title
Elizabeth Andringa	Project Manager, VHA Office of Healthcare Transformation
Shanita R. Jones	Sr. Management and Program Analyst, VBA
Jennifer Moffit	Engagement Management Strategist, VBA
Cam-Van Hunke	Contractor Support - ERPi

Table 15 Project Management Support Members

APPENDIX F. ROADMAP

The Task Force’s project management team produced a road map that outlined the timeline and interdependent tasks necessary to complete the I-DEA Action Plan. The road map ensured that the Task Force completed all project tasks on time to meet the deadline set by the SECVA. **Table 16** below details the road map the Task Force followed:

Deliverable Name	Description	Date
Project Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorizes task force to begin work and establishes duration • Establishes purpose, guiding principles, and objectives of the IDEA Task Force 	4/23/2021
Purpose Statement & Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines purpose of the VA I-DEA Action Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines key terms 	4/30/2021
Workgroup Membership, Scope & Six (6) Essential Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines what is in/out of scope for the VA IDEA Action Plan • Outlines what is changing, when/why it is changing, and the risk of not changing 	5/7/2021
Strategies, Opportunities, Accomplishments, and Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workgroups define how their work supports the objectives outlined in the 120-day memo • Translate support to actions and determine if actions will accomplish the objectives 	5/14/2021
Bold Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess recommendations to propose bold goals 	6/3/2021
Task Force Prioritize Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review list of recommendations from all for workgroups and prioritize recommendations as a Task Force 	6/10/2021
Identify Owners & Collaborators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize recommendations with responsible parties 	6/17/2021
Equity Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force reviews and approves Equity Assessment (200-day report) for EO 13985 	6/24/2021
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop list of recommendations • Building from the quick wins, workgroup to incorporate best practices and lessons learned into recommendations 	7/1/2021
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines guidelines and framework of how success will be measured and how metrics will be established over the four years (Measures and Metrics) 	7/8/2021

Deliverable Name	Description	Date
Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidate Task Force Accomplishments for inclusion in Action Plan 	7/15/2021
Finalize I-DEA Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlines how end users will adopt and sustain change (ADKAR model) 	7/15/2021
I-DEA Action Plan for VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlines how/when VA will implement changes to improve I-DEA for Veterans and the work force over the next several years 	7/22/2021

Table 16 Road Map

APPENDIX G. INFLUENCERS DIAGRAM

Influencers

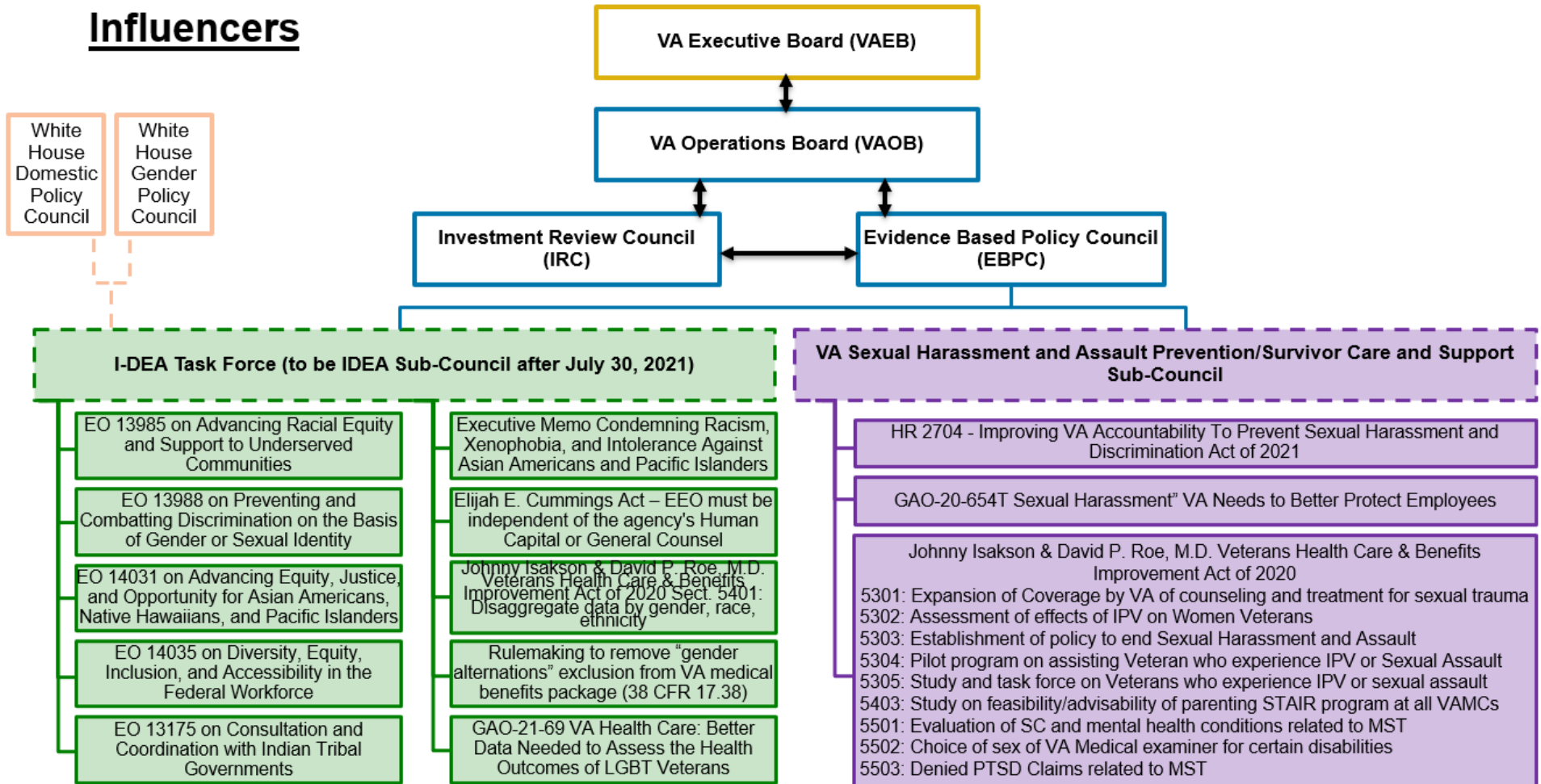


Figure 7 Influencer Diagram