Washington Vet Corps Three-Year Evaluation Plan (November 2014)

Overview

This document provides a framework for conducting a series of inter-related evaluation activities for the Washington Vet Corps program over the course of three years. (The start date is assumed to be around August or September 2015.) The main elements of the plan reflect previously identified program evaluation priorities. The plan assumes that the agency will contract with an external, independent evaluator to help implement the various tasks outlined. Although the evaluator will play a lead role in a majority of evaluation activities, he/she will work closely with program management and evaluation/data review group to ensure that the evaluation remains user-centered and that program stakeholders have not only a say, but also a stake in the evaluation process and its products. The plan further assumes that the data/evaluation review group will have been selected prior to commencing evaluation tasks and will work directly with the evaluator, providing periodic feedback and guidance. A final assumption is that a data specialist will have been added to the program's central office staff and that the specialist will perform certain data collection and compiling tasks in support of the evaluation effort.

The three-year plan encompasses five major interrelated activities:

- 1. **Foundation Building (Year 1):** This year focuses on critical MIS review and testing, plus revision of internal data collection tools to provide important feedback from stakeholders to the program and inform later studies. The overarching goal for MIS development is to ensure quality, consistently collected and comprehensive individual level data on Vet Corps clients and services received.
- 2. **Initial Study Planning (Year 1):** Initial planning for two separate, complementary studies will also occur in Year 1. The first is a study of *client educational outcomes* and will focus on veterans served by the program at community and technical college sites in fall 2015. MIS development in Year 1 is fundamental to this planning and later implementation of the Outcome Study. The second is a Systems Impact study that will examine how Vet Corps activities have influenced support and resources at participating college sites. This initial planning will be exploratory and allow for a more user-centered approach in which program staff and stakeholders help shape each stage of the evaluation. Such input helps to keep the evaluation realistic and on track. Year 1 will provide the basic information needed to structure more detailed implementation planning to follow. [*Note:* The current plan assumes that the Systems Impact study will focus more on retrospective, rather than prospective approaches. This approach may be modified as a result of Year 1 collaborative planning with the review group slated for month 1 and 2.]
- 3. **Stakeholder Feedback (Year 2):** The plan anticipates that revised internal data collection tools (most likely short surveys of members, clients and/or site staff) will provide feedback that will complement and inform both the outcome and systems impact studies.
- 4. Outcome Study Implementation/Reporting (Year 2,3): Building from Year 1 planning activities, the evaluator will implement the evaluation in Year 2. The Outcome Study involves extraction and merging of data from two separate administrative databases (the program's and the colleges') and thus involves detailed planning and coordination across agencies in Year 2 in order to ensure a quality data set for analysis. It is assumed that the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) will be the main partner in the study, providing the critical educational outcomes for veterans who received Vet Corps services. The final data extraction, cleaning and merging activities will occur late in year two to allow for five full quarter of data collected on a fall 2015 cohort of veteran students. Basic data analysis and reporting will occur at the end of Year 2. Results will then be used to inform aspects of data collection for the Systems Change Study. Some additional analyses and reporting will spill over into the beginning of year 3.

5. **Systems Change Study Implementation/Reporting (Year 3):** This study will examine the program impacts on participating sites' a) awareness/understanding of veterans' issues; b) resources dedicated to serving veterans; c) integration of veterans into campus life; and d) coordination of services for veterans/family members.

The chart below provides a synopsis of year-by-year evaluation activities and costs:

| Year | Evaluation Activities | Evaluation Funds |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | MIS development, testing, documentation | \$25,000 |
| | Revision of internal data collection tools | |
| | Detailed implementation planning for Outcome Study | |
| | Initial planning for Systems Impact Study in coordination w/re group and others. | eview |
| 2 | Ongoing periodic review of MIS data for QA | \$30,000 |
| | Client member and/or site staff feedback collected, analyzed | |
| | Outcome study implemented; basic analyses completed [Fall client cohort would allow collection of 5 quarters of SBCTC descriptions.] | |
| | Detailed implementation planning on Systems Impact Study | |
| 3 | Final analysis and reporting on Outcome Study | \$35,000 |
| | Implementation, analysis and reporting on Systems Impact S | itudy |
| | Final presentations of findings | |

