



VA All Employee Competencies

VA identified six broad All Employee competency categories that apply to all employees at VA. Each category includes more specific competencies, which define success for all roles across the Department.

Each competency definition includes the following:

- The competency category (i.e., Communication)
- The name of the competency and definition (i.e., Demonstrates effective written communication skills)
- Five proficiency levels (e.g., Novice, Foundational, etc.)
- Each proficiency level is defined by specific behavioral indicators (e.g., Writes basic communication...)



Communication. Demonstrates mastery of oral, non-verbal, and written communications principles.

Demonstrates effective written communication skills. Selects appropriate communication channels and tools using appropriate media and technology. Conveys written information in a clear, concise, organized, and convincing manner for the intended audience.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writes basic communications (e.g., an email requesting straightforward information), proofreading before sending to others. Uses appropriate grammar, punctuation, and spelling. With guidance, applies the Department’s style and format guidelines to written products.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafts concise, straightforward summaries of information (e.g., portions of plans/reports). Prepares routine written communications that are accurate, clear, concise, and well-organized. Answers routine or basic questions to internal and external customers appropriately (e.g., tone, detail) and when responding in writing.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepares reports, summaries, or recommendations independently; written communications require little to no editing. Reviews and edits materials prepared by others for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and conformance to style and format guidelines.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writes complex documents, using clear terminology and a concise format as appropriate for decision makers. Tailors written communications to address the most critical issues in a compelling and diplomatic manner. Writes clear, concise issue papers or policy documents on complex topics, such as establishing VA-wide guidance or guidelines.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepares highly complex written communications for national distribution that have significant implications for the VA. Communicates persuasively in writing to multiple stakeholders about programs, projects, and proposals.

Demonstrates effective oral communication skills. Verbally communicates ideas and issues in a clear and convincing manner as appropriate to the audience. Seeks feedback to determine that understanding has occurred. Recognizes impact of own non-verbal signals on others and demonstrates positive non-verbal behavior (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and posture).

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides verbal updates on work assignments/task status to immediate supervisors and others as directed. • Uses appropriate language and grammar when speaking to others. • Demonstrates a basic understanding of appropriate non-verbal communication (e.g., makes eye contact).
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents information in own area of expertise to small or moderately-sized groups. • Communicates information clearly and concisely to avoid miscommunications. • Asks questions to make sure information conveyed has been understood. • Answers basic or routine questions from customers, vendors, or other individuals and tailors responses appropriately.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs team meetings and facilitates group discussion. • Makes oral presentations to a variety of audiences of varying size, conveying main ideas and supporting points clearly and concisely. • Adapts verbal communications to diverse audiences, their level of understanding, and needs (e.g., different language, special needs).
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a lead role in delivering presentations and briefings for high-level internal and external stakeholders. • Clearly explains benefits of programs and policies to stakeholders to improve understanding and gain buy-in. • Responds to difficult/complex questions with ease, responding promptly and accurately in a clear, concise, credible, and courteous manner.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents highly complex information articulately when meeting with key executives or public officials, including issues with high-visibility. • Communicates sensitive information on topics in vague or uncertain situations without misleading the audience. • Produces enthusiasm and fosters an atmosphere of open exchange and support through verbal communications.

Interpersonal Effectiveness. Demonstrates mastery of interpersonal interaction, encourages diversity, develops collaborative relationships, and contributes to a culture of civility and trust.

