



VALU
VA LEARNING UNIVERSITY

All Employee Competencies

Building a Competent Organization



Introduction

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has committed to an ambitious transformation effort designed to improve service to our Nation's Veterans. The success of VA in accomplishing this important mission is highly dependent upon the capacity of its workforce. As a result, we have launched an unprecedented initiative to attain, retain, and develop the best and brightest employees in the Federal Government.

Both the world of work and the needs of the Veteran are constantly shifting, expanding, and become significantly more complex. Consequently, the demands placed on our employees have continued to grow. To overcome the challenge of delivering unprecedented levels of high-quality services to our Nation's Veterans, we must provide our workforce with the tools necessary to succeed in our ever-changing environment.

We are committed to helping all our employees build their skills and grow in their careers at VA.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



What are competencies?

Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to build a high-performance organization capable of meeting current and future challenges.

Competencies help us to align our people practices to meet mission requirements. As an employee, understanding the competencies needed to succeed in your career will help you plan your professional growth and development, identify the right training opportunities, and evaluate your progress.

All Employee Competencies are needed by every employee throughout the Department in order to be successful. You can think of these as the core capabilities of our workforce. They serve as the foundation for all employees' behavior, and help to build and support a competent organization.

How to use this guide

This guide provides a high-level overview of VA's All Employee Competency model and outlines the expectations for employees across the Department. It is an important reference for you on how to use the All Employee Competencies for your self development and mission achievement.

Self Development

The All Employee Competencies provide you with a clear understanding of what it takes to succeed in your current role—and advance to more senior roles. You can use the competencies to identify your strengths and areas for development, build a tailored and meaningful Individual Development Plan (IDP), and select targeted training and development opportunities.

Mission Achievement

The All Employee Competencies show you how your expected level of skill needs to increase at each career stage. By setting a common standard for behavior and performance for all our employee—and linking competencies to training and development opportunities—you have a clear path to grow in your career and better meet the complex needs of Veterans.

The following sections will provide:

- An in-depth review of the All Employee Competencies
- Descriptions of how the All Employee Competencies are demonstrated on the job
- A comparison of how competencies vary by work level

Competencies drive mission results

Our mission at VA is one of the most important in government.

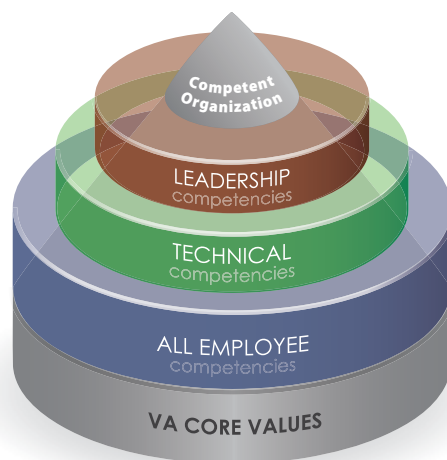
We serve those who have served and sacrificed for our country. With that in mind, VA aspires to be:

- **Forward-looking:** We will deliver the best services with available resources, continually challenging ourselves to do things smarter and more effectively.
- **Results-driven:** We will be measured by our accomplishments, not by our promises.
- **People-centric:** Veterans and their families are the centerpiece of our mission and of everything we do. Equally essential are the people who are the backbone of the Department—our talented and diverse workforce.

These guiding principles are reflected in our Core Values, which define who we are, how we interact with each other, and how we are different from other organizations. Like VA, most successful organizations have core values that form the foundation on which everything else in the organization is built. Values serve as a common bond between us all, regardless of grade, specialty area, location, etc.

Our Values—**I**ntegrity, **C**ommitment, **A**dvocacy, **R**espect and **E**xcellence (“**I CARE**”)—help define our culture and underscore our commitment to Veterans, their families, and other beneficiaries.

Competencies—built on the strong foundation of our values—define what everyone at VA needs to know and be able to do to contribute to our mission and live our core values.



The VA All Employee Competency Model

We have identified six broad All Employee Competency categories that apply to every person at VA. Each category is further defined by more specific competencies.

