



United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
**Diversity and Inclusion  
Strategic Plan**  
Fiscal Years 2021-2022

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## ORGANIZATIONAL ACRONYMS

Center for Minority Veterans	CMV
Center for Women Veterans	CWV
Corporate Senior Executive Management Office	CSEMO
Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council	DIVAC
Employee Engagement Council	EEC
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	EEOC
Employee Education 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 Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion	ORMDI
Office of Employment Discrimination Compliant Adjudication	OEDCA
Office of General Counsel	OGC
Office of Chief Human Capital Officer	OCHCO
Office of Information and Technology	OIT
Office of Labor Management Relations	LMR
Office of Management and Budget	OMB
Office of Personnel Management	OPM
Office of Policy and Planning	OPP
Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs	OPIA
Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization	OSDBU
Talent Management System 2.0	TMS2
VA Central Office	VACO
Veteran Employment Services Office	VESO
Veterans Benefits Administration	VBA
Veterans Health Administration	VHA

## FORWARD

Over two decades ago, VA initiated a new conversation about diversity and inclusion in the public sector. Informed by a growing body of research, VA proffered a transformative paradigm that linked diversity and inclusion to organizational performance. This new paradigm was based on the proposition that equal employment opportunity (EEO) was more than a legal mandate; it was a business imperative. It emphasized 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 it is just one step towards creating a high-performing organization in the 21st century.

### ***The Business Case for Diversity***

Diversity is one of the defining strengths of America and the diversity of our workforce is one of our greatest strengths in accomplishing the Department's missions. Diversity fosters innovative solutions to some of our most challenging issues and enhances decision making by providing a broader range of perspectives and interpretations. We must continue to focus on creating a culture of inclusion that values each individual so you can reach your full potential and feel engaged.

A diverse and inclusive culture is strongly linked to VA's core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (I CARE). This strategic plan outlines our accomplishments while also providing the foundation for VA to build on to continue to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

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 seismic demographic shifts in our population, class action lawsuits, and the 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; McKinsey & Associates, 2015; Turban, Wu, & Zhang, 2019).

Though not driven by market share, the public sector can also benefit from the performance advantages that an inclusive and diverse workforce has to offer. In February 2020, United States Census Bureau issued a demographic projection for

2020-2060 and it projects that by 2045, our Nation will no longer be characterized by a single demographic majority; foreign-born individuals along with people of color will constitute the majority of our population (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2020). To remain relevant, agencies must reflect the growing diversity of the communities they serve. Similarly, the Veteran population we serve 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 and inclusive workforce that can provide world-class services and benefits to all our Nations Veterans.

### ***The Inclusion Imperative***

An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are and for their contributions toward organizational goals.

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 this research 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.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines inclusion as a culture that connects each employee to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organizations that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential. To achieve inclusion, agencies must look internally at their organizational cultures and replace institutional processes that impede optimum participation by employees with the drivers of inclusion which include fairness (equal opportunity), openness (transparent communications and information sharing), cooperativeness, supportiveness (integration of differences), and empowerment (autonomy).

### ***Employee Engagement***

In VA's 2018-2024 Strategic Plan, Management Objective 4.2, the Department recognizes "that the ability to deliver world-class customer experience is strongly

dependent on high levels of employee engagement” by empowering and enabling a diverse workforce.

Most recently, the concept of employee engagement (EE) in the Federal 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 EE 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 is 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 viewed as a necessary antecedent of employee engagement; before you can *engage*, you must first *include*.

### ***Way Forward***

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, how we think, and how we communicate that makes diversity such a potent factor in organizational performance and employee engagement. We power inclusion by creating a diverse workforce that also has a voice in creating a diverse and engaged workforce in serving and caring for our Nation’s diverse Veterans. ORMDI is privileged to lead the effort to promote diversity, inclusion, and engagement in collaboration with all our partners and stakeholders across VA. We do so under the guiding principles of our I CARE values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. We proudly present the VA’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2021-2022.

