

VA HR Academy Career Map for HR Specialist Employee Benefits



U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs



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General Information

This document provides the recommendations within each of the career models for each of the identified HR functions. This includes training, education, and certification recommendations; VA-specific experience recommendations; and other VA-specific recommendations (e.g., manuals, job aids) needed to attain the stated level of proficiency within that function. The core, technical, and strategic competencies associated with each function are also provided in this document. The career model will be used to guide the professional development of VA HR professionals in aligning their skill set with the VA HR competencies.

Function Summary

Individuals in the Employee Benefits function apply HR concepts, principles, and practices relating to retirements, insurances and other employee benefit programs.

What is a Competency?

Competency Models support a streamlined, data-driven approach to professional development, serve as the foundation to all Human Capital practices, and are becoming increasingly important to the Federal Government as a way to show accountability. A competency is a standardized job requirement for an individual to properly perform a specific job or role. It is observable and measurable. Competencies are a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs), attitudes, and behaviors used to improve performance.

What are the differences between core, strategic and technical competencies?

The current competency model contains three competency types - Core, Leadership, and Technical. Each competency type denotes a specific competency area and scope. Core and Leadership competencies are standardized throughout the VA, while Technical competencies are unique to jobs.

- **Core:** Foundational competencies that apply to all functions and levels regardless of job specialty.
- **Leadership:** Competencies for those in a leadership role. Not applicable to the Foundational functional level of a career.
- **Technical:** Job specific competencies required to perform tasks or activities.

Required Competencies (Refer to competencies defined in Appendix)

Core Competencies	Technical Competencies	Leadership Competencies
Analytical Reasoning*	Employee Benefits*	Accountability
Communications*	Employee Development*	Developing Others*
Conflict Management*	Employee Relations*	Human Capital Management
Customer Service*	Human Resources Info Systems (HRIS)	Leveraging Diversity*
Flexibility*	Labor Relations*	Political Savvy
Information Assurance	Pay Administration*	Technology Management
Integrity/Honesty	Performance Management*	-
Interpersonal Skills*	Position Classification & Management	-
Organizational Awareness	Recruitment & Staffing	-
Problem Solving*	Workforce & Succession Planning*	-
Self-Management*	Work/Life Integration	-
Strategic Thinking*	-	-
Teamwork*	-	-
Veterans Service Motivation	-	-

**Note: Indicates competencies represented by courses in the career map.*

How to Acquire Competencies

During an exercise at the September 2010 VA HR Academy Curriculum and Career Mapping workshop, the subject matter experts chose the preferred “acquisition method” that would allow an individual to obtain the desired proficiency standard at each level for every competency. The acquisition method options selected were:

- **Training:** VA or vendor provided courses that have learning objectives (i.e., Time Management Fundamentals).
- **Experience:** Activities the incumbent can engage in to enhance their recommended competencies (i.e., complete a time sensitive assignment with limited notice).
- **Other:** Another method of obtaining the necessary competencies without completing an action with a defined end result (i.e., referencing a job aid or shadowing an experienced professional).

The information contained within the Training, Education, and Certification table lists out the educational information that was identified during the September 2010 VA HR Academy Curriculum and Career Mapping workshop. The “✓” in each table indicates that the training, education, or certification is needed to demonstrate proficiency at the functional level. Additional information on the courses listed in this table can be found on the VA HR Academy website at www.vahracademy.va.gov. Similarly, a “✓” in the Experience or Other Requirements tables indicates that the element is also needed to demonstrate proficiency at the functional level. All of the information taken together provides the overarching framework of what is needed to demonstrate the desired proficiency level within each function across the identified competencies. Activities in the following sections marked with an asterisk (*) indicate those which may be effectively delivered or supported through social learning.

Function Levels

Each VA HR function has three levels. Each employee is assigned to the most appropriate level. These levels represent the primary work you do, the level of experience, and the level of supervision.

