



VHA INNOVATION
Ecosystem



VHA INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

VHA Diffusion of Excellence Program Playbook

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VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

CHANGING LIVES. SAVING LIVES.



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Introduction

In 2016, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Diffusion of Excellence began a journey to develop repeatable, inclusive frameworks that enable Promising Practices developed by our frontline employees to obtain recognition and broader impact. Like most startups, we've encountered plenty of unexpected bumps in the road. We've also discovered unique ways to empower our workforce, make their combined efforts more readily understandable to peers and leadership, and unlock broader impact across our health care enterprise for the most promising of emerging practices.

After five years, six national competitions, 69 Promising Practice designations, 10 National Diffusion Practices, over 800 practice replications, and too many relationships formed to count, it's finally time to share some of the knowledge we've accrued along the way. This Diffusion Playbook is intended as a practical overview and guide. It's a "bread-crum trail," rather than formal manual.

We hope you find this Playbook helpful in your pursuit of health care excellence. Please don't hesitate to reach out at Diffusion@va.gov with feedback or to start a conversation.

DIFFUSION: BY THE NUMBERS

Impact



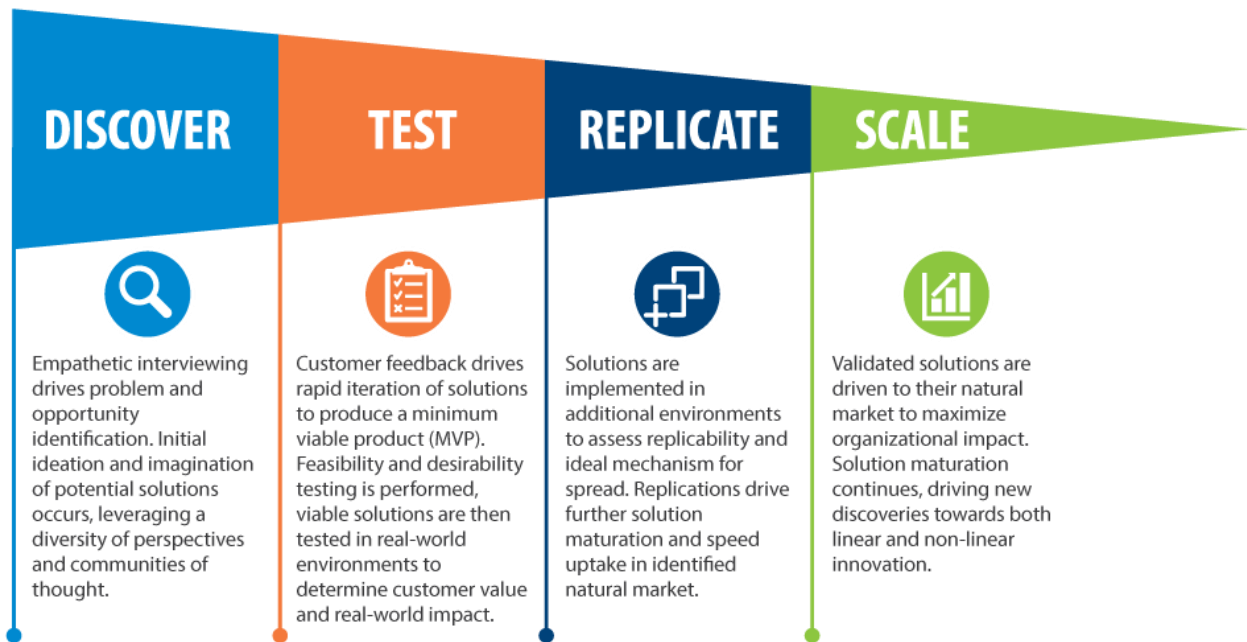


Why the Diffusion of Excellence Program?

The 2015 Veterans Choice Act studies uncovered that on average VHA outperformed the private sector on many measures, but variation between facilities risked poor outcomes in some Veterans. To combat this discrepancy, the VHA Innovation Ecosystem designed an Innovation Operating Model to discover, test, replicate, and scale innovations and Promising Practices. The Diffusion of Excellence program plays a critical role in the replicate and scale stages of this operating model.

We specialize in diffusing emergent, high-impact health care practices across the nation’s largest integrated health care system consisting of more than 300,000 employees serving over nine million Veterans at roughly 1,250 facilities.

Diffusion of Excellence's goal is to identify and disseminate clinical and operational Promising Practices to standardize enterprise-wide health care improvement initiatives. Since 2016, Diffusion of Excellence has sponsored the VHA Shark Tank Competition to enable the early identification of Promising Practices, and facilitate their broader diffusion based on their potential to improve service delivery to Veterans. These Promising Practices address access, care coordination, employee engagement, quality and safety, Veteran experience, and more. Ultimately, Diffusion of Excellence supports VHA as it strives to be a learning system that empowers its employees every day.



Ryan J. Vega, MD and Kenneth W. Kiser, MD MPH, VHA’s Innovation Ecosystem: Operationalizing Innovation in Health Care, *NEJM Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery* 2020; DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1056/CAT.20.0263>

The Setting

Diffusion of Excellence operates in an environment that we often take for granted. Separately, these elements may not appear all that extraordinary, but taken together, they are important operating conditions that make VHA fertile ground for the diffusion of Promising Practices. We want to make you aware of these factors that help us set the stage for success.

Mission-driven Workforce – Our team members (over 300,000 strong!) feel a deep connection and patriotic duty towards the mission of delivering quality health care to Veterans of our armed services. Approximately one-third of our workforce are Veterans themselves, and many have a family member receiving VHA care. Our employees bring a unique sense of purpose to work each day.

Top-down Leadership Support – Senior VHA leadership has a long history of openly celebrating new or derivative clinical and operational practices to improve service delivery. Whereas many health care systems may not offer this latitude, we find our employees often enjoy support from their supervisors to engage in innovation and/or diffusion activities as a collateral duty, so long as they meet their core responsibilities to Veteran customers first.