Demonstrates empathy. Treats others with courtesy, sensitivity, and respect, contributing to a culture of civility. Builds trust and commitment by acknowledging, valuing, and appropriately responding to others' feelings, requests, and concerns.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveys respect for others by consistently communicating in a courteous manner. • Gives others the opportunity to share their views and waits to speak until others have finished making their points.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully listens to others' ideas and concerns and appropriately responds to questions. • Paraphrases what others have stated to demonstrate understanding of messages received.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets other people at ease by creating a relaxed atmosphere and open dialogue. • Builds rapport by asking open-ended questions and accurately restating and reflecting concerns or feelings expressed by others. • Encourages civility by setting expectations for courteous and respectful behavior. • Works out differences without involving management when possible.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms effective working relationships even in difficult and sensitive situations. • Leaves people feeling their ideas have been heard, understood, and valued even when there is disagreement. • Presents difficult or sensitive information respectfully (e.g., constructive feedback), focusing on the issue rather than the person.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains a calm, open demeanor while resolving highly sensitive or controversial issues; models civility. • Champions a culture of civility, promoting respectful behavior and confronting incivility. • Provides guidance and expertise in navigating complex interpersonal interactions.

Fosters diversity and inclusion.

Values and leverages all aspects of human diversity to achieve the vision and mission of the organization. Contributes to an atmosphere of open communication and inclusiveness by seeking out diverse ideas, opinions, and insights and respecting the differing values and perceptions of others. Examines biases and seeks insights to avoid stereotypical responses and behavior.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explains the rationale for and essential components of VA’s diversity-related policies and practices.• Seeks supervisory guidance when unsure how to handle matters related to diversity.• Actively applies knowledge obtained in diversity and sensitivity training.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responds to others in a culturally sensitive manner.• Recognizes inappropriate behavior and seeks coaching for how to address it.• Demonstrates respect for and openness to alternative points of view and diverse ideas.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages others to embrace and respect diversity and inclusiveness.• Seeks out diverse ideas and alternative points of view.• Involves people with diverse backgrounds in solving problems.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educates and advises others on all types of diversity (cultural, racial, occupational, generational, etc.) and inclusion.• Encourages others from different backgrounds (in all types of diversity) to share their ideas and experiences.• Takes appropriate action to address acts of intolerance or discrimination.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develops a culture that encourages and reinforces the open exchange of ideas and inclusive and diverse work teams.• Actively champions and promotes VA’s diversity-related and cultural awareness policies and programs.

Contributes to high-performing teams. Encourages and facilitates cooperation and collaboration among all team members by seeking opportunities to contribute to team goals, share information and knowledge, and support others.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participates in team meetings and events.• Provides assistance and information to team members when asked.• Follows through on commitments to the team.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactively seeks opportunities to assist others with tasks.• Works collaboratively with all team members to accomplish shared goals.• Shares relevant knowledge and experience with others.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shares ideas proactively with team members, encouraging others to do the same.• Understands different team members' roles, how these various roles interact with each other, and the resulting impact on workflow.• Shares knowledge and skills, providing training to others to help them acquire knowledge or develop skills.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses the strengths and development needs of each team member to organize work effectively and foster development.• Creates opportunities for sharing knowledge, experiences, and best practices within and across work units and organizations.• Mentors and coaches others to be more effective contributors to the team.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishes communication processes that ensure work activities are well-integrated and knowledge is shared across teams, business units, or organizations.• Guides others to become effective mentors and coaches; facilitates learning in the organization.

Critical Thinking. Uses systematic approaches to gather, analyze, and evaluate information to make sound, well-informed, and timely decisions or recommendations.

Demonstrates good judgment. Recognizes relevance of information. Identifies, evaluates, and assimilates information from multiple sources. Translates data into meaningful information. Examines and considers all aspects of a situation, including its context and complexity, in order to identify the best course of action and reach an informed decision.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determines when it is appropriate to make a decision on his or her own and when it is appropriate to seek help. • Makes sound and timely decisions in well-defined, low-risk situations that affect own work.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes sound and timely decisions about own work based on policy, logic, and empathy. • Considers alternative courses of action when making decisions. • Recognizes when information is lacking and seeks out additional information to assist in decision-making.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interprets data to identify relationships, issues, assumptions, and emerging trends in order to make recommendations for change or improvement. • Makes sound and timely recommendations and/or decisions in a variety of situations, including those that affect others' work; uses decision-making tools as appropriate (e.g., decision trees). • Considers alternative courses of action and makes decisions that take into consideration future risks and opportunities.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrates and analyzes complex data from multiple sources; identifies connections between seemingly unrelated information. • Thoroughly considers and accurately evaluates the costs, risks, and benefits of alternatives and chooses the best courses of action for which the benefits outweigh the risks. • Makes decisions and takes action when complete knowledge and information are not available
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops measurement systems to analyze current processes. • Makes timely decisions or recommendations regarding highly complex technical, administrative, or policy issues and in sensitive, difficult, and ambiguous situations that have significant organizational impact.