Year 1: Evaluation Foundation Building and Study Planning. The first year must be devoted to building a strong program foundation for carrying out useful evaluation. A contracted evaluation expert will lead major aspects of the evaluation planning effort. At this stage, however, the evaluator will also play a consultative and educative role, helping the organization to build greater internal capacity for self-reflection and program improvement through ongoing assessment. Major evaluation planning goals for this first year include the following:

- 1. MIS Enhancement: Identify, test and implement an MIS capable of providing quality, individual-level client data needed for evaluation.
- **2. Outcome Study:** Define the scope and initial data collection plan for descriptive client outcome study. Conduct exploratory conversations with representative of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to understand options and limitations.
- 3. System Impact Study: Define the scope and potential measures and methods for a system impact study.
- 4. Stakeholder Feedback: Develop new or enhance existing tools.

Year 1 tasks below are listed in rough chronological order. However, some of the later tasks related to the system impact study and internal evaluation tool development are relatively independent of the earlier database-related tasks. Depending on the program's needs, interests and staff resources these tasks may be folded in sooner. **Note:** Deliverables that the evaluator is mostly or wholly responsible for are in red font.

Staffing assumptions for Year 1: Evaluator contract will be \$25,000, which will cover all hours (around 270) and transportation costs. The Vet Corps data specialist will contribute an average of 4 hours/week to MIS-related tasks specified below in coordination with the evaluator. A data/evaluation review group will contribute an average of one day a month to the evaluation project, providing critical feedback and guidance.

YEAR 1

| Tasks and Deliverables | Evaluator Role | Est. hrs. | Month | Comments |
|--|--|-----------|-------|--|
| Review/revise the program's theory of change Discuss current mission, goals, objectives and potential measures with coordinators. | Consult, as needed. Review and comment on draft document. | 8 | 1 | Use existing program logic model as base of departure. |
| Articulate how services, staff qualifications, training, recruitment & hiring relate to each other and to objectives | | | | |
| Document ToC in writing and disseminate to stakeholders. | | | | |
| Deliverable: Revised and completed Program Model | | | | |
| 2. Specify any revisions needed to existing MIS system to support Outcome Study and other information needs | Evaluator is lead, with review by data group. Will work with | 30 | 1 | Assumes initial round of review and revision to MIS has taken place prior to start of Year 1. |
| Identify specific fields, input screen content | provider, as needed. | | | Recommended types of input screens contained in 2014 data review. |
| Identify ideal question/answer format | | | | |
| Define validation and skip logic | | | | |
| Define basic reporting options | | | | |
| Define any other technical info required by MIS provider | | | | |
| Deliverable: Technical specifications document for MIS provider and identification of immediately available output. (i.e., provider's canned reports) | | | | |
| 3. Develop (or revise existing) data dictionary and/or other written guidance to support data entry. Determine whether guidance is imbedded (mouse-overs) in screens or separate. | Evaluator is lead, with review/advice by data group. Will work with provider, as | 28 | 1 | This step may be reduced/eliminated if substantial documentation has already been accomplished prior to start of Year 1. Documentation is an essential support to |
| Test system on data group to identify potential areas in which guidance is needed. | needed. Data specialist may assist. | | | quality data entry. At a minimum guidance should explain purpose of the question, define any terms open to interpretation, provide |
| Write draft guidance document for review | | | | explanation of answer choices, anticipate |
| Revise guidance | | | | FAQs, and provide model examples where likely to be helpful. On-line guidance will take a shorter format and may still need to be |

