



Center for Healthcare Organization and Implementation Research

VERG Veteran Consultant Network Charter

This document provides information on the purpose, function, and processes of the Center for Healthcare Organization and Implementation Research (CHOIR) Veteran Consultant Network (VCN). As needed this document will be reviewed and revised by the Veteran Engagement in Research Group (VERG) Recruitment Network and Development (RND) subcommittee in consultation with CHOIR leadership to incorporate the changing needs and strategic intent of the group.

A. Purpose and Function of the VERG Veteran Consultant Network

Background: In response to the Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) effort on Veteran Engagement in Research, CHOIR convened the Veteran Engagement in Research Group (VERG) tasked with increasing Veteran engagement with CHOIR research. The VERG RND subcommittee has developed the Veteran Consultant Network (VCN), which includes a database of Veterans who may be interested in participating as consultants on CHOIR research projects, quality improvement projects, and/or VERG subcommittees [hereafter referred to as research projects].

Purpose: In keeping with HSR&D recommendations and principles of patient engagement in research, Veteran perspectives should be incorporated into all phases of research projects to help shape the Veteran Health Administration's (VHA) research endeavors and ultimately improve the care provided to Veterans. The VCN connects Investigators to Veterans who are willing and have been screened to serve as consultants on CHOIR research projects and/or other CHOIR Veteran engagement activities (e.g. serving on the CHOIR VERG Stakeholder Council).

Function of the VCN: The Veteran Consultant Network is an avenue for Veterans to participate actively in the planning, direction, conduct, and conclusion of research as consultant partners with Principal Investigators (PIs) and study teams on one or more research and/or Veteran engagement projects. The VCN coordinator will administer a brief screening questionnaire to collect contact information and assess interests and skills of interested Veterans. The Coordinator will maintain a database of updated Veteran information. To maintain privacy and security of interested Veterans, the database will be stored on a restricted folder on the VERG SharePoint that is only accessible to the VCN Coordinator [and RND members in both Boston and Bedford]. Additional information about the Veteran consultant, such as specific scheduling or contact information changes, will be communicated to the VCN Coordinator by study staff as needed so the database is up to date and complete.

This database of Veterans, who have demonstrated interest in collaborative research projects, is to be used for consultant purposes for research projects only. This includes giving feedback, reviews, advice,

and insight on projects on a short-term, ad hoc basis, or for the entire duration of a research project, as determined by the requesting PI. The VCN Coordinator will have sole access to the secure Veteran Consultant Network database, ensuring that this group of Veterans is not to be used as a study participant recruitment pool.

While the Stakeholder Council provides guidance to the overall strategic direction of CHOIR and its research areas, the VCN is designed to match Veterans to Investigators to provide guidance on specific research and/or Veteran engagement projects.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

Veteran Consultant Roles and Responsibilities: The role of the Veteran consultant will be to contribute their unique viewpoint to enhance research projects during all phases of research. Veterans may be required to do specific VA and/or research training sessions, as well as a 1-2 hour orientation on engaging in CHOIR research. They will work with the study groups to have materials and be prepared for meetings. More specific roles and responsibilities will be determined by the PI heading the project.

Principal Investigator Roles and Responsibilities: It is the responsibility of the PI to meet with the Veterans they believe may be a good fit for their research project(s), based upon the information in the VCN repository. The PI will determine which Veteran(s) they would like to participate as a consultant on their study. The PI and/or their research staff will coordinate training of their Veteran consultant(s), so they may adhere to requirements set forth by the training committee. Having a clear vision for the role of the Veteran consultant(s) will help keep roles organized and on track; however, allowing room for change as the project evolves will also be necessary. The PI will clearly communicate goals of the research project throughout its life cycle, as well as roles and responsibilities for the Veteran consultant.

VCN Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities: The VCN Coordinator will be the main point of contact for Veterans and study staff across both Bedford and Boston CHOIR campuses and will be responsible for administrative and evaluation duties for the VCN. Administrative tasks will include Veteran screening questionnaire administration, maintenance and development of VERG's Veterans Consultant Network (VCN) database. Other administrative duties include organizing monthly meetings with the VCN team and reporting to VERG. Evaluation duties include checking in with Veterans and investigators after initial connection and more formally on an annual basis following the start of a project. He/she will also participate in recruitment activities as needed..

