

2020 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Shark Tank Competition

Applicant Frequently Asked Questions

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Veterans Health Administration Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE), Diffusion of Excellence, and VHA Diffusion Marketplace Overview

What is the VHA Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE)?

VHA IE is the catalyst for enabling the discovery and spread of mission-driven health care innovation to advance care delivery and service that exceeds expectations, restores hope, and builds trust within the Veteran community. As part of the VHA Office of Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks (DEAN), VHA IE leverages the collective power of innovation champions from across VHA to drive improvement and foster a culture of innovation and continuous learning.

VHA IE is fueled by five complementary portfolios: VHA Innovators Network (iNET), Diffusion of Excellence, VHA Innovation Community, Care and Transformational Initiatives, the National Center for Collaborative Healthcare Innovation (NCCHI). These core programs operate at distinct stages of the innovation cycle, forming the connective tissue of an ecosystem, driving a culture of innovation and learning, and creating opportunities for VHA staff. These programs offer employees the opportunity to ideate, test, and spread both innovations and best practices through financial support, frontline empowerment, training, and a collaborative network of peers.

For more information, please visit the [VHA IE](#) website.

What is the Diffusion of Excellence?

VHA Diffusion of Excellence specializes in scaling emergent, high-impact health care practices across the nation's largest integrated health care system consisting of more than 300,000 employees serving over nine million Veterans at roughly 1,250 facilities. The 2015 Veterans Choice Act studies uncovered that on average VHA outperformed the private sector on many measures, but variation between facilities resulted in poor outcomes for some Veterans. VHA took a unique approach to solving this issue by designing and deploying a model to identify, test, and diffuse evidence-based practices across VHA, naming it Diffusion of Excellence.

VHA Diffusion of Excellence puts VA's talented clinical and administrative workforce at the helm of enterprise-wide health care improvement initiatives. Since 2015, VHA has held five "shark tank" style competitions, each followed by the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp. During Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp, the winners, known as Gold Status Fellows, build implementation plans for practice replication. VHA consults the Gold Status Fellows on adapting the practices to meet the unique needs of local Veteran populations and employees. Once the practices prove to be replicable and deliver consistent impact, Diffusion of Excellence works with national stakeholders to collaboratively develop strategies for national diffusion throughout the VHA health care system.

For more information on Diffusion of Excellence, please visit the [VHA IE](#) website.

What is the VHA Diffusion Marketplace?

VHA Shark Tank Competition Overview

What is the VHA Shark Tank Competition?

Inspired by the reality television series, *Shark Tank*¹, the VHA Shark Tank Competition offers a unique opportunity to recognize top performers solving some of the toughest clinical and operational challenges across VHA with the goal of changing and saving Veteran lives. The Competition invites all VHA employees to submit promising practices they have successfully implemented in at least one VHA facility. To be eligible, practices must address one of the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Priorities:

- **Access** – improving the ease with which a Veteran can receive timely care including same day services, responding to routine clinical inquiries within two business days, offering appointments and other follow up options upon leaving clinic, integrating community providers, or extending clinic hours
- **Digital Health** – leveraging the use of digital information and/or communication technologies to improve remote healthcare access for Veterans with limited mobility, time, or transportation options
- **High Reliability Culture Change: Commit to Zero Harm** – develop standard work practices for leaders and staff and share best practices to support the enterprise effort to build a *Just Culture* of safety and drive to zero harm
- **Improving Capacity, Efficiency, and Productivity** – standardizing core processes and leveraging innovative practice solutions across specialties to optimize provider and care team productivity, and increase access to quality care for our nation’s Veterans
- **Medical Education in Rural Areas** – establishing programs that foster educational opportunities for providers in rural areas
- **Veteran Experience** – restoring pride, public trust, and confidence in VA; delivering patient experiences marked by effectiveness, ease, and engagement
- **Whole Health** – an approach to health care that empowers and equips people to take charge of their health and well-being and live their life to the fullest
- **Workforce Development** – improving recruitment, retention, and morale of VA employees; empowering staff to contribute greater input into their work environment

Additionally, the Competition seeks promising practices that improve outcomes for the following populations:

- All Veterans
- LGBTQ Veterans
- Older American Veterans
- Post-9/11 Veterans
- Pre-9/11 Veterans
- Rural Veterans
- Women Veterans
- VA Employees
- Veteran Caregivers

¹ [Shark Tank](#) is a reality television series aired on ABC where entrepreneurs make ten-minute business presentations or “pitches” to a panel of potential investors called “Sharks” – self-made multi-millionaire and billionaire executives. In their pitch, entrepreneurs attempt to convince the “Sharks” to invest in their business or product. If “Sharks” believe the idea is viable and will provide a significant return on investment, they will bid their funding and support.

