

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# STAKEHOLDERS SETTING COURSE TOWARD A VA RESEARCH AGENDA

to Improve the Impact of Veteran Community Reintegration Research



**ENCORE**  
Enhancing Veteran Community Reintegration Research

# INTRODUCTION

Speaking: Karen Besterman-Dahan

# SPEAKERS

Karen Besterman-  
Dahan, PhD, RD



Bridget M. Hahm, MA,  
MPH, CCRC



Jason Lind, PhD, MPH



Margeaux Chavez, MA,  
MPH, CPH



# ENCORE TEAM MEMBERS

- Christine Melillo, PhD, RN
- Jacquelyn Heuer, MA
- Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga, PhD
- Lisa Ottomanelli, PhD

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DISCLAIMERS

- The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Dept. of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.
- This material is based upon work supported by the Dept. of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, Office of Research and Development, Health Services Research and Development (IVI 19-487).

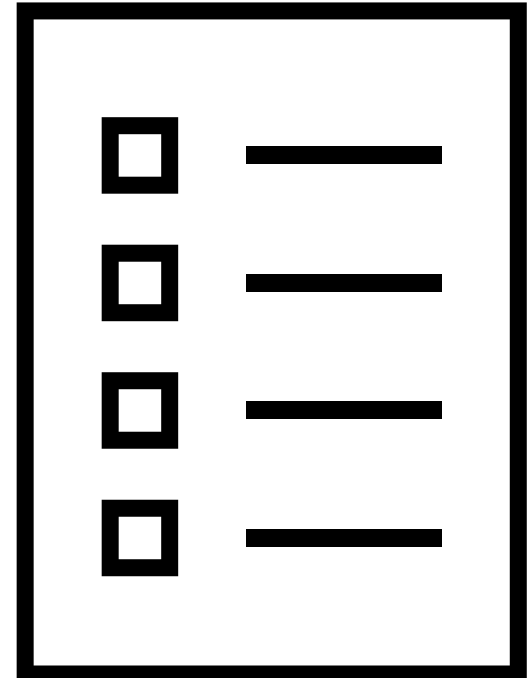
## TODAY'S PRESENTATION

This presentation describes strategies and actionable guidance for engaging multiple stakeholders to:

1. Identify and communicate research needs.
2. Develop meaningful solutions to meet those needs.

# AUDIENCE POLL

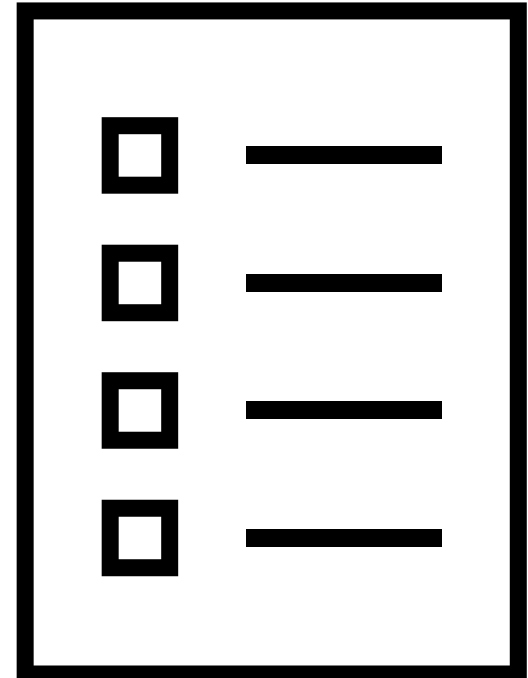
- **POLL #1: Are you familiar with these types of research approaches and methods? (Select all that apply)**
  - Community engaged research
  - Stakeholder engagement methods
  - Participatory action research
  - Stakeholder involvement in priority setting
  - No, I am not familiar with these methods



A diagram of a poll question box. It consists of a large black rectangular border. Inside the border, there are four rows. Each row contains a small square checkbox on the left and a horizontal line on the right, representing a list of options for the poll.

# AUDIENCE POLL

- **POLL #2: Which of these approaches and methods have you used? (Select all that apply)**
  - Community engaged research
  - Stakeholder engagement methods
  - Participatory action research
  - Stakeholder involvement in priority setting
  - None of these



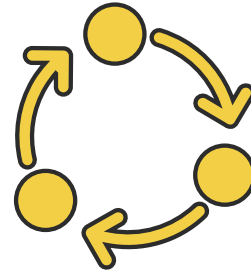
A diagram of a poll question box. It consists of a large black rectangular border. Inside the border, there are four rows. Each row contains a small square checkbox on the left and a horizontal line on the right, representing a list of options for the poll.



# BACKGROUND

Speaking: Bridget Hahm

# WHAT IS VETERAN COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION (CR)?



## Process is:

- Cyclical
- Can extend across the lifetime
- Collective



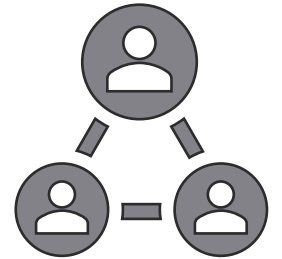
## Successful Reintegration

- Determined by Veteran's own goals



## Challenges to Reintegration

- Barriers within the Veteran's social, cultural, or environmental context



## Requirements

- Resources
- Supports

# WHY IS VETERAN COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION (CR) IMPORTANT?

VA Priority

Known to affect Veterans':

- Cultural and social environment
- Employment and meaningful activity
- Finances
- Health
- Housing and physical environment
- Life skills and preparedness
- Social integration

Still things to learn about CR

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

**Goal:** Improve VA policies, programs and services that support Veteran community reintegration (CR).

## Objective 1:

Mobilize Veteran CR research



## Objective 2:

Communicate and exchange information about Veteran CR research needs

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## Objective 1:

Mobilize Veteran CR research

**Determine what research is needed**

Identified existing research on Veteran CR

Interviewed expert informants



**Set up MSP**

Identified shared values

Developed Research Agenda



## Objective 2:

Communicate and exchange information about Veteran CR research needs

**Convene MSP workgroups**

Develop & Vet ENCORE products (relevance & inclusiveness)

Provide Veteran CR Research Consultation Services

Develop Communication and Knowledge Translation Plan

# ENGAGEMENT

Speaking: Jason Lind

OVERVIEW OF  
COMMUNITY  
ENGAGED  
RESEARCH (CEnR)

CEnR involves establishing and maintaining *authentic partnerships* between researchers and those who are researched.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luger, T. M., Hamilton, A. B., & True, G. (2020). Measuring Community-Engaged Research Contexts, Processes, and Outcomes: A Mapping Review. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 98(2), 493–553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12458>

# CHARACTERISTICS OF MULTI- STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS (MSP)<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, A., Clarke, A., & Huang, L. (2019). Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainability: Designing Decision-Making Processes for Partnership Capacity. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 160(2), 409–426. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3885-3>

<sup>3</sup> Sloan, P., & Oliver, D. (2013). Building Trust in Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Critical Emotional Incidents and Practices of Engagement. *Organization Studies*, 34, 1835–1868. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613495018>

**Diversity of  
perspectives**

**Goal of mutual  
benefit**

**Decentralized  
decision-making**

**Achieving goals  
that no one group  
could achieve  
independently**

*Let's take a closer look at ENCORE's MSP  
in the next few slides*



# CONVENING THE MSP

**Diversity of perspectives**

**Goal of mutual benefit**

**Decentralized decision-making**

**Achieving goals that no one group could achieve independently**

Veterans and Caregivers

VSOs

MSP

VA Program Officers

CR Researchers

# CONVENING THE MSP

**Diversity of  
perspectives**

**Goal of mutual  
benefit**

**Decentralized  
decision-making**

**Achieving goals  
that no one group  
could achieve  
independently**

“I was also personally interested in the MSP because it is diverse in expertise, experience, levels of leaderships, military service, and culture.”

