

The Right Fit for Veterans: Partnership Due Diligence

When Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employees consider partnering with an outside organization, they should look for similarities between the potential partner's goals and objectives and those of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and VHA. We must ensure that a partnership is the right fit for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Above all, it is our duty to protect Veterans from harm or exploitation. Additionally, VHA's reputation will be tied to that of the potential partner. Therefore, it is critical to evaluate potential partners for risk factors. This due diligence should be completed before agreeing to collaborate with any outside entity.

VHA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE) team serves as the VHA subject matter and process experts on nonmonetary partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and offers worksheets so that VA and VHA staff members can document their findings as they begin the formal vetting process. General guidance that will help VA and VHA employees perform an honest assessment of an outside agency's abilities, assets, and track record is offered below:

For Non-Profit And For-Profit Organizations

Are there allegations that the potential partner is exploiting or misrepresenting Veterans, their families, caregivers, or any others?

An internet search should reveal any bad press. Be sure to validate any negative findings, which may require additional internet searches or calls to public agencies.

What is the organization's reputation? Is it subject to active investigations, pending lawsuits, or other notable actions that may cause concern?

The Better Business Bureau offers ratings of some businesses. Also, beyond a broad internet search, sites such as Glassdoor or Indeed may shed some light on how a business or non-profit treat its employees. The organization's social media channels also should be checked for any statements that raise red flags.

Is there evidence that the organization would make a good partner for VHA?

Evaluations must be balanced. Search the internet for positive stories about the organization and partnerships it may have in place with other organizations or government agencies. A lack of negative press does not mean the partner is an appropriate fit for VHA.

For Non-Profit Organizations Specifically

Is the organization registered with its home state?

Every state has a searchable charity database. Searching this registry will provide useful information about the organization, including any other names it is doing business under, its longevity, and possible affiliations.

Does the organization have approved nonprofit status?

The IRS maintains a database of nonprofits and charities. If the charity has been in business for a few years, IRS documentation should be available. This will help identify whether the charity has increased or decreased donations, changed status, or changed names.

What is the organization's mission, and does it align with VA interests and Veterans' needs?

The organization's website should clearly state its mission. Does that mission match VA and VHA's priorities and mission? Will the organization augment services already available within the system? Will partnering be in the best interest of Veterans, VA, and the public?

Is the organization financially sound (assets, reserves, revenue sources), accountable, and responsible?

How much of the organization's total expenses go to programs and services?

Sites such as Charity Navigator and GuideStar can provide this data. At least 70% of a non-profit's budget should be allocated to programs, services, and activities, as opposed to administrative and fundraising costs. The Better Business Bureau recommends that evaluations rely less on overhead costs and more on other factors of nonprofit performance, such as transparency, governance, leadership, and results. A non-profit's IRS 990 tax return can provide insight on the organization's financial picture, such as expenses versus revenue.

OCE: Your trusted resource for guidance

VHA program offices and VA medical facilities are invited to leverage OCE's expertise when forming a partnership. Conducting a due diligence review is a vital step in the process. To share a partnership opportunity or consult with OCE on a nonmonetary partnership, please contact our office via email:

communityengagement@va.gov

For more information about OCE, please visit our website: va.gov/healthpartnerships or our intranet site: <http://vawww.oce.med.va.gov/>.