- **Foundational (F)** - A Human Resources Specialist at the Foundational Practitioner:
 - Typically has 1-2 years of experience
 - In a learning role; requires guidance, supervision, or oversight to perform most activities
 - Can perform basic tasks without guidance
- **Intermediate (I)** - A Human Resources Specialist at the Intermediate Practitioner level is expected to:
 - Typically has 3-4 years of experience
 - Has responsibilities for evolving operational needs
 - Can perform most tasks independently with occasional guidance/oversight
- **Advanced (A)** - A Human Resources Specialist at the Advanced Practitioner level is expected to:
 - Typically has 5+ years of experience
 - Higher level staff with a managerial role
 - Provides guidance to lower level staff
 - Technical experts in the role

Recommended Training, Education, and Certifications

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Training, Education, and Certifications	Competency	F	I	A
Strategic Human Capital Management (CDN/3949109)	Performance Management	✓	✓	✓
Position Management (3832614)	Position Classification & Management	✓	✓	✓
Strategies for Decision Making (CDN)	Analytical Reasoning	✓	-	-
Effective Listening	Communications	✓	-	-
Presenting with Your Audience in Mind	Communications	✓	-	-
Presenting with Your Audience in Mind (CDN)	Communications	✓	-	-
Customer Service for HR Professionals	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Customer Service in Government	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Customer Service in the Field	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Customer Service over the Phone	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Dealing with Irrational Customers and Escalating Complaints	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Internal Customer Service	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Shaping the Direction of Customer Service in Your Organization	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Support Center Services and Work Environment	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Team and Customer Relationships	Customer Service	✓	-	-
Determining Service Computation Dates	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Employee Benefits	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Employee Benefits for Federal HR Professionals	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Federal Employee Benefits	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
FERS Benefits Applications	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Processing Voluntary Retirement Applications for Civil Service Employees (CSRS)	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Processing Voluntary Retirement Applications for Civil Service Employees (CSRS)	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Processing Voluntary Retirement Applications for Federal Employees (FERS)	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Training, Education, and Certifications	Competency	F	I	A
Processing Voluntary Retirement Applications for Federal Employees (FERS)	Employee Benefits	✓	-	-
Instructor Training	Employee Development	✓	-	-
Planning Your Professional Development (CDN)	Employee Development	✓	-	-
Federal Human Resources Management	Employee Relations	✓	-	-
Fundamentals of Legal Research	Employee Relations	✓	-	-
Integrity in the Workplace	Employee Relations	✓	-	-
Consulting Skills for HRM Professionals (3764192)	Interpersonal Skills	✓	-	-
Federal Labor Relations	Labor Relations	✓	-	-
Fundamentals of Legal Research	Labor Relations	✓	-	-
Integrity in the Workplace	Labor Relations	✓	-	-
Promoting a Substance-free Workplace	Labor Relations	✓	-	-
Policy Interpretation Tips and Tricks (CDN)	Organizational Awareness	✓	-	-
PAID Coding: Processing HR Actions	Pay Administration	✓	-	-
PAID Coding: Veterans' Preference	Pay Administration	✓	-	-
Advanced Staffing Module 1: Problem Solving and Decision Making	Problem Solving	✓	-	-
Pragmatic Problem Solving	Problem Solving	✓	-	-
Being an Effective Team Member	Teamwork	✓	-	-
Adverse and Performance-Based Actions	Employee Relations	-	✓	✓
Employee Conduct and Performance	Employee Relations	-	✓	✓
FMLA Leave and More: An Overview of Legally Protected Leave	Employee Relations	-	✓	✓
I-9 Compliance: Verifying Employment Eligibility of US and Non-US Citizens	Employee Relations	-	✓	✓
MSPB	Employee Relations	-	✓	✓
HR Smart: Fundamentals for HR Specialists	Human Resources Information Systems	-	✓	✓
HR Smart: Managers Self Service	Human Resources Information Systems	-	✓	✓

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Training, Education, and Certifications	Competency	F	I	A
HR Smart: Overview	Human Resources Information Systems	-	✓	✓
Alternative Dispute Resolution	Labor Relations	-	✓	✓
Alternative Dispute Resolution (CDN)	Labor Relations	-	✓	✓
EEO in the Federal Sector	Labor Relations	-	✓	✓
I-9 Compliance: Verifying Employment Eligibility of US and Non-US Citizens	Labor Relations	-	✓	✓
Negotiation Skills (CDN)	Labor Relations	-	✓	✓
Rightful Employment Termination	Labor Relations	-	✓	✓
Advanced Staffing Module 6: Complex Pay Determinations	Pay Administration	-	✓	✓
Enhancing Your Attention to Detail (CDN)	Analytical Reasoning	-	✓	-
Measurement: Assessment and Metrics	Analytical Reasoning	-	✓	-
Effective Team Communications	Communications	-	✓	-
Negotiation Skills	Communications	-	✓	-
Presenting Your Case	Communications	-	✓	-
Constructive Conflict Resolution	Conflict Management	-	✓	-
Mediating Employee Disputes	Conflict Management	-	✓	-
First Steps for Turning Around a Performance Problem	Developing Others	-	✓	-
Giving and Receiving Feedback (CDN)	Developing Others	-	✓	-
CSRS Benefits Applications	Employee Benefits	-	✓	-
Processing Personnel Actions	Employee Benefits	-	✓	-
Strategic Human Capital Planning (3852270)	Employee Development	-	✓	-
Strategies for Developing Employees	Employee Development	-	✓	-
Strategies for Developing Your Employees – 1 day	Employee Development	-	✓	-
Training and Development	Employee Development	-	✓	-
Developing Your Political Savvy (CDN)	Political Savvy	-	✓	-
Creative Approaches for Innovative Solutions	Problem Solving	-	✓	-
Decision Making: Making Tough Decisions	Problem Solving	-	✓	-