| Deliverable: Guidance document | | | | supplemented by separate |
|--|---|----|--------------------|---|
| 4. Train all staff in revised system: | Consultation as needed | 12 | 1-2 | Coordinators may be the best vehicle for |
| Identify training options (remote training of entire group, train-the-trainer, other) | | | | providing some updated training to members and to obtain feedback, log questions and convey questions/concerns to central office. |
| Implement training | | | | , , |
| Receive feedback | | | | |
| Deliverable: evaluation training form and implementation instructions. | | | | |
| 5. Review Options for Systems Impact Study | Consultation with data group, as needed | 6 | 1-2 | Sample key questions: |
| Prioritize key questions and methods | as needed | | | What specific system impacts has the |
| Investigate feasibility of different approaches: Coordinate w/ SBCTC and/or individual sites to gain insight into barriers and supports to research. | | | | program had on participating campus sites? • Where have impacts on campus been |
| Confirm cost parameters for year 2/3 | | | | greatest/least? |
| Select most promising questions and methods in conjunction with data group. | | | | What factors have influenced the degree of system change on participating sites? |
| Deliverables: revised scope and research questions | | | | |
| 6. Conduct initial survey of site supervisors or other stakeholders. (Depends on systems study options selected) | Evaluator is lead with assistance from data specialist. | 0 | 2 | This task will only be undertaken if the program decides to focus on change in real time of stakeholder awareness, communication, coordination or other measures of collaboration. Would affect overall evaluator hours for Year 1; adjustments would have to be made to the plan as currently conceived in order to keep within total budget proposed. |
| 7. Testing revised system: Track usage, problems and trouble-shoot. | Evaluator to train staff to test new system, as needed. | 8 | 2 | Data entry problems and questions will inevitably arise with a revised system. It's |
| Identify reporting to be used in tracking usage and ensure availability. | | | | difficult to anticipate all issues in advance. Therefore, important to have initial testing /review period which allows user questions and |
| Analyze tracking data frequently (weekly, bi-weekly) in the beginning and report possible user confusion, system errors or other difficulties. | | | | issues to surface. In addition to tracking data entered into the MIS, the data specialist or other staff person needs to track issues that |
| Correct problems, broadcast clarifications, additional FAQs, as necessary. | | | | arise, keeping a FAQ log that is shared with all users. The reviewing of /communicating to staff about MIS issues should be more |
| Deliverable: memos on issues, corrections, as necessary | | | | intensive the first month. Data entry should be looked at periodically to ensure ongoing quality to support evaluation and other program information needs. (See next step) |
| 8. Enter quality MIS data | Davidon and domenaticate | 10 | Ongoing from mo. 2 | Decentralized data collection presents |
| Develop simple QA protocol to boost/maintain data entry and data quality over time. | Develop and demonstrate simple protocol, then consultation as needed. | 10 | Periodic | challenges to data quality. Once system has been tested and finalized, ongoing collection of data must be consistent enough and of |

| • | Implement QA protocol. | | | QA review | sufficient quality to support evaluation, |
|------|---|--|----|--------------------------------|---|
| | Identify and correct data reporting issues (such as a site's failure to enter data consistently). | | | | planning, ongoing program assessment. Simple quality assurance protocols are likely needed to ensure the usefulness of the data. |
| • | Deliverable: written QA protocols, as needed | | | | |
| 9. D | evelop and test the use of key reports. | | | 3 or later | This is a capacity-building step to support |
| | Identify key reports, using original information needs document as reference and starting point. | Consultation as needed | 20 | | program information needs into the future. These reports should meet a broad set of users needs. Certain monthly, quarterly or |
| • | Coordinate with provider, as necessary, to develop reports | | | | annual reports could be shared with both supervisors and staff to solicit feedback, |
| | Distribute and discuss utility of reports w/data group or others. | | | | encourage ownership of information, and improve compliance with data entry. |
| Deli | verable: memos on test results, as necessary | | | | |
| base | | Evaluator works with data group, as needed, in order to ensure feasible scope. | 12 | Initial: month 4 Revisit | Type of questions considered: What are short-term educational retention and course-taking outcomes for vets who receive mentoring and/or referral |
| | Review and discuss possible questions with data group | | | month 8 | services? |
| | Confirm feasibility of type and scope of study | | | | Does the number of contacts a vet |
| • | Finalize choice of research questions and scope | | | | receives in a specified time period correlate with short-term outcomes? |
| Deli | verable: revised scope and research questions | | | | What are longer-term outcomes for these vets (degree, certification, credits earned, gpa) |
| | | | | | How do short-term educational outcomes for vets at more well-established Vet Corps programs compare with those of newer or less-well established programs? |
| | | | | | How do vet outcomes at participating sites compare with those at non-participating sites? |
| | Develop initial data collection plan for outcome study, ed on core questions to be answered | Evaluator is lead and | 35 | 5-9 | This is necessary front-end planning only—implementation comes in second year, after |
| | Specify study time frame, sample frame (client cohort to be followed), and data fields to be extracted from MIS. | coordinates with SBCTC | | | sufficient data is available. |
| | Coordinate with SBCTC to identify types of data fields needed from their system, ID requirements and extraction process. | | | | |
| | Identify data sharing issues, such as confidentiality agreements needed, ID protection requirements, data ownership and other issues. | | | | |
| • | Identify potential data limitations. | | | | |
| | Develop time frame and requirements for data extraction and merging, data sharing agreements, and data | | | | |

