Veteran Engagement Three Ways:

Insights and lessons learned from engaging veterans at three VA research centers

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Kenda R. Stewart, PhD, CADRE, Iowa City, IA
Kathryn LaChappelle, MPH, The PRIME Center, West Haven, CT
Today’s Speakers

Leah Wendleton
Moderator
Denver

Lindsey Martin
Panelist
Houston

Kenda Stewart
Panelist
Iowa City

Katie LaChappelle
Panelist
West Haven
Disclosures

• No disclosures

• The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

• All Veterans provided written consent for the video/audio recordings and use of their images
## Acknowledgements

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Houston</th>
<th>Iowa City</th>
<th>West Haven</th>
<th>Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ricardo Adame, Marines | John Bentler, Army  
Stephen Drop, Army | Tom Anastasio, Navy | David Carnevale, Army  
Patrick Oliver, Army |
| Erika Bowen, Army | Sonya Justus, Air Force  
Ken Krizan, Army | Michael Borges, Air Force | William (Wes) Westmoreland, Army |
| Brandie McKinley, Army | Erin Madsen, Air Force  
Rick Martin, Navy | Kellie Harris, Army | Donald (Don) Smith, Navy |
| Christian Valenzuela, Navy | Bessy Ortiz, Air Force  
Allen Roberts, Air Force | Hector Hernandez, Jr., Navy &  
Army | Eric Christeson, Army  
Jillian (Jill) Murphy, Army |
| Eugene Vecera, Army | Edward Shreeves, Navy  
Jacob Stone, Marines | Elysia Dahl, Army | Vincent (Vince) Mosley, Army  
Kee Johnson, Army |
| Donald Wagner, Air Force | Phil Ross, Army  
April Schmidt, Air Force  
Bill Wirth, Air Force | | Krystal Conrad, Air Force |
Overview of Panel Discussion

• Veteran Engagement in VA & Local Context

• Adapting a Veteran Engagement Group (VEG)

• Fostering bi-directional relationships

• Measurement & Evaluation
Poll Question

1. Does your center/you currently have a mechanism for Veterans to provide input on research, evaluation, or quality improvement activities? (revised)
   a) No
   b) In-process
   c) Yes
Houston, Iowa City & West Haven

I. VETERAN ENGAGEMENT IN VA & LOCAL CONTEXT
Engaging Veterans in VA Research

- Individual Projects
- Center Level Engagement Groups
- Veteran Engagement Workgroup Created
- Veteran Engagement Workgroup Final Report and Cyberseminars
- Subgroups: Conceptual Model, Health Experience Research, Project-Level, Center Level

**2017 Task Order**

 Strengthening Excellence in Research through Veteran Engagement
Perspectives on Veteran Engagement

“...creating a more collaborative approach to research that can help make research more accessible and meaningful to those involved.”

Investigator, Denver

“It’s changed my opinion of what goes on behind the scenes at the VA.”

VEG member, Denver
Veterans’ Perspectives

“Over the years I have had several problems, personal problems with... back conditions, foot conditions, and I haven’t been getting much satisfaction with the VA itself... so I get to have a hands on type approach to this and be able to give my own personal opinion.”

Mike Borges, Air Force
West Haven, CT
Houston

Population: 2.1 million

• **4th largest city** in the U.S.—ethnically diverse—90+ languages spoken

• “Houston has more than **500 cultural, visual and performing arts organizations**, 90 of which are devoted to multicultural and minority arts”—City of Houston

• Texas Medical Center (TMC) is **largest medical center in the world** and home to the **Michael E. DeBakey VAMC (MEDVAMC)**

• The MEDVAMC serves approximately **130,000 Veterans** at its main campus and network of CBOCs

• **Mission:** Improving health and well-being through innovations in health care delivery

• **Goals:** Innovation, Implementation and Mentorship
Iowa City
Population: 74,398

- The only UNESCO City of Literature in North America
- Home of the Iowa Writer’s Workshop. Famous alumni and faculty include, Marilynne Robinson, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip Roth, Jane Smiley, John Irving.

- University of Iowa and UI Hospitals and Clinics employ ~24,000 people.
- The Iowa City VAHCS is largely rural and serves approximately 51,400 Veterans.

**Mission:** to develop, implement, and test innovative strategies that expand access to high-quality primary and specialty care, while ensuring that the care delivered is safe and free of preventable infections.
West Haven

West Haven, CT is an eastern shoreline community, located adjacent to the larger New Haven, CT.