– MSP Member

# CONVENING THE MSP

Diversity of  
perspectives

Goal of mutual  
benefit

Decentralized  
decision-making

Achieving goals  
that no one group  
could achieve  
independently

“There are a number of benefits...There have been new perspectives, broader ideas, problem-solving strategies.”

– MSP Member

# CONVENING THE MSP

Diversity of  
perspectives

Goal of mutual  
benefit

Decentralized  
decision-making

Achieving goals  
that no one group  
could achieve  
independently

“The immediate feedback between researchers, veterans, and veteran advocates...instilled a confidence that deeper change is possible at the VA.”

– MSP Member

# CONVENING THE MSP

Diversity of  
perspectives

Goal of mutual  
benefit

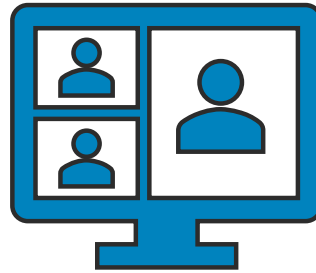
Decentralized  
decision-making

Achieving goals  
that no one group  
could achieve  
independently

“This effort requires  
more than any one  
agency alone can  
achieve.”

– MSP Member

# MSP MEETING FORMATS



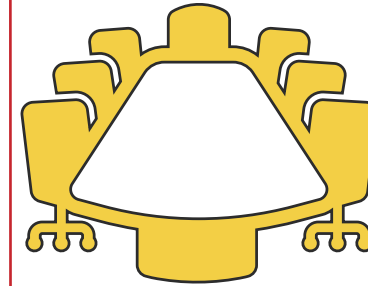
## Virtual Platform

- WebEx
- MS Teams



## Professional Facilitation

- National Center for Organizational Development
- VISN 8 Organizational Development



## Extended Engagement Strategies

- Debriefing
- Surveys

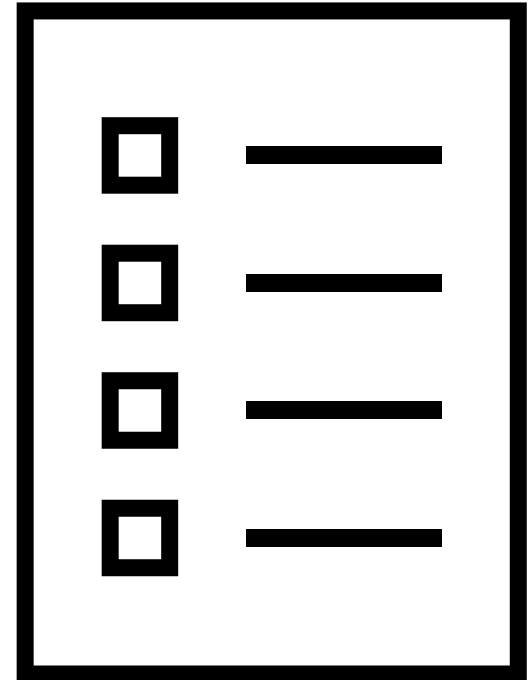


## Course Correcting

- Debriefing
- Ground rules

# AUDIENCE POLLS

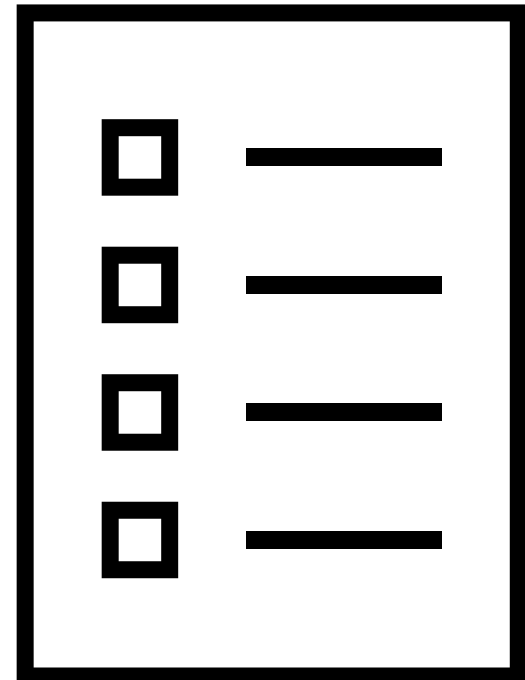
- **#3: Is ENCORE's method of stakeholder engagement similar to how you (or your projects or facility) engage with partners in your research?**
  - Yes
  - No



A poll response form consisting of a large black rectangular border. Inside the border, there are four rows. Each row contains a square checkbox on the left and a horizontal line on the right, representing a radio button for selecting 'Yes' or 'No'.

# AUDIENCE POLLS

- **#4: Do you plan to use any stakeholder engagement methods or approaches in your research?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - Maybe sometime in the future





# DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Speaking: Margeaux Chavez

# WHY A RESEARCH AGENDA?

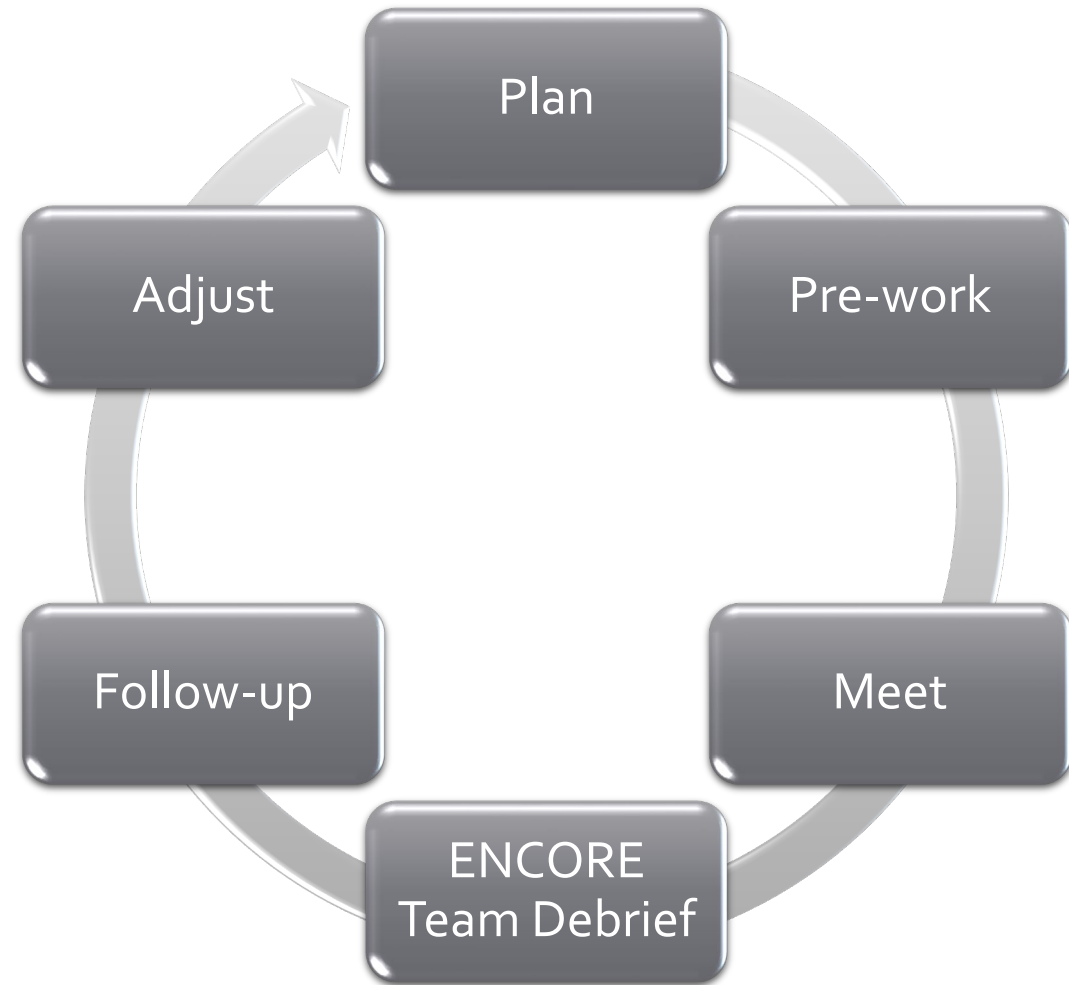
Identifies needs or  
gaps

Provides strategy to  
address gaps

Identifies priorities  
in area of inquiry

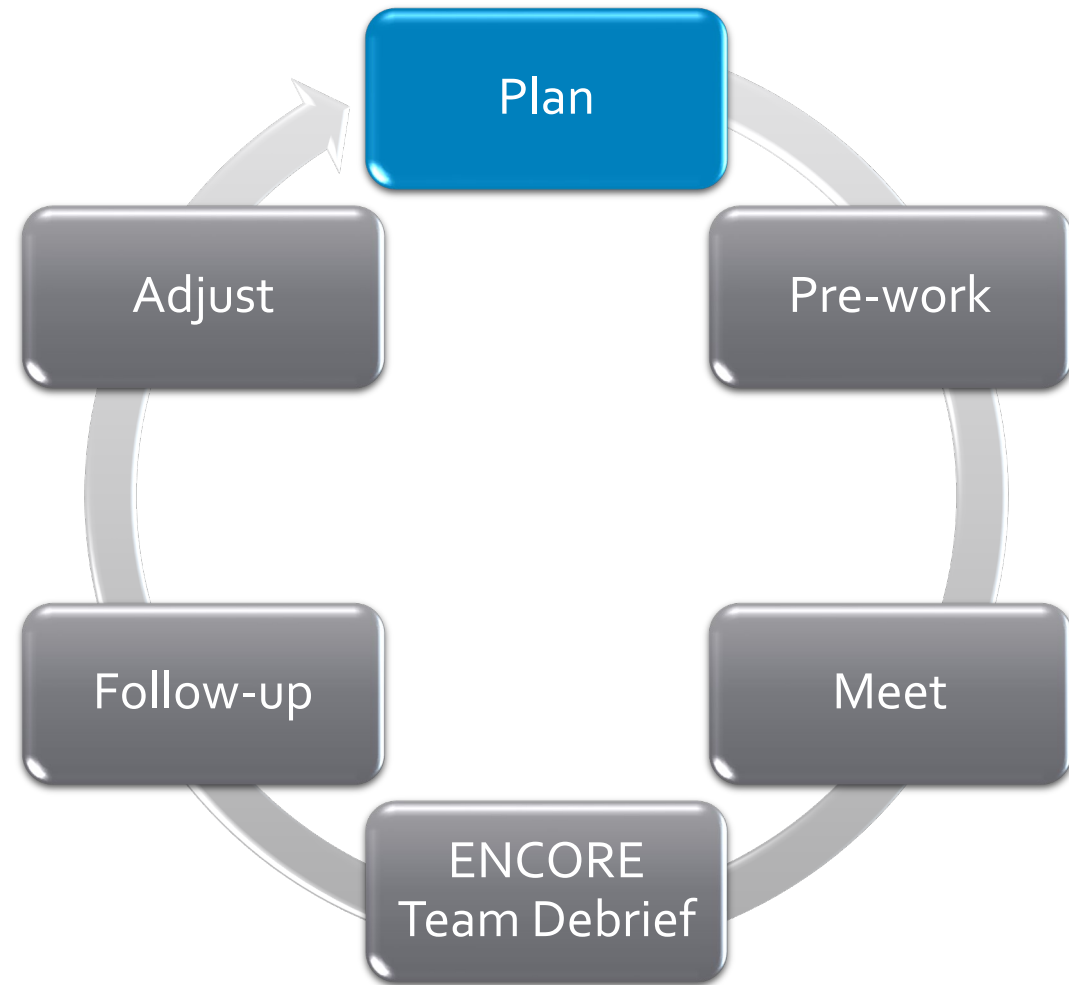
Guides funders' &  
researchers'  
decisions

# PROCESS



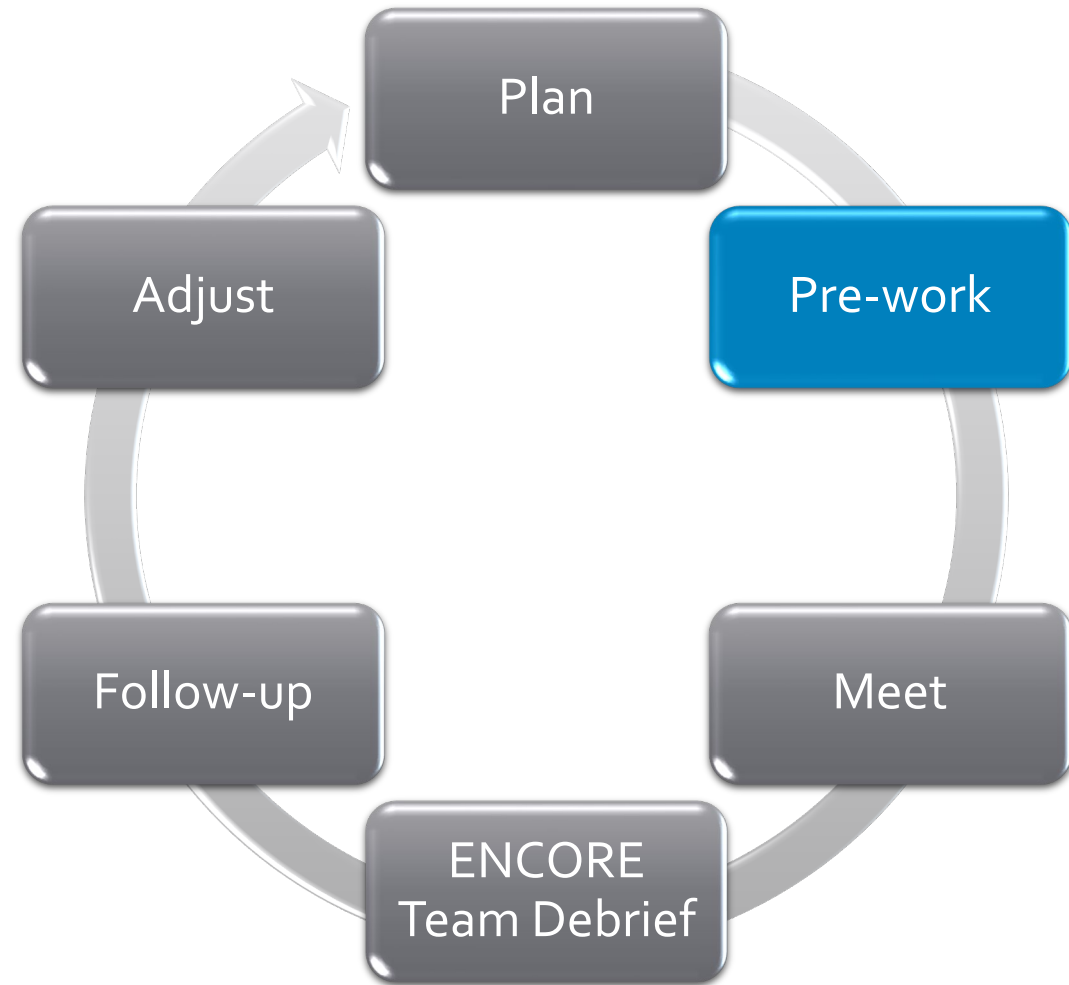
*Let's take a closer look at each step in the next few slides*