| protection. | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----|-----|---|
| Deliverable: Initial implementation framework identifying above elements, as well as potential barriers, limitations and remaining unknowns to take into consideration. Also specify next steps. | | | | |
| 12. Revise training eval form and client feedback process. | | 20 | 6-7 | If survey option is retained, Develop |
| Revise the training evaluation form format, per the data review recommendations. | | | | feasible strategies for increasing survey return, soliciting member thoughts. |
| Assess options for systematic collection of client feedback and choose option. | | | | |
| Revise both content and implementation of survey (if survey is retained). | | | | |
| Develop alternative data collection tool (if survey option not retained) | | | | |
| Deliverable: Revised tools | | | | |
| 13. Create site staff survey. | | 24 | 12 | |
| Identify priority questions | | | | |
| Identify implementation method | | | | |
| Develop instrument and implementation instructions Deliverable: Survey tool, instructions | | | | |
| Additional communication/coordination hours for evaluator (5 hours/month x 12 months) | | 60 | | |
| | TOTAL evaluator hours | 273 | | |

Year 2: Implementation of Stakeholder Feedback and Outcome Study. A contracted evaluation expert will lead most aspects of the evaluation implementation effort, although program staff will play a significant implementation role with regard to the stakeholder data collection (feedback) tools developed in Year 1. A research assistant (graduate student level) will assist in performing selected data collection, preparation and preliminary analysis tasks under the supervision of the evaluator. This staffing allocation extends evaluation resources in Year 2. Major evaluation goals for Year 2 include the following:

- 1. Stakeholder Feedback: Collect and analyze stakeholder feedback, utilizing the new and/or revised tools developed in Year 1. (Feedback from site supervisors, members and/or clients)
- 2. Outcome Study: Continue MIS data collection and QA review of data collection. Develop detailed data collection plan in coordination with SBCTC and specify all variables to be incorporated into analysis. Extract and merge data sets, conduct preliminary analyses.
- **3. System Impact Study:** Create framework evaluation plan, including potential data collection sources, methods, outcome measures. Also specify analysis and reporting time frames.

Staffing assumptions for Year 2: Evaluator contract will be \$30,000, which will cover all hours (around 252) and transportation costs, as well as payment to a research assistant for periodic support. The Vet Corps data specialist will contribute an average of 4 hours/week to evaluation-related tasks specified below in coordination with the evaluator. A data/evaluation review group will contribute an average of one-half day a month to the evaluation project, providing critical feedback and guidance.

