I*DEA

Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI)

*I*DEA Strategic Communications Plan*

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

I*DEA

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1. Document Purpose

The initiative to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and access at VA is called *I*DEA.*

This communications plan will guide *I*DEA* communications activities over the next five years. It will be a living document, updated regularly to reflect changes to key messages, talking points, delivery schedule, and communications strategies and tactics.

2. Background

VA has renewed its focus on the commitment to serve all Veterans equitably by designing a new, strategic approach that reaches Veterans, employees, caregivers, and family members. The goal of this new course of action is to move the Federal government closer to providing equal opportunity to everyone for all VA services and benefits. VA has identified several areas where there are possible inequities in the delivery of benefits and services, so it sought to better understand the problem.

To begin this important and thorough assessment, VA chartered the 18-member *I*DEA* Task Force. It was charged with identifying areas for improvement across VA's vast diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (*I*DEA*) ecosystem. Members of the *I*DEA* Task Force represented a large swath of diverse voices at VA, from Field levels to VA Central Office (VACO). It rigorously examined existing *I*DEA* policies, programs, and infrastructure with the goal of producing enduring recommendations that chart a strategic four-year course of action to improve *I*DEA* at VA. From its findings, the Task Force generated concrete recommendations for the elimination of barriers and the creation of access points for underserved communities, thereby ensuring all VA employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors have equitable treatment and experiences when interacting with VA.

*I*DEA* Mission Statement

To advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities we serve—all who do business with VA—and cultivates equitable access to care, benefits, and services for all.

*I*DEA* Purpose

*I*DEA* seeks to identify and eliminate barriers and create access points for underserved communities, thereby fundamentally advancing equity for employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. VA is building an aspirational

whole-of-agency *I*DEA* strategy that matches the scope of challenges and strategic opportunities we face.

*I*DEA* Sub-Council Objectives

1. Redefine VA's approach and establish best practices in accordance with requirements outlined in the 11 executive orders and presidential memorandum.
   * **Memorandum**: Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States
   * **E.O. 13985:** Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
   * **E.O. 13988:** Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation
   * **E.O. 14020:** Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council – OSVA
   * **E.O. 14031:** Advancing Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders
   * **E.O. 14035:** Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Government
   * **E.O. 14041:** Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HRA)
   * **E.O. 14045:** Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics (VBA)
   * **E.O. 14049:** Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities (OPIA)
   * **E.O. 14050:** Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans (VBA)
   * **E.O. 14058:** Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government
   * **E.O. 14075:** Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) Individuals
2. Examine existing policies, programs, trainings and strategic communications for workforce and Veterans' initiatives to align with VA's strategic mission, goals, and objectives on *I*DEA*.
3. Define and leverage data to inform and utilize the data to identify barriers, gaps, and risks.

4. Design institutional access points and strategic partnerships to support underserved communities.

*I*DEA* Guiding Principles

1. **Be proactive** by deliberately and consciously embedding *I*DEA* into the institutional memory and organizational culture (I-CARE + *I*DEA*). **VA's I-CARE Core Values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect,** and **Excellence** — serve as the guide for all VA interactions:
   I care about those who have served.
   I care about my fellow VA employees.
   I care about choosing "the harder right instead of the easier wrong."
   I care about performing my duties to the very best of my abilities.
2. **Share the burden of inequity** with underserved communities: employees, Veterans, their families, and caregivers.
3. **Be accountable** by accepting the responsibility to improve the services we offer and embody excellence.
4. **Cultivate jointness** across VA to create a holistic and integrated VA mission and strategy for *I*DEA*.

3. Definitions[1]

* **Inclusion**: Every individual who enters a VA facility must feel safe, included, and valued. VA will treat all employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors with dignity, integrity, and respect by encouraging an environment free of harassment and discrimination. Fostering a culture of inclusion, specifically for marginalized and underserved communities, ensures that VA and its employees will act without prejudice or bias.
* **Diversity**: VA strives to leverage the strength and uniqueness that defines our Veteran population, our VA workforce, and our country. VA welcomes all Veterans from underserved communities, including women, Veterans of color, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexual (LGBTQI+) Veterans. Diversity is a key driver of growth and innovation that leads to developing new ideas and perspectives and must be embodied across VA.

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[1] *Definitions are currently in draft, pending formal VA approval. Updated definitions will be proposed by the I*DEA comms team, for ORMDI and Sub-Council approval and ExecSec final review and approval.*

* **Equity**: VA strives to understand systemic barriers to opportunity with a goal of providing everyone, including those who belong to underserved communities, with fair access to health care and benefits. VA will evaluate the intersectionality of systemic inequities and address institutional barriers to outcomes for Veterans and employees.
* **Access**: VA increases access by proactively embedding opportunities and creating institutional pathways for all by eliminating and reducing inequities. VA will create accommodations and modifications to promote equitable opportunities, including providing access to home care and educational opportunities, training and jobs worthy of Veteran's skills and service.
    o VA strives to ensure VA facilities, spaces, technology, programs, and services are consistently designed, constructed, developed, maintained, and promulgated pursuant to the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968; thus, ensuring all people can fully and independently use them.
    o VA has committed to proactive engagement with users and stakeholders in an agency wide effort to support the rapid adoption of high-tech innovations. VA's goal is to ensure that technological and physical infrastructure provides the high level of access and support deserving of our Veterans, family Members, care givers and our VA employees
* **Underserved Communities**: The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, unique challenges, and geographic communities, who have been systemically and institutionally denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. VA recognizes this term includes Black, Hispanic and Latino, or Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women; individuals who face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, including pregnancy status and LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; persons who may face employment barriers based on older age; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise at-risk of persistent poverty, homelessness, or inequality.

4. Subject Matter Experts

Development and execution of the communications plan requires active involvement from various subject matter experts (SMEs). Table 1, below, provides

a list of key ORMDI, *I*DEA*, and supporting SMEs and their respective contact information who we anticipate being actively involved in *I*DEA* communications moving forward.

Strategic Communications Contact Information

TOPIC	POC	Office	Email
HRA/OSP	Gina Grosso	Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness	Gina.Grosso@va.gov
ORMDI	Harvey Johnson	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion	Harvey.Johnson08@va.gov
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AHPO	Lelia Jackson	Assault Harassment Prevention Office	Lelia.Jackson@va.gov
Chief Diversity Officer	Victor LaGroon		Victor.Lagroon@va.gov
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ORMDI Marketing Comms	Daniel Malloy, Ph.D.	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion	Daniel.Malloy@va.gov
*I*DEA* Program Management	Dr. Jennifer Moffit	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion	Jennifer.Moffit@va.gov
*I*DEA* Showcase	Dr. Sabrina Clark	Center for Development and Civil Engagement (CDCE)	Sabrina.Clark@va.gov
Branding/Marketing	Rebecca Hart	Titan Alpha	RebeccaHart@cvpcorp.com

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		Office	Email
Strategic Communications Lead	Erin Gregory	Titan Alpha	egregory@pfs.us
Executive Orders and Presidential Memos Workstream	Dr. Anne-Marie Duncan	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI)	AnneMarie.Duncan@va.gov
Executive Orders and Presidential Memos Workstream	James Albino	Center for Minority Veterans (CMV)	James.Albino@va.gov
Stakeholder Engagement Workstream	Barbara Morton	Veterans Experience Office (VEO)	Barbara.Morton2@va.gov
Stakeholder Engagement Workstream	Lourdes Tiglao	Center for Women Veterans (CWV)	Lourdes.Tiglao@va.gov
Stakeholder Engagement Workstream	Airis Gill	Veterans Experience Office (VEO)	Airis.Gill@va.gov
Action Plan Recommendations Workstream	Laura O'Shea	Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)	Laura.OShea@va.gov
Action Plan Recommendations Workstream	Terry Albritton	VHA Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	Terry.Allbritton@va.gov
Action Plan Recommendations Workstream	Christine Walker		Christine.Walker1@va.gov
Human Capital and Workforce	Jessica Bonjorni	VHA Chief Human Capital Management	Jessica.Bonjorni@va.gov

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TOPIC	POC	CONTACT INFORMATION	
		Office	Email
Planning Workstream			
Human Capital and Workforce Planning Workstream	Tracey Therit	VHA Chief Human Capital Officer	Tracey.Therit@va.gov
Facilities and Accessibility Workstream	Dr. Michael Brennan	Office of Construction and Facilities Management (CFM)	Michael.Brennan@va.gov
Facilities and Accessibility Workstream	Ed Litvin	Office of Healthcare Environment and Facilities	Ed.Litvin@va.gov
FAS/OCONUS Workstream	Vivian Hutson	Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA)	Vivian.Hutson@va.gov
FAS/OCONUS Workstream	Ronald Sagudan	Center for Minority Veterans (CMV)	Ronald.Sagudan@va.gov
Women's Advisory Sub-Group	Soni Meckem	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI)	Soni.Meckem@va.gov
LGBTQI+ Sub-Group	Josh Seefried	Office of Information & Technology (OIT)	Josh.Seefried@va.gov
Countering Anti-Semitism Sub-Group	Dr. Rachel Ramoni	Office of Research and Development (ORD)	Rachel.Ramoni@va.gov

5. Target Audiences

There are many target audiences interested in and impacted by *I*DEA*. The key stakeholders, outlined below, influence both the tailoring of messages and the selection of tactics to best accomplish *I*DEA*'s communication goals.

Internal Audiences

- * VA Leadership
- * VA Employees

* Service Contractors, such as:
* On-Site Vendors including housekeeping, maintenance, greeters, PX/convenience store workers, etc.
* VA Vet Centers
* Veteran Service Providers
* VA Volunteers

External Audiences

* Veterans (including eligible spouses, beneficiaries, survivors, and caregivers)
* Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), including:
    * Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
    * American Veterans (AMVETS)
    * VSO Communicators Group
    * Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
    * Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
    * Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)
* Military Service Organizations (MSOs)
* National Healthcare, Service, and Veteran Organizations and Non-Profits
* Partner Organizations, such as:
    * AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon
    * Wal-Mart
    * US Chamber of Commerce Foundation
    * American Legion and VFW
    * Prostate Cancer Foundation
* Media
* White House
* Congress
    * House Veterans Affairs Committee
    * Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
* General Public

Key Advantages and Benefits to Internal and External Audiences

AUDIENCES	KEY ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS
INTERNAL AUDIENCES	
VA Leadership (All)	* Higher rate of employees from underserved communities in VA's workforce * Increased innovation and productivity * Ability to hire and retain top talent from diverse communities

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AUDIENCES	KEY ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS
	* Successful execution of the OEs * Good news stories
VA Leadership (Underserved)	* Receipt of support and tools required to succeed in new roles * Validation of previous barriers to opportunity and growth * Improved sense of belonging * Empowerment
VA Employees (All)	* Clear expectations around delivery of care and service to underserved communities * Clear expectations around treatment of employees from underserved communities * Improved service to Veterans from underserved communities * Increased productivity and job satisfaction
VA Employees (Underserved)	* Access to career opportunities and progression * Receipt of support and tools required to succeed in new roles * Validation of previous barriers to opportunity and growth * Improved sense of belonging * Empowerment
Service Contractors	* Increased productivity and job satisfaction * Realization of new business opportunities within VA
VA Vet Centers	* Increased productivity in servicing Veterans, including the ability to serve more Veterans * Increased job satisfaction * Realization of new business opportunities within VA * Good news stories
Veteran Service Providers	* Increased productivity in servicing Veterans * Realization of new business opportunities within VA * Increased job satisfaction * Good news stories
EXTERNAL AUDIENCES	
Veterans (All)	* Improved opportunity and channels to ask for and receive benefits * Confidence that VA will act without prejudice, bias, or exclusion * Pride in the knowledge that all Veterans are receiving the care and benefits they've earned

AUDIENCES	KEY ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS
Veterans (Underserved)	* Better care and access leading to improved health outcomes, housing, economic prosperity, etc. * Validation of previous barriers to care and opportunity * Improved sense of belonging
Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs)	* Increased membership of Veterans from underserved communities * Increased involvement of Veterans from underserved communities * Improved service and reach to Veterans from underserved communities
National Healthcare, Service, and Veteran Organizations and Non-Profits	* Improved service to Veterans from underserved communities * Increased visibility as organization dedicated to I*DEA and supporting EOs * Increased community support and donors * Improved access to grants * Good news stories
Partner Organizations	* Improved service to Veterans from underserved communities * Increased visibility as organization dedicated to I*DEA and supporting EOs * Increased community support and donors * Good news stories
Media	* Good news stories * Opportunity to inform and educate the public
White House	* Increased visibility as Administration dedicated to I*DEA and associated benefits * Movement toward federal agencies becoming employers of choice and able to attract top talent * Progress toward EOs * Shining example of energy and momentum to achieve federal I*DEA initiatives (VA's success will lead the way to the success of others) * Good news and success stories
Congress	* Successful and judicious deployment of funds to achieve EOs * Progress toward EOs * Good news and success stories
General Public	* Education, awareness, and opportunity

AUDIENCES	KEY ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS
	* More innovative, effective, and efficient federal government

6. Communications Goals

The goal of this communications plan is to educate all who do business with VA including employees, Veterans, and other key stakeholders such as the Administration and Congress, about the changes associated aligned with priorities set forth by the Administration, the role and importance of *I*DEA* to Veterans and VA employees, and the impact and progress of the *I*DEA* action plan and implementation across VA. For this communications effort, the target audience includes Veterans, VA employees, unions, VSOs, policymakers, and the general public.

The desired outcomes of this communications plan are:

* To build a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible workforce and health care service provider, positioning VA as a leader in cultural health in the country.
* To educate and inform about *I*DEA*.
* To increase awareness and provide tools to help audiences understand the value of *I*DEA*.
* To spark discussion about *I*DEA*, including its benefits and value.
* To encourage internal audiences to embrace inclusiveness, diversity, equity, and access through changed behavior, thoughts, and beliefs.
* To cultivate a culture of inclusiveness, sensitivity, and support of marginalized and underserved communities.
* To signal VA's commitment to improving inclusion, diversity, equity, and access for VA employees and Veterans.
* To encourage third-party service providers and other external audiences to be more inclusive of Veterans from marginalized and underserved communities, and those communities at large.

7. Key Messages

Key messages express essential concepts that target audiences should know about *I*DEA*. These messages should be carried throughout communication products to consistently inform, engage, and persuade stakeholders.

Overarching Key Messages

I*DEA

- **VA is weaving _I*DEA_ into the very fabric of VA. VA embedded _I*DEA_ into its fiscal year 2022 – 2028 Strategic Plan.**
- **VA is requesting funding for _I*DEA_ in the 2024 Budget submission.**
  - VA has developed _I*DEA_ performance metrics that will help us understand the impact of this important initiative.
- **A Country of ONE. We are stronger together despite our differences. Our nation is filled with vast opportunity and is built on a brilliant _I*DEA_**. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and our founding motto, E Pluribus Unum, are all grounded _in I*DEA_.
- **Cultural Health. VA is embarking on a cultural transformation of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility**. We are developing and updating guidance, processes, and frameworks to celebrate and embed _I*DEA_ across the Department.
- **Unity: We're all in this together.** VA is leveraging the institutional access points of our community partners to communicate with underserved communities and amplify _I*DEA_ initiatives.
  - These access points will embed opportunities and create institutional pathways for underserved communities to explore entrepreneurship/partnership opportunities, gain entry into VA's senior leadership talent pipeline, and access VA's services.
- **We may be just getting started, but we're already making progress toward a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible VA**. In 2021, VA has achieved significant progress toward developing and implementing _I*DEA_ guidance, processes, and tools to improve the experiences of Veterans and employees from underserved communities.
  - **We're learning from the best, so VA can be the best**. VA engaged with 20+ community partners to identify best practices and lessons learned to inform _I*DEA_ efforts.
- **VA values the individuality of our diverse Veterans and employees.** For example, for the first time in Department history, VA raised the PRIDE flag at VA Central Office (VACO).
- **Congress increased funding to ORMDI by $12.9M** to support efforts to improve inclusion, diversity, equity, and access at VA.
  - This congressional display of commitment to _I*DEA_ communicates that the federal government wants change. And VA is determined to deliver.
  - The additional funding allowed VA to bring on an additional 74 employees to support the effort. The funding also enabled the acquisition of contract support to provide valuable _I*DEA_ expertise and experience to make _I*DEA_ a success.

* VA will use these funds to help make the Department and its services more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible to Veterans and employees from underserved communities.

Key Messages for VA's workforce

* **VA is leading the way.** VA is taking swift action to become a federal model for *I*DEA,* where all employees are treated with dignity and respect.
* **VA is integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (*I*DEA*) into workforce planning and human capital strategies.** VA ensures all employees have equal access to resources and opportunities to learn and apply new knowledge and skills to improve job performance.
  * VA has resources and opportunities to strengthen and advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (*I*DEA*) for all current and future employees.
  * VA is helping underserved employees thrive**.** Through **I*DEA,** VA ensures access to resources and opportunities that help set our employees on a path to success. Additionally:
    * VA's newly enhanced development tools and support structures ensure success and continued growth throughout the employee lifecycle—from recruitment to the first day, and all the way through retirement.
    * VA's strategies recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain our Nation's talent while removing barriers to equal opportunity.
* **With *I*DEA*, everyone wins.** It's a fact: diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workplaces perform better than their peers.

  * *I*DEA* will enable VA to deliver better services and improved customer experiences to Veterans while becoming an employer of choice for a diverse and talented workforce.
  * *I*DEA* will make VA a stronger, more innovative agency delivering better care and benefits to Veterans.

* **To effect lasting change, VA must embody diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (I*DEA) in all offices and at all levels.** Tomorrow's VA workforce will be stronger. It will reflect the rich diversity of VA employees, and serve as a shining example of equity, inclusion, and access at all levels of government.
* **VA is advancing intentional diversity in the Federal workplace.** VA is partnering with minority-serving institutions (MSIs)—like Historically **B**lack Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)—to identify and recruit diverse talent from underserved communities.

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- **VA is making progress toward a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible VA.** In 2021, VA achieved significant progress toward building workplaces that embody the values of *I*DEA* and I-CARE.
  - VA values our LGBTQ+ employees. VA established its first employee resource group (ERG)—PrideVA—to engage and support LGBTQ+ employees.
  - VA is currently standing up a second ERG—Federal Women's Program.
    - ERGs foster a culture of inclusion by building community and a positive work environment for employees who represent underserved groups.
  - Veteran employees bring indispensable experience, insight, and understanding to VA's workforce. VA added Veteran status to the demographic section of its annual All-Employee Survey (AES).
  - *I*DEA* applies the successful Veterans Experience Office (VEO) model to VA employee career experience.
    - VEO collected over 11,000 insights from diverse VA employees across 33 geographic areas to develop an employee journey map.
    - The journey map includes 23 employment stages and identifies 30 key moments including pain points and bright spots which impact the employee experience.

Key Messages for the Veteran Population

- **VA already leads the way in advancing health equity, but we're not stopping there. VA's strategic plan is being updated to continue improving access to care and benefits and equitable health outcomes for underserved Veterans.**
- **Improving access improves outcomes.** VA is reducing barriers that underserved communities may face in using VA benefits and services.
- **VA is making progress toward a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible VA.** In 2021, VA achieved significant progress toward becoming a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible provider of healthcare and benefits for all Veterans.
  - VA initiated the rulemaking process to modify the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to expand VA's gender affirming care and benefits package for Veterans.
  - VA announced that Veterans discharged honorably under the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* (DADT) policy are now eligible for VA benefits.
  - HR 1596 established the *Commission to Study the Stigmatization, Criminalization and Ongoing Exclusion and Inequity for LGBTQI+ Service members and Veterans*.

* **We are listening: The Veteran voice is our lodestar.** VA is proactively seeking to understand the experiences of Veterans from underserved communities.
  * The Veterans Experience Office (VEO) has updated its Trust Surveys to include questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.
  * VA added new capabilities in Veterans Signals (VSignals) to identify the experiences of underserved Veterans, eligible dependents, caregivers, and survivors.
  * VA hosted public virtual listening sessions with Veterans in March through June of 2021 to gain insight into how to design a future health care system that is equitable and enables access by underserved communities. Topics included:
    * Veteran perception on the quality of health care at VA and within VA's community network
    * How Veterans want care delivered
    * Experience
    * Satisfaction
    * VA's role in research, education, and emergency preparedness

Calls to Action

The **I*DEA** communications team will build out calls to action as activities and products are authorized.

Calls to Action by Audience

AUDIENCES	CALLS TO ACTION
INTERNAL AUDIENCES	
VA Leadership	* **Use the I*DEA action plan to drive change within your organization.** The **I*DEA** action plan provides all VA organizations—from the field to VACO—the blueprint to begin creating a cultural transformation. * TBD
VA Employees	* We need the commitment, understanding, and support of everyone to move the needle in the direction of equity. Therefore, we are asking that all employees to make VA not just the federal model, but the national, and global model for **I*DEA**.
Service Contractors	* TBD

AUDIENCES	CALLS TO ACTION
VA Vet Centers	* National Veterans Art Museum
Veteran Service Providers	* Clinical facilities that deliver care via VA Medical Centers, Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs) and other healthcare facilities.
EXTERNAL AUDIENCES	
Veterans	* We need the commitment, understanding, and support of everyone to move the needle in the direction of equity. Therefore, we are asking that all Veterans, family members, caregivers, and volunteers join us as we work to make VA not just the federal model, but the national, and global model for *I*DEA*.
Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs)	* TBD
National Healthcare, Service, and Veteran Organizations and Non-Profits	* CBOC (Community Based Outpatient Clinics)
Partner Organizations	* Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISI), and other Minority-Serving institutions, to include institutions serving persons with disabilities.
Media	* Affinity Groups
White House	* TBD
Congress	* TBD
General Public	* TBD

Calls to Action by Event, Product, and/or Activity

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EVENT/ACTIVITY	CALLS TO ACTION
Press Release	∗ December 2021: TBD ∗ May 2022 ∗ June 2022
*I*DEA* **Showcase**	∗ January 2022 ∗ February 2022 ∗ March 2022

Taglines

We Are a Country of ONE

One promotes what one permits

E Pluribus Unum

*I*DEA*: The Era of Change

VA Has a Brilliant *I*DEA*

Hashtags

#ABrilliantI*DEA #ACounryofOne #I*DEA

8. Communications Strategy and Tactics

To solicit the greatest engagement from target audiences, this plan will adopt an active communications posture. Active communication—in contrast to reactive, passive, or crisis communications—generates more impact with less risk to the extent that it is planned.

This plan uses a layered approach to deliver key messages to audiences, with a goal of sharing unique messages no fewer than five to seven times via various formats, channels, and messengers.

An omni-channel approach will deliver *I*DEA* key messages and artifacts broadly, ensuring target audiences receive clear, compelling key messages and products across a variety of channels and through multiple messengers. Strategically, the omni-channel and product approach will:

∗ **Establish a drumbeat** focused on communicating and engaging key internal and external audiences early and often.
∗ **Deliver meaningful and actionable** information that informs, engages, and builds support for *I*DEA.*

- ∗ **Create a push-and-pull dynamic** of delivering (pushing) information and products, while also engaging (pulling) audience feedback to support an agile communications approach.
- ∗ **Leverage 3rd party allies** to share and promote *I*DEA's* messages and products.
- ∗ **Amplify and spread *I*DEA* messages** through year-round storytelling of success stories.

Recommended products and activities to distribute key messages include, but are not limited to:

- ∗ ORMDI Website Updates
- ∗ Social Media Post(s)
- ∗ Email(s)/Newsletter(s)
- ∗ Fact Sheet(s)/Infographic(s)
- ∗ *I*DEA* Toolkit
- ∗ Press Release(s)
- ∗ Blog(s)
- ∗ Op Ed(s)
- ∗ Press Conference(s)
- ∗ *Interview(s)*
- ∗ Video(s)
- ∗ Intranet Resources/Landing page

- ∗ *Local Community Events/Sponsors Event(s)*
- ∗ **Branding**
  - ∗ **Logo & Tagline**
  - ∗ **Color palette**
  - ∗ **Voice/Tone**
- ∗ Training/Coaching Materials
- ∗ Town Hall(s)/Meeting(s)
- ∗ Leadership Briefing(s)
- ∗ Conference(s)
- ∗ *I*DEA* Teams Site
- ∗ Virtual Backgrounds

Channels

The table below highlights VA's primary channels and audience reach. Some channels double as products, or as the result of other messaging. For example, local spokespeople are both an audience (when we push key messages and products to them) and a channel (when they push key messages and products to others).