# PROCESS



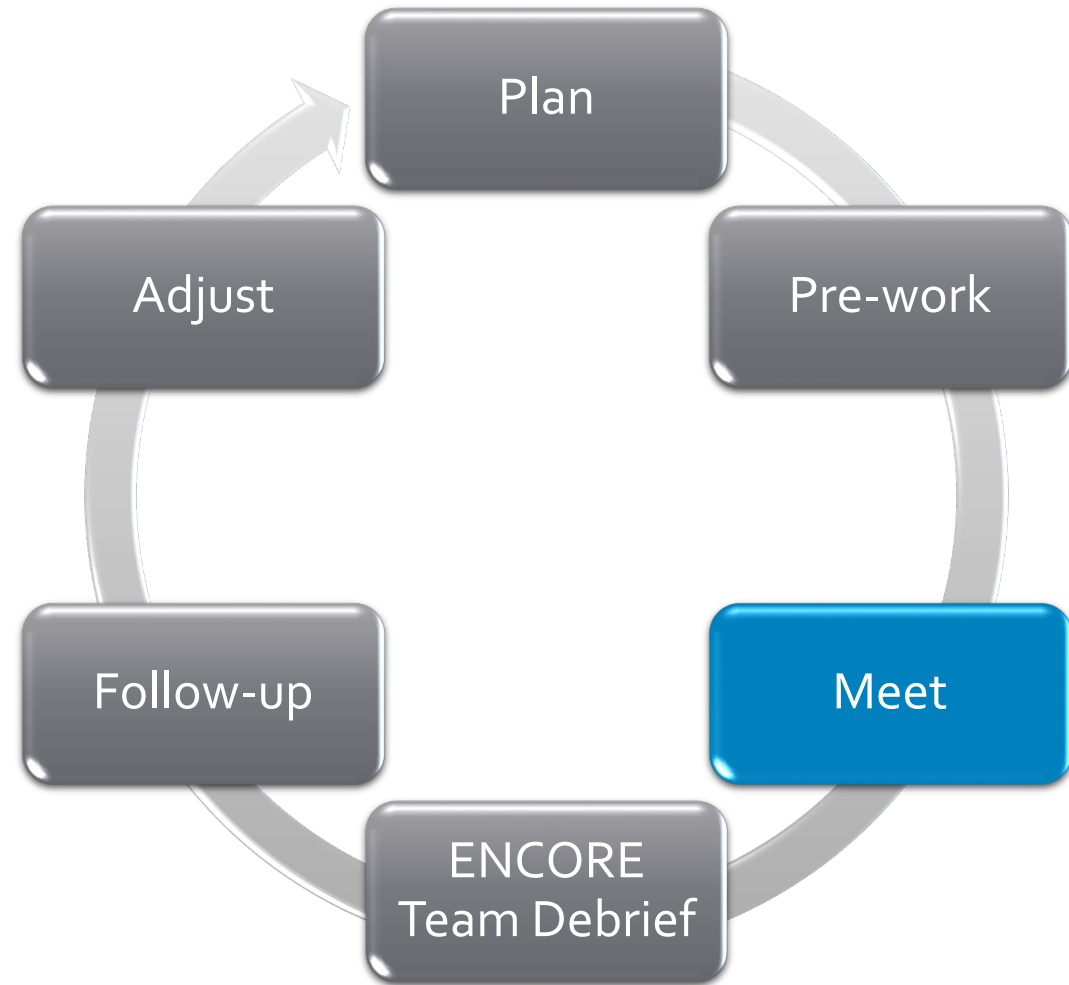
- Set meeting objectives
- Develop agenda
- Determine staff & technology needs
- Identify meeting structure
- Gather materials for MSP review

# PROCESS



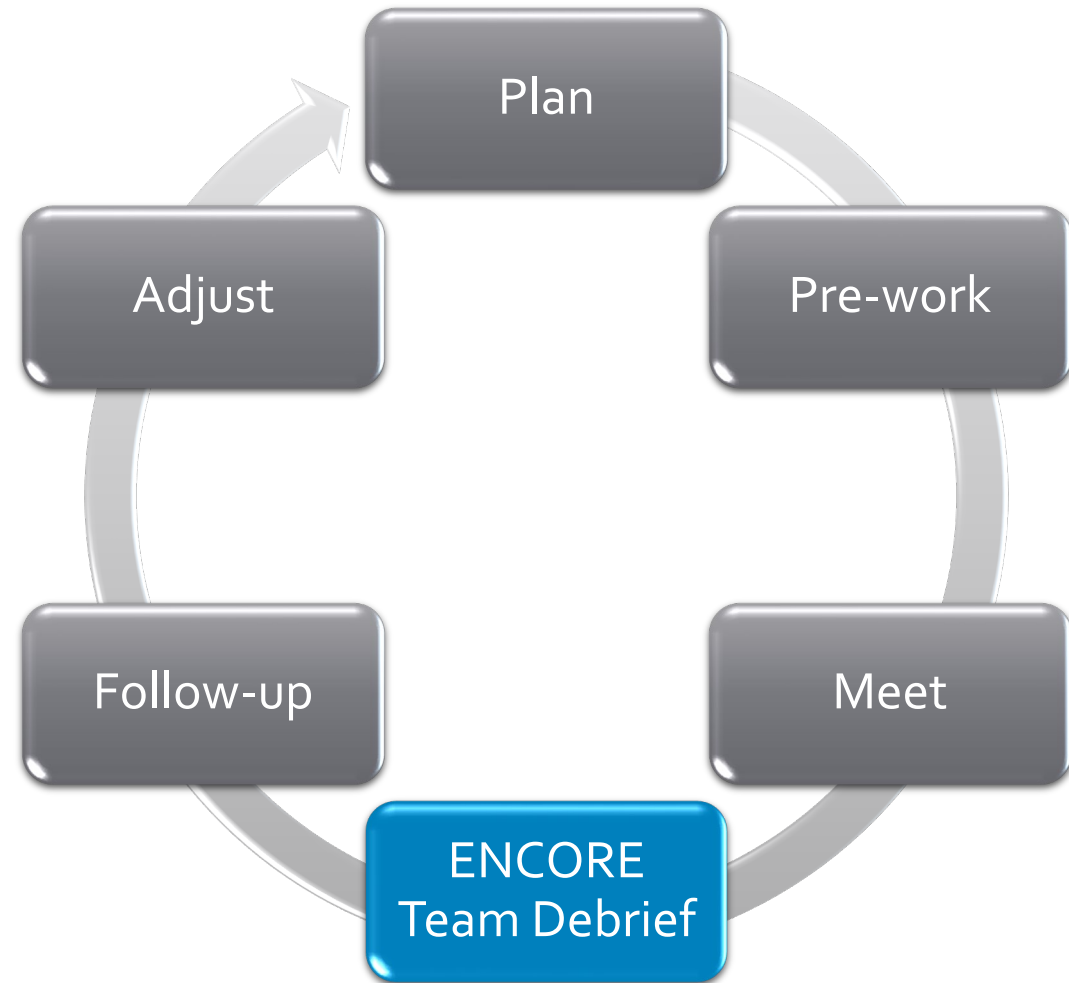
- Send materials to the MSP
- Distribute opinion polls and surveys
- Develop presentation and breakout group materials

