

Task Order for Service Initiated Project (SIP) on Veteran Engagement at the Research Center Level

Announcement. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development (ORD) announces an opportunity for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities to compete for service initiated project (SIP) support by the Health Services Research & Development Service (HSR&D) in ORD to identify best practices for engaging Veterans (and other stakeholders) within the VA and to develop tools and resources to assist other ORD research teams in Veteran engagement endeavors. Detailed instructions for preparing and submitting applications are provided below.

Background. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is undergoing a major reorganization to transform the way it provides services for its Veterans nationally. Moreover, the reorganization under [MyVA](#) includes new initiatives designed to emphasize Veteran engagement, shared VA services (e.g., combining health care, benefits, and customer service), and Veteran centered care as emphasized in the VHA [Blueprint for Excellence](#), with the goal of enhancing access and quality. Similarly, approaches stemming from Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute PCORI as well as other funding agencies, such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), have focused on the importance of engaging critical stakeholders in elements of research, including topic prioritization, study design, and the dissemination of findings. Consensus is emerging that engaging stakeholders in the design, collection, and analysis of research studies improves the relevance of findings to the public, as well as the uptake and dissemination of those findings.

In January 2015, the Director of HSR&D convened a Veteran Engagement Workgroup to focus on ways to best incorporate Veteran input in research and to better foster engagement. This Workgroup was divided into 4 subgroups tasked with exploring the (1) conceptual foundations of Veteran engagement, (2) approaches to health experience research, (3) transformations ensuring engagement at the level of the individual proposal, and (4) exploring processes to engage Veterans at the Center level. The [final report](#) from the Veteran Engagement Workgroup provides a conceptual model and insights, findings, and recommendations for enhancing Veterans' engagement in HSR&D research. Based on the experiences of research centers that have successfully engaged Veterans in the research process in the VA setting, the Veteran Engagement at the Center Level subgroup created a guidance document (see Appendix 2A of the [final report](#)) for implementation at the research center level. The purpose of the final report is to offer guidance on the recruitment and organization of a group of Veterans to provide ongoing engagement with researchers at VA facilities. The Center Level subgroup made recommendations based on Center experiences and identified the following three ways to further support and empower both Centers and researchers in the engagement of Veterans in research.

- Follow up on the survey data collected by workgroup: Conduct qualitative interviews with research centers to further determine their engagement activities with Veterans.
- Provide a list of research centers that are in the process or have implemented a board so that they can be a resource for interested sites.
- Provide research centers with a detailed toolkit for how to engage Veterans in research.

Purpose. This task order is to support a collaborative effort to:

- 1) Conduct an environmental scan of existing VA Veteran groups and Veteran engagement initiatives and strategies pertinent to VA research,
- 2) Synthesize findings of the environmental scan of on-going Veteran engagement initiatives and strategies pertinent to VA research,
- 3) Identify best practices for engaging Veterans (and other stakeholders) via stakeholder councils or other methods within VA,
- 4) Develop a Veteran engagement best practices toolkit to be utilized by HSR&D researchers, ORD, and potentially other VA Program Offices, and
- 5) Develop a process for offering consultations from experienced subject-matter experts regarding Veteran engagement, especially the establishment of Veteran/ Stakeholder Councils, to HSR&D researcher sites seeking to develop or enhance approaches to Veteran engagement.

In this 12-month SIP, we anticipate that the awardee will be able to develop the toolkit and start dissemination and consultations on the toolkit to HSR&D researchers, focusing on Veteran engagement in research. However, this intent does not mean to exclude engagement of Veterans' family members or caregivers in HSR&D's Veteran Engagement Initiative, which we would like to explore further in a future project. To the extent possible, as a response to this Task Order, we encourage the applicants to consider integration of family members and caregivers in the scope of the application.

HSR&D research sites to which the awardee is expected to provide consultations include HSR&D Centers of Innovation (COIN) as well as non-COIN sites. Specifically, the awardee is expected to be available to address specific questions from research centers upon their request once the toolkit becomes available. The awardee is expected to develop a systematic way to receive and triage consultation requests from research centers, and schedule periodic program support calls, cyberseminar sessions, or other events to educate those who are interested in use of the toolkit during the period of the SIP.