Bottoms-up Opportunity – Every VHA team member has the opportunity to submit a practice to the VHA Shark Tank Competition. Employees at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers participating in the [VHA Innovators Network \(iNET\)](#) also have access to the [Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Investment Program](#). Additionally, individual facilities, teams, and national communities of practices offer their own friendly contests and forums to celebrate emerging innovations and practices. These opportunities, alongside the aforementioned leadership support, send a powerful message to our team members.

Research Infrastructure – VHA's Office of Research & Development (ORD) cultivates a robust research community with over \$1 billion invested in research activities each year. Every year, new evidence-based practices backed by formal research (e.g., randomized control trials) are validated and offer increased opportunities to make the pivot to operational implementation. ORD's Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) helps to translate these practices into routine Veteran care utilizing scientifically supported quality improvement (QI) methods. VHA's research infrastructure is truly a national asset.

Vertically Integrated Health Care System – VHA operates as a comprehensive health care provider for the Veterans it serves. For the business of diffusion, this means we can compare costs generated in one service line (e.g., time spent de-prescribing of potentially inappropriate medications by primary care clinicians) alongside gains in another (e.g., annualized reductions in our national pharmacy spend). This creates return-on-investment (ROI) incentives supporting a more comprehensive approach to Veteran care.





Our Principles

Our program's "secret sauce" is a blend of widely applied concepts from the start-up world, implementation science, and human psychology. We use our principles as a lens to constantly examine how to best support our partners. The following are key principles that inform all our diffusion efforts:

1. **Create a Bold Vision:** Collaboratively create a practice vision compelling people to action.

Being a champion for a Promising Practice in the nation's largest integrated health system is hard work. Our fellows and collaborators constantly confront organizational, interpersonal, procedural, and technical hurdles. Taken together, these challenges represent the biggest threat to success. Creating a compelling vision that is shared by peers and other stakeholders is fundamentally important to overcoming these barriers.

2. **Define Practice Fidelity:** Clearly define your practice's core and adaptable components.

Establishing what constitutes your practice's fidelity is a fundamental implementation science concept. Just as a pharmaceutical medication consists of active and inactive ingredients, the core and adaptable components of a Promising Practice must be clearly defined. The core components provide new implementers with "guard rails" to help them achieve consistent clinical or operational outcomes, and the adaptable components grant them important latitude to tailor the implementation to their unique environment.

3. **Build a Stakeholder Coalition:** Cultivate a strong group of committed stakeholders.

Health care delivery is a complex undertaking. Added to that is an inherent risk aversion when new practices and interventions have the potential to impact the lives of patients. Overcoming these natural challenges requires a team approach and deliberate coalition building. We teach our fellows and partners how to methodically educate, activate, and convert key stakeholders to enable long-term success and sustainment.

4. **Select an Implementation Strategy:** Think thoughtfully about how you want to grow.

Often referred in the business world as a "go-to-market" strategy, thinking carefully about how you want to introduce and scale your practice or innovation across a nationwide health care system is critical to your success. The right strategy can create much-needed momentum, while the wrong strategy can stop you in your tracks. We teach our partners how to establish implementation strategies to deliver a strong "pull" of engagement from prospective early adopters and early majority implementers.

5. **Measure Your Impact:** Know your practice's key performance indicators (KPIs), track them closely, and consistently share them with stakeholders.

The health care industry understandably places a heavy emphasis on evidence, and successful diffusion requires a data-driven approach. Promising Practices must clearly define



the KPIs that will drive their success. They must clearly package that information and relay it to the proper stakeholders consistently over time. Of all our principles, measuring your impact serves as the linchpin to your ability to be successful in other areas (e.g., acquiring stakeholders, obtaining resources, celebrating achievements). Most importantly, the Veterans we serve deserve this laser focus on outcomes and results.

6. **Get Resourced for Growth:** Develop a strategy to sustainably support your practice's growth.

Our health care system is fortunate to be comprised of creative team members that can often formulate and implement new practices at relatively low cost. That said, scaling a practice across our nationwide network requires a thoughtful resourcing strategy to avoid "burnout" and effectively achieve a practice's full potential. We teach our fellows how to pragmatically identify what they will need for this journey, and even help them acquire those resources.

7. **Celebrate Along the Way:** Acknowledge milestones and celebrate achievements regularly with your stakeholders and partners.

Health care workers are intrinsically highly motivated individuals. Creating a clear and consistent recognition framework is critical to winning the hearts and minds of practice implementers. At a minimum, this can create a sustainable source of lasting goodwill. At its best, a great recognition framework can serve as a springboard to long-term culture change. We are always looking at creative ways to reward practice contributors. It always amazes us how much a thoughtfully written thank-you note can accomplish.

8. **Pave the Way for Sustainment:** Develop and execute a comprehensive plan to sustain impact.

Long-term practice sustainment requires a thoughtful approach to a health care system's policy, data, budgetary, and performance evaluation frameworks. We work closely with our fellows and organizational stakeholders to drive the embed a successful Promising Practice into the foundation of VHA.



Our Processes

Diffusion of Promising Practices is a contact sport. It takes tremendous coordination and communication to engage the entirety of your health care workforce and empower them to be a part of a broader organizational transformation.

Our processes are thoughtfully crafted over the years with extensive input from key players at all parts of the journey. They are well defined enough to be repeatable, yet adaptable enough to serve a practice at any stage of the Innovation Operating Model. The three core processes we will examine in depth are:

- ▶ **VHA Shark Tank Competition:** Helping us to *identify* emerging Promising Practices by positively incentivizing our employees through greater recognition of their work.
- ▶ **Facilitated Replication:** Enabling us to *replicate* Promising Practices to validate impact, inform the path forward, and develop knowledge-based materials to establish repeatable implementation processes or the practices.
- ▶ **Diffusion Pathways:** Three defined pathways to promote practice *sustainment* and *diffusion* based on a practice's impact, replicability, and other factors.

Diffusion of Excellence Processes



Each of these processes is underpinned by **Key Players** and **Key Events**. We will describe in detail the roles and responsibilities of Key Players, and the importance of Key Events, to bring each process into higher focus.



