VA QUERI SERVICE DIRECTED PROJECTS: PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA

Adequacy of Response to Previous Reviewer Comments

- Did the applicant address the issues raised by the reviewers of the concept paper or previously reviewed full proposal (if this is a resubmission)?

Project Goal(s) and Questions/Hypotheses

- Is the project’s overall goal(s) described in light of the quality enhancement (QE) or performance problem(s) the project is targeting?
- If the project aims to address an intervening barrier or factor contributing to the quality problem (but not directly causing the quality problem), does the proposal explain how the project will contribute to the solution of the overarching quality problem, and why a direct solution is not possible?

Background of Context

- Does the proposal provide an adequate literature review and evidence-based clinical recommendations/guidelines or other foundations supporting the hypothesized effectiveness of the proposed quality improvement approach?
- Is there an adequate description of current practices, determinants, barriers and facilitators?

Significance

- Does the proposal adequately describe the clinical/quality issue(s) to be addressed, including as appropriate data on the clinical condition’s/problem’s prevalence/incidence, mortality/morbidity, quality of life consequences, economic consequences, or other significant considerations.
- Is the proposed work grounded in theoretical and empirical evidence on organizational change and/or provider behavior?
- Will the proposed work contribute to policy, practice and/or the science of Implementation?
- Will lessons learned from the proposed project be generalizable to other Implementation efforts?
- Are the specific research questions/hypotheses clearly stated and appropriate?
- Is the project aimed at creating a learning organization focused on the translation of research into practice?

Methods

- Is an overall conceptual framework for the approach provided, citing specific sources and justifying the selection of the source(s) and framework for the specific quality problem and intervention approach planned?
- Are the design and methods appropriate given the stated project goals?
- Does the work involve a clearly articulated process or formative evaluation?
- If an intervention is being implemented, is it adequately described (e.g., are components specified, is it apparent who will administer the intervention and to whom it is targeted) and justified?
- If applicable, are intervention components described that will perform the functions listed below?
  - Communicate the legitimacy (e.g., evidence base) of recommended practices (to facilitate their acceptance by the target clinicians, managers, patients, and/or other stakeholders),
  - motivate clinician, manager, patient willingness to change via presentation of evidence of a quality/performance problem or via other means

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1. See the following for a shortened table. Cheryl B. Stetler, Brian S. Mittman, Joseph Francis (Guest Editors). QUERI SERIES: Overview of the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) and QUERI Article Series. Implementation Sci

2. From: Cheryl B. Stetler, Lynn McQueen, John Demakis, Brian Mittman. QUERI Series: An evidence-based implementation program in the US Department of Veterans Affairs: The role of context and the strategic management of change Implementation Sci
establish, disseminate and reinforce professional (patient) norms favoring the recommended practices and countering current (non-adherent) practices and conveying the advantages of the preferred practices over current practices,

- create or strengthen external expectations and interest in improved quality (among professional, policy, public, special interest, and/or other groups),

- educate clinicians, staff, patients regarding desired/expected roles, practices and professional behaviors,

- enhance clinician/staff/patient knowledge regarding the desired clinical practices and/or enhance skills in performing desired practices,

- create conditions facilitating and favoring desired practices in routine care, including financial, administrative and other conditions,

- redesign other aspects of the delivery system and organization to facilitate improved practices,

- implement the desired care model or organizational arrangements and the behavior/organizational change efforts in a manner adapted to the target practice settings, to maximize success,

- monitor and continually refine implementation of the new practices, including actions needed to remove any barriers that may arise.

Is the overall research design, including issues such as the experimental unit (facility, clinic, team, clinician, or patient) and other major design features justified?

- Are the variables, measures and data collection methods/plans adequately described?

- If relevant, is detailed information on methods to study current practice patterns and their determinants provided?

- If applicable, is a description provided of plans for monitoring implementation and progress of the quality enhancement effort, and refining the effort based upon this ongoing monitoring?

- Are decisions to attend to certain features of the implementation effort but not others, or to exclude a formative evaluation altogether justified?

Impact (summative) evaluation: overall plan. Are plans for measuring the quality enhancement program’s impacts on key structures, processes and outcomes of interest addressed?

- Are plans for identifying and recruiting all relevant participants, including clinicians, other staff (managers, support staff), patients, patient family members or caregivers, etc., discussed and any human subjects issues addressed?

- Are the participating project sites, site recruitment processes, and timeline adequately discussed and justified? Listed below are some elements that reviewers may wish to consider:
  - Randomization protocol
  - Usual care condition
  - Assurance of patient safety
  - Sustainability

- Are the general analytical approaches for quantitative and qualitative data to be collected as part of the diagnostic analysis, formative evaluation and impact/summative evaluation appropriate?

- Is an Economic Analysis appropriate to VA decision makers (e.g., cost consequences, as opposed to traditional cost-effectiveness) included?

Project Organization and Management

- Are the investigators clearly qualified to lead the proposed project?

- Is there a sound plan for project management and leadership?

- Are the necessary team members identified and are their qualifications, skills, and expertise appropriate for their designated roles within the project?

- Does the project team include individuals with expertise in organizational change and management research?

- Is it clear that the investigators have access to the data required for successful completion of the proposed work?

- If existing databases are to be used, is evidence of familiarity with these databases (and awareness of their idiosyncrasies and limitations) included in the proposal?
Adequacy of Evidence-Base Supporting Implementation at This Time

- Does the proposal clearly demonstrate the existence of an adequate evidence-base, in the form of published research and/or guidelines, to warrant Implementation at this time?
- Are there known or potential risks to patients if implementation is delayed?
- Is it clear that implementation is not being rushed (therein creating potential patient risk)?
- Is there a critical level of need and/or urgency for implementation at this time?
- Does the implementation plan appear to target a viable system or organization (e.g., it may only be feasible to implement an intervention at a single unit – with VISN support – as a step toward implementing VAMC- and/or VISN-wide)?
- Is there sufficient supplemental evidence to support implementation if a substantial body of effectiveness data has not as yet been published (e.g., cumulative efficacy data, practical/clinical evidence, etc.)?

Involvement of Key Stakeholders

- Is there evidence of commitment, including tangible resources, at all necessary levels (e.g., provider, unit, facility, VISN)?
- Are the needs of veterans clearly represented in the project plan either by direct or indirect veteran involvement in process evaluation?
- Is there a plan for continued feedback from all stakeholders?

Contribution to the Veterans Health Administration

- Does the proposed work have the clear potential to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of health care in VA and the health status of veterans?
- Does the proposed work hold the promise of rapid clinical and organizational improvement?
- Is there evidence that the activities planned for implementation would be sustainable beyond the life of the proposed project?
- Is there potential for expansion throughout VHA if the implementation is successful at the level proposed within the scope of the project (e.g., if implementation is to take pace within a single unit, is there potential for expansion throughout on or more VISN(s))? 

Budget Efficiency

- Is the budget well justified?
- Does the budget reflect VISN support (e.g., in-kind support, equipment, facilities)?

Evaluation Plan

- Does the proposal include a well-structured evaluation plan?
- Is the evaluation plan unbiased and appropriately tailored to the goals of the proposed work?
- Will mechanisms be in place to continue to track the success of the implementation efforts after the funding period?
- Will spread and rollout (i.e., to other sites, clinics, VISNs) be tracked?

Dissemination / Implementation Plan

- Evaluate how and when research results will be disseminated and implemented