What are Veteran Patient Experience Domains?

The Veterans Experience Office (VEO) partnered with VHA to design and deploy a Veteran Patient Experience (VA PX) framework consisting of seven Domains to support VHA facilities in providing an experience that strengthens the trust and confidence of Veterans and their families have in VA. If your practice relates to Veteran Experience Priority, it must map to one of the seven Patient Experience Domains:

- **Culture:** A culture of kindness, collaboration, innovation, transparency, and accountability is obvious and contagious to Veterans, their families, and staff. Veterans feel welcomed and cared throughout their health care journey
- **Employee Engagement:** Employees feel passionate about serving Veterans, are committed and accountable to the organization and each other, and are empowered by leadership to put discretionary effort into their work. Employees understand and embody the philosophy of patient experience
- **Environment:** Veterans and their families feel welcomed and supported in an environment that is clean, safe, exudes healing, and mitigates anxiety
- **Leadership:** Leaders are visible, engaged, and set the tone of the patient experience. Leaders empower employees and build an organization committed to patient experience
- **Measurement and Improvement:** The organization uses meaningful, contextual, and real-time insight to better understand patients' needs and to support continuous improvement and innovation
- **Patient Communications:** Veterans know what to expect from their health care. Communications with Veterans are consistent, use plain language, and invite engagement. Veterans feel confident that they are being listened to and heard
- **Voice of the Veteran:** The organization proactively gathers and utilizes Veteran feedback and perspectives to make decisions and solve issues that matter most to Veterans and their families

Who can apply to the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition?

Any VHA employee who has **successfully implemented** a practice in at least one VHA facility can apply to the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition. An employee can submit an application as an individual contributor or on behalf of a team, service line, or medical center. If submitting a group effort, **one individual** must serve as the point of contact during the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition application process. If your practice receives Gold Status designation, only one member of your team can serve as the primary Gold Status Fellow and attend the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp in February 2021. If additional team members would like to attend the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp, their facility must provide travel funding to attend.

What are important dates during the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition?

Figure 1 depicts the key milestones for the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition.

Figure 1. 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition Timeline



2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition Application Process

How can I apply to the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition?

To apply, complete the application form online by 11:59 PM PT on **May 1, 2020**. Please see the [Appendix](#) for a complete list of application questions. For more resources, please visit the VHA Diffusion Marketplace.

What if I miss the submission deadline?

If you miss the submission deadline, you can submit your promising practice in the next VHA Shark Tank Competition, tentatively scheduled for the Spring of 2021. Please monitor the VHA Shark Tank Competition page on the VHA Diffusion Marketplace for more information on the application process.

What are some tips to consider when completing a VHA Shark Tank application?

When completing your application, please consider the following:

- Determine whether your practice can be replicated in another VHA facility in approximately 6-12 months
- Use measurable data in your application when describing your practice's impact, user experience, and financial value
- Provide details on the user experience for your target population (e.g., Veterans, employees, caregivers)
- List all resource requirements (e.g., employees, equipment) necessary to implement your practice at a new facility
- Describe the specific steps to implement your practice, including timeframes
- Avoid acronyms and jargon, explain things like you would to a Veteran
- Do not submit sensitive or protected data in your application
 - For more information, please review [VHA Directive 1080 Access to Personally Identifiable Information in Information Technology Systems](#)

Please see the [Appendix](#) for a complete list of application questions.

My practice crosses several of the key VHA Shark Tank Priorities. Which should I select as the practice's primary Priority?

In general, select the VHA Shark Tank Priority that most closely aligns with your practice. Evaluators will review submissions based on the Priority, so select the one you think will have the most appropriate Evaluator for your submission. You can also include a statement in the “Additional Information” question that indicates your practice covers multiple Priorities.

What happens after I submit an application?

After the application period closes on May 1, 2020, Evaluators will review all submitted applications. All applicants will receive updates on the status of their applications via email. The first-round evaluation period last approximately one month.

Who do I contact if I have additional questions?

For questions related to the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition, please email the [VA Innovation Support Team](mailto:vainnovation@atlasresearch.us) (vainnovation@atlasresearch.us).

2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition Application Evaluation Process


Who will evaluate the submitted practices?



Diffusion of Excellence Fellows, Medical Center and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Directors, Innovation Specialists, Systems Redesign Coordinators, and other recommended Evaluators will review the applications and recommend Semifinalist practices. During the second round of evaluation, Program Office leaders and members of the Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) team will evaluate Semifinalist practices and recommend Finalists to pitch their practices at the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition. Evaluators will have approximately three weeks to evaluate and recommend practices during each round of evaluation.




