

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2017-2020

Office of Diversity and Inclusion
Office of Human Resources and Administration



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Foreword

By the Chief Diversity Officer

A decade ago, VA's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) initiated a new conversation about diversity and inclusion in the public sector. Informed by a growing body of research, we proffered a transformative paradigm that linked diversity and inclusion to organizational performance. This new paradigm was based on the value proposition that equal employment opportunity (EEO) was more than a legal mandate; it was a business imperative. It was predicated on two cardinal precepts: 1) EEO is foundational to achieving workforce diversity; and 2) inclusion is the key to achieving high organizational performance. While we remained unequivocally committed to equal opportunity in the workplace, we also understood that EEO was necessary but not sufficient to create a high-performing organization in the 21st century.

This paradigm shift began by defining diversity in its broadest context to include all the characteristics that make us unique: race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, disability, ethnic culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, parental status, educational background, intellectual perspective, socioeconomic status, organizational level, and more. By doing so, we were able to access all the performance advantages our diversity offers. We then strengthened the model by focusing on *inclusion* as the means by which we leverage our diversity and empowered all voices to contribute to the public service mission.

The Business Case for Diversity

In the years following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the field of EEO evolved from an exclusively legalistic model to the more proactive, business-driven framework of diversity management. This evolution resulted from both seismic demographic shifts in our population and burgeoning globalization of the marketplace. Driven by fierce competition for market share, business leaders quickly recognized that to remain viable in a global economy, their organizations must recruit a diverse, culturally competent workforce that reflected the rapidly changing market. Soon after, empirical research studies affirmed that workforce diversity in the private sector was associated with higher productivity and greater financial returns (Herring 2009; Sausner et al 2008; National Urban League 2004; Barrington & Troske, 2001).

Though not driven by market share, the public sector also benefits from the performance advantages that a diverse workforce offers. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that in the year 2043, our Nation will no longer be characterized by a single demographic majority; foreign-born individuals and people of color will constitute the majority of our population. To remain relevant, public service agencies must reflect the growing diversity of the communities we serve. Similarly, the Veteran population is

becoming increasingly diverse. More women and people of color are joining the U.S. Armed Forces and subsequently separating from military service each year. Accordingly, VA must ensure that it cultivates a diverse workforce that can provide responsive service to all our Nation's Veterans.

The Inclusion Imperative

The millennium ushered in yet a new focus to the emerging concept of organizational *inclusion*. The Center for Creative Leadership found that diverse teams are more creative, perform better in problem-solving, and result in better decision-making than homogeneous teams. Similarly, the Diversity Research Network found that gender diversity results in more effective group processes in people-oriented performance environments (2002). The caveat to these findings was that diversity alone was not sufficient to achieve the performance advantages. Absent the facilitating conditions that *integrate* diverse perspectives and empower the corresponding diversity of thought into the organization, the aforementioned outcomes were reversed. This is the *inclusion* imperative. Simply put, diversity without inclusion will not work.

In 2011, VA partnered with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to develop a metric to measure organizational inclusion: The New IQ. OPM defines inclusion as a culture that connects each employee to the organization and encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness. We add that inclusion is also the extent to which organizations leverage diversity to enable and empower all employees to participate and contribute to their full potential. To achieve full inclusion, agencies must look internally at their workplace culture, and replace rigid institutional processes that impede optimum participation with the drivers of inclusion including fairness (equal opportunity), openness (transparent communications and information sharing), cooperativeness (collaboration), supportiveness (integration of differences), and empowerment (autonomy).

Employee Engagement

Most recently, the concept of employee engagement (EE) in government has gained traction. OPM defines EE as: "The employee's sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence, and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission." Studies show that employee engagement is a core driver of performance as well as lower rates of turnover, complaints, accidents, and absenteeism. One study found that engaged public sector employees are: (1) twice as likely to stay in their current jobs, (2) two-and-a-half times more likely to feel they can make a difference, and (3) three times as likely to report being satisfied in their jobs (Taylor, 2012).

EE is a key tenet in the "people and culture" portion of the President's Management Agenda and a strategic priority of OPM. In December 2014, the Executive Office of the

President issued a joint memorandum with OPM and the Office of Management and Budget exhorting Federal agencies to strengthen their efforts to improve their organizational culture of employee engagement. Like inclusion, the drivers of engagement are autonomy, empowerment, recognition, communication, transparency, psychological safety, and trust. Inclusion is an essential precursor of employee engagement; before you can *engage*, you must first *include*.

Way Forward

From its beginnings in the civil rights to its evolution to diversity and inclusion and now, engagement, EEO remains the foundation upon which diversity and inclusion can be built. Implicit in this experience is the increasing awareness that diversity goes beyond our race and gender, to include the diversity of thought and perspective that accompanies our human identity. It is the inextricable link between who we are and how we think and communicate that makes diversity such a potent factor in organizational performance. ODI is privileged to lead the effort to promote diversity, inclusion, and engagement in VA in collaboration with all our partners and stakeholders. We do so under the guiding principles of our ICARE values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. We proudly present the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2017-2020.



Georgia Coffey
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

Organizational Acronyms

Center for Minority Veterans	CMV
Center for Women Veterans	CWV
Corporate Senior Executive Management Office	CSEMO
Diversity & Inclusion in VA Council	DIVAC
Employee Engagement Council	EEC
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	EEOC
Employee Engagement Service	EES
Inspector General	IG
National Cemetery Administration	NCA
National Center for Organization Development	NCOD
Office of Acquisitions, Logistics, and Construction	OALC
Office of Administration	OA
Office of Diversity and Inclusion	ODI
Office of Employment Discrimination Compliant Adjudication	OEDCA
Office of Enterprise Support Services	OESS
Office of General Counsel	OGC
Office of Human Resources Management	OHRM
Office of Enterprise Integration	OEI
Office of Information and Technology	OIT
Office of Labor Management Relations	LMR
Office of Management & Budget	OMB
Office of Personnel Management	OPM
Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs	OPIA
Office of Resolution Management	ORM
Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization	OSDBU
VA Central Office	VACO
VA Learning University	VALU
Veteran Employment Services Office	VESO
Veterans Benefits Administration	VBA
Veterans Health Administration	VHA

