

**Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS)**  
Vet Center Branding and Awareness Campaign

# Analysis of Current Branding Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities

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U.S. Department  
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# Executive Summary

To assess the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the current Vet Center brand identity, Aptive Resources engaged in a robust data collection and analysis process designed to understand how a variety of stakeholders understand, perceive, experience, and engage with the organization.

This *Analysis of Current Branding Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities* report summarizes findings from Aptive's extensive research process, which consisted of ten focus groups, an organization-wide questionnaire, and numerous stakeholder interviews with community partners. Using a systematic content analysis approach to code and organize data, Aptive categorized this information into five brand categories. These elements were evaluated to determine strengths and gaps that exist in the overall Vet Center brand identity, as well as identify opportunities to increase awareness and enhance engagement across target audiences.

A thorough examination of the data yielded several critical findings, summarized in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Summary of key findings*

Category	Key Finding
<b>Brand Awareness</b> <i>Level of stakeholder recognition for a brand</i>	Vet Centers must improve efforts to increase awareness among both the general public and key stakeholder groups who would benefit from available services.
<b>Brand Positioning</b> <i>The place an organization occupies in the market</i>	Vet Centers can overcome prevailing misconceptions, such as being confused with veterinarian clinics or U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, by standardizing information about services and working with community partners to better differentiate itself in the medical, Veteran, and military markets.
<b>Brand Experience</b> <i>How stakeholders respond to a brand</i>	Promotional and outreach efforts should emphasize Vet Centers' many benefits, while using language that speaks directly to target audiences.
<b>Brand Loyalty</b> <i>Level of repeated stakeholder engagement</i>	The overwhelmingly positive sentiments held by current client and staff members can be leveraged to engage those who may be skeptical or hesitant about receiving Vet Center services.
<b>Brand Purpose</b> <i>The reason an organization exists</i>	The employees who work at Vet Centers nationwide are aware of the organization's mission and purpose but could benefit from receiving more direction and guidance from Readjustment Counseling Service's (RCS) leadership.

Aptive reviewed findings and incorporated branding subject matter expertise to develop three goals to help Vet Centers increase awareness, enhance knowledge, and improve loyalty among stakeholders. Each goal has three corresponding strategies designed to be executed on a national level, summarized in Table 2 below. Together, these recommendations leverage the Vet Center brand's biggest strengths and overcome weaknesses identified by stakeholders.



*Table 2: Goals and suggested strategies for the future of the Vet Center brand identity*

Goal	Recommended Strategies
<p>Increase awareness and understanding of Vet Center services among the general public by leveraging important internal and external relationships and promoting standardized information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize a consistent look and feel for all printed and digital items utilizing a standardized brand identity that is easily recognizable and well received by clients.</li> <li>▪ Enhance collaboration efforts with community partners by providing them with materials that can be shared through digital platforms such as their social media channels.</li> <li>▪ Enhance national recognition of Vet Centers by strategically deploying public relations and advertising campaigns in underserved communities while maintaining a comprehensive website and social media program that enables RCS to distribute controlled messaging to key stakeholder populations.</li> </ul>
<p>Enhance the knowledge and engagement of several targeted stakeholder groups by relaying essential and persuasive information through new communication channels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on improving collaboration efforts among Vet Centers and the VA population by using internal channels, such as blog posts and weekly messages from VHA and RCS leadership, to share important information and cross-promotional opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Develop targeted campaigns and community events that emphasize the most essential and beneficial aspects of Vet Centers to less engaged stakeholder groups, such as families, members of the National Guard and Reserve components, and active duty service personnel.</li> <li>▪ Design videos to connect with strategically chosen demographics identified through the analysis process that highlight whole health solutions in alignment with the Vet Center mission statement and purpose.</li> </ul>
<p>Leverage the high degree of loyalty that existing clients and staff members have for Vet Centers by providing them with resources and tools to increase outreach efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide training and consistent messaging to improve and standardize outreach efforts among targeted populations using products such as partner or staff member toolkits.</li> <li>▪ Use a materials repository portal and comprehensive photo gallery to create outreach materials that are standardized, reflective of the diverse populations Vet Centers serve, and tailored to the unique services and qualities of each Vet Center location.</li> <li>▪ Implement a Brand Ambassador program using challenge coins, wallet cards, and other promotional materials to build trust with those who may be hesitant or skeptical about seeking mental health care or other Vet Center services.</li> </ul>



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# Methodology

To establish a comprehensive understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities connected to the current Vet Center brand, Aptive deployed four industry-proven research techniques to gather and analyze insights from a variety of stakeholders, identified in Figure 1. The icons pictured below are used throughout this report to indicate when a stakeholder's perspective contributed to key findings.

*Figure 1: Targeted stakeholders of the Vet Center brand analysis*



## Planning Process

To gather a highly detailed collection of insights from Vet Center clients and staff members, Aptive worked with RCS leadership to conduct ten focus group sessions in five strategically selected locations across the country. As summarized in Table 3, focus group locations were chosen based on their collective ability to:

- Represent each of the five Vet Center districts.
- Reflect the distinguishing community categories of urban, small, rural, large, and near a military base.
- Recruit between five and nine people for both client and staff member focus groups who were willing and able to participate in discussions.
- Embody a wide range of participant demographics with regards to age, race, ethnicity, gender, and other identifying qualities.

*Table 3: Selected focus group locations*

District	Vet Center	Category	Date Conducted
3	Rapid City Vet Center, South Dakota	Small	Jan. 6, 2020
4	Kalispell Vet Center, Montana	Rural	Jan. 8, 2020
5	San Marcos Vet Center, California	Large	Jan. 10, 2020
1	City Center Philadelphia Vet Center, Pennsylvania	Urban	Jan. 22, 2020
2	Tampa Vet Center, Florida	Near a military base	Feb. 5, 2020

The sample population for client-based focus groups consisted of 33 male and female Veterans, active duty service members, and family members. Focus group participants represented several different military branches and service eras. Their ages spanned from 33 to 82 years old, with an average age of 57.

In total, staff member focus groups were comprised of 32 Vet Center directors, counselors, outreach specialists, and support staff. With experience ranging from just a couple days to more than a decade, 69% of participating staff members identified themselves as Veterans, with several others stating that they were family members to either Veterans or active duty service members. Their ages ranged from 32 to 71 years old, with an average age of 48.

## Data Collection Process

To strengthen the impact of focus group findings, Aptive calculated insights by gathering data from community partner interviews, an electronically distributed questionnaire to RCS employees, and big data trends uncovered through online and social media research. Further description of these efforts can be found in Table 4 below and are elaborated on in the key takeaway tables at the end of each section.

*Table 4: Supplementary data collection techniques*

Technique	Description	Audience
<b>Brand audit questionnaire</b>	A 10-question online questionnaire created to assess how RCS employees use marketing materials, conduct outreach, engage community partners, and perceive ongoing branding initiatives.	
<b>Community partner interviews</b>	Stakeholder interviews with one to three community partners (e.g., Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), non-profits, military bases), from each district designed to better understand their contributions to Vet Center awareness and perception goals.	
<b>Online research</b>	A comprehensive review of search engines, social media outlets, and online forums to inform knowledge of how individuals find, understand, and perceive Vet Centers.	



## Data Analysis Process

After collecting a robust repository of information related to the Vet Center brand, Aptive used a research-based and systematic data analysis approach to assess survey responses, evaluate focus group discussions, organize key findings and messages, elicit meaning from text, and make replicable inferences from all the materials examined. Aptive used both a quantifying and qualifying content analysis approach to achieve the most thorough and accurate findings for RCS. Drawing best practices from an elaborate literature review on brand assessments and experiential marketing, Aptive then applied its subject matter expertise to properly code all insights into a multi-perspective brand analysis consisting of five categories. These categories were chosen based on their ability to capture all emotional and behavioral reactions to the Vet Center brand. A brief explanation of each can be found in Table 5 below.

*Table 5: Data analysis categories*

Category	Description
<b>Brand Awareness</b>	The extent stakeholders can recall or recognize a brand, including analysis on how they first discovered the brand.
<b>Brand Positioning</b>	The place a brand occupies in the mind of stakeholders that makes it distinct from similar organizations.
<b>Brand Experience</b>	The subjective and intrinsic senses, emotions, perceptions, and behavioral responses experienced as a result of stimuli related to a brand. Brand experiences are organized by the following collection methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Experience with an Organization:</b> The sentiments stakeholders develop in response to their involvement with an organization over time.</li><li>▪ <b>Experience with a Brand:</b> The sensory, affective, and intellectual reactions stakeholders develop in response to brand messaging, designs, and promotional materials.</li></ul>
<b>Brand Loyalty</b>	The extent stakeholders will repeatedly engage with a brand as a result of having positive experiences and forming trustworthy relationships.
<b>Brand Purpose</b>	The reason an organization exists with respect to its long-term business strategy and mission-based goals.

Focusing first on the information provided from focus group transcripts, Aptive performed a thorough text data mining process that consisted of information extraction, text categorization, text clustering, sentiment analysis, and concept relation modeling. To bolster findings with additional perspectives and confirm the validity of key focus group takeaways, insights from community partner interviews, questionnaire responses, and online research were also incorporated into Aptive's overall analysis.

All information was quantified into a set of structured data that was used to cross-examine results, uncover patterns, and populate Vet Center's five brand categories. This collection of insights was then verified against the stated brand goals from RCS leadership (found in [Appendix A](#)) to make the final conclusions and overarching recommendations for the Vet Center identity.



## Brand Awareness



*The extent stakeholders can recall or recognize a brand, including analysis on how they first discovered the brand.*

The impact Vet Centers can have within communities is reliant on its ability to foster brand awareness among its numerous stakeholders. Acting as the crucial foundation upon which all other marketing actions take place, brand awareness is required to ensure Vet Centers can continue to serve clients from both current and future generations.

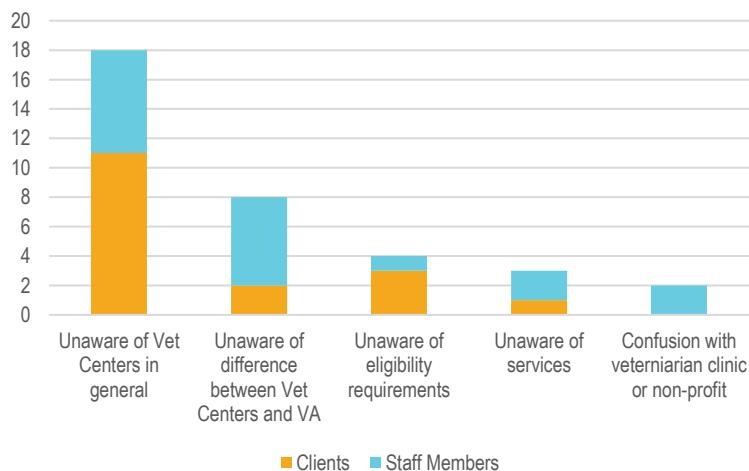
Focus group data has confirmed that many key stakeholders, including those both in and outside of VA, continue to remain unaware of Vet Centers and associated services. This was demonstrated by the fact that in 44% of responses related to brand awareness, participants either recalled their own lack of awareness or relayed the perception that others remain uninformed of these community-based entities.

One Tampa Vet Center staff member emphasized this point by saying despite his years with the U.S. Marine Corps and his experience working at a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), he had never heard of Vet Centers until becoming a client himself. This sentiment was affirmed by a Kalispell Vet Center client, who said he remained unaware of Vet Center services throughout his entire time serving on active duty, transitioning from the military, and participating in the National Guard. Several other participants concurred, recognizing that even while they engaged in both Veteran and military services, they remained unaware of Vet Centers for a significant amount of time.

***"My wife found this job for me on USAJobs. I had never heard of the Vet Center Program prior to that, even after 20 years of active duty." — Staff member, Rapid City Vet Center***

Several client focus group participants attributed this lack of awareness to the abundant amount of resources available to both Veterans and military personnel, suggesting that Vet Center information may be getting overshadowed. For example, the amount of materials provided to transitioning service members is especially cumbersome. As one Kalispell Vet Center client noted, it can be easy for Vet Center information to get "lost in the list" and forgotten about. Another client from the Tampa Vet Center emphasized this point, recalling "two different bible-sized" booklets he received upon retiring from the military. He added that potential clients may overlook Vet Centers due to "information overload."

*Figure 2: Number of participants who believe there is a current awareness issue among people not associated with Vet Centers*



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Figure 2 demonstrates that in addition to acknowledging their own lack of awareness, several focus group participants believe key stakeholders are still unaware of the “well-kept secret” that is Vet Centers. Although answers varied slightly based on the characteristics of the focus group communities, there was a consensus that the awareness issue is particularly prevalent among:

- Vietnam Veterans.
- People who live in rural communities.
- Service members who recently returned from deployment.
- Veterans who recently separated from military service.
- Members of the National Guard and Reserve components.

***“A lot of times the guys had that feeling that the Vet Center was like a service organization that you sit at the bar and just tell war stories. You didn’t get help. You just tell war stories to see who can outdo each other. And I think that has a lot to do with a lot of them that haven’t come in.” — Client, San Marcos Vet Center***

Data indicates that 32% of related responses drew pointed attention to an ongoing knowledge deficiency regarding Vet Center service types and eligibility criteria. Perhaps most noteworthy, 27% of these responses revealed that clients lacked a complete understanding of these elements even on the day of the focus group session. Of all the responses provided, the most frequent suggested a heightened lack of awareness regarding:

- Social, group, and recreational aspects of Vet Centers.
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) services offered to Veterans and service members.
- Eligibility criteria, with most comments noting persistent unfamiliarity about the ability of Vet Centers to serve family members and National Guard and Reserve personnel.

***“I didn’t know you provided information on sexual trauma. ... So, that was kind of new to me. I guess I also didn’t know, again, about bereavement counseling either, or employment counseling and guidance.” — Client, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center***

Focus group data analysis also revealed common misconceptions regarding Vet Centers, including the fact that they are routinely mistaken for non-profits, recreational centers, and veterinarian clinics. Even more so, focus group participants revealed a muddled understanding of how Vet Centers differ from VA medical centers and CBOCs. Mentioned in 14% of related responses, both clients and staff members highlighted this lack of understanding as a serious hindrance to Vet Centers’ broader awareness building goals.