VA Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS) serves approximately 68,000 male Veterans and 4,200 women Veterans

VACHS encompasses an inpatient facility and Ambulatory Care Center in West Haven; an Ambulatory Care Center in Newington; and 6 primary care CBOCs.

VACHS is affiliated with Yale University School of Medicine and UCONN School of Medicine & Dentistry

Pain Research, Informatics, Multimorbidities and Education (PRIME) Center of Innovation (COIN)

Mission: To study interactions between pain and other health conditions and develop and implement effective interventions to reduce pain and improve health.
Meeting the unique needs of VA research and research centers

II. ADAPTING A VEG
Logistics & Regulatory Issues

Key Issues to Consider:

• Mission statement

• Regulatory issues

• Planning VEG meetings
Houston: Logistics & Regulatory Issues

- Internal Steering Committee developed VEG Mission & Goals
  - Public affairs, FACA compliant (Veteran individual viewpoints/experiences)
  - Veteran Community Engagement Committee (CEC) Mission: engaging its membership in research activities and priority areas, and to provide feedback to leadership and investigators on their research

Lindsey Martin, PhD  
CEC Faculty Advisor

Ashley Gendrett, MPH  
CEC Coordinator

Jessica Davila, PhD  
IQuESt Leadership

- CEC Meetings are Veteran-Driven with minimal facilitation
  - One-year commitment; 5 meetings/year, including orientation; 90 minutes long-includes short investigator presentation and Veteran/investigator Q&A
  - Members provided $25 compensation, lunch and free parking at IQuESt
Iowa City: Logistics & Regulatory Issues

• CADRE Leadership enlisted medical anthropologist to develop Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP)
  – IRB, AO for Research, Public Affairs, Privacy & Security Officers, FACA compliant
  – Mission: to inform CADRE leadership and investigators of Veteran preferences regarding research priority areas, research processes and procedures, and research results.

Kenda Stewart, PhD
VEP Liaison

Heather Schacht Reisinger, PhD
Assoc. Dir. Research

Bonnie BootsMiller, PhD
Assoc. Dir. Operations

Eli Perencevich, MD, MPH
Director

• VEP Meetings resemble “works-in-progress” seminars.
  – Investigators present short synopsis of study. Veterans and Investigators brainstorm methodologies, research questions, etc.
West Haven: Logistics & Regulatory Issues

- PRIME Center Executive Steering Committee member invited Veteran outreach specialist to join national Veteran Engagement Workgroup.
  - Veteran Engagement Group (VEG) adapted from Denver model
  - ACOS for Research, FACA compliant, MOU with hospital director
  - **Mission**: to promote patient-centered research and translation of findings by engaging a group of Veteran stakeholders in discussion about the activities of the PRIME Center; involvement spans from strategic planning and research topic generation to dissemination and implementation of results.
  - One year commitment, $50 per meeting, 4 meetings per year.

Lori Bastian, MD, Director

Kathryn LaChappelle, MPH, VEG liaison
Houston: Membership & Recruitment

- **Recruitment**: word-of-mouth; recommendations; VA Research Week; flyers
- **Diverse membership**: ages (38-86); war generation; military branch; race/ethnicity; male/female
We are currently seeking Veterans to serve on the Community Engagement Committee. The CEC helps VA researchers design and implement studies to improve the delivery of VA healthcare.

Are you or do you know a Veteran who has:
A desire to help other Veterans?
An interest in research?
Good communication skills?
A willingness to share healthcare experiences?

Committee service includes:
- Committing to a one-year term
- Attending six in-person meetings at the Michael E. DeBakey VAMC
- Compensation for attendance
- Lunch will be provided

For more info, contact
Ashley Gendrett
713-440-4461
Ashley.Gendrett@va.gov

http://www.houston.hsrdr.research.va.gov/
**Iowa City: Membership & Recruitment**

**Recruitment:** word-of-mouth; recommendations; VA Volunteer Services; ICVA Breast Cancer Awareness Fair; Iowa City LGBT Pride

**Membership:** 13 Veterans; male and female
West Haven: Membership & Recruitment

Recruitment: word-of-mouth; recommendations; VA Research Week; VA Veteran and Family Advisory Council

Membership: 5 Veterans; 3 male and 2 female, age range 35-73 years

MILITARY BRANCH

- Air Force: 20%
- Army: 40%
- Navy: 40%

1 person missing from photo
Summary – Membership & Recruitment

- **Houston**
  - 5 mtgs/yr
  - 1-yr term
  - $25 comp
  - Application & Interview

- **Iowa City**
  - 4 mtgs/yr
  - No term limit
  - Volunteer
  - All comers

- **West Haven**
  - 4 mtgs/yr
  - 1-yr term
  - $50 comp
  - Interview
“I'd like more Veterans to show up... I know that's hard for you, to try and wrangle so many people. ... But, yeah, just having that larger pool of people to pull ideas from gives you a different perspective and fresh ideas.”