VHA SHARK TANK COMPETITION

How does VHA solve its toughest challenges? By asking the people that know best—its employees. Since its inception in 2015, Diffusion of Excellence has sponsored six VHA Shark Tank Competitions, eliciting more than 2,600 employee-designated practices submissions—an average of more than 400 submissions per competition. The practices address key priorities such as access to care, quality and safety, workforce development, and Veteran experience. This all-employee competition not only identifies employee-developed Promising Practices, but also matches them with interested facilities.



Key Players

Applicants	VA employees at all levels and across all service lines (clinical and operational) who submit practices to the competition.
Shark Tank Evaluators	Our Evaluators who volunteer their time to objectively evaluate practices during two rounds of review.
Sharks	Medical Center and Network Directors who bid resources to implement a practice at their facility.

Competition Eligibility

As mentioned above, the VHA Shark Competition is open to all VHA employees. For a practice to be eligible, it must meet all the following criteria:

- 1. Successful Implementation:** The practice must be successfully implemented in at least one facility.
- 2. Supported by Data:** There must be at least one month of real-world data collected to support practice viability and effectiveness.
- 3. Linked to a Priority:** The practice must address one of the VHA Shark Tank Priorities.

Each year our team engages VHA leadership at national and local (e.g., VA Medical Centers) levels to identify organizational priorities. These priorities often change year to year. Refreshing them each cycle is a great way for our program to re-connect with stakeholders and is important to keeping the Diffusion of Excellence program vital and relevant.

2020 VHA Shark Tank Priorities

- ▶ Access
- ▶ Health Care after COVID-19
- ▶ High Reliability Culture Change: Commit to Zero Harm
- ▶ Rural Woman Veterans: A Diverse Community
- ▶ Veteran and Employee Experience
- ▶ Whole Health
- ▶ Upstream Suicide Prevention





Competition Stages

The VHA Shark Tank Competition has many stages that take place over several months leading up to the live event. VHA Shark Tank Priorities are identified, a marketing campaign is launched followed by the practice application, two rounds of evaluations, and finally the VHA Shark Tank Competition happens at the VHA Innovation Experience. The descriptions below offers more insight into each stage.

Stage	Description
Identification of Shark Tank Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify eight VHA Shark Tank Priorities by engaging Medical Center and Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN) Directors ▶ Confirm priority recommendations with VHA leadership
Pre-Launch Application Marketing and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Meet with VHA Communications to review the marketing and communications plan for the upcoming competition ▶ Coordinate delivery of all employee emails announcing the launch of the application and marketing toolkits for facilities ▶ Promote the application submission period on social media and other communication channels internal to VA ▶ Review application feedback from the prior competitions and meet with subject matter experts in research and evaluation to improve the application questions ▶ Develop the application and conduct internal usability testing to ensure its functionality ▶ Develop VHA Shark Tank Competition landing page on VHA Diffusion Marketplace including the link to the application and resource materials
Application Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Submit successfully implemented practices aligning with VHA leadership priorities (all VHA employees) ▶ Continue to coordinate the delivery of all employee emails announcing the launch of the application and marketing toolkits for facilities ▶ Continue to promote the application submission period on the VHA Diffusion Marketplace, social media, and other internal VA communication channels ▶ Provide support to applicants through the development of FAQ documents, the Diffusion of Excellence inbox, and informational sessions ▶ Provide technical support to any applicants that experience issues on the application platform
Round One Evaluation Period <i>(The evaluation period lasts approximately one month)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recruit Diffusion Specialists, Innovation Specialists, Systems Redesign Coordinators, Chief Medical Officers (CMOs), Quality Management Offices (QMOs), Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D), and Medical Center and VISN Directors to participate as Round 1 Evaluators ▶ Develop an evaluation tool based on VHA Shark Tank Competition evaluation criteria ▶ Host Informational Session to provide guidance on the evaluation process and review the evaluation criteria



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Assign applications to Evaluators based on their identified areas of expertise and capacity ▶ Analyze qualitative and quantitative evaluation data using a weighted selection process ▶ Develop 100 Semifinalist practice recommendations to proceed in the competition
<p>Round Two Evaluation Period</p> <p><i>(The evaluation period lasts approximately one month)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recruit Program Office leaders, Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP), Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center (PEPReC), and Center for Evaluation and Implementation Resources (CEIR) to participate as Round 2 Evaluators ▶ QUERI reviews and evaluates 100 Semifinalist practices ▶ Use evaluation tool to evaluate based on clinical soundness, high impact on Veteran outcomes, and spread potential ▶ Host an Informational Session to provide guidance on the evaluation process and review the evaluation criteria ▶ Coordinate an independent evaluation of the Semifinalist applications by the Ethics team ▶ Assign applications to Evaluators based on their identified areas of expertise and capacity ▶ Analyze qualitative and quantitative evaluation data using a weighted selection process ▶ Recommend 15 Finalist practices to be vetted and confirmed by the Governance Board ▶ Provide Program Office Evaluator feedback to 85 denied Semifinalists
<p>Finalist and Shark Preparation Period</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide 15 Finalists with guidance on pitching their practices at the competition ▶ Host dress rehearsal with 15 Finalists at the National Press Club prior to the event ▶ Add Finalist applications to the VHA Diffusion Marketplace ▶ Develop the Readiness to Implement Assessment to assist Sharks with bid development ▶ QUERI develops the Finalist Quickview and Wish List to assist Sharks with developing their bids ▶ Provide Sharks with guidance on developing and submitting their bids at the competition
<p>VHA Shark Tank Competition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Host the competition at VHA Innovation Experience and live stream to all VA Medical Centers ▶ Sharks and Shark Delegates submit bids up to approximately 24 hours after the Competition ▶ Winners are announced at the Closing Ceremony of VHA Innovation Experience



Competition Winners

Winning practices from the VHA Shark Tank Competition receive Promising Practice designation and proceed with six-to-eight months of facilitated replication with the winning Shark's facilities. Winners also gain access to project management, communication, and technical support from Diffusion of Excellence, which helps practice owners, called Diffusion of Excellence Fellows, with impact studies to determine scaling feasibility, support for conference and award submissions, and potentially national rollout. By the end of the Diffusion of Excellence program, Diffusion of Excellence Fellows and Implementing Facility Fellows can expect to accomplish packaged knowledge-based material, confirmation of desired clinical or operational impact in different settings, and engagement from national stakeholders for their input and support.



