MILITARY SUICIDE RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

The Military Suicide Research Consortium

Manual for New Research Consortia

2017

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Table of Acronyms and Definitions

Core A	Executive Management Core
Core B	Information Management Core
Core C	Database/Statistical Management Core
Core D	Dissemination and Implementation Management Core
DoD	Department of Defense
Funded Principal Investigator (PI)	An Investigator funded by the consortium research program
HRPO	Department of Defense Human Research Protection Office
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MOMRP	Military Operational Medicine Research Program
MSRC	Military Suicide Research Consortium
PI	Principal Investigator
Site Principal Investigator (PI)	An on-site Investigator

Section I: Overview

1. Purpose of the Manual

The purpose of this manual is to facilitate the creation of a research consortium. The manual provides researchers with an introduction to developing an infrastructure and collaborative team that will provide efficient and cutting-edge research. It outlines challenges common within a large consortium, while suggesting solutions and tips. The manual serves as a resource for consortium directors, program managers, coordinators, and large research teams wanting to further develop their effectiveness in translating research into practice and creating a public image.

The manual provides suggestions from the Military Suicide Research Consortium's staff and Funded Principal Investigators (PIs) based on their experiences. We hope that large funding agencies, researchers, and their teams find value in our recommendations. In addition, the intended recipients of the research such as our service members, veterans, and community at large, will benefit from the collaborative and efficient research efforts of future consortiums.

2. Intended Audience

The intended audience for this manual includes researchers, clinician-investigators, research administrators, scientific program officers, and funding agencies. This manual is to support the initiation, planning and administration of a collaborative research consortium.

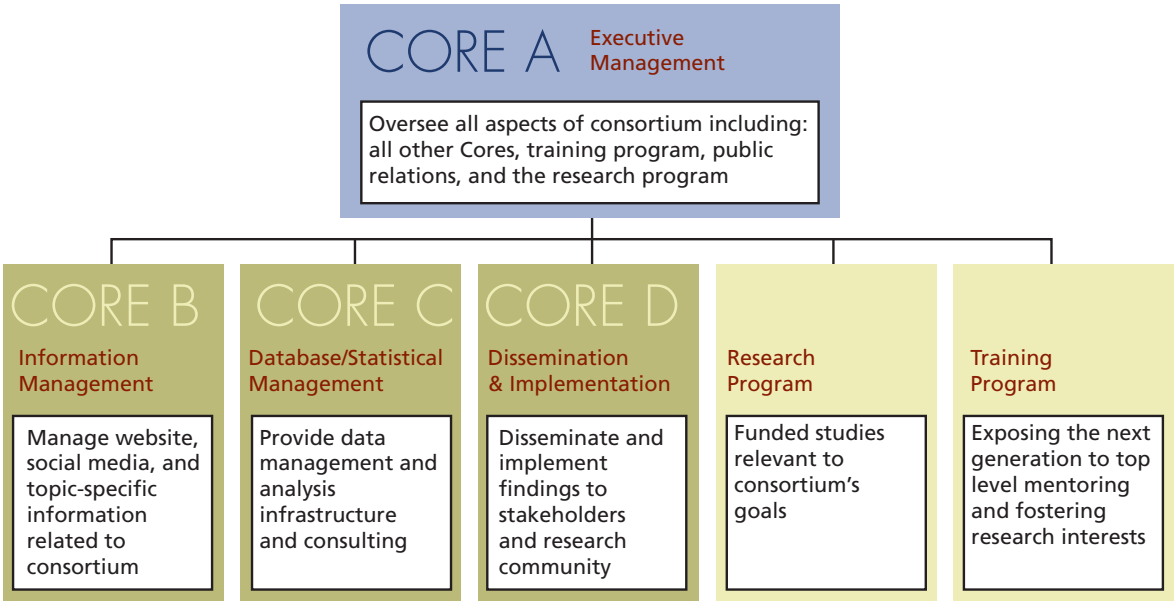
3. What is the Military Suicide Research Consortium?

The Military Suicide Research Consortium (MSRC) is part of an ongoing strategy to integrate and synchronize the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and civilian efforts to implement a multidisciplinary research approach to suicide prevention. Funded through the Defense Health Program and managed by the Military Operational Medicine Research Program (MOMRP), this innovative cutting-edge research aims to enhance the military's ability to quickly identify those at risk for suicide and provide effective evidence-based prevention and treatment strategies.

Section II: Infrastructure

1. Consortium Infrastructure: The Use of Cores

The MSRC organized its infrastructure by using a Core System. Drs. Peter Gutierrez and Thomas Joiner are Co-Directors of the MSRC, and as such Directors of the Executive Management Core, Core A. Drs. Gutierrez and Joiner instituted additional Cores and hired specific Core Directors to manage these responsibilities. Core Directors allow for management to be shared by colleagues with expertise in specific areas such as public relations, statistics, and dissemination and implementation. The organization of the MSRC Core System is described below.