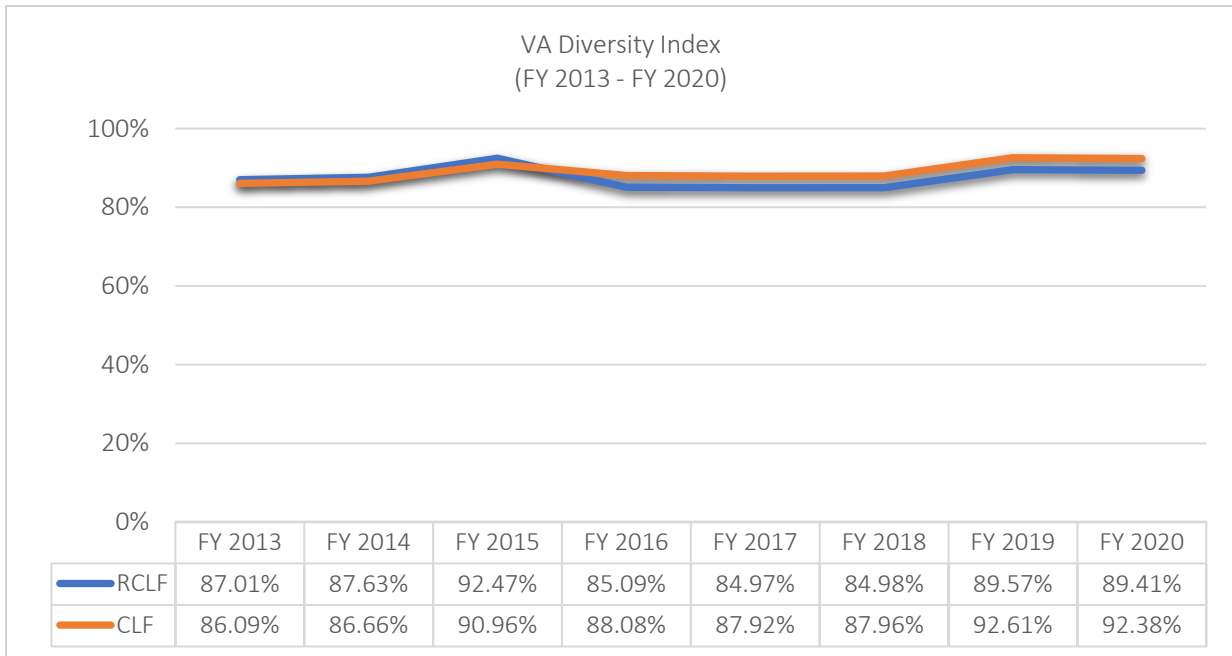
**Harvey Johnson**  
***Deputy Assistant Secretary***  
***Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion***

## THE CURRENT STATE OF VA

As VA continues to transform, it is increasingly important that we have the tools necessary to measure the impact of our efforts on our changing culture. To that end, ORMDI employs an innovative metric to gauge progress in this area: the Diversity Index (DI). The DI provides leadership with an efficient snapshot of VA’s diversity profile.

### **Diversity Index**

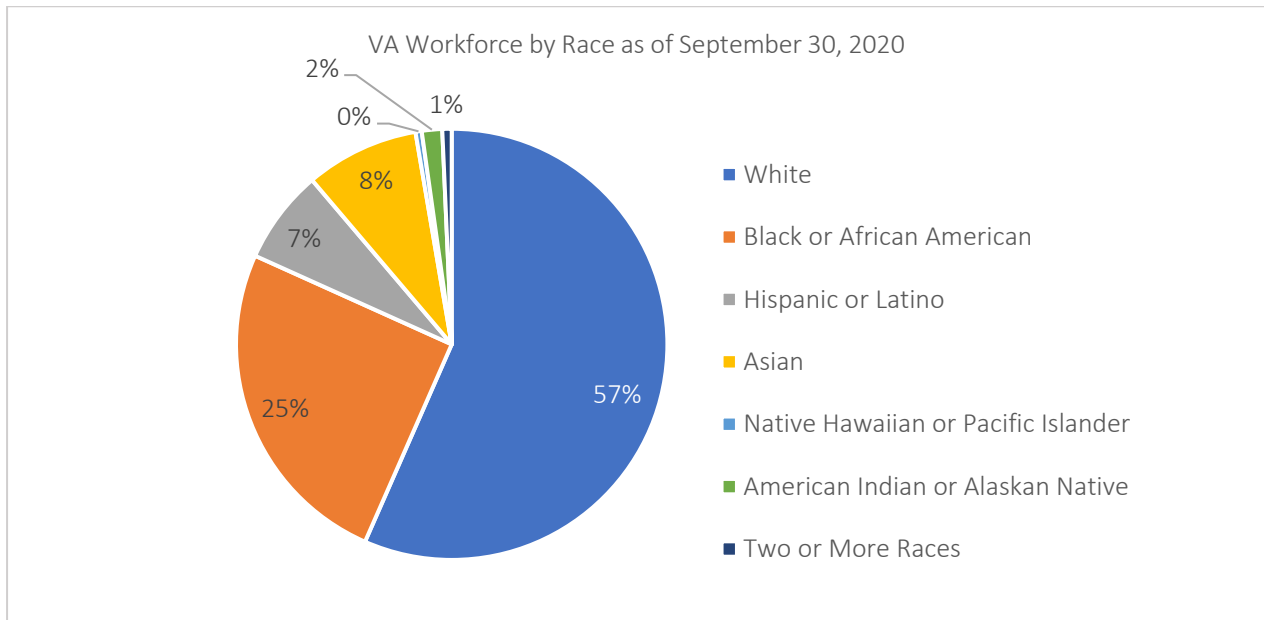
VA’s DI measures the convergence of an organization’s aggregate workforce representation by race, ethnicity, and gender (REG) to the Civilian labor Force (CLF) or Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF), as applicable. Specifically, the Index is calculated as the mean ratio of VA’s incumbent workforce by REG to the corresponding group in the R/CLF, capped at 100% to avoid skewing for overrepresentation of one or more demographic dimension. The result is a score between 0 and 100%, reflecting an organization’s overall diversity relative to the referenced benchmark. This method provides an appropriate and efficient metric to gauge Federal workforce diversity. VA’s DI for fiscal year (FY) 2013 through FY 2020 is provided below.



