Engaging Veterans in Research: An Overview of Successful Practices across VA

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Strengthening **E**xcellence in **R**esearch through **V**eteran **E**ngagement (**SERVE**)

Portland, OR • Los Angeles, CA • Denver, CO • Milwaukee, WI

Boston/Bedford, MA • Durham, NC • New Orleans, LA

Cyberseminar Presenters

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.

Thank you to VHA HSR&D Project #SIP 17-152

Poll Question #1

Do you or your Center currently have opportunities for Veterans to serve as consultants in the research process?

❑Yes
❑Under development /Considering possibilities
❑No
❑I don't know

Poll Question #2

Which of the following best describes your experience with engaging Veterans as consultants in the research process?

❑ Low; tell me everything
❑ Somewhat familiar; want to learn more
❑ Actively engaged; want to learn AND can share with others

What is SERVE?

- "**Strengthening Excellence in Research through Veteran Engagement**" (SERVE) is a multi-site project that aims to synthesize information about successful practices across VA to engage Veterans as consultants to our research.

  - Funded by VA HSR&D
  - Task Order not a research study.
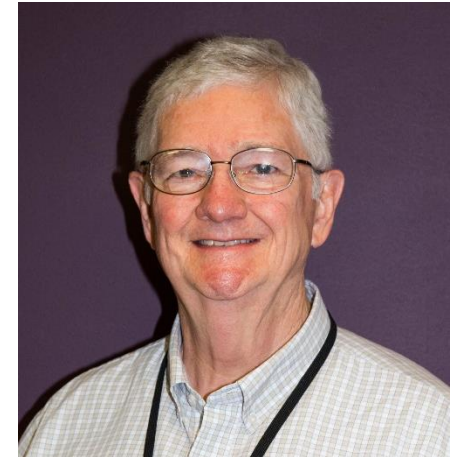
Primary SERVE Goal

Our goal is to identify, describe, and disseminate successful practices and associated tools to operationalize and optimize efforts to engage Veterans in all stages of the research process.

Connecting these people...

...and these people To improve VA research

What SERVE has done in first 6 months:

- Environmental Scan (What is already happening?)
  - Survey
  - Analysis of previously collected qualitative data
  - Listening Sessions with established Veteran Engagement Groups (Denver, Portland, Durham)
- Collaboration with the HSR&D Veteran Engagement Workgroup
- Ad hoc consultation with researchers and Centers
- Participation in non-VA patient engagement groups

What SERVE is working towards:

1) Veteran Engagement (VE) Toolkit
   a) Description of engagement models and range of reasonable practices associated with each
   b) Case studies of these practices
   c) VE resources (e.g., trainings, charters, compensation strategies, etc.) that have been created and used by our VA colleagues

2) Consultation options to further support VA Centers and individual investigators interested in VE

Best practices and a range of reasonable practices

- Our goal is to determine the range of reasonable practices and, if possible, the most common / most successful practice

- To date we have used environmental scan data to point us in the direction of questions that are most common

- We want the VE toolkit to address questions and challenges identified in the environmental scan

What is currently happening across VA?

Environmental Scan: Survey

Conducted April/May 2017

Purpose: To understand the breadth and types of efforts underway across the VA to engage Veterans and other stakeholders in research, evaluation, and quality improvement initiatives

Methods for survey

- Survey programmed in VA REDCap
- Distributed via email to HSR&D Centers' identified leadership and Investigators not affiliated with a COIN
- Survey was initially emailed to approximately 240 individuals
- Three reminder emails to encourage participation

Who participated in the survey?

