# Section 5: Evaluating

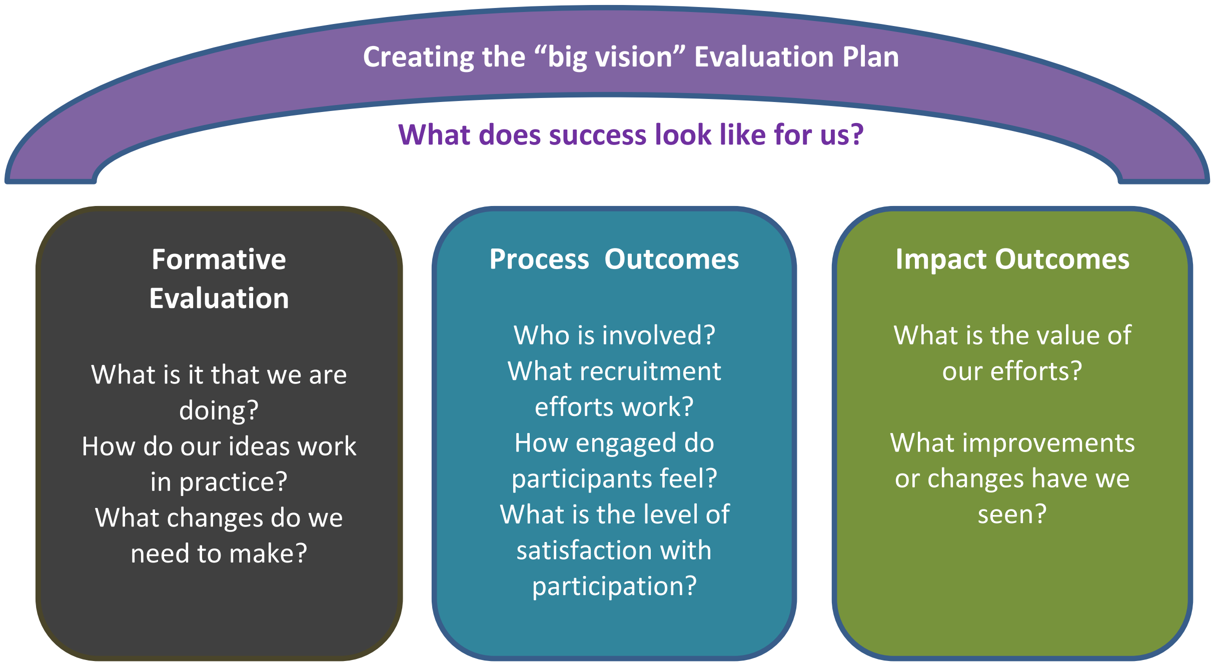
*"Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted"*
~ Albert Einstein

## Evaluation of Veteran Engagement

Previous sections of this Toolkit have hinted at the value of incorporating evaluation strategies into your Veteran Engagement initiative. From thinking about the purpose of your Engagement Group and what success looks like to understanding the impact of participation on Veterans, research teams, and your Center as a whole, there are a number of different questions you can ask and approaches you can use. Ultimately, your evaluation questions should be closely linked to the purpose of your Engagement Group and what you have identified as indicators of success (see Planning section).

In this section you will find guidance on creating a "big vision" to guide your evaluation approach. We recommend working through a process to create a logic model or road map that specifies the activities you are planning, the resources that will go into the effort, and the outcomes (short and long term) you expect to see. Creating a "big vision" road map early in your development process can help inform your planning and implementation efforts. It is also a great way to engage Veterans, researchers, and Center leaders in conversations about what they hope and expect to improve as a result of the Engagement Group. The road map you create is a living document that will likely change as you implement your plans for engagement and assess how they are working.

Once you have your "big vision" evaluation plan drafted, you'll want to think about the information you need as you progress through stages of implementation to know that a) your vision is being implemented as intended, b) the activities you planned are contributing to this vision, c) you are engaging the participants you anticipated, and d) the benefits are worth the effort for those involved. These questions are foundational to your overall evaluation as they help link your inputs and activities to the outcomes you hope to see. They also help inform adjustments to your efforts so that you can continue to grow and evolve.