***“I’ve been coming here for three and a half years. And I didn’t even know that it was separate from VA until I was just looking at these brochures.” — Client, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center***

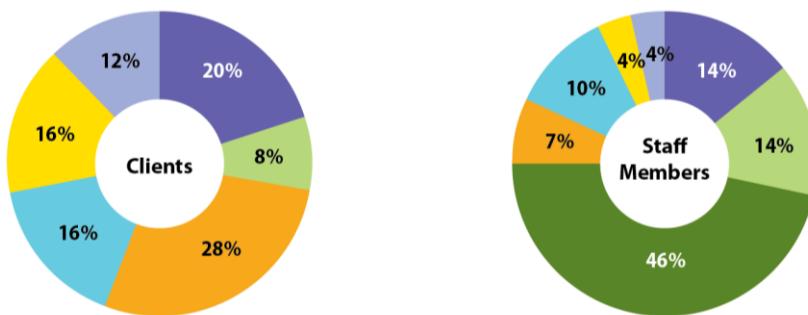
***“I like literally was unclear that RCS was Readjustment Counseling Services and that it is almost essentially a branch of VA health care ... and it took me a while to make that connection because there was nothing branding or office-wise that made that clear to me. And I’m not that slow on the uptake.” — Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center***

Despite these ongoing issues related to brand awareness, many clients recognized the value referrals had in contributing to their eventual knowledge and understanding of Vet Centers. As illustrated in Figure 3, almost half of all client participants said they first became aware of Vet Centers upon receiving a referral from someone they knew, such as a VA employee, peer, or family member. In separate conversations, staff members also frequently recognized the importance of word of mouth marketing, even though most of them first heard of Vet Centers through an employment posting or while working at a previous job.



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Figure 3: Ways clients and staff members learned about Vet Centers for the first time



**Peer referral:** A direct referral from a Veteran or service member who is either already engaged with Vet Centers or aware of services and eligibility criteria.

**Referral from other source:** A direct referral from someone else familiar with the client or staff member, most often a primary care provider, friend, or family member.

**Military program:** A program associated with the military or the transition from military to civilian life, such as the Transition Assistance Program or a military retirement class.

**VA referral:** A direct referral from a VA employee or office, most often a medical or mental health provider.

**Community event or partner:** A Vet Center presence at an event (e.g. car show) held in the local community by the Vet Center itself, VSOs, partners, or local universities.

**External signage or stumbled upon inadvertently:** A chance encounter with Vet Centers either by driving by a location or searching online for help.

**Job posting or space:** A formal job announcement on USAJobs, or direct interaction with Vet Centers or someone familiar with the organization during previous employment (e.g., working with a Veteran- or military-related office or program).

## Key Takeaways Identified by Stakeholders

Table 6: Key takeaways related to brand awareness

Additional Insights
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ According to 50% of 340 RCS employees, the most common thing they hear from first-time clients is: “I didn’t know you were here.”</li> <li>▪ Roughly 72% of RCS employees believe current and potential clients are confused about the services Vet Centers offer, with 22% suggesting that this confusion extends to eligibility requirements.</li> <li>▪ Despite being identified as key strategic partners, some organizations remain unsure about what services Vet Centers aim to provide clients. One partner from District 4 confirmed this notion by saying, “I don’t know exactly what their mission is. I couldn’t tell you their mission statement.” The representative went on to say that before becoming actively engaged with the local Vet Center, he assumed the facility was another VA hospital and noted that “most people don’t even know it exists.”</li> <li>▪ According to Google Trends, “VA Vet Center,” “vet near me,” and “Vet Center near me” are the most popular search queries related to Vet Centers. While the cohesion among these queries suggests users had a basic understanding of Vet Centers prior to searching, the fact that the most common related topic is “Veterinarian – Occupation” shows that there is still confusion existing among the general public. This sense of</li> </ul> </div>

uncertainty is exacerbated by the fact that "Swine Vet Center," an organization specializing in care for pigs, and "Melissa and Doug Vet Center," a children's toy, were the related queries with the biggest increase in search frequency since the year prior.

## Strengths



- Referrals from peers and VA providers encourage potential clients to engage in Vet Center services.
- Job postings on USAJobs and other forums are an effective way to reach people who may be interested in working for Vet Centers.

## Weaknesses



- A general lack of awareness about Vet Centers exists among key internal and external stakeholders. This is particularly the case for information involving Vet Center services, eligibility criteria, and its relationship with VA.
- While often mistaken for non-profits, animal clinics, and recreational centers, the most common misconception surrounds Vet Centers distinction from VA medical centers.
- Vet Center information is often buried in the large amount of information that is presented to transitioning service members and Veterans.

## Opportunities



- Increasing the national presence of Vet Centers through television, radio spots, podcasts, billboards, and digital and social media services could help increase awareness about Vet Centers among the general public.
- Expanding outreach efforts on military bases through avenues such as Family Readiness Officers may help increase awareness of Vet Centers among current active duty and transitioning service members.
- Enhancing efforts to ensure VA employees are well-informed about Vet Centers and actively recommending available services to potential clients will help increase referrals within the VA system.
- Ensuring external signage for brick and mortar buildings is consistent across all Vet Center locations and provides a clear definition of what Vet Centers are while remaining clearly visible from a distance may help standardize the brand identity.

# Brand Positioning



*The place a brand occupies in the mind of stakeholders that makes it distinct from similar organizations.*

Vet Centers serve with the distinct purpose of providing confidential and lifelong counseling, outreach, and referral services to a range of Veterans, active duty service members, and family members at no cost. These organization-defining characteristics enable Vet Centers to maintain a valuable position within Veteran and military communities and the broader medical market. Vet Centers differentiate themselves from VA medical centers, CBOCs, private practices, and military mental health programs by delivering on a pointed mission for a select group of clients, including active duty service members, those who have bad paper discharges, and those who are without a service connected disability.

However, focus group evidence revealed and staff members found four intangible qualities that position Vet Centers within the market better than any of its other discerning attributes, mentioned above. Recognized across all focus group locations, Vet Centers' chief positioning qualities are as follows:

- Welcoming environment and hospitable culture.
- Professional, mission-driven staff members.
- Client-tailored care.
- Rapid, highly accommodating service.

Collectively, these qualities establish Vet Centers' value proposition within the medical, Veteran, and military communities. Cited the most by both client and staff members alike, each is elaborated on in more detail below.

## Welcoming Environment and Hospitable Culture

When discussing their overarching perceptions of Vet Centers, client and staff participants emphasized its warm and welcoming environment more frequently than any other trait. These factors were cited in 19% of all responses related to brand positioning. This was found to be especially important to clients, who referenced Vet Centers' family-like atmosphere almost twice as often as any other attribute.

***"They know my name. They know my voice when I call in at the desk, and I can still feel like I'm part of something. And I just don't think you can have that with a bigger organization."* — Client, Kalispell Vet Center**

Staff members also recognized the value that Vet Centers' easy-going environment has in allowing clients to feel understood, safe, and accepted. By promoting friendships that extend outside of brick and mortar walls and into the community, Vet Centers provide individuals with peer-based alternatives to traditional medical models, while also working to find whole health solutions that incorporate family members and friends into clients' journeys. As told by one San Marcos Vet Center staff member, this type of culture encourages clients to stay engaged, while inspiring other potential clients to want to learn more.

***"We have people who have been coming here for 20 plus years—the same people! Well, it's not because they're still sick, it's because they love it. They feel connected."* — Staff member, San Marcos Vet Center**

This sentiment was mirrored numerous times across all focus groups. Not only was it the most recognizable attribute of Vet Centers but focus group data also suggests that it is the predominant differentiator between Vet Centers and VA medical centers. Figure 4 further demonstrates this distinction by highlighting the most



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common words focus group participants said describe both Vet Centers (pictured at the top) and VA (pictured at the bottom).

Figure 4: Words associated with Vet Centers (top) and VA (bottom)



### Professional, Mission-Driven Staff

Closely following the high volume of comments related to Vet Centers' friendly environment, 18% of brand positioning-related responses underscored the extraordinary quality and character consistently seen across Vet Center counselors. Many participants were quick to note the tremendous value these counselors bring, highlighting both their embodiment of the Vet Center mission and their personal contributions to the client experience. Participants recognized counselors' professional yet relaxed style, their knowledge and understanding of the Veteran experience, and their consistent, judgment-free approach to supporting clients.

*"Other people may not even have a clue of what you went through. They have no idea. So, I think it's very difficult for them to relate. Whereas with the Vet Center, you have people who even though they may not have experienced it, they've studied it, they've focused on that, that's their primary clientele. And they understand the issues and the challenges and the problems." — Client, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center*

This argument was reinforced when participants directly compared Vet Centers to VA medical facilities. Due to its high volume of patients and firmly fixed protocol, VA was critiqued for treating clients like they are "just a number." Particularly, participants noted that VA's long waits and impersonal service put facilities in direct opposition to the friendly and personalized care provided by Vet Centers.

***"The professional people here don't sit behind a desk like they do on the outside. The outside people sit behind a desk or sit on the floor and make you feel like a two-year old. Here, they make you feel like you are a human being and capable of opening up and talking with them. ... I am not judged [here]. On the outside, I'm judged. I'm judged every day. If I were to walk into a counselor's [office] and try to talk to them, they'd tell me I'm nuts, and they'd want to send me away. Well, I'm not nuts. Here, I got the right treatment, and I got it when I needed it." — Client, Kalispell Vet Center***

***"We kind of more offer a hand up and almost like we're bringing them in for a hug, versus: 'Hey, high-five, bro. You know, we're sorry for your pain and suffering. Here's some Ibuprofen. Have a good weekend.' We're here. It doesn't matter. We'll sit here for three hours and talk to a Vet in crisis. ... We've done it—all of us." — Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center***

Although participants reaffirmed this sentiment across numerous focus groups, staff members were almost twice as likely as clients to reference the importance of Vet Center counselors when discussing the organization's overall value. They applauded their colleagues' collective ability to "work in the gray a little bit despite having to work within some structure" in order to accommodate the diverse needs of clients as well as their overall dedication to the Vet Center mission.

***"Everybody here treats this like a sacred mission, like this is not a job, this is something really important that we're doing here. We got to get this right." — Staff member, San Marcos Vet Center***

Across focus groups, participants often mentioned Vet Centers' welcoming environment and friendly staff at the same time. Together, these two qualities were found to be the strongest points of variation between Vet Centers and other mental health service organizations across the VA and private sector health spaces.

## **Client-Tailored Care**

Free from the stringent requirements that VA must meet, Vet Centers have the rare ability to provide clients with tailored treatments that align with their individual needs. This is according to both client and staff participants, who acknowledged Vet Centers' client-centric approach in 15% of all related responses. As stated by a City Center Philadelphia Vet Center staff member, Vet Centers were not designed to diagnose and fit clients into a one-size-fits-all treatment plan. Instead, these community-based entities were acknowledged for having a unique flexibility to work with clients to co-develop treatment plans and set goals.

***"One thing about our service is we're client-centered. They come in and we help them develop their treatment plan; we don't apply something to them. They aren't going to come into a mill and we're going to put them through this 12-week program and that's what they get." — Staff member, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center***

Vet Centers can also extend this level of autonomy to respond to the specific characteristics and needs of their communities. As stated by one staff member from the Rapid City Vet Center, outreach specialists have an unparalleled ability to meet potential clients in the locations that they frequent by leveraging Vet Centers' numerous community access points. This is noted as being especially important for engaging active duty personnel, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and rural Veterans.

***"The other thing that I really like about Vet Centers that makes us different from VA, which is an important selling point, is I can go to clients. I can go to Veterans through community access points, and there's a flexibility. Over 13 years, my community access points change based on the needs of the Veterans in our region or our community. So, for two years, I might go to Wanblee, South Dakota***

*on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and then after that kind of dries up, now I am going to Kadoka. There's a flexibility to meet rural Veterans' needs that you don't actually get with like the VA proper.”— Staff member, Rapid City Vet Center*

The unique latitude afforded to Vet Centers also encompasses the types of services they can provide to clients. For example, in addition to providing readjustment, bereavement, and family counseling services, Vet Centers can facilitate group sessions and promote recreational activities that encourage peer-to-peer connections. From mindful walking classes to week-long fly-fishing retreats, these activities were consistently praised for their ability to build the type of “tribal reconnect” that Veterans often miss after leaving the military. As stated by one San Marcos Vet Center staff member, it is these types of extracurricular and community-based events that keep clients engaged with Vet Centers for decades.

## Rapid, Highly Accommodating Service

For the final point of differentiation, participants acknowledged Vet Centers for their unmatched ability to accommodate client schedules and meet immediate needs. In addition to offering unconventional hours and a variety of engagement opportunities, Vet Centers’ abundant availability and extraordinary efforts to serve troubled clients was cited in almost 15% of total related responses. This trait was found to be especially valuable when helping Veterans in crisis, including a Tampa Vet Center client who said he was immediately able to see a counselor after a Vet Center staff member heard the distress in his voice.

*“So, I work a crazy schedule. I work ridiculous hours. And when I am at that point where I need to come in, my counselor says, ‘Okay, well this night I can stay until 8 p.m., or this day I can come in. I’m not supposed to work at this time, but I can come in if you need to have that happen.’ She does that. She shouldn’t have to do that. She works her butt off here, and yet she stays on days when I can’t come in, but I have to see somebody. No other place does that.”— Client, Tampa Vet Center*

In addition to citing their commitment to the mission as being a driving focus behind this value, staff members also highlighted Vet Centers’ lack of barriers as being a key facilitator in their ability to accommodate clients. For example, one San Marcos Vet Center staff member noted that if a client wants to explore a different type of service, he does not have to wait for a counselor to create an “interoffice memo or a referral” that could take weeks to be acknowledged. Instead, counselors can just walk down to the end of the hall and see if there is room available, he said.

Likewise, Vet Centers have established a culture among both clients and staff where if someone is in crisis, all parties are willing to make immediate adjustments to ensure that person is cared for. Elaborating on this statement, another San Marcos Vet Center staff member said that this would not be possible at other medical facilities where “everybody is getting pounded on for appointment times and everybody has to be on point with having to go set their appointment up.”

*“If I call over to the CBOC, if they leave at 5:00 p.m., they aren’t answering their phones after 4:00 p.m. Here you answer the phone... and if it’s somebody in crisis, you’re staying—and we want to stay. That’s our job, and we’re there.”— Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center*

These points were again emphasized when participants further discussed what makes Vet Centers different from VA clinics. Recalling stories told by peers enrolled in VA health care, one San Marcos Vet Center client said he’s known individuals who were told they would have to wait three years to hear back from certain medical facilities. A Tampa Vet Center client emphasized the significance of this by directly attributing the startlingly high number of Veteran deaths by suicide to VA’s inability to see patients in a timely manner.



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**“Because they can’t get in and get seen when they need to get seen. I’m not going to be put on another waiting list and forgotten about.” — Client, Tampa Vet Center**

Across all locations, Vet Center’s unique ability to accommodate clients was found to be a crucial component of its positioning strategy. Rounding out its welcoming environment, caring staff members, and ability to provide highly customized and community-based treatments, Vet Centers’ rapid and hospitable services secure the organization as a distinct and valuable entity within the medical market.