All Employee Competency Categories and Specific Competencies *(Competencies presented below for your reference)*



- Demonstrates effective written communication
- Demonstrates effective oral communication



- Exemplifies integrity
- Demonstrates accountability
- Organizes and prioritizes work
- Makes effective use of resources



- Demonstrates empathy
- Fosters diversity and inclusion
- Contributes to high-performing teams



- Advocates for Veterans
- Meets customers' needs



- Demonstrates creative problem solving skills
- Demonstrates good judgment



- Exhibits self-awareness and commitment to self development
- Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency

Note: Every employee also has technical competencies that are required for successful performance in each occupation or job. These competencies address occupation-specific or technical skills and will not be covered in the remainder of this guide.

All Employee Competencies in action

Every All Employee Competency is important for success at VA. The application of each competency may vary by job experience level and occupation.

By job experience level: A new employee would not be expected to demonstrate a specific competency in the same way as an expert would. For each competency, there are five distinct proficiency levels: Novice, Foundational, Intermediate, Advanced, and Expert. An example of how behavior varies at the different proficiency levels within a competency is depicted below:

Demonstrates effective written communication skills. Selects appropriate communication channels and tools using appropriate media and technology. Conveys written information in a clear, concise, organized, and convincing manner for the intended audience.

► Proficiency Level				
1–Novice	2–Foundational	3–Intermediate	4–Advanced	5–Expert
► Behavioral Indicator				
Writes basic communications (e.g., an email requesting straightforward information), proofreading before sending to others.	Drafts concise, straightforward summaries of information (e.g., portions of plans/reports).	Prepares reports, summaries, or recommendations independently; written communications require little to no editing.	Writes complex documents, using clear terminology and a concise format as appropriate for decision makers.	Prepares highly complex written communications for national distribution that have significant implications for VA.
Uses appropriate grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Prepares routine written communications that are accurate, clear, concise, and well-organized.	Reviews and edits materials prepared by others for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and conformance to style and format guidelines.	Tailors written communications to address the most critical issues in a compelling and diplomatic manner.	Communicates persuasively in writing to multiple stakeholders about programs, projects, and proposals.
With guidance, applies the Department's style and format guidelines to written products.	Answers routine or basic questions to internal and external customers appropriately (e.g., tone, detail) and when responding in writing.		Writes clear, concise issue papers or policy documents on complex topics, such as establishing VA-wide guidance or guidelines.	

By occupation: An employee working in an office would demonstrate a specific competency differently than an employee working at one of the Nation's Cemeteries.

The following pages provide examples of how the application of the All Employee Competencies, in terms of behaviors and expectations, may vary for employees in different occupations and at different job experience levels. Here's what you'll see on each page:

The image shows a screenshot of a competency page for 'Communication'. On the left, there is a photo of a woman wearing a headset, smiling. Below the photo are three competency categories: 'Results Driven', 'Fosters reasonable risk taking and drives execution', and 'Fosters accountability to Veterans'. The main content area is titled 'Communication' and includes a definition: 'Demonstrates mastery of oral, non-verbal, and written communications principles'. Below this, there are three sections: 'Demonstrates effective written communication skills', 'At the Foundational level, Veronica demonstrates effective written communication skills by:', and 'Over time, as she progresses in her career to the Advanced level, Veronica will be expected to:'. To the right of the main content, there is a section titled 'Example Training Offerings Available in This Competency Category' with two sub-sections: 'Getting Ready to Change' and 'Business Writing: Know Your Reader and Your Purpose'. Annotations with arrows point to the 'Communication' title, the definition, the training offerings section, and the competency categories on the left. A label 'Competencies' points to the left side of the screenshot. A label 'Example' is placed below the screenshot.

Annotations:

- Competency categories
- Competency category definition
- Relevant training offerings are listed
- Competencies
- Example

We've highlighted one competency in each of the six categories to illustrate how behaviors and expectations vary for employees in different occupations and at different job experience levels.

All Employee Competencies in Action



Veronica, Veterans Service Representative

Communication

Demonstrates effective written communication skills

Demonstrates effective oral communication skills



Communication

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

Demonstrates effective written communication skills acknowledges the importance of conveying written information in a clear, organized and convincing manner.

