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# ***Session #3: Strategies for the Development of Mentoring Plans for CDA Applicants***

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**VA HSR&D CDA Enhancement Program Cyberseminar**

April 2016

# Poll Question #1

- **Have you already identified a primary mentor for your planned CDA application?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
  - I am a prospective CDA mentor



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# Poll Question #2

- **Do you anticipate having to reach out to engage a “distance mentor” (i.e., a mentor at another VA or non-affiliated university)?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
  - Don’t know



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# Purpose of Session #3

- **Last time...**
  - Focus on strategies for development of **Career Plans** for prospective CDA applicants
  - Career Plan as important as Research Plan
- **This time...**
  - Focus on identification of mentor(s) and mentoring plan



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# Reminder of CDA Evaluation Criteria

- Nominee's professional background and productivity
- Appropriateness of the research and training plans presented
- **Suitability of proposed mentors in relation to nominee's goals**
- Relevance of planned research to VA
- Feasibility and merit of planned research
- Anticipated long-term contributions to VA



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# CDA Proposal Workshop (Oct 2014)

## *Finding a Mentor(s)*

- Reminded prospective applicants that finding a mentor(s) is the **very 1<sup>st</sup> step to take**
- Applicants at COIN/HSR&D Centers have an advantage
  - Degree of institutional support can make a difference at non-HSR&D Center sites (e.g., facility director, ACOS/R&D)
- Noted that most CDAs have 3-4 formal mentors
- At least one must be on-site at the VA (preferably 1<sup>o</sup>)
- HSR&D has no matchmaking service for mentoring\*



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\*Exception is Women's Health Research Network  
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# VA Mentoring Plan Instructions

**3 pages** to summarize entire mentoring plan:

- Identify all mentors, consultants, and collaborators involved with proposed research and career development program
- Briefly describe their roles, anticipated contributions, and interactions with respect to the career development plan
- Describe respective areas of expertise and how they will be combined and coordinated to enhance your career development



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Should be Associate Professor level or higher**
  - Assistant Professor primary mentor will generally be seen as too junior, not enough of a track record
- **Best if mentor already has a CDA mentoring track record** (but everyone has to start somewhere)
  - What is your prospective mentor's track record of mentorship (CDAs, fellows, others; success rate)?
  - If none, how can your mentor make the case that he/she is ready, understands work required, has connections needed to help you succeed?



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **1° mentor typically someone w/significant VA HSR&D (and/or QUERI) track record**
  - Knows how to successfully develop and get VA grants funded, knows VA healthcare system
- **1° mentor typically at your VA**
  - Provides links to local/institutional resources, capable of negotiating on your behalf
- **1° mentor does not have to be expert in your research area, but should be completely committed to your career success**



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Should demonstrate collaboration and/or connection w/primary and/or other mentors**
  - Example: coauthored papers, other collaboration
  - Evidence of commitment to applicant, evidence of engagement in writing LOI and application
- **1° mentor(s) letter(s) should demonstrate reasons and where possible evidence of commitment (these are not 1-2 page letters)**



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Other Research Services (e.g., Biomedical & Laboratory) may rely on a single 1° mentor**
  - Rare for HSR&D CDA to have only 1 mentor
  - HSR&D is a multidisciplinary “team sport” and your research plan likely to span range of methods, disciplines and areas of expertise
  - Should identify mentors, consultants and collaborators whose roles map to your research and career plans



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Types of additional mentors and others will vary depending on several factors:**
  - Type of applicant
    - MD or PhD, discipline, academic department
    - Nature of local or national VA programs with which applicant is likely to be involved
  - Methods involved in research plan
    - If include qualitative aims, who will mentor you?
    - If focused on sophisticated analysis, who will troubleshoot problems with you?
    - If involves a novel method, who will guide you?



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Can you have too many mentors? Yes**
  - Committee will get concerned if you are at the center of too large a “cast of characters” – run risk of spending too much time managing people
  - Primary mentor should be in a position to help run interference, help you prioritize input, help you negotiate disagreements in approach or plan
  - Every mentor, consultant or collaborator **MUST** have an identifiable role (may dial in and out)



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Can you have too few mentors? Yes**
  - One person cannot be all things to all people
  - 2-3 mentors okay but then clarify resources in environment, how readily they may be accessed
  - Possible that training plan (e.g., courses) may be sufficient for some skill-building (i.e., course professor may become link to method)



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **Are distance mentors okay? Yes**
  - Again, primary should be at your location
  - Not every VA or Center has access to every kind of expertise, so distance mentors may be necessary
    - Best to be able to demonstrate history of successful collaboration from a distance, add credibility
    - Clarify approach for maintaining quality of distance mentoring (e.g., email, in-person opportunities, video conferences, already have coauthored papers, confs)
    - If too many distance mentors, concerns may arise



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# Mentorship Team Examples

- **Candidate #1: Women's health access**
  - 1° VA-based MD professor and head of GIM
  - 2° University-based vulnerable pop expert
  - 3° VA-based content expert (later on)
- **Candidate #2: Falls prevention**
  - 1° VA-based MD professor and head of GIM
  - 2° VA-based geriatrician health services researcher
  - Advisory Board (consulting mentors who meet as a group intermittently, incl GRECC, university)
    - Represents key expertise needed, program heads



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# Mentorship Team Examples

- **Candidate #3: Women's health equity**
  - 1° VA-based Center director (no content expertise)
  - Co 1° VA-based content expert (distance mentor)
  - 2° Local university based content expert
  - 3° Nationally recognized content expert
- **Candidate #4: Nursing and hospital quality**
  - 1° VA-based Center director w/history of relevant content
  - 2° VA-based Center leader with history of mentoring candidates
  - 3° University-based expert in nursing quality
  - 3° VA-based expert in implementation science, nursing



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# Mentorship Team Examples

- **Candidate #5: Women and SUD care**
  - 1° VA Center leader with WH expertise (no SUD)
  - 2° SUD QUERI link (distance mentor)
  - Co 2° VA qualitative methods expert (local mentor)
- **Candidate #6: Smoking cessation**
  - 1° VA-based smoking cessation HSR&D expert with existing track record with candidate
  - Co 1° VA-based implementation expert with existing track record with candidate



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# Mentorship Team Examples

- **Improving care of Veterans with complex physical health conditions, MH and SUD**
  - 1° primary care/PACT MD, HSR&D, QUERI tracks
  - Co 1° psychiatrist, implementation scientist
  - 2° healthcare epidemiologist, implementation
  - Content mentor anthropologist
  - National PC/PACT leadership consulting mentor
  - National PC-MHI leadership consulting mentor



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# Identification of Mentor(s)

- **No fixed “right” formula**
- **Put together best team for you, your career plan, and your research plan**
- **Plan well in advance – no one likes being asked to be someone’s mentor at 11<sup>th</sup> hour**
  - Recognize that someone who is taking mentorship seriously will want to read your application, time for writing a good letter, etc.



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# Roles, Contributions, Interactions

- **Roles will vary**
  - Overall mentorship/guidance, troubleshooting
  - Content mentorship (e.g., disciplinary expertise, methodological experience/expertise)
  - Academic links (e.g., support for promotion, gets you access to needed courses, other resources)
  - Department/service links (e.g., position continuity, access to clinical settings for research conduct)
  - Program partners (VAMC, VISN, VHA...)



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# Roles, **Contributions**, Interactions

- **Contributions opportunity to be specific**
  - May include access to data
  - May include ability to spinoff of existing project
  - May include unique expertise/insights on particular project or theoretical framework for entire CDA application
  - May include resources from a Center, your VAMC, your VISN, your affiliate, a program office, etc.



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# Roles, Contributions, **Interactions**

- **Specify interactions with each mentor**
  - Time that will be spent (e.g., # hours/week, frequency of meetings per month)
  - Type of interactions (e.g., ongoing meetings on existing projects, office nearby so many informal meetings, email, calls, videoconference, in-person)
  - Nature of interactions (e.g., content, approach)
  - Timeline (e.g., dial in for specific project or method vs. consistent interactions throughout CDA)



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# Respective Areas of Expertise

- **May include type of clinician, type of social scientist, history of experience/expertise**
- **May include PI-ship of key studies directly related to CDA research plan**
  - Example: led stepped wedge study, cluster RCT
  - Example: led seminal study in topic area
- **May include track record (refer to biosketch)**
- **May include other types of expertise/support**



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# Management of Mentoring

- **Instructions describe this as “how they will be combined and coordinated...”**
  - Idea is that there should be a plan for how you will interact with these folks in a meaningful and doable way
  - Who will be involved in what activities and when?
  - How often will you meet with them individually, as a group? How will you handle discrepant input?



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# Distinguish yourself...

- **Topic may be aligned with 1+ mentor(s) but...**
  - Make sure your research plan does not look like you are doing your mentor's research – this is NOT a fellowship and you are not being funded to work for your mentor
  - Make sure your pathway establishes you as a distinct and independent investigator
  - Committee sensitive to continuing in supporting role on mentors' projects vs. pursuing indep work



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# Mentoring Environment

- **Best scenario:**
  - Your interests = COIN’s focused or emerging area
- **Best scenario but with non-COIN “home”**
  - Your interests = GRECC, MIRECC, PADRECC, QUERI or other group’s strategic priorities (“fit”)
  - COIN’s ability to help you may be limited by their lack of expertise in your interest area
  - Need to demonstrate acceptance by “home”



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# Mentoring Environment

- **What if your interests are not related to your COIN or other group's expertise/interests?**
  - Example: University has right expertise/links
  - Still need primary VA mentor
  - Possible to use non-VA mentor as co- or 2° mentor
  - Are your interests amenable to adaptation to fit environment's strengths?
    - Try not to over-torque yourself → Committee picks up on square peg trying to fit in round hole
    - Possible this isn't the right fit → consider relocation, different type of career development experience, other strategy



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# Reminder

- **All of this information must fit in 3 pages!**
  - Will require iterative drafts
  - Will require honing qualifications of your mentors down to the key points
  - The more mentors, consultants and collaborators you list, the less space you will have to describe each of them, their roles, contributions, etc.
  - Letters of support may be used to augment plan
    - But make certain letters match mentoring plan (disagreements between sources raise red flags)



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# Meet w/Mentors Early & Often

- **It is never too soon to start thinking about this**
- **Most applicants are not funded 1<sup>st</sup> time**
  - But nearly 40% used to be funded by time of 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> submissions) eventually...this may be changing
- **Mentors may recommend at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour that you not submit → why?**
  - If not 100% ready for primetime, submission could hurt you (only have 3 shots at this)
- **Consider your own (and your mentors') competing demands and timeline**
  - Applications are “all hands on deck” experiences



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# Next Seminar

- Development of research plan, including detailed review of instructions and examples



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# Questions?



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