# PROCESS



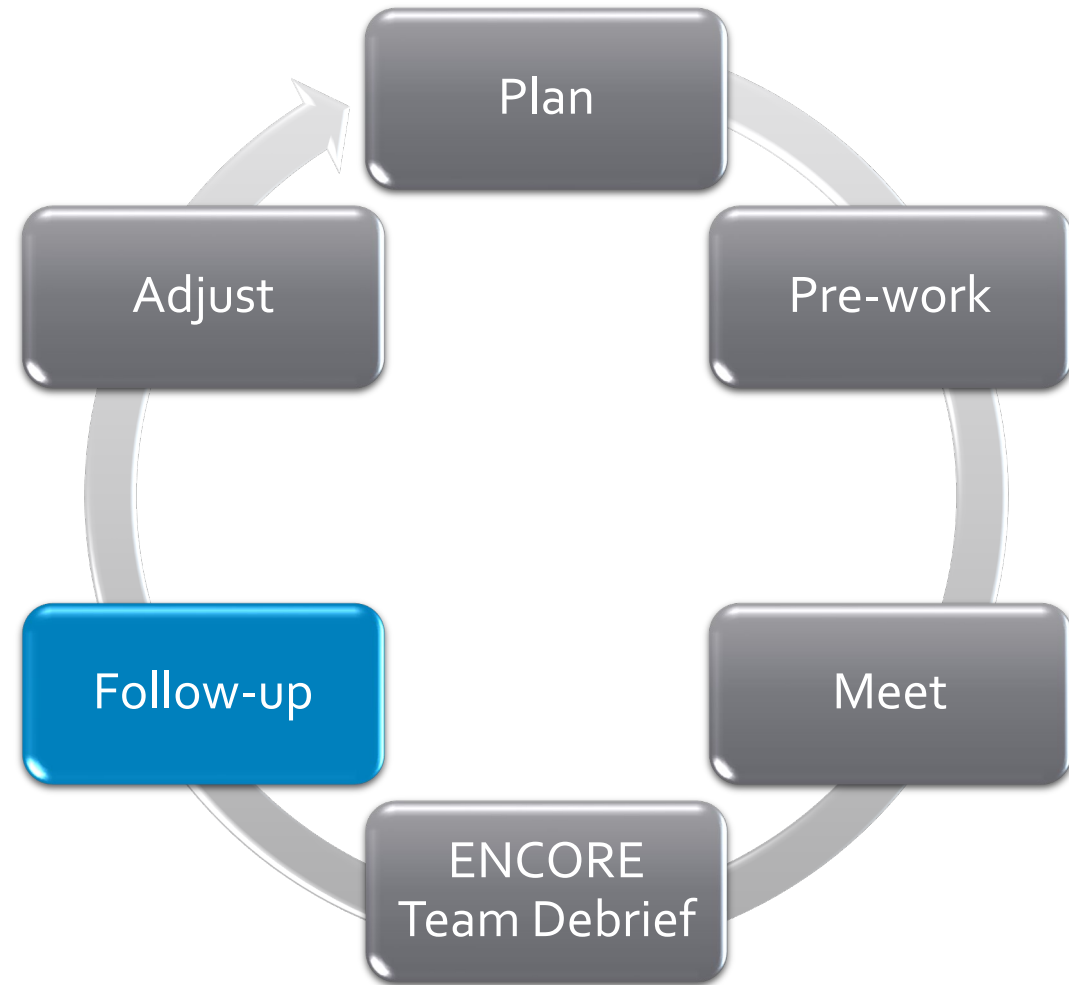
- Virtual meeting software
- Professional facilitation
- Breakout groups & activities

# PROCESS



- Dedicated time directly following meeting where team discussed the tenor, flow and results of meeting
- This may look different based on project needs

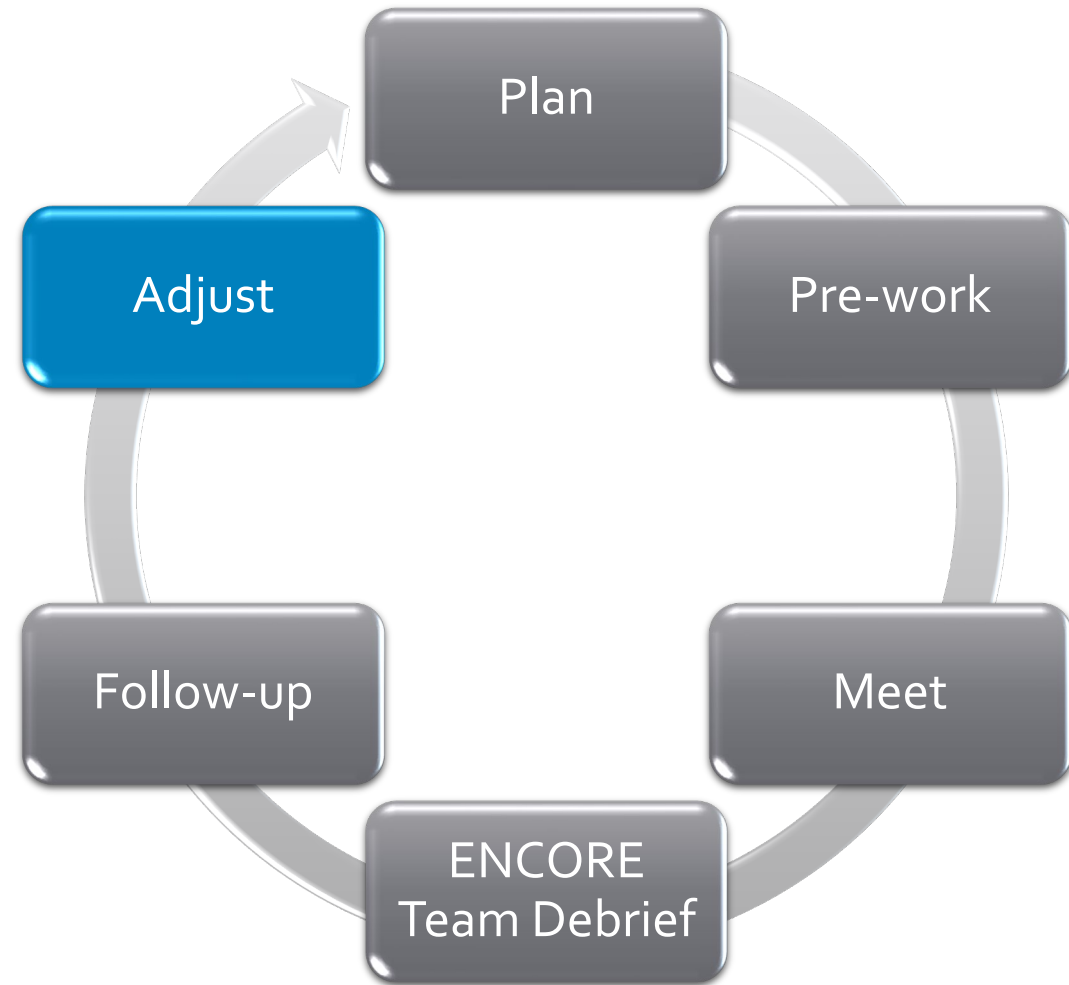
# PROCESS



- Extend engagement via satisfaction survey & occasional requests for feedback and approval of products developed during the meeting
- Distribute meeting notes