Source: VSSC MD-715 Table C1

## Workforce Diversity<sup>1</sup>

ORMDI provides a variety of analyses of workforce diversity on a regular basis. At the end of FY 2020, VA's workforce totaled 420,690 employees, including 24,218 temporary employees.

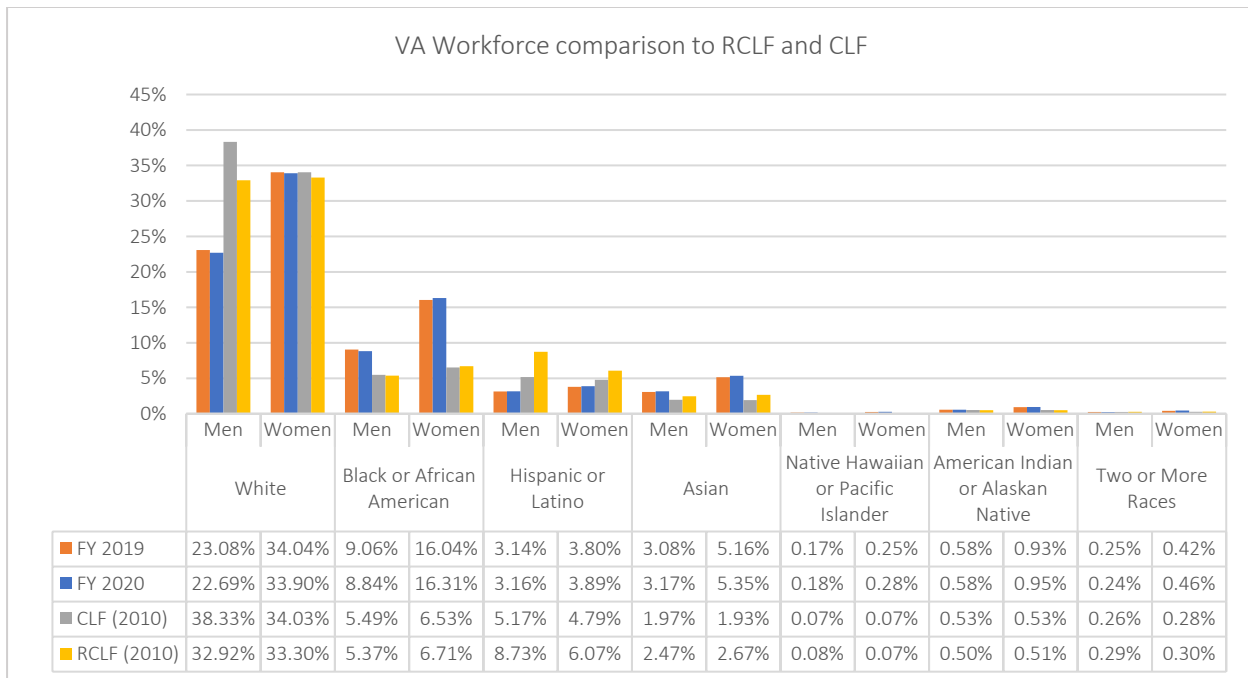


Source: MD-715 Table A1

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requires that Federal agencies compare their workforce composition by REG with corresponding groups in the CLF or 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 to the CLF and RCLF for FY 2019 and FY 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes non pay status employees, medical and Manila residents.





Source: VSSC MD-715 Table A1

### Individuals with Disabilities

To comply with Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, EEOC published new regulations establishing two goals: 12% of agencies workforce be individuals with disabilities (IWD) and 2% individuals with targeted disabilities (IWTD)<sup>2</sup>. In FY 2020, VA exceeded both goals. IWDs represented 12.65% of VA’s workforce (permanent and temporary) and IWTDs represented 2.42%.

These same goals also apply to both lower and higher levels of employment (GS-1 through GS-10 and GS-11 through SES, respectively) in the permanent workforce. At the higher levels of employment VA fell below both goals.