While the VCN Coordinator is not responsible for training of Veteran consultants, he/she will act as the liaison between Veteran consultants and the requesting PI/Training subcommittee to facilitate a smooth transition for the onboarding process. The VCN Coordinator is not responsible for supervising Veterans or for ensuring they are compensated once a grant has been awarded; those responsibilities will lie with the Principal Investigator (PI).

VCN Outreach Specialists(s): Each campus will have a VCN Outreach Specialist whose primary responsibilities will include identifying opportunities to recruit Veterans into the VCN and organizing staff to assure attendance at identified events. The VCN Outreach Specialists will keep recruitment

materials up-to-date and assure that staff attending events are prepared with recruitment materials and contact information for the VCN Coordinator. They will participate in monthly meetings with the VCN Coordinator and report to VERG regularly on recruitment efforts.

Research and Network Development Subcommittee Roles and Responsibilities: This group of CHOIR volunteers will meet periodically (monthly or quarterly) with the VCN Coordinator and VERG leadership to advise on VCN policy and practices. The RND Subcommittee will also conduct review and gather feedback from Veterans, PIs, and the VCN Coordinator during the first year for quality improvement purposes.

C. Process for Connecting VCN Veterans to CHOIR Projects

While Veteran consultants may contribute to any part of a CHOIR project, it is strongly encouraged that PIs include the Veteran consultants in their proposals and planning.

Projected steps for CHOIR Investigators to involve Veteran consultants are as follows:

1. Proposal planning: PIs who are planning submissions and would like Veteran consultants should contact the VCN Coordinator to identify at least two Veterans who can participate in proposal planning. The VCN Coordinator will choose a small set (no more than 6 Veterans) of potential Veteran consultants from the VCN database who may be a suitable fit for the research group, based on information gained from the screening questionnaire about availability, skills, and interests. It is then up to the PI and their team to reach out to each Veteran, select the Veterans who will consult on the project, schedule a time to meet, and begin the onboarding process as determined by their specific project needs and guidance from the VERG Training Subcommittee. Investigators are expected to hold consultative meetings with Veterans over the course of proposal planning and writing. Veterans are anticipated to be influential partners in all aspects of proposal planning (e.g. identification of a topic of need, narrowing of the research question, development of specific aims, selection of research methods including design, measures, recruitment procedures, and the design of dissemination activities). Training will be available for both the Investigators and Veteran consultants for this activity. We anticipate that Veteran consultants will assist for 1-2 hours per month on average during the proposal planning period.

Submitted proposals should provide a clear description of how Veteran consultant partners will contribute throughout the study and a budget for Veteran engagement (see below, D. Budget and Compensation). A variety of designs are possible from minimal and infrequent consultation to full involvement as co-Investigators. Investigators can consult with VERG leadership for guidance. A typical method would be to employ Veterans as consultants on the grant and have them participate in monthly or periodic meetings with Investigators and project staff. It is recommended that at least two Veterans are engaged to promote camaraderie and facilitate sharing opinions with numerous study staff. Ultimately, this will be determined by the needs and budget of each individual PI. During these meetings, PIs will review project activities and seek participation and guidance from Veterans on project decision points.

2. Study conduct: When a project which requires Veteran engagement is planned, Investigators are expected to contact the VCN to identify and recruit Veterans who can consult as part of the study team over the course of the study. While it may be preferred to involve the same Veterans who participated in proposal planning, this may not be possible. Upon recruitment as study consultants, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) is suggested to be reviewed and signed by the Veteran and Investigator. The MOU details the expected frequency and method of involvement, compensation, and grievance procedures. A description of the MOU and a sample copy is available from the VERG. Training will be available for both Investigators and Veterans to ensure a valuable and successful practice of Veteran engagement. The VERG Training Subcommittee will provide orientation for Investigators and Veterans about general best practices for collaboration while the Investigator will be responsible for training specific to their research project.

D. Budget and Compensation

1. Pre-Grant versus Grant-funded Compensation: The VCN Coordinator will assist Veteran consultants with initializing the payment system (TBD) for any pre-grant/proposal work that is done. This compensation will be drawn from a pool of funds made available from a VERG SIP grant (Hyde). Veteran consultants will also need to be compensated for the time it takes to set up the compensation process (estimated at 2 hours). Upon award of the proposed project funding, the amount spent on pre-grant Veteran consultation should be given back to contribute to the VERG fund for future grant preparation. Once a research project has become funded, it will be the responsibility of the PI and study team members to take over compensation activities, ensuring each Veteran consultant is compensated directly from their individual grant.