## Key Takeaways Identified by Stakeholders

Table 7: Key takeaways related to brand positioning

Additional Insights	
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Several community partners recommended promoting that many counselors are Veterans themselves, adding that this level of understanding of military culture and experiences can help encourage people to walk through Vet Center doors.</li><li>▪ According to <a href="#">AnswerthePublic</a>, an online tool used to translate search engine data into frequently searched phrases and questions, users were most often likely to ask, "What is Vet Center" or to explore the differences between Vet Centers and VA medical centers, CBOCs, VA hospitals, and VA when searching online.</li></ul>
Strengths	
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The warm, welcoming, and relaxed environment offered at Vet Centers is the most recognized trait of the organization and a key differentiator from other VA facilities.</li><li>▪ The variety of services and individualized treatment plans are largely recognized for being unique and distinguishing qualities of Vet Centers.</li><li>▪ Lack of barriers to receiving care and staff members' dedication to clients enable Vet Centers to provide quality support services in a highly accommodating manner.</li></ul>
Weaknesses	
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Often confused with VA medical centers and CBOCs, Vet Centers have not yet established themselves as an entity distinct from VA.</li><li>▪ Vet Centers could increase efforts to promote its most distinguishing and highly praised qualities, which are often unknown to different stakeholder groups.</li></ul>



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## Opportunities



- Tailoring outreach and marketing efforts to better promote itself as an organization that is unique and distinct would strongly benefit Vet Centers.
- Emphasizing its confidential services would enable Vet Centers to differentiate itself from mental health services provided on military bases and those available at VA.
- Publicizing the relaxed, non-clinical, and welcoming traits of the Vet Center environment would help set the organization apart from fee-based private counseling practices in the community.
- Enhancing the relationship between RCS leadership and VA medical center directors could encourage the two organizations to work as partners as opposed to competitors.

## Brand Experience



*The subjective and intrinsic senses, emotions, perceptions, and behavioral responses experienced as a result of stimuli related to a brand.*

Vet Centers provide stakeholders with unique cognitive, emotional, and behavioral experiences that collectively determine how its brand is understood and perceived by target audiences. Directly impacting brand loyalty and future engagements with the organization, a positive brand experience is essential to ensuring Vet Centers continue to stay relevant.

To measure the holistic set of circumstances that comprise the Vet Center brand experience, focus group participants were asked a series of questions related to their interactions with both the organization and its overarching brand identity. Questions related to the organization captured if and how perceptions changed over time, starting with first impressions and concluding with ongoing sentiments. The second group of questions focused specifically on the creative and promotional elements that comprise the Vet Center brand identity. Both sets of questions aimed to capture both client and staff members' sensory, affective, and intellectual reactions to the Vet Center slogan, three logos, and six different promotional materials.

Answers from these questions overwhelmingly revealed that focus group participants have a much stronger connection to the Vet Center organization than they do to the products that encompass its brand. As summed up by one client:

***"Your product is perfect. Your branding... needs work. But don't, whatever you guys do, don't mess with what they're doing. Don't change what they're doing. It's exactly what we need, exactly what works, exactly what has saved multiple people in here. Don't change the product; only change like the branding." — Client, Tampa Vet Center***

## Experiences with the Vet Center Organization

From the usual expectation of coffee and doughnuts upon walking into a Vet Center to the much-appreciated crisis support recognized by several community partners, Vet Centers provide its stakeholders with countless experiences that directly reflect organizational goals and objectives. These experiences can evoke strong attitudes that set enduring precedents on what people can expect from Vet Centers. The following two sections depict how participants formed initial perceptions and how they feel about Vet Centers now.



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## ***First Impressions***

Most focus group participants reported having a positive first impression of Vet Centers, regardless of whether they originally joined as a client or staff member. Despite several acknowledging that they felt some hesitancy prior to their initial engagement, most clients recalled their first Vet Center experience as being welcoming, hospitable, and free from judgment. In more than half of related responses, clients directly attributed these positive first impressions to Vet Center counselors and staff members they interacted with.

***"I was very fortunate to have an excellent counselor and within a short period of time, she was able to tell me exactly what I was going through. ... I was really amazed how she understood even though she hadn't been in a war or anything. ... That's what got me really excited and made me want to continue to come." — Client, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center***

In discussions involving their motivations for joining the Vet Center team, staff members mirrored clients in also recognizing the congenial quality of their colleagues. Indicative of this fact, one Kalispell Vet Center staff member likened his experience to "a brotherhood" and said the "Vet Center is like a family." Several others echoed this sentiment, adding that the positive experiences they had as clients contributed to their decisions to join the team. These relationships were frequently cited by staff members from all five focus groups, mentioned alongside Vet Centers' unique ability to provide innovative and tailored treatment plans as well as opportunities for growth.

***"When I ... experienced the vibe of this center, the way that the crew worked together, and heard what they did as far as working in groups, doing psych education, providing individual counseling, advocating—it just really spoke to me as a social worker as far as that wraparound care. And providing it to persons who are really at risk and people who really need to be understood in their complicated experiences." — Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center***

## ***Ongoing Sentiments***

To assess how first impressions have morphed into current and ongoing sentiments, focus group participants were given a list of 12 words, composed by RCS and district leadership, that are commonly used to describe Vet Centers. With the intention of capturing and eventually capitalizing on Vet Center's most positive attributes, clients and staff member participants were asked to choose up to four words that best described their current perceptions towards the organization. Participants were also encouraged to share any additional words they found indicative of Vet Centers and their services.

Figure 5 depicts all the words clients and staff members identified to define Vet Centers. Non-italicized words were part of the original list, with the larger ones chosen most often. Words shown in italics were added by focus group participants.



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Figure 5: Common words clients and staff members associated with Vet Centers



## Experiences with the Vet Center Brand

In addition to tracking how stakeholders interact with the Vet Center organization, information was gathered and analyzed to better understand how these sentiments were translated when interacting directly with Vet Center materials. Stakeholders provided their opinions and guidance on the brand's slogan, three logos, and six pieces of promotional material. Insights gathered from these experiences were then used to inform broader considerations for the entire Vet Center brand.

### ***“Keeping the Promise”***

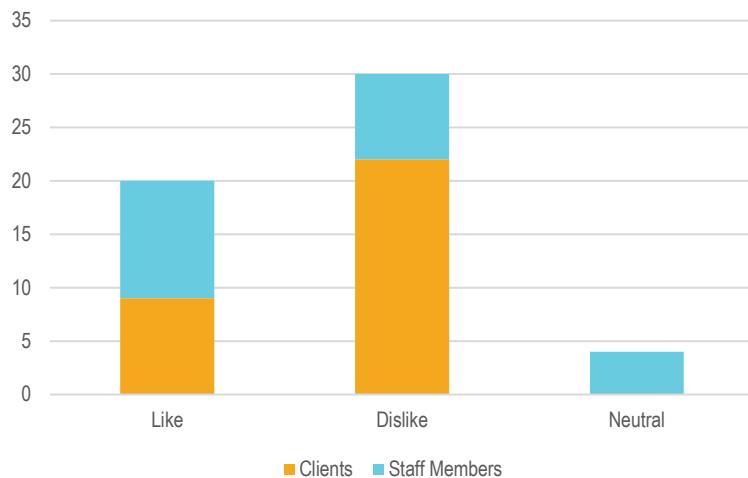
Replacing the original slogan of “Help Without Hassles,” “Keeping the Promise” is now used on Vet Center signage and materials across the nation. Designed to signify Vet Centers’ ultimate mission, this slogan aims to provide the public with an easily recognizable message that speaks to the organization’s priorities and encourages stakeholders to further engage.

However, focus group evidence revealed that an overwhelming lack of awareness exists for this slogan among current clients, with 73% of client participants saying they had never heard of the phrase or were unaware of its connection to Vet Centers. Although staff members were much more cognizant of the slogan, incongruity was found among both groups with regards to its perceived value.

In total, only 37% of focus group participants approved of the “Keeping the Promise” slogan. Most often, these individuals cited both its place in history and its commitment to the future as being the top reasons for their support. As interpreted by one Rapid City Vet Center staff member, “Keeping the Promise” depicts an underlying commitment “to walk that walk with people” and demonstrates the Vet Center promise to help clients reintegrate into civilian life.

Conversely, 63% of participants maintained a negative or neutral stance towards the Vet Center slogan. As illustrated in Figure 6, discontentment was found to be especially prevalent among clients, whose negative sentiments outweighed positive remarks from all other clients and staff members combined.

Figure 6: Number of participant responses regarding the sentiment associated with "Keeping the Promise"



Most often, participants said that their concerns with the slogan came largely from the meaning implied by the message. On several occasions, "Keeping the Promise" was challenged by participants either asking what the promise was or more blatantly saying that the promise has already been broken. This was especially the case for Vietnam Veterans, who said they were more likely to receive hateful speech from picket lines than promises from the government upon coming home from deployment.

*"There was no promise made when I was there. Maybe some of the other brethren here feel the same way. What promise? We had no promise when we left the military. ... You went in, you came back, you wanted to take off your uniform, you took off your uniform. There were no promises and there was no help to go with it." — Client, San Marcos Vet Center*

Participants also noted that because "Keeping the Promise" is reflective of an Abraham Lincoln quote commonly used by VA, the slogan further blurs the lines between the two organizations. One Kalispell Vet Center staff member said that even though she liked the slogan, she could see how clients may interpret it as "VA is somehow not doing their job." Others agreed with this remark, adding that the slogan could trigger clients who have found VA to be unsupportive or neglectful.

### Vet Center Logos

With the goal of facilitating memorable and symbolic attachments to an organization, effective logos work to capture attention, foster recognition, and promote both brand engagement and brand loyalty among target audiences. However, with several different logos concurrently in use, Vet Centers lack the level of brand consistency required to successfully meet branding goals.

To determine how creative aspects can best be shaped to represent the Vet Center mission, focus group participants were asked to provide their thoughts and opinions on three logos currently in use at various Vet Center locations. As shown in Figure 7, these logos were chosen to represent the variety of shapes, styles, and colors used for Vet Center logos.

Figure 7: Logos presented to client and staff member focus groups for discussion



Although participants identified both positive and negative aspects for each logo, overarching conversations revealed a general preference for the following three main design themes:

- Symbolic of the United States of America.
- Representative of military experience.
- Reflective of consistent and professional design standards.

Further illustrated below, these design themes make up the most important aspects of a Vet Center logo, according to Vet Center clients and staff members. Participants proposed that the combination of these three elements will lead to a logo that is widely appealing to Vet Centers' target demographic.

#### Symbolic of the United States of America

Ahead of all other creative elements, focus group participants praised the logos' patriotic symbols and colors. This was especially the case for clients, who were six times more likely than staff members to mention the significance of the eagle symbol or relay fondness for the red, white, and blue color palette represented in Logo 1. One client from the Kalispell Vet Center elaborated on this preference when he said that he didn't need to spend time interpreting the logo because its imagery and colors provided an immediate understanding of the brand. This statement was affirmed by a San Marcos Vet Center client, who said the use of patriotic symbolism rightfully honors Veterans and their services to the country.

**"That's America. That's what I protected when I was in. I signed the deal saying I would die for my country. That's my country." — Client, Kalispell Vet Center**

#### Representative of the Military Experience

Focus group participants collectively expressed a preference for creative designs that symbolized military experience, most often attributing these visual elements to feelings of familiarity and comfort. Conversations around this topic usually coincided with discussions around Logo 3, which elicited the most conflicting responses among participants. For example, while one staff member from the San Marcos Vet Center praised the logo's boots imagery for its ability to resonate with Vietnam Veterans, a client from the City Center Philadelphia Vet Center said this type of visual paid homage to one era at the cost of excluding others.

**"I've seen a couple Vietnam Veterans who walk through these doors for the first time—40, 50 years later—and cry when they saw [the boots logo]. So, I love this logo. It really affects people." — Staff member, San Marcos Vet Center**

Client participants also commonly disagreed over the color palette represented in Logo 3. While some complimented its stark black and yellow contrast, others found these colors to be both irrelevant to the Vet

Center brand and emotionally off-putting. This sensory reaction was especially strong among clients. For example, one Tampa Vet Center client called the colors “bland,” while another from the City Center Philadelphia Vet Center said the color combination was generally appealing. This focus on a sensory reaction was not shared with staff member participants, who were more likely to discount the logo for its “drop-in center” feel.

Despite frequent disagreement over these several creative elements, a consensus was formed regarding Logo 3’s resemblance to challenge coins. Credited for being both a positive and easily recognizable symbol, the challenge coin symbol was universally praised for its ability to appeal to both active duty service members and Veterans from multiple eras and locations.

*“I immediately gravitated to the coin, immediate, because it’s familiar. Whether you spend two years or 20 years, everybody knows that a coin is.” — Client, Tampa Vet Center*

### **Reflective of Consistent and Professional Design Standards**

Both client and staff member participants advised that the Vet Center logo be consistent, professional, and easily recognized in all Vet Center communities. In some cases, participants preferred Logo 2’s clean and simple design over the other two logos, which were found to be “too cluttered” for them. One City Center Philadelphia Vet Center staff member elaborated on this opinion by accrediting the streamlined nature of Logo 2 for connoting “a certain professionalism and modern approach to treatment.”

*“I’d like to see us stick with one thing so that if I’m in another community, I can stop in. … I would like to know by just driving by that this is a Vet Center — Client, Rapid City Vet Center*

However, focus group participants in other conversations criticized Logo 2 for not paying any homage to either the United States or Veterans’ military experiences. These individuals argued that without key symbolic elements, the logo presents an unclear representation of what Vet Centers are and therefore could be confused with logos used for other organizations, such as veterinary clinics.

### **Outreach Materials**

Vet Centers’ outreach and promotional materials play a significant role in increasing brand awareness and sharing essential information to inform and persuade stakeholders. These resources perform on the frontlines for Vet Centers, often acting as a first source of information as well as an effective and reoccurring reminder.

To establish a baseline of how current outreach materials are performing with respect to these goals, focus group participants examined three brochures, one fact sheet, and two flyers all currently in use by various Vet Centers. This suite of outreach material (found in [Appendix D](#)) was used to guide conversations about the types of content, imagery, and language that are most effective in encouraging stakeholder engagement. Additionally, insight was collected regarding elements that may deter someone from seeking Vet Center services.

Collectively, clients and staff member participants recognized the overall value printed materials have in informing current and potential stakeholder groups about high-level information related to Vet Centers. However, they also recognized the need to optimize these materials and agreed that Vet Center promotional materials should consistently share the following characteristics:

- Standardized and clearly stated universal information.
- Representation of diverse needs and populations.
- Positive, destigmatizing, and non-triggering messages.



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These characteristics were reviewed in conversations related to content, imagery, and language. The outreach material attributes deemed most important among focus group participants are described in more detail below.

### **Standardized and Clearly Stated Universal Information**

Nearly 13% of related comments suggested a definitive need for all promotional materials to have simple, standardized, and straight-forward messaging. Materials that were too wordy, had copious amounts of contact information, shared more than one call to action, or included long and overly detailed service and eligibility lists were not well received by either client or staff participants.

Focus group participants said all promotional materials should consistently:

- Define Vet Center services.
- Explain eligibility requirements.
- Illustrate how Vet Centers are connected, but separate from VA.
- Highlight the peer-to-peer, recreational, and group aspects of Vet Centers.
- Pay attention to detail.

**Define Vet Center Services.** Several focus group participants suggested all content related to Vet Center services be more clearly defined and standardized across materials. Participants said that promotional materials should routinely stress that services are confidential, available at no cost, and accessible for life. Additionally, both client and staff member participants advocated for using standardized language when referring to the variety of counseling services available, requesting a consistent message be used about MST and bereavement support. Several others said it would also be important for all material to state that both group and individual treatment plans are available.