Stephen Drop, Army
Iowa City, IA
“Anytime there is a program or service that is going to impact a specific group, in this case the Veterans, I think it is very important to have an inclusionary process. I think the more inclusionary the process is I think it enhances the probability of it being successful, pertinent, and the bottom line really helping out Veterans.”

Tom Anastasio, Navy
West Haven, CT
Fostering lasting relationships between researchers, research centers & Veterans

III. BI-DIRECTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS
Engagement Meetings
Clockwise from top: Houston, Iowa City, Denver
Veterans’ Perspectives

“The collaboration with our panel members adds not only a holistic, but also a cohesive freshness—a fresh approach to the improvement of Veteran care. I also feel that our experiences and input are held in high regard. The investigators here...they care about our opinions. They care about our input.”

Brandie McKinley, Army
Houston, TX
Researchers’ Perspectives on Veteran Engagement

“CEC members challenged me to better frame the scope of my work and provided feedback that will guide my intervention design and shape future directions for my research agenda.”

-Molly Horstman, MD, MS, IQuESt

“The Veteran engagement group provided us insight on how this group of Veterans would like to view research materials, allowing us to better tailor our materials in order to improve their benefits from the research.”

-Eric DeRycke, MPH, PRIME
Approaching Role Differences

• Presenting research to Veterans
  – Avoiding “research speak”—how to speak in non-research language
  – Interpersonal skills and maintaining eye contact

• Veteran’s role as research peer instead of research subject

• Recognizing own expertise
  – Veterans unsure about research knowledge base

• Confidentiality
  – “Rules of Engagement” and the “Right to Pass”

• Creating a feedback loop
Empowering Veterans with their Health Information—My HealtheVet and the Blue Button,

Improving Access and Outcomes for Rural Veterans with HIV

Checklist to Prevent MRSA Surgical Site Infections

Pragmatic Trial of Initial Medication Effectiveness for Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Pilot Study,
IV. MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION (M&E)

The potential value of veteran-engaged research
M&E

• The engagement continuum

• Quantitative and Qualitative Methods
  – Surveys
  – De-briefings with Veterans and investigators post-meeting
  – Interviews/testimonials

• Future Directions
  – IRB
  – Demographics & sustainability
  – Inclusion of Veterans on external conference panels, papers
  – Group resiliency
  – Paradigm shifts in health services research
## Engagement Continuum

### Increasing Level of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTREACH</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>SHARED LEADERSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some community involvement</td>
<td>More community involvement</td>
<td>Better community involvement</td>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>Strong bidirectional relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication flows from one to the other, to inform</td>
<td>Communication flows to the community and then back; answer seeking</td>
<td>Communication flows both ways, participatory form of communication</td>
<td>Communication flow is bidirectional</td>
<td>Final decision making is at community level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides community with information</td>
<td>Gets information or feedback from the community</td>
<td>Involves more participation with community on issues</td>
<td>Forms partnerships with community on each aspect of project from development to solution</td>
<td>Entities have formed strong partnership structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entities coexist</td>
<td>Entities share information</td>
<td>Entities cooperate with each other</td>
<td>Entities form bidirectional communication channels</td>
<td>Broader health outcomes affecting broader community; bidirectional trust</td>
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Reference: Modified by the authors from the International Association for Public Participation
**M&E Tools**

Meeting Evaluation & Feedback

Please take the time to answer the following questions about tonight’s meeting.

1. How many CADRE Veteran Engagement Panel meetings have you attended?

2. Thinking back to your first Veteran Engagement Panel meeting, how would you compare your comfort or discomfort level in discussing research then and now? If this is your first meeting, please skip to Question 4.

3. What was the most interesting information you heard from tonight’s presentations?

4. What did you think about the process of reviewing a data collection instrument, such as Dr. Hadlandsmith’s focus group outline? Do you think this is something the panel should continue doing?

5. What contribution do you think this panel can make to CADRE’s research program or individual studies? What contribution would you like to make?