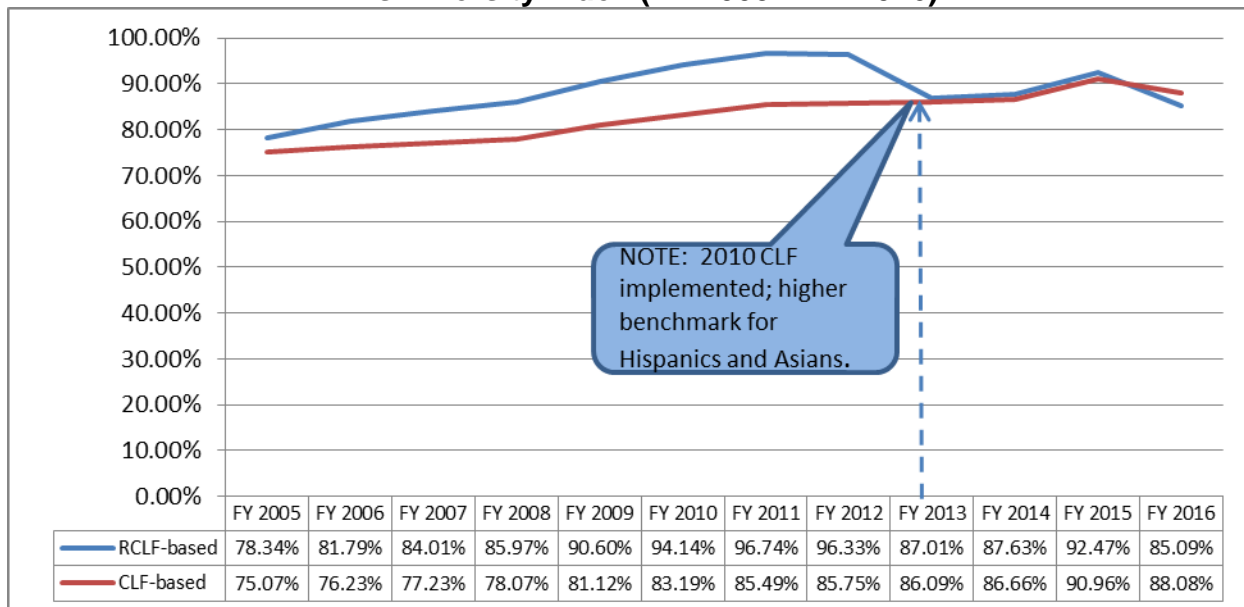
The Current State of VA

As VA continues to transform under its *MyVA* initiative, it is increasingly important that we have the tools necessary to measure the impact of our efforts on our changing culture. To that end, ODI developed and employs three innovative metrics to gauge our progress in this area: the *Diversity Index*, measuring VA's aggregate workforce diversity; the *Inclusion Quotient*, measuring employees' perceptions of organizational inclusion; and the OPM's *Engagement Index*, a measure of employee engagement also based on responses to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). Together, these indices provide leadership with an efficient snapshot of VA's workplace culture.

Diversity Index

The VA's *Diversity Index* (DI) measures the convergence of an organization's aggregate workforce representation by race, ethnicity, and gender (REG) to the Civilian Labor Force (CLF) or Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF), as applicable. Specifically, the Index is calculated as the mean ratio of VA's incumbent workforce by REG to the corresponding group in the R/CLF, capped at 100% to avoid skewing for overrepresentation. The result is a score on a scale of 0 to 100 percent, reflecting an organization's overall diversity. This method provides an appropriate and efficient metric to gauge Federal workforce diversity. VA's DI for fiscal year (FY) 2005 through FY 2016 is provided below.

VA's Diversity Index (FY 2005 – FY 2016)



Source: VSSC MD-715 Table C1

Note: The FY 2016 RCLF diversity index reflects a change in the RCLF computation to correctly align with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidance for agencies preparing their annual EEO Plan and Report, pursuant to EEOC Management Directive (MD) 715.

Inclusion Quotient

The VA's *Inclusion Quotient* (IQ) is a measure of an organization's workplace inclusion based on employee responses to empirically validated items in the FEVS. The survey items are grouped under the following categories: fairness, openness, cooperativeness, support, and empowerment. The score is calculated as the ratio of the total favorable responses (agree and strongly agree) to the total responses in those areas, utilizing OPM's weighted survey results. The IQ for VA and its major subcomponent organizations in FY 2015 and FY 2016 are provided at below.

VA's Inclusion Index (FY 2015 and FY 2016)

	FY 2015	FY 2016
VA-wide	53%	54%
VHA	53%	54%
VBA	52%	55%
NCA	59%	61%
VACO	54%	54%
GOVT-WIDE	57%	58%

Source: OPM FEVS

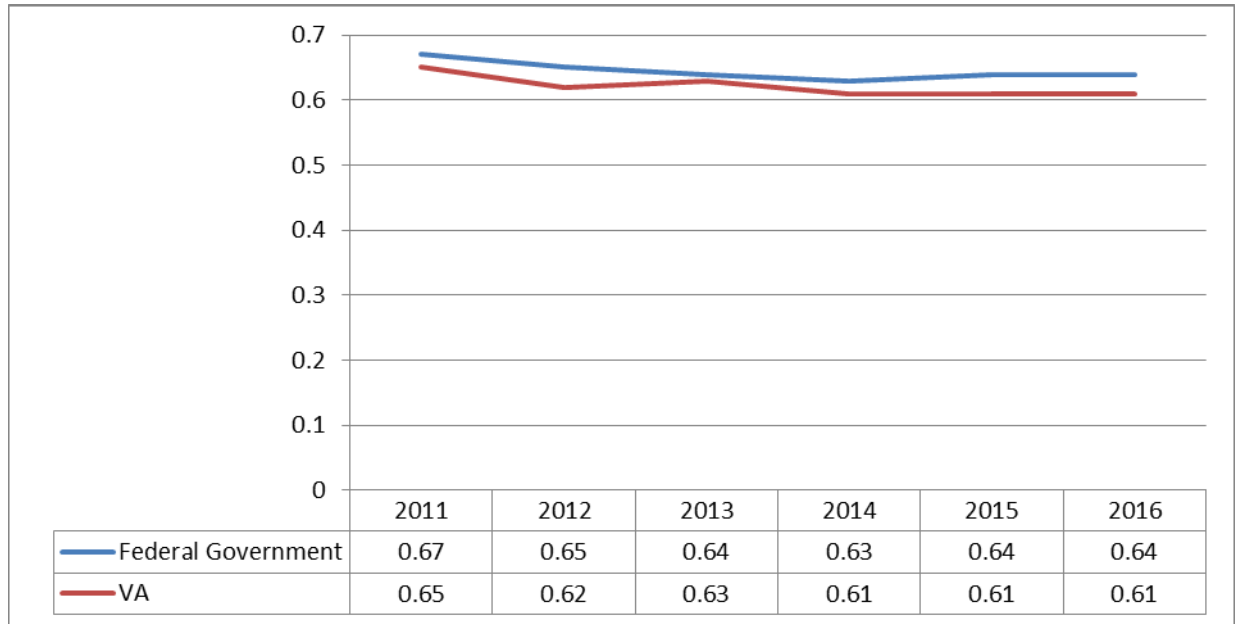
Engagement Index

OPM developed the *Engagement Index* (EI) to measure the degree to which employees feel connected with their organization and its mission, and their sense of purpose evident in their display of dedication, persistence, and effort in their work. An "engaged" employee is one who demonstrates commitment and discretionary effort to their job and organization, which leads to optimum organizational performance. The EI is based on employees' favorable responses to 15 FEVS items, organized in three sub-factors:

- **Leaders Lead:** Reflects the employees' perceptions of the integrity of leadership, as well as leadership behaviors such as communication and workforce motivation.
- **Supervisors:** Reflects the interpersonal relationship between worker and supervisor, including trust, respect, and support.
- **Intrinsic Work Experiences:** Reflects the employees' feelings of motivation and competency relating to their role in the workplace.

The Federal Government EI decreased 3 percentage points since FY 2011. VA's score remains below the government trend as shown below.

Employee Engagement Index (FY 2011 - FY 2016)
(Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey)



Source: FY 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results

When disaggregating the Engagement Index into its sub-factors, we find VA's subcomponent scores remain largely at or below the Federal average as shown below.

