



# VHA OFFICE OF HEALTHCARE INNOVATION AND LEARNING ENGAGING VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS



**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning



# SHARED MISSION

Having a shared mission in a changing world makes collaboration critical. Discerning the reality of where we are today, understanding how we got here, and knowing everyone’s role is essential to achieving where we want to be in the future.

VHA Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning (OHIL) collaborates to improve healthcare services for those we serve. To accomplish this, we engage industry leaders, academic and research institutions, Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) and Veteran Empowerment Organizations (VEOs), and most importantly, the Veterans we serve in designing the future of VHA care delivery. This kind of community collaboration sets us beyond traditional healthcare constructs as we invite perspective and action from Veterans, front-line providers, subject matter experts, and community collaborators to ensure a diverse, relevant, and customer-focused approach that empowers better VHA care delivery.

Engaging Veteran Service Organizations is a playbook for collaborating with VSOs and VEOs. It outlines an engagement structure at the national, local, and community levels and how VHA OHIL can extend more valuable collaboration on innovations benefiting our Veterans. It is more than a guide; it is a call to action for those of us within the VHA, Veteran-focused organizations, and communities everywhere to deliver value.

VHA OHIL possesses unique assets and services that provide access to learning, discovery, implementation, testing, and evaluation of novel solutions and mission-driven initiatives. Because of our robust innovation infrastructure and community ecosystem, we are uniquely positioned to leverage Veteran involvement, VSO/VEO priorities, and identified healthcare pain points to enable a convergence of healthcare policy, process, and innovation.

Together we must continually engage broader communities to drive co-design and delivery through clear methodologies using engagement and development tools you’ll read about in this playbook.

Many of the programs you can find in our annual [State of Innovation Reports](#) have informed the model for VSO/VEO collaboration and defined the plays outlined in this playbook.

I hope this playbook will find its way to every VHA Innovators Network (iNET) site, to every VHA innovator, and into the hands of every key stakeholder whose mission it is to care for our nation’s Veterans.

The next “turn” of our healthcare revolution is to operate outside of the boundaries of what we have known, apply the synergy of strengths of VHA and VSO/VEOs to our shared mission, and collaborate to deliver industry-leading care for our nation’s Veterans and their families.



**Suzanne Shirley, LCSW**  
Director, Community Engagement & Fellowship  
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# HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

**This *Engaging Veteran Service Organizations* playbook was designed as a tactical guide for collaborating with VSO/VEOs. It is intended as a flexible reference guide depending on the outcomes you are looking to achieve. Each play can be utilized independently or in combination with other plays to assist in developing a collaborative engagement strategy with VSO/VEOs.**



# PATHFINDER EMPOWERS VA's INNOVATORS

[pathfinder.va.gov](https://pathfinder.va.gov)

## Pathfinder is an online interactive tool

that allows VA's innovators, collaborators, and community members to easily connect with VHA OHIL.

Pathfinder empowers VA's innovators – both internal staff members and external collaborators – with tailored information and helpful resources to support advancing their innovations and engaging with VA. Pathfinder serves as the starting point to explore the following offerings:



IDEA  
DEVELOPMENT



INNOVATIVE  
PRODUCTS



RESOURCES &  
EXPERTISE



GETTING  
INVOLVED



RESEARCH & ACADEMIC  
ACTIVITIES

Through Pathfinder, VSO collaborators can learn about these offerings, as well as submit interest in collaborating with VA. Whether there is a specific idea or initiative, or a general interest in getting involved in VA innovation, Pathfinder provides the opportunity to submit this interest directly to VA and ensures it is routed to the appropriate contact people across VA!

Pathfinder is an innovation born from VHA OHIL, and thus has followed the same innovation lifecycle that all VA innovators follow. As a part of this human centered design process, VHA OHIL continues to test and refine the Pathfinder prototype through a series of co-design sessions with the stakeholders for whom the tool is meant to serve. This helps us ensure that the solution we launch is a customer-centric solution based on customer feedback and ideas. Insights gathered from VSO collaborators informed the design of the prototype, and many VSO collaborators served as early beta testers and co-designers of the initiative.

Pathfinder guides the innovation lifecycle through a recurring process in four key stages. During each stage, innovators focus on different goals and utilize specific methodologies and tools to further the innovation.