Veronica was just hired as a Veterans Service Representative. She communicates regularly with Veterans and their families about disability claims and benefits. She also communicates with her colleagues at VA to inform their decisions about benefits awards.

At the *Foundational level*, Veronica demonstrates effective written communication skills by:

- Drafting concise, straightforward summaries of information (e.g., disability claims, portions of plans/reports).
- Preparing routine written communications, such as emails to Veterans and their families, that are accurate, clear, concise, and well-organized.
- Answering routine or basic questions (e.g., questions about disability claims or benefits) to internal and external customers appropriately.

Over time, as she progresses in her career to the *Advanced level*, Veronica will be expected to:

- Write complex documents, such as challenging disability claim summaries, using clear and concise terminology and concise formats.
- Tailor written communications to address critical issues in a compelling and diplomatic manner.
- Write clear, concise issue papers or policy documents on complex topics, such as establishing VA-wide policies.

Sample Training Offering Available in TMS

Gaining Buy-in for Change

This highly interactive and hands-on course provides participants the opportunity to examine existing skills in a low-risk environment. Learn how to improve negotiation skills that result in win-win outcomes.

Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose

This course addresses ways to identify your readers and to create messages that convey the appropriate tone for different reader roles. It also outlines how to write effectively for the three most common reasons to write a business document—to inform, respond or persuade.

All Employee Competencies in Action



Sarah, Clinical Pharmacy Specialist

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Demonstrates empathy

Fosters diversity and inclusion

Contributes to high performing teams



Interpersonal Effectiveness

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

Demonstrates empathy means that all employees must treat others with courtesy, sensitivity, and respect, and contribute to a culture of civility.

A clinical pharmacy specialist with the VA for ten years, Sarah's interpersonal skills are a critical part of her work treating Veterans. By acknowledging and valuing her patients' feelings, Sarah builds the trust that enables her to work effectively with Veterans to protect and improve their health.

Earlier in her career, at the *Foundational level*, Sarah:

- Carefully listened to others' ideas and concerns and appropriately responded to questions posed by patients or colleagues.
- Paraphrased what others stated to demonstrate an understanding of messages received.

Now, as an *Expert*; Sarah demonstrates empathy by:

- Maintaining a calm, open demeanor while resolving highly sensitive or controversial issues, such as issues pertaining to Veterans' health.
- Championing a culture of civility, promoting respectful behavior and confronting incivility. She also mentors others and provides guidance and expertise in navigating complex interpersonal interactions.

Sample Training Offering Available in TMS

Influencing with Integrity

Throughout this one-day course, participants will build an influence strategy for engaging, persuading, and securing the backing of people whose support and commitment is critical to the success of their influence situation.

SkillSoft Online Courseware Series: Critical Thinking Essentials

Almost all of your everyday activities require you to seek information, analyze alternatives, assess the alternatives, and reach some conclusion. This is critical thinking. These courses and short video scenarios will help individuals who want to develop or refine their critical thinking skills.

- *Critical Thinking Essentials: What Is Critical Thinking?*
- *Critical Thinking Essentials: Applying Critical Thinking Skills*

All Employee Competencies in Action



David, Accounting Clerk

Critical Thinking

Demonstrates good judgment

Demonstrates creative
problem solving skills



Critical Thinking

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

Demonstrates good judgment refers to the ability to recognize the relevance of information, examine all aspects of a situation, and identify the best course of action.

David is an accounting clerk with twenty years of experience supervising the verification and maintenance of accounts and accounting data. David uses his critical thinking skills and judgment to translate accounting data into meaningful information.

When he first started out, at the *Novice level*, David:

- Determined when it was appropriate to make a decision on his own and when to seek help, especially when he encountered a difficult accounting problem he wasn't sure how to solve.
- Made sound and timely decisions in well-defined, low-risk situations that affected his work.

At the *Advanced proficiency level*, David now demonstrates good judgment by:

- Integrating and analyzing complex data from multiple sources and identifying connections between seemingly unrelated information.
- Considering and evaluating the costs, risks, and benefits of alternatives (such as different accounting systems) and choosing the best courses of action.
- Making decisions and taking action when complete knowledge and information are not available.