Employee Engagement Index Sub factors (FY 2011 - FY 2016)
(Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey)

		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Leaders Lead	Federal Government	54%	53%	50%	51%	51%
	VA	50%	51%	47%	47%	47%
Supervisors	Federal Government	71%	70%	71%	71%	71%
	VA	65%	67%	66%	67%	67%
Intrinsic Work Experiences	Federal Government	71%	69%	68%	69%	69%
	VA	70%	71%	69%	69%	69%

Source: FY 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results

VA Correlation Study

ODI conducted an analysis to determine whether employee diversity (DI), inclusion (IQ), and engagement (EI) is correlated to the following performance outcomes for FY 2015:

- *Productivity*: Completed Normalized Veterans Claims for VBA and Average New Patient Wait for VHA;
- *Quality*: Compensation Accuracy for VBA and Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) Quality Ratings for VHA;
- *Customer Satisfaction*: The Overall Satisfaction scores from the Voice of the Veteran (VOV) project conducted by J.D. Power for VBA and the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) Customer Satisfaction Survey for VHA; and,
- *Employee Satisfaction*: Turnover Rate (Regrettable Losses) and All Employee Survey (AES) Overall Satisfaction for both VBA and VHA.

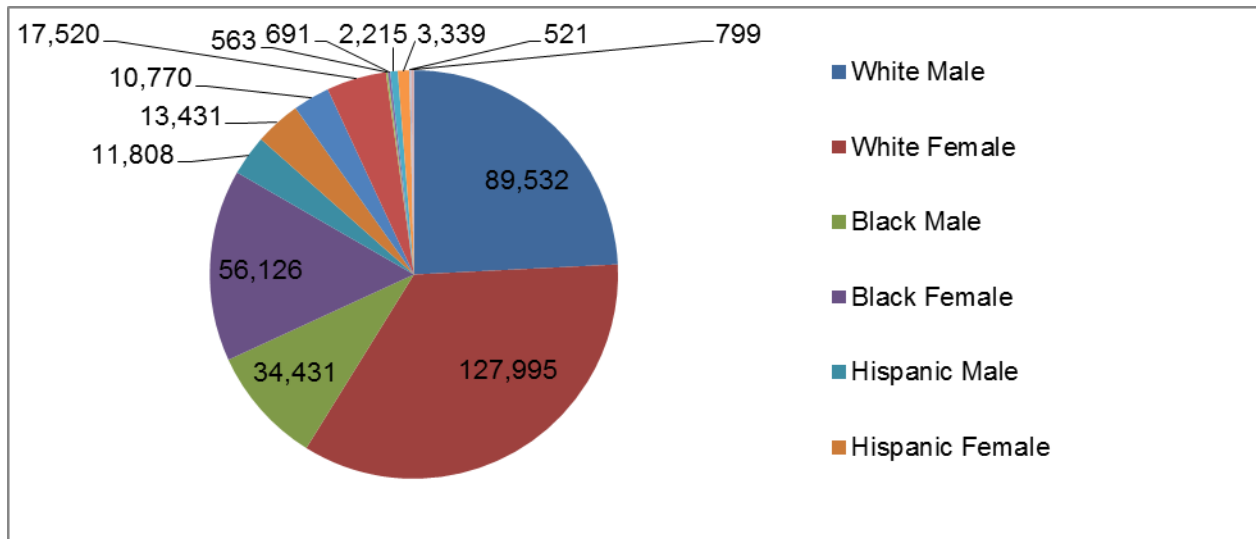
The analysis revealed that diversity, inclusion, and engagement are positively associated with organizational performance. Data consistently indicated that the correlations are stronger for the IQ and EI compared to the DI.



Workforce Diversity

In addition to the aforementioned indices, ODI provides a variety of analyses of workforce diversity on a regular basis. At the end of FY 2016, VA's workforce totaled 369,741 employees, including 18,352 temporary employees.

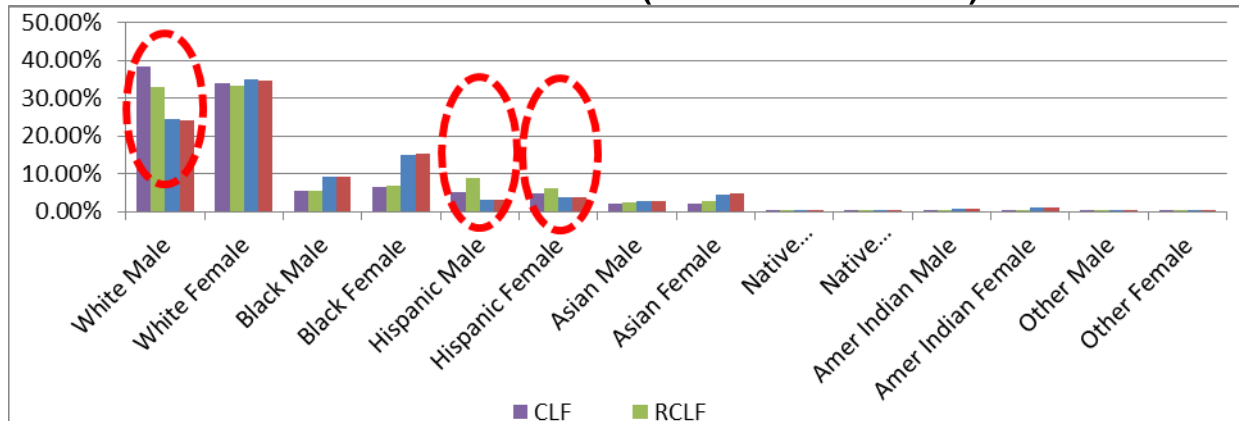
VA's Workforce as of September 30, 2016



Source: VSSC Onboard by Race and Gender Report

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requires that Federal agencies compare their workforce composition by REG with corresponding groups in the CLF and RCLF. Currently, this data is based on the 2010 census. Compared to the RCLF, VA's workforce is at or above the RCLF representation in all areas except White and Hispanic males, and Hispanic females. The following graph depicts a comparison of the VA workforce with the RCLF for FY 2015 (blue bar) and FY 2016 (red bar):

VA Workforce vs. RCLF (FY 2015 and FY 2016)

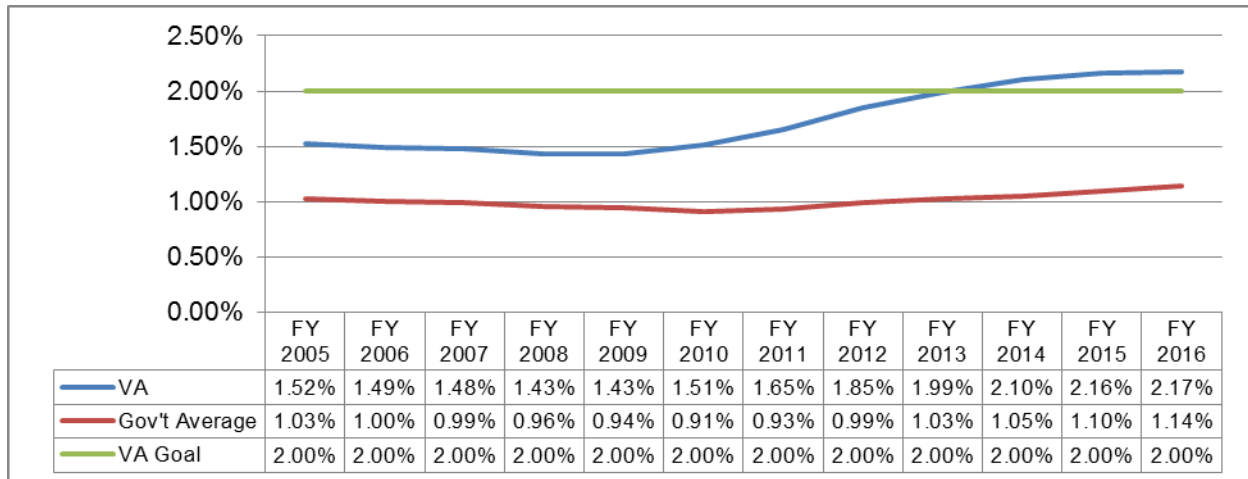


Source: VSSC Onboard by Race and Gender Report, UREP Change Report, and MD-715 Table 1