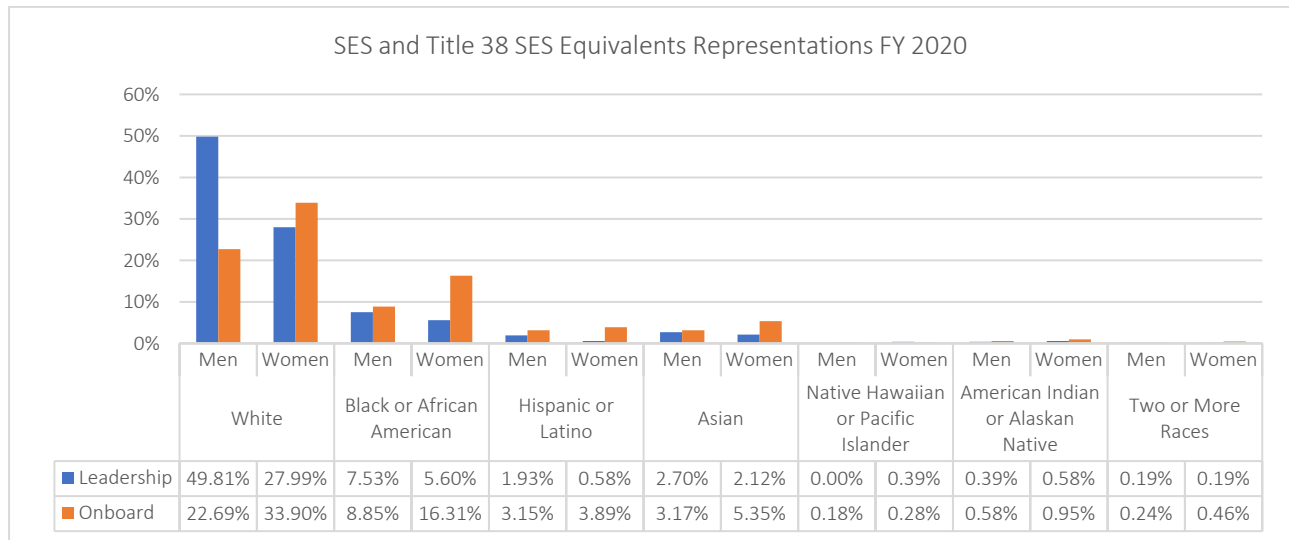
VA’s Grade Grouping by Disability Status

	Disability	Targeted Disability
GS-1 to GS-10	16.64%	3.55%
GS-11 to SES	9.75%	1.41%

<sup>2</sup> Targeted Disability - Disabilities targeted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for special emphasis in the affirmative action program including developmental disability, traumatic brain injury, deafness, blindness, missing extremities, significant mobility impairment, partial or total paralysis, epilepsy, severe intellectual disability, psychiatric disability, dwarfism and significant disfigurement.

## Senior Executive Representation

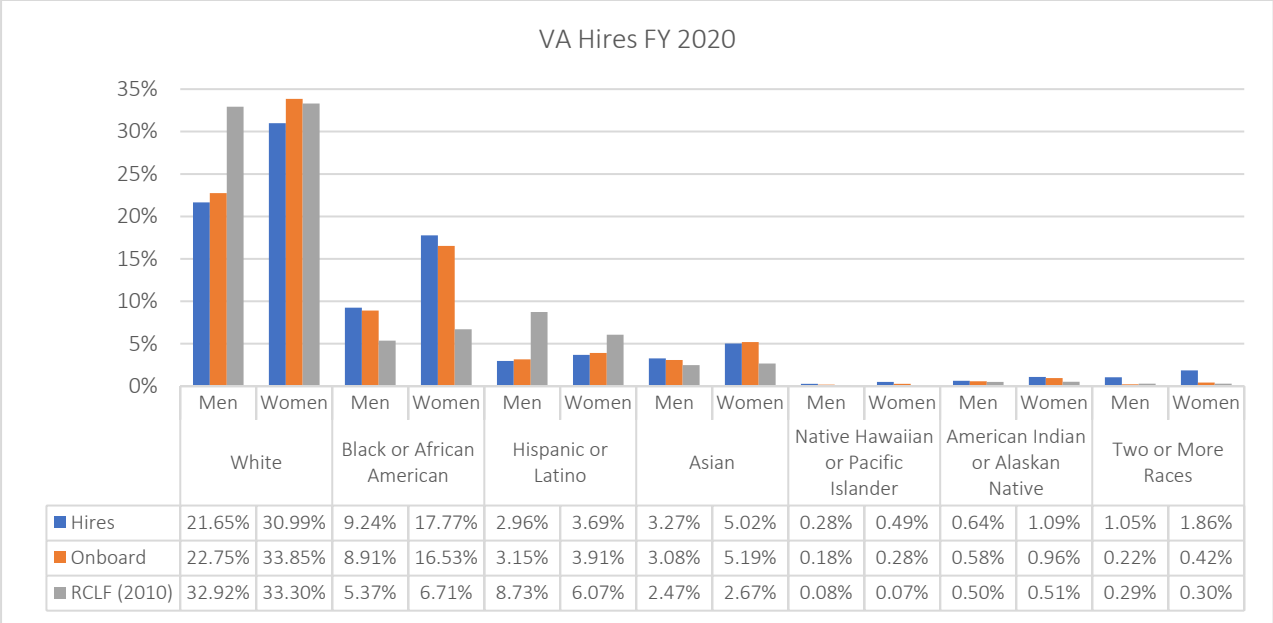
As of September 30, 2020, the Senior Executive Service (SES) and Title 38 SES Equivalent population in VA was 494 (permanent and temporary). The graph below provides the representation of the SES and Title 38 SES Equivalent population by REG. The representation of the entire VA workforce is included in the graph for comparative purposes.