6. What stages of research (e.g., grant writing, data collection, analysis, manuscripts) are you most interested in?

7. After hearing tonight’s presentations, how would you rank your interest in continuing your engagement in VA research? Please circle (1=Not at all interested, 5=Very interested)

   1 2 3 4 5

8. Would you be interested in being contacted between meetings if investigators would like your input as they write grants and design their research?

*Adapted from Denver COIN-MIRECC Veteran Research Engagement Board, further adapted from the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (2001).
Veterans’ Perspectives

Erin Madsen, Air Force
Iowa City, IA

“I would like to see greater, distribution of some of the things we've talked about. I feel like there's a lot of fascinating research that's being done by the VA, and sometimes I doubt whether my representatives, or leadership can really see all the interesting stuff that's being done. And I'd like to be part of whatever effort can make that happen.”
Veterans’ Perspectives

“My expectations are high, and I can’t say that the VA has met my expectations...in a lot of ways. But I see so much promise in the CEC, and in the research that is being done here that I can’t say that I’m anything but...inspired that it’s finally coming to pass. ...not that hard work hasn’t been done in the past, but that this really is a cutting edge understanding about opening the door to the VA future.”

Christina Valenzuela, Navy
Houston, TX
2. Are you aware of the other ways you can learn more about Veteran engagement (e.g. Jam Sessions)?
   a) Yes
   b) No
Research Center Veteran Engagement
Jam Sessions

These sessions will provide a time and space for those involved in or interested in Veteran Engagement systematically to Research Centers to converse with colleagues working on Veteran engagement at other sites. During this call, you will hear about challenges and solutions that others faced during formation of Veteran Engagement Groups for Research. You will be able to ask questions and participate in discussion with your peers in the field and network with others.

For more information on these calls or to bring up questions or comments please reach out to coordinators:

Kenda Stewart (Kenda.Stewart@va.gov); Leah Wendleton (Leah.Wendleton@va.gov)
Kathryn LaChappelle (Kathryn.LaChappelle@va.gov); Lindsey Martin (Lindsey.Martin3@va.gov)

Please call into VANTS at the time of the call at 1-800-767-1750 using code 77466#

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 5th 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Striking the right chord” - experiences around the very early stages of planning a veteran engagement group for research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2nd 2017</td>
<td><strong>ET:</strong> 1 pm</td>
<td>“I’ll be watching you” - navigating ethical, federal, and VA policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>CT:</strong> 12 pm</td>
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<td><strong>MT:</strong> 11 am</td>
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<td><strong>PT:</strong> 10 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 1st 2018</td>
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<td>“Getting the band together” - recruiting veterans and investigators to participate.</td>
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<td>March 1st 2018</td>
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<td>“Opening night” - how the first meeting went, what to expect, the unexpected.</td>
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<td>April 5th 2018</td>
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<td>“Reading the reviews” - conversation about evaluating “engagement” or success.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3rd 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Tuning up” - evolution of your engagement group, lessons learned over time.</td>
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THANK YOU FOR JOINING!

Questions?
Contact Information

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Join the Conversation: #VeteranEngagement  #VAResearch
REFERENCES & RESOURCES


PERSPECTIVES ON VETERAN ENGAGEMENT
“If we think about every decision as a better decision when we invite the wisdom of the crowd. And our crowd is Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, Merchant Marines, and caregivers! It’s very critical that we take the wisdom of all these individual groups, blend them together, because we get a better decision in the end.”

Eugene Vecera, Army
Houston, TX
“One of the projects we talked about recently was how to increase utilization of, um, antibacterial devices, like lotions. And my contribution was too look at the packing, to make the packaging seems something that the recipient would value instead of something that was discardable and trivial.”

Erin Madsen, Air Force
Iowa City, IA
Perspectives on Veteran Engagement

“I would also like to see...more feedback from what comes out of our discussion. Where alterations have been made in the design of the research, or what findings have been made.”

-Don Wagner, Air Force
   Houston, TX

“While I don’t know that I changed anything specifically, the panel discussion definitely confirmed for me that the TAPPS program was going in the right direction. That was personally motivating and gave me a tremendous amount of confidence in moving forward with the intervention phase of the grant.”

-Brian Lund, PharmD
   CADRE, Iowa City
“When you can have a discussion to lay people and they understand what you're saying by the end of the meeting? That's a good thing. I think that you've been very successful with your speakers... They've all be able to do that it, make it understandable and then ask for directions...our participation.”

Bill Wirth, Army
Iowa City, IA