DISCOVER



TEST



REPLICATE



SCALE



**Pathfinder**





# ENGAGING VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

VSOs represent and work directly with Veterans and their families to provide advocacy and knowledge on various post-service experiences, to include: expertise on benefits, processes, access, member experiences and more. They are invaluable to the discovery, evaluation, and design of solutions for Veterans. Engaging with VSOs is an effective way to create awareness and receive on-the-ground feedback from Veterans and deliver more value.

Through VHA OHIL, there exists opportunities to bring VSOs and key stakeholders together to help solve some of VA’s toughest healthcare challenges through human-centered design and collaboration. Collaboration within and outside of the organization is supported by VHA OHIL’s innovation infrastructure, working on shared goals of improving Veterans’ lives, supporting their communities, and creating solutions that benefit members at the local, state, and national levels.

## THE PLAYS

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PLAY 1

# UNDERSTANDING VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Collectively, the Big 6 membership accounts for ~6 million Veterans and family members in chapters, posts, and detachments across the nation. Nationally, these organizations are represented in Washington, DC and have robust advocacy offices that include legislative directors, experts in health and benefits, as well as communications specialists.

Post-9/11 Veteran Empowerment Organizations (VEOs) have also emerged as highly engaged advocates for a

“new generation” of Veterans. VSOs like Wounded Warrior Project, Team Rubicon, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Team Red White and Blue, The Mission Continues, Travis Manion Foundation, and Student Veterans of America help amplify the voice of the Veteran community and create more opportunities for their members to collaborate with VA.

Additional details on several key VSO/VEOs are outlined below.

## Checklist

- ☐ Be familiar with the [many different VSOs](#) and their unique missions
- ☐ Identify the VSOs having an [operating presence in your area/region](#)
- ☐ Subscribe to VSO newsletters, attend local/community events
- ☐ Understand how VSOs operate at the national and local/community levels

## Key Questions

- Who are the Big 6 (largest membership) and where are they headquartered?
- How are Post-9/11 VEOs different than traditional VSOs?
- What is the unique focus of the VSOs with whom I am currently or wanting to collaborate?
- What support do VSOs provide to Veterans and their families?
- How can I utilize VSO communication to be better informed of potential collaboration opportunities?





# VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

There are over 100 VA-recognized VSOs providing different areas of advocacy and support, but with a shared mission of helping Veterans navigate the VA claims and benefits system and providing support through local facilities and programs.

A directory of VSOs can be found [here](#). While VA publishes officially recognized VSOs, this list may not always be comprehensive. Users are encouraged to check multiple sources for additional VSOs.

The following VSOs are the most frequently recognized and largest membership-serving organizations\*:



**1.5M**  
MEMBERS

**Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)**

VFW's focus is fostering camaraderie among United States Veterans of overseas conflicts, to serve our Veterans, the military, and our communities, and to advocate on behalf of all Veterans at the national and local levels.

[www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org)



**1M**  
MEMBERS

**Disabled American Veterans (DAV)**

DVA's focus is providing free-of-charge services that empower Veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity, to include obtaining benefits, advocacy on Capitol Hill, and community outreach and job programs. DAV priorities include but are not limited to improving mental health and suicide prevention.

[www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org)



**16K**  
MEMBERS

**Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)**

PVA's focus is serving the special needs of their members: Veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction, and advocacy for quality healthcare, research and education, benefits, and civil rights.

[www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org)



**85K**  
MEMBERS

**Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)**

VVA's focus is promoting and supporting the full range of issues important to Vietnam Veterans, to create a new identity for this generation of Veterans, and to change public perception of Vietnam Veterans. VVA priorities include but are not limited to Veteran homelessness and addressing the legacy of toxic exposures.

[www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)



**2M**  
MEMBERS

**American Legion**

American Legion's focus is on four pillars of service: 1) Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation; 2) National Security; 3) Americanism; and 4) Children and Youth. Legion Posts are found in nearly every community.

[www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)



**250K**  
MEMBERS

**American Veterans (AMVETS)**

AMVETS' focus is enhancing and safeguarding the entitlements for all American Veterans through providing Veteran services, helping with disability claims, scholarships, funeral honors, and community volunteerism. AMVETS' priorities include but are not limited to women Veterans initiatives and employment related opportunities.

[www.amvets.org](http://www.amvets.org)

\* Up-to-date membership numbers can be found on each VSO's website.