Source: HR Smart and MD-715 Table A1; Leadership includes SES and Title 38 equivalents; Onboard excludes temporary employees

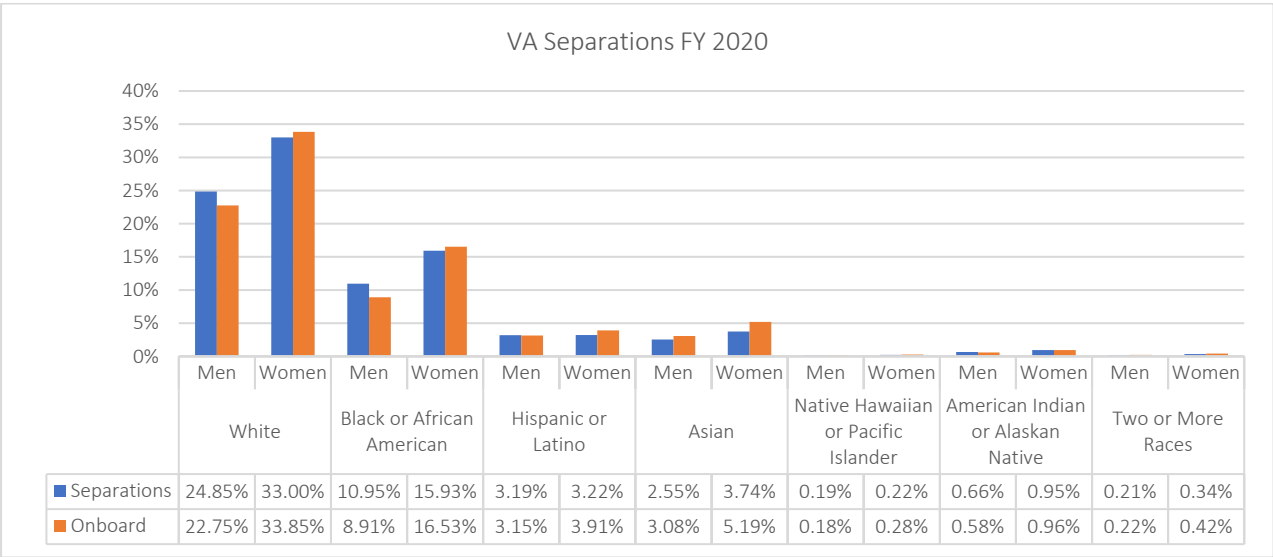
## Hires and Losses

The graphs below provide data on hires and losses (permanent and temporary workforce) by REG, and a comparison of hires and losses with onboard percentages. During FY 2020, VA hired Hispanic males and females and White males and females at a rate less than their representation in the RCLF.



Source: MD-715 Table A1

At the end of FY 2020, Hispanic, White, Black, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Two or More Races males had high separation rates compared to the permanent workforce.



Source: MD-715 Table A1

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 2017-2020 VA DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN**

The following summarizes the major accomplishments made pursuant to the FY 2017 through FY 2020 Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Goals:

### ***Goal 1: A Diverse Workforce***

- VA's DI (CLF-based) increased from 87.92 percent in FY 2017 to 92.38 percent in FY 2020;
- VA's DI (RCLF-based) increased from 84.97 percent in FY 2017 to 89.41 percent in FY 2020;
- Percentage of workforce with targeted disabilities in GS-11 through SES equivalent grades increased from 1.35 percent to 1.41 percent;
- 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;
- In accordance with Executive Order 13779 the White Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, VA submitted its FY 21-22 Historically Black Colleges and Universities Agency Plan. In addition, VA's Acquisition Academy executed a Memorandum of Understanding with Alabama State University;
- 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; and
- Implemented EEO, Diversity and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) dashboard.

### ***Goal 2: An Inclusive Workplace***

- Implemented centrally managed Reasonable Accommodations Program;
- VA's per capita EEO formal complaints rate decreased from 0.71 (FY 2018) to 0.67 (FY 2020);
- VA's participation in ADR increased from 52 percent in FY 2018 to 54 percent in FY 2020;
- Continue to support VA's Special Observance programs to bring diverse and cultural awareness to the workplace;

- Launched new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Special Emphasis Program (SEP) and employee workgroup under auspices of VA Diversity & Inclusion Council;
- Modified the exit survey to include questions on discrimination, harassment, and disability status;
- 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 (TARs) to include on-site training and employee focus groups; invented the TAR Compliance Assessment Scorecard, an instrument that includes information on strengths, challenges, and recommendations for facilities' use towards attainment of model EEO program status;
- Began development of a Virtual Technical Assistance Reviews (V-TARs) to continue to assist facilities in striving to attain a model EEO program;
- Delivered training on managing implicit bias and on reasonable accommodation to 210 participants in the 2017 through 2019 Leadership VA Programs;
- Convened regular meetings of the DIVAC and reported to the Secretary; and
- The Secretary recognized the significant accomplishments of individuals and teams with his awards for excellence in diversity and inclusion as well as for alternative dispute resolution.