2. Veteran Compensation: Veterans willing to commit to and participate as consultants on research projects shall be compensated \$25 per hour for their time on projects. There is a \$2500 cap per year for each Veteran consultant as per vendor requirements, across all projects.. There is no limit on the number of CHOIR projects that can hire Veterans Consultants through the network.

3. PI/Study Project Budget: The budget should include compensation for hours that were spent on planning the proposal. Veterans will need to be paid for reviewing materials beforehand, travel time, and time spent on phone calls or in meetings.

E. Grievances. A process for grievances is specified in the MOU.

VERG RND Budget & Justification

VCN Coordinator

The VCN Coordinator will be the main point of contact and will be responsible for administrative duties for the VCN. Administrative tasks will include maintenance and enhancement of VERG's Veterans Consultant Network (VCN) database and recruitment and referral activities, which will span both Bedford and Boston CHOIR campuses. In the remaining months of FY17, we estimate that more time

will be required by the VCN Coordinator to establish processes as well as to screen and record responses for the Veterans who have already expressed interest in serving as consultants. We estimate that a 6 hours/week (15%FTE) would be required. These are estimates and we suggest they be reviewed by the incumbent, VERG leadership and the ELT as the tasks, CHOIR needs for Veteran consultants, and time actually spent by the VCN Coordinator become clearer. The assignment of VCN coordinator duties should be clearly stated understanding that offset of other administrative duties may be necessary to allow sufficient time.

Veteran Consultants

There will be a network of Veteran consultants available to Principal Investigators (PIs) to assist with projects. They will be paid \$25 per hour up to a maximum of \$2500/year. They will be paid for the prep time before the meeting as well as time spent meeting. We suggest that a pool be created which is initially funded by the Center to cover the costs of Veterans participating in the pre-funding (grant proposal) process until such time as the pool is financed by funded proposals. Once a project has been funded, it is the responsibility of the PI to pay for the Veteran consultant at the established rate from their grant.

Veteran Reimbursement Costs for the remainder of FY17 are estimated based on 5 projects each wanting 2 Veteran members to meet monthly for five months for a total of 10 hours/project in the pre-planning stage. In addition, each of these Veteran Consultants will need to do some training to participate in the proposal process (e.g. what is research) and we estimate each Veteran consultant would need two hours of training. For pre-funding activities we project:

FY17: 10 Veteran consultants for 12 hours/project @ \$25/hour = \$3000.

FY18: 20 Veteran consultants for 12 hours/project @ \$25/hour = \$6000.

VCN Coordinator Responsibilities:

WEEKLY TASKS	FY17 (for remaining 6 months)	FY18
Maintain secure VCN database with contact, communication (frequency of CHOIR contact with Veteran, past/current projects consulting on), and screening information (Veteran interests, skills, availability).	15 min/week	15 min/week
Answer dedicated phone line for inquiries from interested Veterans and maintain contact/message log within database.	60 min/week	30 min/week
Administer screening instrument to interested Veterans and update VCN database (approximately 45 minutes/person).	120 min/week (will decrease after initial people are screened and the network is up and running.)	60 min/week
Maintain and update database of community Veteran Service Organization (VSO) contacts, Voluntary Service staff, and other Veteran group leaders for Veteran consultant recruitment.	15 min/week	15 min/week
Recruitment/Marketing activities to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop marketing materials about VERG RND - Email VSOs, Voluntary Service staff, and Veterans groups - Visit community partners such as Veteran Service Organization (VSO) leaders, Voluntary Service staff, and other Veteran group leaders at their community events or at scheduled presentations to share VERG's mission and expand Veteran Consultant recruitment - Attend local VA recruitment events (e.g., Wednesday morning coffees, Crossroads events at Bedford, etc.) 	90 min/week	60 min/week
Coordinate with VERG training committee so that Veterans consultants and Investigators have appropriate training	15 min/week	15 min/week
Veteran Consultant Compensation: Coordinate with project study staff and CHOIR administration to activate and ensure Veteran compensation during project proposal development	45 min/week	90 min/week
Estimated Weekly total:	6 hrs/week	4.75 hrs/week
LESS FREQUENT, BUT IMPORTANT TASKS		
Field requests from PIs for Veteran Consultant support, matching Veteran(s) to projects based on database information and project needs	[120 min/year]	[240 min/year]
Assist with creation and implementation of evaluation plan of Veteran Consultant involvement, with feedback from Veteran Consultants and PIs	[120 min/year]	[120 min/year]