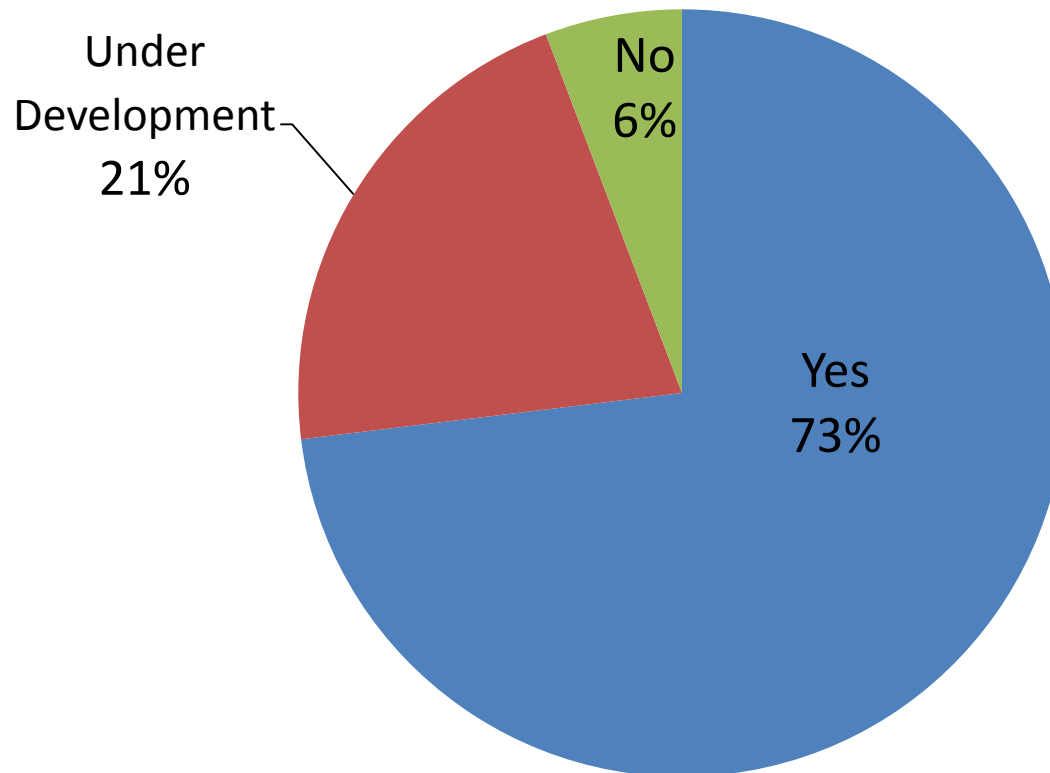Representatives from **42 unique** VA Medical Centers or VISN Offices

- A total of **52 individual** respondents

Representatives from:

- 18 COINS
- 11 QUERIs, 5 MIRRECs, and 3 GRECCs
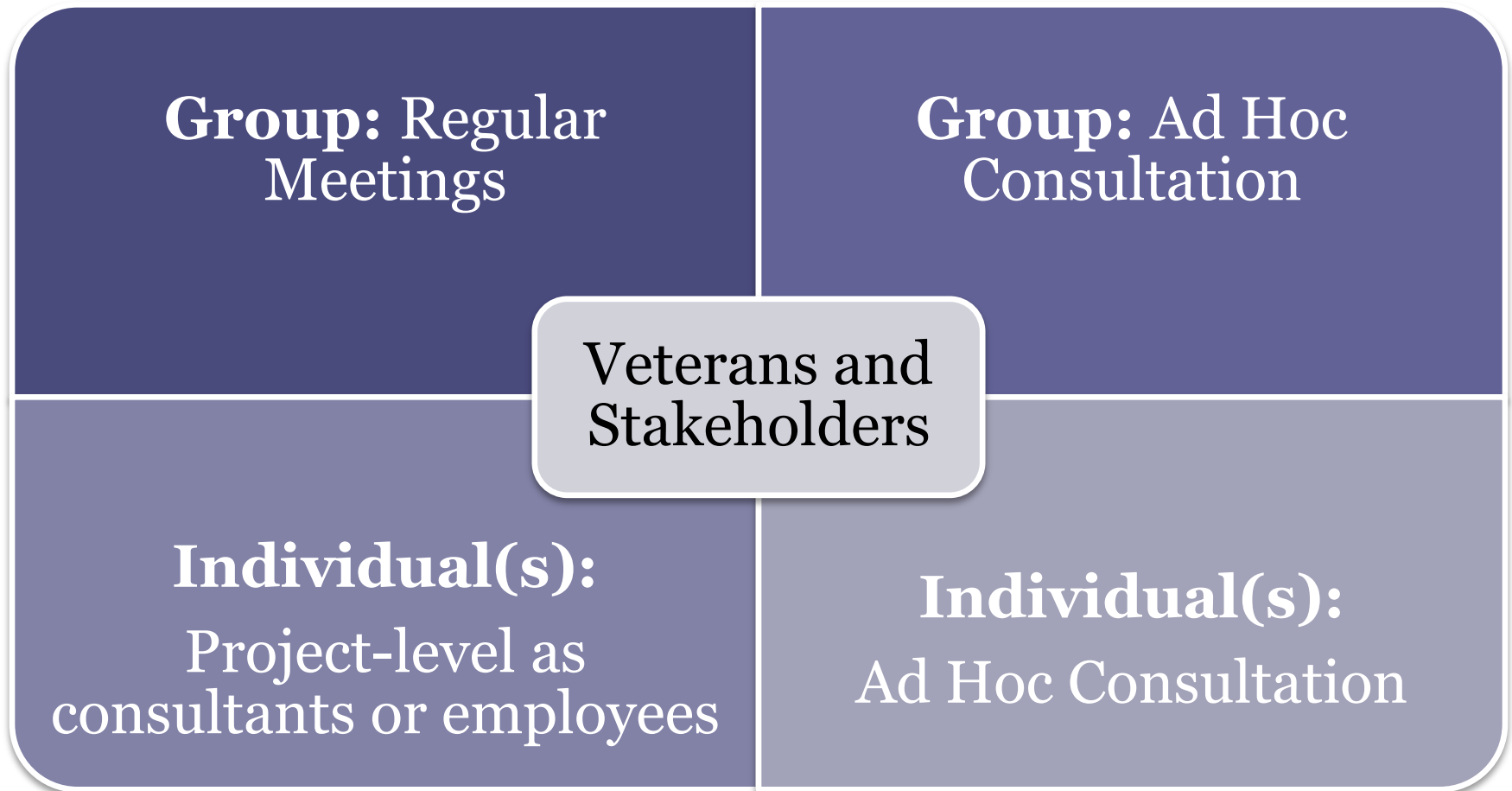- 10 investigators not affiliated with a COIN

Respondents who reported Veteran Engagement in research initiatives N=52
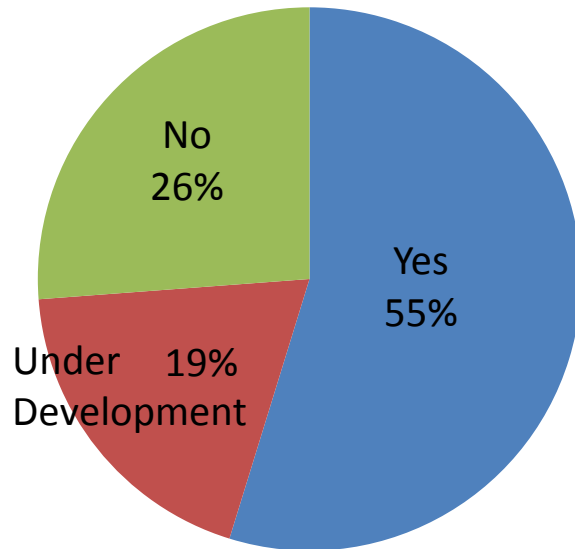
4 Models of Veteran Engagement

Group: Regular Meetings

Group: Ad Hoc Consultation

Veterans and Stakeholders

Individual(s):
Project-level as consultants or employees

Individual(s):
Ad Hoc Consultation

Model: Regularly <u>Group</u>

Who takes part?