### ***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 (D&I), 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 and Whistleblower Protection (OAWP);
- 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;
- Continue to partner with VA's five national affinity organizations, including Blacks In Government, the African American Federal Executive Association, Asian American Government Executives Network, Federally Employed Women, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and others;

- Additionally, established partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with institutions of higher learning to include Valencia College, Florida International University, and Alabama State University. Such partnerships can enhance VA's capabilities to attract a diverse and talented pool of applicants for a myriad of career opportunities;
- Worked with the VHA Office of Academic Affiliations to encourage relationships between VA medical facilities and HBCUs and Minority Serving Institutions to attract a diverse and talented pool of applicants in the health professions;
- Met with representatives from Apple, Inc. to share diversity and inclusion programs as well as share information on how to attract Veterans for jobs at Apple;
- Published regular issues of VA's *Diversity@Work* newsletter, VA's primary communications vehicle for D&I currently distributed to over 10,000 internal subscribers including hundreds of members of VA's Senior Executive Service and Title 38 Executives as well as stakeholders VA-wide and beyond; and
- Maintained [D&I content on the VA website](https://www.diversity.va.gov) (<https://www.diversity.va.gov> and now [https://www.va.gov/ORMDI/Diversity\\_Inclusion.asp](https://www.va.gov/ORMDI/Diversity_Inclusion.asp)).

# VA DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FY 2021-2022

## 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 (I CARE).

## Goals

To fulfill the Mission and Vision, 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 ORMDI 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 Index 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) (ORMDI, NCA, VACO, VBA, and VHA).
- Establish a Barrier Analysis Workgroup under the Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) to identify barriers to EEO annually in accordance with EEOC Management Directive 715 (ORMDI, NCA, VACO, VBA, and VHA).
- Integrate applicant flow data into database platforms and report on results at least annually (ORMDI).
- 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 (ORMDI).
- Promote use of staffing flexibilities and special hiring authorities (e.g., Veterans, Schedule A for people with disabilities, student internships, and fellowships) (ORMDI, OCHCO).
- Update Guide to Conducting an EEO Compliant Recruitment Process (ORMDI, OCHCO).
- Strengthen collaboration between hiring managers and HR Specialists; clarify roles and responsibilities (VA- wide).
- Improve candidate assessment strategies to get the best talent (OCHCO, VA-wide).



**Measures:**

- Report VA Diversity Index to leadership quarterly to gauge aggregate workforce diversity in VA.
- Deliver timely and accurate annual reports to external agencies (EEOC Management Directive 715 Report; diversity reports to OPM) as appropriate.
- Integrate applicant flow data into database platforms by the end of FY 2021 and report on results at least annually.
- Identify and investigate barriers to EEO by the end of FY2021.
- 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 ORMDI dashboard/SharePoint site by end of FY 2021.
- Participate in a minimum of six national/local job fairs or events targeting outreach to groups with low participation rates.
- 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) (ORMDI, OCHCO, VA-wide). 2 Conduct outreach events by ORMDI 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 (ORMDI, OCHCO, and OESS).
- Implement system to identify and track WRP and NDIP interns in VA's human resources information system (OCHCO).
- 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 (ORMDI, OCHCO, 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 10 WRP interns and 25 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 2022.
- 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 (ORMDI).

## **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).
- 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 programs' application and selection processes to identify barriers to leadership development (ORMDI, CLO, and Administration Learning Officers).
- 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 (ORMDI, OCHCO, CLO, 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 2022. (Baseline: FY 2016)
- Increase diversity in leadership development and mentoring program applicant pools.

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

**Strategies:**

- Partner with internal stakeholders to measure inclusion throughout VA.
- 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, OCHCO, 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).
- Integrate program services of the Office of Labor Management Relations (LMR) that focus on fostering effective labor-management relationships.
- 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, OCHCO).
- Developing a Reasonable Accommodation Management System used for monitoring and tracking reasonable accommodation requests (ORMDI).
- 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, ORMDI, VHA, VBA, NCA).
- Conduct EEO program technical assistance reviews in headquarters and field organizations (ORMDI, VHA, VBA, and NCA).

**Measures:**

- Develop and implement a way to measure inclusion throughout VA.
- Conduct quarterly DIVAC meetings and report to the Secretary.
- Administer the Secretary's annual Diversity & Inclusion Excellence Awards program.
- Increase resolution rate (formal and informal) and ADR participation rate by FY 2022.
- Reduce per capita formal EEO complaints to below the government average by end of FY 2022.

- Reduce per capita grievances by five percent below current baseline by end of FY 2022.
- 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 2022.
- 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 2022.

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

**Strategies:**

- Analyze the results of VA's All Employee Survey; develop and implement action plans that build on strengths and address deficiencies in the organizational culture (VA-wide).
- Employ Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) initiatives in organizations experiencing high workplace conflict/per capita complaints.

**Measures:**

- Implement responsive action plans addressing AES survey results, annually.
- Implement EE scorecard by FY 2022.
- Issue monthly EE Newsletters and expand readership annually.