What are the application evaluation criteria?

Table 1 details the evaluation criteria, their definitions, and associated examples of information an applicant may have included in their application. Note the examples do not represent an exhaustive list of the components for each criterion.

Table 1. Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Evaluation Round	Definition	Examples
 VHA Shark Tank Priority Impact	Round 1 Evaluation	Demonstrated impact in the aligned VHA Shark Tank Priority	Access: The practice reduced days to appointment or increased specialty care appointments within 30 days from preferred date
	Round 2 Evaluation		Digital Health: The practice used telehealth technology to manage hypertension in rural Veterans, improving their access to care and reducing their travel frequency

Criteria	Evaluation Round	Definition	Examples
			High Reliability Culture Change: Commit to Zero Harm: The practice reduced hospital readmission or reduced infection rates
			Improving Capacity, Efficiency, and Productivity: The practice restructured the hearing aid drop-off process, increasing the number of Veterans serviced each hour
			Medical Education in Rural Areas: The practice improved educational opportunities for providers in rural facilities
			Veteran Experience: The practice improved understanding of a Veteran's diagnosis or treatment plan or increased feelings of trust or engagement in care
			Whole Health: The practice provided Veterans with alternative options for care, focusing on developing a personalized health experience based on the Veteran's values, needs, and goals
			Workforce Development: The practice improved retention or increased job competency
 Data-Based Improvement	Round 1 Evaluation	Measured improvement in the practice's primary success metric	The practice reduced Veteran's wait time for limb prosthetics by 39 percent, from 33 days to 20 days
	Round 2 Evaluation		The practice resulted in a 54 percent total decrease in RN turnover from FY16 to FY17
			The practice detected more than 2 million anomalous records annually resulting in \$6.4-9.0M additional revenue
			After one year, the practice improved Veteran satisfaction by 14 percent per distributed survey
 Participant Satisfaction	Round 1 Evaluation	Improved satisfaction or experience for the practice user and/or target population	The practice improved patient satisfaction or experience metrics
	Round 2 Evaluation		The practice improved employee job satisfaction or experience metrics
			The practice improved experience for the target population (e.g., rural Veterans, women Veterans)
	Round 1 Evaluation	Can be implemented in	The practice can be implemented in another VHA facility within 6 to 12 months

Criteria	Evaluation Round	Definition	Examples
 Implementation Feasibility	Round 2 Evaluation	another facility through the Diffusion of Excellence model	The practice is process-focused (e.g., has developed training manuals or timeline others can use to achieve similar results)
			The practice has clearly specified resource requirements (e.g., infrastructure, technology, processes)
			The practice integrates into existing VHA facility systems (e.g., infrastructure, technology, processes)
 Alignment to VHA Policies and Processes	Round 2 Evaluation	Does not conflict with existing VHA processes or policies	The practice aligns with VHA policies (or) prescribed mandatory procedures and operational requirements (e.g., directives, handbooks, memorandums)
			The practice aligns appropriately with system relationships (e.g., contracted partners, unions)
 Alignment to VHA Priorities	Round 2 Evaluation	Addresses key areas of improvement identified by VHA leadership	The practice aligns with strategic initiatives of VHA program offices (or) senior leadership

Are most of the selected practices low cost to implement?

The cost levels of the submitted practices vary. In previous VHA Shark Tank Competitions, selected practices had both low and high implementation costs. We recognize that low-cost practices may spread more easily to other facilities; however, low cost is not required for Gold Status Practice selection.

What is expected of an applicant whose practice is selected as a Semifinalist, Finalist, or Gold Status Practice?

If selected as a **Semifinalist**, your practice will continue to the second round of evaluation. The applicant does not need to take any additional action if selected as a Semifinalist.

If selected as a **Finalist**, you will:

- Attend three informational sessions in August, September, and October 2020, designed to help Finalists prepare for the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition
- Give a two-minute pitch presentation at the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition to Medical Center and VISN Director Sharks, who, if interested, will bid resources to replicate your promising practice in their facility or VISN

If your practice receives **Gold Status** designation, you will:

- Participate in the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp event in February 2021

- Work with the Implementing Facility Fellow (IFF) and Diffusion of Excellence team for approximately six months to replicate your practice in the new facility or VISN
- Participate in weekly calls to guide and advise the implementation team
- Travel to the Implementing Facility site, if required
- Support the potential national rollout and implementation of your Gold Status Practice

2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition Event

What happens on the day of the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition?