Internal and External Communication Channels

CHANNEL	DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE
Website	Websites are key centers for messaging during any campaign. After learning about *I*DEA* through other channels, audiences will often visit the ORMDI or other linked websites. It is critical to ensure the website is up-to-date and consistent with *I*DEA* key messages and updates while providing resources that appeal to the widest possible audience group.	All

Social Media	Social media is an important resource for pushing messages out to a group of interested parties who, through following or liking, have indicated an interest in VA. Social media is also a valuable tool for partner collaboration, and ORMDI can coordinate messages with third parties to cross-promote *I*DEA* key messages.	Self-Selected Followers from All Target Audiences
Earned Media	Earned media, developed through coordination with OPIA, is a useful tool to reach a wide array of audiences.	All
Partner Channels	Partner channels include websites, social media, email, events, and collateral materials. These channels will help *I*DEA* to expand its audience with the support of groups whose own audiences are closely aligned with VA or *I*DEA's* target audiences.	Partner Audiences
VAntage Point & **VA Insider**	Blogs allow ORMDI to present *I*DEA* content on VA-owned websites. The VAntage Point blog provides an outlet to communicate with Veterans and the broader public, while VA Insider is a channel to communicate internally to VA employees.	All, Particularly Veterans, VSOs, VA Employees
Email (VA Outlook)	Direct email, either from an individual VA account or a corporate VA account, provides email resources that can be used to directly engage VA employees.	VA Employees
Email (GovDelivery)	GovDelivery is a valuable email platform that can send HTML email to large groups of subscribers. The audience is self-selective—meaning they opt-in to receive emails—and includes VA employees, Veterans, and others interested in *I*DEA* updates and activities. Growing a subscriber base requires significant promotion via websites, social media, and other channels.	Self-Selected Subscribed Users
Events (Virtual or Live)	Events provide an incredibly valuable opportunity to directly engage with audience members. Whether hosting an event or presenting at one, these opportunities can be leveraged in a multitude of ways to increase awareness of and engagement with *I*DEA*.	Event Attendees
Print	Provide print collateral for inside VA health centers and VA offices	Internal and External

External Goals and Tactics

GOAL	TACTICS	KPI'S

Boost Brand Awareness - Create familiarity with our brand, establish trust and inspire action	> Website updates > Quarterly email > Social media content featuring testimonials/VA highlights/key messages > Determine most impactful speaking opportunities > VAntage Point blogs	Establish benchmarks and begin to see an upward trend in: > direct traffic to website > social media engagement > Follow up surveys for participants in attendance at speaking engagements > Email opens/click rates
Enhance Veteran Support/Engagement - Establish consistent communication to VA health care centers and external audiences through print and digital marketing, including VA news, accomplishments, resources, and helpful information	> Quarterly newsletter featuring *I*DEA* updates/highlights/champions > Social media > Speaking engagements > Posters/flyers/brochures > Host events similar to Showcase Series	> Email open/click rates > Surveys to gauge awareness/cultural improvements/ event responses > Social media analytics > Event attendance
Improve Brand Reputation - Increase the quality and quantity of reviews and testimonials - Build awareness of inclusive, diverse (Reputation Management Strategy)	> Case studies > Press releases > Community outreach – speaking engagement/public affairs/service > Social media engagement	> Send bi-annual surveys to clients to gauge success/satisfaction > Follow up surveys after events > Social media analytics > Media placement
Become a leader in healthcare culture - Improve the Veteran experience and culture by encouraging and embracing *I*DEA* practices (Reputation Management Strategy)	> Highlight team member/ Veteran experience at VA facilities > Highlight accomplishments pertaining to *I*DEA*, emphasize change	> Establish how to best measure awareness and advocacy within VA > surveys gauging change/success pertaining to *I*DEA*

Internal Goals and Tactics

GOAL	TACTICS	KPI'S

I*DEA

Boost Brand Awareness - Create familiarity with our brand, establish trust and inspire action within VA	> Monthly email to employees highlighting team members, *I*DEA* accomplishments, upcoming events > Intranet development and consistent updates > Determine most impactful speaking opportunities > VA Insider features > Print/digital collateral	> Direct traffic to Intranet > Follow up surveys for participants in attendance at speaking engagements > Email opens/click rates > Event attendance > Testimonials > Media placement
Enhance Employee Support/Engagement - Establish consistent communication with VA employees including *I*DEA* news and accomplishments, resources, team member features, and helpful information	> Monthly emails with employee features, highlighting advocacy, *I*DEA* accomplishments > Speaking engagements with VBA, VHA, and other determined events > Special event participation i.e., PRIDE	> Develop newsletter to feature organization highlights, *I*DEA* wins, team member features > Track intranet analytics > Surveys to gauge team satisfaction
Support Internal Advocacy - Increase the quality and quantity of reviews and testimonials - Build awareness of an inclusive, diverse workforce (Reputation Management Strategy)	> Provide collateral to support advocacy/outreach > Utilize team members for case studies/blogs/VA Insider/email newsletter features > Intranet features/information/resources	> Establish how to best measure awareness and advocacy within VA > Internal surveys > Track intranet analytics
Become a leader in workplace culture - Improve VA's workplace culture by encouraging and embracing *I*DEA* practices (Reputation Management Strategy)	> Highlight team member accomplishments pertaining to *I*DEA*, emphasize change > Emphasize workplace culture in blogs/newsletter > Award nominations for DEI	> Establish how to best measure awareness and advocacy within VA > Internal surveys > Award recipients

Distribution

The communications team will work with the *I*DEA* Sub-Council to identify the appropriate mechanisms and channels through which to distribute *I*DEA* products. Additionally, products will be bundled into packages of material to share with target audiences such as Congress. The bundled

products will be valuable assets to VSOs, MSOs, and other external influences for their own use and distribution.

9. Communications Timeline

The communications timeline captures events where key messaging is distributed to various stakeholders. 0 presents planned (and tracks completed) communication activities. The table also presents performance measures, where possible.

Planned Communication Activities

DATE	COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY
APR – JULY 2020	* Stood up the *I*DEA* Task Force
September 2021	* Stood up the *I*DEA* Sub-Council
NOV 2021	* Op Ed * Key Messages * Talking Points
DEC 2021	* Press Release
JAN 2022	* Press Conference * SECVA Roundtable Interview * *I*DEA* Showcase Series #1
FEB 2022	* *I*DEA* Showcase Series #2
MAR 2022	* *I*DEA* Showcase Series #3 * VBA SLS * Initial Draft of *I*DEA* Story, Accomplishments and Executive Summary * *I*DEA* Structure & Governance Bullets for Briefing
APR 2022 – OCT 2022	* Showcase Series/Stand Down Bullets for Briefing * EO 14035 Press Release * EBPC Briefing * VHA DEI Summit * LGBTQI+ PRIDE Month Speech * Juneteenth All Employee Message * July 28th Hearing on Sexual Harassment and Assault

	* TEDx on a Country of One August 18, 2022 * VBA EEO Conference October, 2022 * Stand Down Playbook, Resource Page
NOV 2022 – DEC 2022	* VBA EEO Conference October, 2022 * I*DEA Quarterly content structure * Showcasing I*DEA structure * Intranet wireframe * VBA Leadership Deck * VAAA Town Hall Deck * AIAN Deck * MLK Jr. Day Flyer * Content approved for I*DEA intranet Home and About pages * Internal Communications Plan approved Be Your Self * I*DEA/I~STAND Sub-Council Deck * ILEAD Video Script/Direction * I*DEA Quarterly Graphics

JAN – APR 2023	March
	    * OPM deck
	    * Yom HaShoah flyer/Save the Date
	    * Shane Whitecloud story
	    * Influencer Network Talking Points and Elevator Pitch
	    * Melissa Tran story
	    * LVA Denver Presentation
	    * March 23rd Sub-Council slides in process
	    * Four Corners Briefing
	    * Yom HaShoah flyer
	    * Transgender Day of Visibility Slide
	    * Equity Cover Slide
	
	February
	    * Women's History Month Flyer
	    * Yarelli Morales Women's History Month Feature
	    * Jennifer Esparza Showcasing I*DEA story
	    * SLC Onboarding Deck
	    * SES Deck
	    * NAGE Deck
	    * Labor Management Relations Deck
	    * HIMSS Deck
	    * CMV African American History Month Deck
	    * VHA SEO Deck
	    * CSEMO Deck
	    * Grace Hodge story
	
	January
	    * Finalized first I*DEA Quarterly Update
	    * Victor LaGroon Showcasing I*DEA story

I*DEA

	* Harvey Johnson Showcasing I*DEA story * Black History Month flyer * Launched Intranet Home Page * Launched Showcasing I*DEA Stories Page * Harvey Johnson C20 Interview * Annual Report outline/direction approved * I*DEA FAQ * Email copy for intranet inquiries re: special observances, inquiries, etc. * Graphics for Showcasing I*DEA, About Page *
MAY 2023	* TBD

10. Success and Measurement

Measuring the results of any communications effort is a key component to improving the impact and success of messaging and strategies. The table below provides three different categories of measurement—directional, intentional, and anecdotal.

*   Directional metrics are those metrics which can tell us the size and interest of audiences.
*   Intentional metrics are those that highlight the active desire, knowledge or use of ORMDI and *I*DEA* resources.
*   Anecdotal are metrics that can highlight impact but may not be captured in specific digital measurement.

Metrics

METRIC	CHANNEL	CATEGORY
Total Users	Website	Directional
Total Followers	Social Media	Directional
Total Likes	Social Media	Directional
Views	Video	Directional
ORMDI Intranet	Website	Directional
Blog Views	VAntage Point, Insider	Directional
Number of Citations/Year	Earned Media	Directional
Click-Through Rate	Social Media (Twitter & Facebook)	Intentional
Downloads (by Product)	Website/SharePoint	Intentional
Email Subscription	Email (GovDelivery)	Intentional

Traffic Sources	Website	Anecdotal
Earned Media	Earned Media	Anecdotal
Invitations/Presentations/Attendees	Events	Anecdotal
Article Publications	Earned Media	Anecdotal
Media Inquiries	Earned Media	Anecdotal
VA Inquiries	Clinicians & Staff, VHA Leadership	Anecdotal
VAntage Point & Insider Blog Comments	VAntage Point & Insider Blog	Anecdotal
Social Media Comments	Social Media	Anecdotal
Awards Nominations	Award Source	Directional

Additionally, social listening and intelligence will provide ongoing insights into audience sentiment to inform the direction of the *I*DEA* communications strategy and plan.

I*DEA

Appendix A: Talking Points

General

* We—VA—are doing something we've never done before. At least, not like this: not with focused direction and oversight from the Secretary, the Administration, and U.S. Congress to do a better job ensuring everybody feels safe and included. The new VA ethos is to 'take care of our employees and they will take care of the mission.'
  * Today, we are identifying and removing barriers that inhibit equity for all.
  * We must leverage our differences.
  * We must work together to create an enterprise that values diversity, embraces inclusion, and fosters equity and accessibility.
* Serving America's Veterans is our top priority. At VA, we live and breathe for Veterans, and we take great pride in providing them with the exceptional healthcare and benefits they've earned.
  * To do that, we must ensure every Veteran has access to the same care and opportunities. The reality is, we haven't always achieved that mission.
  * Equality does not recognize the myriad lived experiences that result in barriers to equity and access to the services and care they need to thrive.
    * While we've achieved equality in many ways over the past decades, we must now seek to achieve equity.
    * Equity requires recognizing differences to make sure everyone has the tools they need to thrive.
    * To begin understanding the difference between equality and equity, imagine you're barefoot. Equality would be me giving all of you the same size shoes. Equity would be me giving each of you shoes that fit your feet. And for some of you, it might mean giving you shoes that fit and a mobility device like a walker or a wheelchair.
    * The reality is that equity is far more serious than shoes, and there's more on the line than simply getting across the street without a few cuts and scrapes. It's about making sure all Veterans and employees have access to the services, benefits, and opportunities they need.
    * Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.
* VA is committed to consistent and systematic, fair, and impartial treatment of all individuals and a just distribution of tools and resources so all Veterans and employees can thrive.

I*DEA

Sound Bites

Long after their last day of military service, hundreds of thousands of Veterans continue to fight a losing battle on American ground. That battle isn't one they signed up for. It's not one that protects this great country against our enemies. That fight is for something many of us have the luxury of taking for granted: Equity. [from op ed]

I*DEA Influencer Key Messages

I*DEA Background

∗ In 2021, President Biden signed Executive Orders mandating that government agencies further inclusion, diversity, equity and access practices.

∗ VA Secretary McDonough formed the 18-member **I*DEA Task Force** which delivered **20 key recommendations** to effectively implement I*DEA throughout VA.

∗ **The I*DEA Mission** is to advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities we serve—all who do business with VA—and cultivates equitable access to care, benefits, and services for all.

∗

What is I*DEA Doing?

∗ **We are Promoting Inclusion** by treating individuals with dignity, integrity, and respect, and working to create an environment that is safe and welcoming for all by not tolerating harassment or discrimination of any kind.

∗ **We are Increasing Diversity** by partnering with minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to identify and recruit diverse talent from underserved communities;

  o Such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

∗ **We are Fostering Equity** by providing every individual with the support they need to access health care and benefits, and building workplaces that embody the values of I*DEA and I-CARE;

  o VA established its first employee resource groups (ERG)—**PrideVA**—to engage and support LGBTQ+ employees, and the **Women's I*DEA**

Sub-Group (VAWIsg) to improve opportunities and experiences of women employees.

* **We are Improving Access** by reducing barriers that underserved communities may face in using VA benefits and services and leveraging the institutional access points of our community partners to communicate with underserved populations.

What I*DEA Means to Me

* **It's a fact**: Employees at inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible, workplaces are happier and more successful than their peers.
* VA is committed to celebrating inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in all our offices and facilities.
* As leaders, colleagues, and through interactions with one another, **we promote what we permit**.
* We all have the power to shape our experiences and to dictate how we resolve issues that come up in the workplace.

Promoting I*DEA

* The following resources and channels were developed to inform, support, and engage VA employees and leaders:
  o I*DEA Intranet: the hub to learn about all things I*DEA including resources, special events, and first-hand experiences shared on the Showcasing I*DEA page.
  o I*DEA Quarterly: (or I*Q) an engaging e-mail round-up that packages key I*DEA updates and hot topics, upcoming events, tips, and links to resources.
  o Digital Assets: templates, FAQs, toolkits, virtual backgrounds, posters, the I*DEA brand guide, and flyers available on the I*DEA intranet and print to promote progress and acknowledge important special observances.

Influence: Be Your Self

* We are calling all I*DEA Advocates to join the newly formed **Influencer Network** to help build a more inclusive VA that values and supports the diverse communities we serve and cultivates equitable access to care, benefits, and services for all.
* To create an environment where all feel safe and welcome, it takes a village, and **it begins with *you***.

* **Be Your Self:** Bring Your Whole Self to work, share a unique part of your personal story and encourage others to do the same.
* Participate in the **I*DEA Sub-Council** and learn about the progress VA is making to further inclusion, diversity, equity and access.
* Encourage those around you to feel empowered to talk about the importance of I*DEA.
* Intervene and prevent incidents of harassment and discrimination across VA by being a proactive bystander.

Appendix B: Quotes

This section will contain quotes from White House and VA leadership, employees, etc. for use in the development of communications artifacts.

"I take full responsibility to ensure our employees have everything they need to carry out the important work before us and that we operate in a culture that celebrates and draws strength from our country's great diversity."

Denis McDonough

Secretary

Department of Veterans Affairs

*"Imagine everyone who enters a VA facility sees themselves. With this guiding principle lighting our way, we set off on a journey to create a space for all who do business with VA. We invite you to journey with us as we implement the I*DEA initiative to transform VA's cultural health."*

Harvey Johnson

Deputy Assistant Secretary

Office of Resolution Management Diversity & Inclusion

Department of Veterans Affairs

"What you do today will prepare you for tomorrow if you pay attention."

Victor LaGroon (he/him/his)

Chief Diversity Officer

Department of Veterans Affairs

"We have to provide a service to our Veterans. When people say "it's not my job" it bothers me, because my first reaction when I see a Veteran or someone in need is always "how can I help?" Out of human decency we should always be willing to help."

Yarellli Moralescruz (she/her/hers)

Voluntary Service Specialist

Program Manager for My Life My Story

"What health equity means is making sure that every patient, no matter race, creed, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, when they live can have access or has the chance to have access to those therapies."

Ravi Parikh, MD

Medical Oncologist

Philadelphia VA Medical Center

"Its about putting the right leaders in place. I remember speaking to the leader at a facility in Little Rock, Arkansas about having an LGBTQ+ event. We had a small event in the chapel and 16 people showed up; five years later it grew to 200. Making it normal. Being your authentic self. If I can impress upon leadership to do anything, its empowering your people to be themselves."

Toni Hightower (she/her/hers)

MAJ (Ret) USAR

Acting Team Lead Center for Women Veterans/

Human Centered Designer (VEO)

It takes but one person, one moment, one conviction, to start a ripple of change. Are you ready?"

Sammy R Miller, Board Certified Mental Health Chaplain

Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI) Home (va.gov)

"I*DEA is incredibly important. It's exciting. It's powerful. It's anything but boring, and it deserves a brand that makes people pause and take notice. In developing the look and feel of this initiative we embraced bold, optimistic colors that give us energy. The bright oranges, pinks, and purples highlight what really matters: the rich diversity of our employees and our Veterans and the people who love and care for them. I*DEA is all of us—our unique, colorful selves and our ever-evolving kaleidoscope of togetherness—and we hope you see yourself reflected here."

Jennifer Moffit, LP.D (She/Her)

I*DEA Program Manager & I~Stand Co-Chair

Office of Resource Management, Diversity & Inclusion

Department of Veterans Affairs

"By its very nature, I*DEA is about thinking and doing in a human-centered way, with empathy and understanding at the forefront. I believe that honoring and recognizing that we all have diverse experiences and perspectives us to each give our individual best to the greater good of serving Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors and earning their trust. With the shared passion and commitment of VA employees and partners, VA is bringing experts together from across the Department, other federal agencies and organizations, education institutions, and non-profit organizations and industry to actualize this vision. With empathy and understanding for each other and for those we serve driving our orientation, the opportunity for collective impact to reach all Veterans from every background and experience is unparalleled."

Barbara Morton

Veterans Experience Office (VEO)

Appendix C: Stories and Testimonials

* Anonymized personal story/experience/quote from interviews
* Stories from the field – Veteran/VA Employee testimonials

I*DEA

I*DEA Be Your Self Campaign Plan

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI)

November 2022

I*DEA

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I*DEA

BACKGROUND

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is embarking on a cultural transformation of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (I*DEA). We are taking swift action to become a federal model for I*DEA where everyone who engages with the Department is treated with dignity and respect.

With the release of Executive Orders 13985 and 14035 and other related Orders, and amidst growing social unrest, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a unique and meaningful opportunity.

That opportunity is not only to identify and eliminate institutional barriers to equity at VA, but to proactively develop, enhance, and deliver agency-wide practices that will put the Department at the forefront of the federal movement to ensure inclusion, diversity, equity, and access to underserved and otherwise marginalized communities is prioritized.

To demonstrate commitment to this goal and improve the cultural health of VA by weaving these principles into the very fabric of the Department, VA launched an enterprise-wide initiative: I*DEA.

CAMPAIGN PLAN

This campaign plan serves to guide ORMDI in communicating I*DEA goals and objectives to VA employees, Veterans, and other key stakeholders via targeted communications and engagement campaigns. The plan is a living document and will evolve according to stakeholder input, lessons learned, and emerging priorities.

Broadly, the objectives of I*DEA campaigns are:

* Deliver compelling stories and meaningful, actionable information to inform, engage, and build support for I*DEA
* Position VA as a healthcare provider of choice and encourage Veterans to choose VA for their care and benefits
* Cultivate unity, trust, and inclusion across the enterprise to build a stronger, more resilient workforce
* Attract diverse employees to VA and position VA as an employer-of-choice
* Create a push-and-pull dynamic of delivering (pushing) information and products, while also engaging (pulling) stakeholder feedback to support an agile communications approach

Internal Campaigns

Internal I*DEA campaigns focus on VA employees and will offer information and resources that will help them understand the mission and importance of I*DEA and encourage them to engage in and advocate for improved diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in every interaction.

By integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and access into workforce planning and human capital strategies, VA will provide all employees with equal access to resources and opportunities and foster a safe environment where everyone is empowered to bring their authentic selves to work.

Channels to distribute internal campaign messages and materials include:

* Newsletters
* Blogs
* Email Messages
* Fact Sheets
* Videos
* ORMDI Website

* I*DEA Intranet
* Social Media
* C20
* 2023 Stand Down
* Events*

Be Your Self Campaign

The *Be Your Self* campaign will launch in January 2023 with three primary objectives:

1. **Inform VA Employees**
   a. Inform employees about I*DEA's background and principles (inclusion, diversity, equity, and access)
   b. Educate employees about the steps VA is taking to improve the organization and the employee experience
2. **Engage VA Employees**
   a. Encourage employees to act, ask questions, and engage with the I*DEA intranet, blogs, newsletters, Stand Down, FAQ sheets, etc.
   b. Inspire employees to lead with openness, respect, and grace
   c. Encourage employees to understand and embrace the value of a diverse workforce
3. **Support VA Employees**
   a. Introduce employees to the tools and opportunities available to advocate for themselves and others
   b. Empower employees to share their authentic selves within the professional VA work environment

Goal	Tactic	Measurement
* Inform employees about I*DEA's background and principles * Educate employees about the steps VA is taking to improve the organization and the employee experience	* Quarterly newsletter and twice/month blog to employees highlighting team members, I*DEA accomplishments, upcoming events * Intranet development and consistent updates * Determine most impactful speaking opportunities * Print/digital collateral * C20 interviews	* Direct traffic to Intranet * Newsletter/Blog analytics * Surveys from Stand Down to gauge general feeling of I*DEA, overall connection to Comms tactics * Email opens/click rates * Testimonials * Response to speaking engagements
Encourage employees to act, ask questions, and engage with the I*DEA intranet, blogs, newsletters, Stand Down, FAQ sheets, etc.	* Cross promoting all messaging through the various channels * Linking resources and incorporating into speaking engagements with VACO, VBA, VHA, NCA, and other determined events * C20 interviews * Leadership development programs * Engagement with stakeholders i.e. I*DEA Sub-Council	* Newsletter to feature organization highlights, I*DEA wins, team member features * Blog to share stories/track analytics * Track intranet analytics * Surveys to gauge team satisfaction
Introduce employees to the tools and opportunities available to advocate for themselves and others	* Cross promoting all messaging through the various channels * Linking resources and incorporating into speaking engagements with VACO, VBA, VHA, NCA and other determined events * All-employee messages * Engaging senior leadership to share messaging, including I*DEA Sub-Council	* Newsletter analytics * Internal surveys * Intranet/blog analytics * Download rates on Intranet

Goal	Tactic	Measurement
* Motivate employees to embrace their own uniqueness and value differences in others * Empower employees to embrace and share their authentic selves within the professional VA work environment	* Highlight team member accomplishments pertaining to I*DEA, emphasize change in Newsletter, Blog * Lead through example with stories and highlights from VACO and facility leadership * Awards for exemplary employees	* Stand Down Survey responses to gauge overall impression of I*DEA, areas of improvement/lacking resources * Internal awards * Newsletter/blog engagement/analytics * Intranet traffic/engagement
Encourage employees to understand and embrace the value of a diverse workforce	* Emphasize workplace culture in blogs/newsletter * Share best practices * Highlight workplace trends pertaining to I*DEA and industry leaders * Feature I*DEA Advocates in messaging	* Establish how to best measure awareness and advocacy within VA * Internal surveys * Internal awards/shout outs featuring I*DEA advocates in Newsletters/blogs
Inspire employees to lead with openness, respect, and grace	* Share best practices * Feature employees who exemplify I*DEA best practices, and share their whole authentic selves at work (i.e., through special observances) * Establish awards for I*DEA advocates	* Internal surveys * Internal awards * Testimonials

Be Your Self Campaign Audience

Audience	Goals
VA Leadership (All)	* Higher rate of employees from underserved communities in VA's workforce * Increased innovation and productivity * Ability to hire and retain top talent from diverse communities * Successful execution of the OEs * Good news stories
VA Leadership (Underserved)	* Receipt of support and tools required to succeed in new roles * Validation of previous barriers to opportunity and growth * Improved sense of belonging * Empowerment

VA Employees (All)	* Clear expectations around delivery of care and service to underserved communities * Clear expectations around treatment of employees from underserved communities * Improved service to Veterans from underserved communities * Increased productivity and job satisfaction
VA Employees (Underserved)	* Access to career opportunities and progression * Receipt of support and tools required to succeed in new roles * Validation of previous barriers to opportunity and growth * Improved sense of belonging * Empowerment
Service Contractors	* Increased productivity and job satisfaction * Realization of new business opportunities within VA
VA Vet Centers	* Increased productivity in servicing Veterans, including the ability to serve more Veterans * Increased job satisfaction * Realization of new business opportunities within VA * Good news stories
Veteran Service Providers	* Increased productivity in servicing Veterans * Realization of new business opportunities within VA * Increased job satisfaction * Good news stories

Be Your Self Campaign Sponsors & Key Spokespeople

Campaign sponsors and spokespeople are individuals and/or groups who have influence in the target audience community. They are I*DEA advocates prepared to share messaging, answer questions, and engage with the vast VA audience.

POC	Office	Role
Deputy Secretary Donald Remy	Department of Veterans Affairs	Sponsor/Spokesperson
Assistant Secretary Gina Grosso	Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness	Sponsor/Spokesperson
Deputy Assistant Secretary Harvey Johnson	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion	Sponsor/Spokesperson
Chief Diversity Officer Victor LaGroon	Office of the Secretary	Sponsor/Spokesperson
I*DEA Program Management Dr. Jennifer Moffit	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion	Spokesperson

Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary Dr. Anne Marie Duncan	Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion	Sponsor
I*DEA Sub-Council	*Cross-Enterprise*	
I*DEA SMEs	*Cross-Enterprise*	

Be Your Self Campaign Messaging

Campaign messages express the most essential concepts that all stakeholders should know about I*DEA. These messages should be carried through all communication products to consistently inform, educate, or persuade stakeholders.

Campaign Slogan

"Be Your Self" is the *Be Your Self* campaign's primary slogan. Complementary slogans include: "Just Be You" and "Bring Your Whole Self."