**Explain Eligibility Requirements.** In noting the long, often cumbersome explanations related to Vet Center eligibility requirements, focus group participants recommended that promotional materials streamline and standardize all language related to qualifying criteria. Participants also proposed that this section include information related to the availability of services for lesser-known client demographics, such as families, members of the National Guard and Reserve components, and individuals who do not have direct combat experiences but still qualify for Vet Center services.

*"I think giving basic eligibility criteria. So, say if somebody has served a year or we had one person that ... wasn't federally active, we saw them on a humanitarian basis until we could get them connected to more long-term care. I mean, we do have to have some basic information, but I think we tend to include people versus exclude." — Staff member, Rapid City Vet Center*

**Illustrate How Vet Centers are Connected, but Separate from VA.** Several focus group conversations identified a need for outreach materials to explain the interdependencies that connect Vet Centers with VA. Recognizing the adverse association many Veterans have with the larger of the two organizations, both client and staff member participants said materials should use simplified language to explain the organization's differentiating qualities. Materials should also avoid messaging that may come off as too clinical or reflective of VA's medical model. As stated by a Tampa Vet Center client, "most of us don't want to be at the VA; we'd rather be somewhere that's separate."

**Highlight the Peer-to-Peer, Recreational, and Group Aspects of Vet Centers.** Numerous focus group conversations recognized that while Vet Centers excel at providing high-quality counseling services, many clients find additional value in the unstructured conversations that take place with like-minded staff members and peers. Although the discussions, settings, and types of recreational activities offered can vary



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from center to center, several participants said that promotional materials could benefit from having content that acknowledged the peer-to-peer relationships inherently formed within the Vet Center community.

*“Our speech often is tailored towards reconnection and being a family and introducing people to others that are out here in this rural location. So yeah, it’s more about that than—the individual therapy comes later. If they trust us enough to go and do whatever it might be, then they come in for therapy. We can hit them later with that.” — Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center*

**Pay Attention to Detail.** With respect to its highly meticulous client population, focus group participants urged that all outreach materials be consistently polished, accurate, and complete. This attention to detail was cited in more than 13% of all comments surrounding promotional material, with several participants pointing to words falling off page edges, fragmented sentences, cropped service ribbons, incorrect insignia, and service eras listed in the wrong order. Further conversation among clients focused on the need to present military uniforms, service ribbons, and military seals accurately. This was especially the case when stock images were used in an attempt to capture various aspects of military culture.

*Figure 8: This incomplete sentence on one of the sample materials received a significant amount of attention from focus group participants*

1-877 - WAR -VETS  
Combat Call Center.....1-877-927-8387  
Veteran Crisis Line.....1-800-273-8255  
Homeless Veterans.....1-877-424-3838

[www.VetCenter.va.gov](http://www.VetCenter.va.gov)

“The Life You Save May Be Your

*“I can’t even place his uniform. What branch is he in? Where did they get that from? He has no rank on him. He has nothing. Where did they pick this guy up? Did they just go get a foreign uniform and shove it on an actor and give him a haircut?” — Client, San Marcos Vet Center*

### Representation of Diverse Needs and Populations

In addition to standardizing all information related to Vet Center services, eligibility, and other universal traits, focus group participants advised that promotional materials be responsively cognizant of the differences that exist between Vet Centers as well as the variety of the people Vet Centers serve. Above all else, client and staff member participants said promotional materials’ content, imagery, and language for the following information should be both accurately diverse and demonstrative of Vet Center communities:

- Types of Vet Center client groups and demographics.
- Stages of transition into civilian life.
- Resources and opportunities for engagement specific to communities.

**Types of Vet Center Client Groups and Demographics.** Of all the high-level takeaways captured, the need for materials to reflect the diversity of Vet Center clients in images and content was mentioned almost 1.5 times more often than the second most notable recommendation surrounding language. This included a resounding request to showcase Vet Center’s numerous types of client groups, including Veterans, active duty service members, and families, as well as various service eras and branches they represent. According to several focus group participants, materials should also accurately display the races, ethnicities, and ages that are characteristic of their communities. For example, staff members from Western and more mountainous regions suggested having a stronger Native American presence, while individuals from Vet Centers across the country advocated for more content and images related to women, active duty service members, and the variety of individuals who may not have served in frontline combat scenarios.

*Figure 9: Participants discussed the importance of having diversity featured throughout materials, especially when referencing MST*



#### MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA COUNSELING

Counseling is available at all Vet Centers across the country for any Veteran who experienced sexual harassment or violence while serving in the military regardless of gender or era of service.



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The importance of using diverse images was again emphasized when focus group conversations focused on the photo shown in Figure 9. Expressing frustration that only a woman was used to represent MST, clients and staff members called for increased inclusivity.

***“Speaking as a woman, this is what you’re judged on. And if what everybody thinks if you’re a woman, the only reason you need help is because you had sexual trauma. So, it’s not just a gender-specific problem and I think you need to stay away from that. … There’s much more to a woman Veteran service than that and the issues are so more than that.” — Client, Rapid City Vet Center***

**Stages of Transition into Civilian Life.** Some participant responses indicated a specific need to ensure both content and images are demonstrative of the two sides of readjustment—that is, both military experiences and reintegration into civilian life. However, they noted that this must be done responsibly in order to make all clients feel represented.

Participants noted both the pros and cons of showcasing military-related images and language. A deeper look at the data suggests images that placed a strong emphasis on weapons and combat zones elicited stronger negative reactions from clients than images that more generally alluded to their military experiences. For example, after seeing an image of a service member in a tank, one Rapid City Vet Center client said, “I can’t even watch the news. Those things flash me back.”

***“I’m trying to break myself out of being such a soldier. And so, to show me that, it’s like ‘Okay, you want me to go back to doing this?’ I just gave away all my uniforms. I don’t want to be in that.” — Client, Tampa Vet Center***

However, not all participants viewed this content or visuals adversely. Instead, some recognized the value military visuals could provide in demonstrating an understanding of clients’ military and Veteran culture. According to one City Center Philadelphia Vet Center client, images of service members in uniform could also encourage those who are hesitant about counseling to come into a Vet Center. “It’s relatable,” he said, adding that most Veterans probably “have a picture like that.” Another client from the Tampa Vet Center suggested that these images were appealing largely because they served as a reminder of what she is working to put behind her.

Additionally, other conversations recommended including images that depicted civilian life. To provide a valuable example, a Tampa Vet Center staff member referenced an old VA campaign that showed a Veteran looking at himself in a mirror with both a military and civilian reflection. Another client from the Kalispell Vet Center said the connection between military and civilian experiences could even be as subtle as a military haircut so long as the rest of the visual used “civilian clothes and a warm friendly counseling session.”

***“Two parents and kids, smiling. Maybe like walking down the street with the American flag in the back or something. Or an elderly couple. But showing content [where] they’re happy.” — Client, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center***

**Resources and Opportunities for Engagement Specific to Communities.** More than 11% of comments relating to the sample materials recognized the need for certain elements to be tailored to the local population and the communities in which they live. Client and staff members requested the inclusion of local resources, including other Vet Centers in the surrounding area, as well as Vet Center specifics, such as hours of operation, addresses, and levels of flexibility regarding appointment scheduling. One client from the Tampa Vet Center said this type of customization could also be applied to the local Vet Center website, suggesting that new pages highlight specific counselors or events.



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## **Focus on Positive, Non-Triggering, and Destigmatizing Messages**

In conversations centered around messaging, focus group participants agreed on the need for promotional materials to focus on Vet Centers' most positive and uplifting aspects. Acknowledging a prevailing stigmatism related to receiving mental health services within the Veteran and military community, client and staff members agreed that materials should also work to remove any possible barriers that could keep clients from engaging in services. This suggestion could be further broken down into two main elements:

- Depicting positive experiences in images.
- Using appropriate language related to mental health.

As discussed below, both elements can help Vet Centers create outreach materials that will accurately depict the benefits of its services, while reassuring potential clients of its safe and judgment-free environment.

**Depicting Positive Experiences in Images.** In roughly 27% of responses related to imagery, focus group participants suggested that Vet Center promotional materials be carefully crafted to depict positive experiences that promote wellness and destigmatize mental health. One staff member from the City Center Philadelphia Vet Center explained that materials should include images that are representative of current Vet Center clients and emphasize their daily lives "here and now." In addition to noticing the absence of positive images in some materials, focus group participants also acknowledged the harmful and potentially triggering effects of images that displayed feelings of frustration, anger, or sadness. For example, clients and staff members across focus groups consistently cited Figure 10 as the most disliked visual within the promotional materials. Based on comments, it is recommended that this image be immediately changed to a visual that represents a more positive, welcoming, and "less dramatic representation of therapy" and Vet Centers as a whole. "It denotes weakness and you're not going to get a guy to buy into that, not a combat guy," confirmed a City Center Philadelphia Vet Center client.

*Figure 10: This image on one of the sample materials sparked a lot of conversation among focus group participants*



**Using Appropriate Language Related to Mental Health.** Focus group data also illustrated the need to strategically select words used across marketing materials, especially when discussing mental health. In reviewing all six materials, participants from several focus groups routinely concentrated their conversations involving language around three words: readjustment, counseling, and psycho-social.

As demonstrated in Figure 11, staff member and client opinions around the word "readjustment" varied most significantly. As one Tampa Vet Center participant noted, "I don't need something else to tell me that something is wrong with me," adding that "readjustment" just implies that there were still aspects that need fixing. To help combat these negative associations with the word "readjustment," participants brainstormed several neutral words for its replacement. These included "transitional," "integration," and "after deployment."

*Figure 11: Number of focus group responses that addressed the usage of "readjustment" and "counseling"*



***"Yeah. I concur with "readjustment" is not a good word. It has a very negative connotation to it. I think counseling is a generational gap because I think people of my generation and younger, I don't think we have such a negative connotation attached to it, so perhaps different brochures for different eras might be useful to target different age groups." — Client, San Marcos Vet Center***

The word “counseling” also drew mixed feelings from focus group participants. Some associated the word with a negative stigma and argued that it does not convey the homey, peer-to-peer feeling Vet Centers are typically known for. One client from the San Marcos Vet Center recommended that the materials aim to first showcase the organization’s welcoming environment “and let counseling come afterwards.” Others, however, said the concept of counseling has become much more accepted by younger generations and would resonate with that population.

A smaller selection of participants provided comments on the word “psycho-social,” which was used by one brochure to describe the types of services Vet Centers provide. One Kalispell Vet Center staff member summarized general sentiments towards this word in suggesting that it is not “going to appeal to anyone who’s not a mental health professional,” adding, “it’s going to sound especially distressing to somebody when the initial part of that word is ‘psycho.’” Others agreed, noting that “psycho” could likely trigger or upset clients who are already hesitant about seeking mental health services.

***"I still think there's a stigma to counseling, psycho-social readjustment. There is a stigma that goes with those words, that when you say them, you're headed towards the door and then all of a sudden you see 'readjustment and counseling' and you're like, hmm, I think I'm going to hit Dollar Tree over there, because I don't want to go in.." — Client, Tampa Vet Center***

## Key Takeaways Identified by Stakeholders

Table 8: Key takeaways related to brand experience

Additional Insights
<p></p> <p><b>“Keeping the Promise”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Nearly 71% RCS employees currently use the “Keeping the Promise” slogan.</li><li>▪ A representative from a partner organization from District 1 said, “No one believes that ‘Keeping the Promise’ is true.” He elaborated by saying the slogan does not make a real commitment to clients and instead, suggested Vet Centers use phrases, such as “we are here” and “we are going to help you” to resonate more with clients.</li><li>▪ A Google search for "Keeping the Promise" did not return any results associated with Vet Centers for 14 pages. The first relevant hit was associated with an article about VA's <a href="#">My HealtheVet</a>.</li></ul> <p><b>Outreach Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ More than 76% of responses collected from RCS employees suggest that brochures, business cards, flyers, and swag items are the most used materials at Vet Centers. Other useful items include television and radio spots, word-of-mouth referrals, participation at events, and presentations.</li><li>▪ The overwhelming majority of RCS employees stated that they currently use printed materials more often than electronic versions. According to the data, employees are twice as likely to print hard copies to distribute directly to clients or at events, rather than email electronic copies or present materials on digital displays.</li><li>▪ The need to standardize content was reinforced in several partner interviews. For example, a representative from a partner organization in District 5 recommended having an all-encompassing brochure focused on standardized information as well as simpler brochures explaining services in more detail.</li><li>▪ Several other partners suggested materials should better clarify services and eligibility requirements by presenting high-level information in an easily digestible format. For example, despite having an active relationship with their nearby Vet Centers, representatives from organizations in District 4 and District 5 said they were still unclear about the suite of services Vet Centers offered as well as its eligibility parameters.</li><li>▪ A representative from a District 5 partner organization noted that the ability for clients to receive care at no cost was one of the reasons he encourages those who may be eligible for services to visit Vet Centers for more information.</li><li>▪ The need to clarify the relationship between Vet Centers and VA was confirmed through partner interviews from several different districts. An organization representative from District 2 said communication products that are too heavily associated with VA, such as the Vet Center <a href="#">website</a>, can deter those who have grown to distrust VA.</li></ul>

- According to Social Mention, sentiment surrounding Vet Centers on social media is largely positive or neutral across mainstream channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Over the last five years, Facebook has had the largest percentage, 80%, of positive associations, with no notable negative sentiments in the data. While other channels sometimes present negative perceptions about Vet Centers, in general, positive associations were four times as likely to be made on social media platforms than negative associations.

## Strengths



- The organizational culture of Vet Centers elicits positive experiences and strong emotional connections among clients and staff members.
- Vet Centers are commonly viewed as being safe, confidential, welcoming, supportive, and relaxed places for clients to receive mental health care.
- While all stakeholders agreed that there are too many Vet Center logos in use nationwide, basic creative elements of the current logos—patriotic symbolism, connection to military experience, and streamlined design—are widely appealing to clients and staff members. Likewise, promotional materials offer some visual and content elements that can be built upon.

## Weaknesses



- Despite the overwhelmingly positive reputation of Vet Centers, some potential clients may be hesitant to come in for care largely due to the organization's relationship with VA and the stigma surrounding mental health.
- The "Keeping the Promise" slogan is widely unknown and disliked by clients because of the implied meaning that a promise was made by the government that was never kept.
- Although printed materials do provide value and are used frequently by stakeholders, they are often overly complex and inaccurately represent or exclude Vet Center clients, services, and eligibility criteria.
- Outreach materials lack images that resonate with target audiences and attention to detail, particularly as it relates to diversity, the inclusion of all service branches and conflicts, and military insignia.

## Opportunities



- Update Vet Center logo and slogan in a way that pays homage to the organization's history, while reflecting current sentiments.
- In addition to creating more streamlined and simplified outreach materials, usage of digital and programmatic channels such as social media and online marketing should be considered to expand the reach of marketing and outreach efforts.

- The Vet Center website and facility locator application should be updated and must provide clear and accurate information about each Vet Center location.
- Technologies, such as QR codes or automatic text messages could provide Vet Centers with a simple way to distribute messages to targeted populations who prefer to stay connected using personal devices.
- Swag items, such as refrigerator magnets, stickers, and clothing are often eye-catching and can easily promote Vet Centers among current and potential clients.
- Practical skill-based toolkits that encourage techniques such as mediation could provide clients with a way to engage in self-care without requiring access to technology.