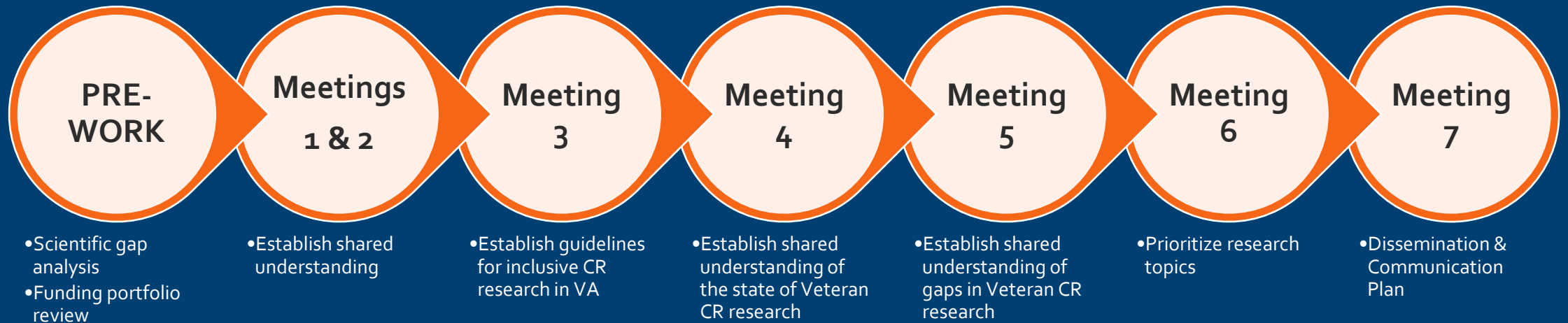


# PROCESS



- Modify approach based on MSP surveys and debrief

# PROCESS



# ELEMENTS OF THE VETERAN CR RESEARCH AGENDA



[Mission, Vision, & Values](#)



[Statement of purpose](#)



[Principles for inclusive Veteran CR research](#)



[MSP-driven working definition of CR](#)



Identified Research Priorities

PROCESS FOR  
DETERMINING  
RESEARCH AGENDA  
PRIORITIES

Generate

Define

Prioritize

Refine

*Let's take a closer  
look at ENCORE's  
MSP in the next few  
slides*

# PROCESS FOR DETERMINING RESEARCH AGENDA PRIORITIES

Generate

Define

Prioritize

Refine

MSP members listed **46 research topics** (projects, questions, and needs) that they believed would advance Veteran CR research.

# PROCESS FOR DETERMINING RESEARCH AGENDA PRIORITIES

Generate

Define

Prioritize

Refine

9 “**areas of inquiry**” ordered from areas with most to the least number of corresponding research topics:

- 1) What services, programs, and interventions improve Veteran community reintegration outcomes?
- 2) What are the predictors of Veteran community reintegration or dis/integration?
- 3) How do Veterans’ families/caregivers and the broader community affect Veteran community reintegration? And how are they impacted?
- 4) How does accessing Veteran community reintegration resources impact suicide prevention?
- 5) Which personal, social, and environmental conditions affect Veteran community reintegration?
- 6) What tools need to be developed to measure Veteran community reintegration processes and risks?
- 7) What are the economic impacts of services, programs, and interventions that support Veteran community reintegration?
- 8) How is Veteran community reintegration defined?
- 9) What is the impact of Veteran services, programs, and interventions that target service members early (i.e. as they transition out of service)?

# PROCESS FOR DETERMINING RESEARCH AGENDA PRIORITIES

Generate

Define

Prioritize

Refine

## 3 Research Priorities

**Which three Areas of Inquiry are most important to advance Veteran CR research?**

➡	1. What services, programs, and interventions improve Veteran community reintegration outcomes?	██████████
⬆	6. What tools need to be developed to measure Veteran community reintegration processes and risks?	██████████
⬆	2. What are the predictors of Veteran community reintegration or dis/integration?	██████
⬆	9. What is the impact of Veteran services, programs, and interventions that target service members early (i.e. as they transition out of service)?	████
➡	5. Which personal, social, and environmental conditions affect Veteran community reintegration?	████
⬆	3. How do Veterans' families/caregivers and the broader community affect Veteran community reintegration? And how are they impacted?	███
⬆	4. How does accessing Veteran community reintegration resources impact suicide prevention?	███
⬆	8. How is Veteran community reintegration defined?	███
⬆	7. What are the economic impacts of services, programs, and interventions that support Veteran community reintegration?	█

Key: ⬆ position on the list increased, ➡ position on the list stayed the same, ⬆ position on the list decreased

Research Priorities (i.e. Priority Areas of Inquiry)	Related Areas of Inquiry
<b>1. What services, programs, and interventions improve Veteran community reintegration outcomes?</b>	7. What are the economic impacts of services, programs, and interventions that support Veteran community reintegration? 4. How does accessing Veteran community reintegration resources impact suicide prevention? – what is the impact on suicide risk? 9. What is the impact of Veteran services, programs, and interventions that target service members early (i.e. as they transition out of service)?
<b>6. What tools need to be developed to measure Veteran community reintegration processes and risks?</b>	8. How is Veteran community reintegration defined?
<b>2. What are the predictors of Veteran community reintegration or dis/integration?</b>	3. How do Veterans' families/caregivers and the broader community affect Veteran community reintegration? And how are they impacted? 5. Which personal, social, and environmental conditions affect Veteran community reintegration?

# PROCESS FOR DETERMINING RESEARCH AGENDA PRIORITIES

Generate

Define

Prioritize

Refine

1. What are the comparative outcomes and costs of Veteran CR services, programs, and interventions at every stage of the CR continuum?
2. What screening tools, clinical assessments, and measures are needed to evaluate Veteran CR processes and risks in clinical and non-clinical settings? And how can these tools be appropriately translated into practice?
3. What are the personal, social, and environmental conditions that predict Veteran community reintegration or dis/integration?



# KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION & COMMUNICATION

Speaking: Karen Besterman-Dahan

# RESEARCH COMMUNICATION GOALS



IMPROVE OR  
CREATE  
POLICY



INFORM  
PRACTICE



INCREASE  
KNOWLEDGE



CREATE A  
SPACE FOR  
RESEARCH  
DIALOGUE



STIMULATE  
INTEREST IN A  
TOPIC



PROMOTE AN  
APPROACH

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

1. Creating and sharing knowledge alone are not enough to ensure research will inform decision-making.
2. Some ways of communicating research are not appropriate and might exclude people.