This section of the Toolkit is organized into four sections. The first is the process for creating the "big vision" evaluation plan. The second (Formative Evaluation), third (Process Outcomes) and fourth (Impact Outcomes) sections narrow in on different types of evaluation questions and strategies that you might develop as you progress through your phases of development and implementation.

## 5.1 Creating the "Big Vision"

The process you work through with your group to create the "big vision" evaluation plan builds on the work you did in the Planning stage to develop a purpose and mission for your Engagement Group. As noted previously, this initial plan is a living document that you should expect to revisit, modify and update as you move through stages of development and implementation. In the early phases, it can serve as a beacon to your group as you embark on this journey. In later phases it can support quality improvement activities and inform answers to questions related to how and why more inclusive approaches make a difference in the quality, reach and impact of your research.

### *5.1.1 Initial questions*

There are some initial questions that you want to discuss with your subcommittee or others who are interested in thinking about the evaluation of your engagement group. These questions are meant as starting points to guide the development of your evaluation plan.

***Purpose:*** What is the purpose of your evaluation? What is it that you want to learn?

***Audience:*** Who will be the audience for the findings? What kind of information do they want or need? Why?

***Stage of Development:*** Where are you in the process of developing your engagement groups? Where can you reasonably expect to be in 1 year? In 3 years? In 5 years?

***Resources:*** What resources are available to you to implement your evaluation plan? Who will be responsible for oversight of evaluation activities? How much time is available (or is it a collateral duty)?

The first two questions are really important for creating that big vision so that you can select some initial outcomes and impacts that you would like to see. The stage of development question is designed to help keep you grounded in where you are in the process of development and how much you can know given where you are. The last set of questions about resources is not meant to dampen your big vision, but to help create a realistic vision for what you can actually develop (inputs and activities) AND evaluate (outcomes and impacts).

### *5.1.2 Create a Logic Model*

Once you work through these questions, we recommend developing a logic model or road map as a visual representation of your "big picture" evaluation plan. Creating a logic model may sound complex, but it is really just a visual depiction of how your intended activities relate to your anticipated outcomes. This is likely something you have already thought of since you aren't just choosing random activities; you are using your own experience or knowledge of the literature to choose particular activities with the expectation that they will lead to specific outcomes. It is a valuable process as it makes explicit the linkages between activities and the change you hope to see.

### *What is the value…*

#### *Of the process:*

The process of creating a logic model is helpful too for generating buy-in and clarifying stakeholders' expectations and goals regarding the work they are embarking on together. It provides an opportunity to talk with Veterans, researchers, Center leaders, and any other key participants about their expectations and interests. These conversations can help clarify your mission, deepen your understanding of what success means to different people, and illuminate assumptions that may need to be discussed and challenged. It highlights gaps in activities (hoped for outcomes that have no activities associated with them) and inefficiencies (planned activities, especially those we particularly like to do, that have no outcomes of interest associated with them).

#### *Of the product:*

The "final" product, the logic model, is a valuable communication tool that can quickly convey to others what your Engagement Group does and hopes to achieve. It is also incredibly helpful for planning realistic and useful evaluation activities. It is important to note that your logic model reflects your *theory* of what will happen, not necessarily what *actually* happens. Because of that, logic models should be considered dynamic documents that need to be revisited periodically and reevaluated against any new knowledge or changes that have occurred. Instead of your logic model being called a 'final' product, it is probably better to think of it as the latest draft.

There are a number of on-line resources available to support your development of a logic model. A link to these resources is included at the end of this section. Here we provide a broad overview of the process to get you started.