Key Event: VHA Shark Tank Competition

The VHA Shark Tank is a live-pitch event in which our 15 Finalists deliver a five-minute pitch to Sharks. The pitch consists of a three-minute presentation followed by a two-minute question and answer session. Sharks have 24 hours to place their bids outlining resources they will commit to the implementation at their health care facility.

The competition is live streamed on YouTube and open to the public. General participants can cast a vote for their favorite pitch, and the practice winning the most votes is automatically declared one of our 10 winners. In recent years, the competition has taken place as part of the VHA Innovation Experience. The event draws several thousand real-time viewers and celebrates the pioneering work of the best of our workforce.

We invite you to view the 2020 VHA Shark Tank Competition here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYJV-BHIEac>.

FACILITATED REPLICATION

Once Promising Practices have been identified in the VHA Shark Tank Competition, they are launched into the facilitated replication phase. During this phase, the Key Players, Diffusion of Excellence Fellows (Diffusion Fellows), Implementing Facility Fellows (IFFs), and the Implementation Lead and Coordinator are charged with:

- ▶ Developing an implementation plan to replicate the Promising Practice.
- ▶ Replicating the practice.
- ▶ Creating knowledge-based materials.
- ▶ Tracking and reporting the impact of the practice to chart a path forward.

Facilitated replication consists of two Key Events in the Diffusion of Excellence Program—Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp and Diffusion of Excellence Summit—which allow Fellows to establish important relationships, develop actionable materials, and share experiences that are integral to their journey through replication. At the end of facilitated replication, Diffusion of Excellence leadership analyzes each practice and determines the appropriate path forward.



Key Players

<p>Diffusion of Excellence Fellows <i>(Diffusion Fellows)</i></p>	<p>Diffusion Fellows are our VHA Shark Tank Competition winners. They serve as experienced mentors to the implementing facility during the facilitated replication period.</p>
<p>Implementation Facility Fellows <i>(IFFs)</i></p>	<p>Implementing Facility Fellows are selected by the winning Shark to implement the practice at their facility. Primary responsibility for a successful implementation rests with them, and they can often become key practice champions.</p>
<p>Implementation Lead & Implementation Coordinator</p>	<p>Diffusion of Excellence project managers support replication and diffusion by facilitating weekly meetings, monitor progress, and track risks and mitigation plans. They also develop implementation guides and informational materials to institute a repeatable implementation process for the practices.</p>



Key Event: Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp

After winning the VHA Shark Tank Competition and being designated a Promising Practice, facilitated replication begins with Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp (Base Camp). Base Camp is a three-day training bringing together the Diffusion Fellow, IFF, and Base Camp Support Team, which consists of a iNET Innovation Specialist or a Diffusion Specialist as group facilitator and contractor support as documenter.

This event offers presentations from subject matter experts, implementation project planning led by facilitators, and ample opportunities to network with colleagues and leaders from across VHA. Most importantly, the Diffusion Fellow and IFF will work together and design an implementation plan to be used over the course of the facilitated replication process in the coming months.

Once Base Camp concludes, the implementation teams utilize the implementation plans created at Base Camp to replicate the Promising Practice at the implementing facility.

Diffusion of **EXCELLENCE** >>>>>> **BASE CAMP** >>>>>>





Goals of Facilitated Replication

As part of facilitated replication, Diffusion of Excellence provides project management and communications support to Diffusion Fellows and IFFs during the replication of their practice at the implementing site. Facilitated implementation is important because this period effectively serves as a “replication study” to help mature the practice and deepen our understanding of its impacts.

The three primary goals during the facilitated replication period are:

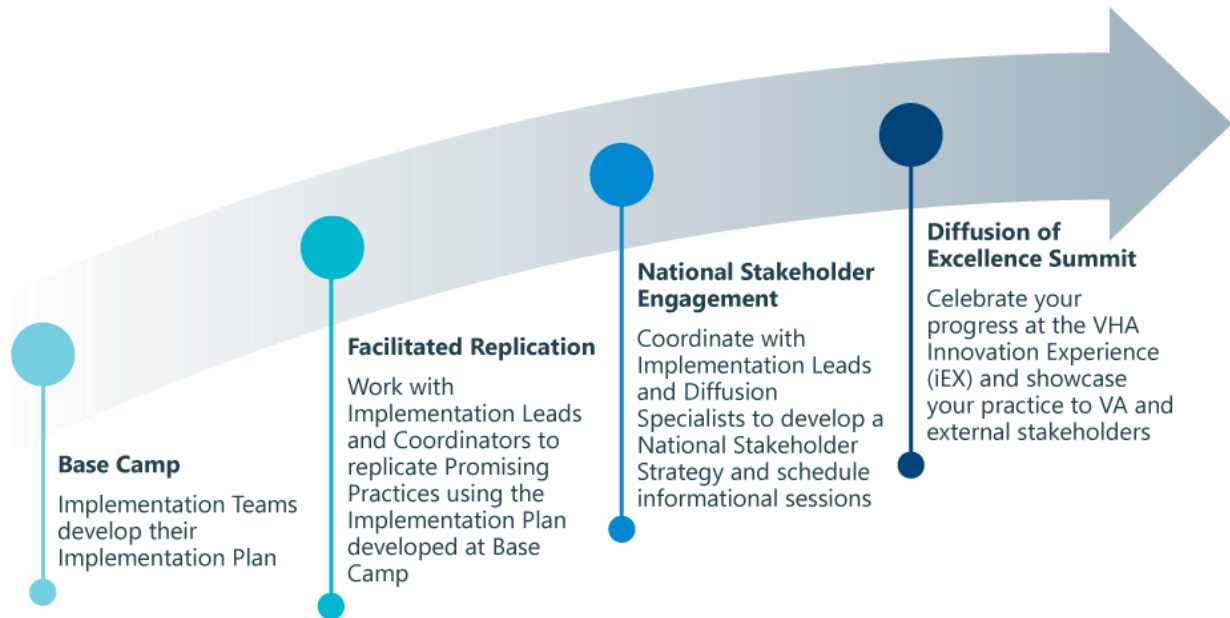
1. **Package the Knowledge Base:** Our project managers, known as Implementation Leads, assist the Diffusion Fellows with development of a comprehensive Implementation Guide and supporting materials (e.g., one-pagers, leadership presentations, training materials).
2. **Confirm Impact:** We work with the IFFs to design a metrics and measurement plan to confirm the practice is achieving the desired outcomes.
3. **Cultivate National Stakeholder Support:** We facilitate informational briefings with potential national stakeholders, help them design the briefing materials, and collect data after stakeholder meetings to ascertain their level of support.