Campaign Key Messages

* I*DEA represents four individual yet interdependent principles: inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.
    o VA is promoting inclusion: Every individual who enters a VA facility must feel safe, included, and valued.
    o VA is increasing diversity: VA strives to leverage the strength and uniqueness that defines our VA workforce, our Veteran population, and our country.
    o VA is fostering equity: VA seeks to reduce systemic barriers to opportunity with a goal of providing everyone with fair access to health care and benefits.
    o VA is improving access: VA increases access by proactively embedding opportunities and creating institutional pathways for all by reducing and eliminating inequities.
* I*DEA celebrates human difference and signifies conscious inclusion for all.
    o The I*DEA awareness ribbon is a symbol of and shows support for inclusion, diversity, equity, and access at VA.
* VA is nurturing an environment of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access to ensure all VA employees feel safe, welcome, and valued.
    o VA values the vibrant diversity of its workforce and recognizes the impactful contributions of every employee.
    o VA is building a safe space where employees can bring their authentic selves to work.

- o VA is on a mission to improve the cultural health of VA—taking better care of VA employees so VA employees can take better care of Veterans.
  - o It is our mission to advance an inclusive environment that nurtures employee growth and best supports the diverse communities we serve.
* We are igniting I*DEA through the power of our unified workforce by emboldening employees with the tools to effectively be I*DEA activators.

Campaign Hashtag

The *Be Your Self* campaign's hashtag is #BeYourSelfatVA, which should be used on all campaign-related social media posts.

Be Your Self Campaign Channels

The table below highlights the primary channels and target audience for each.

Channel	Description	Target Audience
I*DEA Intranet	The intranet will become the hub for all things I*DEA and will play a key role in informing, engaging, and supporting VA employees. The intranet will host the I*DEA blog and the tools and resources (e.g., one-pagers, presentations) VA leaders and employees need to understand and advance I*DEA.	VA Leadership and Employees
I*DEA Quarterly (GovDelivery)	The I*DEA Quarterly (I*Q) is a focused information source delivering I*DEA messaging and information including letters from I*DEA leaders (e.g., Chief Diversity Officer, Chief of Staff, Deputy Assistant Secretary, etc.), initiative successes, creative contributions (e.g., poems, artworks, or personal narratives from the field), current events, best practices, and links to resources. The newsletter will also drive viewers to the intranet and blog.	Internal/ ORMDI to review current lists to segment appropriately
Showcasing I*DEA Story Site	Showcasing I*DEA, hosted on the intranet, allows ORMDI to present I*DEA content through first-person narratives, highlights of I*DEA advocates, relevant updates.	VA Leadership and Employees

I*DEA

VAntage Point & VA Insider	VAntage Point provides an outlet to communicate with Veterans and the broader public, while VA Insider is a channel to communicate to VA employees. ORMDI will leverage these outlets to cross-promote the I*DEA blog and news-worthy information.	Subscribed VA Leadership and Employees, Veterans, general public
Email (Outlook)	Email can be used to directly inform and engage VA employees.	VA Leadership and Employees
Email (GovDelivery)	Email is a valuable channel to share recent news, current events, stories and testimonials from the vast audiences throughout VA, and connect employees from the field to VACO. Audience members can self-select their engagement and opt-in to receive messages.	Self-Selected Subscribed Users/ Carefully curated groups through ORMDI internal audiences
Print Materials	Print collateral, such as posters and flyers, will be shared and/or displayed in VA medical centers and offices	VA Leadership and Employees, External
Radio/C20	C20 reaches the greater VA audience through interview-style conversations with key stakeholders.	Internal
Facility Monitors	Develop logo animation and video to inform target audiences. Will be shared on the intranet, ORMDI website, and VA facility monitors.	VA Leadership and Employees, External

Be Your Self Campaign Key Deliverables

Goals	Timeline	Responsible
Igniting I*DEA Quarterly Update		
INFORM * Introduce I*DEA (background & principles) * Share I*DEA goals, successes, announcements, events **ENGAGE** Spark curiosity & engagement with I*DEA **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA intranet, forums, etc.)	* Newsletters are published quarterly January/April/July/October and scheduled on or around the 15th of the month *]	* TA design and select content * ORMDI connect with key stakeholders/ dissemination
I*DEA FAQ		

Goals	Timeline	Responsible
INFORM * Outline I*DEA principles * Answer the six essential questions * Answer anticipated questions **ENGAGE** Encourage employees to get involved **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA intranet, forums, etc.)	Published January 2023	* TA development * ORMDI dissemination * Post to Intranet

I*DEA Intranet		
INFORM * Outline I*DEA principles * Describe/outline goals and successes * Highlight upcoming events/opportunities for involvement **ENGAGE** Encourage employees to get involved **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA FAQs, links, forums, etc.)	* Wireframe: November 20, 2022 * First review: December 15, 2022 * Publish/Test: January 10 * Final: January 17, 2023	ORMDI/TA Support
Showcasing I*DEA Story Site		
INFORM * Share I*DEA principles and key messages * Introduce goals and successes through storytelling **ENGAGE** * Inspire curiosity/awareness/action * Encourage employees to get involved * Showcase personal narratives/artistic contributions to drive interaction **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA FAQs, links, forums, etc.)	* Twice/month * Publish on the 15th and 30th	* ORMDI/TA collect material/ content from SMEs; draft content * ORMDI post teasers to VA Insider/Hey VA
Senior Leadership Video (Secretary or DAS)		
INFORM * Outline I*DEA principles * Describe/outline goals and successes * Highlight upcoming events/opportunities for involvement **ENGAGE** Encourage employees to get involved **SUPPORT** * Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA FAQs, links, forums, etc.)	* Begin development 11/2022 * Publish 3/2023	Titan Alpha to draft content; VA to implement
Animated I*DEA Logo		

INFORM * Outline what I*DEA means * Highlight principles/high level definitions **ENGAGE** Encourage employees to get involved **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA FAQs, links, forums, etc.)	* Begin framework November 2022 * Completed January 2023	* Titan Alpha and ORMDI to collaborate on animated logo vision and design * Titan Alpha to produce

Animated I*DEA Video		
INFORM * Outline I*DEA principles * Highlight importance/need **ENGAGE** * Encourage employees to get involved * Drive excitement for change * Attract employees towards the initiative with thoughtful targeted messaging **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA FAQs, links, forums, etc.)	* Begin framework January 2023 * Completed by October 2023	* Titan Alpha and ORMDI to collaborate on script/direction of video * Titan Alpha to produce
C20 Interview		
INFORM * Outline I*DEA principles * Share latest progress, bring awareness to resources * Highlight upcoming events/opportunities for involvement **ENGAGE** Encourage employees to get involved **SUPPORT** Provide access to tools & information (I*DEA FAQs, links, forums, etc.)	* January 2023 * April 2023 * July 2023 * October 2023	TA to draft talking points; ORMDI to select SME for interview

Be Your Self Campaign Content Calendar

Date	Deliverable	Timeline	Channel
Jan 2023	I*DEA Launch/Intro Story featuring DAS	Due 12/30 Publish 1/17	I*DEA Blog VA Insider/HeyVA
	A/S Grosso Intro Story	Due 1/20 Publish 1/30	I*DEA Blog VA Insider/HeyVA
	I*DEA FAQ	Due 1/5 Publish 1/10	I*DEA Intranet Email
	Igniting I*DEA Quarterly Update Launch	Due 12/30/22 Publish 1/30	GovDelivery Post to Intranet
	C20 I*DEA Intro with DAS	Scheduled 10/2022 Interview 1/12	C20 Email Distribution from ORMDI Post to Intranet

I*DEA

Month	Item	Dates	Distribution
Feb 2023	Black History Month Story	Due 2/5 Publish 2/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Black History Month Flyer	Due 1/25 Publish 2/1	ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
	What I*DEA Means for Me Story	Due 2/15 Publish 2/28	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
Mar 2023	Women's History Month Story	Due 3/5 Publish 3/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Women's History Month Flyer	Due 2/25 Publish 3/1	ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
	Highlighting a VA Female Leader/Healthcare worker Blog	Due 3/15 Publish 3/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Women's History Month C20 Interview	Schedule 12/22 Interview March 2023	C20 ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
Apr 2023	Q2 2023 Newsletter Featuring: Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Heritage Month	Due 3/30 Publish 4/30	GovDelivery Post to Intranet
	April Story Post Feature SAAPM	Due 4/5 Publish 4/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	April Story Post Feature Graqce Hodges	Due 4/20 Publish 4/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
May 2023	Be Your Self: Nurses Appreciation Month Flyer	Due 4/20 Publish 5/1	ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
	I*DEA Animated Video	Due 4/20 Publish 5/1	ORMDI to Distribute to Facilities
	Asian American and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander Heritage Month Flyer	Due 4/25 Publish 5/2	ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
	Acting DepSec story	Due 5/5 Publish 5/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	May Story Post Asian American and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander Heritage Month	Due 5/20 Publish 5/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
Jun 2023	June Story Post PRIDE month interview with a SME	Due 6/5 Publish 6/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	PRIDE Flyer	Due 5/25 Publish 6/1	ORMDI Email distribution Post to intranet
	Blog post: 75th Anniversary of Women's Integration in the Military Act	Due 6/20 Publish 6/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA

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Jul 2023	Access/Accessibility Blog Post	Due 6/5 Publish 7/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Flyer What access/ability means: Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act	Due 6/20 Publish 7/1	ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
	Q3 2023 Newsletter: Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act; Women's Equality Day; National Hispanic Heritage Month	Due 7/1 Publish 7/15	GovDelivery Post to Intranet
	I*DEA Blog Veteran/employee highlight	Due 7/20 Publish 7/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	C20 Interview: Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities/Influencers Nework Campaign	Schedule 4/2023 Interview 7/2023	C20 ORMDI Email Distribution Post to Intranet
Aug 2023	August Blog Post	Due 8/5 Publish 8/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	August Blog Post Women's Equality Day	Due 8/20 Publish 8/26	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Influencers Network Campagin Posters	Due 8/20 Publish 8/26	ORMDI to distribute to facilities
Sep 2023	September Blog Post National Hispanic Heritage Month	Due 9/5 Publish 9/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Stand Down overview Flyer	Due 9/1 Publish 9/5	ORMDI Email distribution Post to intranet
	September Story Post	Due 9/20 Publish 9/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	C20 Interview	Schedule June 2023 Interview September 2023	C20 Post to Intranet ORMDI Email Distribution
Oct 2023	October Story Post Become an I*DEA activator – tips to embrace I*DEA and host a great Stand Down	Due 10/5 Publish 10/15	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA
	Q4 2023 Newsletter: Stand Down; National Disability Employment Awareness Month; Disability Mentoring Day – what is this and how can you be an advocate; DVAM; Trans day of remembrance	Due 9/20 Publish 10/15	Gov Delivery Post to Intranet

	October Story Post Veteran highlight/feature for National Disability Employment Awareness Month	Due 10/20 Publish 10/30	Showcasing I*DEA Share to Hey VA/VA News
	I*DEA Animated Video: what I*DEA is, how to carry it out through their day-to-day interactions, drive to resources	Due: 8/2023 Publish: 10/2023	Facility Monitors Intranet Website ORMDI Email Distribution

External Campaigns

[Content Placeholder]

I*DEA: A Country of One

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11. Introduction

VA has a renewed focus for how individuals can use their own personal power to make a difference by inspiring positive change in their workspaces and lives. Dedicated VA professionals teamed up across our vast enterprise to build a stronger VA that ensures a space for all employees to feel safe, respected, and valued.

The starting point for VA was recognizing that as managers, colleagues, and through our individual interactions with one another, we promote what we permit. We acknowledge that we all have the power to shape our own experiences as well as the power to dictate how we resolve issues that come up in the workplace.

VA is creating a tool kit that outlines ways in which employees can find the courage to create a positive cultural shift. The toolkit provides suggestions on how to handle debilitating workplace issues including harassment, discrimination, or micro-aggressions. By creating learning tools to recognize implicit bias within VA , we are creating an environment where all employees feel safe, respected, and valued.

VA is in a position to take steps toward evolving as an organization. Organizations are stronger with an inclusive workforce. The following statistics share insight on how a lack of thought for diverse populations has resulted in issues that potentially could have been less impactful had there been a greater focus on inclusivity.

* Indigenous, Black, Asian, and Pacific Islander Americans experienced the highest death tolls from COVID-19 amongst any other demographic in the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that there is evidence of more individuals in racial and ethnic minorities getting COVID-19 due to structural inequalities.
* Due to underlying factors and a lack of preparedness for how to take necessary precautions, individuals living with disabilities have fallen into a higher risk category and have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
* People in the LGBTQ+ community experienced elevated health and economic risk related to COVID-19 , as they are more likely to work in highly affected industries, less likely to have health coverage, and are more likely to smoke and have chronic illnesses that can increase complications during infection, as reported by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (Foundation, n.d.).
* A study by American Press (Sharita Gruberg, 2020) revealed that many LGBTQ+ individuals reported mistreatment in their public, work, and personal lives in the year 2020. More than one-third of LGBTQ+ people—36 percent of respondents in the report —said they had experienced discrimination based on their race or ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, economic status, immigration

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status, or age. Transgender individuals reported even higher rates, with 62 percent reporting discrimination in the past year.

* A report by the National Women's Law Center (nwlc.org) states that nearly one in six (16.3 percent) working mothers who have children under age 18 are in low-wage jobs. Nearly one in five (18.3 percent) working mothers who have children aged 3 and under are in low-wage jobs.
- Regardless of economic hardships, women continue to be underpaid relative to men, earning 92 cents to every dollar earned by a man (Anthony P. Carnevale, 2018).
- Nearly one fifth (46 million people) of Americans cannot afford necessary healthcare services (Witters, 2021). This lack of access is the result of systemic inequality that has been around for a very long time and is exacerbated by fear, ignorance, and misinformation.

VA has a unique opportunity to create lasting, impactful change for Veterans, caregivers, and VA beneficiaries. As the nation's largest health care system, VA has taken the initial steps to understand the varied reasons why health care disparities often occur.

Exhibit 1.The Impact of Inequity to Service Members, Veterans

Figure 1.Women, LGBTQ+, Underserved Populations face Discrimination

In the 73 years since President Truman desegregated the military in 1948—making discrimination on the basis of race illegal in the armed forces—many forms of inequity have persisted, many of which stem from overt and covert racism, sexism, discrimination, conscious, and unconscious bias.

LEGISLATION	PARAMETERS
The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944	Commonly referred to as the GI Bill: intended to help American Veterans prosper and build wealth through home loans, unemployment assistance, and higher education enrollment. However, the bill was designed to chiefly allocate assistance to white Veterans (Blakemore, 2021) since the responsibility was left up to the states to determine. The disparity in the bill's implementation helped drive further separation in income level, education, and equity between white and black Americans.
Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948	Allowed women to serve as full members in the armed forces. The passage of this act created concerns among male military leaders that military readiness would negatively be impacted

	by pregnancy and female parenthood obligations. In 1951, President Truman signed Executive Order 10240, which authorized an involuntary discharge of a woman if she became pregnant, gave birth, or became a parent through adoption.
Department of Defense Directive 1304.26	"Don't Ask Don't Tell" is the discriminatory ban on openly gay or lesbian United States military personnel. It was implemented in 1994 and prohibited any identified gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals from defending their country. If a service member was *outed*, they were almost immediately discharged as their presence was feared to "create an unacceptable risk to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability" (10 U.S.C. § 654(b), essentially suggesting they would undermine the ability of others to carry out their duties. Thousands of service members were discharged throughout the duration of the policy's existence, a total of 17 years before it was repealed in 2011.

12. The Root Cause of Inequity

There are a multitude of factors for inequity that result from various biases. Some biases are known, such as conscious biases; some are inherited and reiterated to the point of becoming engrained in others or in society. From addressing unconscious biases to improving cultural competency, there are numerous ways to change how underrepresented individuals are treated.

Unconscious biases, also known as hidden biases or implicit biases, are buried within a blind spot of the brain (Ruiz, 2021). These biases, inherited or experience-based, can influence how an individual treats others, and can be the direct result of a response to events that have happened, or beliefs that were passed down through family and home environments. These experiences can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviors toward others. We are not inherently aware of our unconscious biases but they can be uncovered by taking the Implicit Association Tests (IAT) that were developed by researchers at Harvard University.

Microaggressions are another form of bias which involve a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.

Cultivating cultural competency can lead to understanding of the specific ethnic, language, social, and economic distinctions of particular people and families. Cultural competency has four major components: awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills. It also means being able to negotiate cross-cultural differences to accomplish practical goals. Multicultural competency requires the following:

1. A basic understanding of your own culture and ethnicity
2. A willingness to learn about the cultural practices and worldview of others
3. A positive attitude toward cultural differences
4. A willingness to accept and respect these differences

Being humble, or harnessing humility, means thinking of others more and considering how one's actions can affect others. For individuals in leadership, it can involve recognizing that others may have a better way of doing things or an idea that's stronger than the original, welcoming those differences and actively trying to incorporate them into our day-to-day interactions with one another.

Veterans Affairs has taken significant steps in the last few years to improve inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. With the target of growing claims (Katz, 2021) to better address the concerns shared by Veterans and employees, VA has optimistic goals that will drive tangible results.

13. Legislation and Actions to Improve Equity in VA

There have been many efforts aimed at better serving our Veterans, VA employees, family members of Veterans, and caregivers of Veterans. It is a continuous, concerted effort to provide the highest quality of service to our diverse audience. Significant progress has been made in recent years, but there is still work to be done.

LEGISLATION	PARAMETERS
H.R.7105 - Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020	This new law created significant changes to Veterans' education and health benefits. This act was designed to better serve Veterans by reducing inefficiencies and improving the quality of care and benefits Veterans receive.
Deborah Sampson Act of 2020	Signed into law in January of 2021 as a part of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement

	Act of 2020, with the intent of better serving women Veterans through improved access to care and services.
Diversity and Inclusion Veterans Affairs Council (DIVAC)	An internal forum to address Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) issues impacting VA's workforce. The council does not operate as a public forum. The council provides independent recommendations to VA leadership on policies, programs and initiatives relating to VA workforce diversity and organizational inclusion.
VA MISSION Act of 2018	This law brought significant changes in how health care is to be delivered to Veterans by VA and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). It provided guidance on increasing community care programs and access to care in underserved areas.
Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014	Commonly referred to as the Choice Act, this law sought to improve access to care from non-VA providers. It established the Veterans Choice Fund to pay for these services to non-VA providers for Veterans.

14. White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (WHIAANHPI)

This Presidential Memorandum dated January 26, 2021, requests Federal Agencies to review all existing orders, regulations, guidance documents, policies, programs, and other agency actions to ensure they do not contribute to racism, xenophobia and intolerance against Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI). Strategic priority areas within the memorandum cover:

* Anti-Asian Hate/Discrimination, Inclusion, and Belonging Data Disaggregation for Asian Americans (AAs) and NHPIs (Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders) Language Access for AA and NHPIs COVID-19 Response and RecoveryCapacity Building

15. Veterans Affairs Launches *I*DEA* (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access) Task Force

As the nation's largest health care system, VA has taken the initial steps to understand the reasons health care disparities occur, and to create a more inclusive and supportive care environment for all Veterans, particularly for those from underserved or underrepresented communities.

In 2021, following the issuance of the Executive Orders to address inequalities issued by the Biden Administration, Secretary McDonough launched the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (*I*DEA*) Task Force comprised of an interdisciplinary team of 30+ multi-disciplinary subject-matter experts from different offices within VA to review existing policies, programs, and organizational structures across the enterprise. The team included representatives from the White House, members of academia, community partners, and more. The following guiding principles were established by the Task Force to help direct sustainable change when developing recommendations:

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

The Task Force worked over 120 days to develop an action plan which includes 20 recommendations and 68 sub-recommendations focused on building *I*DEA* within the Department. VA has adopted a graduated approach towards the implementation of the recommendations to better ensure all VA employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors receive equitable treatment and are treated with dignity and respect in their experiences when interacting with VA.

20 Recommendations

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

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

In addition to the original 20 recommendations from the *I*DEA* Task Force action plan, an additional four were created by the Facilities and Accessibility (F&A) workstream. The recommendations are:

* Identifying strategic criteria for capital investments that support *I*DEA*.
* Evaluate a representative sample of 14 VA facilities (owned and leased) to develop general guidance for maximizing physical accessibility, beyond the existing duties to comply with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and

related standards and propose workplace adjustments that may reduce the need for reasonable accommodations (E.O. 14035: sec 10.c and 10.d).

* Ensure that VA employees are adequately notified of the procedure for filing complaints concerning accessibility barriers in Federal buildings with the Access Board (E.O. 14035: sec 10.d)
* Ensure that all information and communication technology and products developed, procured, maintained, or used by VA are accessible and usable by employees with disabilities consistent with all standards and technical requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

At the conclusion of the *I*DEA* Task Force in July 2021, SECVA decided the ownership and implementation of the *I*DEA* Action Plan would be transitioned to an *I*DEA* Sub-Council within VA's Governance Structure. The *I*DEA* Sub-Council was originally comprised of five domain-specific workstreams with subject matter experts from across different offices at VA. The workstreams include Action Plan Recommendations (APR), Human Capital & Workforce Planning (HC&WP), Executive Orders & Presidential Memorandums (EO/PM), Stakeholder Engagements (SE), and Facilities and Accessibility (F&A).

The I-DEA Sub-Council in consultation with VA subject matter experts across all three administrations, compiled insights through quantitative data review, qualitative interview styles and conducted a series of feasibility assessments of each of the Task Force recommendations. The feasibility assessments assessed the technical, operational, economical, estimated impact, and legal feasibility of each recommendation. The feasibility assessments aimed to inform the prioritization, provide fact-based recommendations to VA decision makers on how to purse and modify recommendations, as well as to evaluate resources needed to implement the recommendations.

In August 2022, a sixth workstream Freely Associated States/ Outside the Continental United States (FAS/OCONUS) and four sub-groups were added to the *I*DEA* Sub-Council. The FAS/OCONUS workstream focuses on improving care for Veterans in the FAS, and OCONUS. The workstream also oversees the assessment and implementation of four recommendations. The four sub-groups added include the LGBTQI+ Sub-Group, the Disability Sub-Group, the Women's Advisory Sub-Group, and the Countering Anti-Semitism Sub-Group. These sub-groups will serve as technical advisors in a specific protective class, to the workstreams and report directly to sub-council chairs. These sub-groups are tasked with reviewing policy and proposing a course of action to align with VA's strategic mission, goals, and objectives on I-DEA, in accordance with requirements outlined in E.O.s 13985, 14035 and any other subsequent relative E.O.s.

I*DEA

Engaging with community partners and experts outside of VA is essential to understanding lessons learned and best practices to advance equity. Outside advocates and subject matter experts (such as Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), non-governmental organizations, businesses, and academia partners) maintain a responsive relationship with Veterans. The *I*DEA* Task Force (and eventually the *I*DEA* Sub-Council) engages with community partners consisting of professional associations and other stakeholders who have extensive experience on inequities that Veterans face when using VA programs and services.

VA's goals to make the necessary steps towards equity include:

Through these efforts, VA is reducing internal and external barriers that have impeded access to benefits, services, and healthcare. VA recognizes that internal barriers will require changes to policies, processes, and procedures to enable access to underserved Veterans. Conversely, external barriers such as legislation, infrastructure, or technology differences can contribute to inequities.

VA's highest priorities are our three core responsibilities:

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

VA seeks to advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities we serve—Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors—and to cultivate equitable access to care, benefits, and services for all. VA seeks to accomplish this mission in the following ways:

1. Develop Data for Equity strategy.
2. Improve access, advance outcomes.
3. Increase contract awards to Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSB) and Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDB).
4. Address health equity for underserved Veterans.
5. Build and maintain trust with underserved Veterans.

16. The Intent of the *I*DEA* Sub-Council

The VA *I*DEA* Sub-Council was established to ensure that enterprise policy decisions are consistent with the Secretary's strategic goals and are developed to improve the lives of Veterans, caregivers, and their families. This sub-council

serves as the primary **I*DEA** oversight body to the Office of the Secretary (OSVA) for enterprise-wide decision-making.

The **I*DEA** Sub-Council reports to members of the Evidence Based Policy Council (EBPC), VA Operations Board (VAOB), and VA Executive Board (VAEB). The **I*DEA** Sub-Council is focused on policy, placing an emphasis on identifying any internal and external problems that impact the VA's **I*DEA** efforts. The **I*DEA** Sub-Council has been reviewing the existing policies to identify any gaps, needs, and problems within VA. The **I*DEA** Sub-Council has been focused on identifying the individuals involved with the affected population and engaging with impacted stakeholders to effectively devise resolutions.

The **I*DEA** Sub-Council is comprised of dedicated subject matter experts and representatives from across VA Administrations and Staff Offices. The **I*DEA** Sub-Council is currently assessing the feasibility of the 20 recommendations from the **I*DEA** Action Plan. Half of those recommendations are focused on integrating **I*DEA** into our human infrastructure capabilities.

One of the priority Task Force recommendations was the formation of an **I*DEA** Sub-Council to elevate visibility and sustain efforts at the Office of the Secretary Veterans Affairs (OSVA) level. Secretary McDonough centered the Department's strategic vision on four fundamental priorities: (1) Advocacy, (2) Access, (3) Outcomes, and (4) Excellence. Access and outcomes are strategic principles that guide the Department's efforts to integrate an equity agenda into VA's core mission.

A three-phase approach was decided upon to:

1. Establish the Sub-Council and the associated workstreams.
2. Create a series of feasibility assessments to determine how to approach the task force's recommendations effectively and prepare VA for future success.
3. Develop an implementation plan to help VA carry out the **I*DEA** Action Plan.