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Training, Education, and Certifications	Competency	F	I	A
Problem Solving: Digging Deeper	Problem Solving	-	✓	-
Professionalism, Business Etiquette, and Personal Accountability	Self-Management	-	✓	-
Strategic Human Capital Management (3884547)	Strategic Thinking	-	✓	-
Strategic Human Capital Planning (3852270)	Strategic Thinking	-	✓	-
Consulting Skills for HRM Professionals (1328706)	Teamwork	-	✓	-
Effective Team Communication	Teamwork	-	✓	-
Writing a Business Case	Communications	-	-	✓
Essential Mentoring Techniques: Building and Maintaining Mentoring Relationships	Developing Others	-	-	✓
Essential Mentoring Techniques: Designing and Initiating Mentoring Programs	Developing Others	-	-	✓
Essential Mentoring Techniques: Evaluating and Ending the Mentoring Program	Developing Others	-	-	✓
Essential Mentoring Techniques: Mentoring Fundamentals	Developing Others	-	-	✓
Federal Employee Development	Employee Development	-	-	✓
Developing Your Political Savvy	Interpersonal Skills	-	-	✓
Leveraging Multicultural and Multigenerational Diversity	Leveraging Diversity	-	-	✓
Establishing Team Goals and Responsibilities	Teamwork	-	-	✓
Leading Teams and Groups	Teamwork	-	-	✓

**Note: Indicates courses do not map to the competency*

Recommended VA-Specific Experience

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Experience	F	I	A
Actively participate on a team and articulate individual contributions to the team.	✓	-	-
Attend a diversity program to learn about other cultures and perspectives.	✓	-	-
Collaborate with other team members on a project or assignment.	✓	-	-
Complete multiple assignments to meet deadlines while accommodating competing priorities	✓	-	-
Partner with your supervisor/mentor to develop the skill of dialogue	✓	-	-
Read the Standards of Ethical Conduct and Merit Systems Principles	✓	-	-
Receive updated information regarding employee benefits, to include: retirement, OWCP, etc.	✓	-	-
Take a personality inventory (e.g., Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) to learn more about your personality and relationship to teamwork	✓	-	-
Assist in preparing monthly or quarterly reports for your work unit.	✓	-	-
Make a presentation at a team meeting.	✓	-	-
Participate in an ethical discussion regarding work practices	✓	-	-
Prepare for (with a facilitator's guide) and present an existing education program to a small group (students/interns, etc.)	✓	-	-
Research updated information regarding employee benefits, to include: retirement, OWCP, etc.	✓	-	-
Research assigned subject area utilizing online (i.e. FLRA, MSPB, EEOC, OSC, OPM, VA internal websites, Cyberfeds, etc.) and hardcopy resources.	✓	-	-
Consult with managers/supervisors on their personal development needs and options for their specialty area(s) and create a unique employee development plan	✓	-	-
Perform a briefing of each section of HR to new HR specialists coming into the department.	✓	-	-
With guidance, coordinate and follow up to meet presenters' needs (i.e. presentation, IT, room setup, etc.)	✓	-	-
Work on an innovative project or team that is different from your normal work.	✓	-	-
Foster productive relationships with union officials.	-	✓	-