### **Goal 3: *Outstanding Public Service***

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

The ultimate goal of having an engaged diverse workforce and an inclusive 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.

#### **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 (ORMDI, 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 diversity and inclusion training utilizing TMS by end of FY 2022.
- 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
- Blacks in Government
- Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives
- 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
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Special Emphasis Group
- 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
- National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
- National Coalition for LGBT Health
- National VA Chaplain Service
- Office of Health Equity
- Office of Rural Health
- Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization
- Office of Tribal Government Relations
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Society of American Indian Government Employees
- State Cemetery Grant Program
- HN Consulting LLC - The Washington Center
- VA Advisory committees
- Veteran Service Organizations
- White House Initiatives on Diversity Issues

**Measures:**

- Increase participation in national/local outreach and partnership events involving stakeholder/affinity organizations to as many virtual events as budget permits, by end of FY 2022.
- 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 updated mandatory EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, and Conflict Management Training for all Executives, Managers, and Supervisors (ORMDI).
- 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 2022; achieve 98% completion rate biennially.
- Implement updated mandatory biennial Whistleblower Protection and No FEAR training for all employees by FY 2022 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 2022.

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

**Strategies:**

- Issue annual VA-wide diversity and inclusion policy directives and statements issued by the VA Secretary (ORMDI).
- Implement and monitor mandatory EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, ADR performance standards in all leadership (SES and Title 38 equivalents) and supervisory performance plans (ORMDI, CSEMO, and OCHCO).
- Implement standardized VA-wide diversity and inclusion performance elements and standards in all employee performance plans (ORMDI, CSEMO, OCHCO).



- Provide updated EEO, Workplace Harassment training for all employees (ORMDI and EES/TMS).
- Conduct Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) meetings to address VA-wide EEO, diversity and inclusion matters impacting VA (ORMDI).
- Promote participation in Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and in the Secretary's Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program (ORMDI, 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) (ORMDI, OPIA, OCHCO).

### **Measures:**

- 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 2023.
- Update VA Directive 5975 (EEO and diversity management) and all related handbooks by end of FY 2022.
- 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.
- Increase nominations for Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards Program and the Secretary's Alternative Dispute Resolution Excellence Awards Program.
- Maintain subscription list for and dissemination of the *Diversity@Work* newsletter and other diversity and inclusion communications.
- Maintain D&I content on the [VA diversity and inclusion section of the ORMDI website](https://www.va.gov/ORMDI/Diversity_Inclusion.asp) ([https://www.va.gov/ORMDI/Diversity\\_Inclusion.asp](https://www.va.gov/ORMDI/Diversity_Inclusion.asp)).

## APPENDIX I: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Bias:** A prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that is considered unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences. Types of bias: Affinity Bias, Confirmation Bias, Bandwagon Effect, and Attractiveness Bias.

**Barrier Analysis:** An investigation of the any triggers indicating that workplace policies, procedures, or practices are having a negative impact on one or more protected EEO groups, with an eye toward identifying the root causes of those anomalies so that they can be addressed and eliminated, if possible.

**Civilian Labor Force (CLF):** consists of all U.S. citizens 16 years of age and over, excluding those in the Armed Forces, who are employed or unemployed and seeking employment in all U.S. occupations. The CLF does not include Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories.

**Culture:** The way we learn to interpret, give meaning to, and function in the world based on the shared values, beliefs, history, transitions, standards, language, behavioral norms, communication styles, etc. of the communities with which we primarily identify.

**Customer Satisfaction Index:** A versatile analytical tool for measuring customer satisfaction with a product, service or company.

**Disability:** Disability means, with respect to an individual: (i) A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (ii) A record of such an impairment; or (iii) Being regarded as having such an impairment.

**Discrimination:** Treating a person or a group of people less favorably. Federal law prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including gender identity, transgender status, sexual orientation and pregnancy), age (40 or older), disability, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation or retaliation for opposing discriminatory practices or participating in the discrimination-complaint process.

**DIVAC:** An independent executive level body that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on areas related to diversity and inclusion (D&I). The Council comprises representatives from each of the Department's major organizations, staff offices, and stakeholders. It serves as communication link between the workforce, subcomponent organizations, and VA leadership and also as a clearinghouse on D&I issues.

**Diversity:** Workforce diversity is characterized by all that makes us unique, including but not limited to race, color, national origin, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability status, age and mutable characteristics such as educational background, socioeconomic status, organizational level, geographic region and cognitive/intellectual perspective.

**Diversity Index:** Measures the convergence of the workforce by race, ethnicity, and gender relative to CLF/RCLF. In other words, it measures how diverse the workforce is in relationship to the CLF/RCLF. An index of 100 percent means the workforce is fully diverse.

**EEOC:** [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#). The EEOC is the federal agency that enforces the federal laws that prohibit employment discrimination based on [race](#), [color](#), [religion](#), [sex](#) (including [pregnancy](#), [sexual orientation](#), or [gender identity](#)), [national origin](#), [disability](#), [age](#) (40 years old or older) and [genetic information](#) (including family medical history). The laws enforced by the EEOC also prohibit [retaliation](#). The EEOC is a [bipartisan Commission](#) led by five Commissioners who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The EEOC has a headquarters office in Washington, D.C. and 53 [field offices](#) throughout the United States.