Secondary goals of facilitated replication can vary widely, and we try to stay flexible to each practice’s needs. For example, we may provide technical support like data analysis or site visit coordination.





Diffusion Timeline and Events



National Stakeholder Engagement

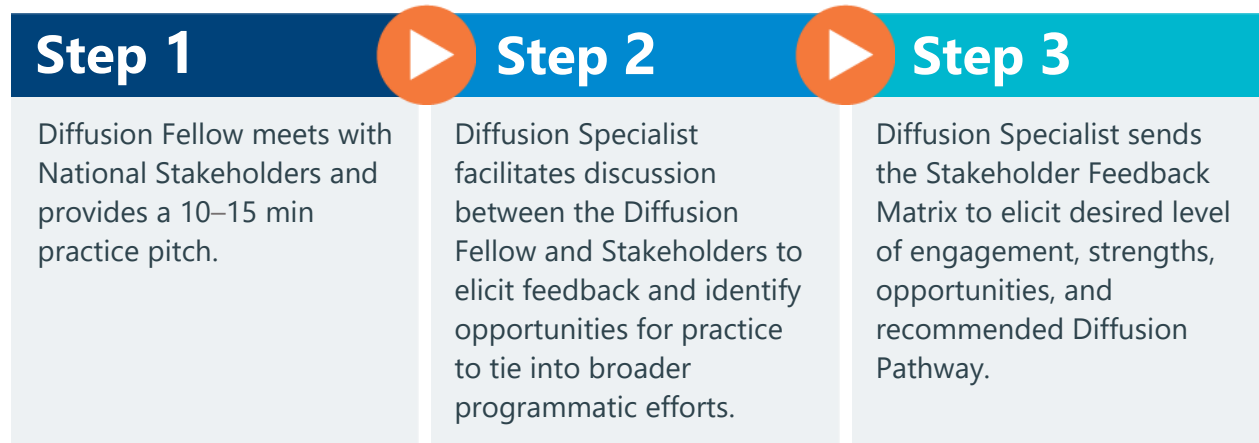
We find it's critical to engage and educate national stakeholders during facilitated replication. We tap into our Diffusion Specialists in the final three months of facilitated replication to facilitate *low-risk* interactions with at least three national stakeholders for each practice. The term *low-risk* is emphasized here because it's important that Diffusion Fellows and national stakeholders feel comfortable having a candid conversation. From a practical standpoint, this means we never make concrete requests for funding or support.

The Diffusion Fellow begins these stakeholder meetings by providing a brief (10–15 minute) practice overview, including clearly describing the practice's impacts based on available qualitative and quantitative data. Then we pause to collect feedback and answer questions. Once we've answered all questions from the national stakeholder, we use the opportunity to ask any questions we might have about their existing priorities, and how this practice might (or might not) align with them.

Finally, to close the meeting, we let the national stakeholder know we will be sending them a brief survey, and that their feedback will be critical to helping Diffusion of Excellence assess the best Diffusion Pathway for the Promising Practice.



National Stakeholder Engagement Steps:



The Stakeholder Feedback Matrix is designed to help us understand a stakeholder’s: 1) Desired Level of Engagement, and 2) Recommended Diffusion Pathway. This enables us to take the answers from the three stakeholders and arrange them in a matrix. This provides a strong “at-a-glance” depiction of stakeholder support. Diffusion Pathways are discussed further in the Diffusion Pathways section of this document.

Sample Stakeholder Feedback Matrix

Stakeholder Feedback Matrix			
Desired Engagement	Strong – We would like regular updates and to play an active role in diffusing this practice		
	Moderate – Please update us at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly) on the status of this practice		
	Light – Only make us aware of significant updates or milestones achieved		
		Organic Diffusion – We support the continued “organic” diffusion of this practice as facilities see fit to adopt it	Initial Diffusion – We support the continued systematic diffusion of this practice to help mature it and prepare it for national diffusion
Recommended Diffusion Pathway			



The Stakeholder Feedback Matrix below is for a practice that was ultimately selected for National Diffusion. We were able to identify several national stakeholders that felt the practice exhibited very high impact and aligned to their organizational priorities.

Stakeholder Feedback Matrix			
Desired Engagement	Strong – We would like regular updates and to play an active role in diffusing this practice		Stakeholder #2
	Moderate – Please update us at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly) on the status of this practice	Stakeholder #1	Stakeholder #3
	Light – Only make us aware of significant updates or milestones achieved		
	Organic Diffusion – We support the continued “organic” diffusion of this practice as facilities see fit to adopt it	Initial Diffusion – We support the continued systematic diffusion of this practice to help mature it and prepare it for national diffusion	National Diffusion – We believe VHA should implement this practice as a national standard
Recommended Diffusion Pathway			

On the other hand, the Stakeholder Feedback Matrix below is for a practice that was slated for Organic Diffusion. The stakeholders felt the practice needed stronger supporting data if it was to gain their support.