## *How do you develop a logic model?*

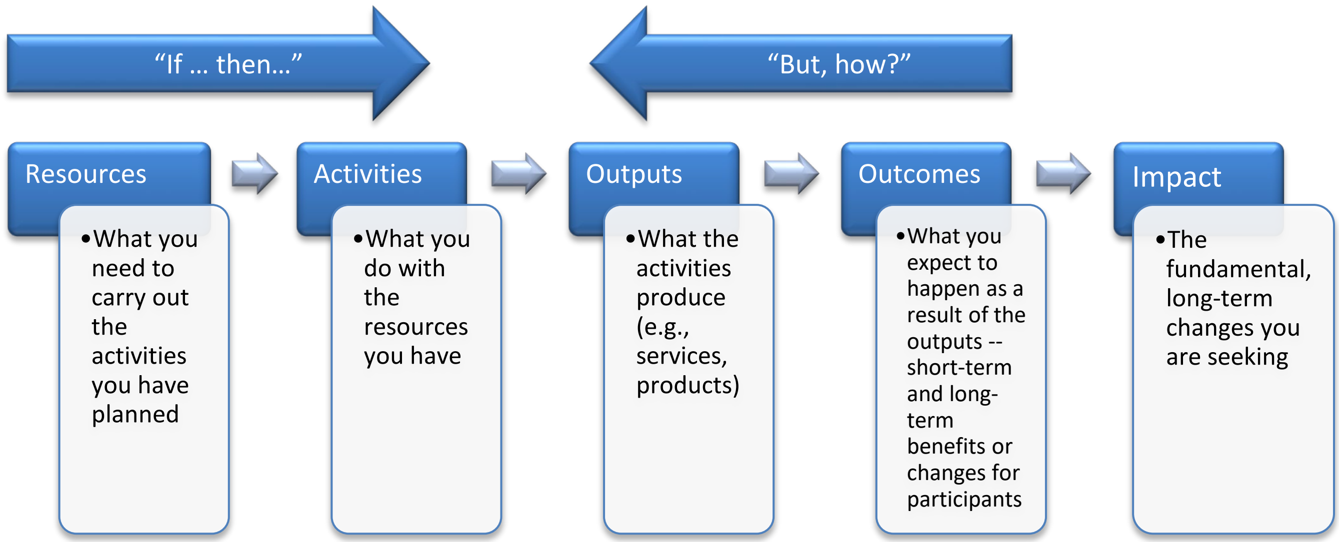
Facilitating the development of a logic model involves asking yourself and any early partners a series of questions. This line of questioning may start with broad questions such as:

- What does "successful" engagement look like from the point of view of different stakeholders (e.g., individual researchers, research centers, operational and clinical partners, individual Veterans, Veterans as a community)?

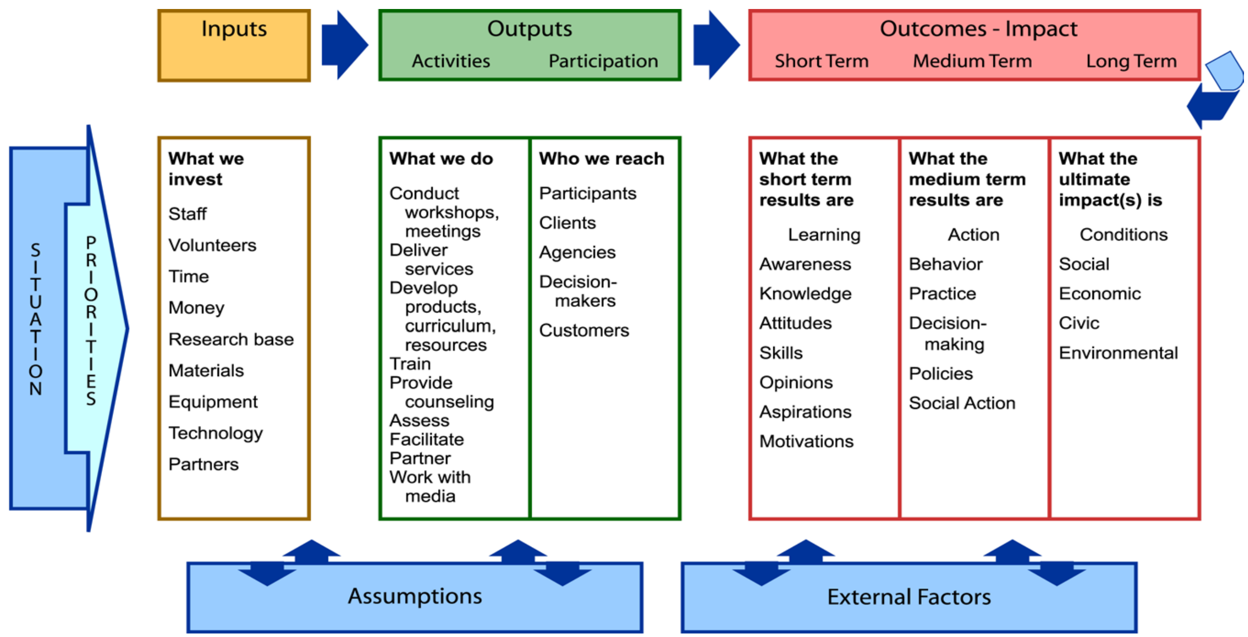
And then move on to a more specific line of questions, such as:

- In [5 years], what will it look like if we achieve our desired outcome? *This is asking about the impact.*
- What needs to change prior to that in [3-5 years] in order for that impact to be achieved? *This is asking about long-term outcomes.*
- What needs to change prior to that in [2-3 years] in order for those long-term outcomes to be achieved? *This is asking about intermediate-term outcomes.*
- What needs to change prior to that in [0-2 years] in order for those intermediate-term outcomes to be achieved? *This is asking about short-term outcomes.*
- Activities: What activities have to happen in order for those short-term outcomes to be achieved?

This is a helpful visual for guiding this conversation:




If you start with the impact, you move from right to left and continually ask yourselves 'But, how will that happen?' If you start with activities, you move from left to right and make a series of "If-Then" statements. It is traditional to start with the impact, though in reality it is a little like sailing, tacking back and forth between "But, how" questions and “If-then” statements. The timeline is highly dependent on your particular activities and could be significantly truncated from the example given.




*Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Feb. 2003*
*https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guids/results_chain/logic_models*

Having a one-page visual representation of your overarching vision, activities, outcomes, and assumptions will help guide your evaluation plan. You do not have to measure every outcome that you hope to achieve. However, it is useful to have this big picture as you proceed through stages of development. It serves as a quick reference for bringing on new people and getting them oriented to the initiative.

Additional resources on logic model development include:

- **Logic Model Development Guide** developed by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- **Logic Model Workbook** developed by the Innovation Network
- **How to Develop a Program Logic Model** presentation developed by the Corporation for National & Community Service

## 5.2 Formative Evaluation

It might be tempting to jump right into evaluating your Veteran Engagement initiative. Given that most of us are working with limited resources, you want to make sure that you are evaluating your initiative (inputs and activities) as it is intended to be implemented. Often in the early launch period, things do not work out as intended or modifications need to be made to your inputs and activities. If you are just getting started, we recommend starting with a formative evaluation.

### *5.2.1 What is Formative Evaluation?*

Formative evaluation is a way to gather timely information that can inform and improve your work. It can help you understand what it is you are doing and reflect on whether or not this is aligned with plans and expectations.

### *5.2.2 Key Formative Evaluation questions include:*

- How are the activities we developed to recruit and engage Veterans being implemented?
- Are the inputs (staffing, communication, materials) sufficient for the activities we developed?
- What do people think about the activities we have designed? Are there things we can do to improve our efforts to engage Veterans in research?
- How prepared do research teams feel to engage Veterans in conversations about their research and how prepared are Veterans to provide input?
- What else should we be doing that we haven't thought about to make the experience better for all participants and/or to make sure our activities are suited to the outcomes we hope to achieve?

### *5.2.3 Approach*

Formative evaluation is often performed while a program is still being developed. Typically, a small number of individuals provide feedback so that you can identify any improvements that are needed or design elements that work well.