Individuals with Targeted Disabilities

In FY 2013, VA established a three percent hiring goal for individuals with targeted disabilities (IWTD). In FY 2016, VA fell below the Secretary's hiring goal with 2.65 percent of the total hires (permanent and temporary) having a targeted disability for the first time since the hiring goal was established. However, for overall employment, VA continues to increase its on-board representation of IWTDs. As of September 30, 2016, IWTDs represented 2.17 percent of the VA workforce (temporary and permanent). Beginning in FY 2009, VA reversed a decade long decline in the representation of IWTDs. An eleven year trend of the percentage of the VA workforce with a targeted disability is provided in the graph below.

Individuals with Targeted Disabilities

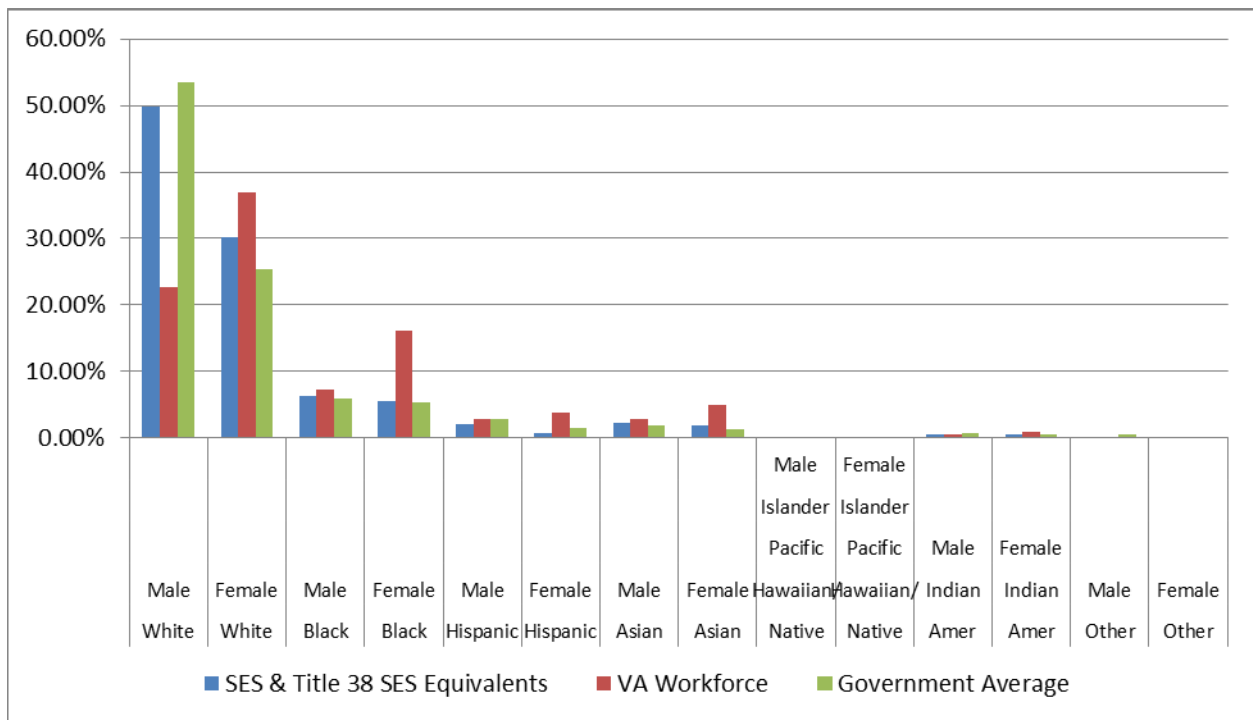


Source: ProClarity – Staff offices Workbook

Senior Executive Representation

As of September 30, 2016, the Senior Executive Service (SES) and Title 38 SES Equivalent population in VA was 433 (permanent and temporary), an increase of 9 from September 30, 2015. The graph below provides the representation of the SES and Title 38 SES Equivalent population by REG. The representation of the entire VA workforce is included in the graph for comparative purposes. VA's representation of White and Asian females and Asian males in the SES and Title 38 Equivalent population are above the government average.

SES and Title 38 SES Equivalent Representation FY 2016

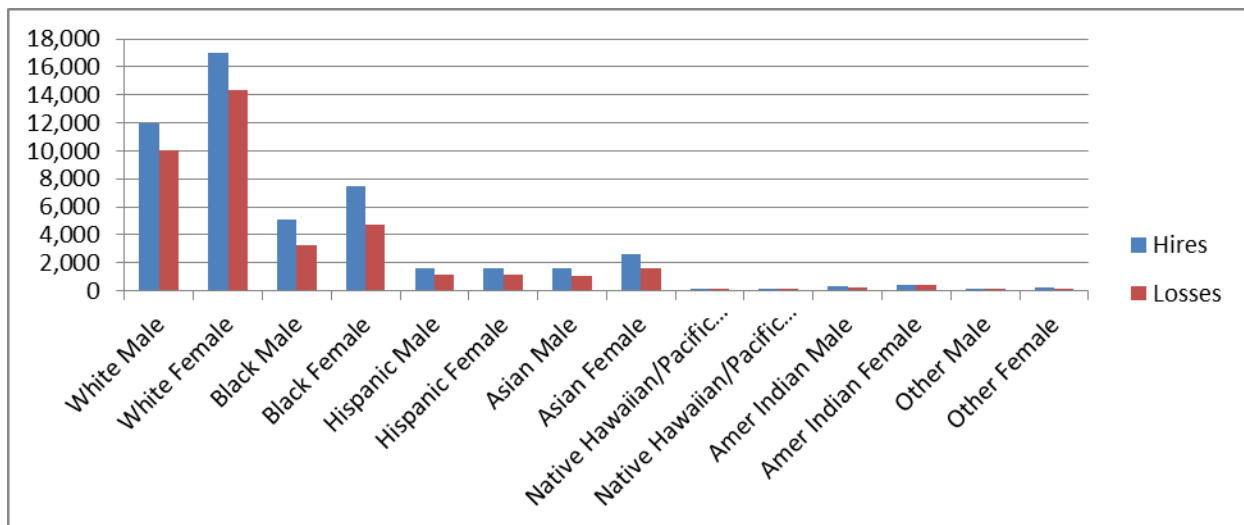


Source: VSSC Onboard by Race and Gender Report; OPM Office of Planning and Policy Analysis

