

Case Example: Veteran Consultants on Individual Research Studies



Organization

The Denver Research Engagement Board of the Denver VAMC engages with two different research centers within the same hospital. Providing unique military background, health conditions, and health consumer perspective to a wide variety of research topics. The research centers involved and their missions are provided below.

- Center of Innovation for Veteran-Centered and Value Driven Care (COIN) Mission: Conduct high quality health services research that promotes Veteran-centered and value-driven care, generate and disseminate knowledge that contributes to the well-being of Veterans, work collaboratively with VA policy and operational leaders to implement research findings into clinical care, and train the next generation of health services researchers and leaders.
- Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECC) for Suicide Prevention Mission: Study suicide with the goal of reducing suicidal ideation and behaviors in the Veteran population. Towards this end, the work of the MIRECC is focused on promising clinical interventions, as well as the cognitive and neurobiological underpinnings of suicidal thoughts and behaviors that may lead to innovative prevention strategies.

Mission Statement

In order to promote Veteran community engagement, patient-centered research and translation of Veteran Health Administration research findings in practice and community settings, this Board will work in partnership with, and provide recommendations to researchers throughout the research process, from topic generation to dissemination and implementation of results.

Who is involved?

- Engagement Board Liaison: Both Research Center's provide a Liaison to provide administrative duties and coordination for the board. The Liaison is the main point of contact for Veterans and study staff at each Center. Their responsibilities include coordinating recruitment with Veterans, schedule investigator meetings, taking meeting notes, communicating with both Veterans and Investigators around meetings, collecting evaluations, coordinating Veterans needs and technical needs for meetings. Estimated time/effort once board is established is 4-7 hours monthly including meeting time.
- Veteran Board Members: Veteran board members contribute their unique individual viewpoint to enhance research projects during all phases of research. Veterans receive a 2-hour orientation to both research centers, a research 101 and information on responsibilities involved in being a Veteran Engagement Board member.
- Investigators and Research Teams: It is the responsibility of the PI to reach out to the Liaisons to secure a date, receive consultation, and coordinate materials for meetings. The investigator is expected to teach Veterans and collaborators and peers during the engagement meeting and coordinate communication with the board through the Liaison.
- Outside Facilitator: The outside facilitator is an unbiased moderator for the meetings. They are responsible to check in with meeting attendees, scan/read the room, check time, ensure both Veterans and Investigators questions are answered, record themes, and provide synthesis of the meeting.

How it Works

Prior to the meeting

1. Investigators who would like Veteran Engagement on their research projects and grant submissions contact the Liaison about project/timeline and to secure a meeting date.
2. Once date secured they are required to submit research materials (abstract, grant proposal / protocol, background information that may be helpful and 2-3 specific questions) more than one month in advance of scheduled meetings
3. Liaison then review the submitted materials to help investigator target questions, refine language and provide guidance on the process.
4. The Liaison provides the materials provided to the board members one month prior to the meeting so that Veteran members have time to review information, do their own research, ask questions to the investigator and prepare for the meeting.

At the meeting

1. The Board members take the first 15 minutes for administrative work and to discuss the project amongst themselves with the liaison and outside facilitator prior to the meeting. This allows for them to get feedback from one another and encourages them to bring up concerns they may have and formulate how to articulate that with the investigator.
2. The investigator joins the meeting. Introductions take place, the investigator presents the project and discusses with the board all aspects of the project that may come up as well as the specific questions asked.
3. The Investigator leaves the meeting and the last 15 minutes the Veterans discuss the project and the interaction with the investigator.

After the meeting

1. Evaluations are given to both Veterans and the Investigator. Both the Veterans and the Investigator receive meeting notes.
2. The Investigator is asked to provide feedback on how their project has changed or adapted from the interaction with the Veteran Engagement Board for the Veterans to review one week after the meeting.
3. At the next meeting the board members agree to the type of interaction and choose to issue a Letter of Support based on how the Investigator responded to the feedback.
4. The Investigator is asked to provide 6 and 12 months follow up about the project that will be provided to the Veterans.

Compensation

Veteran consultants are compensated \$599 annually, this compensation covers 12 two-hour meetings and any work needed to review documents prior to the meeting.

Evaluation

Both Veterans and Investigators fill out an adapted Wilder Collaborative Inventory to gauge power dynamics, engagement, collaboration, and trust, and awareness. The Veterans discuss where the interaction fell on a Research Engagement Continuum, and the Investigator fills out a 1 week, 6 months and 12 months follow up surveys that ask how they adapted or changed their project from the engagement. Changes include identifying what part of research was impacted and how. This information is provided back to the Veteran members.

Please reach out to Kelty.Fehling@va.gov or Leah.Wendleton@va.gov for more information or with any questions.