Stakeholder Feedback Matrix			
Desired Engagement	Strong – We would like regular updates and to play an active role in diffusing this practice		
	Moderate – Please update us at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly) on the status of this practice	Stakeholder #2	
	Light – Only make us aware of significant updates or milestones achieved	Stakeholder #1	
	Organic Diffusion – We support the continued “organic” diffusion of this practice as facilities see fit to adopt it	Initial Diffusion – We support the continued systematic diffusion of this practice to help mature it and prepare it for national diffusion	National Diffusion – We believe VHA should implement this practice as a national standard
Recommended Diffusion Pathway			

Taken together, this collection of data points from national stakeholders helps inform the path forward for each practice. It also helps us establish open and honest working relationships between Diffusion Fellows and national stakeholders. Many of these relationships live on and do not require our team’s continuous involvement.



Key Event: Diffusion of Excellence Summit

Facilitated replication wraps up with a graduation presentation at Diffusion of Excellence Summit (Diffusion Summit). Occurring simultaneously with the annual VHA Innovation Experience, this event provides each Promising Practice’s Diffusion Fellow(s) and IFF(s) the opportunity to report out on what their year has been like since the previous VHA Shark Tank Competition. The forum is designed for the audience, including program office leaders, facility leaders, and fellow colleagues, to hear about the Promising Practice’s replication, including initial outcomes, lessons learned, successes, and next steps.

Diffusion of **EXCELLENCE** SUMMIT





DIFFUSION PATHWAYS

Once a cohort of Promising Practices completes their facilitated replication with Diffusion of Excellence, there are three Diffusion Pathways recommended to move forward: Organic Diffusion, Initial Diffusion, and National Diffusion.



Key Players

Diffusion of Excellence Fellow
(Diffusion Fellows)

Diffusion Fellows are our VHA Shark Tank Competition winners. They serve as experienced mentors to the implementing facility during the facilitated replication period.

Diffusion Specialists

Diffusion Specialists are senior project managers that are responsible for scaling National Diffusion Practices and serve as purveyors of diffusion knowledge through trainings like Diffusion Academy.

Organic Diffusion

Organic Diffusion Practices demonstrate moderate impact, replicability, stakeholder support, and cost effectiveness. These Promising Practices remain a part of the VHA Innovation Ecosystem community, are made available on VHA Diffusion Marketplace for organic dissemination, are eligible for ad hoc support, and receive access to resourcing opportunities offered within VHA Innovation Ecosystem.



Organic Diffusion Example Suicide Alert Card

Suicide Alert Card is a critical tool that empowers front line staff to signal for Mental Health support when in conversation with a Veteran in crisis. It allows for continuous engagement with the Veteran until help arrives. This practice is replicating organically across multiple facilities as its impact continues to be validated.

Initial Diffusion

Initial Diffusion Practices demonstrate strong impact, replicability, stakeholder support, and cost effectiveness. Similarly to Organic Diffusion Practices, Initial Diffusion Practices are highlighted on VHA Diffusion Marketplace and receive insight to resourcing opportunities offered within VHA Innovation Ecosystem. In addition, they are invited to attend VHA Diffusion Academy, a learning opportunity offered annually. At VHA Diffusion Academy, Practice Teams are invited to network and learn alongside other Project Teams from across VHA Innovation Ecosystem, as well as work as a Practice Team to develop a 1–2-year Diffusion Business Plan. More information about VHA Diffusion Academy can be found [here](#).



Initial Diffusion Example Advanced Comprehensive Diabetes Care

ACDC is a nurse-administered telehealth intervention for Veterans with poor diabetes control despite standard VA diabetes care. In a randomized trial, ACDC improved hemoglobin A1C by an average of 1% versus usual care and by approximately 2% among engaged Veterans.




VHA INNOVATION Ecosystem


National Diffusion

National Diffusion Practices demonstrate very high impact, replicability, stakeholder support, and cost effectiveness. They also receive the same foundational benefits as Organic and Initial Diffusion Practices. Promising Practices nominated for National Diffusion are assigned a Diffusion Specialist from Diffusion of Excellence for approximately 3 years of the implementation effort. Other support can include developing a strategic plan for National Diffusion and building a national stakeholder coalition.



 **VAMC-Driven Implementation**
VIONE
 VIONE is a clinician and patient-friendly methodology to address polypharmacy risk.

 **VISN-Driven Implementation**
TeleWound Care Practice
 Telewound Care brings specialty wound care to Veterans irrespective of where they are.

 **Program Office Implementation**
Stay in VA
 Stay in VA is a practice focused on employee retention through employee engagement in stay interviews.



Key Event: VHA Diffusion Academy

VHA Diffusion Academy (Diffusion Academy) brings together Practice Teams across VHA Innovation Ecosystem and our partners eager to take their Promising Practices to the next level of scaling and sustainability. The first event of its kind, Diffusion Academy, is an energizing and inspiring event that connects like-minded innovators and offers a platform to brainstorm and collaborate. The curriculum offers flexibility to assess each practice's specific needs while promoting team cohesion, replication pathways, strategic communication, and resourcing opportunities.



VHA leaders, subject matter experts, and attendees all help facilitate conversation with a great depth of diverse perspective. Diffusion Academy helps Practice Teams build a network of supportive colleague innovators to build a legacy to scale excellence and deliver exemplary service to our Veterans.





