Developing Partnerships with External & Internal Stakeholders

Charles Selby
Strategic Advisor & Communications and Engagement Coordinator
Veterans Health Administration, Homeless Programs Office (10NC1)

Julie Irwin, LCSW
Homeless Care Line Manager
VA New York / New Jersey Health Care Network (VISN 2)
The National Center on Homelessness among Veterans promotes the development of policy and practice that targets ending and preventing Veteran homelessness through supporting the implementation of relevant research findings into clinical practice, providing education and training for VA and community partners, disseminating evidence-based and emerging best practices, and developing new empirical knowledge.
Charles “Charlie” Selby currently serves as a Program Analyst in the Community Engagement Office of VHA Homeless Programs. He works to establish public-private partnerships (P3) with organizations that can help deliver services to homeless and at-risk Veterans that VA enhance VA’s efforts to end Veteran Homelessness. VA provides a broad range of services to homeless Veterans, including health care, housing, job training, and education. There are a variety of reasons why Veterans are homeless and VA is committed to providing solutions to put an end to this problem.

Charlie Selby has been a Federal employee since September 28, 2001. He joined the Department of Veterans Affairs in May 2011 as the Deputy Director, National Office of Outreach. In May 2011 he moved to the Homeless program to manage their outreach efforts. For the prior 10 years he worked for the Department of the Army focusing on homeland defense, emergency management, disaster response, Army Reserve combat training, and contract management. As a former Army Captain, he served on active duty in Turkey during the Gulf War, and again later in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom conducting convoy security escort.

Charlie and his family have been active supporters and members for 17 years of the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix, a charity vintage sports car racing event to raise money for the Western Pennsylvania Autism Society. His son plays hockey well for Carnegie Mellon University, while Charlie plays hockey on occasion in a manner best described as “not truly awful.”

He is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in Psychology and the Defense Language Institute with a certificate in Turkish. His awards include the Bronze Star, Combat Action Badge, multiple Army Commendation and Achievement Medals, and the Army Superior Civilian Service Medal.
Ms. Irwin is the Network Homeless Care Line Manager for the Department of Veterans Affairs New York / New Jersey Health Care Network. She is responsible for overseeing a full continuum of VA homeless programs including Health Care for Homeless Veterans contract residential care, Grant Per Diem transitional housing, HUD-VASH permanent housing program, and the Veterans Justice Outreach programs. Ms. Irwin has spent her social work career working with homeless Veterans. After receiving her MSW from the Columbia University School of Social Work, she began as a case manager and Social Security Liaison in the Health Care for Homeless Veterans outreach program at the VA Medical Center in Brooklyn. She went on to coordinator positions for several VA homeless programs, including Health Care for Homeless Veterans, the Homeless Women Veterans Program, and the Collaborative Initiative to Help End Chronic Homelessness in conjunction with other federal partners and Project Renewal.

As Network Homeless Care Line Manager, Ms. Irwin leads the VISN 2 Homeless Executive Council and works with local medical center homeless program leadership and community partners to develop, coordinate and effectively deliver services to homeless Veterans in the downstate New York and New Jersey areas. In addition, Ms. Irwin currently co-chairs the New York City Continuum of Care Veterans Task Force that was established to coordinate local planning and efforts to end Veteran homelessness.
Overview of Webinar

• National perspectives on partnerships
• Partnership development – benefits, risks, rewards
• Principles of leadership in context
• Case examples – national and local
• Lessons learned
National Perspectives on Partnerships

• VA has invested a lot in ending homelessness:
  – VA has always valued its partnerships.
  – VA knows it cannot end Veteran homelessness alone.
  – Secretary McDonald opened the gates to looking for community based partnerships and new ways to meet the needs of homeless Veterans
  – We take the long term view on achieving the goal
  – Partnerships are key to the sustainability of our progress
National Perspectives on Partnerships

• What is a “partnership”?
  – An association of two or more parties that work collaboratively to better meet the needs of Veterans

• Formal or Informal?
  – **Formal** partnerships have some way to bind the parties together, such as a memorandum of agreement (MOA) / understanding (MOU) or other written documentation to solidify the arrangement.
  
