

VA Leadership Competencies

VA has identified six broad leadership competency categories that apply to anyone in a formal leadership role. Each category includes more specific competencies, which define success for leadership roles across the Department.

Although these competencies are only required for formal leaders, aspiring leaders should refer to them to begin developing the skills needed for career progression into a leadership role.

The leadership competency categories, specific competencies, and behavioral indicators are presented on the following pages.



Leading People. Demonstrates commitment to employees and VA. Empowers and trusts others. Builds high-performing teams. Develops the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization.

Promotes lead	ership at all levels. Develops the potential in others by identifying strengths and
providing opportunities for others to take on leadership roles. Delegates effectively and	
inspires, motiv	ates, and guides others to take initiative and achieve desired results.
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	 Talks with employees about their interests in pursuing leadership opportunities. Offers suggestions and encourages employees to pursue leadership opportunities.
2 – Foundational	 Identifies employees' strengths and areas for growth and assists them in setting realistic objectives. Provides opportunities for employees to lead work groups or projects.
3 – Intermediate	 Establishes clear directions and maintains dialogue with others on assignments and results. Provides regular feedback to aspiring leaders on how to develop leadership skills. Provides support and necessary resources so that subordinates can meet their goals and develop their skills.
4 – Advanced	 Creates work opportunities and stretch assignments that lead to growth and development. Delegates authority and responsibility to build the leadership capacity of others.
5 - Expert	 Guides subordinate leaders on how to identify and develop leadership potential in others. Develops/advocates programs for leadership development.

Inspires continual learning and development. Designates resources and time for learning		
across the full range of development opportunities (e.g. education, training, knowledge		
sharing, mentor	sharing, mentoring, coaching, and assignments). Removes barriers to and encourages	
application of no	ew knowledge and skills.	
Proficiency	Behavioral Indicators	
Level		
1 – Novice	Describes the value of long-term development to others.	
	Supports development initiatives of the organization.	
	Encourages employee involvement in learning opportunities.	
2 –	Assists employees in developing short- and long-term career goals.	
Foundational	Identifies resources and opportunities for growth and development.	
3 –	Adjusts behavior to support the different development needs of individual	
Intermediate	employees.	
	Allows flexibility and provides resources in accomplishing daily work to support	
	employees' efforts to participate in training and other developmental	
	opportunities.	

	Supports employees' efforts to apply what they have learned in training on-
4 – Advanced	 the-job. Provides challenging and stretch assignments to employees to leverage and improve their skills. Allocates unit or department-level resources in support of employees' development needs. Serves as a coach or mentor to employees, emphasizing the value of continuous development.
5 - Expert	 Creates opportunities and processes for others to develop and apply new skills in the organization. Evaluates success of development initiatives in the organization and makes adjustments as necessary. Establishes and supports organization-wide training and development policies that foster continual learning and development.
that capitalize o	forming, diverse teams. Builds high-performing, diverse, and inclusive teams in the skills of all members. Promotes teamwork and participative work by building a supportive work environment where employees feel free to raise oncerns.
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	 Encourages team members to participate in discussions. Defines characteristics of a high performing team and ensures a common understanding of purpose and direction among members.
2 – Foundational 3 – Intermediate	 Manages team in a way that builds morale and achieves results. Fosters and models an open dialogue among team members. Creates an environment that promotes collaboration among team members. Recognizes and rewards team efforts and individual accomplishments.
4 – Advanced	 Recognizes and utilizes the strengths of all members. Gives credit to and shares successes with the team. Creates an environment where team members can raise sensitive issues and concerns.
5 - Expert	 Creates an overall climate in the organization that is conducive to high- performing teams by establishing expectations and reward and recognition systems that reinforce teamwork, honest communications, diversity, and inclusion.

Partnering. Develops networks and builds alliances. Collaborates with stakeholders to better achieve objectives. Finds common ground with a wide range of stakeholders and uses these contacts to build and strengthen internal support bases to better serve Veterans.

Drives integration. Recognizes interdependencies among internal and external processes, resources, and capabilities. Demonstrates understanding of how Administrations, Staff offices, stakeholders, partners, and customers work together to achieve the VA's mission. Applies a departmental perspective when planning, coordinating, and communicating the organization's policies and processes. Considers cross-organizational requirements and information-sharing needs so that initiatives are integrated across organizational lines.

needs so that initiatives are integrated across organizational lines.		
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators	
1 – Novice	• Explains how organizational units and external stakeholders work together to fulfill the VA's mission.	
2 – Foundational	 Encourages others to make decisions with all key stakeholders in mind. Keeps work unit's stakeholders updated on changes that may affect them. 	
3 – Intermediate	 Ensures programs and policies are integrated with needs and/or resources of key stakeholders within and outside of own department. Champions a stakeholder perspective to decision making at all levels. 	
4 – Advanced	 Clearly conveys information to multiple stakeholders so that initiatives are integrated across the entire organization. Implements processes that foster a cross-organizational approach to achieving VA's mission and strategic goals. 	
5 - Expert	 Creates systems and processes for sharing information to facilitate the integration of initiatives across the VA. Considers and aligns the various perspectives and needs of the entire VA when planning, coordinating, and communicating organization's policies and processes. 	