# POST-9/11 VETERAN EMPOWERMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Post-9/11 VEOs connect Veterans to their community and each other through nonprofit, donor-funded, foundation, and corporate collaborations among others.\*



**140K**  
MEMBERS

**Team Rubicon (TR)**  
Team Rubicon serves communities by mobilizing Veterans to continue their service; leveraging their skills and experience to help people prepare, respond, and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises. TR is a non-profit, grassroots organization.  
[www.teamrubiconusa.org](http://www.teamrubiconusa.org)



**184K**  
MEMBERS

**Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)**  
Wounded Warrior Project provides services, programs, and events to Veterans and service members who incurred a physical or mental injury, illness, or wound while serving in the military on or after September 11, 2001.  
[www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org)



**425K**  
MEMBERS

**Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)**  
IAVA's mission is to connect, unite, and empower post-9/11 Veterans. They do this through a variety of programs (e.g., Quick Reaction Force and Vote Hub, as well as a range of advocacy efforts).  
[www.iava.org](http://www.iava.org)



**130K**  
MEMBERS

**Travis Manion Foundation (TMF)**  
TMF strives to unite and strengthen communities by training, developing, and highlighting the role models that lead them. They develop programs, training opportunities, and events designed to empower Veterans and families of the fallen, and then inspire them to pass on their values to the next generation and the community at large.  
[www.travismanion.org](http://www.travismanion.org)



**217K**  
MEMBERS

**Team Red, White, and Blue**  
By forging America's leading health and wellness community for Veterans, service members, and their families, Team RWB delivers virtual and local, consistent, and inclusive opportunities for Veterans and the community to connect through physical and social activity. Volunteers host regular fitness activities, social gatherings, and community service events, and facilitate building strong local connections with members and organizations within the community.  
[www.teamrwb.org](http://www.teamrwb.org)



**94K**  
MEMBERS

**The Mission Continues**  
The Mission Continues is a national nonprofit organization connecting military Veterans with new missions in under-resourced communities. Their programs deploy Veteran volunteers to work alongside nonprofit collaborators and community leaders to improve educational resources, tackle food insecurity, foster neighborhood identity, and more.  
[www.missioncontinues.org](http://www.missioncontinues.org)



**140K**  
MEMBERS

**Student Veterans of America (SVA)**  
SVA is the premier organization leading service, research, programs, and advocacy for Veterans in higher education. To accomplish their vision of empowering student Veterans to lead and live their best lives, they act as a catalyst by providing student Veterans with resources, network support and advocacy to, through, and beyond higher education.  
[www.studentVeterans.org](http://www.studentVeterans.org)

\* Up-to-date membership numbers can be found on each VEO's website.





## PLAY 2

# ENGAGING VSOS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Engaging with VSOs through pilot programs and developing concepts with VSO members at the local VA Medical Center (VAMC) level is good because it creates an opportunity to continually solicit problems and ideas directly from the “voice of the Veteran.” With consistent engagement, outcomes can be improved for specifically targeted problem areas like military-veteran transition, suicide prevention, growing the Veteran government workforce, and improving access to care and healthcare outcomes.

Additionally, there are currently 12 VAMCs with a Veteran and Family Advisory Council (VFAC). These advisor members are trained to understand the Veteran perspective and engage with Veterans and family members to understand healthcare challenges they are facing, receive feedback on services, and identify projects from VA in which Veterans can actively participate in co-designing and testing. VFAC advisors are members of VSOs (or encouraged to become members), and participate in work done with Veterans, VAMC leadership, VSO leadership, and in the community.

Subsequently, Innovation Specialists can inform VSOs on the evolution and direction of VHA OHIL, and ensure Veterans are aware of best practices and the innovation resources available to them. Likewise, VSO leadership and members can inform VA on the most pressing challenges for Veterans to be addressed in future VHA innovation.

### Checklist

- ☐ Know the leadership roles (e.g., Associate Director, Chief of Staff) internal to a VAMC and how frequently they meet with VSO representatives
- ☐ Know the key leadership roles and organizations external to a VAMC
- ☐ As you create a relationship guide to your location/region, be aware of monthly VSO engagements to help establish and actively continue a relationship
- ☐ For each VSO relationship, be familiar with the types of services provided to Veterans and their families