## Brand Loyalty



*The extent stakeholders will repeatedly engage with a brand as a result of having positive experiences and fostering trustworthy relationships with it.*

By fostering consistent and positive experiences with both its organization and brand, Vet Centers can encourage additional, more frequent, and enhanced opportunities for engagement among stakeholders. In turn, this strengthened sense of brand loyalty can increase both awareness and demand for Vet Center services by transforming dedicated stakeholders into brand ambassadors.

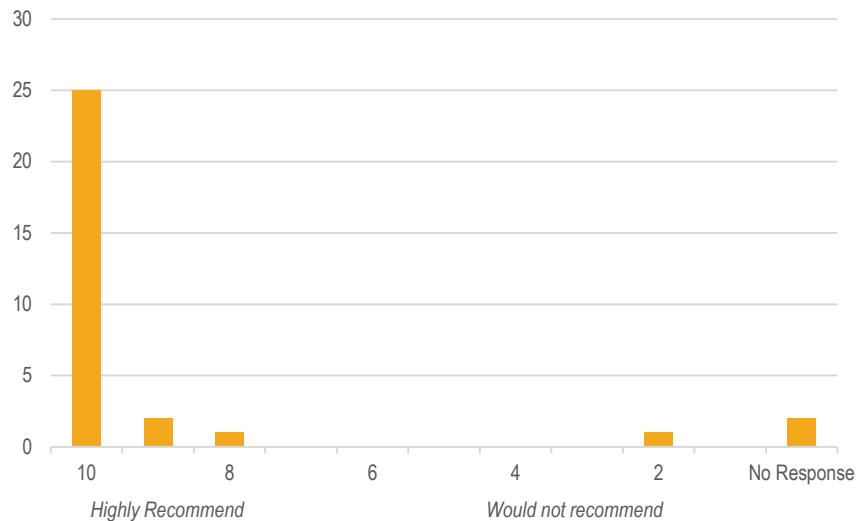
To better understand the degree to which stakeholders maintain a sense of brand loyalty, focus group participants were asked several questions focused on measuring their likelihood to actively support Vet Centers' awareness and engagement goals. Clients were asked how likely they were to either help promote or recommend Vet Centers to a friend, while staff members were asked what they could do to help keep Vet Centers relevant into the future.

Answers to these questions revealed participants' levels of commitment to the organization as well as the potential impact that these actions could have in supporting overall Vet Center branding objectives.

### Client Commitment to Vet Centers

Focus group data overwhelmingly confirmed that clients have a strong loyalty to the Vet Center organization. This is illustrated in Figure 12, which shows that almost all clients provided the highest score on a numerical scale when rating whether they would recommend Vet Centers to a peer, friend, colleague, or family member.

*Figure 12: Number of client responses rating their willingness to recommend or help promote Vet Centers*



Several clients further emphasized their high level of loyalty to the organization by noting that they have already recommended Vet Centers to people they know. One Kalispell Vet Center client said that he has recommended Vet Centers to friends and colleagues for years by using social media channels to “tell folks about the effectiveness of Vet Centers.” Another client from Tampa said he has already recommended Vet Centers to his wife, sisters, and clients, adding that they provide a “low-risk, high reward” opportunity.

**“I put a 10. My reason being this place has changed my life. And I share my experiences with my peers in hopes of [them] being able to achieve where I’m at right now.” — Client, Tampa Vet Center**

Notably, only four clients did not use the highest score when rating their likelihood of helping to promote or recommend Vet Centers. In these cases, clients said it was not the quality of care nor their experience with Vet Centers that held them back, but rather the eligibility limitations, specifically around combat zone criteria, and limited scope of services that gave them pause. As one San Marcos Vet Center client pointed out, some Veterans and service members never leave the continental United States and therefore do not qualify for Vet Center services. This is despite the fact that they still have to work shifts that deprive them of their families and count as deployment.

**“I’m hesitant to go beyond 8 because of the restrictiveness of service. That is to say, most of Marines I know are not likely to qualify as “combat vet” in the Vet Centers’ eyes and so I don’t want them to get rejected.” — Client, San Marcos Vet Center**

## **Staff Member Commitment to Keeping Vet Centers Relevant**

Staff member participants from all five focus group locations largely agreed on the necessity to take strategic actions to ensure Vet Centers stay relevant for current active duty service members and future generations of Veterans. Collectively, their suggestions informed the following high-level themes:

- Expanding outreach efforts and relationships with community partners.
- Embracing new technological tools and trends.
- Maintaining Vet Centers’ flexibility to serve the unique needs of their communities.

## **Expanding Outreach Efforts and Relationships with Community Partners**

Most staff members acknowledged the need to expand their outreach efforts by better positioning themselves in locations where Veterans and active duty service members frequent. For example, staff member participants recommended car and gun shows, motorcycle rallies, and sporting events as being particularly valuable in catching the attention of younger demographics. As one Tampa Vet Center staff member pointed out, Vet Centers “need to be able to go where Veterans go.”

*“We need to look at this in two roads. One is the external part of the community and informing to stay relevant. The other one is within the VA itself. ... I think that we are not where we need to be on the internal side of the house to let folks that actually are with VA know what we do. A lot of people ask me. They think that I’m a nonprofit organization. ... So, there’s a lot of work to be done within that internal population, looking inward for branding of our own entity.” — Staff member, Tampa Vet Center*

## **Embracing New Technological Tools and Trends**

Vet Center staff recognized the value an enhanced website and new digital tools could play in increasing awareness and fostering deeper engagement with clients. One City Center Philadelphia Vet Center staff member suggested that videos highlighting the services and environment of Vet Centers would be a modern way to engage clients. Other staff members emphasized that tools such as social media and podcasts would help Vet Centers reach the younger demographic that is more engaged online and through mobile devices.

*“I think if we had a podcast where it talks about the Vet Center [and] we have guests come on. ... We have to really gear things toward the generation of today. And I think some of this [printed material] is kind of outdated. They’re not carrying around papers anymore, everything is on their Apple iPhone or their iPad. So, we need to do something that appeals to them ... something like a Snapchat.” — Staff member, Tampa Vet Center*

## **Maintaining Vet Centers’ Flexibility to Serve the Unique Needs of Their Communities**

Staff members implied that maintaining the unique culture of Vet Centers, including the flexibility and variety of services, will be vital to ensuring the demand for Vet Centers continues. Individualized care, non-traditional hours, and environments that do not feel overly clinical were all critical aspects of the Vet Center culture that staff members found are necessary to maintain.

*“Vet Centers aren’t cookie cutter. You can’t cookie cut our services. It’s a community. It’s a home. It’s not just the counselor [or] interacting with the counselor. It’s also the environment. You can’t just take a Vet Center counselor, put him in somewhere and call that a Vet Center. A Vet Center is a community-based place where our Veterans come in and they feel safe and comfortable. ... This building, and the setup, and the layout is welcoming to the Veterans. And that’s very important.” — Staff member, San Marcos Vet Center*

## **Key Takeaways Identified by Stakeholders**

*Table 9: Key takeaways related to brand loyalty*

Additional Insights
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Partner interviews recommended the use of digital channels, such as social media platforms, to increase engagement among clients and partners alike. A representative from a District 2 organization made it a point to emphasize that social media has been instrumental in helping</li></ul>



them field questions about Vet Centers and share available resources with target audiences.

## Strengths



- Current clients are extremely loyal to the Vet Center organization because of the quality of counselors, variety of services, and welcoming environment.
- Once engaged in services, clients are highly likely to recommend Vet Centers to someone they know.
- The Vet Center culture, mission, and services often exceed both client and staff member needs and expectations.

## Weaknesses



- Restrictions on eligibility, particularly regarding combat zones, limit some clients from recommending Vet Centers to others.
- Outreach specialists are not engaging stakeholders enough in the locations where they frequent, including being a presence at community events dedicated to cars, guns, and sports.
- Engagement and cross-collaboration opportunities could also be improved upon between Vet Centers and its partnering organizations, including providers and other individuals from VA medical centers.

## Opportunities



- A Brand Ambassador program that relies on firsthand experiences and testimonials from current clients could encourage those who are hesitant to seek mental health care to try Vet Center activities.
- Efforts to enhance the prevailing perception of Vet Centers as a trusted, go-to source for referrals in the Veteran and military communities could round out promotional efforts.
- Vet Centers should expand outreach efforts to better engage in locations clients frequent to help increase awareness and ensure that the organization remains relevant while reaching targeted demographics.

## Brand Purpose



*An organization's reason to exist, including its long-term business strategy that is tied to societal change and guides strategic decisions and actions.*

Staff members from all focus group locations were asked to put the Vet Center's mission and purpose into their own words. Below is a selection of the most notable comments centered around what staff members believe Vet Centers are working to achieve in Veteran and military communities nationwide.

***"I typically say to people that we are a soft landing spot for people when they return from deployment—or even 20, 30 years after they've returned from deployment—to come in and reconnect with peers and people who understand their experience. And also, to allow them to bring***



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*in their experience and connect with others, and have it be in a safe, comfortable, recreational place.” — Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center*

*“We’re that light in the dark. We really do jump in and really fill gaps and unmet needs. Resume writing. If we could dog sit, we would. You name it, if it’s within scope, we do it. And we have individuals that need it done. I’ve watched [staff members] take time and help people with their cell phones. We had a work study who came in wrinkled every day and I think I ironed his clothes one day. I mean, we do it for the Veterans that are struggling, for individuals that come in that are struggling.” — Staff member, Tampa Vet Center*

*“We care about one thing: How can we help you? … If I can’t help you, I’m going to get you to somebody who can, right? If he’s not here, I’m going to get you somebody else who’s well-versed. We [are] going to get you somewhere.” — Staff member, Tampa Vet Center*

*“For me, it’s like welcoming people home in a way that has meaning to them. … Readjustment counseling can mean so many different things. It can be so individualized to each person’s needs. And I remember saying to Vietnam Veterans 30 years later … just saying, “Welcome home.” And they said, ‘I finally feel like I am coming home.’ I think that’s what we do.” — Staff member, Rapid City Vet Center*

*“The goal is to help transition them back to the civilian world with the least amount of serious issues or obstacles. To teach them how to jump over those hurdles, go around those hurdles, and get through—even with the pain, with the disability. … We don’t discount them, but help them, teach them how to get through with the fears, with the anxiety, with the depression. … Teaching them they’re stronger than they think.” — Staff member, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center*

*“The Vet Center is … a really great resource to find things that you might not even know you’re entitled to. On top of that, it’s just a great place to come hang out if you want to be with other Veterans, too.” — Staff member, San Marcos Vet Center*

*“We do readjustment counseling primarily, but we also network with anything VA-related. We can help you with paperwork. We can get you connected to the community, anywhere in the community, with the people that can support you in the ways that you need to get supported.” — Staff member, Kalispell Vet Center*

*“I tell people it’s an outpatient clinic for warzone Veterans. They can come in and talk about whatever issues, whatever is going on with them in their lives. It could be related to the war. It could be related to just going back to school or getting along with family. But they can just come here and talk about things.” — Staff member, City Center Philadelphia Vet Center*

## Conclusion

Findings from this report will be used to inform future creative decisions, including the development of a new brand identity and supportive outreach materials. These findings also informed nine communications strategies capable of fulfilling three broader Vet Center awareness and perception goals. Found in the [Executive Summary](#) of this report, all recommendations reflect opportunities for RCS to build on the strengths of the Vet Center brand, while improving upon its weaknesses. These recommendations can immediately help enhance the Vet Center brand and support its ability to provide unmatched services to Veterans, active duty service members, and their families across the nation.



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# Appendix A: Brand Strategy Brief



*The perception of RCS and district leadership on the inner workings of the Vet Center brand.*

To better understand how RCS leadership perceives the Vet Center brand, Aptive conducted two creative brainstorming sessions. The first meeting was with Mike Fisher, RCS chief readjustment counseling officer, and Jessica Schiefer, RCS communications officer, in October 2019. The second meeting was tailored for district directors and deputy directors and took place in December 2019 during the RCS district leadership meeting.

Each brainstorm session was designed to assess how participants felt about the current Vet Center brand promise, purpose, vision, mission, and application. Questions were intended to get to the root of how leaders identified the goals, challenges, and perceptions about the current Vet Center brand as well as the upcoming rebrand.

## RCS Leadership Feedback

### ***What Do We Need to Achieve and Why?***

We need to create a brand and a consistent suite of materials that explain what a Vet Center is and what services the Vet Centers provides to Veterans, service members, and their families. Consistency is key in the visual brand and voice (i.e., the language used on all products and in all messages). The look and feel of products, as well as the language used, should be consistent across all Vet Centers.

The materials should:

- Explain what a Vet Center is (e.g., brick and mortar place for Readjustment Counseling Services, not an animal hospital or college campus facility for Veterans).
- Explain who Vet Centers are (e.g., the brand promise, core benefits).
- Explain why Vet Centers are committed to the clients that they serve (e.g., brand purpose, pull at the heartstrings).
- Use consistent visuals and messaging across all products and for all locations. Speak the same language. Be consistent.
- Increase awareness among Veterans, key stakeholders (e.g., partner organizations, Congressional Representatives), and other VA employees.
- Offer an understanding of the basic services.
- Increase utilization of Vet Centers by Veterans, active duty service members, National Guardsmen and Reservists, and their families.
- Ensure the materials at each Vet Center have the flexibility to meet the needs in their community.
- Keep Vet Centers relevant.
- Support Vet Center staff by providing them with the tools and resources they need.

The materials will explain that a Vet Center is a one-stop-shop for psychological and social well-being. Ultimately, we want to emphasize that the Veteran or service member is the driver of their care. Vet Centers helps individuals identify and set goals, create a support structure to help them accomplish those goals. The process will continue as clients identify new goals.

A Veteran should walk into a Vet Center and know it's going to be unbureaucratic. The process should be a seamless transition for a Veteran. Clients often feel like they have a reason to say "no," and we want to give them a reason to say "yes."



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## ***What is the Background?***

With more than 300 Vet Centers, 80 Mobile Vet Centers, numerous outstations, and 900 community access points, RCS is uniquely positioned to assist Veterans in their communities, while reducing barriers for them to receive care. Created largely from grassroots efforts, these Vet Centers currently lack a standardized and consistent brand that presents them as a single unified force for Veterans, active duty service members, and their families. There is also a significant awareness issue—both in and outside of VA—regarding what Vet Centers are, what they do, and what services they provide.