# SOLUTIONS



USE PUBLIC-  
FACING  
COMMUNICATION  
FORMATS AND  
MESSAGING



VARY  
MESSAGING  
STRATEGIES  
ACCORDING  
TO TARGET  
AUDIENCES



INVOLVE ALL  
STAKEHOLDERS  
EARLY



FORM ENGAGED  
PARTNERSHIPS  
BETWEEN THOSE  
WHO PRODUCE  
RESEARCH AND  
THOSE WHO USE  
IT

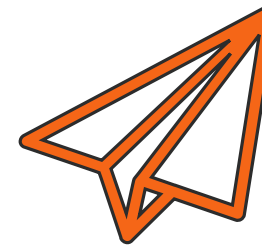
# ENCORE COMMUNICATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



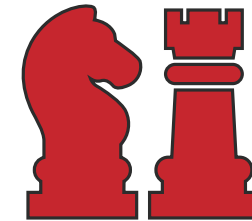
Define target audience



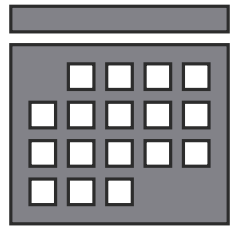
Develop communication goals



Create main messaging

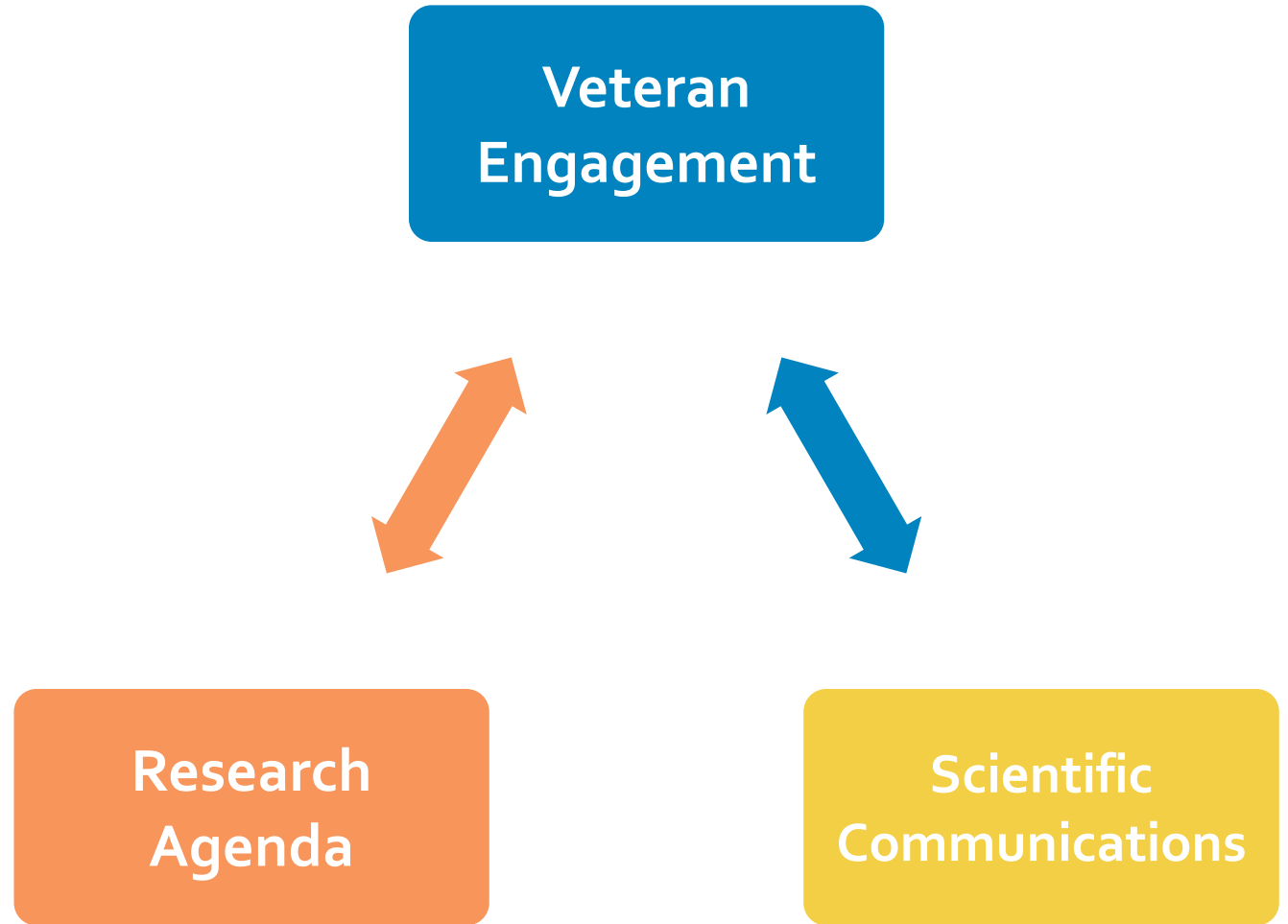


Select communication Strategies



Schedule implementation of strategies

# MSP WORKGROUPS



# COMMUNICATION & DISSEMINATION

## Infographics

- In development

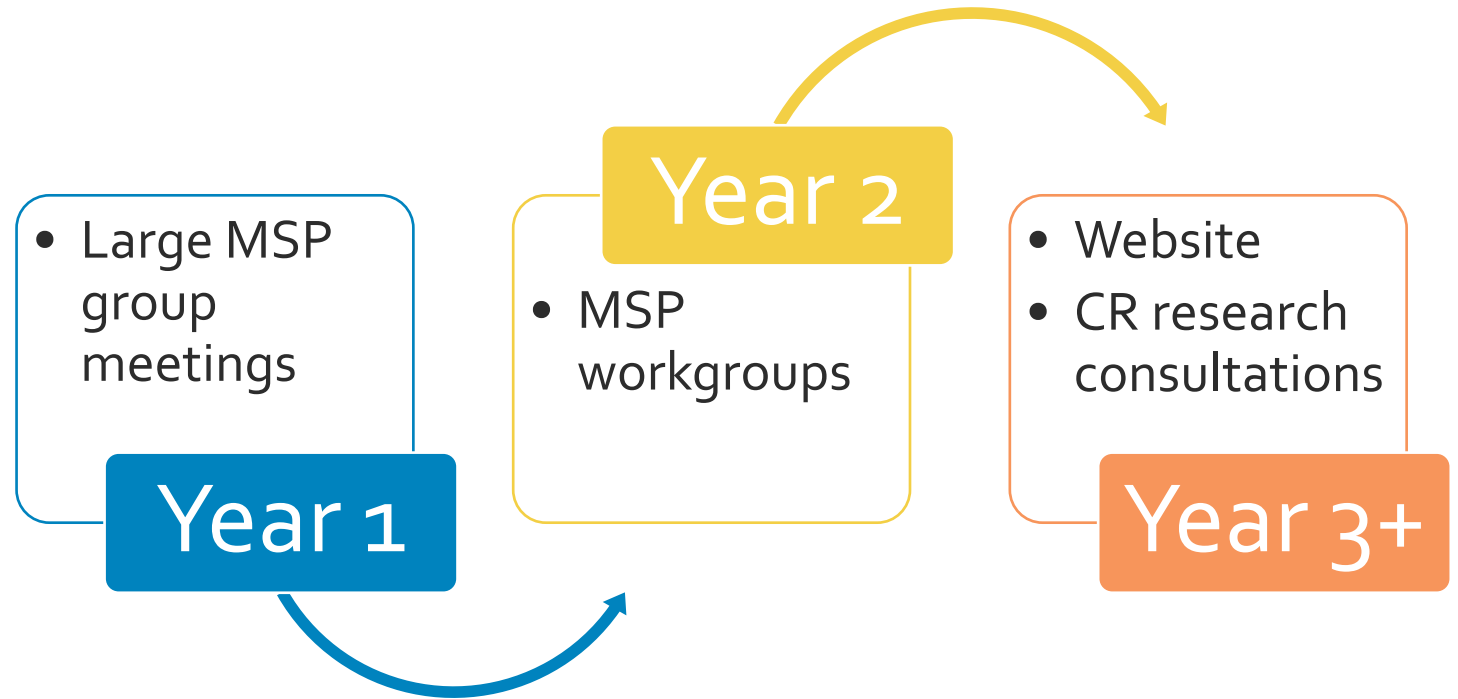
## Presentations

- ACRM Poster - "Enhancing Veteran Community Reintegration Research (ENCORE): A Stakeholder-Engaged Research Agenda Setting Approach"
- SfAA Roundtable - "Room at the Table: Engaging Communities to Enhance Veteran Community Reintegration Research (ENCORE)"

## Manuscript (under review)

- Journal of Veterans Studies - "The Future of Veteran Community Engagement: Perspectives on Engaging Veterans and Other Stakeholders in Research Agenda Setting"

# COMMUNICATION & DISSEMINATION





THANK YOU

# APPENDICES

ENCORE MSP Products

# MSP MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

## Mission

- "To maximize Veteran and family community reintegration by working collaboratively to share information seamlessly, promote innovative research, and inform equitable Veteran policies and programs."