## Checklist (cont.)

- ☐ [VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement \(CDCE\)](#): Create a list of key relationships, roles, events, schedules, and services provided
- ☐ VSO representative(s) embedded at a VAMC: Identify who are the representatives and how they are helping Veterans with healthcare challenges
- ☐ Community Veteran Engagement Board ([CVEB](#)) representative(s): Identify who are the representatives and their schedule of hosted events
- ☐ Mayors Veteran Advisory Boards/Councils: Identify the local/regional leadership and sponsored events
- ☐ County Commissioners: Identify the county commissioner representatives in the area, and any formal or informal advisory councils, events, and services
- ☐ National Association of County Veteran Service Officers ([NACVSO](#)): Be aware of training and education for CVSOs and Veteran advocates
- ☐ National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs ([NASDVA](#)): Identify the State Directors (leaders of governmental agencies tasked by their respective Governors, State Boards and/or Commissions)
- ☐ As new innovations and innovation topics emerge from VHA OHIL, discern how VSO relationships could be involved and introduced to VHA OHIL initiatives
- ☐ Identify the VFAC advisors at your VAMC and the VSOs of which they are members
- ☐ Participate in a meet and greet to learn how the VFAC can assist you
- ☐ Engage Veterans and advisors in recurring and ad hoc VFAC and sub-council meetings
- ☐ Communicate with Innovation Specialists at other VAMCs regarding innovation programs for diffusion
- ☐ Build a relationship with VAMC-embedded, local, and regional VSO representatives
- ☐ Maintain strong relationships through a consistent and productive presence
- ☐ Actively communicate process, status, and tools to drive clarity on collaborations

## Key Questions

- Who are the VAMC leadership (e.g., Associate Director, Chief of Staff) and what are their relationships to key VSO representatives?
- Who are VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) members, do they also belong to a VSO(s), and what type of services do they provide?
- What types of services or changes to services have been identified by VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE)?
- Who are the VSO representatives embedded at the VAMC, and what challenges are they experiencing or have played a part in solving?
- What events, training, town-halls, and seminars are available for me to attend?
- If my VAMC does not have a VFAC, can I use the [Diffusion Marketplace](#) to promote the establishment of one? Who are the stakeholders I should involve?
- To which VSOs do my VAMC VFAC advisors belong?
- What challenges have been brought by Veterans and their families to the VFAC and how can I integrate their perspective into my facility innovation program?
- Could a collaborative program at my VAMC provide value at other VAMCs, and can I utilize other VFACs to extend broader Veteran collaboration?
- How am I communicating to my network of VSO officers and Veterans on initiatives, status, availability, and opportunities?
- Is my communication actively helping to contribute to the design and end-solution and/or service?
- How am I maintaining awareness of national VSO advocacy strategies?
- What is the outcome from my meetings and discussions with community VSO offices on issues, needs, and services for the Veteran and caregivers, and does it help in addressing issues?
- Am I maintaining a consistent engagement with the VSO representatives embedded at my VAMC, VSO offices, posts, and detachments?





## PLAY 3

# SHARING INNOVATIVE STORIES AND OPPORTUNITIES WITH VSOS

Driving ongoing awareness through focused/ programmatic networking and messaging will help optimize our overall efforts to support VHA OHIL objectives.

To advance their organizations' missions, VSOs, and Post-9/11 VEOs participate in media, events, and social networking to engage with and be engaged by Veterans and civilians alike. Subscribing to VSO publications, downloading their mobile apps, and being aware of and participating in events creates opportunities for further engagement and alignment.

### Checklist

- ☐ Define [Mission Model](#) and build your engagement strategy
- ☐ Define the target audience
- ☐ Develop a strategic plan
- ☐ Develop a proposal for needed resources
- ☐ Develop and deploy an operating model

### Key Questions

- Do concepts, pilots, and programs focus on VSO and member feedback (e.g., focus groups, brainstorm sessions, federated data analytics, etc.)?
- Are value propositions, target market segments and audiences, beneficiaries, channels, and impact clearly defined?
- Am I strategically communicating by building an annual plan including a monthly calendar of key VSO events aligned with go-to-market (GTM) strategy?
- Do I understand and have I articulated the people I need, their expertise, amount of time, and budget required?
- Do all collaborators understand the innovation goals, timeline, and plan to maximize impact to Veterans and their families?



## PLAY 4

# LEVERAGING VSO ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATION

VSO advocacy officers frequently meet with members of Congress and their staff, testifying and lobbying for legislation and policy changes. They engage at least monthly with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Undersecretaries of Health and Benefits, and VA program office leaders. VSO senior leadership also meets frequently

with the White House. VHA healthcare priorities, investments, and collaborations are often driven in part by legislation that has been lobbied for by VSO advocates. The [Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee](#) and legislation from current and past Congressional sessions are available [here](#).