  – **Informal** partnerships may be less structured and are not legally binding; the parties work together in good faith with a shared understanding.
National Perspectives on Partnerships

- The most ideal partnerships:
  - Fill needed service gaps for Veterans
  - Have shared goals and mutual benefit with a focus on the Veteran
  - Have shared levels of commitment and collaboration
  - Set clear expectations and focus on outcomes
National Perspectives on Partnerships

• Other considerations for external partnerships:
  – What degree of working relationship will be most effective - a partnership or a legal contract?
  – Should we establish an agreement? If so, what level is needed – formal or informal?
  – Have we done our homework?
  – Does the partnership allow for flexibility and openness?
  – Communication, communication, communication
National Perspectives on Partnerships

• Other considerations for internal partnerships:
  – How can we most efficiently use our resources?
    • Reduce or eliminate duplication of services?
    • Save taxpayer dollars?
  – Does the partnership improve the quality of care Veterans receive?
    • Increase access to care?
    • Improve health care outcomes?
  – Does the partnership increase Veterans’ satisfaction?
    • Increase Veterans’ choices / self-determination?
    • Increase Veterans’ trust in VA?
External Partnership Benefits

• Increased community awareness of the needs of homeless Veterans

• Access to additional community based resources for Veterans, especially those the VA cannot provide

• Leveraging community expertise

• Increased awareness of and access to VA resources for local service providers and Veterans they serve
Internal Partnership Benefits

• Increased sensitivity to the needs of homeless Veterans across VA services

• Improved timeliness of access to care

• Enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery; reduction in duplication of services

• Improved coordination of care
Partnership Risks

• Staff turnover within either party
• Conflict of interest – perceived or real
• Partner over-promises / under-delivers
• Partner engages in embarrassing or illegal behavior
• Lack of awareness / agreement regarding interaction with media
• Partner goes out of business
Partnership Rewards

• Opportunities to try out new, innovative approaches
• Learn from success and failure
• Solidify trust with partners and Veterans
• Everyone can take credit – everyone wins
• Veterans benefit!
Degrees of Partnership & Guidance

• When is a partnership an actual partnership?
• When do we need a contract?
• How are grants different from contracts?
• When should a memorandum of agreement (MOA) / memorandum of understanding (MOU) be used?
• What about a linkage agreement?
Principles of Leadership

• What does it mean to be a “leader” in establishing a partnership?
  – Spoiler Alert! *It’s not about being the decision maker.*

• Good leaders:
  – Identify needs and assess opportunities
  – Know their community and network, network, network
  – Are servant leaders, putting Veterans and others first
Principles of Leadership

• A leader in partnership development:
  – Facilitates among the parties
  – Ties the effort to the mission
  – Gets buy-in from the chain of command (above and below)
  – Makes the link between strategy and operations
Principles of Leadership

• A leader in partnership development:
  – Coordinates operations and people using a strengths based approach
  – Consistently follows up and follows through
  – Stretches while being realistic about what can be accomplished
  – Takes responsibility for the outcome and sustaining the partnership
Effective Partnerships

Strengths:

• Shared commitment to process

• Shared values

• History of / develops positive relationships

• Goal-directed work, with deadlines and deliverables
Effective Partnerships

Challenges:

• Similar goals; different objectives
• Developing trust
• Learning to speak the same language
• Bureaucratic obstacles and levels of decision-making
• Myth busting
• Different definitions or measures of success
Case Examples – National Level

• AMVETS Welcome Home

• Military Outreach USA

• PennFED

• Feeding America
Case Examples – VISN / Local Level

• NYC CoC Veterans Task Force

• GPD Conversion

• Telehealth for frail/elderly GPD residents

• CRRCs and HUD-VASH
Lessons Learned (so far!)

1. Patience and persistence are basic tools for creating change. **Never give up!**

2. Relationships are built on mutual trust and respect. This takes time and good listening skills. **Focus on understanding your partners and their worlds.**

3. In working with different systems, look for the “match” in values and goals to build a solid working relationship. Be aware of the possible areas for conflict (generally policies and procedures). **Focus on “win / win” problem solving techniques.**

4. Trying to “own” the process won’t work and will alienate others from becoming part of a successful team approach. **Leave ego and control at the door.**
Lessons Learned (so far!)

5. Consensus isn’t always going to be possible. **Look for ways to minimize barriers as they occur and offer constructive alternatives.**

6. Ensure that your top management know the issues and have input into the planning process at every step along the way. **Don’t ever go it alone.**

7. Always have “Plan B” and “Plan C” as possible options when “Plan A” doesn’t work. Review these plans with key players prior to coming to the table to obtain their support and/or recommendations. **Never make promises that you can’t keep.**
Lessons Learned (so far!)

8. In a true partnership, all parties must do what they say they are going to do, even when the players change. Maintain your integrity.

9. Communication is an ongoing process that must be continually nurtured, monitored and improved. Don’t take for granted that you have to keep working at communication.

10. Change and evolution are constants you can count on. Be open minded and flexible about what works and what doesn’t work.
Questions