Hires and Losses

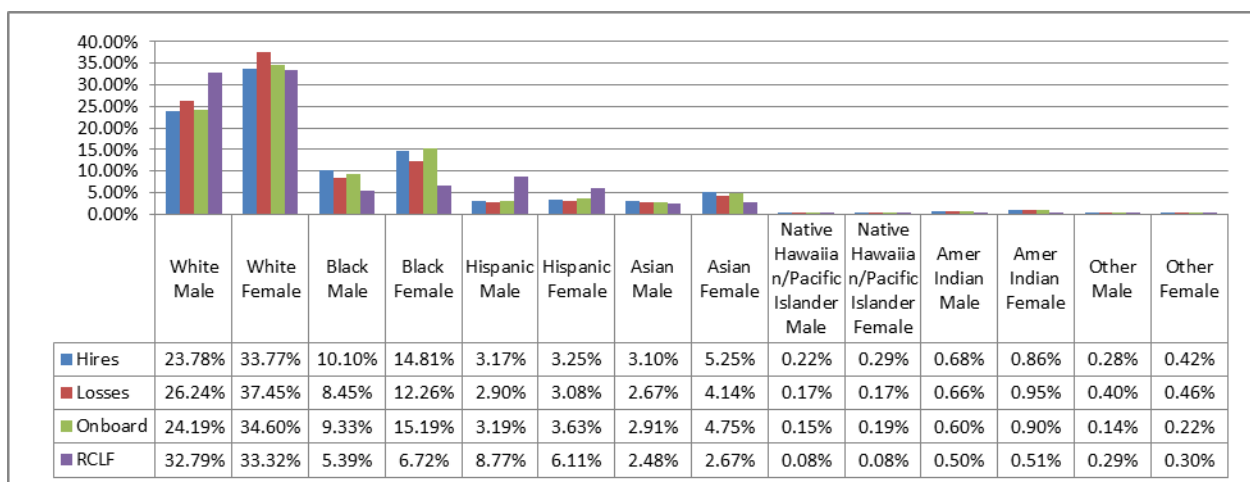
The graphs below provide data on the hires and losses (permanent and temporary workforce) by REG, and a comparison of hires and losses with on-board percentages. During FY 2016, VA hired individuals from each group at a number equivalent to or greater than their separations. White men, Hispanic men and women fell below their expected representation rate based on the RCLF. The hire rates for White and Hispanic men and Hispanic women also fell below their respective rate in the RCLF.

Hires and Losses by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender FY 2016



Source: VSSC NOA Breakout Report (Hires) and NOA Breakout Report (Separations)

Separations, Hires, and On-Board Representation Rates in FY 2016



Source: VSSC NOA Breakout Report (Hires), NOA Breakout Report (Separations), and UREP Change Report

Accomplishments: 2012-2016 VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan

The following summarizes the major accomplishments made pursuant to the FY 2012 through FY 2016 Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Goals:

Goal 1: A Diverse Workforce

- ✓ Developed and implemented the VA Diversity Index.
- ✓ VA's Diversity Index (CLF-based) increased from 85.75% in FY 2012 to 90.96% in FY 2015.
- ✓ Percentage of workforce with targeted disabilities increased from 1.85 percent to 2.19 percent.
- ✓ Implemented applicant flow analysis for recruitment and leadership development programs.
- ✓ Instituted National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP) and centralized Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for students with disabilities. Funded over 500 NDIP interns and 70 WRP interns since inception
- ✓ VA's centralized WRP cited as a Government-wide promising practice. VA has hired over 70 WRP interns with disabilities and converted 18 from Schedule A status to permanent status
- ✓ Launched Hispanic Employment Retention & Outreach (HERO) Plan and Student Outreach and Retention (SOAR) Initiative.
- ✓ Implemented EEO, Diversity and Alternative Dispute Resolution dashboard.

Goal 2: An Inclusive Workplace

- ✓ Developed and implemented the Inclusion Index which was adopted by OPM for Gov't-wide use.
- ✓ Implemented centrally managed Reasonable Accommodations Program
- ✓ VA's per capita EEO formal complaints rate decreased from 0.75 (FY 2011) to 0.70 (FY 2016).
- ✓ VA's participation in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) increased from 58% in FY 2012 to 61% in FY 2016.
- ✓ Telework participation increased from 3.87% in FY 2012 to 7.30% in FY 2015.
- ✓ Launched new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Special Emphasis Program (SEP) and employee workgroup under auspices of VA Diversity & Inclusion Council.
- ✓ Added voluntary, confidential LGBT self-identification to VA All Employee Survey to identify potential barriers to full inclusion of the LGBT community.
- ✓ Enhanced EEO Technical Assistance Reviews to include on-site training and employee focus groups
- ✓ Delivered training on managing implicit bias and on reasonable accommodation to 100 participants in the 2016 Leadership VA Program

- ✓ Implemented the World Café Model to promote meaningful dialog and collaborative action planning; introduced the topic of race relations at several VA facilities as well as two other Federal agencies and a university. Rolled out the inaugural World Café event in the field on April 28, 2016 to the VBA St. Louis Records Management Center with outstanding positive results and feedback. Subsequently held other events in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver, Washington; and Detroit, Michigan.
- ✓ Convened regular meetings of the DIVAC and reported to the Secretary.
- ✓ The Secretary recognized the significant accomplishments of individuals and teams with his awards for excellence in diversity and inclusion.

Goal 3: Outstanding Public Service

- ✓ Issued the policy guidance on religious exercise and expression in VA facilities.
- ✓ Added new employee protections related to LGBT status and to workplace bullying in the VA's EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, and No FEAR Policy Statement; clarified Whistleblower rights and protections as well as the mandatory training requirement for managers and supervisors.
- ✓ Developed and implemented a new employee education program addressing Whistleblower Rights and Protection; produced the web-based training course for managers and supervisors; achieved U.S. Office of Special Counsel certification
- ✓ Created the Office of Accountability Review.
- ✓ Expanded training portfolio to include new on-line and face-to-face modules on cultural competency, unconscious bias and implicit association, generational diversity, LGBT awareness, and addressing incivility and bullying.
- ✓ Implemented new D&I performance element in all SES performance plans.
- ✓ Implemented a national Barrier Analysis training program.
- ✓ Renewed Memoranda of Understanding and strategic partnerships with six national affinity organizations, including the African American Federal Executive Association, Asian American Government Executives Network, Federally Employed Women, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and others.

VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2017-2020

Overview

Mission

The mission of the VA diversity and inclusion program is to grow a diverse workforce and cultivate an inclusive work environment, where employees are fully engaged and empowered to deliver the outstanding services to our Nation's Veterans, their families, and beneficiaries.

Vision

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.

Values

VA's diversity and inclusion program adheres to and advances the Department's core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (ICARE).

Goals

To fulfill the Mission and Vision, the VA will pursue the following strategic goals:

1. **A Diverse Workforce:** Grow a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects all segments of our society and values all aspects of our human diversity.
2. **An Inclusive and Engaged Organization:** Cultivate an inclusive work environment and create an engaged organization that leverages diversity and empowers all contributors.
3. **Outstanding Public Service:** Facilitate outstanding, responsive public service through principled leadership, shared accountability, and educated stakeholders.