The **I*DEA** Sub-Council is comprised of six focus area workstreams:

WORKSTREAM	FOCUS
Action Plan Recommendations	This workstream leads the recommendations from the **I*DEA** Action Plan. They are charged with creating policies to support the implementation of recommendations outlined in the VA **I*DEA** Action Plan.
Executive Orders and Presidential Memorandums	This workstream leads **I*DEA** Executive Orders and Presidential Memorandums. They are charged with redefining VA's approach and

	establishing best practices for **I*DEA** in accordance with requirements outlined in Executive Orders and Presidential Memorandums.
Human Capital and Workforce Planning	This workstream is responsible for evaluating the needs of internal stakeholders. They are charged with examining existing policies to grow diversity, create equity, strengthen inclusion, and enable access in the workforce.
Stakeholder Engagements	The Stakeholder Engagement Workstream serves as a forum to foster enterprise integration. This workstream is responsible for creating and strengthening existing partnerships and outreach to both internal and external stakeholders. The workstream fosters sharing best practices across Administrations and staff offices, building more robust communications plans upon ongoing work where necessary.
Facilities and Accessibility	This workstream is responsible for identifying and addressing the physical barriers to access for Veterans and employees. They are charged with assessing facilities and infrastructure for accessibility and designing policy to make VA more accessible.
FAS/OCONUS	This workstream is responsible and the lead for efforts related to improving health care and increasing benefits for Veterans in the Freely Associated States (FAS) and Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS).

The **I*DEA** Sub-Council is comprised of four population specific sub-groups:

SUB-GROUP	FOCUS
LGBTQ+ Sub-Group	Lead the efforts to improve the LGBTQ+ Veteran experience.
Disability Sub-Group	Lead the efforts to improve the care of Veterans with disabilities.
Women's Advisory Sub-Group (V-WAG	Provide strategic recommendations to improve the inclusion, diversity, equity and access of VA women employees enterprise-wide.
Countering Anti-Semitism Sub-Group	Lead the efforts to countering Anti-Semitism.

The **I*DEA** Sub-Council solidifies VA's enduring commitment to embracing the incredible diversity that defines its Veteran and employee population. The **I*DEA** Sub-Council will accomplish this by implementing a holistic and integrated mission on **I*DEA**, reviewing existing policies, and leveraging the VA Chief Data Officer to gather appropriate data to refine best practices with the goal of creating a sense of unity across agency initiatives.

Feasibility Assessments

To provide fact-based proposals to VA decision-makers on how to pursue, modify, or rethink the recommendations, the Sub-Council has initiated two waves of feasibility assessments in the first half of 2022 focused on the technical, operational, legal, and economic feasibility of each of the recommendations, as well as the estimated impact the recommendations could have. The assessment results will be instrumental in answering the questions 'how much of the gap identified is likely to be closed by the recommendation?' and 'how many employees and/or Veterans is the recommendation likely to positively impact?' These assessments will aid VA in choosing the most effective and economical course of action towards identifying and addressing inequities.

The *I*DEA* Sub-Council in consultation with VA subject matter experts across all three administrations, compiled insights through quantitative data review, qualitative interview styles and conducted a as series of feasibility assessments of each of the Task Force recommendations. The feasibility assessments assessed the technical, operational, economical, estimated impact, and legal feasibility of each recommendation. The feasibility assessments aimed to inform the prioritization, provide fact-based recommendations to VA decision makers on how to purse and modify recommendations, as well as to evaluate resources needed to implement the recommendations. To effectively plan for implementation, the next steps will require a decision on assigning business owners of each recommendation including at the (sub)recommendation level.

Internal Partners (IP) Workgroup

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

VA is reimagining how to integrate best practices from its' community partners to help shape VA's future workforce. As part of this effort, the IP workgroup assisted the Department with a holistic analysis of current regulations, policies, and initiatives through discovery sessions. These sessions captured key insights, "pain points" and bright spots from interviews with community partners, particularly those working with Veterans from underserved communities. Comprehensive insights from across the communities and demographics that VA serves were collected.

The workgroup also evaluated current initiatives to identify barriers that may exist in career progression for employees that represent underserved communities and analyzed the current state of racial and ethnic disparities in the VA workforce, with an emphasis on diversity in the talent pipeline. As a result, VA is better prepared to identify where gaps exist in serving specific communities and which of the best practices VA can leverage to advance *I*DEA*.

The key insights assessed by the *I*DEA* Task Force were integrated into recommendations outlined in the *I*DEA* Action plan.

Strategic Communications (SC) Workgroup

The SC workgroup evaluated *I*DEA* through the lens of communication. It is not enough to use different wording to describe essential and sensitive topics; communication with a human-centered approach showcases the need to shift how to talk about *I*DEA*. The SC workgroup recognized that diversity and inclusion initiatives are often unsuccessful when it lacks a deliberate communications strategy.

The SC workgroup evaluated existing communications campaigns, marketing strategies, and symbols internally and externally in an effort to orient VA's communications pathways to best reach Veterans, the VA workforce, and particularly members from underserved communities. The workgroup recognized that an essential component to communicate VA's perspective on *I*DEA* was to establish linkages between *I*DEA* and the institutional memory of VA's Core Values (I-CARE) values and principles. I-CARE describes how VA will accomplish its mission and inform every interaction with its customers. These core values are: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence — better known as "I-CARE." The core values serve as the guide for all VA interactions:

    I care about those who have served.

    I care about my fellow VA employees.

    I care about choosing "the harder right instead of the easier wrong."

    I care about performing my duties to the very best of my abilities.

Using thoughtful and purposeful engagement of internal and external stakeholders, the SC workgroup focused on understanding the values that underpin *I*DEA* and connecting *I*DEA* to I-CARE to ensure a sustained change of foundational and core values. The workgroup focused on the value of symbols and their role in advancing a sense of inclusion and belonging for underserved communities.

These interactions provided comprehensive insights from across the communities and demographic groups VA serves. Community partners are essential to sparking new ideas and refining perceptions of how to best serve Veterans by integrating equity into the Department's benefits and services. The *I*DEA* Task Force conducted targeted interviews with more than 20 community partners and this work is ongoing with interviews designed to avoid collection of personally identifiable information and use aggregate data to inform VA policies and protect Veteran privacy.

Measures and Metrics (M&M) Workgroup

Operationalizing *I*DEA* metrics can inform future decisions and ensure accountability. The ability to make data-driven and evidence-based decisions is essential to sustainable change. The M&M workgroup evaluated *I*DEA* from a data-focused perspective, which began with an enterprise-wide analysis of which *I*DEA* metrics are currently being captured to understand the current state.

The M&M workgroup then evaluated what *I*DEA* metrics should ideally be captured for VA and identified what critical gaps exist that could influence decision-making from across VA including VACO. Existing data analyzed included VA Trust Scores, global All Employee Survey (AES) metrics, D&I data, and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) utilization data. The M&M workgroup used this information to support the other workgroups to identify the necessary metrics to include in their recommendations with the ultimate goal being gaining a broad perspective of the organizational demographics to understand where change is needed.

Defining *I*DEA*

The *I*DEA* Task Force recognized early on that to develop recommendations, VA must define what these terms meant for VA and connect them to I-CARE core values, characteristics and customer experience principles. VA will best serve Veterans by integrating the principles of *I*DEA* into the fabric of the mission for employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. The principles will create an inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible environment, especially for those from underserved communities. The *I*DEA* Task Force recommends VA adopt the following definitions outlined below and begin to codify them within VA policy and/or Directives:

Inclusion	Every individual who enters a VA facility must feel safe, included and valued. VA will treat all employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors with dignity, integrity and respect by encouraging an environment free of harassment and discrimination. Fostering a culture of inclusion, specifically for

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	marginalized and underserved communities, ensures that VA and its employees will act without prejudice or bias.
Diversity	VA strives to leverage the strength and uniqueness that defines our Veteran population, our VA workforce, and our country. VA welcomes all Veterans from underserved communities, including women, Veterans of color, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQI+) Veterans. Diversity is a key driver of growth and innovation that leads to developing new ideas and perspectives and must be embodied across VA.
Equity	VA strives to understand systemic barriers to opportunity with a goal of providing all employees with fair access to health care and benefits. VA will evaluate the intersectionality of systemic inequities and address institutional barriers to outcomes for Veterans and employees.
Access	VA increases access by proactively embedding opportunities and creating institutional pathways for all by eliminating and reducing inequities. VA will create accommodations and modifications to promote equitable opportunities, including providing access to home care and educational opportunities, training and jobs worthy of Veteran's skills and service. VA strives to ensure VA facilities, spaces, technology, programs, and services are consistently designed, constructed, developed, maintained, and promulgated pursuant to the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968; thus, ensuring all people can fully and independently use them. VA has committed to proactive engagement with users and stakeholders in an agency wide effort to support the rapid adoption of high-tech innovations. VA's goal is to ensure that technological and physical infrastructure provides the high level of access and support deserving of our Veterans, family Members, care givers and our VA employees
Underserved communities	The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, unique challenges, and geographic communities, who have been systemically and institutionally denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. VA recognizes this term includes Black, Hispanic and Latino, or Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women; individuals who face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, including pregnancy status and including LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; persons who may face employment barriers based on older age; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise at-risk of persistent poverty, homelessness or inequality.

VA Assesses for Equity

Working in tandem with the Sub-Council, VA is assessing four areas for equity regarding Veterans who receive benefits and services from VA in accordance with Executive Orders 13985, 14020, 14031, 14041.

The assessment areas focus on:

* VBA pensions delivered to Veterans and possible demographic disparities.
* Disparities in federal procurement and contracting opportunities for Women-Owned Small Businesses and other Small Disadvantaged Business categories, and the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization.
* Unmet needs of women Veterans and Veterans who are members of historically underserved populations who reside outside of the Continental United States (OCONUS), within the Freely Associated States (FAS), and in the Philippines, in partnership with Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) and the Center for Women Veterans (CWV)
* Disparities in utilization rates for enrollees of the Veteran Benefits program

Equity & Access/Barrier Analysis Resolution Plan:

A complete VA employee barrier report has been developed, and includes an analysis, findings, and an action plan with recommendations to assist VA in improving the diversity of the Senior Executive Services (SES) career field. These three assessments provided a framework that includes structure, guidance, and assurance of repeatable processes to explore inequity in policies and programs. As a result, an Equity & Access/Barrier Analysis Resolution Plan was created to allow VA to better ensure equity is embedded in the fiber of how VA operates, and to assist in decision-making that will impact Veterans and their families.

Several themes emerged from the assessment that are implemented into the Plan:

Data for Equity:

* Issue: Lack of complete and consistent collection and reporting of demographic data to be able to measure equity on all programs.
* Driver: Complete and consistent collection of demographic data will allow VA to make equitable, evidence-based, and accountable decisions that could inform program planning, policy development, and service delivery to all Veterans, particularly women and Veterans from underserved communities. It will also allow for action towards equitable outcomes in VA.
* Recommendation:
    * Develop a data equity strategy for VA enterprise-wide collection of demographic data for use by all programs
    * Establish a policy directive for VA external demographic data collection

- Define key indicators of equitable access and utilization for each program and measure by demographic
- Develop a program equity dashboard for VA leaders, leverage the program equity dashboard and data to conduct additional equity assessments.

Civil Rights and Equity Infrastructure:

- Issue: Multiple offices in VA have overlapping civil rights or equity related responsibilities. The civil rights process within VA could be improved. Limited equity-focused training exists.
- Driver: Creating a centralized focus on civil rights and equity will identify opportunities for improved coordination and accountability for sustained growth and impact for Veterans.
- Recommendation:
  - Build a robust external Title VI civil rights program
  - Consolidate to a single office with direct reporting to the Secretary with the mission to oversee and enforce all external civil rights and equity requirements across VA, to clarify accountability.
  - Ensure compliance with existing civil rights requirements to equitable access for Veterans and caregivers who require reasonable accommodations for disabilities or have limited English proficiency.
  - Develop an equity and external civil rights technical assistance team to support VA.
  - Develop equity, external stakeholder engagement, implicit bias, cultural awareness, and disability training.

Community Engagement:

- Issue: Although there are multiple community engagement efforts across VA, there is a lack of a coordinated, VA-wide approach that intentionally seeks out Veterans from underserved communities.
- Driver: Putting equity at the core of VA's community interactions will build trust with Veterans and their caretakers, help VA understand insights from underserved communities, and help Veterans and VA collectively overcome barriers that underserved communities face.
- Recommendations:
  - Support existing centers that have equity as part of their mission by providing human capital and financial resources.
  - Establish an integrated community engagement governing body that works toward common, community engagement objectives and creates a strategy for executing goals and distributing best practices.

* Explore legal and practical feasibility of community-centered practices that promote equitable engagement.
* Develop journey maps that illustrate different Veteran experiences.
* Create a repository of national and local partners for VA for underserved communities.
* Create a centralized approval office for surveys sent to Veterans.

VBA Pension Equity Assessment:

* Issue: After completing detailed research it was concluded that more data, analysis, and learning is still needed regarding VBA pension equity. In the meantime, enhancing awareness and educating Veterans about this benefit through communications, outreach, and engagement will provide additional financial support to Veterans in need. Initial indications suggest that different sub-communities require different communication, outreach, and engagement efforts.
* Recommendations:
    * Conduct additional analysis to understand the differences identified in the findings through an audit and root-cause analysis to investigate the process outputs for different underserved populations
    * Evaluate and continuously report VBA Pension Outcome Equity Measures
    * Develop an outreach and engagement strategy and action plan
    * Create a comprehensive external communication strategy and Veteran engagement plan to reach all Veterans eligible to ensure accessibility of information.

Small Business Procurement Assessment:

* Issue: VA analyzed disparities in Federal procurement and contracting opportunities within Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) and other Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Categories. From 2010 to 2019 there was a 38% decline in the number of small businesses providing common products and services to VA. The number of new businesses entrants into Federal contracting declined by 79% from 2005 to 2019. Barriers exist for small businesses over the entire business life cycle, but underserved communities and new vendors particularly experience challenges.
* Driver: Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization's (OSDBU) mission is to support the Secretary's priorities to enable Veterans to gain access to economic opportunities, by developing policies and programs, informed by customer feedback that improves market research, increases direct access, and maximizes the participation of procurement ready

Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB), Service-Disabled VOSB (SDVOSB), and socioeconomic small businesses in Federal contracting.

* Recommendations:
  * Deliberately engage WOSBs and SDBs that are not part of the Federal contract marketplace in accordance with Section 8 of EO 13985 – using HCD approaches
  * Experiment with different avenues of communication with small businesses around VA's forthcoming and future acquisition needs
  * Continue to share challenges and lessons with other Federal partners and outside advocates

The following policies were designed and agreed upon by VA and multiple Federal Departments and Councils, taking a whole-of-government approach to address small business concerns.

These policies were designed to reduce barriers to access to Federal contracts for socioeconomic small businesses:

1. VA will adopt the goal of SDB of 10.2% for FY2022.
2. VA will adopt Category Management reform with the following actions:
   a. Align category management scoring to socioeconomic small business contracting goals.
   b. Ensure a balance between the use of Best-in-Class (BIC) category management contracts and decentralized contracts as appropriate, to increase diversity in the procurement base.
3. VA will implement senior-level engagement reform including a performance plan element on small business achievements that will incentivize SES leadership to track and increase the number of opportunities available.
4. VA will increase the number of new entrants to the Federal marketplace to reverse the general decline in supplier base.

SES Barrier Analysis:

VA's Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) in partnership with MITRE conducted a barrier analysis to assist VA in improving the diversity in the Senior Executive Service (SES) workforce. This analysis was conducted through both qualitative and quantitative research methods including extensive policy reviews, data analysis, benchmark analysis, employee interviews, focus groups, and qualitative data from a survey.

The analysis found that women are underrepresented at the SES level, employees with disabilities are below the stated goal, and there is a lower percentage of Black/African American SES employees than GS-12 to GS-15 but above benchmark.

The factors identified that influence desire to advance to SES include salary concerns, work-life balance, SES behaviors do not meet expectations of leadership, and perceived lack of HR accountability in addressing employee behavioral issues. Additionally, 13 perceived barriers were identified. This includes a lack of clarity in SES career path, lack of clarity in education requirements, job mobility (including limited telework), lack of transparency around opportunities, lack of mentorship programs available for GS-13 employees and below, nepotism and favoritism, lack of feedback in hiring, lack of SES diversity, lack of approval for details or leadership experience, limited time for professional development, lack of leadership support of employee growth and diversification, lack of training, and bias against employees based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, Veteran status, and family status.

The Barrier Analysis also included a review of VA policies. It found that there is a lack of prioritization of diversity in Executive Review Board (ERB) procedures, there are gaps in discipline policies at the SES levels, and there are VA policies and guidance overdue for recertification.

Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS), Freely Associated States (FAS), and Philippines Equity Assessment:

* As defined in the Equity Assessment, the regions analyzed include OCONUS (Hawaii, Alaska, U.S. territories [U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of The Northern Mariana Islands]), FAS (the Republic of The Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau) and the Philippines.
* Issue: Veterans in Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands are on average thousands of miles from the closest impatient facility station.
* Driver: As of fiscal year (FY) 2019, a total of 265,574 Veterans live outside the continental U.S. in Hawaii, Alaska, and U.S. territories. Guam and Puerto Rico have a higher number of Veterans as a part of the U.S. Census Bureau when compared to US Vets data. The Guam VA office estimates the number to be 28,000 (using form DD-214). No data available for FAS and Philippines.
* Overall Recommendations:
  * Update US Vets Database to include locations outside the U.S. – add country as a field. This will allow VA to keep track and be able to count Veterans in FAS and Philippines.
  * Conduct a total cost assessment of Veteran healthcare per capita for each location using the FMP and Care in the Community claims data.

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- ∗ Conduct an equity assessment focused on a survey or study to understand why OCONUS, FAS Veterans are not using their benefits.
- ∗ Explore a partnership between VA and the U.S. Island Census Bureau to conduct a special count of Veterans in locations where the current Census estimates are contended by local Veterans (i.e., Guam) and in FAS and the Philippines where there aren't accurate/complete estimates.
  - ∗ Reassess resources as needed within VA.
  - ∗ Consider partnering with local embassies to conduct community counts where there is no estimate (Philippines and FAS).

From the OCONUS, FAS, and Philippines Equity Assessment 4 recommendations and 18 sub-recommendations were developed that focus on improving the care and benefits provided to Veterans in these regions.

VA's Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) in partnership with Titan Alpha conducted a gap analysis to determine the feasibility and gaps of these 4 recommendations and 18 sub-recommendations. This gap analysis included both quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews with more than twenty subject matter experts at the VA. The findings highlighted the strengths and needs of the priority population, and the gaps in the original recommendations. Following the completion of the gap analysis, a crosswalk was conducted of the gap analysis, SME input, insights from the Veterans Experience Office (VEO) Journey Map project, field notes from a recent site visit to the Indo-Pacific by the Deputy Secretary and the Senior Advisor for Pacific Strategy, and the original MITRE recommendations. This resulted in updated recommendations that are more actionable and incorporate the *I*DEA* initiative.

FAS/OCONUS Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Engage the FAS/OCONUS community through varied outreach strategies and communications channels that are culturally inclusive, equitable, and linguistically appropriate.	*Recommendation #2: Review and evaluate community care and available providers in FAS/OCONUS and identify gaps in coverage.*	*Recommendation #3: Enhance benefits awareness and utilization among FAS/OCONUS Veterans*	*Recommendation #4: Advocate for legislative initiatives and modifying existing regulations to improve access and benefits delivery for FAS/OCONUS Veterans.*

1.1 Tailor outreach materials to include different language options for identified populations. Examples of outreach materials include public TV programming, radio, physical mailers, and newsletters.	2.1 Explore private and public partnerships that can be leveraged to provide access to care, such as the Pacific Basin Telehealth Resource Center at the University of Hawaii at Manoa which is committed to expanding health care availability to underserved populations in U.S. Pacific Islands, including the U.S. Territories and FAS.	3.1 Develop a care provider network to increase access to medical exams that are required to determine service-related disability, thus removing a barrier to qualify for earned benefits. (Dependency on Rec. 2)	4.1 Advocate for representation for FAS/OCONUS Veterans through the use of federal advisory committees. Utilize the existing FAC Advisory Committee for Minority Veterans (ACMV). Update statutory language of ACMV scope to include FAS/OCONUS Veterans. (Note: pending S. 4141 may have implications and require the creation of an entirely new federal advisory committee dedicated to Veterans in FAS/OCONUS.)
1.2 Conduct focus groups to engage the FAS/OCONUS population and include person-to-person contact, as that is a preferred form of communication for Veterans in these regions.	2.2 Assess capacity of VA facilities and expand as needed. Conduct a capacity analysis of all facilities in the OCONUS and the Philippines locations and prioritize Guam.	3.2 Explore development of a travel cost reimbursement program for Veterans in FAS/OCONUS who have inequitable access to local services. Conduct a cost/benefit analysis on the implementation of a travel cost reimbursement program. (Dependency on Rec. 4.4)	4.2 Review and determine if the Secretary will prescribe VA policy changes to provide Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) to Veterans in FAS and the U.S. territories according to 38 U.S.C. § 3114.
1.3 Delineate engagement strategies and communication tools to be culturally specific and inclusive for each population within FAS/OCONUS and are tailored to each nation, territory, and region.	2.3 Identify and train community leaders to be resources of knowledge that can be utilized to increase access to community networks for care and to re-establish Veteran trust in the VA.	3.3 Develop a Benefit Awareness Campaign to inform Veterans in FAS/OCONUS of the benefits and services available to them. This can include informational letters and postcards and should not be solely	4.3 Modify 38 U.S.C. § 1730C to expand telehealth to FAS. Following the modification of telehealth limiting regulation, amend VHA Directive 1601F.05 to extend medical services to FAS.

	(Dependency on Rec. 1.5)	done via the internet. Utilize the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) when Veterans separate from the Military as a platform to share the campaign. (Dependency on Rec. 1).	(Dependency on Rec 2.6)
1.4 Implement communication strategies to increase FAS/OCONUS-based Female Veterans' utilization of VA. Create VA representation and marketing materials that are inclusive of all genders, sexual orientations, and races (Pacific Islanders/pan-ethnic).	2.4 Develop a user-friendly resource guide on community network providers and share through varied channels, including uploading through VA data systems and distributing in community settings. (Dependency on Rec. 1)		4.4 Review and modify 38 C.F.R. § 70.1(a) to expand a travel cost reimbursement program for Veterans in FAS and the Philippines. Further amend or recertify VHA Handbook 1601B.05 Beneficiary Travel in order to update beneficiary travel benefits per the new regulation. (Dependency on Rec. 3.2)
1.5 Explore partnerships with various public-private entities for means of distribution of communication materials and work with local community leaders to increase engagement with FAS/OCONUS Veteran populations. (Dependency on 2.3)	2.5 Identify gaps of coverage for each region. Explore ways to reduce provider turnover. Increase mental health providers and expand mental health services for Veterans in FAS/OCONUS.		4.5 Advocate for legislation to be passed that would require VA to provide health care to Veterans in FAS, such as the COFA Veterans Review Act (H.R. 2916).
	2.6 Explore ways to increase Veterans' access to VA via telehealth through the mobile (cell phone), internet, virtual offices and/or ATLAS sites.		

	Identify partnerships and collaborate with U.S. embassies, international NGOs, and international VSOs in the FAS, and FAS governors to provide spaces where Veterans can access the VA via the internet. (Dependency on Rec 4.3)		

* Recommendation #4: Advocate for legislative initiatives and modifying existing regulations to improve access and benefits delivery for FAS/OCONUS Veterans.
  * 4.1 Advocate for representation for FAS/OCONUS Veterans through the use of federal advisory committees. Utilize the existing FAC Advisory Committee for Minority Veterans (ACMV). Update statutory language of ACMV scope to include FAS/OCONUS Veterans. (Note: pending S. 4141 may have implications and require the creation of an entirely new federal advisory committee dedicated to Veterans in FAS/OCONUS.)
  * 4.2 Review and determine if the Secretary will prescribe VA policy changes to provide Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) to Veterans in FAS and the U.S. territories according to 38 U.S.C. § 3114.
  * 4.3 Modify 38 U.S.C. § 1730C to expand telehealth to FAS. Following the modification of telehealth limiting regulation, amend VHA Directive 1601F.05 to extend medical services to FAS. (Dependency on Rec 2.6)
  * 4.4 Review and modify 38 C.F.R. § 70.1(a) to expand a travel cost reimbursement program for Veterans in FAS and the Philippines. Further amend or recertify VHA Handbook 1601B.05 Beneficiary Travel in order to update beneficiary travel benefits per the new regulation. (Dependency on Rec. 3.2)
  * 4.5 Advocate for legislation to be passed that would require VA to provide health care to Veterans in FAS, such as the COFA Veterans Review Act (H.R. 2916).

Hispanic Barrier Analysis

VA's Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) conducted a barrier analysis of Hispanic VA employees to better understand their experiences and needs. The process to identify chosen facilities started at the VA-wide level and

moved to administrations at the regional level and the individual facility level. This resulted in 15 facilities across five states being identified. The methodology for conducting the analysis began with Virtual Site Visits that included an entrance brief, interviews, and focus groups. The interviews were conducted with the facility director, EEO program manager, human resources, Hispanic employment program manager (HEPM), hiring managers, and other (Union, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion, etc.). The focus groups were conducted with non-supervisors and supervisors.