Addition background points include:

- Vet Centers have grown immensely since 2000 and now have 2,200 employees.
  - Most Vet Centers have five to seven staff members on site.
- Vet Centers differ from VA medical centers because they:
  - Provide individual treatment plans and services for those who may not be able to receive care at VA medical centers (e.g., active duty service members, members of that National Guard, Reserve components and their families).
  - Provide a community-based option for those who may distrust other VA programs and offices.
  - Use outreach specialists to find people to bring in for services, whereas most people will seek out services at VA medical centers.
- As part of their responsibilities, every Vet Center must provide individual, group, marriage, and family counseling, as well as outreach and referral services.
  - There are both national and local partnerships in place that can be used to increase awareness.
  - A recent effort has been focused on working with the National Guard through avenues such as attending drill weekends.
- All Vet Centers have an outreach specialist who is dedicated to raising awareness among the local population. Ninety-nine percent of these individuals are Veterans and most specialists are combat Veterans.
  - Vet Centers have a different definition of “outreach” than most of VHA. At Vet Centers, outreach specialists go out and actively look for clients through face-to-face communication.

## ***What is the Human-Centered Design Challenge?***

The challenge is speaking a common, trusted language with Veterans, active duty service members, members of the National Guard and Reserve components, and their families. It's important to communicate that a Vet Center is a safe, confidential place to start the readjustment journey. Messages and materials need to explain the why and how.

## ***Why is This Challenge Important?***

Before Vet Centers switched to the “Keeping the Promise” slogan, “Help without hassle” was used. The decision was made to change the “Help without hassle” slogan as it portrayed VA as being the “hassle.”

Many Vet Centers want to emphasize the idea that “we are not VA.” The more the Vet Centers create relationships with VA medical center counterparts, the more VA medical centers will refer Veterans to Vet Centers. The ultimate goal is to create a message and brand that showcases how Vet Centers are separate from VA, without celebrating it. This will help ensure that Veterans trust Vet Centers as the entry point to VA services, if they want/need them, and allow VA to be seen as a partner.



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Another challenge is communicating an accurate portrayal of what the Vet Center provides. We need to make it clear that it's not a veterinarian clinic/hospital or a place for military students/Veterans on a college campus.

### ***Who Do We Need to Reach?***

RCS has several target audiences that it needs to reach with the new Vet Center brand. This includes:

- **Primary:** Veterans, active duty service members, National Guardsmen and Reservists, and their families who do and do not currently use Vet Center services.
- **Secondary:** Stakeholders/partners that work with or provide services to the primary target audience; this includes Vet Center staff members and VA/VHA employees.
- **Tertiary:** Communities surrounding Vet Centers and community partners that can provide resources for outreach opportunities.
- **Quaternary:** Congressional Representatives that can support policy and advocacy.

Additional information about the identified target audiences is listed below.

- Four years ago, Vietnam Veterans made up the largest percentage of Vet Center clientele.
- Currently, Vet Centers see more Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans. However, Vietnam Veterans engage in services more often than Veterans who served in OEF/OIF.
- Research shows that the younger generation of Veterans come into Vet Centers for services and then return to their normal day-to-day lives shortly after their needs are met.
- The goal is to create unique ways to find those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and keep them engaged.
- Another goal is to engage with those who do not know or haven't been to a Vet Center.
- Women Veterans, a small group seeking Vet Center services, is growing at a similar rate to the overall growth of women in the military population.
- The ages that fought in Iraq and Afghanistan can range from 18 to 60 years old.
- There is no way of measuring the military ranks of those who come in for services. However, we can assume based on the overall military population, that there are more enlisted ranks than officers.
- 70% of staff at Vet Centers are Veterans, the majority being combat Veterans.

### ***How Will We Reach Them?***

The audience will be primarily engaged through the use of Mobile Vet Centers, and face-to-face interaction with outreach specialists. RCS will engage the audience through the use of their Facebook page and expand into other digital/social media when those resources become available.

There are also opportunities to connect with partners. Vet Center staff members will find places to get the materials out to local partnerships/organizations. Vet Center staff will also find additional opportunities where they can engage with the community on a face-to-face basis.

### ***What is the One Thing We Need to Tell Them?***

For Veterans, active duty service members, members of the National Guard, Reserve components, and their families, we want to emphasize that Vet Centers are a trusted and safe to place to go. We need to ensure that clients know a Vet Center is where they can go to set goals and have someone help them reach their goals.

For staff members, we need to emphasize that Vet Centers are a place of empowerment. We can do this by ensuring staff members know that they have the flexibility to try new things. While Vet Centers are evolving, the core of what they are and the services they provide are not changing.



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## **What Else Do They Need to Know?**

In addition to the one primary message we want the target audience to know:

- When a client comes into a Vet Center, they don't have to fill out paperwork.
- There is no charge for the service.
- The client does not have to enroll in a VA health care plan or private insurance.
- There is no time limitation on when a client can visit a Vet Center, the benefit doesn't expire.
- There are support groups.
- Vet Centers will help Veterans or service members create an individual plan.
- There is a spectrum of services that include both mental health and socioeconomic services.
- Vet Centers can provide services throughout a Veteran's lifelong journey.
- Vet Centers can provide services to family members even if the service member is deployed.
- Once a client becomes eligible, they are eligible for life.
- Vet Centers will help a Veteran or service member figure out their individual needs and goals.

## **What Do We Want Them to Do?**

The primary goal is to get Veterans engaged in Vet Center services. Our primary call to action will be: Visit VA's Facility Locator page (<https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>) to find a Vet Center in your area.

## **What Do We Want Them to Think and/or Feel?**

It's important for Vet Center clients to feel empowered and safe. Vet Centers are here to help and guide Veterans, active duty service members, National Guardsmen and Reservists, and their families in the direction they want to go. They are in the driver's seat of their care.

All stakeholders should feel knowledgeable and have an awareness and understanding of Vet Centers and the offered.

Vet Centers can adjust to meet the clients' needs. We have the ability to take a step back and reassign the client to a different counselor if that's best for the client.

## **What Does the Audience Currently Think?**

Research suggests that most Vet Centers are perceived positively and viewed as a trusted organization. A common sentiment in the Vet Centers FY19 Customer Feedback survey is, "Vet Centers saved my life." Clients see the Vet Centers brand differently than the larger VA brand.

- Vet Centers remain an important place for Veterans to seek help, especially for those who do not trust VA medical centers.
  - Grassroots efforts have historically carried the reputation of the Vet Centers brand.
- Many Vet Center clients still believe there is a stigma around seeking care. The active duty population has expressed concerns about privacy since the new Electronic Health Record (EHR) system will merge with the Department of Defense (DoD).

## **What is the Tone?**

The tone of the rebranding campaign should be casual, friendly, and supportive. It should focus on the peer-to-peer connections made at Vet Centers and do everything we can to decrease barriers to care.

## **What are the Mandatories?**

Deliver 508-compliant final materials. Although it's not required, the VA Branding Guide should be considered and referenced in the logo development. There is an opportunity to incorporate the VA logo with the Vet Center logo, but it's not mandatory.



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## ***What are the Specific Deliverables and Formats?***

The deliverables for this campaign include:

- Logo development.
- Brochure/pamphlet template (page count is still to be determined).
- Flyer template.
- Fact sheet template.
- Business card template.
- Letterhead template.
- Graphics (Brand) Standards Guide.

Where applicable, creative deliverables will also include one Adobe design file (e.g., InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop) and one flattened file (PDF, JPEG, or TIFF).

Optional deliverables for this campaign include:

- Additional logo development.
- Outreach material (banner).
- Outreach material (tent).
- Infographic.
- Mobile Vet Center vehicle wrap design.
- Promotional videos.
- External signage design.

## ***What Research or Resources Do You Already Have?***

Existing research and resources include:

- Vet Centers FY19 Customer Feedback, Activities of RCS FY18.
- Vet Centers (Readjustment Counseling) – Services:  
[https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Vet\\_Center\\_Services.asp](https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Vet_Center_Services.asp).
- Vet Centers (Readjustment Counseling) – Home Page: <https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>.
- Mike Fisher – Borne The Battle #164 (VA’s Borne the Battle podcast for a benefits breakdown episode).
- NBC News / Sunday Today / Gabe Gutierrez / VA “Vet Centers” 11/11/18:  
<https://www.today.com/news/veterans-reveal-vet-center-spokane-washington-changed-their-lives-t141803>.
- Inside the monumental program helping Veterans readjust to civilian life:  
<https://www.today.com/video/inside-the-monumental-program-helping-veterans-readjust-to-civilian-life-1367526467959>.
- ‘Life changing’: How one center is helping Veterans, families readjust after combat:  
<https://www.today.com/video/-life-changing-how-one-center-is-helping-veterans-families-readjust-after-combat-1367494211538>.
- Muddy Boots Vietnam Veterans group offers hope to others:  
<https://www.today.com/video/muddy-boots-vietnam-veterans-group-offers-hope-to-others-1367486531776>.

## ***What Additional Information (If Any) Would be Helpful for Our Creative Team?***

The Vet Centers brand shouldn’t speak so closely to a Veteran or service member that we miss speaking to a family member. Family members can be Vet Centers’ most prominent advocates; therefore, the brand voice or materials should talk to families as well.



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VA leadership has to buy-in on the Vet Centers rebrand. To do this, we must make sure to think through the following questions when addressing the creative strategy:

- How will this brand increase access?
- How will it promote relevancy for Vet Centers?
- How will it improve Vet Center relationships with partners, both internal and external?

## District Leadership Feedback

### ***What is Your Brand Promise?***

Describe what your brand stands for, its core values, and key benefits?

- **Brand promise:** Give us 15 minutes and we'll give you a better future.
- **One message you wish to convey to eligible clients through our new communication materials:** Whatever you need, we'll provide it when you need it.
- Other important phrases and words noted:
  - When you are ready, we are here.
  - Availability to talk to a person.
  - Welcoming environment.
  - Feel at home.
  - Same day service.
  - Put Veterans first.
  - Families count too.
  - Keeping the Promise.
  - We know you.
  - Veterans serving Veterans.
- There was a lot of praise for "Give us 15 minutes and we'll give you a better future" promise.
- We promise to understand you, we meet you where you are at.
- Readjustment is whatever the Veteran needs it to be (the full spectrum).
  - How do you capture the full spectrum of services and eligibility without listing it all out?
  - How you capture services from a "cup of coffee" to evidence-based therapy?
- We provide the full spectrum of readjustment counseling support.
- We build a relationship from the very beginning. It's what makes us different.
  - Our services exist nowhere else.
  - What you need when you need it.
  - At some point, a Veteran might only need the benefits for today, but next year he/she might do a kayaking group for two years.
- Nike doesn't say "Just do it for \$179.99." We need to find the balance between what we need to tell them and what is too much information.
- The brand promise should be positive, optimistic, and short enough to be memorable.

### ***What is Your Brand Personality?***

Identify five or six words that describe the characteristics of the Vet Center brand and its organization.

- **One message you wish to convey to eligible clients through our new communication materials:** Welcome and empower Veterans with sincerity and honor them throughout their lifetime.
  - Sincerely welcome and honor Veterans anytime, through a lifetime.
  - Keeping the promise to honor your service through a lifetime.
- Other important phrases and words noted:



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- o Welcoming.
  - o Honor.
  - o Sincerity.
  - o Anytime access to service.
  - o Empowering.
- Let's not be like the Army that changes its slogan all the time. The Marines have always used a consistent slogan (The Few. The Proud. The Many.) and everyone knows the Marines when they hear that slogan.
- Keeping the Promise has been around for 40 years. Do we really need to change that now?
- Other important phrases and words noted:
  - o Confidential (there was a lot of praise for this one).
  - o Validating.
  - o Hopeful.
  - o Professional.
  - o Comprehensive.
  - o Relaxed (there was a lot of praise for this one).
  - o Holistic.
  - o Keeping the Promise.
    - Does this appeal to a new generation? Does it speak to OEF/OIF Veterans?
    - Similarly, does "Welcome home" appeal to OEF/OIF Veterans as it did for Vietnam Veterans?

### ***What is Your Brand Purpose?***

Describe what motivates and inspires Vet Center staff to do the work that they do. This is the “why” or the reason your organization exists.

- **One message you wish to convey to eligible clients through new communication materials:**  
We provide comfortable coaching and camaraderie in a safe, sacred place where Veterans can find hope and purpose in a transition from stress to serenity.
- Other important phrases and words noted:
  - o Finding home.
  - o Coming home.
  - o Making the connection.
  - o Continuing the journey.
- It's important to keep in mind that until Veterans start talking to someone, they so often don't think anything is wrong.
- Commitment and dedication to service.
  - o Can a piece of this be “provided by dedication and commitment...”?
- There is such a feeling of difference between the institutional piece and who we are.
- Commitment, connection, and community – that's what we provide.
- Suicide prevention was not a priority in the past, but now we are feeling more hopeful for Veterans. Giving them a chance to feel readjusted and healed. Hopeful they will find the resources they need.
  - o From the clinical side, we should be seeing signs of hope.
  - o From the benefits and socio-economic side, it's a solution.

### ***What is Your Brand Position?***

Identify the one thing you want current and potential clients to know about you.



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- **One message you wish to convey to eligible clients through our new communication materials:**  
Quality, peer-based counseling services for Veterans, service members, and families in a variety of modalities to connect them to their communities.
- Other important phrases and words noted:
  - o We are a one-stop-shop where Veterans can come for anything from employment to mental health and family care.
  - o Quality counseling just in time.
  - o Focused on quality and non-traditional services.
  - o Innovative approaches to therapy (e.g., women's events).
  - o Services are community- and peer-based.
  - o All Veterans can come.
    - Even if they don't meet the eligibility criteria, we can point them in the direction they can go.
- We can help.

### ***What is Unique About Your Brand?***

Describe how you differ from VA or similar organizations.

- We have to make the messages something short and concise—something people can remember.
  - o Someone provided the example of Nike's "Just do it" slogan.
- Other important phrases and words noted:
  - o Lifelong partners.
  - o Unlimited.
  - o No cost.
  - o Always welcome.
  - o Welcome home.
  - o We are always in partnership with you.
  - o Lifelong commitment.
  - o Always a partner after deployment.
  - o Always a partner.
  - o Keeping the Promise.
- The group was trying to figure out how to use readjustment and do we need to stick to that word?
- How do you capture that it is after deployment?
  - o Managing the balance between listing too much and too little.
  - o Name what eligibility is in a short, concise way.
- How do we portray the idea that we have belief in Veterans?
  - o Portray the sense that Veterans are driving their care.
  - o This is yours.
  - o We believe in you, even if you don't believe in yourself.
- Other important phrases and words noted:
  - o Non-institutional.
  - o Professional in a casual environment.
  - o More Veteran-centric staff members.
  - o We will be with you throughout your lifetime.
  - o Flexibility (there was a lot of praise for this).

### ***What is the Main Message for the Campaign?***

- We provide the right services, at the right time, in the right location.
- Portray that there isn't a "catch" to receive care.
  - No red tape.
  - No paperwork.
  - We aren't going to tell someone your story.
- Be cautious to not be the counternarrative to VA.
  - Don't emphasize the differences too much.



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## Appendix B: Brand Audit Questionnaire Question Bank



A 10-question online questionnaire created to assess how RCS employees use marketing materials, conduct outreach, engage community partners, and perceive ongoing branding initiatives.

