

FAQ for VA Researchers:
Facilitating Veteran Engagement in Research
at the VA Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research (CORE)

Questions? Contact Tracy Sides at Tracy.Sides@va.gov

What is “Veteran engagement” in research?

Within the VA Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research (CORE) we define “engagement” as the active, meaningful, and collaborative interaction between Veterans and researchers across all stages of the research process, where research decision-making is informed by Veterans’ lived-experience expertise.¹ An equity lens is intended with this definition and is reflected in the diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, and social identities of the Veterans who serve on Pain/Opioid CORE-based engagement panels.

Veterans who offer their expertise through engagement processes are *not* research subjects and they are *not* referred to as patients; they are our colleagues. As such, they serve as paid experts who share their “boots on the ground” perspectives to help health researchers better integrate the real-world experiences of Veterans into the design, conduct, interpretation, and dissemination of their studies.

Why is Veteran engagement in research important?

Veterans are at the heart of health care provided by VA and should have a voice in research done to improve the care they receive. Veteran engagement (VE) across the research process also provides a valuable “reality check” that helps ensure research studies are both feasible to conduct and meaningful to the Veteran community.

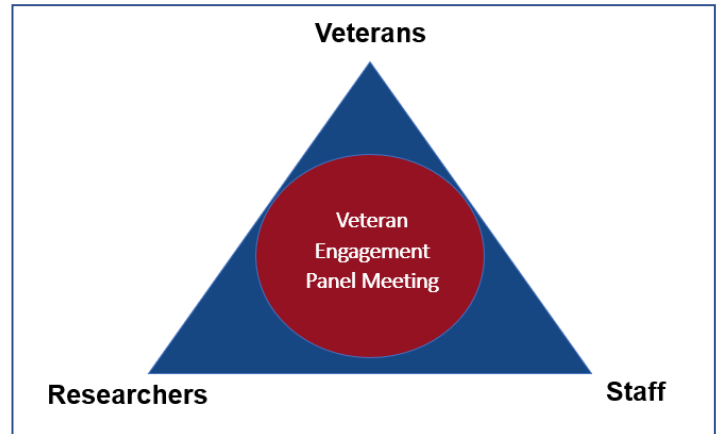
How does the Pain/Opioid CORE facilitate Veteran-engaged research?

In 2020, the CORE convened a Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP) as a resource for VA investigators to learn about and integrate Veterans’ perspectives into their studies and to connect Veterans with the VA research community. The VEP is comprised of Veterans from around the country who have personal experience with chronic pain, opioid use, or addiction. The 13-member panel is a diverse group of men and women and includes students, retirees, and current workers with varied military, volunteer, and professional experiences. The VEP meets virtually each month and, to date, has met with more than 30 different research teams.

¹ Definition adapted from Harrington RL, Hanna ML, Oehrlein EM, et al. Defining Patient Engagement in Research: Results of a Systematic Review and Analysis: Report of the ISPOR Patient-Centered Special Interest Group. *VALUE HEALTH* 2020;23:677-88.

How does the CORE Veteran engagement panel operate?

Trained staff support interactions between researchers and diverse groups of Veterans who serve on the CORE Veteran engagement (VE) panel. Each panel meeting lasts 2 hours and is intentionally structured to produce co-learning conversations and build relationships based on mutual respect. During the meeting planning process, CORE VE panel staff work with guest researchers to identify key questions to discuss with the VEP. CORE VE staff then prepare VE panel meeting materials; facilitate panel meetings; and produce detailed meeting notes to make the whole VE process as easy and valuable as possible for guest researchers and Veteran panel members.



Veteran engagement (VE) in research involves Veterans, Researchers, and VE Staff.

Who can meet with the Veteran engagement panel?

Any VA researcher studying a topic that relates in some way to health care or quality of life concerns of Veterans with chronic pain or opioid-related conditions.

What is the cost for a researcher to meet with the panel?

None. The national Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran engagement panel is a complimentary resource to VA pain/opioid researchers and project leaders. Staff time and compensation for Veteran panel members are paid by the Pain/Opioid CORE through funding from VA Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D).

See Page 3 for a table listing the specific steps for a visiting research team before, during, and after a VE panel meeting.

What is the process for a researcher to meet with the Veteran engagement panel (VEP)?

CORE Veteran Engagement Staff	Research team
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Before Meeting</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send intake form to Researcher 2. Facilitate VEP planning meetings to understand Researcher priorities 3. Create both a tailored VEP meeting agenda and background materials to help VEP members prepare for meeting discussions 4. Handle all meeting logistics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Confirm meeting time b. Send VEP the agenda and background materials 1 – 2 weeks before meeting c. Send out Webex link and reminder to all attendees prior to meeting 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Before Meeting*</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>6 weeks before VEP meeting</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Submit VEP intake form b. Attend 45-minute VEP planning meeting with CORE VE staff 2. <u>2 – 3 weeks before VEP meeting</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Meet with CORE VE staff to run through meeting, finalize materials, and address any questions <p><i>* Structured preparation for the meeting enables us to facilitate an effective VEP meeting for you.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>During Meeting</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate meeting 2. Take notes on Veteran feedback; copy the “chat” transcript and any poll results 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>During Meeting</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Briefly introduce yourself 2. Respond to clarifying questions 3. Be fully present and interact with the VEP
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>After Meeting</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pay VEP stipends 2. Send meeting summary to Researcher <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Notes summarizing feedback b. “Chat” transcript from meeting c. Link to online researcher evaluation form 3. <u>About 6 months after VEP meeting</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contact you for a brief call regarding your experience with the VEP 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>After Meeting</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete an online evaluation* 2. <u>About 6 months after VEP meeting</u> Share how you used feedback in your research plans during a brief phone call with VE staff* <p>* Optional.</p>

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