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Experience	F	I	A
Research and distribute/communicate updated information regarding employee benefits, to include: retirement, OWCP, etc.	-	✓	-
Serve as a mentor to at least one individual meeting on a regular basis to provide advice and guidance.	-	✓	-
Compile data for incentive awards report.	-	✓	-
Provide informal benefits counseling to meet respective office needs using internal/external resources.	-	✓	-
Implement employee benefits including retirement calculations for servicing employees benefits	-	✓	-
Administer OWCP benefits	-	✓	-
Review and distribute worklife policies (e.g., telework, childcare subsidies, etc.)	-	✓	-
Review and provide guidance and feedback on coworker output to ensure compliance with applicable requirements	-	✓	-
Volunteer to work on a programmatic strategic plan.	-	✓	-
Prepare a briefing for your supervisor regarding a development problem and potential solutions. The briefing should include the following: (1) Define the problem, (2) List the concerns, (3) Recommend a training curriculum	-	-	✓
Provide benefits training (e.g., OWCP, retirement, insurance)	-	-	✓
Implement change based on new developments (i.e. new policy, case law, best practices).	-	-	✓
Implement worklife policies (e.g., telework, childcare subsidies, etc.)	-	-	✓
Serve as a mentor to at least one individual meeting on a regular basis to provide advice and guidance.	-	-	✓
Serve as SME for local/national projects which may involve collaboration with inter or intra-agency partners.	-	-	✓
Take initiative to identify areas of liability and use creativity in developing resolution/recommendations for stakeholders.	-	-	✓
Volunteer to work on a service or facility programmatic plan (e.g., workforce plan, succession plan, strategic plan)	-	-	✓
Develop and implement a policy and/or procedures to improve program operations	-	-	✓
Gather data and interpret needs for senior leadership to integrate across VA or an Administration	-	-	✓

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Experience	F	I	A
Lead roundtable discussions and debate ideas regarding recent developments and/or emerging trends	-	-	✓
Monitor the implementation of a benefit and solve a complex benefits issue.	-	-	✓
Participate in a roundtable discussion in an HR field. Debate ideas regarding recent developments and/or emerging trends	-	-	✓
Participate on a team developing Service or Departmental policy	-	-	✓

**Note: Indicates a social learning activity*

Recommended VA-Specific Other

HR Specialist Employee Benefits Other	F	I	A
Orientation to Mission, Vision, and Values	✓	-	-
Orientation to VA and HR Core Competency Model	✓	-	-
Participate in office orientation program	✓	-	-
Review a Job Aid that addresses courtesy in customer service (e.g., phone, email, in-person)	✓	-	-
Review checklists, job aids, worksheet and tool kits for technical area	✓	-	-
Review learning resources (e.g., VALU, TMS, HRD)	✓	-	-
Shadow an experienced HR Specialist in how they consult with new employees, customers, and stakeholders	✓	-	-
Job Aids - CFR; online publications; and/or locally produced resources	✓	-	-
Attend locally sponsored workshops and training classes (e.g., Roadshows, Blue Cross, Lunch and Learn)	✓	-	-
Review OHRM website and VA HR Resource Center	✓	-	-
Attend HR Café - online webinar on a variety of HR-related topics	✓	-	-
Participate in agency-wide training forums to gain a broader area of knowledge of benefits best practices	-	✓	-
Formal or informal mentoring relationship - discussions etc.	-	-	✓
Present at HR Café - online webinar on a variety of HR-related topics	-	-	✓
Participate in a Root Cause Analysis	-	-	✓
Present at a conference in your technical area	-	-	✓
Present at national HR conferences	-	-	✓
Recommend alternative development methods to appropriately address training needs in the organization	-	-	✓

**Note: Indicates a social learning activity*

APPENDIX

CORE Competencies Defined

- Analytical Reasoning: Identifies issues and analyzes information to draw accurate conclusions, ensuring careful attention to detail. Dissects problems and information into their meaningful parts, and uses logic and judgment to evaluate alternatives and develop solutions.
- Communications: Effectively expresses information to multiple audiences through clear, convincing oral and written communications; demonstrates logical thinking when describing facts and concepts, and shapes communications to meet the needs of a specific audience; actively listens to others and demonstrates understanding of their comments and/or questions.
- Conflict Management: Helps to manage and resolve conflicts, grievances, confrontations, or disagreements in a constructive manner to minimize negative personal impact; collaborates with others to encourage cooperation and teaming.
- Customer Service: Anticipates, identifies, and manages the needs and expectations of internal and external customers; makes the effort to understand customer issues and priorities to deliver quality services and support; solicits regular formal and informal feedback and takes action to drive high levels of customer satisfaction.
- Flexibility: Is open to change and new ways of approaching working and solving problems; adapts behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; deals effectively with ambiguity.
- Customer Service: Working with clients and customers to assess their needs, provide information or assistance, resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations.
- Flexibility: Adapting behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles. Open to change and new information.
- Information Assurance: Applies knowledge of methods and procedures to protect information systems and data by ensuring their availability, authentication, confidentiality, and integrity.
- Integrity/Honesty: Contributes to maintaining the integrity of the Department of Veterans Affairs; displays high standards of ethical conduct at all times and understands the impact of violating these standards on the organization, self, and others; is trustworthy.
- Interpersonal Skills: Develops and maintains effective relationships with others; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations. Considers and responds appropriately to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of subordinates, peers, and seniors. Gains cooperation to obtain information and accomplish goals, including managing disagreements in a constructive manner to minimize negative personal impact.
- Organizational Awareness: Knows the organization's (e.g., VA, domain, work unit) mission and functions. Knows how its social, political, and technological systems work and operates effectively within them. Understands how programs, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations drive and impact the work and objectives of the organization
- Problem Solving: Identifies problems, determines accuracy and relevance of information, and uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives; makes well-informed, objective decisions that take into account facts, goals, constraints, and risks while perceiving the impact and implications of decisions.