Implementation

The following pages identify the objectives, strategies, and measures designed to achieve the aforementioned goals. Implementation of this Plan will be led by ODI and its counterparts in VA's Administrations and Staff Offices. Organizations with primary responsibility for specific strategies may be identified at the end of the strategy in parentheses. In cases where there are joint responsibilities, the responsible offices may not be specifically identified. The *VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* is a multi-

year effort, and changing conditions, including budget constraints, will impact implementation and may require adjustment to the timelines and performance targets.

Goal 1: A Diverse Workforce

Grow a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects all segments of our society and values all aspects of our human diversity.

The foundation to achieving workforce diversity and the advantages that it provides in the public sector is the assurance of equal employment opportunity (EEO) in the workplace, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, and other legally protected characteristics. Actions towards this end include comparing the demographic composition of the workforce to the demographic composition of the relevant labor market, removing barriers, conducting strategic outreach to communities and utilizing special hiring authorities for members of groups with less than expected participation rates. In a constrained fiscal environment, leaders also must look internally to enable, facilitate, and grow diversity, including diversity of thought and perspective from within. Achieving workforce diversity in the 21st century will involve established external strategies as well as new, unprecedented strategies aimed at attracting and empowering broader, emerging aspects of our human diversity.

Objective 1A: Eliminate barriers to EEO at all levels and in all occupations.

Strategies:

- Monitor the VA Diversity Index¹ regularly and update methodology as appropriate to keep leadership apprised of VA's workforce diversity status, relative to the Relevant/Civilian Labor Force (R/CLF) (ODI, NCA, VACO, VBA, and VHA).
- Identify barriers to EEO by Race, Color, Religion, Ethnicity, Gender, Disability status, Veteran status, in hiring, promotions, separations, and career development; and by grade levels and major occupations annually in accordance with EEOC Management Directive 715 (ODI, NCA, VACO, VBA, and VHA).
- Establish baseline metrics and a reporting system to enable VA offices to identify and eliminate any barriers present in the processes used to recruit or select groups with less than expected participation in the VA workforce.
- Establish baseline metrics and a reporting system to enable VA offices to identify and eliminate any barriers present in the processes used to recruit or select groups with less than expected participation in the Senior Executive Service (SES) workforce.
- Integrate applicant flow analyses of recruitment (including Senior Executive Service

¹ The VA Diversity Index is a new metric developed by VA ODI that measures VA's aggregate workforce composition by race, ethnicity, and gender as compared with the corresponding R/CLF.

and equivalent) and leadership development selection processes into automated platforms, e.g., HRSmart, VHA Support Service Center (VSSC), and report on results at least annually (ODI, OHRM, VHA).

- Enhance and increase utility of EEO, Diversity and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) dashboard providing monthly status of EEO, workforce diversity and ADR usage at facility level of detail (ORM, ODI).
- Promote use of staffing flexibilities and special hiring authorities (e.g., Veterans, Schedule A for people with disabilities, student internships, and fellowships) (ODI, OHRM).
- Update Guide to Conducting an EEO Compliant Recruitment Process (ODI, OHRM).
- Establish new hiring and on-board goals for people with targeted disabilities (VA-wide).
- Strengthen collaboration between hiring manager and HR Specialist; clarify roles and responsibilities (VA- wide).
- Improve candidate assessment strategies to get the best talent (OHRM, VA- wide).

Measures:

- Report VA Diversity Index in quarterly workforce diversity reports and in Monthly Performance Review/HRStat to gauge aggregate workforce diversity in VA.
- Deliver timely, accurate quarterly workforce diversity analysis reports to leadership and annual reports to external agencies (EEOC Management Directive 715 Report; diversity reports to OPM) as appropriate.
- Integrate applicant flow analysis system into VSSC MD 715 application system by end of FY 2017.
- Increase participation of groups with low participation rates in recruitment and leadership development applicant pools.
- Upgrade EEO, Diversity and Alternative Dispute Resolution dashboard and implement internal ODI dashboard/SharePoint site by end of FY 2017.
- Participate in a minimum of six national/local job fairs or events targeting outreach to groups with low participation rates.²
- Implement active engagement by supervisors/hiring managers with their human capital partners.

Objective 1B: Achieve diversity in the broadest context throughout the workforce.

Strategies:

- Expand and strengthen strategic partnerships with diverse affinity organizations, professional associations, and educational institutions to perform recruitment outreach focusing on promoting workforce diversity (e.g., Student Outreach and Recruitment (SOAR) program) (ODI, OHRM, VA-wide).

² Six outreach events by ODI and per Administration.

- Continue diversity-focused programs and initiatives to include the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP), Pathways Programs, and the Student Outreach and Recruitment Program (ODI, OHRM, and OESS).
- Implement system to identify and track WRP and NDIP interns in VA's human resources information system (OHRM)
- 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 (VA-wide).
- Continue collaboration and participation on the Workforce Planning Steering Committee (ODI, OHRM, Administrations and Staff Offices).
- Explore the inclusion of LGBT voluntary self-identification in VA's personnel data collection forms in both applicant flow and on-boarding processes.

Measures:

- Sponsor 20 WRP interns and 100 NDIP interns annually, budget permitting.
- Convert 50% of WRP interns to career full-time equivalent positions annually.
- Increase on-board representation of Veterans to 35 percent of the workforce by FY 2018.
- Increase participation in Veteran outreach events targeting demographic groups with low participation rates.
- Improve retention of individuals with targeted disabilities.
- Work with DIVAC, OMB, OPM and other Federal stakeholders to identify legal considerations in implementing voluntary self-identification of LGBT status in recruitment and on-board data collection (ODI).

Goal 2: An Inclusive and Engaged Organization

Cultivate an inclusive work environment and create an engaged organization that leverages diversity and empowers all contributors.

In order to reap the performance benefits of workforce diversity, work environments must be purposefully designed to enable diverse perspectives to be heard and empower all participants to contribute to the mission. This requires deliberate efforts to proactively include individuals in the work through robust, transparent communications; psychological safety; participatory work processes; cross-functional work experiences; and employee engagement at all levels. These are more than retention strategies; they are strategies that empower our human resources to contribute to their fullest potential so that they may advance the VA mission.

Objective 2A: Leverage workforce diversity and empower diverse perspectives throughout the organization through employee and leadership development.

Strategies:

- Develop workforce succession plans addressing barriers to EEO and diversity; analyze attrition and participation rates in leadership ranks by REG and develop appropriate outreach and corrective strategies (VA-wide).
- Modify existing electronic employee exit survey to include questions focused on diversity and inclusion issues (OHRM, ODI).
- Aggressively promote and communicate leadership development and mentoring programs to all eligible employees (Aspiring Leaders, Leadership VA, SES Candidate Development Program, Technical Career Field programs) (VA-wide).
- Perform applicant flow/adverse impact analyses of leadership development application and selection processes to identify barriers to leadership development (ODI, VALU, and Administration Learning Officers).
- Track training and development participation rates by REG in VA Talent Management System (TMS) (VALU, OHRM, and ODI).
- Support for broad participation in inter-office/inter-agency details and rotations including Inter-governmental Personnel Act Mobility Program and Presidential Management Council Rotation programs (VA-wide).
- Incorporate diversity and inclusion themes in the curricula of all leadership development programs, including cognitive diversity (ODI, VALU, CSEMO, VHA, VBA, and NCA).