1. Which of the following most accurately describes what you hear from active duty service members, Veterans, National Guardsmen and Reservists, and their families when they come into your Vet Center or call for the first time? Please select the one you hear most often.
  - a. "I didn't know you were here."
  - b. "I was hesitant to come in (or call) because Vet Centers are part of VA."
  - c. "My buddies say great things about Vet Centers, so I had to check it out."
  - d. "I saw your sign/flyer/brochure and thought I'd stop by to check it out."
  - e. "I was referred to the Vet Center by a community provider, VSO, or another partner."
  - f. Other (please specify)
2. What materials does your Vet Center currently use for outreach or communications? Please check all that apply.
  - a. Brochures.
  - b. Flyers.
  - c. Fact sheets.
  - d. Business cards.
  - e. Posters.
  - f. Letterhead.
  - g. Email blasts/Listservs.
  - h. Swag (e.g., pens, stress balls, dog tag key chains, cell phone card holders, magnets, stickers).
  - i. Other (please specify)
3. How do you use these materials? Please check all that apply.
  - a. Print hard copies and distribute to clients.
  - b. Email electronic copies to clients.
  - c. Print hard copies and distribute at events.
  - d. Use electronic versions on digital displays.
  - e. Email electronic copies to partners or other Vet Centers.
  - f. Other (please specify).
4. What are some common misconceptions you hear about Vet Centers? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Vet Center staff are not licensed and/or qualified to provide readjustment counseling services for Veterans.
  - b. Most Veterans are not eligible for Vet Center services.
  - c. Vet Centers are part of a big VA and therefore are difficult to get into.
  - d. It's not clear what services Vet Centers offer.
  - e. Only Veterans can receive Vet Center services.
  - f. Records will be shared with employer.
  - g. Counselors do not spend enough time with clients.
  - h. Other (please specify).
5. Does your Vet Center partner or collaborate with other Vet Centers in your area?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No.
  - c. Sometimes.
  - d. If yes, please explain how.



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6. Does your Vet Center use the “Keeping the Promise” slogan on marketing materials, signage, or communication?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No.
  - c. Sometimes.
  - d. I’m not familiar with the “Keeping the Promise” slogan.
  - e. If you answered “Yes,” “No,” or “Sometimes,” please explain why you do or do not use the “Keeping the Promise” slogan on marketing materials, signage, or communications.
7. Which of the following most accurately describes how you would use the newly branded materials?
  - a. I would use newly branded materials **more often** than our current materials.
  - b. I would **not use** the newly branded materials more often than our current materials.
  - c. I would use newly branded materials **about as often** as our current materials.
  - d. **I don’t currently use** Vet Center branded materials and therefore am unlikely to use newly branded materials.
8. Which of the following items do you believe your Vet Center would benefit most from? (Scale: Not useful, somewhat useful, neutral, useful, very useful)
  - a. Updated Mobile Vet Center wrap design.
  - b. Vehicle wrap for a car.
  - c. Updated website on VA.gov that provides more information on your Vet Center.
  - d. Vet Center facility locator app.
  - e. External signage that provides more clarity on the services Vet Centers provide.
  - f. Please provide any concerns you have about the current website, Mobile Vet Center wrap, or external signage.
9. Please provide any other comments you have regarding your current marketing and communications materials or the Vet Center brand.
10. **Optional Question:** If you are able, please upload a copy of the material that your Vet Center distributes or uses the most. This can include brochures, fact sheets, flyers, business cards, or more. To upload, click the **Choose File** button. You can upload **only one** file that is up to 16 MB. Files can be either .pdf, .doc/.docx, .png, or .jpg/jpeg. If you have more than one file you would like to share, please upload them directly to the [Vet Center Branding Project](#) folder on the Vet Center SharePoint site.

# Appendix C: Focus Group Question Bank



*Focus group questions centered around the Vet Center brand identity with the intent of gathering highly detailed perception and awareness information from Vet Center clients and staff members.*

## Client Focus Group Discussion Questions

### **Awareness of Vet Centers**

1. How did you first become aware of your local Vet Center?
  - a. What made you want to get involved or learn more information? Please know that you do not have to share any personal details related to your experience if you do not feel comfortable doing so.
  - b. **If time allowed:** In your own words, please explain the types of services offered at Vet Centers.
  - c. **If time allowed:** Please explain the types of individuals who are eligible for Vet Center services.
2. How would you sum up, in your own words, your first impression of the Vet Center?

### **Communication Materials (Brochures, Fact Sheet, Flyers, and Logos)**

#### **Comprehension and Impression**

3. Is any of the information in these materials new to you? Is there anything in here that you did not know before reading these items?
4. Do these materials grab your attention or encourage you to come into a Vet Center? Please explain why or why not.
  - a. What, if anything, do you think would make them more appealing to friends, peers, or family members who should get involved with Vet Centers?
  - b. Now, looking specifically at the information—or content—provided within the materials themselves, which sections of the materials are most useful and important to you? Please explain.

#### **Relevance**

5. Do you believe the *types* of materials in front of you, these being brochures, flyers, and fact sheets, provide value in helping you encourage a friend or family member to try Vet Center services? Please explain why or why not.
  - a. If not, what other types of materials do you think would be more valuable (e.g., digital marketing, social media, videos, a small card that can fit into your wallet, a new website, an app)?
6. How could these materials better speak to you or your loved one's readjustment process?
  - i. How could these materials speak specifically to the unique characteristics of your community?
  - ii. Please explain why this is important to you.

#### **Images, Visuals, and Signage**

7. How do you feel about the logos and imagery used in the materials? Please explain.
8. What types of images or visuals do you think would best speak to you and would be most likely to encourage you to engage with a Vet Center?
  - a. What images or visuals speak to your readjustment process?



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- b. What images or visuals speak to your community?

### Words and Phrases

9. What messages, if any, in these materials are important to you? Please explain.
  - a. Is there anything about this messaging that you would change? Please explain.
  - b. What, if anything, about the writing, appeals to you?
10. What words and phrases do you think are important to encourage peers and family members to try Vet Center services?
  - a. In the materials that are in front of you, what words or phrases pop out as being significant? Please explain.
11. Let's take a few minutes now to talk about the "Keeping the Promise" slogan. Before today, were you aware that "Keeping the Promise" was used as a slogan for Vet Centers?
  - a. In just a few words, please describe what "Keeping the Promise" means to you.
  - b. Do you believe this is the most effective message to describe Vet Centers and the Vet Center brand?

### Perception of Vet Centers

12. On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend or help promote the Vet Center to a friend, colleague, or family member? Please explain.
13. What is it about Vet Centers that compels you to stay engaged and keep coming back?
  - a. For example, what would make you or someone you know go out of your way to use Vet Center services as opposed to using another option or not at all?
14. What information do you think is most important to emphasize in order to encourage more Veterans, active duty service members, and their families to come to Vet Centers?
  - a. What information do you think would discourage someone from coming in?
15. In your packet, there is a list of words that looks like this [**moderator holds up the list of words from her own packet**]. Which of these words, if any, describe Vet Centers? Please circle up to four choices and then we'll take a few minutes to discuss the words chosen by the group.
  - a. How do you feel about all the words that were chosen?

#### Word List:

Community.

Advocacy.

Trustworthy (Credible).

Empowerment (Empowering).

Dedication (Caring, Supportive).

Safe (Confidential).

Relaxed (Informal, Casual).

Grassroots.

Holistic.

Professional.

Welcoming.

Comprehensive.

Other. If there is a different word that comes to mind, feel free to provide it.

16. How would you describe your emotional connection to the Vet Center culture?
  - a. What about its logo, slogan, messaging, and culture? Please explain.
  - b. How would your perception change if any of these elements were altered? Please explain.
17. From your perspective, what is unique about Vet Centers?



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- a. How do Vet Centers compare to VA, private counseling, or fee-based mental health services in the community that you've experienced or heard of?
18. If there were any services or events that were taken away from Vet Center that would cause you to stop engaging, what would those be? Please explain.

### **Wrap-Up**

19. Of all the things we discussed today, what do you think is most important?
20. Is there anything else you'd like to add about Vet Centers' current communications and marketing materials, or the Vet Center identity in the community as a whole?

## **Staff Focus Group Discussion Questions**

### **Awareness of Vet Centers**

1. How did you first become aware of Readjustment Counseling Services and Vet Centers?
  - a. What made you want to become part of the team?
2. In the communications and marketing field, we often use brief statements known as "elevator pitches" to quickly explain the purpose, benefits, or services of a program. Imagine that you were riding in an elevator with a potential client or partner. If you only had that brief elevator ride to inform potential clients and partners of the benefits and services available at Vet Centers, what would you say?
  - a. Explain how you inform current and potential clients and partners of the programs and services available at your local Vet Center.
3. What information has been most important to emphasize in our communication materials in order to encourage more Veterans, active duty service members, and their families to come to Vet Centers?

### **Communication Materials (Brochures, Fact Sheet, Flyers, and Logos)**

#### **Outreach Materials**

4. Do you believe the *types* of materials in front of you, these being brochures, flyers, and fact sheets, provide value in increasing awareness and sparking interest from potential clients and partners? Please explain why or why not.
  - a. If not, what other materials do you think would be more valuable (e.g., digital marketing, social media, videos, a small card that can fit in your wallet, a new website, an app)?
5. Now, looking specifically at the information—or content—with the materials themselves, which sections of the materials in front of you are most important? Please explain.
  - a. Which sections do you think need to be tailored to meet the unique needs of your Vet Center?
  - b. Is there any information you would add to promotional materials to make them more reflective of your community? Please explain.

#### **Relevance**

6. Is there anything about these materials that you would change to make them more appealing to current or potential clients and partners?

#### **Images, Visuals, and Signage**

7. How do you feel about the logos and imagery used in the materials? Please explain.
8. What types of images or visuals do you think would best speak to clients while accurately displaying what Vet Centers do?

## **Words and Phrases**

9. Is there anything about this messaging that you would change? Please explain.
10. Now let's look specifically at the messaging used within the materials. What words and phrases do you think are most effective when communicating about Vet Centers?
  - a. In the materials that are in front of you, what words or phrases pop out as being significant? Please explain.
11. Let's take a few minutes now to talk about the "Keeping the Promise" slogan. Please describe what it means to you.
  - a. Do you believe that "Keeping the Promise" accurately portrays what takes place inside a Vet Center? Please explain why or why not.

## **Perception of Vet Centers**

12. From your perspective, what is unique about Vet Centers?
  - a. How do Vet Centers compare to VA or similar organizations?
  - b. What will help keep Vet Centers relevant going into the future?
13. What are your perceptions about the overarching Vet Center brand? Does it tie into the existing VA brand? Please explain why or why not?
14. What kind of information or materials would help you feel prepared to recommend Vet Centers to potential clients or partners?
15. In your packet, there is a list of words that looks like this [**moderator holds up the list of words from her own packet**]. Which of these words, if any, describe Vet Centers? Please circle up to four choices and then we'll take a few minutes to discuss the words chosen by the group.
  - a. How do you feel about all the words that were chosen?

### **Word List:**

Community.

Advocacy.

Trustworthy (Credible).

Empowerment (Empowering).

Dedication (Caring, Supportive).

Safe (Confidential).

Relaxed (Informal, Casual).

Grassroots.

Holistic.

Professional.

Welcoming.

Comprehensive.

Other. If there is a different word that comes to mind, feel free to provide it.

16. How would describe your emotional connection to the current Vet Center culture?
  - a. **Usually skipped:** What about its logo, slogan, messaging, and culture? Please explain.
  - b. **Usually skipped:** How would your perception change if any of those elements were altered? Please explain.

## **Wrap-Up**

17. Of all the things we discussed today, what do you think is most important?
18. Is there anything else you'd like to add about Vet Centers' current communications and marketing materials or the Vet Center identity in the community as a whole? Appendix D: Samples used during focus group sessions



*Aptive used three brochures, one flyer, one fact sheet, and one page of logos to guide both client and staff member focus group discussions at all five Vet Center locations.*



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## Appendix D: Samples Used During Focus Group Sessions

### Brochure One

Locations	Phone Numbers
<b>Cheyenne Vet Center</b> 3219 E. Pershing Blvd Cheyenne, WY 82001 Office: 307-778-7370	Cheyenne VAMC.....307-778-7550 Sheridan VAMC.....307-672-3473 VA MISSION Act.....307-778-7550 opt #6 WY Veterans Commission.....307-777-8152 WY Veterans Benefits.....1-800-833-5987 VA Benefits.....1-800-827-1000 Caregiver Support.....1-855-260-3274 Homeless Veterans.....1-877-424-3838 VA Healthcare.....1-877-222-8387 VA Education.....1-888-442-4551 VA Home Loans.....1-877-827-3702 VA Life Insurance.....1-800-669-8477 Women Veterans.....1-855-829-6636 Debt Management Center... 1-800-827-0648
<b>Casper Vet Center</b> 1030 N. Poplar Suite B Casper, WY 82609 Office: 307-261-5355	<b>Websites</b>  Vet Center..... <a href="http://www.vetcenter.va.gov">www.vetcenter.va.gov</a> VA MISSION Act..... <a href="http://www.missionact.va.gov">www.missionact.va.gov</a> VA Home Page..... <a href="http://www.va.gov">www.va.gov</a> VA Benefits..... <a href="http://www.vba.va.gov">www.vba.va.gov</a> eBenefits..... <a href="http://www.ebenefits.va.gov">www.ebenefits.va.gov</a> Education Benefits..... <a href="http://www.gibill.va.gov">www.gibill.va.gov</a> Burial/Memorial Benefits... <a href="http://www.cem.va.gov">www.cem.va.gov</a> Military Records..... <a href="http://www.archives.gov">www.archives.gov</a> VA Healthcare ... <a href="http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits">www.va.gov/healthbenefits</a> My HealtheVet..... <a href="http://www.myhealth.va.gov">www.myhealth.va.gov</a> VA Home Loan..... <a href="http://www.homeloans.va.gov">www.homeloans.va.gov</a> VA Life Insurance..... <a href="http://www.insurance.va.gov">www.insurance.va.gov</a> Homeless Veteran..... <a href="http://www.va.gov/homeless">www.va.gov/homeless</a>



### Counseling & Outreach Services For Veterans & U.S. Military



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Who We Are	Eligibility	Confidentiality & Privacy
<p>Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers operated by the Office of Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS), an independent mental health division of the Department of Veterans Affairs.</p> <p>Vet Centers provide Readjustment counseling, a non-medical/non-diagnosis counseling service for eligible Veterans and Active Duty Service Members, including members of the National Guard &amp; Reserve components, in the effort to make a successful transition from military to civilian life.</p>	<p>Any veteran, Active Duty Service Member, including members of the National Guard &amp; Reserve components, who served in any of the following combat operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WWII</li> <li>• Vietnam War</li> <li>• Lebanon</li> <li>• Korean War</li> <li>• Grenada</li> <li>• Panama</li> <li>• Desert Storm/Shield</li> <li>• Somalia</li> <li>• Bosnia</li> <li>• Kosovo</li> <li>• Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)</li> <li>• OEF/OIF/OND</li> <li>• OIR/OFR</li> </ul>	<p>Vet Center staff respects the privacy of all clients, and we hold in the strictest confidence all information disclosed in the counseling process.</p> <p>No information will be communicated to any person or agency, without written consent from the veteran, except on disclosures required by Federal &amp; State law.</p>
<h4>Vet Center Services</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Individual counseling</li> <li>✓ Group counseling</li> <li>✓ Family counseling for military related issues</li> <li>✓ Bereavement counseling</li> <li>✓ Military Sexual Trauma (MST) counseling &amp; referral</li> <li>✓ Outreach &amp; Community Education</li> <li>✓ Substance abuse assessment &amp; referral</li> <li>✓ Employment assessment &amp; referral</li> <li>✓ VBA benefits explanation &amp; referral</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medical/Mortuary Care:</b> Provided direct emergent medical care and/or mortuary services to the casualties of war, while serving on active duty.</p> <p><b>UAV Crew:</b> Served as a member of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility.</p> <p><b>Military Sexual Trauma:</b> Offered to all service members &amp; veterans who suffered sexual assault and/or sexual harassment while serving in the military.</p> <p><b>Family Members:</b> Counseling services are provided to family members to assist with deployment &amp; reintegration issues.</p>	<h4>Emergency/After Hours</h4> <p><b>Combat Call Center</b>  <b>1-877-WAR-VETS</b>          or  <b>Veterans Crisis Line</b>  <b>1-800-273-TALK PRESS 1</b></p> <p><b>Vet Center services are provided at <u>NO COST!!!</u></b></p> <p><b>VA Enrollment is <u>NOT</u> required to receive Vet Center services</b></p> <p>For more information please visit  <a href="http://www.vetcenter.va.gov">www.vetcenter.va.gov</a></p> 



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## Brochure Two



**WE ARE THE VET CENTER.** We're here for you when you need us most.

Life isn't always easy after a deployment. That's where Vet Centers can help. Vet Centers across the country provide a broad range of free counseling, outreach, and referral services to combat Veterans and their families.

