

Virginia Executive Institute

VEI Fall 2023 Preliminary Leadership Challenge Topics

1. A Virginia Crisis: The Fight Against Fentanyl

Drug overdoses are the leading cause of unnatural deaths in Virginia. According to the Virginia Department of Health, more than 7,300 fatal fentanyl deaths occurred from 2013 to 2021. An average of five Virginians die from fentanyl overdoses each day. Ninety-four percent of these overdose deaths were accidental. According to the CDC over 150 people die each day across the United States from overdoses that are related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

Many Virginians are fighting back against this deadly killer. VEI Group One plans to present facts about legal and illicit fentanyl, the crisis that is before us, and the current efforts in Virginia to help lower overdose deaths. Our group will also explore factors that we believe can help reduce overdoses such as training, and awareness.

Zacc Allen: VADOC, Mike Alston: DMAS, Allen Blair: DHRM, Tiffany Yacomeni: CSOSA

2. With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: The Retention Tension

“People don’t quit jobs, they quit managers.” Leadership quality has been identified as a key influence in workforce retention. It is imperative that state agencies find ways to focus on leadership behaviors that retain employees such as effective communication, collaboration, empowerment, development, and integrity. Employees need to feel valued through opportunities, growth, career development, and mentorship. The return on investment for the Commonwealth of Virginia to develop its leaders intentionally and continually may contribute to its ability to attract and retain the best talents and thus continue to strengthen its workforce. Our presentation will provide strategies that state agencies can implement to retain top employees and identify reasons why such an effort will be beneficial to Virginia.

Amanda Davis: DOF, Rose Durbin: VADOC, Cassandra Harris: ELECTIONS, Allison Richter: VDOT, Juan Zelaya: CSOSA

3. Navigating AI Adoption in Government for the Commonwealth

Artificial intelligence (AI) as we know it has been changing and developing in ways not previously thought possible. This presentation will describe some benefits and apprehensions of using AI in the workplace and explore potential pilot uses of AI by agencies in the Commonwealth. We will also explore possible next steps for establishing a legal framework governing AI use in the Commonwealth to ensure AI is used to provide better service to the public.

John Kirk: DWR, Jessica Lee: VADOC, Andrea Macgill: SCC, Joel Maddux: VDACS, Tashmeen Malik: TAX

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4. Virginia State Employee Mental Health and Well-Being: The Role of Leadership

Mental health has become a pressing issue in the workplace due to the long-term impact of the pandemic and the current turbulent state of the world. Burnout and rising mental health challenges in the workplace have become an issue that has extended beyond Human Resources and should concern all leaders. In this presentation, we will explore the question of whether mental health training should be mandatory for organization leaders, and what resources are available.

John Northon: VDEM, Sara Page: DGS, Tyhisha Pittman: VDACS, Michelle Prosser: HOUSING, Danita Scherff: DARS-DDS

5. Public Sector Digital Transformation

Much of government is still weighed down by paper and by antiquated processes that are not efficient for their staff nor convenient for citizens. Part of the challenge posed by the coronavirus pandemic was its impact on workflow. Social distancing regulations and health concerns shut down government offices and interrupted daily operations. Almost overnight, governments had to adapt to a remote workforce needing digital access to documents, databases, and vital IT infrastructures. Digital workflows and storing documents electronically save employees time to access what they need to do their job and enables government employees to track a project's progress, automatically notify the correct people once a milestone is reached and create reminders, so tasks are not stalled due to interdepartmental miscommunication. Digital forms, filled out by the public and employees, automatically populate databases with information, reducing the need for manual data entry. Digital transformation also lets organizations better serve their constituents by providing them with 24/7 access to information and forms that they can complete when and where convenient for them. Citizens are accustomed to intuitive and efficient services they receive from the private sector and expect from their government.

Lester Brantley: DWR, Rob Davenport: VDACS, Zach Trogon: DRPT, Angela Wright: VEC, Kelly Zeoli: DSS