The work proposed in this task order will commence late February in 2017 and end in February 2018. The awardee of the task order is expected to deliver the products outlined below during this 12-month SIP.

April 1, 2017; A list of research centers that are in the process or have implemented Veteran Engagement initiatives in research along with a summary/synthesis of their activities and scope of Veteran Engagement work (e.g., how are group members selected, how are activities supported, what type of input is solicited from stakeholders)

June 1, 2017: An initial report and accompanying cyberseminar on the preliminary findings that identifies best practices for engaging Veterans (and other stakeholders) in research including methods and rationale for how best practices were identified

September 15, 2017: A draft toolkit submitted to the HSR&D CO

September to December 2017: A cyberseminar on the draft toolkit, active dissemination of the toolkit, and consultations provided to research centers

February 2018: Final report including a list of the research centers who received consultation services and the nature of the services, summary of findings from providing consultations to research centers, an assessment of the need for consultation moving forward and the feasibility of providing future consultation in order to inform future endeavors in this area, and the final version of the toolkit.

Mechanism. Up to \$100,000 of administrative funds for fiscal year 2017-2018 will be awarded based on the administrative review of submitted proposals.

Goals. Proposals must describe the applicant's proposed plan for detecting VA Veteran groups and Veteran engagement initiatives, collecting information from relevant groups, identifying best practices, developing a toolkit based on best practices, and disseminating the toolkit and guidance including options for consultation on establishing stakeholder councils for those centers early in the process or looking to reevaluate their current methods. ***Special consideration will be given to proposals that are highly collaborative and are able to incorporate expertise from multiple sites.***

Proposals are due February 3rd, 2017 and should not exceed seven pages (excluding budget information and bio-sketches of the key personnel), single spaced, 11 point Arial font, with at least 0.5 inch margins. Send proposals to Courtney Lyndrup, MSPH (Courtney.Lyndrup@va.gov).

Proposals should provide an overview of the plan that includes each of the following sections:

- 1. Statement of Purpose (~.5 page):** Describe the main purpose of your proposal
- 2. Approaches/Plan (3 pages):** This section should describe how you intend to accomplish the purpose described above. The plan should specify your unique and innovative approach to complete the tasks, given your team's experiences and expertise, and how your approach would facilitate collaborative learning on Veteran Engagement in research in HSR&D community and make a great impact. Explain any potential obstacles and solutions that may arise. Note any proposed novel uses of technology either in the environmental scan or dissemination of best practices. Emphasize how your approach builds on the Veteran Engagement Workgroup final report. Specify how you plan to receive and triage requests for consultation on use of the toolkit in a systematic manner and educate those requestors either in a group setting (e.g. periodic interest group calls, cyberseminar sessions) or in one-on-one conference calls.
- 3. Deliverables and Timelines (~.5 page):** Describe planned intermediate and final deliverables and their timelines associated with the outlined tasks. The exact details will be negotiated with HSR&D, but give a clear description of what deliverables would be possible in 1-3 month intervals. A Gantt Chart of core activities needs to be included.
- 4. Management Plan (~1 page):** Describe the project management plan including roles and tasks of each member of the team and how the work will be coordinated with all involved parties. Clearly define which team members will conduct what aspect of the environmental

scan, toolkit development, and dissemination. Include processes and methods to ensure collaboration with institutions or investigators outside the principal facility. In addition, describe local resources available at participating facilities that will contribute to your team's ability for success.

5. **Team and Relevant Experience (~2 page):** In this section, describe the key team members (qualifications and affiliated organizations) and their relevant experience in qualitative research (e.g. survey methods), patient engagement, stakeholder engagement, specifically Veteran engagement, and community-based participatory research (CBPR). Include the qualifications and accomplishments of the Team Leader to lead and to collaborate in the area of research, and, where appropriate, experience coordinating multi-site research or quality improvement (QI) efforts.
6. **Budget (NOT included in 7-page limit):** Using the embedded summary budget table, list anticipated expenses for the project and fully describe expenses in an accompanying budget justification.