### 5.2.4 Common methods include:

***Surveys*** are useful methods for getting feedback on how your processes are working. For example, you can survey Veterans or other stakeholders to gauge how satisfied they are with the organization of your meetings, communication leading up to and during the meetings, how input is received, and strategies for sharing how their input was received. Research team members can also be surveyed to assess satisfaction with the communication leading up to and during the meeting, the usefulness of input, and recommendations for preparing other research team members for meetings.

***Interviews:*** For more in-depth feedback on the approach you have developed for engaging Veterans, you can opt to get feedback by talking with participants one-on-one or as a group. Similar questions to those you ask in surveys can be used to guide conversations. You can also ask specific questions about aspects of your approach that are working well and/or not working as well. Interviews provide a nice opportunity to elicit recommendations for improvement. They are, however, more resource intensive.

***Observations*** can also be conducted to assess how meetings are running, levels of engagement among group members, and dynamics between research team members and Veterans.

### 5.2.5 From Analysis to Action

Our recommendation is to keep your questions brief and targeted so that you can quickly synthesize information and incorporate what you learn into your structure and organization. Go back to your original formative evaluation questions and review what you wanted to learn. Look over the data you have gathered. Identify areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. Discuss which recommendations are reasonable and feasible to act upon. Consider how you can incorporate these changes into your structure and organization. Identify the changes or modifications you are going to act on and document your plans.

Depending on your time and resources, you may go through another review and feedback cycle after you implement changes to determine whether or not they led to desired improvements. The need for this may depend on the extent of the changes made. You may also consider incorporating similar feedback questions into subsequent phases of your evaluation efforts to determine whether or not there have been improvements or changes.

Once you are confident that your mission is aligned with your activities and input, you may feel like it is time to start focusing on measuring outcomes.

## 5.3 Process Evaluation

In order to ensure that your group's work does not end before it has truly begun, the first focus of your evaluation efforts may be on the ***process*** of successfully engaging Veterans and researchers in this work. This is not an inconsequential step; if the Veterans and researchers to do not like this work and/or find it hard to remain engaged there will be no actual Engagement Group to evaluate further.

### *5.3.1 Satisfaction with Engagement*

Collecting some simple measures of satisfaction with the process (of which there are many facets) and barriers and facilitators to engagement can be useful for continually improving the quality of your Engagement Group activities. You may consider measuring the extent to which the meetings achieve known benchmarks for the experience of collaborative work (example benchmarks can be found in the Wilder Collaboration Survey or PCORI's WE-ENACT). This type of data collection is considered a best practice and many sites with the most successful Engagement Groups collect these types of process measures regularly.

## *Example process measures:*

| Engagement Group Members | |
|---|---|
| Engagement | • Number of people present at each meeting<br>• Consistency of participation in and across meetings<br>• Perception that meetings are interesting |
| Satisfaction with experience | • Overall satisfaction with being involved in group<br>• Perception that input is valued<br>• Would recommend involvement in the group to others |
| Feedback on organization of meetings | • Perception that meetings are well organized<br>• Perception there is enough time to discuss topics<br>• Perception that materials are useful in preparing people for meetings |
| Meeting facilitation | • Perception that meetings are well facilitated<br>• Facilitator ensures that everyone has a chance to voice their opinion<br>• Facilitator has the right skills to ensure that the group is able to meet its goals for each meeting |
| **Research Team Members** | |
| Interest | • Number of research teams who sign up to present their work to the engagement group<br>• Number of research teams who present multiple times |
| Valuable Input | • Perception that the input elicited is valuable<br>• Discussion with the engagement group leads to new thinking or ideas |
| Feedback on organization of meetings | • Perception that meetings are well organized<br>• Perception of the facilitator's skills in keeping the meeting on-track |

(Survey samples are available in **Section 6.6 – Evaluation Materials**)