Twelve observations were identified, including lack of outreach events, time to hire too long, non-competitive salary/benefits, lack of training for hiring managers, lack of familiarity with applicant flow data, lack of barrier analysis, low morale amongst Hispanic employees, HEPMs primarily focused on observances, relationship between EEO and HR needs improvement at facility level, new employee orientation (too much too fast), training needed for EEO/HR/HEPMs, and collateral duty HEPMs don't have time to fulfill duties.

Eleven recommendations were concluded: 1) partner with Hispanic Student Organizations at Hispanic Serving Institutions, 2) partner with elementary/middle/high schools, 3) seek ways to cut down on time to hire, 4) training program for EEO/HR/SEPMs, 5) bring SMEs to recruitment events, 6) partner with local development programs and/or non-profit organizations, 7) create training program for hiring manager, 8) require facilities with less than expected representation of Hispanics to conduct barrier analysis, 9) create mentorship program for new hires, 10) make applicant flow data readily available to local EEO program managers, and 11) adjust performance expectations for collateral duty HEPMs.

Federal Workforce Diversity

As a result, an Interagency Working Group (IWG) has been convened. Comprised of officials from 45 federal agencies and offices, the IWG is tasked with developing and implementing agency plans to advance equity, justice, and opportunity for the AA and NHPI community. Agency plans will consist of:

EO 14031 Agency Plan - Advancing Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders

* Goal/Action 1: Develop data for Equity Strategy (E.O. 13985)
* Goal/Action 2: Improve access, advance outcomes (E.O. 13985)
* Goal/Action 3: VA's inclusive work environment is free from all discrimination, retribution or harassment and all employees feel safe and empowered to be their authentic selves (E.O. 14035)

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* Goal/Action 4: VA eliminates barriers to EEO at all levels and in all occupations to advance equity for employees (E.O. 14035)
* Goal/Action 5: Address health equity for Underserved Veterans (E.O. 13985)

17. VA Sub-Council on Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention/Survivor Care and Support (I~STAND)

Alongside the I*DEA Sub-Council, is the Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention/Survivor Care Support (I~STAND) Sub-Council, organized by the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs to support activities related to sexual harassment prevention; sexual assault prevention; survivor care; and support efforts. The VA I~STAND Sub-Council was established under the Evidence Based Policy Council (EBPC) to ensure that enterprise policy decisions are consistent with the Secretary's strategic goals and are developed as intended to improve the lives of Veterans, caregivers, and their families.

I~STAND is charged with organizing and supporting activities related to sexual harassment prevention, sexual assault prevention, and sexual harassment and assault survivor care and support efforts. This includes requirements from legislation and other sources as well as aspirational goals that support VA's vision of creating an inclusive environment. I~STAND encompasses related efforts for all Administrations of VA including Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA), and National Cemetery Administration (NCA), and contains representation from each Staff Office as permanent members of the Sub-Council.

The purview of the I~STAND Sub-Council includes assessing and monitoring the implementation of all enterprise intra-agency and interagency activities and requirements to ensure they are compliant with the laws set by Congress and are consistent with the Secretary of VA's strategic goals, objectives and strategies related to sexual harassment and assault prevention, survivor care and support initiatives.

I~STAND creates a forum to unify agency efforts across four workstreams:

WORKSTREAM	FOCUS
Proactive Culture	Aid in the implementation of proactive, prevention strategies for anti-discrimination and harassment programming in VA, in coordination with the chartered **I*DEA** Task Force, support the execution of recommended actions

	as determined by the Sub-Committee and provide a bi-directional avenue for top-down support for ongoing prevention and elimination efforts in VA.
Accountability	Recommend the process, structure, rules, and corrective measures by which <u>individuals</u> are held accountable for their actions and non-actions in the prevention and recourse of sexual assault and sexual harassment experienced at VA.
	* Some examples include, but are not exclusive to:
	* clear articulation of the desired outcomes for key party(s) (i.e., the alleged, alleger, VA Operations/employees) at each phase of the experience
	* identification of the responsible party(s) for delivering each desired outcome
	* identification of how to detect, measure and report on whether the outcomes are being delivered
	* the appropriate actions to be taken when outcomes are not delivered
	* make recommendations to ensure appropriate oversight and accountability of the process
	* review the table of penalties
	* recommendations that strengthen accountability within VA (enable parties to successfully deliver the outcomes and strengthen accountability across VA) such as:
	* training and development needed to help enable responsible parties to execute their responsibilities consistently.
	* fact finding standards for events when they may need to be pursued in various processes.
	* looking at cross process.
Survivor care and support	* Focuses on issues related to services for sexual assault and harassment survivors. * Provides VA-level oversight of and support for key and/or cross-Administration efforts related to provision of services. * Creates a venue for coordination and information-sharing amongst program offices and individuals doing this work. * Facilitates development of best practices, shared problem-solving, and identification of areas for system improvement.
Strategic engagement	Provides communication and marketing support for SHAPSCS.

SHAPSCS accelerates progress and implements specific requirements and policies to inform the development of new or revised policies, as needed. The SHAPSCS has

developed an action plan for addressing changes at all levels of VA to reduce harassment and sexual assault; developed standardized media for VA, Veterans Service Organizations and other stakeholders to use in print and on the internet to help reduce sexual assault and harassment; and developed bystander intervention training for Veterans.

18. VA Women's *I*DEA* SUB-Group (VAWISG)

Th Federal Women's Working Group, now called the VA Women's *I*DEA* Sub-Group (VAWIsg) is an internal-facing work group aligned to the *I*DEA* Sub-Council, with a goal of providing strategic recommendations to improve the inclusion, diversity, equity and access of VA women employees enterprise-wide. The Women's Advisory Sub-Group is comprised of a group of experts and volunteers from all disciplines and grade levels within VA using a human-centered direction lead by women volunteers.

The Group's work is organized around four key elements of the employee experience at VA and how each specifically relates to women:

1. recruiting and hiring.
2. performing, growing and adapting.
3. changing roles.
4. wanting to stay at VA.

FWPC efforts began in October 2021 and have already made progress in identifying key insights and questions around women's careers at VA. One insight is that women go through career "seasons," which are defined as the intersection of personal and professional goals and barriers. The next phase of work is focused on how VA can address the disparity of women in leadership roles. Currently, women make up 61.62% of the VA workforce, but at the Senior Executive Service (SES) level women only make up 37.45% of senior leaders. FWPC will be conducting research to identify meaningful career "seasons" within the VA female population, each associated with 'personas' that represent key segments and the personal and professional priorities and goals associated with each "season" of a woman's career.

In August 2022, it was announced that the Women's Advisory Sub-Group has been moved from under the DIVAC to the *I*DEA* Sub-Council.

Language Access Plan

It is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy that no individual be subjected to any form of discrimination because of national origin in any VA programs, programs receiving VA funding, or VA programs, receiving Federal financial

assistance in accordance with the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Language Access Plan (LAP) ensures equal access to services provided by VA to individuals with limited English proficiency, which is also consistent with the provisions of Title VI and the implementation of compliance standards relating to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) requirements. The Office of Resolution Management Diversity and Inclusion's (ORMDI) External Complaints Program Manager is responsible for ensuring the establishment and implementation of policies and procedures for providing language assistance sufficient to fulfill equal opportunity responsibilities and provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to services. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other key officials are accountable for implementing, training, and enforcing the Guidelines in Section IV of this Plan as it applies to covered programs, services or activities provided to LEP clients/customers or individuals.

19. Special Emphasis Program

As part of VA's commitment to create a more diverse and inclusive work environment, the LGBTQI+ Special Emphasis Program created the VA Departmental LGBTQI+ Employee Workgroup in 2012 under the supervision of the VA Diversity & Inclusion Council (now DIVAC). The purpose of the Workgroup is to establish a department-level framework to develop strategies and recommendations to identify and eliminate systemic barriers to the LGBTQI+ community. In addition to the Workgroup, VA established the first LGBTQI+ Employee Resource Group (PRIDE VA) in June 2021, as an additional support group and as a resource, for LGBTQI+ employees at VACO and VA wide. With the advancement of these initiatives, and with the full support of Executive Order 13988, the program aims to ensure that VA has an inclusive environment that is free from discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Research shows that organizational inclusion is associated with higher employee engagement and greater organizational performance. The LGBTQI+ community is an integral and growing segment of workforce diversity. It is also one of the more misunderstood aspects of human diversity.

In collaboration with the Workgroup, VA created the first Transgender Employee Transition Guide (VA Handbook 5975.4) to assist employees and managers in navigating what may be a new and understandably difficult process for many. The Guide provides information on laws, policies, and tips on facilitating a smooth and supportive transition for employees who identify as a gender different from their sex assigned at birth and are undergoing gender transition in the workplace.

The LGBTQI+ Special Emphasis Program continues to lead the effort to increase education and awareness of the LGBTQI+ community and further demonstrate its integral aspect of our human diversity.

LGBTQ+ Workgroup

The VA LGBTQ+ Workgroup was established in January 2012, under the auspices of the VA Diversity Council. The purpose of the LGBTQ+ Workgroup is to establish a department-level LGBTQ+ framework to develop ideas and recommendations on strategies to identify and address any VA global, systemic LGBTQ+ employee concerns and/or needs, to ensure VA has an inclusive work environment that is free from sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination.

Of all of the federally recognized Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Special Emphasis Programs in VA, the LGBTQ+ Program is the only program to date with an established employee-based Workgroup that specifically addresses systemic LGBTQ+ issues affecting VA employees. Despite the emergence of the most recent LGBTQ+ related groups such as PrideVA Employee Resource Group (ERG) and the LGBTQ+ Integrated Product Team (IPT) established in June and July of 2021, the VA LGBTQ+ Workgroup still remains as VA's longest serving and active employee resource group.

A key distinction between the LGBTQ+ Workgroup and the other groups is that this Workgroup has a closed membership, while the other groups have open membership. This Workgroup, by charter, is limited to a specific number of members, and they are generally selected by recruitment only. The Workgroup consists of members that were specifically recruited for their subject matter expertise, knowledge and other skills that are pertinent to the needs of the Workgroup and its projects. Although membership is small (consisting of just 8-12 core members chosen from each Administration - VBA, NCA, and VHA), members are geographically dispersed throughout the United States and serve in a collateral duty role, reporting to the VA Departmental LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program Manager.

The Workgroup meets once a month as a body and then separately throughout the month in the form of subgroups or action teams as needed, depending on existing projects and taskers. For example, one of the action teams Virtual National Pride successfully hosted VA's first Virtual Pride Month. This event was unprecedented as the LGBTQ+ community within VA was brought together on a national platform for the first time in VA history hosting a total of 28 virtual events. The executive team of VA Virtual National Pride organized a sub-group of 300+ employees at the facility-level nationwide to accomplish this task. Given the success of the inaugural

event of 2021, the Workgroup has already embarked on the mission to bring the same events for the second annual 2022 Virtual Pride Month in June.

* The Workgroup has made significant initial steps towards equity with the following actions:
* The creation and implementation of our LGBTQ+ Workgroup Standards of Practice for Responding to Email Inquiries.
* ORMDI's Diversity & Inclusion's LGBTQ+ Website Design (reviewed existing website content, identifying changes, and meeting with ORMDI's Webmaster to implement these changes).
* Increasing Membership of LGBTQ+ Workgroup with attention to diversity within the Workgroup and Key Stakeholder Offices which is critical to successful community organizing on behalf of LGBTQ+ Employees across the VA.
* The creation of a National List of LGBTQ+ SEPs that has been used to organize National LGBTQ+SEPM calls regarding organization of Pride Observances.
* The fielding of hundreds of emails and phone calls regarding LGBTQ+ employee and Veteran patient concerns/questions. The volume of these inquiries increased dramatically following major policy changes (e.g., DOMA and DADT repeals) and the most recent Supreme Court decision concerning same sex marriage.
* Contributing and playing an active participant role in the VACO LGBTQ+ Pride Observance Planning Committee
* Contributing and providing input concerning VA's Annual All Employee Survey.
* Established LGBTQ+ Workgroup Objectives based on Workgroup Member interests/expertise and informed by feedback from the field. Routine creation of sub- committees to accomplish Mission projects as needed (i.e., Transgender Transition Planning Team, which initiated, drafted, and implemented VA's first gender transition plan and policies for our VA workforce employees).
* Participated in previous Diversity News Broadcasts and contributed to numerous written publications which highlighted the recent Supreme Court decisions, on same sex marriage, Title VII Protections regarding LGBTQ+ employees, and VA's commitment to our Veterans, families, and our employees.

Employee Resource Group (ERG) - PRIDE VA

In addition to VA's established LGBTQ+ Employee Workgroup, the Employee Resource Group serves as another viable resource for VA's LGBTQ+ employees who wish to be a part of the agency affiliated organization that serves the special interests of the LGBTQ+ community throughout the Federal government. The ERG is tentatively known as "PRIDE VA" and will join the other similar interest groups that have also been established in our sister agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The priority tasks for this group, pertaining to E.O. 13988, include preventing and combating discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. The group has reviewed all existing orders, regulations, guidance documents, policies, programs and other agency actions, specific LGBTQ+ related EEO cases to identify systemic issues and growing trends and carried out actions in May 2021 to prohibit sex discrimination. VA LGBTQ+ Departmental Special Emphasis Program has been implemented to resolve conflict, eliminate barriers, and make employees whole. The program provides a wide range of services for preventing discrimination and responding to individual claims of discrimination.

LGBTQ+ Sub-Group

Until 2022, VA employees have not had an opportunity to appropriately identify their gender pronouns, and many voiced a desire to exhibit their pronouns through organization email. Additionally, regions across the country have previously been inconsistent with approval of pronouns on email signatures. The *I*DEA* Sub-Council took the next step forward to create and standardize a policy that is optional for employees to include pronouns in their email and eliminates the need for supervisors to approve the signature change. As a result, VA has had 15,631 individuals incorporate their pronouns into signatures as of April 5, 2022, with over 6,700 at the initial launch. There is no longer a delay in processing the ticket requests for this action to better incorporate gender equity and support across VA.

Other than Honorable (OTH) Discharges and LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ Servicemembers were given OTH discharges up to and through the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" era. HIV+ Servicemembers, such as those at U.S. Service Academies, up until recently were still facing issues with discharges related to this status. Collateral or OTH discharges are used not just for LGBTQ+ Servicemembers, which can create confusion and disparity amongst Veterans. VA has attempted to address the disparity and has emphasized the importance of the existing policy which outlines that these Servicemembers are due their benefits. As a result, the Secretary released a memo on September 20, 2021, emphasizing this policy. New

portals and education were launched around this initiative for all Servicemembers. Efforts are underway to ensure these individuals are receiving adequate benefits.

Other Projects focused around LGBTQ+ Equity and Benefits

* Working with offices such as Suicide Prevention and Homelessness to start outreach to LGBTQ+ centers
* Enterprise-wide training to be released by Pride (June)
* Coordinating Pride Events on the Enterprise Level
* Studied ~50 areas VA can work on in LGBTQ+ areas
* A Best Practices Study is currently being completed to see what will be done with LGBTQ+ Core Team/IPT
    * One option being evaluated is the Core Team living under *I*DEA*
    * Studying implications of potential LGBTQ+ Center
* Details in Veterans Experience Office (VEO) will expire in May

LGBTQ+ Definitions

Term	Definition
Preferred Name	The name a person goes by and wants others to use. May not be legal name.
Administrative Sex	A person's current sex for admin purposes: e.g., room placement. <u>Not for clinical use.</u>
Gender Identity	A person's individual sense of identity with a particular gender.
Birth Sex	Sex for clinical use. In VA, a person's sex assigned at birth.
Pronouns	Gender terms people use when they refer to someone without using their name.
Sexual Orientation	How a person labels their emotional and sexual attraction to others.

20. Accomplishments

VA Accomplishments: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access

Thank you to our many partners from ORMDI and across VA for the contributions and dedication made to improve the cultural health of our organization. Your hard work is greatly appreciated and is reflected within this document.

I*DEA Action Plan initial accomplishments:

*While the I*DEA Sub-Council continues to research, investigate, and allocate resources to move forward on the 20 recommendations, the following actions have already been initiated:*

* VA drafted and disseminated critical messaging:
  o SECVA All Employee Messages:
    ▪ Heritage Months (Black History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Women's History Month)
    ▪ Derek Chauvin guilty verdict
    ▪ PRIDE Month recognition
    ▪ Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention – White Ribbon Pledge
    ▪ Juneteenth
  o Blogs
    ▪ Tulsa Race Massacre Remembrance
  o Videos
    ▪ Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander Hate
* Worked with Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) to develop an all-employee message from VA Senior Leadership on I*DEA and a press release announcing the I*DEA Task   Force.
* Finalized VA's Mission Statement on I*DEA.
* Made I*DEA Needs Assessment readily available at a VA Medical Center (MC) level or any smaller organization so they can make use of this (e.g., program offices, medical centers, etc.).
* Developed Framework for creating Institutional Access Points
* Developed an internal site to enable accessing and reporting of data by race and ethnicity as a resource to meet the reporting requirements in Megabus Act Section 5401 and the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

I~STAND Sub-Council Initial Accomplishments:

* Added Veteran safety survey question to VSignals deployed on October 15, 2021. The question is projected to be integrated into the Patient Advocate Tracking system in the summer of 2022.
* Annual distribution of VA's anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault policy and education. Distributed VA's anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault policy and education material to 16 million Veterans. The annual distribution

began in December 2021 with email distribution to approximately 6 million Veterans with a rolling U.S. Postal Service distribution beginning in January 2022 to the remaining 10 million Veterans.

* National Discussion on Sexual Assault and Sexual /Harassment at America's Colleges, Universities, and Service Academies, Hosted by the Navy, DEPSEVA Plenary Speaker

* Established Secretary's workgroup to include VSOs & tribal; action plan for facilities, bystander intervention training for Veterans. First meeting was held on September 22, 2021.

* **Bystander Intervention Training for Employees.** Refreshed the VA mandatory Harassment Prevention Training that now incorporates bystander intervention techniques for VA employees and mandatory educational components of the Deborah Sampson Act, as required by P. L. 116-315. Since the training refresh in October, total of 416,941 VA employees have completed the training

* Establishing policies in all three Administrations to address harassment prevention (VA Handbook 5979, VHA Directive 5019.02, etc.)

* Facility Remediation Plan (FRP) Tool. The law mandates a remediation plan for facilities that experience five or more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or combination thereof, during any single fiscal year. To meet this requirement, VA created a national automated workflow tool for tracking of remedial actions as well as oversight and trending to comply with the requirements of the law. The FRP tool eases reporting and tracking for the facility and for national oversight.

* ORMDI briefed HVAC on July 28, 2022, on the progress of I~STAND and VA's zero-tolerance policy for harassment, sexual harassment, and sexual assault at VA, as well as elements from the government accounting office's 7 recommendations. We are proactively preventing and responding to harassment claims to ensure everyone feels welcome and safe at all VA facilities.

* VA developed a new mandatory Harassment Prevention and Accountability training course in VA's Talent Management System (TMS) (VA 45224), required for completion by all employees within 90 days of hire and annually thereafter. VA also revised the EEO, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training for all executives, managers, and supervisors (VA 45049) and mandated training completion within 90 days after launch and biennially thereafter.

* Virtual interactive vendor-led bystander intervention training was provided to VHA employees across the field. Updated mandatory harassment

prevention training for all employees to include bystander intervention techniques was also provided.

* In acknowledgement of Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), the Assault and Harassment Prevention Office partnered with the VA Caribbean Healthcare System to produce three outreach clips, one in English, one in Spanish, and one Bilingual (English/Spanish), to reach a larger audience:

* Domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, race, age, or sexual orientation. If you are a Veteran, their partner, or VA staff who are impacted by IPV, VA's Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP) is committed to helping. IPVAP has program coordinators who can provide resources for you. You can also support a VA that is free from sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence by taking the White Ribbon VA pledge. White Ribbon VA pledge is your dedication to never commit, excuse or stay silent about sexual harassment, sexual assault or domestic violence.

* Domestic Violence Awareness Month https://youtu.be/cwOVYg1pgxA

* Domestic Violence Awareness Month (English/Spanish) https://youtu.be/5nOmrUUeC0k

* Mes de Concientización sobre la Violencia Doméstica https://youtu.be/fBRmwCdxtbs

* VHA transitioned to a universal application methodology for leadership development programs to deemphasize reliance of essay-based frameworks and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has experimented with anonymizing applications for leadership programs by removing demographic information.

* Education Development & Training Team

* All Employee Survey and Data Collection Team

* LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program Manager Team

* Information Distribution and Outreach Team

* Continued to work on the 2nd LGBTQ+ Veteran Chartbook. This chartbook examine disparities Veteran experiences with care at VA related to sexual orientation and should be released in June for PRIDE Month.

* VA initiated the pilot pronoun usage/program in FY 2022, Q2.

* Review of all VA Policies for LGBTQ+ issues

* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program

* VA health records now display gender identity. Healthcare professionals who use Computerized Patient Record System now have visibility on the structure

to display birth sex, self-identified gender identity, sexual orientation, and pronouns used on the patient inquiry page.

* ORMDI is working on a cyber bullying video series in partnership with Ruchika Croall, Director, Enterprise Cybersecurity Strategi Communications. The topics will be: 1) how to recognize someone is being cyber bullied, and 2) how to talk to someone that is being cyber bullied and get them help. The second topic will be more centric to talking to a peer or child, as children are on technology at a very young age, especially with hybrid schooling starting now. So, it will be about veterans and employees being able to talk to their kids or younger people that may be getting cyber bullied.

Additional points:

* The I~STAND covers all forms of harassment, including bullying and cyber-bullying.
* Definitions—cover all of VA and presently being routed through internal governance for adoption.
* DRAFT Definition: Cyberbullying/Cyberstalking* is a form of harassment that takes place through electronic devices or the internet by means of technology such as SMS Texts, Apps, social media platforms, cell phones, computers, tablets, gaming platforms, or similar methodologies/technologies. Cyberbullying/Cyberstalking may cause another person, group or family member distress. It may also severely impact their career, personal relationships, and quality of life.
* Examples of Cyberbullying include, but are not limited to, subjecting another person(s) to verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, retaliation, and/or other conduct, whether of a sexual nature or not, which threatens or endangers the health or safety of any person or which has the purpose or effect of creating a hostile or intimidating environment.
* Examples of Cyberstalking include, but are not limited to, gathering personal information on another person, spreading false rumors, encouraging others to join in the harassment, threatening harm through email, creating fear and paranoia for someone else, hacking into online accounts, placing orders for delivery in someone else's name, etc.
* *The determination of cyberbullying/cyberstalking is made on a case-by-case basis by the adjudicating authority. Some cyberbullying/cyberstalking crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior. Refer to relevant VA policy and Federal, state, and local laws. A VA employee who engages in cyberbullying/cyberstalking may be subject to disciplinary actions.

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* 3) ORMDI is in the process of hiring 22 additional harassment prevention coordinators to add to the existing eight. Several of these positions will be dedicated to cyber-bullying.

EO 13988 initial accomplishments

Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation

* Preferred name field, gender identity field are live in VistA/CPRS health record.
* Veterans can enter/edit preferred name and gender identity via profile on VA.GOV
* Employees can add pronouns to their VA display name (Outlook, SharePoint, Teams, etc).
* Broad VA participation in Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) survey: 51 facilities are designated Leaders, 25 are Top Performers.
* The All-Employee Survey has been updated to include other gender options (non-binary, intersex, etc.), changed transgender to transgender/gender diverse, additional options for sexual orientation (queer, asexual, etc.), and adjusted the placement of these LGBTQ+ demographic questions.
* Provided training on the following topics for over 1,200 VA enterprise and U.S. territories between June 2021-June 2022:

    a. Transgender Employee Transition Guidance
    b. Valuing Workforce Diversity and Workplace Inclusion with a Focus on LGBTQ+

* For the June 2021 virtual PRIDE event there were 2,200 participants. Approximately 10% participated in a demographic survey. Of those who participated in the survey, 70% identified as White/Caucasian, 11.5% identified as Black/African American. 26% identified as having a disability, 34% identified as Veteran employees and 10% of all participants consisted of 9 different gender identification types. No statistical data available yet for June 2022 Pride event.
* VA's Office of Resolution Management Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) deployed a new discrimination complaint tracking system in November 2021 that includes a field to add pronouns.
* Issued enterprise policy guidance that instructed VA adjudicators to determine that all discharged Service members whose separation were due to sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status should be classified as eligible Veterans for VA benefits. Future Actions, including rulemaking,

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updated policies and guidance, is VA considering to fully implement EO13988:

    c. Process initiated for rulemaking to allow gender affirming surgeries. VA is responding to OMB feedback on the proposed rule and on the Regulatory Impact Analysis.

    d. VA Handbook 5975.4 "Transgender Employee Transition Guidance" is currently under review for revision and pending recertification.

    e. VHA Directives 1340: Health Care for Veterans who Identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual and 1341: Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans are currently under review for revision and renewal. VA LGBTQ+ Policies

    f. Addressing any blockers or barriers in full implementation of EO 13988 and identifying resources, Technical Assistance, or coordination would help VA address those barriers.

    g. PIV Cards – legal name vs. pseudonym- a whole-of-government policy can assist with implementation of future changes.

    h. Some VA facilities still have single stall restrooms with signs that are gender-specific instead of unisex or gender neutral. Leased buildings can cause a barrier when it comes to making sign changes.

    i. Collecting data on sexual orientation and gender identify is not a required HR field. Therefore, VA is limited in its efforts to proactively prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identify if things such as promotion rates, retention rates, separations rates cannot be analyzed.

    j. Additional staffing and resources are needed to expand support in areas where patient demands, and mission is growing and changing. At this moment Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMS) serve in a collateral duty position.

