



VHA Diffusion of Excellence

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# DIFFUSION TALENT ACCELERATOR SYLLABUS

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning



VHA Innovation Ecosystem



## WHAT IS DIFFUSION TALENT ACCELERATOR?

Diffusion Talent Accelerator (DTA) is an offering from VHA Innovation Ecosystem that embeds the Diffusion Specialist Skillset within National Program Offices and VISNs to build an organization capable of spreading and scaling promising innovations. DTA works with National Program Offices and VISNs to identify and train Diffusion Specialists to see a project through the Innovation lifecycle of Discover, Test, Replicate, and Scale, with an emphasis on the latter two. By the end of their first year in the Diffusion Talent Accelerator Program, these Specialists will have the skills needed to deploy their own National Diffusion program and to usher promising practices within their VISN or Program Office through the Innovation lifecycle.

Diffusion Talent Accelerator begins with a one-year intensive training program to equip each new Diffusion Specialist with the tools they need to develop their own Diffusion Program. Each DTA Diffusion Specialist will identify a capstone project that addresses 1-2 priorities of their respective offices. Through the first year of the program, DTA Diffusion Specialists will be guided through the Diffusion of Excellence programming and apply those concepts to their capstone projects. Engagement with the VHA Innovation Ecosystem does not stop after the first year. Once a Diffusion Specialist is accepted into DTA, they are a part of the team and are welcome to attend events and trainings beyond the first year of the program. These Diffusion Specialists will be exposed to new and exciting opportunities that will enhance their skillset and reach within VHA.

## DTA MISSION & VISION

### Mission Statement

We want to expand VHA's human talent pool capable of replicating and scaling promising practices by partnering with VISNs and National Program Offices who are ready to invest their FTE in these activities.

### Vision Statement

Embedding a diffusion culture into VHA as an integral part of VHA's learning health care system.

# DTA PHASES AND TIMELINE





## Phase One: Connect

Diffusion Talent Accelerator is a unique offering that provides an actionable answer to the common question, “How do we scale and sustain practices if we aren’t a part of Shark Tank?” DTA enables us to bring this previously scarce opportunity to those in the field, allowing for a diffusion culture to be embedded throughout VHA. If a National Program Office or VISN Office is ready to connect, we encourage them to begin their journey with the Diffusion Talent Accelerator.

In January and February prior to a DTA cohort kicking off in September, VISNs and National Program Offices can submit applications to participate in Diffusion Talent Accelerator. After applications are reviewed in February/March and the next cohort is identified, commitments are made by the respective applicant offices to dedicate FTE to the initiative. For the next several months until DTA Kick-Off in September, MOUs are signed, positions are recruited for, and priorities for the first year of the program are identified and outlined with the help of DTA leadership.



## Phase Two: Catalyze

After connections and commitments are made, we move right into the catalyze phase of DTA to ensure our participants hit the ground running with the tools and education they need to be successful. The Catalyze phase is all about sharing the Diffusion of Excellence “Secret Sauce,” or Diffusion Principles that participants can apply toward their capstone projects.

The Catalyze phase of Diffusion Talent Accelerator begins in September with the virtual kick-off call. The goal of the first few calls as a group is to get to know the participants and offices and to begin preparations for the In-Person Orientation and Diffusion Academy.

DTA Orientation is held in person over the course of two days. At this event, participants will learn more about the Diffusion of Excellence portfolio and each other. There are activities and working sessions to foster relationship-building and start planning for the year ahead. A detailed agenda for the two days can be found on pages 9 and 10. Following the Orientation, the DTA Specialists and their assigned Diffusion Specialist mentors will have a 1:1 call to set expectations for their time together and make a plan moving forward.

Diffusion Academy is a 2.5 day conference that provides ample opportunities to network with other innovators, learn more about the Diffusion process, and build out

the capstone projects. It is held in-person in changing cities. The next Diffusion Academy will be in Asheville, NC from January 30 – February 1, 2024.