- **Veterans (100%)**
- Family members (45%)
- VA service providers (45%)
- Non-VA service providers (9%)
- Other (15%)*

Frequency of meeting per year

- 1-4 times = 43%
- 5-9 times = 17%
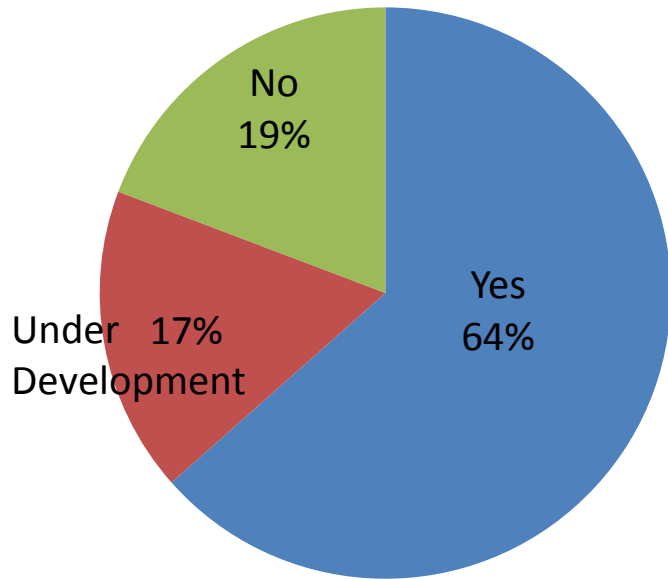- 10+ times = 39%

Number of unique participants

- 4-8 individuals = 35%
- **9-15 individuals = 48%**
- 16+ individuals = 17%

* Other includes VA researchers, administrators, VA employees who are Veterans

Pie chart:
- Yes 55%
- No 26%
- Under Development 19%

What input do regularly meeting <u>Groups</u> provide?

- 82% Review & provide input on research studies

- 82% Assist in planning for/developing individual research studies

- 58% Assist in strategic planning for Center

- 36% Assist in identifying Veterans to participate in studies

- 18% Other*

Ad Hoc Models: Group or Individuals that Meet on an Ad Hoc Basis

No 19%

Under Development 17%

Yes 64%

- Most (55%) meet with groups and individuals
- 27% meet with groups only
- 18% meet with individuals only

Frequency of meeting per year

- 0 times = 12%
- 1-4 times = 36%
- 5-9 times = 16%
- 10+ times = 32%

Who takes part in Ad Hoc VE Activities?

- Veterans (100%)
- Family members (50%)
- VA providers (75%)
- Non-VA providers (25%)
- Other (19%)

What input do Ad Hoc groups or individuals provide?

- 83% Review & provide input on research studies

- 64% Assist in planning for/developing individual research studies

- 42% Assist in strategic planning for Center

- 36% Assist in identifying Veterans to participate in studies

- 25% Other*

Reported challenges related to Veteran Engagement (VE) (reported across all models)

- Regulatory barriers (25%)
- Not enough resources (22%)
- Not enough time (20%)
- Limited experience establishing VE opportunities (20%)
- Don't have the right staff (14%)

Successful practices in Veteran Engagement

Listening to Veterans' recommendations

- Discussions with 3 established groups (Denver, Portland, and Durham) to collect feedback on the experience of Veteran participants

- Each group had between 6-9 participants

- Conversations with these groups lasted 60 to 90 minutes

Best Practice: Create meaningful engagement opportunities

Veterans get involved and stay involved when they <u>feel</u> their engagement is an opportunity to:

- Serve other Veterans
- Improve the quality and relevance of research—ultimately care for Veterans and support a Veteran-centered approach
- Learn about and share research findings

Best Practice: Understand and value unique contributions that Veterans bring to our research

• Bring diverse perspectives based on varied age, military experience, and use of VA services

• Push researchers to articulate _why_ their research is <u>important and relevant</u> to Veterans

• Provide important insights to help shape research questions, study designs, instruments, and other study components

• Help researchers communicate the value of research and their specific findings to other Veterans, family members, and stakeholders

Best Practice: Invest time and resources

Plan

- What kind of input is needed?
- From whom?
- How often?