## Checklist

- ☐ Identify legislation advocacy from VSOs being presented to and passed by Congress via VSO websites
- ☐ Understand published legislative priorities for VSOs and the yearly schedule for new priorities
- ☐ Know the VSO advocacy - subject matter experts (SME), the topics on which they are meeting with VA program offices, when, and the outcomes
- ☐ Understand legislation passed by Congress and alignment to advocacy efforts by specific VSOs
- ☐ Identify tools, programs, initiatives and priorities that align with relevant VSO legislative priorities
- ☐ Understand the current "Promising Practices" available on [Marketplace](#)
- ☐ Share Marketplace opportunities with VSO collaborators

## Key Questions

- Do VSO legislative priorities identify funding, modification to a current program, and specific impacted Veteran populations?
- What collaboration is currently underway in support of VSO priorities?
- What are the key topics of Veteran legislative advocacy this year, and how do they relate to VSO priorities?
- How does legislation correlate to related engagements I have with my VSO and Veteran network?
- Is my VSO and Veteran network aware of VHA OHIL priorities associated with legislation and how to collaborate on projects funded through and supporting that legislation?
- Do I understand VSO advocacy efforts affecting new legislation and how to facilitate collaboration with VHA OHIL?



## PLAY 5

# COLLABORATING ON EMERGING HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS, MEDICAL DEVICES AND ADVANCING PILOTS

Increasing the frequency of evaluation and understanding of emerging technology with VSOs builds awareness of programs, services, and solutions available to Veterans. And as VA clinicians and care teams are being trained on new technology, Veterans can be engaged in field-based design and development, with opportunities for real-life user testing.

Making innovative solutions available to the broadest Veteran community is increased with VSO collaboration on quality improvement, technology validation, and clinical trial research. Collaborating with VSOs, their SMEs, clinicians, and leaders on shared problems and outcomes enables a deeper investment in impactful and scalable healthcare solutions.

Connect with VSOs to help inform, pilot, launch and sustain Veteran initiatives. Through these efforts we can effectively engage Veterans to help advance VHA OHIL's work and create multiple access points to pilot programming.

VHA OHIL offers field and national pilot support and the invitation to collaborate through [Pathfinder](#), [Spark-Seed-Spread](#), [Greenhouse Initiative](#), [VA National Centers for Innovation to Impact](#), [Diffusion of Excellence Marketplace](#), [SimLEARN](#), [SLICE Network](#) and [Challenge.gov](#).

## Checklist

- ☐ Engage the [Diffusion Marketplace](#) to discover fully vetted best practices implemented within the VA Enterprise and ready for consumption
- ☐ Source potential pain points or problem areas with VSOs to inform the [VA Shark Tank](#) competition
- ☐ Coordinate with VSOs to assist in prioritizing internal challenge competition focus areas
- ☐ Share and help facilitate [Greenhouse](#) processes with VFAC advisors, VSOs, and Veterans who express healthcare concepts and ideas for solutions (refer to "Creating Collaborative Agreements - Play 6" in this playbook for more on facilitating the collaboration process)

## Key Questions

- Is there synergy with healthcare process/practice at the VAMC and innovations available on Marketplace?
- Are there any products I use, or have been made aware of through my VSO relationships that should be elevated for use by more Veterans?
- Is there an opportunity to collaborate with VSOs and Veterans on topic-based healthcare solutions through co-development and user acceptance testing (UAT)?
- What Spark-Seed-Spread programs align to challenges communicated by my Veteran network?
- Is the phase of the Spark-Seed-Spread project viable for my VAMC to be involved now?
- Who in my Veteran and VSO network is aware of Greenhouse and the process to submit ideas and collaborate on pilots?



## Checklist

- ☐ Identify potential healthcare innovation projects and programs through the [National Center for Collaborative Healthcare Innovation](#) that align to challenges communicated by your VSO and Veteran network
- ☐ Engage with [VA Ventures](#) to proactively involve your VFAC, VSO, and Veteran network in early collaboration incubator solutions
- ☐ Provide frequent updates at recurring VFAC, VSO, and other meetings on potentially aligned and upcoming pilots available through the [Diffusion of Excellence Marketplace](#)
- ☐ Identify current and upcoming national and regional Center for Care and Payment Innovation (CCPI) pilots
- ☐ Understand the purpose of the pilot, scope, population, and collaborators/testing resource needs
- ☐ Identify VA collaborators for pilots from program offices with established VSO relationships
- ☐ Share pilot information during regular engagements with my VSO network, and follow-up on collaborator opportunities and logistics
- ☐ Secure the resources needed to be effective in the pilot execution
- ☐ Share the [Pathfinder](#) tool with the VSO community
- ☐ Build a clear teaming and operational model
- ☐ Develop a strategy for engaging VSOs in the field and supporting pilots with their collaborative engagement (see Play 6)
- ☐ Collaborate with VSO and Veterans as team members, with active communication and feedback
- ☐ Plan a scaling model with a leadership stakeholder coalition for cohesive and productive lessons-learned benefits for all participating sites
- ☐ Objective and key results are clearly defined and communicated