Sample VA HSR&D
summary budget table

7. **Core team members' bio sketches (NOT included in 7-page limit):** please use the bio sketch forms used for research application submissions, which can be found here: http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/docs/SF424R-R_biosketch_VerC.docx and a sample is located here: http://vaww.research.va.gov/funding/docs/SF424R-R_biosketchsample_VerC.docx

Key Dates for the HSR&D Veteran Engagement SIP Review Process:

December 14, 2016: HSR&D Task Order released

January 9, 2017: Inform HSR&D if planning on submitting a proposal and note all collaborating sites. (email to Courtney.Lyndrup@va.gov)

February 3, 2017: Proposals due

Week of February 13th, 2017: Administrative Review

Mid-late February 2017: Funding Notification

General Criteria for Review and Scoring of Proposals

HSR&D CO will conduct the programmatic and administrative review of the submitted proposals. Reviewers are instructed to evaluate proposals using the review criteria described below, and to assign a single, global score for each scored application. The score will reflect the merits of the proposals and its overall impact on HSR&D's work in integrating Veterans' voice in research and advancing the health and healthcare of Veterans.

Approach: Reviewers will assess the appropriateness of the work plan, design, and specific methods proposed for completing the work.

Reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the following questions:

- Is the overall work plan well-reasoned and appropriate to the statement of the purpose in the proposal?
- Does the proposal demonstrate feasibility?
- Is the approach the best way to accomplish the tasks proposed?
- Does the proposed approach aim to foster wide collaborations among those who have experiences in Veteran Engagement initiatives? Is the plan likely to create positive synergies and outcomes in the HSR&D community?
- Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented?

Team Qualifications: Reviewers will be asked to assess the expertise of each team member and each major consultant, including professional credentials, institutional position, role in the project, expertise, and relevant experience. All reviewers will assess the combined strength of the team in relation to the objectives of the project and determine whether it encompasses all needed skills and competencies.

Reviewers will be specifically asked to comment on the following questions:

- Is the team appropriate and does it capitalize on unique expertise or opportunity?
- Does the proposed team have a track record for success? Has this team worked together before?
- Have they initiated or/and managed a learning community on Veteran Engagement or other topics relevant to the missions of the HSR&D?
- When appropriate, reviewers will be asked to comment on:
 - ✓ Implementation expertise of the team
 - ✓ Qualifications for mixed methods or qualitative analyses

Facilities and Resources: Reviewers evaluate the adequacy of facilities and resources to carry out the proposed work. The proposal must include evidence of support from the applicant's VA facility, support from any additional site(s), and documentation of any agreements with consultants, or commitment of non-VA resources to the proposed work.

Reviewers assess:

- Do the environment, facilities, and resources support the work requirements so as to enable success of the project?
- Is there evidence of institutional support reflecting space, equipment, and other unique resources including availability of and access to populations adequate for the project proposed and/or to facilitate collaborative arrangements?

Scoring Scale

Using the above factors, the merit of the proposals should be assigned a score corresponding to the following:

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| 1.0 to 1.5 | Excellent | Proposal demonstrates very well-reasoned planning and approach with strong capacity for significant contributions to the area of Veteran engagement pertaining to research: clear and strong added value to the HSR&D research community and ORD; team qualifications and available resources appear outstanding. |
| 1.6 to 2.2 | Very Good | Proposal demonstrates good planning and approach with |

adequate capacity for significant contributions to the area of Veteran engagement pertaining to research: there are minor concerns related to the added value of the project to the HSR&D research community and ORD; team qualifications, and available resources appear good.

2.3 to 2.8 Good

Proposal **demonstrates adequate planning and approach with potential for significant contributions** to the area of Veteran engagement pertaining to research: there are major but correctable concerns related to the added value of the project to the HSR&D research community and ORD; approach, team qualifications, and available resources appear adequate.

2.9 to 3.4 Fair

Proposal **does not clearly demonstrate successful planning and approach nor future potential** in advancing the area of Veteran engagement pertaining to research: there are major concerns related to the added value of the project to the HSR&D research community and ORD; approach, team qualifications, and available resources appear inadequate.

3.5 to 5.0 Poor

Proposal suggests **inadequate planning and approach as well as demonstrates weak future potential** in advancing the area of Veteran engagement pertaining to research: there are significant concerns related to the added value of the project to the HSR&D research community and ORD; approach, team qualifications, and available resources severely inadequate.