Build a Strong Infrastructure

- ❖ For Centers: budget for a facilitator who will work with Veterans as an ongoing point of contact

- ❖ The scale of the activities will determine how much dedicated time will be needed

Best Practice: Invest time and resources

- Have a coordinator for groups that meet regularly to help create the "glue" (point of contact, communication, coordination)

- Invest time in clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations for Veterans and research teams

- Create an open environment where people feel comfortable providing feedback, even when feedback is critical or questioning

- Assure Veterans and research teams have the right training to engage in a meaningful way

Best Practice: Provide support to research teams to assure meaningful engagement
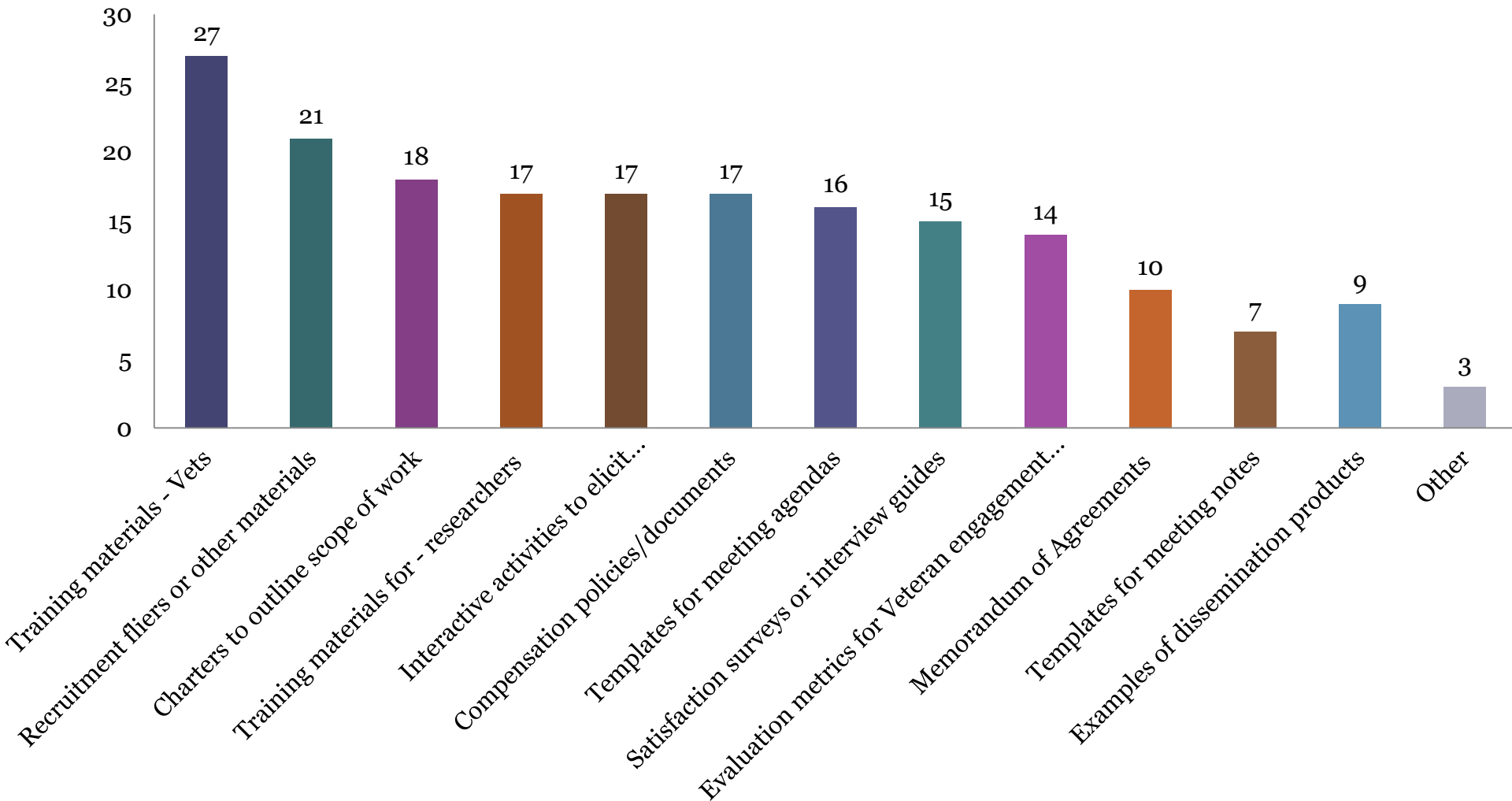
- Keep research presentations simple. Use lay language. (*Think dinner table conversation, not academic conference*)