Demonstrates creative problem solving skills.

Identifies and analyzes problems and their root causes. Generates creative ideas and potential solutions. Resolves barriers and chooses course of action that optimize chances of achieving desired outcomes.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognizes and refers issues that deviate from standard practice to immediate supervisor.• Identifies problems and information that may be relevant to a solution.• Applies clear and concise guidelines to resolve routine problems.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies and communicates barriers to performing daily duties.• Identifies problems, considers available information, and evaluates alternative solutions to problems affecting own work.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies barriers that interfere with achieving team goals and serving Veterans and independently develops possible solutions.• Anticipates potential problems and takes or proposes corrective actions.• Generates multiple ideas for addressing barriers or problems; is not limited to suggesting conventional approaches.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Synthesizes information from internal and external sources to address complex issues (e.g., applying information from VACO to VISN or VBA Regional Office problem; updating guidelines with new technologies).• Manages a group’s problem solving process, assisting others in staying focused on the current problem and systematically working through the issue.• Develops new and innovative methods for addressing barriers and problems.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies and resolves problems of particular difficulty, sensitivity, or strategic importance that cross organizational (i.e., VACO, VHA, VBA, NCA) lines.• Generates highly novel and groundbreaking solutions to complex problems.

Organizational Stewardship. Takes responsibility and initiative, sets and meets priorities, follows through on commitments, safeguards information, and organizes and uses time and resources to achieve desired results.

Exemplifies integrity. Behaves in an honest, fair, respectful, and ethical manner. Puts VA mission and values before own self interests. Upholds the VA's high standards of integrity and ethics.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains the VA's standards of ethical conduct and the implications for violating ethical standards. • Completes required ethics awareness training. • Recognizes and seeks guidance when dealing with an ethical dilemma.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings concerns about ethical issues to the attention of supervisors or managers. • Demonstrates integrity in work assignments and in working with others.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently balances the needs of the VA with the best interests of Veterans or customers. • Acts ethically and in line with VA values in performing duties, regardless of internal and external pressures. • Advises others on VA's ethical standards and policies.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates in ethical boards or forums. • Identifies unusual and/or complex ethical dilemmas and takes necessary action to resolve unethical conduct in a fair and timely manner. • Leads/directs others by modeling ethical behaviors.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively identifies potential ethical issues and provides guidance to staff. • Maintains the highest ethical standards, even when actions may negatively impact self or stakeholders. • Supports responsible dissent and the reporting of ethical violations.

Demonstrates accountability. Performs work in a thorough and conscientious manner, ensuring that work products and services provided are accurate and complete. Follows through on commitments. Accepts and assumes responsibility for one's own actions. Follows relevant policies and procedures. Knows when to ask for help and seeks guidance when necessary.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completes assigned tasks in a timely manner. • Takes personal responsibility for own actions.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows policies and procedures with minimal guidance. • Notifies supervisor when obligations are unable to be met so that alternative plans can be made.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps supervisor and stakeholders informed of changes in schedules and deliverables. • Conveys to others the importance of accomplishing goals and delivering results on time.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes responsibility for work unit or project outcomes, regardless of positive or negative results. • Establishes expectations for self and/or work unit so that goals are reasonable and achievable and projects are set up to succeed.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides guidance and communicates methods for achieving results to correct failed or delayed department-level efforts. • Ensures a culture of accountability among others by defining roles and responsibilities. • Guides others in the interpretation and application of policies, procedures and guidelines.