### *5.3.2 Is what you are doing useful?*

Another important early step in the development and implementation of your Engagement Group is setting up tools to document the engagement strategies and activities that are taking place. If you conducted a formative evaluation you may have already started this process. Continuing to collect this type of process data will be valuable for determining your own best practices for engaging Veterans in research and, in the event you collect outcomes data, will be necessary for articulating the activities that were associated with your outcomes of interest. These tools can be simple and often takes the format of paper or electronic logs that systematically document activities implemented, content shared, attendance rates, etc.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Recruitment** | • Documentation of how Veterans are recruited<br>• Strategies or outreach efforts<br>• Characteristics of individuals who agree to be in engagement groups<br>• Experience with recruitment efforts |
| **Meetings** | • Days and times that meetings are held |
| **Training** | • Types/content of trainings offered<br>• Frequency of trainings<br>• Characteristics of training facilitators |
| **Leadership** | • Characteristics of people playing a leadership role<br>• Roles and responsibilities of leaders |
| **Decision-making** | • Types of decisions made<br>• Documentation of how decisions are made |
| **Communication** | • Modes of communication with engagement group members<br>• Modes of communication between engagement group members and research team members |
| **Dissemination** | • Materials shared with engagement groups<br>• Types and formats of information shared with other Veterans<br>• Frequency of dissemination |

Collecting and periodically reviewing process data can help you maintain an awareness of the various strategies you have developed to get your Engagement Group up and running. It can provide you with concrete information such as trends in participation and outreach activities. Importantly, these types of data can help you reflect on why your engagement efforts are successful or not.

## 5.4 Outcome Measures

When you are ready to evaluate outcomes related to your engagement group, return to the logic model you originally drafted and determine which outcomes are most relevant *and* feasible at your stage of development. You may not be able to measure all of the outcomes you have identified as important. Resources are finite, so you need to focus your evaluation activities. The logic model shows what activities can be expected to change, *within a given timeframe.* Therefore your logic model is most helpful in figuring out *when it* is feasible to measure particular outcomes. Outcomes such as changes in clinical health measures may be what all the stakeholders are ultimately hoping to achieve, but the logic model will show that those types of outcomes are generally a number of years in the future. Therefore, creating short term evaluation goals around measuring clinical health outcomes would not be realistic or feasible. Logic models can be a helpful tool for communicating this to others.

It is important to note that measurement of engagement outcomes is still evolving. In our review of the literature, we have observed that, to date, measurement of engagement efforts and initiatives has largely focused on pre-implementation, context and process. There is still much work to be done on measures of short-term (proximal) and long-term (distal) outcomes.

### *5.4.1 Selection*

You will want to think about selecting outcomes measures that are feasible for you to measure in the timeframe you are working with. Some outcomes may require a baseline measurement in order to determine changes over time. This may or may not be feasible depending on the developmental stage you are in when you are ready to measure outcomes.

***Example Outcome Measures include:***

| | Short term | Long term |
|---|---|---|
| **Veterans** | • Increased knowledge about the research process<br>• Increase in capacity to contribute to research ideas<br>• Increased perception in the value of VA research | • Engagement group members see themselves as ambassadors to VA research<br>• Increase sense of empowerment to contribute to the research process<br>• Sense of shared ownership over the research process |
| **Research Teams** | • Perception of improved quality of research questions and design<br>• Perceived value of introducing new perspectives in the development of research | • Greater proportion of grant proposals funded<br>• Increase in dissemination of research findings to Veterans, Care Partners, and others |
| **VA Health Systems** | • VA supports quality research that is meaningful and relevant to Veterans | • Research informs policy changes to improve the quality of care, types of services, organization of systems |

In **Section 6- Literature and Selected Readings** you will find links to a number of articles about patient engagement in research. The strength of this literature is that there are well-defined frameworks for engagement and anticipated outcomes for different types of stakeholders. However, for most outcomes there are few agreed-upon and validated measures. The following graphic presents a few measures that some have used to measure different outcomes associated with patient engagement in research.