**Equity:** The guarantee of fair treatment, access and opportunity for advancement for all (employees) while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding unbalanced conditions is needed to assist in fostering equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.

**Ethnicity:** Refers to shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs.

**Genetic Information:** Information about an individual's genetic tests and the genetic tests of an individual's family members, as well as information about the manifestation of a disease or disorder in an individual's family members (i.e. family medical history). Family medical history is included in the definition of genetic information because it is often used to determine whether someone has an increased risk of getting a disease, disorder, or condition in the future. Genetic information also includes an individual's request for, or receipt of, genetic services, or the participation in clinical research that includes genetic services by the individual or a family member of the individual, and the genetic information of a fetus carried by an individual or by a pregnant woman who is a family member of the individual and the genetic information of any embryo legally held by the individual or family member using an assisted reproductive technology.

**Genetic Information Discrimination:** Treating an applicant, employee or former employee less favorably on the basis of genetic information when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoffs, training, fringe benefits, or any other term or condition of employment. An employer may never use genetic information to make an employment decision because genetic information is not relevant to an individual's current ability to work.

**Inclusion:** Practices that enable the full participation and contribution of the workforce in support of the mission of the organization by eliminating implicit and explicit barriers. Inclusion involves leveraging the diverse talents and attributes of the entire workforce by configuring work opportunities, business processes, functional operations, rewards systems, work-life options, professional interactions, communications, information-sharing and decision-making to empower the full participation of all employees.

**Management Directive 715 (MD-715):** The policy guidance that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides to federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, for use in establishing and maintaining effective programs of equal employment opportunity under Section 717 of Title VII of the Civil Rights. Describes program responsibilities and reporting requirements relating to agencies' EEO programs.

**Outreach:** Presentations and participation in meetings, conferences and seminars with employee and employer groups, professional associations, students, non-profit entities, community organizations and other members of the general public to provide general information about its mission, the employment discrimination laws enforced by EEOC and the complaint process.

**Participation Rate:** The extent to which members of a specific demographic group are represented in an agency's work force.

**Personal Assistance Services (PAS):** provide employees with targeted disabilities "assistance with performing activities of daily living that an individual would typically perform if they did not have a disability, and that is not otherwise required as a reasonable accommodation.

**Reasonable Accommodation:** Any change in the work environment, work processes or the application process that enable a person with a disability to apply for a job, perform the essential functions of a job or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment, in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

**Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF):** consists of all U.S. citizens 16 years of age and over, excluding those in the Armed Forces, who are employed in or unemployed and seeking employment in VA specific occupations. When the organization has a presence in Puerto Rico, the population of Puerto Rico is included.

**Respect:** We value our diverse workforce. We treat each other and those we serve with fairness, dignity, and compassion. We encourage creativity through empowerment. We work as a team.

**Special Emphasis Program:** An integral part of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Program. The purpose of these programs is to ensure that agencies take affirmative steps to provide equal opportunity to all VA employees in all areas in the employee life cycle. The term, "Special Emphasis Programs," refers specifically to employment related programs, which focus special attention on groups that are conspicuously absent or have a lower than expected participation rate in a specific occupational category or grade level in the agency's workforce.

**The Student Outreach and Recruitment (SOAR) Program:** focuses on providing information to students and recent graduates on the Federal Hiring Process, VA careers, and internships and shadowing experiences. The goal of the program is to establish a pipeline for students and recent graduates to explore VA careers and to foster capacity building. The intent is to provide real-time job, internship, and career information to SOAR Program participants. Through SOAR, VA will market Pathways, the National Diversity Intern Program (NDIP), the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), USAJOBS.gov (the Federal Government's official source for federal job listings, job applications, and employment opportunity information), and other VA internship and employment programs to increase the pool of potential fully qualified applicants for VA employment opportunities.

**Targeted Disabilities:** Per EEOC regulations [29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(a)(9)] – The term targeted disability means a disability that is designated as a “targeted disability or health condition” on the Office of Personnel Management's Standard Form 256, Self-Identification of Disability. The Targeted Disability Codes included are: (02) Developmental Disability; (03) Traumatic Brain Injury; (19) Deaf or serious difficulty hearing; (20) Blind or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses; (31) Missing extremities; (40) Significant mobility impairment; (60) Partial or complete paralysis (any cause); (82) Epilepsy or other seizure disorders; (90) Intellectual disability; (91) Significant Psychiatric Disorder; (92) Dwarfism; (93) Significant disfigurement.

## **APPENDIX II: APPLICABLE LAWS**

**(Not exhaustive)**

1. 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.
2. Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended – prohibits employment discrimination against individuals 40 years of age or older.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2008 – prohibits employment discrimination based on genetic information.
6. Title 55, 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 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.
7. 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.

## **APPENDIX III: 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. 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.
6. Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance.

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.

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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