Year 2

| Tasks and Deliverables | Evaluator Role | Est. hrs. | Month | Comments |
|--|--|-----------|-------|--|
| 1. Finalize stakeholder feedback strategy and tools Determine staff roles in implementing | Evaluator and staff plan and implement field test jointly. | 20 | 1 | An important goal, along with developing useful feedback for the program, is to build program's |
| Field test tools | | | | internal capacity to use these tools in the future. |
| Revise tools as necessary | | | | |
| Revise implementation plan, as necessary | | | | |
| Deliverable: Revised data collection tools | | | | |
| 2. Implement stakeholder data collection | Evaluator guides data | 35 | 2-4 | This task involves extra hours devoted to staff |
| Create detailed protocols for staff that are implementing to ensure systematic data collection. | collection and analysis steps and provides documentation for future use by staff. | | | capacity-building through documenting every process and including staff in each step. The data specialist will learn how to implement, |
| Supervise data collection activities, as necessary. | | | | compile and analyze feedback |
| Catalog data collection barriers/ issues | Research assistant with data specialist's assistance, | | | |
| Develop detailed protocols for analyzing feedback | compiles, analyzes and | | | |
| Analyze and report results | reports. | | | |
| Deliverables: Documentation of all protocols and descriptive feedback results | | | | |
| 3. Finalize implementation and analysis plan for Outcome Study | Evaluator is lead and coordinates with SBCTC. | 40 | 5-7 | The process of identifying the proper data elements to pull from a comprehensive and |
| Develop final plan for data extraction and merging, including data sharing agreements, and data protection, in conjunction with SBCTC staff. | Research assistant helps with tasks, as appropriate. | | | complex system like that of the SBCTC can be time-consuming because the best data element sometimes must be chosen from multiple |
| Define, confirm all data elements to be used in study. | | | | possible fields measuring similar, but not identical concepts. |
| Develop formal data request to SBCTC that specifies all data elements needed. | | | | Assumption is that the study time frame will use a Fall 2015 cohort of entering veterans, |
| Sign MOU, confidentiality agreements, as necessary. | | | | potentially allowing for five quarters of follow-u |
| Specify analyses to be conducted. | | | | (Winter 2015, Spring 2016, Summer 2016, Fall 2016, Winter 2016). However, final time frame and cohort identification will be informed by |
| Deliverables: Final implementation plan, documentation of data sharing agreement, formal data request to SBCTC | | | | coordinated planning with SBCTC. |
| Create outcome study data set. Enter additional, readily available implementation variables in program data set. | Evaluator is lead; research assistant performs routine data preparation tasks under supervision. | 45 | 8-9 | How "readily available" these additional implementation variables are will partly depend on the accessibility of such information and |

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|-----------|--|--|-----|------|---|
| • Clear | n program data set. | | | | staff assistance from either the program or participating sites in providing these data. They |
| • Add | calculated fields, as needed. | | | | could include site characteristics such as: |
| | blish adequate identifiers per SBCTC. action/merging. | | | | length of site participation in program, size of student body, percent of students who are vets, |
| • Provi | ride identifier client data to SBCTC. | | | | or school type. Implementation variables could also include an implementation quality |
| • Obta | nin, review SBCTC data set. | | | | variable(s), based assessments derived from stakeholder feedback. |
| • Follo | ow up with SBCTC, as necessary. | | | | stakenoider reedback. |
| • Merg | ge program data with SBCTC data into single database. | | | | |
| | identifiers, per data-sharing requirements, and replace study IDs (crosswalk key preserved) | | | | |
| | ble: Study data set ready for analysis | | | | |
| 5. Analyz | ze client outcome data | Evaluator is lead; research | 55 | 9-12 | Analysis will be primarily descriptive, looking at |
| by ye | duct initial analyses on entire cohort, by type of school, ears of program participation and by current cipation status. | assistant involved in supportive tasks. | | | outcomes such as retention, on-track to completion, accumulated credits, certificate completion and transfer status, assuming feasibility of these measures. Additional comparative measures from non-participating sites may be examined, as well. |
| | elop additional comparative measures from non-cipating sites within and without SBCTC system. | | | | |
| | tify any areas where feedback data may explain, rm or contradict client outcome results | | | | |
| • Ident | tify possible further analyses. | | | | |
| | ent preliminary results to data group and others, per ram's request | | | | |
| 6. Review | w Systems Study plan | Evaluator is lead: program | 32 | 12 | Methods cannot be fully specified until |
| | tify results from Outcome Study with potential rance to Systems Study. | staff will assist in identification of key informants. | | | exploration of options/limitations is completed, as described under Year 1. However, methods likely will involve a combination of key |
| | tify methods, including sampling strategy and time es for implementation. | | | | informant interviews, site staff surveys and document review. Developing quantifiable |
| • Ident | tify potential key informants and survey recipients. | | | | measures may require extra hours of exploration to determine feasibility of |
| | ble: detailed implementation plan | | | | measurement. |
| Additiona | al coordination/communication hours | | 25 | | |
| | | | 252 | | |

Year 3: Implementation of Systems Study, Analysis & Reporting. A contracted evaluation expert will lead most aspects of the evaluation effort. As in Year 2, a research assistant will assist in performing selected data collection, preparation and preliminary analysis tasks related to the Outcome Study. All these activities will be under the supervision of the evaluator.