Sample Training Offering Available in TMS

Critical Thinking Essentials: Applying Critical Thinking Skills

This Challenge Series exercise considers the many ways that business organizations can serve their customers—internal and external.

Critical Thinking Essentials: What Is Critical Thinking?

This course defines critical thinking, describes the elements of critical thought, and outlines strategies for improving the quality of your thinking.

All Employee Competencies in Action



Sam, Cemetery Caretaker

Organizational Stewardship

Exemplifies integrity

Demonstrates accountability

Organizes and prioritizes work

Makes effective use of resources



Organizational Stewardship

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

Demonstrates accountability requires employees to perform work in a thorough and conscientious manner, follow through on commitments, and ensure work products and services are accurate and complete.

As a cemetery caretaker, Sam maintains and upkeeps cemeteries. He takes responsibility and performs his work with care, taking the time to preserve the beauty of our Nation's burial grounds, and show our respect to Veterans and their families.

Early in Sam's career, he demonstrated accountability by:

- Following policies and procedures, such as those governing lawn care, with minimal guidance.
- Notifying his supervisor when obligations were unable to be met so that alternative plans could be made.

With his current role, Sam demonstrates *Advanced proficiency*, he:

- Takes responsibility for work unit or project outcomes, regardless of positive or negative results.
- Establishes expectations for himself and/or his work unit so that goals, such as the number of lawns to be weeded or mowed in one day, are reasonable and achievable and projects are set up to succeed.

Sample Training Offering Available in TMS

SkillSoft Online Courseware Series: Personal Productivity Improvement

These one-hour online courses will help you improve your productivity by learning how to organize yourself and your workspace and how to use scheduling to manage tasks and priorities.

- *Personal Productivity Improvement: Managing Your Workspace*
- *Personal Productivity: Self-organization and Overcoming Procrastination*
- *Personal Productivity Improvement: Managing Tasks and Maximizing Productivity*

All Employee Competencies in Action



Anne, Nurse Practitioner

**Veteran and Customer
Focus**

Advocates for Veterans

Meets customers' needs



Veteran and Customer Focus

Understands the VA's mission and uses this knowledge to guide actions; provides outstanding customer service and represents the organization effectively •

Advocates for Veterans refers to demonstrating awareness of the Veteran population and advocating for Veterans when by representing VA effectively to both internal and external audiences.

Anne is a new Nurse Practitioner in a VA hospital outpatient clinic. Understanding Veterans' unique needs and the benefits and services available to them allows Anne to provide her patients with the best care possible. Anne also communicates VA goals within her community and with her colleagues in the medical community.

As a *Novice*, Anne advocates for Veterans by:

- Acting respectfully and courteously to all Veterans and their families when treating them.
- Maintaining Veterans' privacy.
- Describing VA's basic mission and goals and the needs of the Veteran population to her community.

When she progresses to the *Intermediate level*, Anne will expand her responsibilities and need to demonstrate a higher proficiency by:

- Participating in community or other outreach activities that are consistent with the VA's mission, such as volunteering at blood drives.

Representing the VA in a professional and respectful manner in the community.

Sample Training Offering Available in TMS

Customer Advocacy: Supporting Customer Advocacy

This course describes how to support customer advocacy efforts effectively in your organization. It explains how to communicate the goals and values that drive the customer advocacy approach, and how to create an environment that supports cooperation and coordination.

Customer-Driven Process Improvement: Basic Framework

This course describes the benefits of customer driven process improvement and outlines a six-step framework for customer-focused improvement activities, which include identifying customer needs, translating those needs into process requirements, and implementing and sustaining improvements.

All Employee Competencies in Action



Patrick, Medical Record Administrator

Personal Mastery

Exhibits self-awareness and commitment to self-development

Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency



Personal Mastery

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

Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency requires employees to deal effectively with pressure and work stress, such as ambiguity, emergencies/ crises, emerging conditions, and multiple tasks.

As a medical record administrator, Patrick advises many different types of internal customers on the use of medical records and on health information management. He manages the stress of juggling competing time sensitive assignments.