Vet Centers guide Veterans and their families through many of the major adjustments in lifestyle that often occur after a Veteran returns from combat. Vet Centers understand and appreciate the Veteran's war experience while assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their community.

**FIND A VET CENTER NEAR YOU.**  
NORTH TEXAS LOCATIONS

**DALLAS**  
8610 Greenville Ave., Suite 125  
Dallas, TX 75243  
(214) 361-5896

**MESQUITE**  
502 W. Kearny St., Suite 300  
Mesquite, TX 75149  
(972) 288-8030

**FORT WORTH**  
6620 Hawks Creek Ave.  
Westworth Village, TX 76114  
(817) 921-9095

**ARLINGTON**  
3337 W. Pioneer Pkwy.  
Pantego, TX 76013  
(817) 274-0981



Vet Center Call Center, 24/7  
1-877-WAR-VETS  
(927-8387)

Veterans Crisis Line, 24/7  
1-800-273-8255

Need a Vet Center outside North Texas? We have over 300 locations nationwide, visit [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)



Helping Veterans readjust to civilian life.  
No cost counseling services for Veterans  
and their families.



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## VET CENTER SERVICES

### READJUSTMENT COUNSELING

A wide range of psycho-social services offered to eligible war-zone Veterans and their families in the effort to make a successful transition from military to civilian life.



### BEREAVEMENT COUNSELING

Counseling for all immediate family members (including spouses, children, parents and siblings) of Servicemembers who die while on active service. This includes federally-activated members of the National Guard and reserve component. Often, counseling can be made available in the family's home or where the family feels most comfortable.



### MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA COUNSELING

Counseling is available at all Vet Centers across the country for any Veteran who experienced sexual harassment or violence while serving in the military regardless of gender or era of service.

### SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT

The Vet Center is a free, community-based counseling center; therefore you do not need enrollment, appointment or referral from a VA hospital or clinic. Vet Center services and locations are part of the Department of Veterans Affairs, yet our services are accessible separately from VA Medical Centers.

Vet Centers maintain a safe, confidential atmosphere for talk therapy with individual, group and family counseling offered. All Vet Centers maintain non-traditional appointment schedules, after normal business hours, to accommodate the schedules of Veterans, Service members, and their family members.

Veterans are eligible if they served on active duty in a combat theater or area of hostility during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, or the campaigns in Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Global War on Terror. For a complete list with dates visit our website.

Visit us at any of our 300 locations. Simply contact your nearest Vet Center through the information provided in this pamphlet, or online at our website, [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov).

Give us a call, or walk on in.  
You served proudly — now, let us serve you.



Service members returning home from combat may experience the following, the Vet Center can help.



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## Brochure Three

### Confidentiality And Privacy

Vet Center Staff respect the privacy of all veterans. We hold in the strictest confidence all information disclosed in the counseling process. No information will be released to any person or agency without written consent from the client, except in circumstances averting a crisis. Your confidentiality is protected under the Privacy Act of 1974.

### VET CENTER SERVICES ARE PROVIDED AT NO COST TO THE VETERAN OR FAMILY



*We are the people in VA who welcome home war veterans with honor by providing quality readjustment counseling in a caring manner. Vet Centers understand and appreciate veterans' war experiences while assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their community.*

### Vet Centers Value:

- Veteran focused services
- Community based care
- Delivery of cost effective services
- Health, wellness, and preventive services
- Honoring & respecting the service of our nation's veterans & their families

Point of Contact:  
Wayne Stinchcomb  
Vet Center Outreach Specialist  
Work: 301-589-1073  
Email: [wayne.stinchcomb@va.gov](mailto:wayne.stinchcomb@va.gov)

## REGIONAL VET CENTERS

[www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)  
**1-877-WAR-VETS**



*"Keeping the Promise"*



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## Background of Readjustment Counseling Service

In 1979, the Veterans Administration began its Vet Center program, designed specifically to treat veterans and their families for trauma-related difficulties. Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a broad range of services to assist in a readjustment to civilian life.

### Eligibility

#### OIF/OEF/OND

#### Global War on Terrorism

#### Operation Joint Endeavor, Joint Guard,

#### Joint Forge (Former Yugoslavia: Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia)

#### Somalia: 09/17/1992 to TBA

#### Persian Gulf: 08/02/1990 to TBA

#### Panama: 12/20/1989 to TBA

#### Grenada: 10/23/1983 to 11/21/1983

#### Lebanon: 08/25/1982 to 02/26/1984

#### Vietnam War: 02/28/1961 to 05/07/1975

#### Korean War: 06/27/1950 to 07/27/1954

#### World War II: 12/07/1941 to 12/31/1946

#### American Merchant Marine: In ocean going service, 12/07/1941 to 12/31/1946

#### Sexual Trauma/ Harassment: Veteran of any era who has experienced this trauma while on active duty.

The family members of all veterans listed above are eligible for Vet Center services as well.

## REGIONAL VET CENTERS

Aberdeen Outstation 223 West Bel Air Ave Aberdeen, MD 21001 (410) 272-6771	Elkton 103 Chesapeake Blvd. Suite A Elkton, MD 21921 (410) 392-4485
Annapolis 100 Annapolis St. Annapolis, MD 21401 (410) 605-7826	Prince Georges County 7905 Malcolm Rd. Suite 101 Clinton, MD 20735 (301) 856-7173
Baltimore Commerce Centre East 1777 Reisterstown Rd. Suite 199 Baltimore, MD 21208 (410) 764-9400	Silver Spring 2900 Linden Lane Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301) 589-1073
Dundalk 1553 Merritt Blvd Dundalk, MD 21222 (410) 282-6144	Salisbury Outstation 926 Snow Hill Rd Bldg #3 Salisbury, MD 21804 (443) 257-1487
Alexandria 6940 South Kings Highway Suite 204 Alexandria, VA 22310 (703) 360-8633	Washington DC 1296 Upshur NW Washington DC 20017 (202) 726-5212



## READJUSTMENT COUNSELING SERVICES

- Individual and group counseling for Veterans and their families
- Family counseling for military related issues
- Bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death
- Military sexual trauma counseling and referral
- Outreach and education including PDHRA, community events, etc.
- Substance abuse assessment and referral
- Employment assessment & referral
- VBA benefits explanation and referral
- Screening & referral for medical issues including TBI, depression, etc



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## Fact Sheet



Veterans Health Administration  
Readjustment Counseling Service Fact Sheet  
[www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)  
[veteranoutreach@va.gov](mailto:veteranoutreach@va.gov)



### Vet Centers

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers, within the Veterans Health Administration's Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS), that provide a wide range of social and psychological services including professional readjustment counseling to Veterans and active duty Service members, to include members of the National Guard and Reserve components, who:

- Have served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility;
- Experienced a military sexual trauma;
- Provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services, while serving on active military duty, to the casualties of war, or;
- Served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility.
- Vietnam Era veterans who have accessed care at a Vet Center prior to January 1, 2004

Vet Center services are also provided to family members of Veterans and Service members for military related issues when it is found aid in the readjustment of those that have served or help cope with the deployment of a loved one. This includes marriage and family counseling and bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death.

A core value of the Vet Center program is to promote access to care by helping Veterans, Service members, and their families overcome barriers that impede them from using those services. Actions include: Vet Centers maintain regularly scheduled non-traditional hours, to include evening and weekends, to ensure Veterans and Service members are able to access these services. Vet Centers create Veteran to Veteran connections as over 72% of Vet Center staff are Veterans and a majority of those individuals have served in combat zones.

There are 300 Vet Centers located in every state, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

#### Additional Information

- All services are available without time limitation and at no cost
- To use Vet Center services Veterans or Service members:
- Do not need to be enrolled with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Medical Centers;
- Do not need a disability rating or service connection for injuries from either the VA or the Department of Defense, and;
- Can access Vet Center services regardless of discharge character.
- No information will be released to any person or agency without the written consent from the Veteran or Service member, except in circumstances for averting a crisis or where legally required.



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[www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov) | 1-877-WAR-VETS



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### Outreach

To ensure that Veteran, Service members, and their families are provided access to care, RCS has a robust outreach program that focuses on the creation of face to face connections with those that have served. Vet Center staff regularly participate in a myriad of Federal, State, and local sponsored Veteran related events in the communities where Veterans and Service members live.

RCS maintains a fleet of 80 Mobile Vet Centers that are designed to extend the reach of Vet Center services through focused outreach, direct service provision, and referral to communities that do not meet the requirements for a "brick and mortar" Vet Center, but where there are Veterans, Service members, and their families in need of services. Many of these communities are distant from existing services and are considered rural or highly rural.



### Vet Center Call Center

The Vet Center Call Center **1-877-WAR-VETS** is an around the clock confidential call center where those that served and their families can call to talk about their military experience or any other issues they are facing in their readjustment and get connected to a Vet Center. The staff is comprised of combat Veterans from several eras as well as family member of combat Veterans. The call center has warm handoff capabilities with all Vet Centers, the National Crisis Hotline, and the National Caregiver Hotline.

@VAVetCenters



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[www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov) | **1-877-WAR-VETS**



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## Flyer One



**Vet Center**  
“KEEPING THE PROMISE”

Our mission is to provide a continuum of quality care and service to all **combat Veterans and Family members**, to Veterans with **Military Sexual Trauma**, and to **Survivors of deceased active duty military members**.

**Our services include:**

- Individual Readjustment counseling
- Group meetings & counseling
- Military Sexual Trauma counseling
- Bereavement counseling
- Marital & Family counseling
- Employment counseling & guidance
- Benefits referral source
- Substance abuse information & referral
- Community resource education
- Liaison with community agencies

All our services are **Confidential** and are at **No Cost**.

1-877 - WAR -VETS  
Combat Call Center.....1-877-927-8387  
Veteran Crisis Line.....1-800-273-8255  
Homeless Veterans.....1-877-424-3838  
[www.VetCenter.va.gov](http://www.VetCenter.va.gov)

“The Life You Save May Be Your

**Milwaukee Vet Center**  
7910 N 76th Street  
Milwaukee , WI 53223  
414.434.1311

**Hours of Operation**  
Mon-Thrus 8a-7p, Fri 8a- 4:30p  
Saturdays by Appointment



Korean Service Medal	Vietnam Service Medal	Southwest Asia Service Medal
Kosovo Campaign Medal	Afghanistan Campaign Medal	Iraq Campaign Medal
Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal		



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## Flyer Two



### Veteran Counseling & Outreach Services



#### Services

Vet Centers provide FREE Readjustment counseling for eligible Veterans and Active Duty Service Members, including members of the National Guard & Reserve components (AGR, M-Day, ADOS, DSG, MPA, & Technicians), in the effort to make a successful transition from military to civilian life.

#### Services include:

- Individual and group counseling
- Military Sexual Trauma counseling and referral
- Screening, treatment, and referral for PTSD, Depression, Substance abuse, Sleep disorders, TBI, and other conditions
- Outreach and community education
- VA benefits explanation and referral

#### Eligibility

Any Veteran and active duty Service Member, including members of the National Guard & Reserve components (AGR, M-Day, ADOS, DSG, MPA, & Technicians), who:

- Have served on active duty in any combat theater or area of hostility
- Experienced a Military Sexual Trauma while in the military
- Provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services while serving on active duty to the casualties of war
- Served as a member of an Unmanned Ariel Vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility

#### Bereavement Counseling

Vet Centers provide bereavement counseling to assistance and support families who experience an active duty death. Bereavement counseling includes a broad range of transition services, including outreach, counseling, and referral services to family members.

#### Family Counseling

Vet Center services are also provided to family members or loved ones of Veterans and service members for military-related issues when it is found to aid in the readjustment of those that served, or to help cope with the deployment of the service member. This includes marriage and family counseling.



#### Cheyenne Vet Center

3219 E. Pershing Blvd

Cheyenne, WY 82001

Office: 307-778-7370

#### Vet Center Call Center

1-877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)

#### Bereavement Counseling

202-451-6530



1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1



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## Logo Sheet

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②

Vet  
Center

③



## Appendix E: Partnership Interview Question Bank



*Community partners from each district were asked the following questions designed to better understand their contributions to Vet Center awareness and perception goals.*

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your organization, what you do, and what services you provide?
2. Can you tell me more about the type of people that you serve?
3. How do you become aware of the [insert Vet Center] or Vet Centers in general?
4. In your own words, please describe what Vet Centers do.
5. What do you usually say about Vet Centers to someone who may be a potential Vet Center client?
6. How are you currently working with your local Vet Center?
7. Do you commonly recommend Vet Center services to your clients?
  - a. If so, what encourages you to recommend Vet Centers to clients as opposed to other organizations?
  - b. If not, what stops you from recommending Vet Centers to clients? What other organizations do you recommend instead?
8. Do you ever receive any pushback from your clients on going to or contacting a Vet Center? If so, what do you usually hear?
9. What do you usually hear from stakeholders when you suggest Vet Centers as a resource? For example, do you hear misconceptions, concerns, praise, etc.?
10. Is there any reason why you wouldn't recommend a Vet Center to a Veteran, active duty service member, or family member?
11. Are there any marketing materials or resources—such as fact sheets, brochures, or flyers—that we could provide that would help your organization better inform clients on the services that Vet Centers provide?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about Vet Centers as a whole?



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## **Analysis of Current Branding Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities**

*Readjustment Counseling Services (RCS)  
Vet Center Branding and Awareness Campaign*

[www.aptiveresources.com](http://www.aptiveresources.com)