Measures

- Reduce “regrettable losses” (non-retirement voluntary separations/resignations) by 10 percent of current baseline for groups with higher than expected attrition rates by end of 2020. (Baseline: FY 2016)

- Increase diversity in leadership development and mentoring program applicant pools.
- Track training, employee development, and leadership development participation rates by REG and disability status in TMS replacement system by end of FY 2018.

Objective 2B: Cultivate a flexible, collaborative, and inclusive organizational culture that gives voice to all employees.

Strategies:

- Monitor VA IQ³ to gauge organizational inclusion in VA (ODI).
- Administer and support participation in Diversity & Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) and its activities/initiatives.
- Perform organizational climate assessments in organizations experiencing high workplace conflict/per capita complaints/employee grievances (ORM, OHRM, and LMR).
- Support participation in special emphasis programs (SEPs), employee affinity and resource groups; expand SEPs to focus on new, emerging aspects of diversity (multigenerational; LGBT; religious, etc.) (VA-wide).
- Employ Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) initiatives in organizations experiencing high workplace conflict/per capita complaints (VA-wide).
- Integrate program services of the Office of Labor Management Relations (OLMR) that focus on fostering effective labor-management relationships. Additionally to collaborate with OLMR and support implementation of action plans produced during World Café dialogue or similar employee engagement sessions. (ODI, LMR)
- Implement World Café employee dialogue sessions in VA facilities upon request and as needed to address specific, cultural, diversity and inclusion, and employee engagement topics and encourage Union participation with all World Café dialogues
- Implement work/life flexibilities (wellness, telework, flexible work schedules) as appropriate (VA-wide).
- Support and participate in ADR processes and promote effective labor/management collaborations (VA-wide).
- Track and establish a baseline for VA-wide employee grievances in VA (LMR, OHRM).
- Enhance the Reasonable Accommodation Compliance System used for monitoring and tracking reasonable accommodation requests (ODI).
- Ensure 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 (EIT) (OIT, ODI, VHA, VBA, NCA).

³ The VA IQ is an index initially developed by ODI to measure organizational inclusion based on employee responses to select survey items related to inclusion in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. ODI later partnered with NCOD and OPM to refine the index and it was ultimately adopted by OPM for government-wide use and rebranded as the “New IQ.”

- Conduct EEO program technical assistance reviews in headquarters and field organizations (ODI, VHA, VBA, and NCA).

Measures:

- Increase VA IQ in annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, by 3 points by FY 2020.
- Conduct quarterly DIVAC meetings and report to the Secretary
- Administer the Secretary's annual Diversity & Inclusion Excellence Awards program
- Implement six World Café events per year VA-wide; develop train the trainer program by 2018.
- Enhance standardized electronic employee exit survey to include questions on diversity and inclusion and engagement by 2018.
- Increase work/life initiatives and telework usage for suitable positions by 10 percent above current baseline by end of FY 2020.
- Increase resolution rate (formal and informal) and ADR participation rate by FY 2020.
- Reduce per capita formal EEO complaints to below the government average by end of FY 2020.
- Reduce per capita grievances by five percent below current baseline by end of FY 2020.
- Increase usage of wellness and telework programs by five percent above current baseline by end of FY 2020.
- Conduct a minimum of six technical assistance reviews annually.
- Process 90 percent of reasonable accommodation requests in accordance with established timelines as outlined in VA Handbook 5975.1 by end of FY 2020.
- Perform compliance review of physical, EIT, and program accessibility standards in VA Administrations in collaboration with the Office of Information and Technology and Office of Acquisitions, Logistics, and Construction by end of FY 2020

Objective 2C: Create an organizational culture where all employees feel engaged and empowered.

Strategies

- Analyze the results of FEVS and VA's All Employee Survey; develop and implement action plans that build on strengths and address deficiencies in the organizational culture (VA-wide).
- Develop a VA-wide Employee Engagement (EE) Plan to promote and strengthen employee engagement throughout VA (ODI, EEC).
- Provide EE training, tools, and resources to promote EE at all levels across VA (ODI, EEC).

- Implement robust communications and information sharing regarding EE initiatives and improvements VA-wide, including monthly EE newsletter, EE blogs, all-stations memoranda, and VA-wide broadcasts (ODI, EEC, and EE Champions VA-wide).
- Maintain and enhance EE Leading Practices Website and Exchange
- Administer the VA Employee Engagement Council (EEC) and coordinate and support the VA-wide network of EE Champions VA (ODI, EEC).
- Develop EE Excellence Awards Program, under auspices of EEC.
- Develop a VA EE scorecard and conduct assessment and analysis of EE in VA (ODI, EEC).
- Employ Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) initiatives in organizations experiencing high workplace conflict/per capita complaints.

Measures:

- Increase Employee Engagement Index⁴ VA-wide by 3 points by FY 2020.
- Increase EI sub-factor scores for Leaders lead, Supervisors, and Intrinsic work experience.
- Implement responsive action plans addressing AES and FEVS employee survey results, annually.
- Implement EE scorecard by FY 2018.
- Issue monthly EE Newsletters and expand readership annually.
- Hold quarterly EE Council meetings and implement EE Excellence Award in 2018.

⁴ The Employee Engagement Index is a measure of employee engagement based on responses to select items in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Goal 3: *Outstanding Public Service*

Facilitate outstanding, responsive public service through principled leadership, shared accountability, and educated stakeholders.

The ultimate goal of having a diverse workforce and an inclusive and engaged work environment is to deliver better services to our customers (internal and external) and meet the needs of our stakeholders. The transformation of an organization's culture to this end requires a long-term commitment. Effective leadership and shared accountability are critical to sustaining this organization-wide commitment. The following strategies and objectives are aimed at facilitating and sustaining the effort to achieve the ultimate goal.

Objectives 3A: Provide outstanding, culturally competent services to Veterans, their families, and beneficiaries. (This objective is aligned with VA's Strategic Goal 1 to empower Veterans to improve their well-being.)

Strategies:

- Deliver cultural competency, unconscious bias/implicit association, diversity and inclusion training to the VA workforce, including training focused on Veteran, disability, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) issues, generational issues, and other emerging diversity and inclusion issues (ODI, VALU, Administrations).
- Support implementation of patient-centered care (VHA).
- Promote use of Small, Disadvantaged, Veteran-owned businesses (OSDBU).
- Monitor customer service surveys and indicators and take action as appropriate (Staff Offices, VHA, VBA, NCA).
- Target outreach to Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, American Indian, and other indigenous/rural populations that historically do not avail themselves of VA services (VA-wide).

Measures:

- Establish baseline of employees completing cultural competency/diversity and inclusion training utilizing TMS by end of FY 2017.
- Increase VA scores that fall below industry standards on customer satisfaction index in all populations annually.
- Increase timeliness in approval/certification of Veteran-owned businesses annually.
- Meet or exceed OSDBU socioeconomic procurement goals annually.
- Increase culturally competent services to LGBT, Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, American Indian, and indigenous/rural populations.

Objectives 3B: Strengthen relations with diversity focused stakeholders.