VHA Diffusion Academy Curriculum

Pre-Event Core Webinars <i>Six Weeks Prior to Main Event</i>	Main Event Core Webinars <i>Three Half-Days</i>	Post-Event Core Webinars <i>Six Weeks After Main Event</i>
<p>Kick-Off Meeting</p>	<p>Identifying Resources</p>	<p>VHA Communications</p>
<p>Redefining the Vision and Project Fidelity</p>	<p>Reporting Metrics at Scale</p>	<p>Cerner Introduction and Transition</p>
<p>Enhancing Your Stakeholder Coalition</p>	<p>Developing an Enterprise-Wide Business Case</p>	<p>Awards and Recognition Systems/Graduation</p>
<p>Refining the Implementation Strategy</p>		



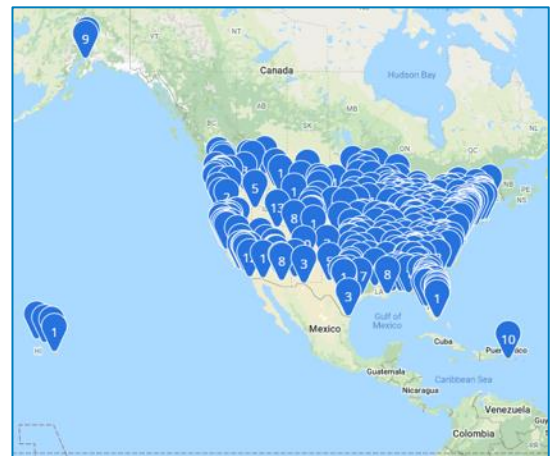
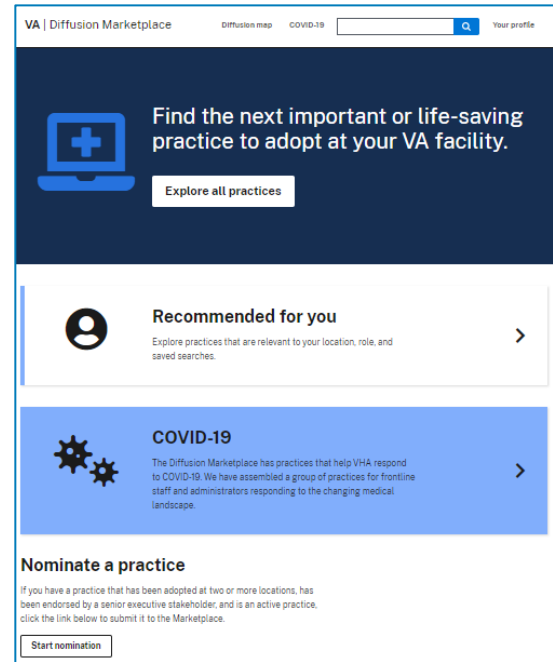
VHA DIFFUSION MARKETPLACE

What if everyone in VHA could search across all the Promising Practices currently being diffused in our health care system to find the one that is right for their facility and the problems they need to solve? VHA Diffusion Marketplace (Marketplace), housed on the VA Intranet, is a digital platform designed to do just that. The Marketplace is a living, searchable repository of over 100 Promising Practices developed and implemented by frontline employees to improve clinical care and operations. These practices are submitted by VHA employees and typically meet the following criteria:

- ▶ Currently an active practice
- ▶ Adopted at two or more locations
- ▶ Endorsed by a senior executive stakeholder with relevant expertise

These life-saving Promising Practices range in origination, complexity, accomplishments, and resources. Practice creators manage their own practice pages and provide updates as their practices evolve. Visitors to the Marketplace can search, follow, comment, and even commit to adopting a practice. They can navigate an interactive map of over 1,000 practice adoptions to see what other facilities have implemented or are in the process of adopting. As of December 2020, the Marketplace contains over 120 practices and has logged 1,000 adoptions with efforts to expand to every Medical Center and VISN.

Visit Diffusion Marketplace today to discuss the next impactful or life-saving practice to adopt at your VA facility <https://marketplace.va.gov/> (*Available only inside the VA firewall). If you have a practice ready to be assessed for the VHA Diffusion Marketplace, please email Marketplace@va.gov.