* LGBTQ+ accomplishments to date:

    a. First time in VA history, the SECVA raised the LGBTQ+ Flag atop VACO Headquarters in 2021 and again in 2022. In 2022 Kansas City VA Medical Center raised the pride flag.

    b. Visible gender identity field in VistA/CPRS.

    c. Veteran can enter/edit gender identity and preferred name via their profile on VA.GOV.

    d. VA released the 2nd LGBTQ+ Chartbook. It is posted here:

        i. VHA_OHE_LGB_SHEP_Chartbook_Final_508_June_2022.pdf (va.gov). The chart book focuses on Veteran experiences with VHA care so we gave it a different name instead of 2nd chartbook. Not surprisingly, sexual minority Veterans report worse access, person-centered care, and care coordination than heterosexual Veterans.

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e. VA announced that it is closing a gap in survivor benefits for certain survivors of LGBTQ+ Veterans and survivors. It was published in the VA News here on October 13, 2022.
   i. VA closes gap in survivor benefits for LGBTQ+ Veterans and survivors

   Info for who is eligible:
   Today, VA announced that it is closing a gap in survivor benefits for certain survivors of LGBTQ+ Veterans—specifically, for those who were unable to wed until the 2015 ***Obergefell v. Hodges*** Supreme Court decision*,* and who, therefore, were not married to their now-deceased Veteran spouses for long enough to qualify for survivor benefits.

   "VA is closing a gap in benefits for surviving spouses of LGBTQ+ Veterans, righting a wrong that is a legacy of the discriminatory federal ban on same-sex marriages," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "It is VA's mission to serve all Veterans—including LGTBQ+ Veterans—as they've served our country, and this decision is a key part of that effort."

   Who will be impacted by this decision?
   Due to bans on same-sex marriages, many LGBTQ+ Veterans were unable to get married until ***Obergefell v. Hodges*** (6/26/2015) despite being in "marriage-type" relationships long before that. This wrongly precluded many survivors of those LGBTQ+ Veterans from becoming eligible for survivor benefits because their Veteran spouse died before the marriage met VA's length-of-marriage requirements (1 year for survivor benefits, 8 years for a higher rate of benefits).

   This decision addresses that problem by counting the duration of marriage from when the surviving spouse can establish a "marriage-type" relationship—such as a commitment ceremony, joint banking account, or joint purchase of a house. Importantly, these benefits are not retroactive.

   How do I apply for these benefits, and when will they take effect?
   This decision is effective immediately, and survivors can apply now for these benefits. Eligible surviving spouses who apply in the next year will receive benefits backdated to October 11, 2022.

What other steps has VA taken recently for LGBTQ+ Veterans?

VA is committed to delivering world-class care and benefits to LGBTQ+ Veterans. As a part of this effort, last year, VA began providing benefits to Veterans who were given "Other Than Honorable" discharges due to their sexual orientation.

LGBTQ+ Veterans can learn more about VA's current health care offerings on the LGBTQ+ Health Program website.

* LGBTQ+ priorities going forward:
    o Complete rulemaking by posting the proposed rule. Respond to comments. Simultaneously set up new surgical services in late FY23.
    o Add sexual orientation field in VistA/CPRS in August 2022.
    o Allow Veteran ability to enter/edit sexual orientation via profile on VA.GOV in the future.
    o Develop pronoun field in VistA/CPRS in FY23
    o Create the following additional subgroups in the VA II+ Workgroup:
    o Policy Creation and Review Team
    o Education Development & Training Team
    o VA National Virtual PRIDE – Pride Month and Event Planning Team
    o All Employee Survey and Data Collection Team
    o LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program Manager Team
    o Information Distribution and Outreach Team
* Continued to work on the 2nd LGBTQ+ Veteran Chartbook. This chartbook examines disparities Veteran experiences with care at VA related to sexual orientation and should be released in June for PRIDE Month.
* VA initiated the pilot pronoun usage/program in FY 2022, Q2.
* Review of all VA Policies for LGBTQ+ issues
* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program
* VA health records now display gender identity. Healthcare professionals who use Computerized Patient Record System now have visibility on the structure to display birth sex, self-identified gender identity, sexual orientation, and pronouns used on the patient inquiry page.

EO 13985 initial accomplishments

Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. (For Veterans, Families and Caregivers): VA submitted an Agency Equity Plan on February 10, 2022.

* **VA Agency Equity Action Plan:** The Department of Veterans Affairs released its Equity Action Plan, April 14, to eliminate barriers to health care, benefits and services, and create opportunities to improve access and experiences for historically marginalized Veterans. To serve all Veterans, VA must reach the most marginalized and underserved — regardless of race, gender, age, or socio-economic status. The plan sets forth a myriad of goals to effectively incorporate equity across the department.
* **VA Veterans and Family Equity Assessment:** The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI), in partnership with program offices, has conducted three equity assessments regarding Veterans who receive benefits and services from the VA in accordance with Executive Orders (EOs) 13985, 14020, 14031, and 14041. The Equity Assessment focused on: VA's Pension Program, accessing disparities in Federal Procurement and assessing the unmet needs of Women and Veterans who are of members of historically marginalized underserved population that are Outside Continental United States, in Freely Associated States and in the Philippines.
* **Procurement Equity-** Key procurement deliverables are on track: Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Goal, New Entrants, and Small Business (SB) subcontracts.
* VA's SDB established Goal was 10.2%. VA is currently exceeding this goal.
* Investment in Women and Women's health care.
* The VA Center for Women Veteran's is working with the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization to establish a partnership with the Department of Commerce to empower minority women Veterans to become entrepreneurs and is collaborating with the Office of Women's Health to enhance women Veteran's access to information about issues and programs that specifically address their concerns.
* More women are choosing VA healthcare than ever before, with women accounting for over 30 percent of the increase in Veterans enrolled over the past five years. Investments support comprehensive specialty medical and surgical services for women veterans at a VA facility or through referrals to the community. The budget proposes to increase access to infertility counseling and assisted reproductive technology and to eliminate copayments for contraceptive coverage. The budget also improves the safety of Women Veterans seeking healthcare at VA facilities by supporting

implementation of the zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and assault.

* **VA Identity Insights Project**: VA's Veteran's Experience Office has partnered with the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI) for the Identity Insights Project. The Identity Insights Project affords an opportunity for employees of various demographic groups to participate in interviews or focus groups, and to provide critical insights into existing pain points, needs, and challenges to creating a more inclusive employee experience. The data collected will assess how employees feel a sense of belonging throughout their career journey with the Department. This project may include Veterans that are also employed by the VA.
* **Data for Equity Strategy**
* **Health Equity**
* **Language Access Plan**: OPIA is currently leading effort to implement recent legislation requiring VA to provide agency fact sheets in 10 languages in addition to English, Tagalog and Spanish, so that work might fit seamlessly into the Language Access sub-committee. ORMDI is in partnership with OPIA, as we update the handbook that covers LAP.
* VA continues to approach the inequitable access to the benefits claims process for all Veterans, to include American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans due to the communities' predominantly remote locations. VA consulted with tribal governments to develop partnerships that enhance access to services and benefits by Veterans and their families. One notable outcome from these collaborations was the development of Tribal Claims Clinics
* OPIA has partnered with VA Digital Services and Veterans Experience Office on an intermediate translation web page capability by leveraging the recently passed PACT Act (click link: Spread the word about PACT Act eligibility - VA News , for examples of materials translated into the languages required by the legislation. OPIA has also partnered with the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) to concurrently update the department's Language Access Plan to assist in this effort. Additionally, Intergovernmental Affair's Executive Director for Pacific Strategy has worked with Interagency partners and identified the Chamorro and Samoan languages for inclusion in this effort.
* VA consulted with tribal governments to develop partnerships that enhance access to services and benefits by Veterans and their families. The OTGR crafted an Interagency Project Team Charter that would pull together, enterprise-wide, the various administrations, leadership and program offices working with tribal governments and AI/AN Veterans across the VA

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organization to better inform and craft a strategic plan, aligned with the VA strategic plan, to effectively engage and partner with tribal governments. This population is unique from other diverse groups in that they are recognized as being part of a political classification rather than a racial classification of people.

EO 13985 accomplishments update (October 12, 2022)

Goal 1: Data for Equity

* VA Data Governance Council (DGC) sponsored the creation of a Demographic Data Workgroup (DDWG) in April 2022 functioning as a subset of the DGC Stewardship Sub-Council. This Charted Workgroup oversees three lanes of effort (workstreams) and focused on:
* Gaining Veterans' insights sentiments on VA's collection, use, and management of their demographic data.
* Understanding the current landscape for collecting demographics data.
* Developing and applying a standardized process for demographic data quality assessments and inform suggestions for improved data collection and curation across the enterprise.
* The Data Governance process includes an ethics review and its adherence to Principle-Based Ethics Framework for Access to and Use of Veteran Data.
* Critical to ensuring race and ethnicity as a trusted data object, identified OMB's Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for maintaining, collecting, and presented Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity as the VA enterprise standard. A comparison of existing race and ethnicity collection standards used throughout the VA (HL7, OMB-15, and MISMO) was conducted to understand the interoperability between reporting standards. Data quality analyses were conducted on race and ethnicity data from VistA, Cerner, Loan Guaranty (LGY), Special Adaptive Housing (SAHSHA) VA Defense Information Repository, and Enrollment Services (ES) to determine no single-source currently meets the gold standard of most recent, self-reported and OMB-15 compliant.
* Conducted ten cultural observance events for VHA employees and Veterans to recognize the achievements and contributions of designated racial, ethnic, religious and gender-diverse communities in our society. These observances celebrate VHA's multicultural workforce and increase cross-cultural awareness to build trust, improve communication and break down barriers to effective healthcare. Last month VA created a very moving tribute to MLK Jr.

that represents the diversity of our workforce. Please see the below link during your speech:

[I Have a Dream Project (brightcove.net)](#)

Goal 2: Improve access and advance outcomes

* VA has completed equity assessments for:
    o VA's Pension program,
    o Reduce barriers to access for underserved Veterans OCONUS and in Freely Associated States (FAS).

Goal 3: Increase contract awards to women-owned small business (WOSB) and small disadvantage businesses (SDB)

* VA will begin the use of Vendor Management Program that will involve QR code technology. The QR code will provide industry educational resources on how to do business with VA Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction's Office of Construction and Facilities Management (CFM), provide educational links, and display what events CFM will be attending.
* VA's SDB established Goal was 10.2%. VA is currently exceeding this goal.

Goal 4: Address health equity for underserved Veterans

* Best Practices Guide on collection of data on Race and Ethnicity has been developed.
* VA continues to make information available on health disparities experienced by Veterans in print, podcast, and cyber-seminar formats; recent reports include the Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Veteran Chartbook and the Primary Healthcare Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Veterans report.
* $750,000 was distributed to support 25 VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) projects to address inequities and supporting dashboards use to guide improvements.
* VA continues to support addressing social determinants of health as a way to reduce inequities; the numbers of VAMCs that use the Assessing Circumstances & Offering Resources for Needs (ACORN) screener to identify Veterans at risk and match them with appropriate services continues to grow.

Goal 5: Build and maintain trust with Underserved Veterans

* VA-wide trust Vsignals survey went live in October 2021.
* VA completed the Pacific Journey map to better understand awareness of VA benefits and services in the Pacific region.

I*DEA

* Human-Centered Design and Research for data collection was completed in September 2022, it included 59 interviews and surveys with VA data subject matter experts as well as Veterans. A playbook was developed to provide a framework for improving Veterans experiences in collecting their demographic data. This playbook can be used as a guide for VA internal staff looking to inform decisions related to Veteran demographic data collection and usage across VA programs and lines of business. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors Veterans and their eligible family members with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our nation. This core mission ensures that those who served this Nation are always remembered and honored. NCA maintains more than 150 cemeteries as national shrines and provides digital memorialization at the Veterans Legacy Program to commemorate their legacy, service, and sacrifice to our Nation. NCA further complements its cemeteries with 121 State, Territorial and Tribal VA Grant Funded Veteran Cemeteries.

Deborah Sampson Act

* VA added a Veteran Safety Survey question to VSignals to capture experience of underserved populations.
* VA standardized anti-harassment/sexual assault signage delivered to 100% of VA facilities.
* A VA Harassment Prevention Handbook was published in March 2022.
* A national discussion on sexual assault and harassment has been implemented at America's colleges, universities, and service academies.
* VA's 2023 budget allocates $9.8 billion for all of women Veterans' healthcare, including $767 million towards women's gender specific care.
* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program.
* Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) Repeal: VA announced last Fall under its existing authority to offer relief to those discharged from military service.
* Secretary McDonough promulgated a memorandum in Sep 2021, providing for a Character of Discharge Review: VA adjudicators shall find that all discharged Service members whose separation was due to sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status are considered "Veterans" who are eligible for VA benefits; so long as the record does not implicate a statutory or regulatory bar to benefits.

I*DEA

* The outreach effort to Veterans, included a Secretary issued Press Release that highlighted the process for gaining access to benefits when a Veteran had an Other Than Honorable (OTH) Discharge. In addition to the Sec Press Release for LGBTQ+ Veterans, VBA also provided additional information to VSO, and other stakeholders that sought to encourage Veterans to seek out access to VBA benefits if they had an OTH discharge.
    o The effort has had an amazing impact and reach as VBA has seen the number of requests increase to over 12,000 received from Jun of 2021 to March of this year (2022).
* VA participates in the White House Gender Marker Interagency Policy Council working towards adopting the "X" gender marker for those who do not identify as male or female.
* VA Initiated the rulemaking process to modify the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to expand VA's gender affirming care and benefits package for Veterans.
* VA initiated the rulemaking process to change the policy ban on gender-affirmation surgery, which is part of formal regulation under the Administrative Procedure Act.
* Effective October 1, 2021, Veterans Experience Office (VEO) Trust Surveys now include questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.

EO 14031- WHIAANHPI (White House Initiative on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander):

Presidential Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States
* Completed Feasibility study and submitted to Congress to create a center for NHPI and USAPI to advance health equity and decrease health disparities among NHPI Veterans. (VHA/OPIA)
* VEO Veterans Experience a Journey Map Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and CMNI
* Manila Operations- VBA Regional Office; Health Care Operations
* On November 18, 2021, the House passed H.R. 3730, to amend Title 38, United States Code, to establish VA Advisory Committee on US Outlying Areas (Guam, CNMI (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), American Samoa, US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico) and Freely Associated States (FAS)

* OPIA is currently leading effort to implement recent legislation requiring VA to provide agency fact sheets in 10 languages in addition to English, Tagalog, and Spanish
* ORMDI/CMV/CWV/OPIA completed a study to examine the unmet needs of women and minority Veterans in the Pacific region, including Territories, COFA (Compact of Free Association) states, Philippines. This study resulted in over 35 recommendations for VA.
* Completed funding and start-up of over 20 equity-guided improvement strategy projects. These pilot and innovation projects that use equity to drive quality improvement were selected from over 60 proposals submitted by VAMC staff.
* Completed the National Veterans Health Equity Report Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Chartbook. This chartbook focuses on disparities among AANHPI Veterans identified in the NVHER and should be posted this month for AANHPI Heritage Month.
* Completed classification of 8 new health equity staff whom we hope to hire over the next few months.
* Continued to work with the VHA High Reliability Organization Collaborative to use equity to improve Veteran outcomes. This year's collaborative focuses on reducing readmission rates so our team has been working with the ~40 VAMCs participating in the collaborative to understand whether equity would be an efficient way to target interventions to reduce readmissions in their facilities.
* VA continues to approach the inequitable access to the benefits claims process for all Veterans, in include American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans.
* On November 18, 2021, the House passed HR 3730 to amend Title 38, United Stated Code, to establish VA Advisory Committee on US Outlying Areas and FAS.
* OPIA is leading the effort to implement legislation requiring VA to provide agency fact sheets in 10 languages in addition to English, Tagalog, and Spanish.
* VA participated in WHIAANHPI Regional Network 9 Roundtable on Combatting Anti-Asian Hate on March 22, 2022.
* **VA supports the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans** (ACMV). The ACMV has three members serving on the committee that represent the Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans: Lt. Colonel Michael Yaguchi, Retired, SFC Nathan Tilton, Retired and Dr. Georgina Dodge.
* VA has released its first ever harassment policy that standardizes harassment response and reporting across the entire enterprise.

* The Pacific Island Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC) event was held in Guam (February 28, 2023) and Hawaii/American Samoa (March 1–2, 2023). This is a major accomplishment for Veterans in FAS/OCONUS, especially women Veterans. The attached document Pacific Mar 2023 VEAC AAG details the customers that were served. Women Veterans accounted for 27.3% of all VEAC customers in the Pacific Island VEAC. This is particularly noteworthy because the woman Veteran population in the region is 10.4%.
* VEAC Highlights
    o 121 customers were provided 299 services during the Pacific Island VEAC. Over 40 support staff were trained for VEAC engagement. The services provided will increase access to VA, state, local, and community resources for the Veteran community in the regions of American Samoa, Guam, and Hawaii.
    o 26 (21.5%) customers initiated their intent to file with VBA while 18 (14.9%) Veterans were referred to VHA for eligibility and enrollment. The VEAC website and VEAC support staff knowledge helps customers understand the full scope of services offered through a VEAC. This assists in introducing VA services to customers who are not yet utilizing select services, such as VA healthcare and VA benefits.
    o The customer no-show rate was 11.7%. The VEAC planning team has robust notification efforts including text and email reminders to help customers remember their scheduled appointments.
    o Women Veterans accounted for 27.3% of all VEAC customers in the Pacific Island VEAC. This is particularly noteworthy because the woman Veteran population in the region is 10.4%.
    o 14 (11.6%) event participants were referred to Community and Peer-to-Peer partners: GotYour671 and U.S. Vets. The connections made with these organizations provide participants with a direct connection to local organizations in their community for support in the areas of mental health, social connection, financial assistance, and more.

VA continues to embed equity in the Veteran's Health Administrations operations, benefits, and services, through understanding health care disparities.

EO 14035 initial accomplishments
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Government:
* VA submitted a workforce-focused I*DEA Strategic Plan to OMB on March 23, 2022.

I*DEA

- I*DEA Memorialized in the Strategic Plan:

    a. I*DEA is now memorialized in the Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal years 2022 – 2028 Strategic Plan.
    b. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.3: I*DEA - VA will enhance understanding of Veteran needs and eliminate disparities and barriers to health, improve service delivery and opportunities to enhance Veterans' outcomes, experiences, and quality of life. Objective 2.3 expands VA's understanding of Veterans to customize care and meet the specific needs of individual Veterans and underserved communities. This expanded understanding will enable VA to address inequity, health disparities and barriers to access and opportunities. VA will weave the principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (I*DEA) into the fabric of our mission and create an organization where all employees support the cultural transformation to a VA that is more inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible to all, especially those from underserved communities.

- The Diversity and Inclusion Veterans Affairs Council (DIVAC) serves as an internal forum to address Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) issues impacting VA's workforce.

  > Commented [EG(1): Check with Jenna on update here

- SES Barrier Analysis
    o Hispanic Barrier Analysis- Report due later this year.
    o SES Barrier Analysis- We are working on the next steps on ownership and public release.
    o Employees with Disabilities: We just started the task order for this effort with FFRDC MITRE.

- The I*DEA Stand-down Task Force planned for events at VA facilities to address related topics for VA workforce.
- VA is moving forward with hiring a Chief Diversity Officer.
- VA has evaluated the internal capability and resources needed for an I*DEA Dashboard.
- I*DEA is now a mandatory executive performance element under Leading People.
- Rescinded HRL 0601-17. VA Central Office (VACO) Human Resources Service (COHRS) Dress Code Guidance.
- Partnered with the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to develop I*DEA performance metrics.
- Added Veteran status to the All-Employee Survey data dashboard.
- Consulted with Labor Unions to inform them on I*DEA and to prepare to garner their perspectives on ways for VA to improve diversity and inclusion for employees.
- The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) hosted the Virtual Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Access Conference with over 2,000 participants consisting of EEO Program

Managers, Directors, supervisors, and others during fiscal year (FY) 2021. The conference provided information to ensure EEO personnel had the knowledge, skill, and ability to affectively advise, and give guidance to leadership and appropriate EEO services.

* The diversity and inclusion (D&I) staff conduct thorough, accurate and effective field audits of the EEO programs in field offices. Technical Assistance Review (TAR) evaluate the VA's EEO and D&I program infrastructure and organizational impact and ensure that progress is made to achieve model EEO and D&I program status. To achieve this goal, the EEO Commission (EEOC) requires that periodic reviews be conducted throughout the organization. The review framework was transitioned to a virtual platform due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; creating a virtual methodology which allowed the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) to perform 910 TARs in FY 2022 per year, an increase from 6 conducted held in FY 2021.

* VA Nurse and PA (Patient Advocate) Retention and Income Security Enhancement (RAISE) Act was signed into law on March 15, 2022, increasing the pay limitation on salaries for nurses, advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and PAs employed within VA. The act is part of the omnibus appropriations bill (HR 2471) passed by Congress to fund the federal government through the end of the 2022 fiscal year.

* VA partnered with a federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) to analyze the lack of diversity among the Department's Senior Executive Service (SES) employees and the feeder pipeline (GS13, GS14 and GS15). FFRDCs are academic, corporate, and nonprofit organizations owned by the Federal Government but operated by contractors to augment VA's research and development capabilities.

* RAISE ACT: OALC (Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction) has taken the lead on the RAISE Act to raise minimum wage for contractors. (EO 13985/Procurement Equity).

* 2022 Inclusivity Close Out: "Commitment to F.O.C.S.E." (Fair Open Cooperative Supportive Empowering) - The Inclusivity Campaign is an initiative to model inclusive behaviors throughout VHA focused on improving communication, building trust, and encouraging teamwork to create an equitable and inclusive VHA that fosters a culture of dignity and respect.
  o In 2022, VISN 17 employees shared various perspectives each month on Fairness, Openness, Cooperation, Supportive and Empowerment (F.O.C.S.E.) For the Close-out, employees signed a Commitment to continue to foster an environment of Inclusivity.

- VA launches *Be Your Self* internal communications campaign to communicate I*DEA goals and objectives to VA employees, Veterans, and other key stakeholders via targeted communications and engagement campaigns.
- VA soft launches I*DEA Intranet to serve as the hub for all things I*DEA and play a key role in informing, engaging, and supporting VA employees.
    o As part of the Intrant launch, the Showcasing I*DEA story sub-page to present I*DEA content through first-person narratives, highlights of I*DEA advocates, relevant updates.
- VA launched an Inclusivity Campaign from April 2022 to December 2022. The Campaign engaged VHA employees, at Program Offices, VISNs and Medical Centers, on the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in breaking down barriers to effective healthcare and demonstrating the Department's commitment to building a workplace that values inclusivity, connectedness, mindfulness, dignity and respect. VA concluded the Inclusivity Campaign by creating and disseminating an Inclusive Intelligence Guide. ODEI introduced their Dignity and Respect Campaign that ran from February through September 2023 which is in line with National Respect Day.
- Planned and executed the inaugural VHA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Summit in June 2022 to educate the field on DEI best practices. During the Summit, over 540 employees and DEI stakeholders convened virtually to collaborate on DEI best practices and participate in experiential learning activities to build an inclusive work environment and foster a culture that values and leverages individual diversity. ODEI is currently planning its 2023 Diversity Summit "Fostering an Inclusive Culture of Dignity and Respect."

- Trained over 7,000 employees on multiple diversity, equity and inclusion topics to include Inclusive Intelligence, Increasing All Employee Engagement and Building Your Personal Brand. VA conducted training sessions during Program Office, VISN and Medical Center town hall meetings and committee meetings.
- VA launches the I*DEA Quarterly Update, a focused information source delivering I*DEA messaging such as letters from I*DEA leaders, initiative successes, creative contributions, current events, best practices, and links to resources.

- The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (I*DEA) unit is located within NCA's Human Capital Management's Office of Workforce Relations (OWR). NCA strives to empower employees to promote curiosity, dignity and respect in order to drive psychological safety, synergy and understanding. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, NCA achieved the following I*DEA accomplishments:

- o Filled its first full-time diversity and inclusion position. This position focuses on all Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (I*DEA) related programs and initiatives for NCA;
- o Launched a Special Emphasis Recruiting Team (SERT) and Diversity Hiring Team, which developed recruitment and hiring solutions for underrepresented groups;
- o Developed and released four issues of NCA I*DEA Newsletter, to date;
  - ▪ The purpose of this newsletter is to provide Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I*DEA) information to ensure a welcoming atmosphere by increasing cultural awareness through information, training and resources.
- o Initiated nation-wide in-person training sessions for National Cemetery Administration Supervisors, Managers and Staff;
- o Trained Supervisors in the Advanced Leadership Program at NCA's National Training Center in St. Louis, Missouri;
- o Co-facilitated virtual I*DEA trainings for cemeteries on the following topics with the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) throughout the year:
  - ▪ Managing Implicit Bias in VA
  - ▪ Managing Generational Diversity in the Workplace
  - ▪ Managing Gender Diversity in the Workplace
  - ▪ Understanding Micro Behaviors in VA Work Environment
  - ▪ Applying Cultural Competence in a Multicultural VA
- o Developed and facilitated the following virtual and in-person trainings throughout the year which offered a deeper understanding of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the workplace and offered highlights on Diversity and Inclusion trends (trainings were for cited NCACO and District personnel below:
  - ▪ May 17, Audience: Minority Veteran Program Coordinators, Virtual
  - ▪ June 15, Audience: Office of Asset Enterprise Management, Virtual
  - ▪ June 29, Audience: Willamette National Cemetery Director, Managers and Supervisors, In Person
  - ▪ July 19, Audience: Deputy Director Cemetery Operations Staff, (Part 1)
  - ▪ August 16, Audience: Deputy Director Cemetery Operations Staff, (Part 2)
  - ▪ September 13, Audience: Office of Workforce Relations
  - ▪ September 21, Audience: Florida National Cemetery Directors and Supervisors
  - ▪ 60 Minute Manager (MM) Diversity "Jeopardy" Training, Virtual, September 6
- o Communicated details of 21 VA I*DEA observances to all NCA team members to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding.