During the months of February through September, different mandatory virtual trainings are offered to help prepare DTA Specialists for their roles. There is one DTA-specific training meeting per month, however DTA Specialists are encouraged to take advantage of the wide array of informational opportunities offered by the Innovation Ecosystem throughout the year (these offerings can be found in the IE Catalog).





## Catalyze Events

### SEPTEMBER: DTA KICK-OFF

A virtual meeting to start getting to know each other, hear an overview of DTA, learn about the current Diffusion Specialists, and share hopes, dreams, and pauses for DTA.

### OCTOBER: PREP CALL

A virtual meeting to begin discussing logistics and expectations for DTA. This will include going over capstone projects and reviewing the Diffusion Marketplace.

### NOVEMBER: MONTHLY MEETING

A virtual meeting to discuss travel for the January In-Person Orientation; for Danielle Hagan, Diffusion Specialist, to share about her experience with scaling the Surgical Pause; and to refine capstone projects from the October call.

### DECEMBER: IN-PERSON ORIENTATION AND DIFFUSION ACADEMY PREP

A virtual meeting to prepare for the In-Person Orientation and to discuss what to expect at Diffusion Academy. This will include ensuring clear expectations of the event and the participants, and confirming event and travel logistics.

### JANUARY: IN-PERSON ORIENTATION (WASHINGTON, DC)

A 2-day, in-person meeting to learn more about Diffusion of Excellence, start going over training content, and have a capstone working session. More information, including the agenda, can be found starting on page 9 of this syllabus.

### JANUARY: DIFFUSION ACADEMY

Diffusion Academy addresses project management gaps for innovations looking for resourcing opportunities, national stakeholder buy-in, and communication strategies. Each course and corresponding activity are designed to help Innovation Teams assess their project-specific needs and provide distinct pathways to further mature and realize their goals.

### FEBRUARY – SEPTEMBER: MONTHLY TRAINING SESSIONS

Monthly virtual training meetings will be held from February to September to go over a wide range of content relevant to work in Diffusion Talent Accelerator. The topics covered may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Facilitation 101
- Human-Centered Design Series
- Storytelling
- Metrics in Real Life
- Communications Strategies
- How to Leverage AI
- DTA Going Forward and Debrief

► **Pre-Work** will be shared ahead of each monthly session





## Phase Three: Supercharge

The Supercharge phase includes those DTA Specialists who have completed the one-year training course with Diffusion of Excellence and are well-equipped to sustain a Diffusion program within their own office! These participants are supercharged and ready to continue engagement with the Ecosystem to hone their Innovation skillset.

DTA graduation and the conclusion of a cohort's first year is only the launching point for countless opportunities for involvement in the Diffusion of Excellence portfolio. The Innovation Experience (iEX) event in October officially closes out the Catalyze phase of DTA. After that, DTA Specialists transition to the Supercharge phase and are invited to continue engaging with Diffusion of Excellence.

### **SUPERCHARGE ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

- Attend Innovation Ecosystem events and training opportunities
- Get a sneak peek at new content and programming coming out of Diffusion and the Innovation Ecosystem
- Join quarterly calls to learn about what is happening in the field
- Serve as mentors for future cohorts
- Serve as facilitators at Diffusion Academy
- Evaluate applications for Shark Tank
- Participate in content reviews

*Additional opportunities will be shared with DTA Specialists, alongside their ongoing work as Diffusion Specialists in their respective VISNs or National Program Offices.*

### **October: VHA Innovation Experience (iEX) Conference (location TBD)**

iEX is an opportunity for VA and VHA leadership, frontline teams, Veterans, industry collaborators, and the public to come together and showcase VHA innovations that are improving Veteran care. Diffusion of Excellence has two main events at iEX, the VHA Shark Tank Competition and Diffusion Summit. VHA Shark Tank is a Diffusion tool used to identify VHA employee innovations and give them a platform for exposure. Diffusion Summit is a celebration of the previous year's VHA Shark Tank Competition winners and their accomplishments of implementing their practices at other facilities across the country. DTA Diffusion Specialists will attend iEX to celebrate the end of their DTA training year. It will be a chance to network with other members of the VHA community, learn about the latest happenings in the Innovation Ecosystem, and further develop skills that will be utilized as Diffusion Specialists.

# PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

## DTA Specialists

Agreeing to be a part of the Diffusion Talent Accelerator cohort comes with a level of commitment that you are expected to meet. You will need to work with your supervisors to ensure that DTA involvement is prioritized alongside other work and that you will be supported in attending in-person events, virtual monthly trainings, maintaining the mentor/mentee relationship, and meetings/calls as scheduled. Scheduling recurring protected time, respected by your colleagues and supervisors, to work on DTA activities and assignments is recommended. Active participation in all such gatherings is crucial for making the most of this experience so please come prepared for each session.

More specifically, the expectations are as follows:

- Attend an in-person orientation and monthly meetings with Diffusion of Excellence to ask questions, interact with fellow DTA Diffusion Specialists, and receive education
- Work with a mentor from Diffusion of Excellence
- Identify at least one capstone project to develop a replication and scale plan for during 1st year (can extend past 1st year)
- Collect 1-3 qualitative or quantitative data points and report back to Diffusion of Excellence quarterly.
- Attend Diffusion Academy and the Innovation Experience (iEX) Event
- Develop a 1–3-year strategic plan for your promising practice
- Develop a Diffusion Strategy for your VISN/Program Office

Your enthusiasm and hard work throughout this process will be instrumental in improving the lives of Veterans through DTA's Vision of "embedding a diffusion culture into VHA as an integral part of VHA's learning healthcare system." We appreciate your commitment to this Vision and are excited for everything to come.



## Diffusion of Excellence Team

Diffusion Specialists have the opportunity and responsibility to mentor DTA participants throughout their diffusion training timeline. DTA became an available offering in FY23 to VISNs and National Program Offices seeking to invest their own FTE to enhance their ability to replicate and scale promising practices. Below outlines timing, planning, and expectations for Diffusion Specialists regarding DTA.

### Planning and Prep Expectations

- The Diffusion Talent Accelerator Cohorts run from September to October, crossing fiscal years, with recruitment for the next cohort taking place January – March (see timeline on the next page).
- During the planning phases, Diffusion Specialists are expected to review content as needed/ requested (this includes applications, training materials, agendas, syllabus, etc.).
- Help evaluate VISN and National Program Office application submissions after the application period ends and help form the next cohort.



### Mentor Expectations

- Serve as a mentor to a DTA participant from either a National Program Office or VISN Office. As a mentor, Diffusion Specialists play a crucial role in supporting DTA Specialists' career development, offering personal coaching, and guiding project focus and implementation. Mentors are expected to participate in the following ways:
  - Attend the following in-person events:
    - DTA In-Person Orientation
    - Diffusion Academy
    - VHA Innovation Experience (iEX)
  - Be available for 1:1 meeting with mentee(s) each month (minimum of one meeting per month) at a time that is advantageous for both parties. Meetings can be held via Teams or phone.
    - It is expected that the mentee will take the lead on setting up these 1:1 meetings.
    - It is expected that the mentee will come to the meeting with an agenda and/or specific questions/concerns.
    - The mentor should follow up on all questions and concerns in a reasonable amount of time or elevate the question/concern to the DTA Program Director.
- Allow the mentee to join the mentor on any meetings/calls that feel appropriate to teach them how Diffusion Specialists run meetings, organize teams, etc. It is the mentor's responsibility to set expectations for participation (i.e. can they ask question during the meeting? Can they engage in discussion? Should they just be a fly on the wall?). Mentees are not to serve as minute takers, agenda makes, or provide any other administrative function (i.e. scheduling follow up meetings, route documents, send follow up emails, etc.) for meetings they observe.



# TIMELINE