- Start with why the research is important and how it will be useful

- The best encounters are ones that feel like a two-way conversation

- Provide information back to the group regarding how researchers used the Veterans' input. Feedback loops are important for sustaining interest and motivation

- ❖ Don't engage Veterans in research you are not interested in getting feedback and open to a dialogue

Best Practice
You do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Reported resources developed for VE

Category	Value
Training materials - Vets	27
Recruitment fliers or other materials	21
Charters to outline scope of work	18
Training materials for - researchers	17
Interactive activities to elicit...	17
Compensation policies/documents	17
Templates for meeting agendas	16
Satisfaction surveys or interview guides	15
Evaluation metrics for Veteran engagement...	14
Memorandum of Agreements	10
Templates for meeting notes	7
Examples of dissemination products	9
Other	3

You don't have to reinvent the wheel...

We intend to:
- Provide guidance on key questions to ask in the planning phases
- Share model documents that support Veteran Engagement
- Provide some case examples of different engagement models across VA

❖ Special thank you to the individuals and Centers who are sharing their materials with us!
   We will retain branding for the location that developed any materials used as examples.

Consultation opportunities * MARK YOUR CALENDAR *

- Research Center Veteran Engagement Jam Session
  - **October 5th** "Striking the Right Chord" – Experiences and questions around the very early stages of planning a Veteran Engagement Group.

- Cyber seminar: VE panel from 2017 HSRD/QUERI
  - **November 1st** "Veteran Engagement Three ways"

- Launching a web-based resource for FAQs

Poll Question #3

After this presentation today, I would ... ... arn more about (select all that apply):

- ❑ Developing opportunities to engage Veterans in research
- ❑ Recruiting Veterans and other stakeholders
- ❑ Preparing Veterans and researchers to engage in research
- ❑ Guidance on regulatory issues
- ❑ Other (Please add to cyber feedback)

Poll Question #4

What resources or support would you find most useful as you develop and implement activities to engage Veterans in VA research?

- ❏ Toolkit with guidance on models and example materials
- ❏ Community of Practice call to share ideas and ask questions
- ❏ Virtual trainings on specific topics related to VE
- ❏ Online forum to post questions and receive information
- ❏ Other (Please add to cyber feedback)

Feel free to reach out to any of us!

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New Orleans: Gala True   jennifer.true2@va.gov

l'shanah torah! HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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:
Stewart, Kenda R Kenda.Stewart@va.gov   Wendleton, Leah Leah.Wendleton@va.gov
LaChappelle, Kathryn Kathryn.LaChappelle@va.gov   Martin, Lindsey A. (HOU) Lindsey.Martin3@va.gov

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

Date	Time	Topic
October 5th 2017	ET: 1 pm CT: 12 pm MT: 11 am PT: 10 am	"Striking the Right Chord" - Experiences around the very early stages of planning a Veteran Engagement Group for Research.
November 2nd 2017		"I'll be Watching You" - Navigating Ethical, Federal, and VA policies
February 1st 2018		"Getting the Band Together" - Recruiting Veterans and Investigators to participate.
March 1st 2018		"Opening Night" - How the first meeting went, what to expect, the unexpected.
April 5th 2018		"Reading the Reviews" - Conversation about evaluating "engagement" or success.
May 3rd 2018		"Tuning Up" - Evolution of your Engagement Group, lessons learned over time.