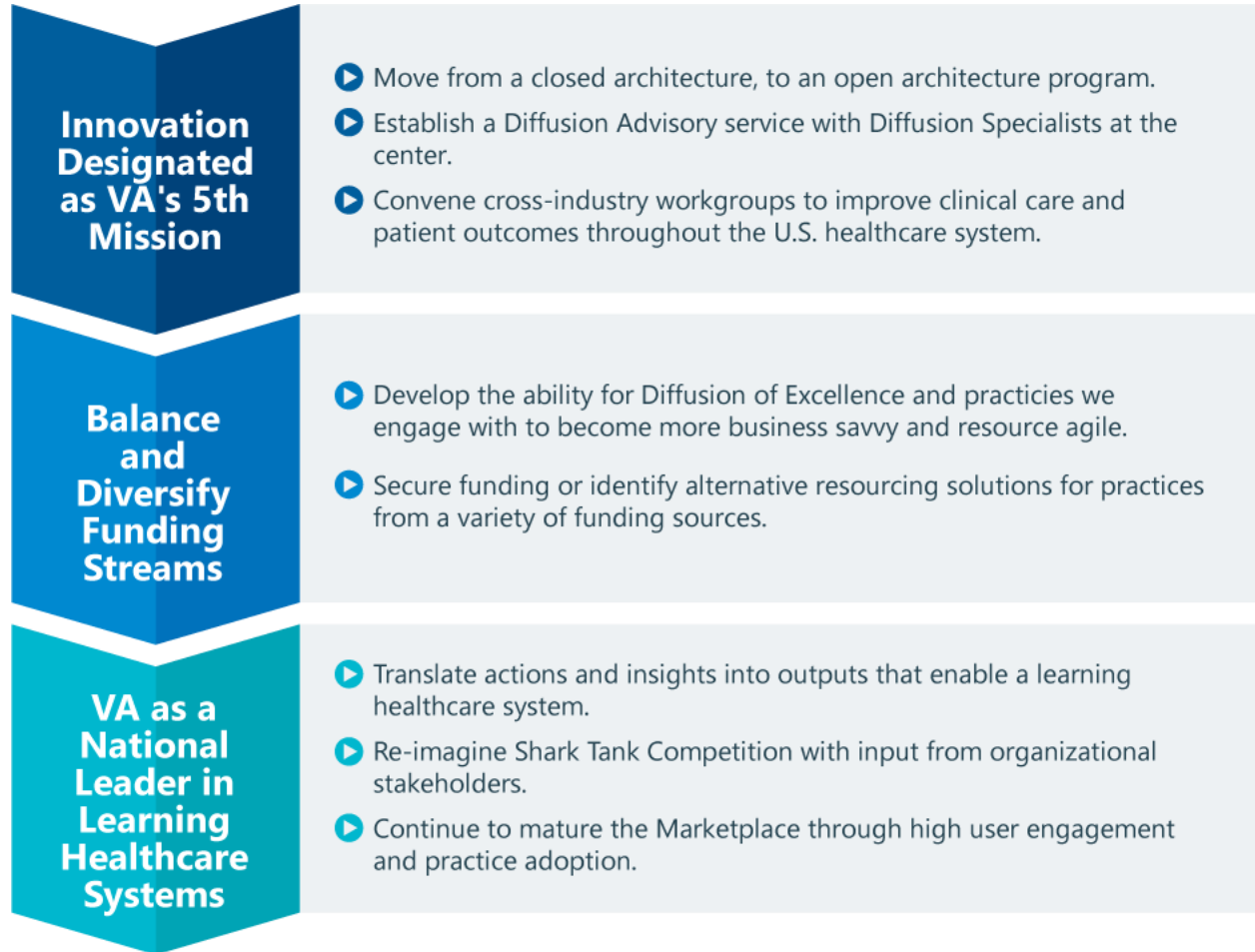




Conclusion

WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the course of the next fiscal year, Diffusion of Excellence intends to tackle three “Wildly Important Goals” that make us more accessible to VHA facilities and community partners so that we can further VA’s mission to serve Veterans.





Thank You

On behalf of the VHA Innovation Community we would like to say, “Thank you!” to the many individuals and partners that played important roles in the development and success that led to the creation of this playbook. We are truly appreciative of each Promising Practice and the time and dedication our fellows and partners sacrifice to tackle some of the toughest challenges within VHA. We look forward to expanding our reach as we continue to make an invaluable difference in the lives of those, we serve.

Questions?

For questions pertaining to Diffusion of Excellence and any information provided in the Playbook, please reach to Diffusion@va.gov.

Appendix

ACRONYMS

Shown in order of presentation in the Playbook

Acronym	Definition
VHA	Veterans Health Administration
iNET	VHA Innovators Network
ORD	Office of Research & Development
QUERI	Quality Enhancement Research Initiative
QI	Quality improvement
ROI	Return on investment
VISN	Veteran Integrated Service Network
CMOs	Chief Medical Officer
QMOs	Quality Management Office
ESP	Evidence Synthesis Program
HSR&D	Health Services Research and Development Service
PEPReC	Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center
CEIR	Center for Evaluation and Implementation Resources



Acronym	Definition
Diffusion Fellow(s)	Diffusion of Excellence Fellow(s)
IFF(s)	Implementing Facility Fellow(s)
Base Camp	Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp
Diffusion Summit	Diffusion of Excellence Summit
Diffusion Academy	VHA Diffusion Academy
Marketplace	VHA Diffusion Marketplace

LIST OF KEY PLAYERS

Shown in order of presentation in the Playbook

Role	Description
Shark Tank Applicants	VA employees at all levels and across all service lines (clinical and operational) that submit practices to the VHA Shark Tank Competition.
Shark Tank Evaluator	Evaluators are individuals who are objectively evaluating the practice at any stage of the process. Our Round 1 Evaluators generally consist of field-based staff, such as system redesign coordinators and Innovations Specialists. Round 2 Evaluators are more senior leaders identified by program offices with a national purview. See the Shark Tank table on page 13 for more information on how they fit into the Shark Tank process.
Sharks	Medical Center and Network Directors that bid resources to implement a practice at their facility.
Diffusion Specialist	Serves in an advisory capacity with the following focus areas and talents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ National purview ▶ Act as enterprise coalition builders for practice sustainment ▶ Facilitate design and execution of national implementation plans Enable long-term practice sustainment by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identifying and securing long-term funding (if applicable) ▶ Collaborating with program leaders to facilitate policy design and dissemination for lasting impact
Diffusion of Excellence Fellow	Guide and support the implementation of the practice in the new sites, serving as experienced mentors during the facilitated replication period. Support includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Assisting the development of an implementation plan for replicating the Promising Practice at an Implementing Facility



Role	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Providing guidance in the event adaptations are required to ensure success at the Implementing Facility ▶ Serving as a subject matter expert on practice implementation ▶ Sharing and aiding in the development of documents and other materials to assist in the implementation process ▶ Participating in weekly meetings with your implementation team
Implementation Facility Fellow	<p>Individual(s) who have bid on a practice for their respective site via Shark Tank and are working with a Diffusion of Excellence Fellow and Diffusion Specialist to roll out the practice at their site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lead implementations at their facility and responsible for the execution of the implementation plan developed at Base Camp ▶ Participate in weekly Implementation Team meetings ▶ Provide implementation updates to stakeholder groups ▶ Become practice champions to further support or diffuse practice
Implementation Lead & Implementation Coordinator	<p>Works in partnership with Diffusion of Excellence program to lead facilitated replication and diffusion with the Diffusion of Excellence Fellow and Implementation Facility Fellow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Serve as primary facilitator for Implementation Teams to accomplish their plans successfully and provide team mentorship and advisement ▶ Facilitate weekly meetings, monitor progress, and track risks and mitigation plans ▶ Assess technical assistance needs and make recommendations for additional support/resources (as needed) ▶ Communicate updates to Diffusion of Excellence and VHA Innovation Ecosystem Leadership
Innovation Specialist (when applicable)	<p>Implementing facilities with Innovation Specialists may benefit from working with their Innovation Specialist to understand operational aspects of the facility along with other available resources at the facility level.</p>

VHA INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM ORG CHART

The Innovation Ecosystem has the privilege of being made up of four portfolios that work to foster, enhance, share, and replicate innovation that is happening within VA and with our community partners. The Innovation Ecosystem alignment is displayed in the figure below. Diffusion of Excellence is made up of various personas which are listed in the table below. These personas are made up of Diffusion of Excellence employees, Atlas contractors, and facility stakeholders.

