



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

John Maxwell
Commissioner

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June 30, 2026

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

The Honorable Timothy Williams
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs

The Honorable Don Scott
Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
President Pro Tempore, Senate of Virginia

Delivered via electronic mail

Re: 2026 Report of the Department of Veterans Services on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals

Dear Governor Spanberger, Secretary Williams, Speaker Scott, and President Lucas,

Section 2.2-602 of the Code of Virginia requires state agencies to establish and maintain a diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan in coordination with the Governor's Office and report annually.

Please find attached the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) 2026 annual report detailing our goals in support of the plan.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may provide additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Maxwell".

John Maxwell

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan
AGENCY: Department of Veterans Services
(DVS) YEAR: 2026 (covering Calendar Year 2025)

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goal 1: Access and Success

Recruit and retain a diverse workforce by increasing access to diverse populations for recruiting.

Objective 1: *Continue to improve hiring process and increase access to potential applicants from diverse populations. In Calendar Year (CY) 2025, the Department of Veterans Services (DVS):*

- a. Enhanced the talent pipeline and workforce partnerships with community organizations, colleges and universities, veteran organizations, and the military through shared mission and multiple outreach activities.
- b. Conducted pre-posting meetings with hiring managers to educate them on the appearance of unconscious biases during the recruitment and interview process.
- c. Reinforced merit-based hiring practices that supported equal access to employment opportunities while maintaining evaluation standards. These standards focused on the objective qualifications for the job, structured interviews, standardized evaluations, and position requirements based on skill.
- d. Created access for individuals with disabilities throughout the hiring process by providing reasonable accommodation as requested.
- e. Conducted outreach and recruitment at veteran employment and military transition events.

Objective 2: *Continue to retain and promote a diverse workforce. In CY2025, DVS:*

- a. Ensured workplace inclusion by encouraging employee participation in meetings, retreats, consortia, annual training and employee centric events aimed to promote employee engagement.
- b. Adopted new policies and procedures for agency recruitment and hiring that promoted equitable and inclusive hiring practices. This included interview processes that contributed to diversity in the workplace, including ensuring job duties, functions, and competencies that followed objective, job-related qualification standards; ensured: job openings and promotion criteria were communicated to all employees; that job postings reached a broad audience; and that interview practices and questions were non-discriminatory.
- c. Rewrote the agency Salary Administration Plan to put stronger emphasis on equitable, objective, and merit-based salary practices.

- d. Created a new employee referral incentive program (part of the agency Salary Administration Plan) to encourage DVS team members to use their networks to help recruit talented candidates for agency positions.
- e. Promoted an equitable work environment that recognized team members from diverse backgrounds and the contributions they bring through different perspectives and experiences – this helped DVS team members better serve the Commonwealth’s diverse community of veterans and family members.
- f. Ensured that the agency’s commitment to employment decisions were based on merit and qualifications and were applied without discrimination based on protected characteristics including race, gender, age, disability, or religion in a formal Equal Employment Opportunity declaration statement.
- g. Promoted internal advancement opportunities and encouraged employees to pursue career growth.

Goal 2: Welcoming and Respectful Culture

Create and sustain a culture that welcomes and embraces diverse opinions, independent thinking, and respectful interactions to deliver optimal results for the organization and its customers.

Objective 1: *Create and maintain a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values and integrates differing perspectives and experiences. In CY2025, DVS:*

- a. Encouraged participation in team building activities and monthly staff luncheons to promote dialogue and acknowledgement of diverse issues and experiences.
- b. Recognized and welcomed diversity and enhanced workplace culture that recognizes and welcomes differences and enhances workplace culture through employee professional development, mentoring, and coaching.
- c. Promoted a culture of respect, civility, and conduct consistent with the expectations included in the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) Civility in the Workplace and Standards of Conduct Policies.
- d. Successfully conducted monthly orientation and onboarding activities for new agency hires with the goal of creating a welcoming environment on day one.
- e. Conducted monthly employee activities to facilitate diverse dialogue and interactions with our resident veterans at our long-term care centers.
- f. Secured translators to assist employees at the long-term care centers whose first language is not English – helping to ensure they had access to information and support.
- g. Held employee engagement activities to mark special occasions or to recognize diverse populations (ex. Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Veterans Day, etc.)

- h. Supported a person-centered environment that respects the individuality, preferences, and life experiences of each veteran served.
- i. Recognized employee contributions through appreciation events, employee recognition initiatives, and team celebrations.

Objective 2: *Continue to provide an environment where conflicts, concerns, and complaints are aired and addressed expeditiously. In CY2025, DVS:*

- a. Trained agency management teams on the best approaches to address and manage conflict in the workplace including utilizing constructive dialogue during difficult conversations and understanding the sources of team conflict.
- b. Promptly investigated violation of the Commonwealth's Standards of Conduct and Civility in the Workplace policies and took appropriate remedial action, up to and including termination of employment.
- c. Partnered with law enforcement officials and members of the agency executive leadership to address workplace safety concerns.
- d. Encouraged leadership support to cascade the message that DVS is an agency committed to a safe workplace free from retaliation.
- e. Reinforced expectations for respectful communication and accountability at all levels of the agency.

Goal 3: State Agency DEI Infrastructure & Training

Maintain a plan and infrastructure that continues to provide individualized skills training and career development for state employees.

Objective 1: *Continue to amplify opportunities to advance the goals outlined in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion framework. In CY2025, DVS:*

- a. Communicated the agency commitment to the values of DEI to the workforce.
- b. Shared the importance and commitment to transitioning veterans during outreach events, workshops, conferences, and training.
- c. Shared the agency commitment to potential applicants for employment.
- d. Partnered with local colleges to offer nursing students clinical hours and precepting hours at our long-term care facility.
- e. Encouraged all employees to take responsibility for creating a culture that recognizes and welcomes differences.
- f. Implemented workforce tracking and reporting processes to support informed decision-making and organizational effectiveness.
- g. Established performance management expectations focused on employee development, coaching, and continuous improvement.

Objective 2: *Continue to create structures and processes of accountability to increase organizational effectiveness with the Department of Veterans Services. In CY2025, DVS:*

- a. Implemented the agency's new Salary Administration Plan to ensure consistent pay processes, equity, and compliance.
- b. Introduced the Virginia Veterans Network (VVN) to assist veterans in accessing education, employment, transition services, family support services, and disability claims processing.
- c. Implemented new processes to support employee performance management, employee development, and transactional activities.
- d. Encouraged participation in Commonwealth-sponsored training programs, webinars, and professional development opportunities
- e. Supported leadership development through coaching, mentoring, and management training initiatives.
- f. Provided education on workplace expectations, resident rights, professionalism, and compliance requirements.
- g. Promoted a culture of continuous learning by encouraging employees to enhance their skills, knowledge, and professional competencies

Objective 3: *Continue to provide training and educational workshops available to all employees. In CY2025, DVS:*

- a. Promoted professional development training, including attendance at conferences, classroom sessions, and virtual learning to include the Commonwealth Management Institute and the Virginia Executive Institute.
- b. Encouraged employee development and skills training to promote career development and learning.
- c. Participated in DEI training opportunities provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Learning Center.
- d. Developed and delivered in-service training, both in person and virtually to assist staff transition from paper evaluations to an online system, ensuring all had the support needed to adapt successfully.
- e. Encouraged leaders to model inclusive behaviors and create opportunities for employee participation and feedback.
- f. Reinforced the importance of maintaining a workplace where all employees feel valued, respected, and supported in achieving success.