Organizes and prioritizes work.

Plans work, manages time, and balances priorities, taking into consideration VA's mission. Sets short- and/or long-term goals and determines strategies to achieve them. Monitors progress toward goals, evaluates outcomes, and makes appropriate adjustments.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizes assigned tasks to accomplish them on time.• Seeks guidance on setting work/task priorities and follows priorities as assigned.• Maintains appropriate files and records to document progress toward goals.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets measurable goals for self that are on target with departmental goals.• Systematically breaks large tasks down into smaller, more manageable subtasks.• Prioritizes work on subtasks based on project timelines and scheduled tasks.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determines when additional resources are required to complete tasks.• Uses effective strategies to balance multiple projects and ensure completion of all assigned tasks.• Prepares plans for non-routine projects to provide deliverables within established parameters (e.g., budget, resources, timeframes).
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepares for and manages complex projects and/or assignments that directly address organizational goals.• Reviews project plans of others, providing adequate feedback as needed.• Reallocates resources or negotiates revised deadlines when conflicting priorities impact timelines.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluates department or administration progress and makes adjustments according to mission and vision.• Anticipates changing workload requirements well in advance and advocates for needed resources based on strategy and planning.• Implements multi-department, multi-year, large-scale efforts based on VA goals and strategic direction.

Makes effective use of resources.

Identifies and effectively manages resources (e.g., material, equipment, space, and money) in order to achieve the VA's goals and objectives.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explains the importance of energy and resource conservation.• Protects sensitive information, systems, and the workplace.• Maintains appropriate documentation of resource use.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses resources prudently.• Identifies and reports fraud, waste, or abuse.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looks beyond existing programs to identify additional ways to reduce waste and recycle.• Assists peers and co-workers with their efforts to more effectively use resources.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develops procedures and guidelines for appropriately managing resources.• Identifies innovative strategies to reduce operating costs.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balances multiple departments'/units'/locations' needs to achieve optimal use of resources.• Oversees management of resources (e.g., money, equipment, security, and/or material) across multiple work units.• Partners with senior leaders to ensure effective resource management across the VA.

Veteran and Customer Focus. Understands the VA’s mission and uses this knowledge to guide actions; provides outstanding customer service and represents the organization effectively.

Advocates for Veterans.	
Demonstrates awareness of the Veteran population (including generational differences), their needs, and the benefits and services available to them. Demonstrates an understanding that serving Veterans, families, and other stakeholders is VA’s mission. Represents VA effectively to both internal and external audiences. Keeps respect and advocacy for Veterans at the forefront of actions.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts respectfully and courteously to all Veterans and their families. • Maintains Veterans’ privacy. • Describes VA’s basic mission and goals and the needs of the Veteran population.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly articulates VA’s mission and goals to internal and external audiences. • Routinely strives to maximize service to Veterans when prioritizing and completing own work. • Presents a positive image of the VA through language and actions.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates in community or other outreach activities that are consistent with the VA’s mission. • Represents the VA in a professional and respectful manner in the community.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies issues that distract from VA’s mission of respect and advocacy and takes steps to address them.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands VA initiatives throughout the community. • Initiates and shares best practices with outside organizations/agencies to promote Veteran advocacy.