* VA launched an internal communications campaign to educate employees, and other key internal audiences about I*DEA goals and objectives, progress, and actionable steps through targeted communications. The campaign included the following key elements:
  * I*DEA Quarterly (I*Q): A quarterly update that provides leadership highlights, stories from the field, artwork, events, and access to resources.
  * Showcasing I*DEA Stories: real life contributions from VA employees exemplifying advocacy and the need to further I*DEA as well as highlights from VA leadership.
  * I*DEA Intranet: the hub for all things I*DEA including hot topics, background information, resources, information pertaining to the Influencer Network, Showcasing I*DEA, and more.
  * Print Collateral: flyers and posters exemplifying special observances through the lens of I*DEA that can be shared digitally, as well as in VA spaces such as medical centers and offices.

  LGBTQ+

* Secretary McDonough approved the VA's first ever PRIDE Employee Resource Group in April 2021. The first-ever PRIDE Employee Resource Group (ERG) - a Department of Veterans Affairs ERG for gender and sexual minorities, including those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+), as well as allies. Since its founding the ERG has advised VA on LGBTQ+ issues, acted as a social space for LGBTQ+ employees, and provides support to LGBTQ+ efforts at VA.
  o In addition to this VA already had and still has a very Active LGBTQ+ Work Group. The Secretary announced and VA initiated the Rule Making Process in 2021. This is a process that will help VA realize the standards of care consistent with industry and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). This work group transitioned from an Integrated Project Team to a governance model within the I*DEA Sub-Council as the LGBTQ+ Sub-Group
* The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) demonstrated proof-of-concept with a pilot program to include pronouns in email headers and in the global address list. The program was deployed VA-wide in April 2022 VA LGBTQ+ Support Groups
* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program.

I*DEA

* Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) data collection in Cerner Millennium and VistA/CPRS.
* Developed a white paper on LGBTQ+ efforts within VA.
* Crafted a briefing book for the incoming Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) on LGBTQ+ efforts at VA.
* LGBTQ+ Training – Through the efforts of the LGBTQ+ ERG, the first VA National Virtual PRIDE event took place on June 1, 2021, and concluded on June 30, 2021, with over 300 diverse volunteers across the country who planned 27 successful live/virtual events that were produced and presented nationally as an inclusive, safe, and open forum. The 30-day successful event:
  o Hosted over 2,200 participants, with presence from across the VA enterprise and U.S. territories.
  o Continues engagement with the recorded videos that have since been viewed over 4,500 times both internally and externally to date.
  o Of the 2,200 program participants in the first virtual Pride event, approximately 10% participated in a demographic survey. Of those who participated in the survey, 70% identified as White/Caucasian, 11.5% identified as Black/African American. 26% identified as having a disability, 34% identified as Veteran employees and 10% of all participants consisted of 9 different gender identification types.
  o Given the outstanding success of VA's inaugural Virtual Pride Month Event in 2021, VA National Virtual Pride hosted its second annual event in 2022, which consisted of 40 events, and the SECVA kicked off this year's event with a welcoming address. As Pride Month has just ended, statistical data is not yet available. However, it can be surmised that this year's event was a very huge success and should be highlighted as a best practice throughout the Federal Government. No other agency to our knowledge has planned or executed such a comprehensive virtual LGBTQ+ training and awareness event.

Underserved/Monitory VA Employees
* VA hosted a three-part Showcase Series to highlight the innovation of I*DEA.
* The Federal Women's Working Group is an internal-facing work group aligned to Diversity and Inclusion in the VA Council (DIVAC) and I*DEA, with a goal of providing strategic recommendations to improve the inclusion, diversity, equity and access of VA women employees enterprise-wide.
* VA submitted the annual Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP) Accomplishment Report and Certification.

* VA automated the forms that employees complete to update their disability status. This provides better information into the types of disabilities that the workforce has and informs considerations regarding the types of accommodations that may be required.

Additional communications are continuously in progress.

I*DEA Dashboard

The objective of the I*DEA Dashboard is to improve the culture of VA to better serve Veterans and their families. The dashboard will track a portfolio of cultural health signals from across existing data focused on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, to compare current health status with desired health outcomes. It will then utilize a systems-thinking approach and data driven decision making to provide an intervention strategy, and a follow-up strategy (post-vention) to track progress. The portfolio of intervention and post-vention will show trends such as improved overall VA brand, performance, and productivity.

The profile of each VA facility focuses on a cultural health heatmap, business operations heatmap, workforce profile heatmap, and a financial heatmap providing a holistic representation of the organization. These profiles will be represented by three colors: green (meeting the target), yellow (potential barriers), and red (falling short of the target and problematic). Users can personalize their dashboard by filtering by administration, segmentation, protected class status, etc. to target specific needs. The coalition behind the creation of the Dashboard focused on driving the right outcomes through feeding particular information that result in a clear direction driving I*DEA.

Different VA-wide cultural health coalitions have been leveraged in building the I*DEA Dashboard and determining where intervention is necessary. User group teams have held a series of co-design sessions with different subject matter experts across the VA.

Next steps would be to conduct feasibility assessments to examine the potential operational, technical, economical, and legal requirements and success measures of the Dashboard. There is still a need to assign a partner to monitor, provide regular updates, run analytics, and govern the Dashboard.

Three-Part Showcase Series

VA hosted a three-part Showcase Series in 2022 to highlight the innovation of I*DEA, engaging individuals in the field up to VA headquarters. Each showcase was approximately 60 minutes hosted virtually.

The first of the series was hosted in February 2022 and focused on providing participants with information about I*DEA presented by guest speaker VA Deputy Secretary, a panel presentation on the I*DEA Task Force, and an overview of what to expect throughout the showcase series. In a post-event survey, 91% of survey participants rated the event as "good" or "very good".

The second event took place in March 2022 and presented I*DEA through artistic expression, music, and poetry. This showcase served as an opportunity for personal stories, open conversation, and questions. The event kicked off with an original song by Sabrina Clark, featured artwork by Tammy Finney and students, and guest speaker VA Chief of Staff. Over 150 participants joined and a post-event survey conveyed that 88% of participants thought the event was effective and 91% were 'very likely' or 'extremely likely' to attend a similar event in the future.

The last of the series was on April 13, 2022 and engaged members to act. Guest Speaker VA Chief of Staff discussed the progress that has been made thus far, inspired participants, and provided them with the tools to take to their local offices to spread I*DEA throughout their Veteran communities. The event brought in 233 participants. A recorded version of each showcase is available on the ORMDI intranet.

Though there have been many accomplishments coming out of the Executive Orders, the I*DEA Dashboard, and the Showcase, there is more to come. This is a continuous effort and accomplishments will continue to come out of the work that the VA is implementing.

EO 14041 initial accomplishments

Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HRA)

* Annual HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) Agency Plan: Submitted on January 13 with the goal of improving VA's programs, initiatives, and education services to further the advancement of historically black colleges and universities.

EO 14091 initial accomplishments

Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government

∗ Advancing equity, the Federal Government can support and empower all Americans, including the many communities in America that have been underserved, discriminated against, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.
  - o Establish equity team.
  - o Implement and develop comprehensive equity strategies that will drive equitable outcomes through government policies, programs, and activities.
  - o Embed equity into government wide processes.
  - o Deliver equitable outcomes in partnership with underserved communities, rural America, and advanced urban equitable development.

VA Accomplishments: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access

Thank you to our many partners from ORMDI and across VA for the contributions and dedication made to improve the cultural health of our organization. Your hard work is greatly appreciated and is reflected within this document.

I*DEA Action Plan initial accomplishments:

*While the I*DEA Sub-Council continues to research, investigate, and allocate resources to move forward on the 20 recommendations, the following actions have already been initiated:*

- ∗ VA drafted and disseminated critical messaging:
  - o SECVA All Employee Messages:
    - ▪ Heritage Months (Black History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Women's History Month)
    - ▪ Derek Chauvin guilty verdict
    - ▪ PRIDE Month recognition
    - ▪ Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention – White Ribbon Pledge

- Juneteenth
  - Blogs
    - Tulsa Race Massacre Remembrance
  - Videos
    - Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander Hate
* Worked with Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) to develop an all-employee message from VA Senior Leadership on I*DEA and a press release announcing the I*DEA Task Force.
* Finalized VA's Mission Statement on I*DEA.
* Made I*DEA Needs Assessment readily available at a VA Medical Center (MC) level or any smaller organization so they can make use of this (e.g., program offices, medical centers, etc.).
* Developed Framework for creating Institutional Access Points
* Developed an internal site to enable accessing and reporting of data by race and ethnicity as a resource to meet the reporting requirements in Megabus Act Section 5401 and the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

I~STAND Sub-Council Initial Accomplishments:

* Added Veteran safety survey question to VSignals deployed on October 15, 2021. The question is projected to be integrated into the Patient Advocate Tracking system in the summer of 2022.
* Annual distribution of VA's anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault policy and education. Distributed VA's anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault policy and education material to 16 million Veterans. The annual distribution began in December 2021 with email distribution to approximately 6 million Veterans with a rolling U.S. Postal Service distribution beginning in January 2022 to the remaining 10 million Veterans.
* National Discussion on Sexual Assault and Sexual /Harassment at America's Colleges, Universities, and Service Academies, Hosted by the Navy, DEPSEVA Plenary Speaker
* Established Secretary's workgroup to include VSOs & tribal; action plan for facilities, bystander intervention training for Veterans. First meeting was held on September 22, 2021.
* **Bystander Intervention Training for Employees.** Refreshed the VA mandatory Harassment Prevention Training that now incorporates bystander intervention techniques for VA employees and mandatory educational components of the Deborah Sampson Act, as required by P. L. 116-315.

Since the training refresh in October, total of 416,941 VA employees have completed the training

* Establishing policies in all three Administrations to address harassment prevention (VA Handbook 5979, VHA Directive 5019.02, etc.)

* Facility Remediation Plan (FRP) Tool. The law mandates a remediation plan for facilities that experience five or more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or combination thereof, during any single fiscal year. To meet this requirement, VA created a national automated workflow tool for tracking of remedial actions as well as oversight and trending to comply with the requirements of the law. The FRP tool eases reporting and tracking for the facility and for national oversight.

* ORMDI briefed HVAC on July 28, 2022, on the progress of I~STAND and VA's zero-tolerance policy for harassment, sexual harassment, and sexual assault at VA, as well as elements from the government accounting office's 7 recommendations. We are proactively preventing and responding to harassment claims to ensure everyone feels welcome and safe at all VA facilities.

* VA developed a new mandatory Harassment Prevention and Accountability training course in VA's Talent Management System (TMS) (VA 45224), required for completion by all employees within 90 days of hire and annually thereafter. VA also revised the EEO, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training for all executives, managers, and supervisors (VA 45049) and mandated training completion within 90 days after launch and biennially thereafter.

* Virtual interactive vendor-led bystander intervention training was provided to VHA employees across the field. Updated mandatory harassment prevention training for all employees to include bystander intervention techniques was also provided.

* In acknowledgement of Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), the Assault and Harassment Prevention Office partnered with the VA Caribbean Healthcare System to produce three outreach clips, one in English, one in Spanish, and one Bilingual (English/Spanish), to reach a larger audience:

* Domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, race, age, or sexual orientation. If you are a Veteran, their partner, or VA staff who are impacted by IPV, VA's Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP) is committed to helping. IPVAP has program coordinators who can provide resources for you. You can also support a VA that is free from sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence by taking the White Ribbon VA pledge. White Ribbon VA

pledge is your dedication to never commit, excuse or stay silent about sexual harassment, sexual assault or domestic violence.

* Domestic Violence Awareness Month https://youtu.be/cwOVYg1pgxA
* Domestic Violence Awareness Month (English/Spanish) https://youtu.be/5nOmrUUeC0k
* Mes de Concientización sobre la Violencia Doméstica https://youtu.be/fBRmwCdxtbs
* VHA transitioned to a universal application methodology for leadership development programs to deemphasize reliance of essay-based frameworks and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has experimented with anonymizing applications for leadership programs by removing demographic information.
* Education Development & Training Team
* All Employee Survey and Data Collection Team
* LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program Manager Team
* Information Distribution and Outreach Team
* Continued to work on the 2nd LGBTQ+ Veteran Chartbook. This chartbook examine disparities Veteran experiences with care at VA related to sexual orientation and should be released in June for PRIDE Month.
* VA initiated the pilot pronoun usage/program in FY 2022, Q2.
* Review of all VA Policies for LGBTQ+ issues
* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program
* VA health records now display gender identity. Healthcare professionals who use Computerized Patient Record System now have visibility on the structure to display birth sex, self-identified gender identity, sexual orientation, and pronouns used on the patient inquiry page.
* ORMDI is working on a cyber bullying video series in partnership with Ruchika Croall, Director, Enterprise Cybersecurity Strategi Communications. The topics will be: 1) how to recognize someone is being cyber bullied, and 2) how to talk to someone that is being cyber bullied and get them help. The second topic will be more centric to talking to a peer or child, as children are on technology at a very young age, especially with hybrid schooling starting now. So, it will be about veterans and employees being able to talk to their kids or younger people that may be getting cyber bullied.

Additional points:

* The I~STAND covers all forms of harassment, including bullying and cyber-bullying.
* Definitions—cover all of VA and presently being routed through internal governance for adoption.
* DRAFT Definition: Cyberbullying/Cyberstalking* is a form of harassment that takes place through electronic devices or the internet by means of technology such as SMS Texts, Apps, social media platforms, cell phones, computers, tablets, gaming platforms, or similar methodologies/technologies. Cyberbullying/Cyberstalking may cause another person, group or family member distress. It may also severely impact their career, personal relationships, and quality of life.
* Examples of Cyberbullying include, but are not limited to, subjecting another person(s) to verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, retaliation, and/or other conduct, whether of a sexual nature or not, which threatens or endangers the health or safety of any person or which has the purpose or effect of creating a hostile or intimidating environment.
* Examples of Cyberstalking include, but are not limited to, gathering personal information on another person, spreading false rumors, encouraging others to join in the harassment, threatening harm through email, creating fear and paranoia for someone else, hacking into online accounts, placing orders for delivery in someone else's name, etc.
* *The determination of cyberbullying/cyberstalking is made on a case-by-case basis by the adjudicating authority. Some cyberbullying/cyberstalking crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior. Refer to relevant VA policy and Federal, state, and local laws. A VA employee who engages in cyberbullying/cyberstalking may be subject to disciplinary actions.
* 3) ORMDI is in the process of hiring 22 additional harassment prevention coordinators to add to the existing eight. Several of these positions will be dedicated to cyber-bullying.

EO 13988 initial accomplishments
Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation
* Preferred name field, gender identity field are live in VistA/CPRS health record.
* Veterans can enter/edit preferred name and gender identity via profile on VA.GOV

* Employees can add pronouns to their VA display name (Outlook, SharePoint, Teams, etc).
* Broad VA participation in Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) survey: 51 facilities are designated Leaders, 25 are Top Performers.
* The All-Employee Survey has been updated to include other gender options (non-binary, intersex, etc.), changed transgender to transgender/gender diverse, additional options for sexual orientation (queer, asexual, etc.), and adjusted the placement of these LGBTQ+ demographic questions.
* Provided training on the following topics for over 1,200 VA enterprise and U.S. territories between June 2021-June 2022:

    k. Transgender Employee Transition Guidance
    l. Valuing Workforce Diversity and Workplace Inclusion with a Focus on LGBTQ+

* For the June 2021 virtual PRIDE event there were 2,200 participants. Approximately 10% participated in a demographic survey. Of those who participated in the survey, 70% identified as White/Caucasian, 11.5% identified as Black/African American. 26% identified as having a disability, 34% identified as Veteran employees and 10% of all participants consisted of 9 different gender identification types. No statistical data available yet for June 2022 Pride event.
* VA's Office of Resolution Management Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) deployed a new discrimination complaint tracking system in November 2021 that includes a field to add pronouns.
* Issued enterprise policy guidance that instructed VA adjudicators to determine that all discharged Service members whose separation were due to sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status should be classified as eligible Veterans for VA benefits. Future Actions, including rulemaking, updated policies and guidance, is VA considering to fully implement EO13988:

    m. Process initiated for rulemaking to allow gender affirming surgeries. VA is responding to OMB feedback on the proposed rule and on the Regulatory Impact Analysis.
    n. VA Handbook 5975.4 "Transgender Employee Transition Guidance" is currently under review for revision and pending recertification.
    o. VHA Directives 1340: Health Care for Veterans who Identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual and 1341: Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans are currently under review for revision and renewal. VA LGBTQ+ Policies

p. Addressing any blockers or barriers in full implementation of EO 13988 and identifying resources, Technical Assistance, or coordination would help VA address those barriers.

q. PIV Cards – legal name vs. pseudonym- a whole-of-government policy can assist with implementation of future changes.

r. Some VA facilities still have single stall restrooms with signs that are gender-specific instead of unisex or gender neutral. Leased buildings can cause a barrier when it comes to making sign changes.

s. Collecting data on sexual orientation and gender identify is not a required HR field. Therefore, VA is limited in its efforts to proactively prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identify if things such as promotion rates, retention rates, separations rates cannot be analyzed.

t. Additional staffing and resources are needed to expand support in areas where patient demands, and mission is growing and changing. At this moment Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMS) serve in a collateral duty position.

* LGBTQ+ accomplishments to date:

f. First time in VA history, the SECVA raised the LGBTQ+ Flag atop VACO Headquarters in 2021 and again in 2022. In 2022 Kansas City VA Medical Center raised the pride flag.

g. Visible gender identity field in VistA/CPRS.

h. Veteran can enter/edit gender identity and preferred name via their profile on VA.GOV.

i. VA released the 2nd LGBTQ+ Chartbook. It is posted here:

   i. VHA_OHE_LGB_SHEP_Chartbook_Final_508_June_2022.pdf (va.gov). The chart book focuses on Veteran experiences with VHA care so we gave it a different name instead of 2nd chartbook. Not surprisingly, sexual minority Veterans report worse access, person-centered care, and care coordination than heterosexual Veterans.

j. VA announced that it is closing a gap in survivor benefits for certain survivors of LGBTQ+ Veterans and survivors. It was published in the VA News here on October 13, 2022.

   i. VA closes gap in survivor benefits for LGBTQ+ Veterans and survivors

   Info for who is eligible:
   Today, VA announced that it is closing a gap in survivor benefits for certain survivors of LGBTQ+ Veterans—specifically, for those who were unable to wed until the 2015 ***Obergefell v. Hodges*** Supreme Court decision*,* and who, therefore, were not married to their now-deceased Veteran spouses for long enough to qualify for survivor benefits.

"VA is closing a gap in benefits for surviving spouses of LGBTQ+ Veterans, righting a wrong that is a legacy of the discriminatory federal ban on same-sex marriages," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "It is VA's mission to serve all Veterans—including LGTBQ+ Veterans—as they've served our country, and this decision is a key part of that effort."

Who will be impacted by this decision?
Due to bans on same-sex marriages, many LGBTQ+ Veterans were unable to get married until ***Obergefell v. Hodges*** (6/26/2015) despite being in "marriage-type" relationships long before that. This wrongly precluded many survivors of those LGBTQ+ Veterans from becoming eligible for survivor benefits because their Veteran spouse died before the marriage met VA's length-of-marriage requirements (1 year for survivor benefits, 8 years for a higher rate of benefits).

This decision addresses that problem by counting the duration of marriage from when the surviving spouse can establish a "marriage-type" relationship—such as a commitment ceremony, joint banking account, or joint purchase of a house. Importantly, these benefits are not retroactive.

How do I apply for these benefits, and when will they take effect?
This decision is effective immediately, and survivors can apply now for these benefits. Eligible surviving spouses who apply in the next year will receive benefits backdated to October 11, 2022.

What other steps has VA taken recently for LGBTQ+ Veterans?

VA is committed to delivering world-class care and benefits to LGBTQ+ Veterans. As a part of this effort, last year, VA began providing benefits to Veterans who were given "Other Than Honorable" discharges due to their sexual orientation.

LGBTQ+ Veterans can learn more about VA's current health care offerings on the LGBTQ+ Health Program website.

* LGBTQ+ priorities going forward:
    o Complete rulemaking by posting the proposed rule. Respond to comments. Simultaneously set up new surgical services in late FY23.

I*DEA

- o Add sexual orientation field in VistA/CPRS in August 2022.
- o Allow Veteran ability to enter/edit sexual orientation via profile on VA.GOV in the future.
- o Develop pronoun field in VistA/CPRS in FY23
- o Create the following additional subgroups in the VA II+ Workgroup:
- o Policy Creation and Review Team
- o Education Development & Training Team
- o VA National Virtual PRIDE – Pride Month and Event Planning Team
- o All Employee Survey and Data Collection Team
- o LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program Manager Team
- o Information Distribution and Outreach Team
- ∗ Continued to work on the 2nd LGBTQ+ Veteran Chartbook. This chartbook examines disparities Veteran experiences with care at VA related to sexual orientation and should be released in June for PRIDE Month.
- ∗ VA initiated the pilot pronoun usage/program in FY 2022, Q2.
- ∗ Review of all VA Policies for LGBTQ+ issues
- ∗ VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program
- ∗ VA health records now display gender identity. Healthcare professionals who use Computerized Patient Record System now have visibility on the structure to display birth sex, self-identified gender identity, sexual orientation, and pronouns used on the patient inquiry page.

EO 13985 initial accomplishments

Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. (For Veterans, Families and Caregivers): VA submitted an Agency Equity Plan on February 10, 2022.

- ∗ **VA Agency Equity Action Plan:** The Department of Veterans Affairs released its Equity Action Plan, April 14, to eliminate barriers to health care, benefits and services, and create opportunities to improve access and experiences for historically marginalized Veterans. To serve all Veterans, VA must reach the most marginalized and underserved — regardless of race, gender, age, or socio-economic status. The plan sets forth a myriad of goals to effectively incorporate equity across the department.
- ∗ **VA Veterans and Family Equity Assessment:** The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI), in partnership with program offices, has conducted three equity assessments regarding Veterans who receive benefits and services from the

VA in accordance with Executive Orders (EOs) 13985, 14020, 14031, and 14041. The Equity Assessment focused on: VA's Pension Program, accessing disparities in Federal Procurement and assessing the unmet needs of Women and Veterans who are of members of historically marginalized underserved population that are Outside Continental United States, in Freely Associated States and in the Philippines.

* **Procurement Equity-** Key procurement deliverables are on track: Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Goal, New Entrants, and Small Business (SB) subcontracts.
* VA's SDB established Goal was 10.2%. VA is currently exceeding this goal.
* Investment in Women and Women's health care.
* The VA Center for Women Veteran's is working with the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization to establish a partnership with the Department of Commerce to empower minority women Veterans to become entrepreneurs and is collaborating with the Office of Women's Health to enhance women Veteran's access to information about issues and programs that specifically address their concerns.
* More women are choosing VA healthcare than ever before, with women accounting for over 30 percent of the increase in Veterans enrolled over the past five years. Investments support comprehensive specialty medical and surgical services for women veterans at a VA facility or through referrals to the community. The budget proposes to increase access to infertility counseling and assisted reproductive technology and to eliminate copayments for contraceptive coverage. The budget also improves the safety of Women Veterans seeking healthcare at VA facilities by supporting implementation of the zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and assault.
* **VA Identity Insights Project**: VA's Veteran's Experience Office has partnered with the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI) for the Identity Insights Project. The Identity Insights Project affords an opportunity for employees of various demographic groups to participate in interviews or focus groups, and to provide critical insights into existing pain points, needs, and challenges to creating a more inclusive employee experience. The data collected will assess how employees feel a sense of belonging throughout their career journey with the Department. This project may include Veterans that are also employed by the VA.
* **Data for Equity Strategy**
* **Health Equity**

- **Language Access Plan**: OPIA is currently leading effort to implement recent legislation requiring VA to provide agency fact sheets in 10 languages in addition to English, Tagalog and Spanish, so that work might fit seamlessly into the Language Access sub-committee. ORMDI is in partnership with OPIA, as we update the handbook that covers LAP.
- VA continues to approach the inequitable access to the benefits claims process for all Veterans, to include American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans due to the communities' predominantly remote locations. VA consulted with tribal governments to develop partnerships that enhance access to services and benefits by Veterans and their families. One notable outcome from these collaborations was the development of Tribal Claims Clinics
- OPIA has partnered with VA Digital Services and Veterans Experience Office on an intermediate translation web page capability by leveraging the recently passed PACT Act (click link: Spread the word about PACT Act eligibility - VA News , for examples of materials translated into the languages required by the legislation. OPIA has also partnered with the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) to concurrently update the department's Language Access Plan to assist in this effort. Additionally, Intergovernmental Affair's Executive Director for Pacific Strategy has worked with Interagency partners and identified the Chamorro and Samoan languages for inclusion in this effort.
- VA consulted with tribal governments to develop partnerships that enhance access to services and benefits by Veterans and their families. The OTGR crafted an Interagency Project Team Charter that would pull together, enterprise-wide, the various administrations, leadership and program offices working with tribal governments and AI/AN Veterans across the VA organization to better inform and craft a strategic plan, aligned with the VA strategic plan, to effectively engage and partner with tribal governments. This population is unique from other diverse groups in that they are recognized as being part of a political classification rather than a racial classification of people.