- 1. Stakeholder Feedback: Identify results of stakeholder feedback relevant to Systems Study. Use the results to inform specific data collection activities for the Systems Impact study.
- 2. Outcome Study: Conduct final analyses and report all results.
- 3. System Impact Study: Implement data collection, conduct analysis and report results.

Staffing assumptions for Year 3: Evaluator contract will be \$35,000, which will cover all hours (around 322) and transportation costs, as well as payment to a research assistant. The Vet Corps data specialist will contribute an average of 4 hours/week to evaluation-related tasks specified below in coordination with the evaluator. Members of a data/evaluation review group may contribute several additional hours to the evaluation project, mostly in the form of review and comment on draft reports for both studies.

Year 3

| Tasks and Deliverables | Evaluator Role | Est. hrs. | Month | Comments |
|--|--|-----------|-------|---|
| Specify detailed implementation for Systems Impact Study Coordinate with sites, as necessary and finalize all tasks needed in preparation for implementation | Evaluator is lead; research assistant may help with coordination | 25 | 1 | This step recognizes that information derived from Year 2 activities (e.g., from program's stakeholder feedback tools and/or Outcome Study) may influence final decisions regarding Systems study plan. |
| Confirm research questions, data collection methods, sampling, schedule, key informants and others to be involved. | | | | |
| Deliverable: Final implementation plan | | | | |
| Design Data Collection Instruments Survey instruments | Evaluator is lead; research assistant will help finalize | 35 | 2 | Methods and instrument content flow from finalized plan. |
| Interview and/or focus group instruments | instruments | | | |
| Documents to be collected | | | | |
| Any additional site or program data to be collected | | | | |
| Deliverables: data collection instruments and activities specified. | | | | |
| 3. Field test/review instruments | Evaluator is lead; research | 20 | 2 | |
| Test relevant instruments on program and/or site staff. At a minimum have internal staff review and provide feedback. | assistant | | | |
| Revise instruments, as necessary | | | | |
| Deliverables: Final data collection instruments | | | | |
| 4. Conduct data collection for Systems Impact study | Evaluator is lead; research | 60 | 3-6 | Ideally all data collected in 2 months or less, |
| Request, confirm, schedule participation of relevant informants, survey-takers | assistant or data specialist will support requests, scheduling and confirmations | | | but individual respondent schedules may require longer data collection period. |

| Request and collect relevant documents | | | | |
|---|--|-----------|------|---|
| Conduct all stakeholder interviews, focus groups or surveys | | | | |
| Deliverables: Data sets for analysis | | | | |
| 5. Analyze Systems Impact data | Evaluator is lead; research assistant or data specialist will handle any analysis of | 58 | 6 | Will involve a combination of content analysis and quantitative analysis of scaled questions, plus identification of supporting documentation |
| Deliverables: Summary of findings in tables, charts or other | scaled questions under | | | and direct observations. |
| formats. | evaluator's supervision. | | 0 | |
| 6. Report (in writing) on Systems impact, including relevant findings from outcome study. | Evaluator is lead; research assistant will contribute to report production (review and | 58 | 8 | |
| Write draft report. | comment, proofing, | | | |
| Revise report, as necessary. | formatting). The review group will review and comment. | | | |
| Deliverables: Draft and final reports. | comment. | | | |
| 7. Conduct additional outcome analyses; include relevant findings from Systems Impact study. Write draft report. | Evaluator is lead; research assistant involved in supportive tasks. | 50 | 9-10 | Once systems impacts are analyzed, this information may generate some follow-up questions about client outcomes. |
| Revise report, as necessary. | | | | |
| Deliverables: Draft and final reports. | | | | |
| 8. Present all findings to program staff and other stakeholders | | 4 | 12 | Includes some preparation and travel time |
| Additional coordination with program manager | | 12 | | |
| | | 322 hours | | |