Meets customers' needs. Seeks information to understand customer needs and manage expectations. Communicates with customers to provide assistance and resolve problems. Anticipates and meets expectations; follows up to ensure satisfaction and improve service quality.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treats customers with respect. • Maintains documentation of customer requests and/or complaints. • Responds to questions or requests from customers in a timely and professional manner. • Refers unresolved customer complaints to supervisor.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages customers' expectations to ensure that they are in alignment with applicable policies. • Identifies and recommends to customers products and services that meet their needs/objectives. • Communicates with customers to verify that products and services meet their requirements. • Identifies potential problems that could affect customer relations and informs supervisor, thereby avoiding escalation of problems or issues.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathers customer feedback to identify opportunities to enhance customer satisfaction. • Anticipates customers' needs or questions in advance. • Develops relationships with diverse customers (e.g., external offices/departments, other administrations, etc.).
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops processes that take into account the needs of all customers (Veterans, families, employees, staff, etc.) • Creates opportunities and strategies to enhance interdepartmental collaboration to meet customers' complex needs. • Resolves contentious situations with customers while still maintaining strong working relationships.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops and/or implements customer service initiatives which significantly improve quality and enhance customer satisfaction. • Prepares for the consequences of policy changes and improvements on customers.

Personal Mastery. Assumes responsibility for personal well-being and career goals. Demonstrates self-awareness. Actively seeks feedback from others and takes action to improve performance, effectiveness, and resilience. Engages in continuous learning while balancing competing priorities and demands.

Exhibits self-awareness and commitment to self-development. Actively seeks and acts on feedback about how one is perceived by others. Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses and takes action to improve performance and effectiveness. Takes initiative and responsibility to manage own career and pursues self-development through education, training, knowledge sharing, experiences, coaching, mentoring, and self-reflection.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses. • With prompting from others, participates in training to improve performance. • Actively listens to feedback offered by supervisors, mentors, coaches, or peers.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses constructive criticism to improve performance. • Identifies areas for improvement; creates an IDP. • Seeks guidance for self development and career advancement.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participates in self development and career advancement opportunities. • Asks for feedback regarding performance. • Regularly examines and applies past experiences to improve current performance.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtains additional training in an effort to build subject matter expertise. • Encourages others to participate in learning opportunities and programs. • Continues to build own skills by acting as a coach/mentor.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks out innovative ways for self and others to acquire new knowledge and skills that contribute to the VA mission. • Champions coaching and mentoring activities; encourages and helps others to become effective coaches and/or mentors.

Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency. Deals effectively with pressure and work stress, such as ambiguity, emergencies/crises, emerging conditions, and multiple tasks. Remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity or uncertainty. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Adapts behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles. Examines mistakes and identifies and applies lessons learned.

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains a respectful and professional attitude even in changing conditions. • Displays a generally positive attitude and productive behavior in times of mild adversity. • With support from others, persists when faced with small obstacles or minor work pressures.
2 – Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies alternative options and ways to shift priorities when conditions change. • Recovers quickly from setbacks with some encouragement from others. • Persists and remains productive when under pressure and experiencing stress. • Seeks feedback to help understand and learn from mistakes.
3 – Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds appropriately to emergencies and other situations. • Adapts readily to changing work conditions with minimal support and encouragement. • Remains productive and optimistic under moderate levels of uncertainty and ambiguity.
4 – Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzes unexpected outcomes and demonstrates flexibility to change processes. • Remains productive, persistent, optimistic, and even-tempered, even in the face of significant pressure, stress, or uncertainty; encourages others to do the same.
5 - Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates resilience, energy, and enthusiasm even in the face of great pressure, uncertainty, and adversity. • Helps others to overcome negative feelings or emotions and acknowledges when own emotions interfere with productivity in order to process them effectively. • Helps others analyze their setbacks and develop plans to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

VA LEARNING UNIVERSITY: YOUR PARTNER FOR CHANGE

Powered by ADVANCE, VALU works with VA employees and leaders like you to put effective change management in the forefront of our operations. As VA begins implementing steps to transform into a 21st century organization that is people-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking, engaging change leaders is critical.

VALU is your partner in driving this historic transformation and motivating your team to be unifying, innovative change agents that make a difference in the lives of our Veterans.

VALU your potential. VALU our Veterans. Be a positive force for change.

For additional information about the VA Learning University's Leadership and Change Programs, please write to us at VALU.Training@va.gov.