



# VA Core Values and Characteristics Fact Sheet



Core Values and Characteristics that apply universally across all of VA have been approved. The five Core Values define “who we are,” our culture and how we care for Veterans, their families and other beneficiaries. The Values are **I**ntegrity, **C**ommitment, **A**dvocacy, **R**espect and **E**xcellence (“I CARE”). The Core Characteristics define “what we stand for,” and help guide how we will perform our core mission; they shape our strategy, and will influence resource allocation and other important decisions made within VA. The Characteristics are Trustworthy, Accessible, Quality, Agile, Innovative, and Integrated.

## Background

The VA consists primarily of a central office (VACO), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), and Veterans Health Administration (VHA). All of these organizations provide support and services to Veterans, their families and other beneficiaries. All of these organizations have their own culture; the composition and competencies of the respective workforce are different. The Core Values and Characteristics provide all of these organizations with one common foundation of shared principles, which will guide and influence the behavior of all members of the VA workforce and influence all key organizational decisions. As is true with any large and complex organization that impacts millions of people, there are many different perceptions of VA – not all of them are favorable or accurate. In many cases, the perceptions do not come close to matching VA’s many accomplishments or the millions of people whose lives have been positively impacted as a direct result of the care, services, assistance and support they have received from VA. In addition to providing a shared foundation of guiding principles, our Core Values and Characteristics could change how others view VA and better position VA to excel in a rapidly changing and fiscally constrained environment.

## Process

The process used to develop these Core Values and Characteristics was comprehensive, collaborative, inclusive, involved participants from VACO and all three VA Administrations, and took nearly two years.

This transformational journey began in 2009 by asking important questions, such as, “How well are we performing our mission?”, “What is changing in our operating environment and how do we respond to that change?”, “What is working, and what isn’t working so well, and why?”, etc. Included in this process were two productive off-sites – one in New Orleans and one at Fort McNair in Washington DC.



The participants from the many different VA organizations provided considerable input into the development of the Core Values and Characteristics. Additionally, critical thinking around these Core Values and Characteristics included input from the VA workforce through surveys and feedback as well as discussions on myriad of topics. Based on these activities, and the recommendations of the different panels and groups, the Secretary approved the Core Values and Characteristics presented in this packet and on the enclosed DVD. These Core Values and Characteristics reflect the consensus views as to the existing culture of VA and what the workforce believes VA should look like in the future. Once the Core Values and Characteristics were approved, a communications plan was developed to disseminate the information to the VA workforce as well as to other audiences. The highlights of the communications plan are discussed below.

## Communications Plan

**Phase I:** Beginning in June, the entire VA workforce will be informed about the Core Values and Characteristics; this initial phase will run through mid-August 2011. The internal campaign began on June 20, when the Secretary met in his office with the Deputy Secretary, Chief of Staff, and three Under Secretaries. The Secretary emphasized that leadership at all levels of the VA chain of command must personally be involved in communicating these Core Values and Characteristics. On June 20, the Deputy Secretary also met with the Assistant Secretaries in his office and reiterated similar points.

Starting during the week of June 20-24, and using a “cascading effect,” senior leaders from VACO, NCA, VBA and VHA will begin leading discussions with their subordinate senior leaders to get the word out on the Core Values and Characteristics. The process will continue – each level of leadership will be responsible for informing those VA personnel whom they supervise – until such time as the entire VA workforce has participated in an initial orientation on the Core Values and Characteristics. The different Administrations and Offices within VACO will report back up the chain of command when they have completed their workforce orientation of Core Values and Characteristics, so VACO can track progress and know when VA has met its goal of completing this initial phase by early August. The two main products all VA employees will see during Phase I are a DVD on the Core Values and Characteristics (which will include remarks by Secretary Shinseki and Deputy Secretary Gould) and a Standardized Training Package that provides additional amplification of the key points made in the DVD.

**Phase II:** Between August and October 2011, the VA Core Values and Characteristics will be shared for the first time with external audiences. This phase will kick off with Secretary Shinseki’s speeches at the Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) annual conventions, and will include notification of Congress and other stakeholders. The primary focus of this effort is to increase visibility and understanding within key external audiences that VA has one set of Core Values and Characteristics, and why that is good for VA, for Veterans and the American people. The primary audiences for Phase II are Veterans, other beneficiaries, Members of Congress, VSOs and the American public. VA will get the word out about its Core Values and Characteristics during Phase II through



mainstream print media (newspaper, magazines), broadcast (TV and radio), and social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc). There will also be a public-facing I CARE website.

**Phase III:** Building on the momentum gained with the initial communication efforts of the first two phases, during Phase III VA will develop near- and long-term goals and actions to ensure the Core Values and Characteristics are fully integrated into the VA workforce and institutionalized for the long haul. This phase (which intentionally has no defined end-date) will include procedures to orient new VA employees on the Core Values and Characteristics; ensure Core Values and Characteristics are integrated into the many different training programs run by VA; a formal recognition program to identify VA employees and organizations that best exemplify the Core Values and Characteristics; inclusion of Values and Characteristics-related questions and input on the VA Annual Employee Survey (AES); and localized communications campaigns for VA facilities throughout the USA to ensure the Core Values and Characteristics gain a foothold and become ingrained in VA's culture.