Note: Measurement of outcomes associated with Veteran engagement in research is an area of potential for growth and development. There are many VA colleagues who are interested in collaborating on measurement development if you are interested.

| What do you want to measure? | Try This Measure | What it Covers | Reference (including links) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trust, shared decision-making, perceived benefits | Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory | Measures how collaboration is working | Mattessich P, Johnson, K. (2018). *Collaboration Factors Inventory, 3rd Edition*. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research. |
| Influence on project, satisfaction | We-ENACT | Assesses nature and impact of engagement | PCORI |
| Sustained Engagement | Community Engagement in Research Index | Tracks levels of engagement of different partners | Khodyakov D, Stockdale S, Jones A, et al. On Measuring Community Participation in Research. *Health education & behavior*. 2013;40(3):346-354. doi:10.1177/1090198112459050. |
| Capacity | Interorganizational Network Survey (ION) | ▪formal agreements ▪joint activities | Wendel M, Prochaska JD, Clark HR, et al. Interorganizational Network Changes Among Health Organizations in the Brazos Valley, Texas. Journal of Prevention, April 2010. |
| Processes | HMORN Patient Engagement Workbook | Documents processes and details of engagement | Madrid S, Wright L. Healthcare Systems Research Network. |

### *5.4.2 Data collection feasibility:*

The ideal evaluation and what is possible, given the resources available, is often not the same thing. It is important when designing your evaluation to consider what it will take to conduct the evaluation activities.

### *5.4.3 Choosing indicators:*

Outcomes are often phrased in a general way that are not amenable to measurement, so outcomes have to be translated into indicators. For example: a more traditional health services indicator for the outcome “Veterans experience better health” may be “60% of the Veterans with uncontrolled diabetes reduce their A1c levels to below 8% within 6 months.” You can imagine the challenge of creating reliable indicators for the outcome “Veterans have an increased understanding of the research process.” What is an indicator of “understanding the research process?” Without established or agreed upon measures, most of us may rely on self-reported perceptions. Other outcomes, such as “decrease in the average length of time from study conclusion to dissemination” is possible to examine more objectively, but it will require baseline and follow up data collection and many discussions to come to consensus around what constitutes key concepts, such as “study conclusion” and “dissemination.”

In creating useful and streamlined evaluation plans, it is important to know what indicators are meaningful for your stakeholders and to have some sense of the difficulty you would experience in trying to gather the data related to those indicators. To determine the feasibility of your evaluation activities, ask yourself and your partners:

- What ***resources*** will be needed to collect any measures, manage the data, and conduct analysis, and reporting of findings? Will additional funding be needed to provide these resources? Who will be responsible for the evaluation (e.g., only the researchers, researchers and partners)?
- What level of ***response burden*** is acceptable for different stakeholders when it comes to completing measures? (e.g., how many questions/questionnaires can you reasonably expect different stakeholders to complete, and how often?)

## 5.5 Disseminating your Evaluation Findings

As you develop your evaluation plan you will want to keep your audience in mind. You may have multiple audiences, some who will review evaluation data and support quality improvement efforts. Others will be interested in outcomes associated with engagement.

Some important questions to consider include:

- How do you plan to use any findings from outcomes measures? How will you disseminate or share findings, and to which audiences (internal and external)?
- What will you do with "negative" findings (e.g., if you find out that some members of the Engagement Group feel disempowered during meetings, or that some researchers do not appreciate the feedback they receive from the Engagement Group)?
- Who is responsible for sharing findings? How will you assure accuracy in reporting?

Having these discussions in advance of your data collection efforts can increase transparency of your process and reduce concerns with bias or selectivity.

## 5.6 Ethical Considerations

Evaluation activities associated with your Veteran Engagement board will likely lead you to question whether or not your activities are in the realm of research or quality improvement. This will vary based on your evaluation questions, design, and use of the data. Here are some good resources to help you think through the kind of work you are doing with your evaluation and the potential to bring this work up for more formal review with your facility's institutional review board. If you have questions, we recommend talking with the chair of your board to seek additional guidance.

QUERI Program: https://www.queri.research.va.gov/tools/roadmap.cfm

For more information, see the 2018 cyberseminar by Hamilton and True and consult the corresponding reading list here.