Patrick is at the *Intermediate proficiency level*. He demonstrates resilience, agility and a sense of urgency by:

- Responding appropriately to emergencies, such as record system outages.
- Adapting readily to changing work conditions, such as new medical records systems, with minimal support and encouragement.
- Remaining productive and optimistic under moderate levels of stress.

When he advances, Patrick may need to be at the *Expert level*. He will:

- Demonstrate resilience, energy, and enthusiasm even in the face of great pressure, uncertainty, and adversity.
- Help others overcome negative feelings or emotions and acknowledge when his own emotions interfere with productivity in order to process them effectively.
- Help others analyze their setbacks and develop plans to avoid mistakes.

Sample Training Offering Available in TMS

Self-Awareness: Taking Charge of Your Career

This hands-on course provides a four-step development process to help participants identify areas for growth, create a plan for improvement, seek feedback on performance, and commit to continuous review and modification of the plan to achieve their career goals.

Recognizing and Contributing to Change Initiatives: Personal Focus

This course, part of the Change Certificate Program provides skill development in understanding and adapting to change. The program prepares an individual to recognize and embrace change both in the workplace and in life. Various exercises, tools and strategies are introduced to provide a basic foundation for managing personal change.

Competencies: A Blueprint for Development

Competencies are critical for your career growth and development.

In fact, you can think of them as the components of your professional development blueprint. Below are just a few examples of how you can use the competencies to tailor your development experience.

ASSESS. Competencies set the standards and expectations for effective performance. You can use them to assess your current capabilities and identify your strengths and areas for improvement.

- Competency self-assessments are available in the Talent Management System (TMS).
- 180- and 360-degree feedback assessments are available through the VA National Center for Organizational Development (NCOD).
- You can meet with your supervisor to discuss what the expectations are at your work level—and how you can demonstrate the competencies in your job.

SELECT. Pursue specific training and development opportunities based on the competencies you would like to target.

- Search the TMS for competency-based formal training opportunities. There are hundreds

of courses in our catalog linked to specific All Employee Competencies.

- Consider some on-the-job experiences. Use the Development Guides located in the TMS to choose meaningful development experiences for you.

PLAN. Build a tailored IDP.

- You can use the competencies to build a development plan specifically tailored to your needs.
- Match your needs to the formal training and the on-the-job-experiences available to create a developmental experience as unique as you are.
- Your IDP should match your strengths and weaknesses to the mission needs. Be bold in your choices...matching your personal growth to VA's needs will result in huge benefits to Veterans and their families.

Leadership Competencies—Aspire to the Next Level

Are you an aspiring leader? Would you like to pursue more formal leadership opportunities?

Just as all employees have competencies, leaders also have competencies they need to achieve in order to be successful leaders of people and projects at VA. Although these additional competencies are only required for formal leaders, as an aspiring leader, you can refer to them to understand what is required of VA's leadership positions—and begin

developing the skills you'll need to move to those roles in the future.

For more information, refer to the *Leadership Competency Guide*, which is available on the VALU portal, www.valu.va.gov.

Leadership Competency Categories and Specific Competencies

Leading Change

Champions innovation

Communicates vision and drives change

Global Perspective

Ensures strategic alignment

Enhances outcomes for Veterans

Results Driven

Fosters reasonable risk-taking and drives execution

Fosters accountability to Veterans

Business Acumen

Applies forward-looking human capital management principles

Applies sound financial and material resource management principles

Employs technology effectively

Leading People

Promotes leadership at all levels

Inspires continual learning and development

Builds high-performing, diverse teams

Building Coalitions

Integration

Builds and maintains partnerships

Demonstrates political savvy

Effectively manages conflicts

Conclusion

This guide was designed to provide you with an understanding of VA All Employee Competencies. The information provided focused on the six All Employee Competency categories, with an overview of the specific competencies in each category. These competencies set the standards for what is necessary to achieve excellence throughout VA.

The competencies also serve as guideposts for planning your growth in the future. By building the knowledge and skills necessary to progress in your own career, you are also building the capabilities of our organization as a whole and enhancing VA's capacity to provide unparalleled service to our Veterans.

Demonstrating these competencies will help us achieve our goals and continue providing high-quality services to our Veterans. For more information on All Employee Competencies, go to the VALU portal, www.valu.va.gov.





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