Builds and maintains partnerships. Networks with others internally and externally. Builds and maintains strategic relationships to achieve common goals. Participates in and contributes to collaborative work by sharing information and soliciting input from others.		
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators	
1 – Novice	 Identifies networking opportunities inside and outside of the organization. Establishes relationships with internal and external colleagues. 	
2 – Foundational	 Builds upon existing and new relationships to achieve organizational goals. Uses internal projects as opportunities to collaborate and establish strategic relationships. 	
3 – Intermediate	 Maintains strategic relationships and collaborates with internal and external colleagues to fulfill the organization's mission. Identifies and works to eliminate conditions that impede within-department and across-department collaboration and knowledge sharing. 	
4 – Advanced	 Contributes to collaborative work by proactively sharing information and providing input and support to strategic partners. Provides guidance to others that fosters the development of cross-department and organization partnerships. 	

Develops strategic partnerships with other organizations.

leverages this network to contribute to the mission.

and external collaborative efforts.

Creates a process and develops criteria for evaluating the success of internal

Possesses an extensive professional network across and outside the VA and

5 - Expert

Demonstrates political savvy. Understands how the organization works and the impact of	
dynamics and culture and acts accordingly. Applies sound judgment and diplomacy when	
dealing with oth	ners.
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	 Directs complaints, makes special requests, or brings concerns to the attention of the appropriate party.
	 Considers impact when addressing employee expectations (e.g., working with union, relocations).
	 Explains to employees who the top decision makers are and their roles within VA.
2 –	Uses necessary diplomacy when sharing opinions and stating decisions.
Foundational	Maintains awareness of the organizational political climate.
3 –	• Identifies and works within the dynamics of the organization to achieve results.
Intermediate	Expresses needs, concerns, or requests at the appropriate time, using
	the appropriate method and forum.
4 – Advanced	 Views organizational dynamics/politics as a normal part of an organization and adjusts to this reality (e.g., routinely includes the process of gaining buy-in from key stakeholders in project plans).
	 Evaluates how changing conditions, current events, and historical contexts impact the work of the organization.
5 - Expert	 Effectively navigates complex and sensitive situations with internal and external stakeholders.

Effectively manages conflict. Embraces differences of opinion and openly considers alternative perspectives. Manages and resolves conflicts in a constructive manner and creates a positive environment that leads to accomplishment of VA's goals. Creates and maintains an environment where employees can raise difficult issues and engage in constructive disagreements and debates.

disagreements and debates.		
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators	
1 – Novice	 Responds to conflicts as if they are an inevitable and potentially productive part of business, rather than personal attacks. Acknowledges differences of opinion and considers alternative perspectives. Resolves simple disagreements with others, with supervisor (or other third party) acting as mediator. 	
2 – Foundational	 Encourages discussion of differences of opinion as a means to stimulate healthy debate. Addresses conflicts by providing a safe and respectful environment for each party to discuss their needs and concerns. 	
3 – Intermediate	 Mediates conflicts in a direct and straightforward manner that focuses on the issues and keeps the situation from escalating. Creates an environment where employees can openly raise and debate difficult issues. 	
4 – Advanced	 Mediates complex conflicts and disagreements to ensure solutions that are satisfactory to all parties. Identifies potential conflicts and proactively addresses them before they escalate. 	
5 - Expert	 Diffuses high-tension situations comfortably, empowering others to develop their own approaches to effective conflict resolution. Uses conflict productively to address challenging issues without damaging relationships. 	

Leading Change. Positions the organization for future success by identifying new opportunities, implementing new strategies, and developing and improving products and services. Creates a culture that fosters creativity and applies innovative solutions to drive organizational change. Communicates the mission and values and provides milestones for decision-making and action.

Champions Innovation. Looks beyond current reality and the "status quo." Challenges assumptions. Creates a work environment and culture that values, fosters, and rewards creativity and innovation. Positions the organization for success by identifying, developing, and implementing new or cutting-edge programs, processes, or strategies. Anticipates the potential impact of decisions on existing delivery systems. **Behavioral Indicators Proficiency** Level 1 - Novice Describes trends and innovations within personal area of expertise. Makes incremental improvements by adapting solutions from similar settings. Recognizes and supports creative ideas proposed by others. 2 – Identifies new ways of performing work that may increase efficiencies. Foundational Makes improvements by adapting solutions from loosely related settings. Supports others in challenging the status quo. 3 – Looks beyond organizational boundaries to identify opportunities for Intermediate improvement. Makes small, but meaningful shifts in programs or processes by helping to develop and implement novel ideas. Encourages creativity of others by recognizing employee efforts to generate 4 - Advanced Looks inside and outside of the government to identify opportunities for improvement or anticipated demands for improvement. Makes significant shifts in programs, processes or overall strategy by generating novel ideas. Develops new procedures or processes for increasing efficiencies and works with senior leaders to communicate the ideas and implement changes. 5 - Expert Continually scans the broad environment, looking for strategic opportunities or demands for strategic change. Transforms organizational processes, programs, and overall strategies by generating groundbreaking ideas and creating movement in an unprecedented direction. Inspires creativity of others by challenging them to think beyond current assumptions and conventional wisdom and guiding them to generate innovative and viable new ideas.

Communicates vision and drives change. Builds a shared sense of purpose and communicates the need for change. Acts as a catalyst for organizational change. Translates vision into action by inspiring others to act, while providing guideposts for decision-making and action. Recognizes challenges and deals effectively with resistance.

Recognizes chai	lenges and deals effectively with resistance.
Proficiency	Behavioral Indicators
Level	
1 – Novice	 Communicates the vision and need for change to others within own work group. Follows guidelines for decision-making that have been established to achieve changes.
2 –	Translates the organization's vision for the future into work group actions and
Foundational	provides direction by helping employees understand what is important.
	Communicates the work unit's mission and vision clearly to others.
	Addresses challenges and resistance to implementing changes with guidance.
3 –	Creates a vision that is simple, clearly captures a desired future state, and
Intermediate	provides direction by helping employees see their role in achieving that vision.
	 Communicates the work unit or department's vision in a way that establishes a shared understanding of the desired future state of VA.
4 – Advanced	 Creates a compelling vision and communicates it in a way that motivates and mobilizes employees to help achieve it.
	 Translates broad organizational goals into well-defined strategies, plans, priorities, and assignments.
	 Anticipates challenges and resistance to implementing planned changes and develops strategies to address them.
5 - Expert	 Creates a vision that guides the short and long-term activities of VA at every level or the Department.
	 Communicates a vision for the future in a way that inspires and captures employee's imagination.
	 Considers various viewpoints from internal and external sources when developing new organizational mission and vision.

Results Driven. Guides and inspires others to achieve results and improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Implements effective control measures. Fosters a climate of reasonable risk taking.

Fosters reasonable risk taking and drives execution. Determines priorities and sets clear objectives for workgroup. Defines evaluation criteria and continuously collects, shares, and evaluates data to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Takes calculated risks to accomplish organizational objectives and empowers employees to do the same. Proficiency **Behavioral Indicators** Level 1 – Novice Prioritizes day-to-day activities with supervisor's guidance and provides input into standard operating procedures. Identifies performance measures and evaluation criteria that apply to own Clearly explains tasks and expectations to work group members. 2 – Monitors performance of workgroup and reports results; relates workgroup Foundational performance to organizational performance. Identifies potential barriers to achieving results and provides recommendations for overcoming them. Identifies the potential costs and benefits of taking specific business risks. 3 -Analyzes performance measure data and takes action to improve or sustain Intermediate performance. Interprets organizational goals and directives and translates them into procedures and guidelines. Makes well-reasoned recommendations for taking calculated risks based on a cost/benefit analysis. 4 – Advanced Establishes criteria against which project/program success will be evaluated. Specifies data to be gathered and utilizes data and information to formulate policy and strategic plans. Identifies potential risks and barriers; removes barriers and takes calculated risks to achieve results. 5 - Expert Specifies data to be gathered and develops systems for collecting and sharing data on progress towards achieving organizational objectives. Sets organizational goals and performance measures based on the VA's mission/vision/values. Establishes a climate of reasonable risk-taking, empowering and rewarding employees who demonstrate entrepreneurial behavior and the ability to take

calculated risks.

Fosters accountability to Veterans. Acts in a manner that instills public trust while accomplishing the mission. Ensures compliance with established control systems and rules. Holds self and team members accountable for measurable, high-quality, timely, and cost-effective results. Balances competing demands, and employs sound management processes and procedures to ensure that Veteran, employee, and other stakeholder interests are well-served.

serveu.	
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	With guidance, ensures that established control systems and rules have been
	correctly followed.
	Maintains accountability when faced with competing demands and priorities.
2 –	Monitors and ensures adherence to established control systems and rules.
Foundational	With guidance, measures work quality against established standards.
	Holds employees accountable for achieving results.
3 –	Contributes to establishing control systems and rules.
Intermediate	Guides employees in prioritizing among tasks with competing deadlines and
	balancing the needs of varied stakeholders.
	Identifies or establishes quality standards and holds employees accountable.
4 – Advanced	Creates formal systems for monitoring progress and holds teams/units
	accountable for meeting or exceeding goals.
	Assumes ownership for own and organizational mistakes and takes steps to
	mitigate their impact.
	Leverages lessons learned from mistakes and failures to improve the VA.
5 - Expert	Models behavior that instills public trust, balancing achieving results with the
	highest ethical standards.
	Balances multiple competing demands to develop solutions that optimize
	outcomes for employees, Veterans, and other key stakeholders.
	Designs enterprise-wide mechanisms for taking corrective actions when
	aspects of the VA mission are not being met.

Global Perspective. Demonstrates a broad view of the VA's mission, strategic priorities, and role within the Federal Government and broader community (e.g., healthcare community, public at large). Understands and integrates stakeholder perspectives and takes action to improve delivery of benefits and services to Veterans.

Ensures strateg	ic alignment. Promotes an awareness of all factors that influence desired	
outcomes, including economic, political, technical, demographic, environmental, and social		
trends that affect the Veteran. Examines key national policies and VA strategic plans to develop		
	plans, objectives, and measures with a short and long-term perspective. Aligns	
organizational o	bjectives and practices with public interests and needs.	
Proficiency	Behavioral Indicators	
Level		
1 – Novice	Describes the major internal and external factors that affect the organization.	
	Explains at a basic level how changing conditions, current events, and historical	
	contexts influence own work and unit's work.	
2 –	Keeps abreast of current events and changes in policy and legislation; describes	
Foundational	how these events and changes could potentially impact the VA.	
	Ensures work group goals and priorities are consistent with the VA Strategic	
	Plan, as well as public interests and needs.	
3 –	Educates others on how major internal and external factors affect the	
Intermediate	organization.	
	Evaluates how changing conditions and current events will impact work group	
	and incorporates this information when making plans and decisions.	
	Responds to external changes that affect programs and policies (e.g., changes	
	in administration or a new Veteran-related bill) by refocusing efforts,	
	redistributing resources, or otherwise overcoming roadblocks	
4 – Advanced	Conducts environmental scanning to stay abreast of relevant, emerging trends	
	and uses this information to adjust goals and priorities as needed.	
	Contributes to the development of long-term goals by recommending effective	
	strategies that take into account external factors that may impact the VA.	
	Anticipates how work processes may be affected by changes in the external	
	environment and develops alternatives.	
5 - Expert	Demonstrates expertise in internal and external factors impacting the VA and	
	shares this expertise broadly to enhance the understanding of others.	
	Forecasts the probability of future trends and external factors relevant to the	
	VA and Veterans, evaluates their impact, and takes proactive action.	
	Creates and implements strategic programs or initiatives (e.g., Veteran	
	Reintegration, Ending Veteran Homelessness) based on stakeholder needs and	
	views, public interests, and organizational objectives.	

Enhances outcomes for Veterans. Models commitment to public service and advocacy for Veterans. Uses multiple modalities to clearly and regularly communicate the VA's mission, vision, and values both internally and externally. Encourages and empowers employees to ensure their daily work is focused on supporting or providing better services to Veterans and other stakeholders.

other stakeholders.		
Proficiency	Behavioral Indicators	
Level		
1 – Novice	 Demonstrates commitment to serving Veterans and other members of the public. Demonstrates understanding of Veterans' needs and their impact on daily operations. Explains the VA's role in advocating for Veterans both inside and outside the VA. 	
2 – Foundational	 Provides coaching and guidance to employees to ensure their daily work is focused on supporting or providing better services to Veterans and other stakeholders. Reviews policies and procedures on a regular basis to ensure they are consistent with public needs. Encourages and supports employee participation in various public service programs targeted at awareness of Veterans and their needs. 	
3 –	Uses Veteran feedback to make improvements that better support the VA's	
Intermediate	 mission. Reinforces employee actions that are Veteran and customer focused through rewards, recognition, and feedback. 	
4 – Advanced	Guides others in advocating for Veterans and other stakeholders.	
	 Creates a climate that is Veteran and customer-centric, empowering employees to continually improve the VA's services. Strategizes with other leaders to develop action plans to meet public needs. 	
5 - Expert	 Champions the VA mission internally and externally to further the VA's strategic objectives. Creates strategic direction that is customer and Veteran-centered; evaluates current outcomes and provides direction for continuous improvement. Models dedication and passion for serving Veterans in daily actions and speech; inspires other leaders to follow suit. 	

Business Acumen. Demonstrates exceptional judgment and applies resource allocation and management skills to optimize business operations and quality of service.

Applies forward-looking human capital management principles. Identifies staffing needs and		
builds a diverse workforce based on organizational strategy, priorities, and budget		
considerations. Leads comprehensive succession management and workforce development		
efforts. Evaluates performance fairly and accurately and effectively rewards and recognizes		
employee perfo	rmance.	
Proficiency	Behavioral Indicators	
Level		
1 – Novice	Identifies high potential employees and encourages their development.	
	Provides fair and accurate input into performance appraisals for others.	
	Acts consistently with HR policy.	
2 – Foundational	 Prioritizes current human capital needs to meet organizational priorities within the constraints of budget allowances. 	
	Ensures that succession management activities initiated by HR are completed	
	and that leaders within own organization have individual development plans.	
	 Evaluates performance fairly and differentiates rewards and recognition based on performance. 	
3 –	Forecasts future human capital needs to meet future organizational priorities	
Intermediate	within the constraints of budget allowances and partners with HR to source,	
	select, and develop necessary talent.	
	Leads efforts to create succession management activities tied to strategic	
	needs and reinforces the importance of manager support of employee	
	development.	
	 Identifies poor performers and creates opportunities for them to improve performance; identifies opportunities for ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) 	
	when necessary.	
4 – Advanced	Leads efforts to create succession management activities that will develop the	
	next generation of leaders and rewards managers who support employee	
	development.	
	Ensures that managers are fairly managing performance, providing feedback on	
	 an ongoing basis, and regularly rewarding/recognizing superior performance. Proactively partners with HR to generate a system of HR practices that will 	
	most effectively source, select, and develop talent to meet strategic needs.	
5 - Expert	Champions a culture where development of the next generation of leaders is a	
	strategic priority and everyone embraces succession management and	
	individual development.	
	Champions a culture of high performance where everyone is committed to and	
	accountable for ongoing performance management and feedback.	
	Partners with HR to develop strategic programs designed to source, select, and	
	develop talent to meet future needs.	

Applies sound financial and material resource management principles. Demonstrates understanding of the organization's financial processes. Applies sound resource management principles, best practices, and applicable policies, regulations and laws to support operations. Aligns resources with policy, strategic direction, and priorities.

Proficiency
Level

1 - Novice

Allocates resources efficiently (time, money, materials, people) in support of

Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators
1 – Novice	 Allocates resources efficiently (time, money, materials, people) in support of operations.
2 – Foundational	 Effectively and efficiently manages the expenditure of resources (time, money, materials, people) in support of operations, providing justification in relation to program objectives.
3 – Intermediate	 Works with others to generate and manage financial allocations in support of strategic priorities and consistent with appropriation laws Describes how the budget process works within the organization and/or contributes to budget discussions.
4 – Advanced	 Applies a comprehensive knowledge of Department financial processes and appropriation law to establish cost-effective organization-level (e.g., VISN, VBA Region, MISN) budgets and/or financial processes that tap into financial resources from conventional and unconventional sources. Guides others in making decisions regarding the expenditure of resources that is consistent with strategic initiatives.
5 - Expert	 Identifies financial resources available internal and external to the VA, and skillfully gains access to these resources. Establishes systems to monitor expenditures within the Department to ensure that financial resources are effectively allocated to achieve goals and objectives. Contributes to the enhancement and improvement of VA-wide financial management systems to meet organizational objectives.

Employs Technology Effectively. Makes effective use of technology to achieve results. Leverages technology to improve decision making and outcomes. Keeps up-to-date on technological developments and decides when technology changes are needed. Ensures access to and security of technology systems.		
Proficiency Level	Behavioral Indicators	
1 – Novice	Ensures that technology resources are up-to-date, secure, and accessible.	
2 – Foundational	Ensures that technology resources are deployed efficiently.	
3 – Intermediate	 Explores the adoption of alternative technological solutions to improve organizational performance, consistent with strategic priorities. Ensures technology resources are deployed in a manner consistent with strategic priorities. 	
4 – Advanced	Identifies innovative technological solutions to drive strategic priorities.	
5 - Expert	Champions innovation of technological solutions to drive strategic priorities.	

VA LEARNING UNIVERSITY: YOUR PARTNER FOR CHANGE

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

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

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

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