

VA CORE VALUES AND CHARACTERISTICS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

This document provides high-level insights, background and details of VA's Core Values and Characteristics ("I CARE"). It is not intended to be all-inclusive, but will provide the information you need to understand the purpose of I CARE, and what it means to VA, its employees, and the Veterans and other beneficiaries we serve. For more details, please engage your supervisor, or visit the I CARE intranet site, vaww.va.gov/ICARE.

What are Core Values and Characteristics?

VA's Core Values and Characteristics apply across the entire VA enterprise. They essentially define "who we are" and also differentiate us from other organizations. The Values help define our culture and underscore our commitment to Veterans. Our Core Values are: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (I CARE). The Characteristics define "what we stand for" and help guide the execution of our mission, shape our strategy, and influence resource allocation and other key decisions made within VA. Our Core Characteristics are: Trustworthy, Accessible, Quality, Innovative, Agile, and Integrated.

What are the differences between the Core Values and Characteristics?

Core Values define "who we are" and Characteristics define "what we stand for." Values represent our beliefs and provide a baseline for the standards of behavior expected of all VA employees. They are relevant, meaningful, actionable, and enduring. Core Characteristics are a common set of principles around which our actions are organized and describe the traits all VA organizations and individuals should possess and demonstrate. The VA Characteristics identify the qualities needed to successfully accomplish our mission, and support our ongoing transformation to a 21st century VA.

How were the Core Values and Characteristics developed?

This effort began in 2009 by asking important questions, such as, "How well are we performing our mission?", "What is changing in our operating environment?", "How do we respond to that change?", "What is working, and what isn't working so well, and why?"

We included participants from many different VA organizations, who provided considerable input into the development of the Core Values and Characteristics. Additionally, critical insights were gathered throughout VA's workforce through surveys, feedback, and discussion. Based on these activities, and the recommendations of different panels and groups, Former Secretary Shinseki approved the Core Values and Characteristics. They represent the common view of VA's existing culture, and what the workforce believes VA should look like in the future.

Why was this initiative undertaken?

A primary motivation in formalizing VA's Core Values and Characteristics was to unify the entire VA workforce around a common set of desired principles, and to influence our thinking, behavior, and performance. Additionally, they will influence how people outside of VA perceive our organization. Although everyone working in VA is unique and possesses different skills, backgrounds, and roles within our organization, the Core Values and Characteristics apply equally to each of us. Every single worker in VA plays a critical role in supporting the overall strategic vision and mission of the VA—to better serve our Veterans, their families, and caregivers—and also contributes to our professional reputation as a caring and quality organization.

INTEGRITY

COMMITMENT

ADVOCACY

RESPECT

EXCELLENCE



For more information, visit vaww.va.gov/ICARE.
Please send questions or comments to ICARE@va.gov.



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Why was it necessary to formalize our Core Values and Characteristics?

VA's dedicated and professional workforce has always demonstrated a strong commitment to Veterans and exhibited many worthwhile values aimed at providing the best-possible services, care, and support. However, there has not been a universal set of Core Values and Characteristics that applied to all VA employees until now. By formalizing our Core Values and Characteristics, we ensure they receive the proper emphasis at all levels within the organization, are clearly understood by the workforce, and most importantly, become an enduring part of our VA culture.

Are these Core Values and Characteristics permanent?

Core organizational values are enduring – they are written to withstand the test of time. They are not linked to any particular person or group, so although people come and go within VA all the time, our Core Values will endure. They become the foundation of our VA culture, upon which everything we do as an organization is built.

Will the Core Values and Characteristics change VA, or change how we serve Veterans, their families, and other beneficiaries?

Our Core Values and Characteristics do not change our fundamental mission of caring for Veterans and other beneficiaries; they are in large part derived from many values VA has demonstrated throughout its existence. The Characteristics are also not entirely new concepts. But, by actively considering them as we perform our duties, we can each look for opportunities to demonstrate them in the workplace, and find ways to discuss and display them with Veterans and others outside of our organization. Also, the Values and Characteristics and "I CARE" logo – which will be prominently displayed in all VA facilities – send a strong signal to all that we take pride in what we do and we care deeply about our mission. They underscore our commitment to "caring" and are tangible ways we demonstrate that VA is a "people-centric" organization and not an insensitive bureaucracy.

How will we know if we are living up to the Core Values?

Most VA employees already display one or more of these Core Values and Characteristics every day. However, each of us can and should look for opportunities to publicly demonstrate our Values in the workplace. This effort is not just about knowing what "I CARE" stands for, or being able to recite the words. It is about "actions." It is about every VA employee living and exemplifying these Core Values and Characteristics every day in the workforce, and proudly recognizing each other when we see them in action.