EO 13985 accomplishments update (October 12, 2022)

Goal 1: Data for Equity

- VA Data Governance Council (DGC) sponsored the creation of a Demographic Data Workgroup (DDWG) in April 2022 functioning as a subset of the DGC

Stewardship Sub-Council. This Charted Workgroup oversees three lanes of effort (workstreams) and focused on:

* Gaining Veterans' insights sentiments on VA's collection, use, and management of their demographic data.
* Understanding the current landscape for collecting demographics data.
* Developing and applying a standardized process for demographic data quality assessments and inform suggestions for improved data collection and curation across the enterprise.
* The Data Governance process includes an ethics review and its adherence to Principle-Based Ethics Framework for Access to and Use of Veteran Data.
* Critical to ensuring race and ethnicity as a trusted data object, identified OMB's Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for maintaining, collecting, and presented Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity as the VA enterprise standard. A comparison of existing race and ethnicity collection standards used throughout the VA (HL7, OMB-15, and MISMO) was conducted to understand the interoperability between reporting standards. Data quality analyses were conducted on race and ethnicity data from VistA, Cerner, Loan Guaranty (LGY), Special Adaptive Housing (SAHSHA) VA Defense Information Repository, and Enrollment Services (ES) to determine no single-source currently meets the gold standard of most recent, self-reported and OMB-15 compliant.
* Conducted ten cultural observance events for VHA employees and Veterans to recognize the achievements and contributions of designated racial, ethnic, religious and gender-diverse communities in our society. These observances celebrate VHA's multicultural workforce and increase cross-cultural awareness to build trust, improve communication and break down barriers to effective healthcare. Last month VA created a very moving tribute to MLK Jr. that represents the diversity of our workforce. Please see the below link during your speech:

   I Have a Dream Project (brightcove.net)

Goal 2: Improve access and advance outcomes

* VA has completed equity assessments for:
  o VA's Pension program,
  o Reduce barriers to access for underserved Veterans OCONUS and in Freely Associated States (FAS).

Goal 3: Increase contract awards to women-owned small business (WOSB) and small disadvantage businesses (SDB)

* VA will begin the use of Vendor Management Program that will involve QR code technology. The QR code will provide industry educational resources on how to do business with VA Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction's Office of Construction and Facilities Management (CFM), provide educational links, and display what events CFM will be attending.
* VA's SDB established Goal was 10.2%. VA is currently exceeding this goal.

Goal 4: Address health equity for underserved Veterans

* Best Practices Guide on collection of data on Race and Ethnicity has been developed.
* VA continues to make information available on health disparities experienced by Veterans in print, podcast, and cyber-seminar formats; recent reports include the Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Veteran Chartbook and the Primary Healthcare Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Veterans report.
* $750,000 was distributed to support 25 VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) projects to address inequities and supporting dashboards use to guide improvements.
* VA continues to support addressing social determinants of health as a way to reduce inequities; the numbers of VAMCs that use the Assessing Circumstances & Offering Resources for Needs (ACORN) screener to identify Veterans at risk and match them with appropriate services continues to grow.

Goal 5: Build and maintain trust with Underserved Veterans

* VA-wide trust Vsignals survey went live in October 2021.
* VA completed the Pacific Journey map to better understand awareness of VA benefits and services in the Pacific region.
* Human-Centered Design and Research for data collection was completed in September 2022, it included 59 interviews and surveys with VA data subject matter experts as well as Veterans. A playbook was developed to provide a framework for improving Veterans experiences in collecting their demographic data. This playbook can be used as a guide for VA internal staff looking to inform decisions related to Veteran demographic data collection and usage across VA programs and lines of business. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors Veterans and their eligible family members with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our nation. This core mission ensures that those who served this Nation are always remembered and honored. NCA maintains more than 150 cemeteries as national shrines and

provides digital memorialization at the Veterans Legacy Program to commemorate their legacy, service, and sacrifice to our Nation. NCA further complements its cemeteries with 121 State, Territorial and Tribal VA Grant Funded Veteran Cemeteries.

Deborah Sampson Act

* VA added a Veteran Safety Survey question to VSignals to capture experience of underserved populations.
* VA standardized anti-harassment/sexual assault signage delivered to 100% of VA facilities.
* A VA Harassment Prevention Handbook was published in March 2022.
* A national discussion on sexual assault and harassment has been implemented at America's colleges, universities, and service academies.
* VA's 2023 budget allocates $9.8 billion for all of women Veterans' healthcare, including $767 million towards women's gender specific care.
* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program.
* Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) Repeal: VA announced last Fall under its existing authority to offer relief to those discharged from military service.
* Secretary McDonough promulgated a memorandum in Sep 2021, providing for a Character of Discharge Review: VA adjudicators shall find that all discharged Service members whose separation was due to sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status are considered "Veterans" who are eligible for VA benefits; so long as the record does not implicate a statutory or regulatory bar to benefits.
* The outreach effort to Veterans, included a Secretary issued Press Release that highlighted the process for gaining access to benefits when a Veteran had an Other Than Honorable (OTH) Discharge. In addition to the Sec Press Release for LGBTQ+ Veterans, VBA also provided additional information to VSO, and other stakeholders that sought to encourage Veterans to seek out access to VBA benefits if they had an OTH discharge.
  o The effort has had an amazing impact and reach as VBA has seen the number of requests increase to over 12,000 received from Jun of 2021 to March of this year (2022).
* VA participates in the White House Gender Marker Interagency Policy Council working towards adopting the "X" gender marker for those who do not identify as male or female.

I*DEA

* VA Initiated the rulemaking process to modify the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to expand VA's gender affirming care and benefits package for Veterans.
* VA initiated the rulemaking process to change the policy ban on gender-affirmation surgery, which is part of formal regulation under the Administrative Procedure Act.
* Effective October 1, 2021, Veterans Experience Office (VEO) Trust Surveys now include questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.

EO 14031- WHIAANHPI (White House Initiative on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander):

Presidential Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States

* Completed Feasibility study and submitted to Congress to create a center for NHPI and USAPI to advance health equity and decrease health disparities among NHPI Veterans. (VHA/OPIA)
* VEO Veterans Experience a Journey Map Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and CMNI
* Manila Operations- VBA Regional Office; Health Care Operations
* On November 18, 2021, the House passed H.R. 3730, to amend Title 38, United States Code, to establish VA Advisory Committee on US Outlying Areas (Guam, CNMI (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), American Samoa, US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico) and Freely Associated States (FAS)
* OPIA is currently leading effort to implement recent legislation requiring VA to provide agency fact sheets in 10 languages in addition to English, Tagalog, and Spanish
* ORMDI/CMV/CWV/OPIA completed a study to examine the unmet needs of women and minority Veterans in the Pacific region, including Territories, COFA (Compact of Free Association) states, Philippines. This study resulted in over 35 recommendations for VA.
* Completed funding and start-up of over 20 equity-guided improvement strategy projects. These pilot and innovation projects that use equity to drive quality improvement were selected from over 60 proposals submitted by VAMC staff.
* Completed the National Veterans Health Equity Report Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Chartbook. This chartbook focuses on disparities

among AANHPI Veterans identified in the NVHER and should be posted this month for AANHPI Heritage Month.

* Completed classification of 8 new health equity staff whom we hope to hire over the next few months.
* Continued to work with the VHA High Reliability Organization Collaborative to use equity to improve Veteran outcomes. This year's collaborative focuses on reducing readmission rates so our team has been working with the ~40 VAMCs participating in the collaborative to understand whether equity would be an efficient way to target interventions to reduce readmissions in their facilities.
* VA continues to approach the inequitable access to the benefits claims process for all Veterans, in include American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans.
* On November 18, 2021, the House passed HR 3730 to amend Title 38, United Stated Code, to establish VA Advisory Committee on US Outlying Areas and FAS.
* OPIA is leading the effort to implement legislation requiring VA to provide agency fact sheets in 10 languages in addition to English, Tagalog, and Spanish.
* VA participated in WHIAANHPI Regional Network 9 Roundtable on Combatting Anti-Asian Hate on March 22, 2022.
* **VA supports the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans** (ACMV). The ACMV has three members serving on the committee that represent the Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans: Lt. Colonel Michael Yaguchi, Retired, SFC Nathan Tilton, Retired and Dr. Georgina Dodge.
* VA has released its first ever harassment policy that standardizes harassment response and reporting across the entire enterprise.
* The Pacific Island Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC) event was held in Guam (February 28, 2023) and Hawaii/American Samoa (March 1–2, 2023). This is a major accomplishment for Veterans in FAS/OCONUS, especially women Veterans. The attached document Pacific Mar 2023 VEAC AAG details the customers that were served. Women Veterans accounted for 27.3% of all VEAC customers in the Pacific Island VEAC. This is particularly noteworthy because the woman Veteran population in the region is 10.4%.
* VEAC Highlights
    o 121 customers were provided 299 services during the Pacific Island VEAC. Over 40 support staff were trained for VEAC engagement. The services provided will increase access to VA, state, local, and community resources for the Veteran community in the regions of American Samoa, Guam, and Hawaii.

- o 26 (21.5%) customers initiated their intent to file with VBA while 18 (14.9%) Veterans were referred to VHA for eligibility and enrollment. The VEAC website and VEAC support staff knowledge helps customers understand the full scope of services offered through a VEAC. This assists in introducing VA services to customers who are not yet utilizing select services, such as VA healthcare and VA benefits.
- o The customer no-show rate was 11.7%. The VEAC planning team has robust notification efforts including text and email reminders to help customers remember their scheduled appointments.
- o Women Veterans accounted for 27.3% of all VEAC customers in the Pacific Island VEAC. This is particularly noteworthy because the woman Veteran population in the region is 10.4%.
- o 14 (11.6%) event participants were referred to Community and Peer-to-Peer partners: GotYour671 and U.S. Vets. The connections made with these organizations provide participants with a direct connection to local organizations in their community for support in the areas of mental health, social connection, financial assistance, and more.

VA continues to embed equity in the Veteran's Health Administrations operations, benefits, and services, through understanding health care disparities.

EO 14035 initial accomplishments

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Government:

- ∗ VA submitted a workforce-focused I*DEA Strategic Plan to OMB on March 23, 2022.
- ∗ I*DEA Memorialized in the Strategic Plan:

  c. I*DEA is now memorialized in the Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal years 2022 – 2028 Strategic Plan.
  d. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.3: I*DEA - VA will enhance understanding of Veteran needs and eliminate disparities and barriers to health, improve service delivery and opportunities to enhance Veterans' outcomes, experiences, and quality of life. Objective 2.3 expands VA's understanding of Veterans to customize care and meet the specific needs of individual Veterans and underserved communities. This expanded understanding will enable VA to address inequity, health disparities and barriers to access and opportunities. VA will weave the principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (I*DEA) into the fabric of our mission and create an organization where all employees support the cultural transformation to a VA that is more

inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible to all, especially those from underserved communities.

∗ The Diversity and Inclusion Veterans Affairs Council (DIVAC) serves as an internal forum to address Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) issues impacting VA's workforce.

∗ SES Barrier Analysis
  o Hispanic Barrier Analysis- Report due later this year.
  o SES Barrier Analysis- We are working on the next steps on ownership and public release.
  o Employees with Disabilities: We just started the task order for this effort with FFRDC MITRE.

∗ The I*DEA Stand-down Task Force planned for events at VA facilities to address related topics for VA workforce.

∗ VA is moving forward with hiring a Chief Diversity Officer.

∗ VA has evaluated the internal capability and resources needed for an I*DEA Dashboard.

∗ I*DEA is now a mandatory executive performance element under Leading People.

∗ Rescinded HRL 0601-17. VA Central Office (VACO) Human Resources Service (COHRS) Dress Code Guidance.

∗ Partnered with the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to develop I*DEA performance metrics.

∗ Added Veteran status to the All-Employee Survey data dashboard.

∗ Consulted with Labor Unions to inform them on I*DEA and to prepare to garner their perspectives on ways for VA to improve diversity and inclusion for employees.

∗ The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) hosted the Virtual Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Access Conference with over 2,000 participants consisting of EEO Program Managers, Directors, supervisors, and others during fiscal year (FY) 2021. The conference provided information to ensure EEO personnel had the knowledge, skill, and ability to affectively advise, and give guidance to leadership and appropriate EEO services.

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

Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) to perform 910 TARs in FY 2022 per year, an increase from 6 conducted held in FY 2021.

* VA Nurse and PA (Patient Advocate) Retention and Income Security Enhancement (RAISE) Act was signed into law on March 15, 2022, increasing the pay limitation on salaries for nurses, advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and PAs employed within VA. The act is part of the omnibus appropriations bill (HR 2471) passed by Congress to fund the federal government through the end of the 2022 fiscal year.

* VA partnered with a federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) to analyze the lack of diversity among the Department's Senior Executive Service (SES) employees and the feeder pipeline (GS13, GS14 and GS15). FFRDCs are academic, corporate, and nonprofit organizations owned by the Federal Government but operated by contractors to augment VA's research and development capabilities.

* RAISE ACT: OALC (Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction) has taken the lead on the RAISE Act to raise minimum wage for contractors. (EO 13985/Procurement Equity).

* 2022 Inclusivity Close Out: "Commitment to F.O.C.S.E." (Fair Open Cooperative Supportive Empowering) - The Inclusivity Campaign is an initiative to model inclusive behaviors throughout VHA focused on improving communication, building trust, and encouraging teamwork to create an equitable and inclusive VHA that fosters a culture of dignity and respect.
   o In 2022, VISN 17 employees shared various perspectives each month on Fairness, Openness, Cooperation, Supportive and Empowerment (F.O.C.S.E.) For the Close-out, employees signed a Commitment to continue to foster an environment of Inclusivity.

* VA launches *Be Your Self* internal communications campaign to communicate I*DEA goals and objectives to VA employees, Veterans, and other key stakeholders via targeted communications and engagement campaigns.

* VA soft launches I*DEA Intranet to serve as the hub for all things I*DEA and play a key role in informing, engaging, and supporting VA employees.
   o As part of the Intrant launch, the Showcasing I*DEA story sub-page to present I*DEA content through first-person narratives, highlights of I*DEA advocates, relevant updates.

* VA launched an Inclusivity Campaign from April 2022 to December 2022. The Campaign engaged VHA employees, at Program Offices, VISNs and Medical Centers, on the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in breaking down barriers to effective healthcare and demonstrating the Department's commitment to building a workplace that values inclusivity, connectedness,

mindfulness, dignity and respect. VA concluded the Inclusivity Campaign by creating and disseminating an Inclusive Intelligence Guide. ODEI introduced their Dignity and Respect Campaign that ran from February through September 2023 which is in line with National Respect Day.

* Planned and executed the inaugural VHA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Summit in June 2022 to educate the field on DEI best practices. During the Summit, over 540 employees and DEI stakeholders convened virtually to collaborate on DEI best practices and participate in experiential learning activities to build an inclusive work environment and foster a culture that values and leverages individual diversity. ODEI is currently planning its 2023 Diversity Summit "Fostering an Inclusive Culture of Dignity and Respect."

* Trained over 7,000 employees on multiple diversity, equity and inclusion topics to include Inclusive Intelligence, Increasing All Employee Engagement and Building Your Personal Brand. VA conducted training sessions during Program Office, VISN and Medical Center town hall meetings and committee meetings.

* VA launches the I*DEA Quarterly Update, a focused information source delivering I*DEA messaging such as letters from I*DEA leaders, initiative successes, creative contributions, current events, best practices, and links to resources.

* The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (I*DEA) unit is located within NCA's Human Capital Management's Office of Workforce Relations (OWR). NCA strives to empower employees to promote curiosity, dignity and respect in order to drive psychological safety, synergy and understanding. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, NCA achieved the following I*DEA accomplishments:

  o Filled its first full-time diversity and inclusion position. This position focuses on all Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (I*DEA) related programs and initiatives for NCA;
  o Launched a Special Emphasis Recruiting Team (SERT) and Diversity Hiring Team, which developed recruitment and hiring solutions for underrepresented groups;
  o Developed and released four issues of NCA I*DEA Newsletter, to date;
    ▪ The purpose of this newsletter is to provide Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I*DEA) information to ensure a welcoming atmosphere by increasing cultural awareness through information, training and resources.
  o Initiated nation-wide in-person training sessions for National Cemetery Administration Supervisors, Managers and Staff;
  o Trained Supervisors in the Advanced Leadership Program at NCA's National Training Center in St. Louis, Missouri;

- o Co-facilitated virtual I*DEA trainings for cemeteries on the following topics with the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion (ORMDI) throughout the year:
  - Managing Implicit Bias in VA
  - Managing Generational Diversity in the Workplace
  - Managing Gender Diversity in the Workplace
  - Understanding Micro Behaviors in VA Work Environment
  - Applying Cultural Competence in a Multicultural VA
- o Developed and facilitated the following virtual and in-person trainings throughout the year which offered a deeper understanding of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the workplace and offered highlights on Diversity and Inclusion trends (trainings were for cited NCACO and District personnel below:
  - May 17, Audience: Minority Veteran Program Coordinators, Virtual
  - June 15, Audience: Office of Asset Enterprise Management, Virtual
  - June 29, Audience: Willamette National Cemetery Director, Managers and Supervisors, In Person
  - July 19, Audience: Deputy Director Cemetery Operations Staff, (Part 1)
  - August 16, Audience: Deputy Director Cemetery Operations Staff, (Part 2)
  - September 13, Audience: Office of Workforce Relations
  - September 21, Audience: Florida National Cemetery Directors and Supervisors
  - 60 Minute Manager (MM) Diversity "Jeopardy" Training, Virtual, September 6
- o Communicated details of 21 VA I*DEA observances to all NCA team members to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding.
- * VA launched an internal communications campaign to educate employees, and other key internal audiences about I*DEA goals and objectives, progress, and actionable steps through targeted communications. The campaign included the following key elements:
  - * I*DEA Quarterly (I*Q): A quarterly update that provides leadership highlights, stories from the field, artwork, events, and access to resources.
  - * Showcasing I*DEA Stories: real life contributions from VA employees exemplifying advocacy and the need to further I*DEA as well as highlights from VA leadership.

* I*DEA Intranet: the hub for all things I*DEA including hot topics, background information, resources, information pertaining to the Influencer Network, Showcasing I*DEA, and more.
* Print Collateral: flyers and posters exemplifying special observances through the lens of I*DEA that can be shared digitally, as well as in VA spaces such as medical centers and offices.

LGBTQ+

* Secretary McDonough approved the VA's first ever PRIDE Employee Resource Group in April 2021. The first-ever PRIDE Employee Resource Group (ERG) - a Department of Veterans Affairs ERG for gender and sexual minorities, including those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+), as well as allies. Since its founding the ERG has advised VA on LGBTQ+ issues, acted as a social space for LGBTQ+ employees, and provides support to LGBTQ+ efforts at VA.
  o In addition to this VA already had and still has a very Active LGBTQ+ Work Group. The Secretary announced and VA initiated the Rule Making Process in 2021. This is a process that will help VA realize the standards of care consistent with industry and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). This work group transitioned from an Integrated Project Team to a governance model within the I*DEA Sub-Council as the LGBTQ+ Sub-Group
* The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) demonstrated proof-of-concept with a pilot program to include pronouns in email headers and in the global address list. The program was deployed VA-wide in April 2022 VA LGBTQ+ Support Groups
* VA changed the name of Veterans Health Administration's "LGBT and Related Identities" health program to "LGBTQ+" Health Program.
* Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) data collection in Cerner Millennium and VistA/CPRS.
* Developed a white paper on LGBTQ+ efforts within VA.
* Crafted a briefing book for the incoming Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) on LGBTQ+ efforts at VA.
* LGBTQ+ Training – Through the efforts of the LGBTQ+ ERG, the first VA National Virtual PRIDE event took place on June 1, 2021, and concluded on June 30, 2021, with over 300 diverse volunteers across the country who planned 27 successful live/virtual events that were produced and presented nationally as an inclusive, safe, and open forum. The 30-day successful event:

o Hosted over 2,200 participants, with presence from across the VA enterprise and U.S. territories.

o Continues engagement with the recorded videos that have since been viewed over 4,500 times both internally and externally to date.

o Of the 2,200 program participants in the first virtual Pride event, approximately 10% participated in a demographic survey. Of those who participated in the survey, 70% identified as White/Caucasian, 11.5% identified as Black/African American. 26% identified as having a disability, 34% identified as Veteran employees and 10% of all participants consisted of 9 different gender identification types.

o Given the outstanding success of VA's inaugural Virtual Pride Month Event in 2021, VA National Virtual Pride hosted its second annual event in 2022, which consisted of 40 events, and the SECVA kicked off this year's event with a welcoming address. As Pride Month has just ended, statistical data is not yet available. However, it can be surmised that this year's event was a very huge success and should be highlighted as a best practice throughout the Federal Government. No other agency to our knowledge has planned or executed such a comprehensive virtual LGBTQ+ training and awareness event.

Underserved/Monitory VA Employees

* VA hosted a three-part Showcase Series to highlight the innovation of I*DEA.

* The Federal Women's Working Group is an internal-facing work group aligned to Diversity and Inclusion in the VA Council (DIVAC) and I*DEA, with a goal of providing strategic recommendations to improve the inclusion, diversity, equity and access of VA women employees enterprise-wide.

* VA submitted the annual Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP) Accomplishment Report and Certification.

* VA automated the forms that employees complete to update their disability status. This provides better information into the types of disabilities that the workforce has and informs considerations regarding the types of accommodations that may be required.

Additional communications are continuously in progress.

I*DEA Dashboard

The objective of the I*DEA Dashboard is to improve the culture of VA to better serve Veterans and their families. The dashboard will track a portfolio of cultural health signals from across existing data focused on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, to compare current health status with desired

health outcomes. It will then utilize a systems-thinking approach and data driven decision making to provide an intervention strategy, and a follow-up strategy (post-vention) to track progress. The portfolio of intervention and post-vention will show trends such as improved overall VA brand, performance, and productivity.

The profile of each VA facility focuses on a cultural health heatmap, business operations heatmap, workforce profile heatmap, and a financial heatmap providing a holistic representation of the organization. These profiles will be represented by three colors: green (meeting the target), yellow (potential barriers), and red (falling short of the target and problematic). Users can personalize their dashboard by filtering by administration, segmentation, protected class status, etc. to target specific needs. The coalition behind the creation of the Dashboard focused on driving the right outcomes through feeding particular information that result in a clear direction driving I*DEA.

Different VA-wide cultural health coalitions have been leveraged in building the I*DEA Dashboard and determining where intervention is necessary. User group teams have held a series of co-design sessions with different subject matter experts across the VA.

Next steps would be to conduct feasibility assessments to examine the potential operational, technical, economical, and legal requirements and success measures of the Dashboard. There is still a need to assign a partner to monitor, provide regular updates, run analytics, and govern the Dashboard.

Three-Part Showcase Series

VA hosted a three-part Showcase Series in 2022 to highlight the innovation of I*DEA, engaging individuals in the field up to VA headquarters. Each showcase was approximately 60 minutes hosted virtually.

The first of the series was hosted in February 2022 and focused on providing participants with information about I*DEA presented by guest speaker VA Deputy Secretary, a panel presentation on the I*DEA Task Force, and an overview of what to expect throughout the showcase series. In a post-event survey, 91% of survey participants rated the event as "good" or "very good".

The second event took place in March 2022 and presented I*DEA through artistic expression, music, and poetry. This showcase served as an opportunity for personal stories, open conversation, and questions. The event kicked off with an original song by Sabrina Clark, featured artwork by Tammy

Finney and students, and guest speaker VA Chief of Staff. Over 150 participants joined and a post-event survey conveyed that 88% of participants thought the event was effective and 91% were 'very likely' or 'extremely likely' to attend a similar event in the future.

The last of the series was on April 13, 2022 and engaged members to act. Guest Speaker VA Chief of Staff discussed the progress that has been made thus far, inspired participants, and provided them with the tools to take to their local offices to spread I*DEA throughout their Veteran communities. The event brought in 233 participants. A recorded version of each showcase is available on the ORMDI intranet.

Though there have been many accomplishments coming out of the Executive Orders, the I*DEA Dashboard, and the Showcase, there is more to come. This is a continuous effort and accomplishments will continue to come out of the work that the VA is implementing.

EO 14041 initial accomplishments

Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HRA)

* Annual HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) Agency Plan: Submitted on January 13 with the goal of improving VA's programs, initiatives, and education services to further the advancement of historically black colleges and universities.

EO 14091 initial accomplishments

Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government

* Advancing equity, the Federal Government can support and empower all Americans, including the many communities in America that have been underserved, discriminated against, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.
  o Establish equity team.
  o Implement and develop comprehensive equity strategies that will drive equitable outcomes through government policies, programs, and activities.
  o Embed equity into government wide processes.

- o Deliver equitable outcomes in partnership with underserved communities, rural America, and advanced urban equitable development.

"Our future cannot depend on the government alone. The ultimate solutions lie in the attitudes and the actions of the American people."

– **PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN**