

Cyberseminar CREATE/COIN 101 Q&A 11/28 Session

Q: The structure of the CREATES suggest that larger sites with many investigators have a competitive advantage over smaller sites with fewer investigators, shorter histories of funding, and less diverse research portfolios. Is there any discussion of developing multiple CREATE mechanisms with various sizes in terms of budget and expectations in terms of scope?

A: One of the core concepts of the CREATES is collaboration across medical centers. The CREATE can consist of three to five projects, with a principal investigator (PI) located at a medical center other than the main VA Medical Center (VAMC) to which the CREATE director is attached. For example, a CREATE may consist of three projects: two projects might be based at the primary VAMC, and the other project would be based at an adjunct medical center. This type of structure (supporting two or three smaller projects as opposed one larger project) may also offer a competitive advantage in a tight budgetary environment.

With regard to the number of investigators developing the CREATE submission, it's true that a smaller core team may have a harder time putting together a submission than a larger team. However, for those smaller teams, it's very important to note that the HSR&D Investigator Initiated Research (IIR) and Service Directed Research (SDR) programs are still available and should be leveraged.

Q: What are examples of the different health system partners referred to in the CREATE projects?

A: Partners are people who develop clinical policy—CMOs, QMOs, for example—and those who have broader responsibility for directing healthcare to Veterans. More generally (at the Central Office or VISN level) partners include those with programs and operations interests.

Q: If a VAMC has a number of collaborative research projects going on, will it be necessary to have a CREATE when applying for a COIN?

A: No. (Note: *The COIN submission is approximately one year out and is currently undergoing concurrence within the Office of Research & Development. It is expected that the solicitation will be available online sometime during January 2012.*)

Q: Does a CREATE application for the December 2011 submission need a letter of support from each co-investigator?

A: No. The criteria for letters of support are the same as a “regular” research project, such as an IIR.

Q: The presentation indicated that the CREATE application for the second solicitation must involve projects from more than one medical center. Is this a change from the initial solicitation? Further, could an application involve a PI from only one VAMC, but co-investigators from other medical centers?

A: First, there has been no change from the initial solicitation. It's always been an important element that the PI be based at more than one medical center, as an underlying concept (of the CREATE) is to foster cross-center collaboration.

Second, if the submission team believes that all of the necessary investigators are located at only one medical center, it is conceivable that the submission criteria could be met (i.e., having a PI from only one VAMC, with co-investigators from other medical centers.) The CREATE concept is so new and while the details and elements have been carefully considered, they are not perfect yet. It may take two or three rounds to fully refine the solicitation, and that has advantages—one of them being ability to consider these kinds of alternatives and modify future solicitations.

Q: The current and planned programs favor VAMCs with existing HSRD programs. What are the mechanisms that smaller groups should use to expand their HSRD programs?

A: This is a good general question, and certainly we understand that one needs investigators in order to have a program, and in order to have investigators, a team needs support from both the VAMC and academic affiliate leadership. Early steps are for the investigators at the VAMC to get together and involve their own leadership, as well as the leaders at the academic affiliate to figure out how to develop and gradually expand the program.

With regard to investigators at a small VAMC becoming involved in a CREATE, they should reach out to another academic medical center to see if the academic team might play a role in the CREATE, particularly since one of the submission criteria is cross-medical center investigator collaboration. There are travel funds available to groups of investigators who develop a core idea and wish to meet with their potential partners to discuss the CREATE concept in preparation for the February 2012 submission. There will only be one request per fund per medical center, and the request for travel funds must be routed through the ACOS for research; that means the investigators must all collaborate before submitting for travel funds.