The Diffusion of Excellence leadership team will host the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition in October 2020 at the VHA Innovation Experience (iEx) in Washington, DC, and live stream the event to facilities across the country. Finalists will give a two-minute pitch presentation on their promising practice. Following the presentation, the VHA IE team will facilitate a question and answer (Q&A) session with the Finalists asking them questions related to their practice. Medical Center and VISN Director Sharks will place bids on the Finalist practices via a SurveyMonkey tool. Sharks will have approximately 24 hours to submit their bids on the practices. There is no minimum or maximum number of practices that Sharks can bid on during the VHA Shark Tank Competition. Examples of resources that Sharks may bid include:

- One or more part-time or Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) to focus on implementation of the practice at their site
- Travel funds for their site to attend the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp
- Time and/or other resources to help support implementation of the practice

Diffusion of Excellence leadership will announce the Gold Status Practices and Implementing Facilities at the awards ceremony on the last day of the VHA iEx event.

Who are Sharks? Can I serve as a Shark?

Only Medical Center and VISN Directors will serve as Sharks and have the opportunity to bid resources to implement Finalist practice(s) pitched during the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition. If you are a Medical Center or VISN Director and are interested in serving as a Shark, please contact the [VA Innovation Support Team](#). The VA Innovation Support Team will provide a separate Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document for Sharks at a later date.

Gold Status Practice and Implementation

What happens after the VHA Shark Tank Competition?

After the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition, the VA Innovation Support Team will compile Shark bids on the Finalist practices and evaluate them based on quantity, quality, and the facility or VISN's need for the practice. The team will present the bids to VHA IE leaders for their recommendations on which practices should win and proceed with implementation. Additionally, Diffusion of Excellence leadership will select one Gold Status Practice based on popular vote from the audience. The team will capture popular vote via a mobile application during the live event.

VHA leaders will review the recommendations and select approximately 10 Gold Status Practices and 10 Shark bids as winners of the Competition. Diffusion of Excellence leadership will announce the winners at the awards ceremony on the last day of the VHA iEx event. The Gold Status Practices will proceed with implementation in the winning Shark's facility or VISN. Upon selection as an Implementing Facility, the Shark will designate an Implementing Facility Fellow (IFF) to lead the implementation of the Gold Status Practice in their facility or VISN. The creators of the Gold Status Practices will join the sixth cohort of Gold Status Fellows (GSFs) and spend the subsequent six months guiding the selected IFF in adapting and replicating the Gold Status Practice.

What is a Gold Status Practice and a Gold Status Fellow (GSF)?

Gold Status Practice refers to a practice selected by VHA senior leaders during the VHA Shark Tank Competition for facilitated replication in another VHA facility or VISN. A GSF refers to the individual(s) that submitted the Gold Status Practice to the VHA Shark Tank Competition.

If your practice receives Gold Status designation, you will participate in the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp event. During the event, you will work with the IFF to develop action plans for implementing your practice in the facility over the subsequent six months. After the event, you will spend the following six months working with the IFF and the Diffusion of Excellence team to implement your practice. You will attend weekly calls to guide and advise the implementation team in the replication of your practice. GSFs will not receive any additional salary to support the implementation of their practice. However, travel funding is available for one person to attend the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp event in 2021.

What are the benefits of being a Gold Status Fellow (GSF)?

If selected as a GSF, the benefits include:

- Recognition from VA and VHA senior leaders
- Travel funding to attend the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp
- Access to communication (e.g., graphics, toolkits) and technical (e.g., data analysis) support
- Support for conference submission development
- Invitation to develop a practice page on the VHA Diffusion Marketplace
- Access to training
- Possible national rollout of the Gold Status Practice
- Possible travel funding to attend the 2021 VHA iEx event
- Invitation to participate in Diffusion of Excellence Virtual Grand Rounds sessions and other presentation opportunities

What is an Implementing Facility? What is an Implementing Facility Fellow (IFF)?

The VA Innovation Support Team will compile Shark bids from the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition and present them to VHA IE leaders. They will select Implementing Facilities based on the quality of the bid placed by the Shark and the facility or VISN's need for the practice. Upon selection as an Implementing Facility, the Shark will designate an IFF to lead the implementation of the Gold Status Practice in their facility or VISN.

An IFF's responsibilities include participating in weekly calls with the GSF and implementing team members to support and lead the successful replication of the Gold Status Practice. An IFF must travel to

Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp and if necessary, the Gold Status Facility to better understand how to implement the Gold Status Practice.

What is the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp?

The Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp is a kick-off event where GSFs and IFFs meet to develop implementation plans for replicating and adapting the Gold Status Practices in a 6-month timeframe. The event will take place in February 2021. Travel funding is available for one GSF per facility. The event provides an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and GSFs to receive formal recognition by VA and VHA senior leaders.

Appendix

2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition Application