Strategies:

Leverage, support, and coordinate with internal and external VA stakeholders, including but not limited to the following:

- African American Federal Executive Association
- American Indian Science and Engineering Society
- Asian American Government Executive Network
- Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies
- Blacks in Government
- Center for Minority Veterans
- Center for Women Veterans
- Department of Defense's Computer Assistance Program
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Labor's Workforce Recruitment Program
- Disabled American Veterans
- Disabled Veterans National Foundation
- Federal Asian Pacific American Council
- Federally Employed Women
- Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Employees Organization
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
- Hispanic Serving Health Professional schools
- Human Rights Campaign
- International Association of Latino Public Administration Executives
- International Leadership Foundation
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- Minority Access
- National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
- National Coalition for LGBT Health
- Office of Faith-based Initiatives
- Office of Health Equity
- Office of Rural Health
- Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization
- Office of Tribal Government Relations
- Organization of Chinese Americans
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- State Cemetery Grant Program
- The Washington Center
- VA Advisory committees
- Veteran Service Organizations
- Washington Internships for Native Students

- White House Initiatives on Diversity Issues (Women and Girls, Asian American Pacific Islander, etc.)

Measures:

- Increase participation in national/local outreach and partnership events involving stakeholder/affinity organizations to ten, budget permitting, by end of FY 2018
- Meet or exceed Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization goals in contracting activity annually.

Objectives 3C: Equip leaders with diversity and inclusion knowledge and skills to effectively lead their workforce and create a psychologically safe work environment.

Strategies:

- Implement ILEAD and Leaders Developing Leaders programs VA-wide (HRA, VHA, VALU)
- Implement updated mandatory EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, and Conflict Management Training for all Executives, Managers, and Supervisors (ODI, ORM, and VALU).
- Provide updated mandatory biennial Whistleblower Protection and No FEAR training for all managers and supervisors.
- Deliver *Inclusion Paradigm* training to senior leadership at Senior Executive Service (SES) forums, leadership development sessions, and leadership briefings at Technical Assistance Reviews and other VA leadership venues.

Measures:

- Implement updated mandatory EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, and Conflict Management Training for Executives, Managers, and Supervisors by end of FY 2018; achieve 98% completion rate biennially.
- Implement updated mandatory biennial Whistleblower Protection and No FEAR training for all employees by FY 2018 and achieve 98% training completion rate biennially.
- Increase overall ADR participation rate to 60 percent and resolution rate of informal EEO complaint rate to 50 percent by end of FY 2018.

Objective 3D: Institutionalize shared leadership and accountability for a culture of diversity and inclusion.

Strategies:

- Issue a *VA Diversity and Inclusion Annual Performance Report* reporting progress made on the *VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* (ODI).

- Issue annual VA-wide diversity and inclusion policy directives and statements issued by the VA Secretary (ODI).
- Implement and monitor mandatory EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, ADR performance standards in all leadership (SES and Title 38 equivalents) and supervisory performance plans (ORM, ODI, CSEMO, and OHRM).
- Implement standardized VA-wide diversity and inclusion performance elements and standards in all employee performance plans (ORM, ODI, CSEMO, OHRM).
- Provide updated EEO, Workplace Harassment training for all employees (ODI, ORM, and VALU).
- Conduct Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) meetings to address VA-wide EEO, diversity and inclusion matters impacting VA (ODI).
- Promote participation in Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and in the Secretary's Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program (ODI, ORM, VHA, VBA, and NCA).
- Incorporate broad-based diversity and inclusion content in agency branding and communication strategies (media outreach, public awards, various communications tools and vehicles, strategic communications, Web sites) (ODI, OPIA, OHRM).

Measures:

- Issue timely and accurate *VA Diversity and Inclusion Biennial Performance Report* reporting progress made on *VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan*.
- Implement on-line EEO, diversity, and ADR dashboard to report subject metrics, including VA Diversity and Inclusion Indices, to VA leadership, by end of FY 2017.
- Update VA Directive 5975 (EEO and diversity management) and all related handbooks by end of FY 2018
- Issue timely annual EEO and diversity policy statements by the VA Secretary.
- Report on VA EEO, diversity and inclusion, ADR leadership performance standards annually through performance review process.
- Maintain standardized VA-wide diversity and inclusion performance elements and standards in all employee performance plans
- Conduct quarterly DIVAC meetings and issue biennial DIVAC Report to the Secretary of VA.
- Increase nominations for Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and the Secretary's Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program.
- Increase dissemination and readership of the *Diversity@Work newsletter*, *NewsLink*, *Diversity News* broadcasts, and other diversity and inclusion communications annually.
- Maintain updated content on the VA diversity and inclusion Web site (<https://www.diversity.va.gov>) annually.

Applicable Laws (Not exhaustive)

- Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended – prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin; the law also makes it illegal to retaliate against an individual because he/she complained about discrimination, filed a complaint, or participated in an employment discrimination investigation or lawsuit;
- Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended – prohibits employment discrimination against individuals 40 years of age or older;
- Equal Pay Act of 1963, as amended – prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in compensation for substantially equal work performed under similar working conditions;
- Sections 501, 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended – prohibits employment discrimination and reprisal against people with disabilities in the Federal government or applicants for Federal employment; Section 501 requires reasonable accommodation for known disabilities; Section 504 requires that all Federal programs be accessible; and Section 508 requires that all electronic technology be accessible;
- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 – prohibits employers from discriminating against workers based on pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions. It affects only companies that employ 15 or more people. The EEOC enforces the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978.
- Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA) – prohibits genetic information discrimination in employment. Under Title II of GINA, it is illegal to discriminate against employees or applicants because of genetic information. Title II of GINA prohibits the use of genetic information in making employment decisions, restricts employment decisions, restricts employers and other entities covered by Title II (employment agencies, labor organizations and joint labor-management training and apprenticeship programs – referred to as “covered entities”) from requesting, requiring or purchasing genetic information, and strictly limits the disclosure of genetic information.
- Title V, United States Code Section 2301 – provides that recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources from all segments of society; selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of merit, after fair and open competition so that all receive equal opportunity; and fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or

handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights;

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Title 1, and ADA Amendments Act of 2008 – revises the definition of “disability” to more broadly encompass impairments that substantially limit a major life activity. The amended language also states that mitigating measures, including assistive devices, auxiliary aids, accommodations, medical therapies and supplies (other than eyeglasses and contact lenses) have no bearing in determining whether a disability qualifies under the law. Changes also clarify coverage of impairments that are episodic or in remission that substantially limit a major life activity when active, such as epilepsy or post-traumatic stress disorder. The amendments took effect January 1, 2009.

Merit System Principles (5 USC § 2301)

1. Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a work force from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity.
2. All employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights.
3. Equal pay should be provided for work of equal value, with appropriate consideration of both national and local rates paid by employers in the private sector, and appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance.
4. All employees should maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.
5. The Federal work force should be used efficiently and effectively.
6. Employees should be retained on the basis of adequacy of their performance, inadequate performance should be corrected, and employees should be separated who cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards.
7. Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance.
8. Employees should be--

- a. protected against arbitrary action, personal favoritism, or coercion for partisan political purposes, and
 - b. prohibited from using their official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for election.
9. Employees should be protected against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information which the employees reasonably believe evidences--
- a. a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or
 - b. mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an absence of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

For more information,
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