## Key Questions

- Is the process of working through Greenhouse made available to my network and how do I share this pathway to healthcare innovation?
- Am I proactive in aligning VA Ventures (an NCI2I Center) and my VFAC, VSO, and Veteran network to well-matched collaboration opportunities?
- How am I tracking Marketplace projects aligned to challenges communicated at my VAMC?
- How does sharing a Marketplace collaboration with my VAMC with other Innovation Specialists at other VAMCs increase the success of the pilot or project?
- What alignment do I see between my VSO network and CCPI pilot initiatives?
- Is my VSO network aware of where to find CCPI pilot information, and am I regularly sharing pilot opportunities for VSO collaboration?
- Who are the right resources for a pilot based on the CCPI lifecycle stage?
- Is the opportunity, concept, and mission model clearly defined to next level of detail including a problem statement about current/future state, potential stakeholders, outcomes, and next steps?
- Does my pilot program include 2-3 active pilots?
- Are collaborators and key stakeholders clear on the tasks to build, measure, learn and improve pilot objectives?
- Have I identified the people, process, and technology needs and created a resource request?
- How do I include VSOs and Veterans in the identification, discovery, and design of healthcare solution, ensuring they are a part of the team?
- Do I understand the customer's needs?
- Are the collaboration networks or like-sites scaling in phases, and are lessons-learned communicated clearly? Are after-action reviews successful?
- Do I have commitment from my coalition and organizational leaders?
- Are key performance indicators (KPI) and User Acceptance Testing (UAT) outcomes planned for and published?



## PLAY 6



# CREATING COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENTS

Collaboration is a critical component when building a culture of innovation. Strength is found by leaning into the expertise of external entities and, together, delivering mission-driven innovation to all Veterans. Collaborations can come in many forms. Through collaboration, companies and organizations can further grow innovative business models for successful use in VAMCs. With the help of VHA OHIL, VAMCs can continue providing poignant and nuanced care by leveraging the [Collaboration Playbook](#) to build collaborative agreements that better serve the Veteran community.

We especially encourage our VSO collaborators to get involved by joining VHA OHIL's innovation and learning communities as a subject matter expert (SME) and/or

Veteran or caregiver advocate. SMEs are key collaborators in helping to accelerate our innovations and our innovators' learning and development. Some ways SMEs are involved include but are not limited to: mentoring innovators in design challenges, speaking at innovation demo days for make-a-thon/hack-a-thon events, participating in focus groups, and offering subject matter expertise.

Our Veteran and caregiver advocates provide invaluable insight to inform VHA's innovation efforts. Veteran and caregiver advocates can participate in discovery interviews or focus groups, participate in testing of innovation projects, and/or provide testimonials for VA care and services.

## Checklist

- ☐ Reference the 2021 [Collaboration Playbook](#)
- ☐ Identify the problem the collaboration looks to solve
- ☐ Define the roles and responsibilities of both the collaborator and VHA
- ☐ Communicate the solution to be tested
- ☐ Identify and validate data being shared (if applicable)
- ☐ Create alignment to VHA OHIL mission and goals
- ☐ Gain agreement on the value proposition for the collaboration
- ☐ Request and complete the Conflict-of-Interest form

## Key Questions

- Does your potential collaboration contribute to building a culture of innovation and invite expertise from external entities?
- Is the opportunity focused on mission-driven innovation to help all Veterans?
- What is the value proposition of this collaboration?
- What does VHA receive because of this collaboration?
- What does the collaborator receive?
- How is this in line with the VA mission? How does this benefit Veterans?
- How will you tell the story of this collaborations' success both internally and externally?





# THANK YOU

Thank you to all the local and national level collaborators that supported the development of this playbook. Remember to leverage Pathfinder to pursue innovative collaborations with VSOs.



[pathfinder.va.gov](https://pathfinder.va.gov)





**For more info visit [innovation.va.gov](http://innovation.va.gov) or email [vhainnovation@va.gov](mailto:vhainnovation@va.gov)**