- **Self-Management:** Sets well-defined and realistic individual goals; displays a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment toward completing assignments in a timely manner; accepts feedback and works with minimal supervision; is motivated to achieve even under stressful conditions; demonstrates responsible behavior.
- **Strategic Thinking:** Formulates effective strategies consistent with the objective, vision, and competitive strategy of the organization (e.g., VA, domain, work unit). Applies knowledge of planning, coordination, and execution of HR services, business functions, and resource allocation when examining issues and determining priorities. Takes a long-term view to recognize opportunities. Determines objectives and sets priorities. Anticipates potential threats or opportunities.
- **Teamwork:** Encourages and facilitates cooperation, pride, trust, and group identity; fosters commitment and team spirit; works with others to achieve goals.
- **Veterans Service Motivation:** Shows a commitment to serve Veterans, and works to ensure all actions are focused on meeting and supporting Veterans' needs; aligns organizational objectives, processes, and practices with Veterans' and the public's interests.

TECHNICAL Competencies Defined

- **Employee Benefits:** Applying HR concepts, principles, and practices relating to retirements, insurances and other employee benefit programs.
- **Employee Development:** Applying employee development concepts, principles, and practices related to planning, evaluating, and administering training, organizational development, and career development initiatives.
- **Employee Relations:** Applying laws, rules, regulations, case law, principles, and practices related to employee conduct, performance, and dispute resolution.
- **Human Resources Information Systems:** Knowledge of HR management concepts, principles, and practices related to identifying and analyzing HR processes, translating functional requirements into technical requirements, and delivering and maintaining HR information systems.
- **Labor Relations:** Applying laws, rules, regulations, case law, principles, and practices related to negotiating and administering labor agreements.
- **Pay Administration:** Applying pay administration concepts, principles, and practices relating to pay setting, pay schedules, pay determinations, and other pay administration regulations.
- **Performance Management:** Applying performance management concepts, principles, and practices related to planning, monitoring, rating, and rewarding employee performance.
- **Position Classification & Management:** Determining the correct title, series, and grade of a position. Ensuring the accuracy of a position description, and advising management on organization and position management issues.
- **Recruitment & Staffing:** Applying HR concepts, principles, and practices related to identifying, altering, and selecting individuals and placing them into positions to address changing organizational needs.
- **Work/Life Integration:** Helping others meet the needs of their lives in a way that helps them be most productive, effective, and healthy, both at work and outside of work.
- **Workforce & Succession Planning:** Applying HR concepts, principles, and practices in order to determine the composition of the workforce, projecting the composition of the future workforce, and identifying current and future competency gaps to align human capital with organization goals. Consulting with organizations to produce action

plans to bridge both workforce and competency gaps and ensuring an adequate and well qualified workforce to fulfill the mission.

LEADERSHIP Competencies Defined

- **Accountability:** Holds self and others accountable for measurable high-quality, timely, and cost-effective results. Determines objectives, sets priorities, and delegates work. Accepts responsibility for mistakes. Complies with guidelines and rules.
- **Developing Others:** Develops the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization by providing ongoing feedback and by providing opportunities to learn through formal and informal methods.
- **Human Capital Management:** Builds and manages workforce based on organizational goals, budget considerations, and staffing needs. Ensures that employees are appropriately recruited, selected, appraised, and rewarded; takes action to address performance problems. Manages a multi-sector workforce and a variety of work situations.
Leveraging Diversity: Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and individual differences are valued and leveraged to achieve the vision and mission of the organization
- **Leveraging Diversity:** Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and individual differences are valued and leveraged to achieve the vision and mission of the organization.
- **Political Savvy:** Identifies the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization. Perceives organizational and political reality and acts accordingly.