## Vision

- "Every Veteran and their family has the opportunity to live and thrive in their desired community."

## Values

### Collaboration

- We engage stakeholders as partners to make decisions.

### Diversity

- We commit to equitable and inclusive Veteran community reintegration research.

### Innovation

- We promote research that offers creative and resourceful solutions.

### Integrity

- We conduct honest, ethical, and transparent research.

### Veteran-centeredness

- We empower and amplify Veteran voices.

# STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- “The MSP stakeholder engagement process was designed to establish trust, create a sense of legitimacy with regard to the research findings, and encourage the uptake of research findings.<sup>1</sup> The MSP’s Veteran community reintegration research agenda is designed to be inclusive, innovative, & maximally meaningful to all stakeholder groups...There are some important gaps that need to be addressed in the current body of work on Veteran CR. Future research must include diverse populations, standardized measures, and identification of successful CR strategies. ”  
(ENCORE, 2021 pg. 1)

# PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE VETERAN CR RESEARCH

## Principles for Inclusive Veteran CR Research

The MSP developed the following four principles to ensure that research is relevant to the Veteran community (i.e., Veterans, their families and caregivers, Veteran service-providers, and members of the communities in which Veterans live and work). These principles are recommended to guide funders, researchers, and stakeholders as they develop inclusive Veteran CR research.

1. Ensure CR research programs reflect the makeup of the Veteran population (e.g., race, culture, language, etc.).
  - a. Prioritize research that samples women and minority Veterans (American Indian/Alaskan Native Veterans, LGBTQ Veterans, Veterans of Color, religious minorities)
  - b. Promote research that samples geographically diverse participants.
  - c. Invest in research that samples Veterans at risk for adverse social circumstances due to physical or mental health status, employment status, economic status, or legal status.
  - d. Design longitudinal research programs that follow Veterans along the CR continuum.
  - e. Promote research that includes innovative strategies for accessing and sampling Veterans who are not enrolled in the VHA.
2. Focus CR research programs on the interests of the Veteran community, addressing issues that matter to them.
  - a. Invest in research that uses community-based, collaborative, or partnered research methods.
  - b. Support research that includes opportunities to engage the Veteran community in the research process. This can include creating Veteran Engagement Groups, to co-develop research proposals, and data collection procedures, and informing feedback on findings.
3. Access and represent the views and experiences of the communities in which Veterans live and work.
  - a. Identify opportunities to develop research that involves non-Veteran members of Veterans' communities.
  - b. Prioritize research that focuses on or includes Veterans' families and caregivers.
  - c. Prioritize research programs that create and sustain partnerships with other national, state, and local government agencies, community-based Veteran service organizations, non-profits, and businesses.
4. Engage Veterans and members of the community in meaningful dissemination in accessible formats.
  - a. Promote the dissemination of research findings through non-research and non-academic sources.
  - b. Encourage researchers to work with publishers and science journalists to frame research findings in terms of impact.
  - c. Promote the use of Veteran engagement groups and advisory boards to identify 1) how to share the most relevant findings with Veteran communities and 2) preferred information sources.

# PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE VETERAN CR RESEARCH

## Priority Populations to Include in CR Research

### Population Characteristics

- Community
  - Community Service Providers, Community Political Leadership, Community Business Leadership, Community Religious/Spiritual Leadership
- Minority Veterans, examples provided:
  - American Indian/Alaskan Native Veterans, LGBTQ Veterans, Veterans of Color, Religious minorities
- Veteran caregivers
- Veteran family members
- Veterans who are housing unstable
- Veterans who are rural
- Veterans who are unemployed
- Women Veterans

### Veterans with Specific Clinical Needs

- Disability
- Mental Health
- Polytrauma
- PTSD
- SCI/D
- Survivors of MST (military sexual trauma)

### Military Service Characteristics

- Combat deployed
- Military Service Members in the process of separating from military
- Non-combat deployed
- Veterans from specific service era (e.g. post 9/11, Vietnam, etc.)
- Veterans with medical discharge
- Veterans with punitive discharge
- Enlisted service members and officers
- Military branch

### Transition Characteristics

- Incarcerated Veterans (or those at risk of incarceration)
- VA eligible Veterans
- Veterans with no connection to the VA
- Veterans at risk for adverse social circumstances (better define)
- Veterans at specific time points post separation from the military

# PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE VETERAN CR RESEARCH

## Veteran Engagement Barriers & Strategies to Improve the Design of CR Research

MSP Identified Research Engagement Barriers	MSP Identified Strategies
<p>Research instruments and measurement approaches are not very accessible.</p> <p>Some veterans prefer not to engage in research because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they feel like lab rats not partners engaging in research.</li> <li>• they do not understand the importance of their participation in research efforts.</li> <li>• they are wary of working and affiliating with VA.</li> <li>• they are not aware of how research works.</li> </ul>	<p>Improve data collection procedures and instruments to ensure important Veteran subgroups are reached (i.e. Veterans who are not enrolled in VA and some of whom are not VA-eligible populations).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Veteran Engagement Groups.</li> <li>• Establish more direct of communication between Veterans and VA.</li> </ul>
<p>Some Veterans cannot engage in research because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they are incarcerated.</li> <li>• they lack time to commit to research activities.</li> <li>• they experience language barriers.</li> <li>• they lack access to phone and email</li> </ul>	<p>Establish variety of access points for participants to contribute to research.</p>
<p>Findings from research are not accessible to broad audiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers focus on outlets and findings that are significant to the research community, but do not ask veterans about the findings important to them.</li> <li>• Rural veterans who don't have access to libraries, medical journals, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with publishers and science journalists to improve how findings are framed or identify potential misreading prior to releasing findings.</li> <li>• Identify what's important to veterans and use research summaries and policy briefs to focus on research impact.</li> <li>• Disseminate research findings broadly:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Disseminate in military or veteran-specific magazines.</li> <li>◦ Use approach like the "The Conversation" to mobilize knowledge in non-research communities, <a href="https://theconversation.com/ca">https://theconversation.com/ca</a>.</li> <li>◦ NPR StoryCorps <a href="https://storycorps.org/">https://storycorps.org/</a></li> <li>◦ Successful VA model of disseminating information to non-academic and academic audiences: LGBT Health Program. <i>Example:</i> the LGBT Health Program has (1) an <a href="#">information repository</a> with one-page fact sheets, printable posters and hand-outs; (2) LGBT Health Awareness Week to bring attention to the unique health needs of LGBT Americans; and (3) resources to celebrate LGBT Pride Month.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# MSP DRIVEN- WORKING DEFINITION OF CR RESEARCH

*Veteran community reintegration is an individualized process by which a Veteran transitions from one functional role/status to another, sometimes resulting in changes to the Veteran's personal identity. This process can be cyclical and extend across the Veteran's lifetime. The process is collective and necessarily includes the Veteran's family, caregivers, and communities of choice. Successful community reintegration is determined by the Veteran's own goals for achieving wellbeing as they transition; can be challenged by barriers that exist within the Veteran's social, cultural, or environmental context; and requires connection to a broad system of resources and supports.*