Executive Management Core

The Executive Management Core (Core A) has ultimate responsibility for ensuring the Consortium's overall mission is accomplished successfully, with proper vision and oversight. This includes leadership of all aspects of the consortium, such as public relations, training, the operation of the other Cores, and the research program. Core A is also responsible for assuring that participating institutions secure all relevant regulatory agency approvals prior to initiating the protocol and obtaining research authorization for each study.

The MSRC recommends choosing Co-Directors for a large consortium who complement each other's strengths, are readily available to the sponsor and Funded PIs' questions, welcome collaboration, and share both successes and challenges. In the MSRC's experience, these qualities have directly influenced its success as a consortium.

The Executive Management Core includes the MSRC Co-Directors and support staff under each Director, such as a Project Coordinator, to assist in the management of the Research Program portfolio. In addition, the creation of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator position has been essential in the oversight and management of IRB and Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) approvals for the MSRC and Research Program.

Information Management Core

The Information Management Core (Core B) is primarily in charge of organizing and maintaining MSRC knowledge, information, and findings through a variety of methods such as social media and a web presence. This information is made available to decision makers, practitioners, and others when appropriate. The work of this Core includes a rapid response function for queries from decision makers and senior leadership at the DoD that can be answered in an efficient and timely manner. The Core's ultimate goal is to assist in the needs of all potential stakeholders and Funded Principal Investigators (PIs) of the consortium as well as create effective models to help with the dissemination of information gained through supported research. In addition, this Core creates all public relations materials, developing a brand and therefore a following for the consortium. The Information Management Core includes a Director and support staff, such as Research Assistants and a Web Master.

The most frequently used methods for relaying information are through the MSRC's website, Facebook page, and Twitter account. The MSRC website is used as the access point for information and other resources and is divided into two main areas. The first is for the general public to learn about the research being done. Additionally, it provides resources and links to related research. The second area is accessible by invitation where only consortium staff and Funded PIs share ideas, problem solve, and upload reporting forms, de-identified data and other regulatory documents. The website can be organized with different user interfaces tailored to meet the needs of the specific user groups.

Annually the MSRC Co-Directors review each Cores' success and challenges. Through this process it was determined that while the original goals of Information Management Core were inventive and potentially groundbreaking, many were ultimately outside the realm of the mission. The Information Management Core was restructured as described. Similarly through this review process, the MSRC cut its Monitoring Military Relevance Core whose mission and tasks were determined to be similar to those of the Military External Advisory Board (MEAB) and therefore, absorbed by the advisory board. The elimination of the Monitoring Military Relevance Core was an opportunity for the MSRC to recognize that its infrastructure had evolved and that adapting for the betterment of the consortium, sponsor, and stakeholders was essential to its mission and success. With large research consortia, annual reviews maintain cost-effectiveness and efficiency for the stakeholders.

Database/Statistical Management Core:

The Database/Statistical Management Core (Core C) coordinates and assures quality of data management and analyses across the consortium. This Core provides support to the projects in three broadly defined areas: data collection, data management, and data analysis. Communication among Core staff and Funded PIs provides an opportunity for successful interdisciplinary research and application of advanced statistical models to complex scientific hypotheses. It should be noted that Core C provides expert consultation to those within each funded study team responsible for data collection and management. They do not perform statistical analyses for teams, nor are they directly involved with the management of data. Instead, they provide meta-level assistance and oversight ensuring that the overall data needs of the MSRC are met.

One of the most important tools developed by the MSRC is its Common Data Elements (CDE) measure and MSRC Demographics Form. The creation of a CDE as an instrument aids Funded PIs with their research activities and provides the consortium a measure administered across all funded studies. The original MSRC CDE measure included 57 suicide-specific items, implemented across all project collection time points to the extent possible. The MSRC CDEs were updated to include an additional 33 suicide-related items, to support the use of constructs within the National Institutes of Health's PhenX Toolkit (phenxtoolkit.org). The PhenX Toolkit offers a list of standard measures that relate to complex diseases, traits, and environmental exposures for use in biomedical research, with a specialty collection specific to suicide. The MSRC is adaptive to changes occurring nationally within research to ensure that our efforts remain cutting-edge within the scientific community.

To capitalize on the CDE, the MSRC funds rigorous secondary analyses that explore rival mediators and mechanisms and will make the data available to the broader research community, with proper reviews from the Core Director and MSRC Co-Directors. When creating a measure or requiring uploads from Funded PIs, it is recommended that a Standard Operating Procedure is written and reviewed by all parties. It should include expectations for double entering data, data cleaning, timeline for uploads, and instructions for accessing de-identified data. In addition,

There are pros and cons to the creation of a new CDE measure (including consortium-specific constructs from reliable and valid instruments) versus requiring the use of several relevant full instruments. Participants and Funded PIs' time, permissions from authors, integrity of the measure, and overall goal of the CDE should be considered when determining the creation of a consortium CDE measure. A third option would be to include a list of recommended measures for particular constructs common within the consortium's funded studies' data collection.

creating a code book detailing how to enter data, including rare responses, for any new CDE measure and/or demographics allows for consistency across sites. The Database/Statistical Management Core includes a Director and support staff, such as Research Assistants.

Dissemination and Implementation Management Core

The Dissemination and Implementation Management Core (Core D) is responsible for the distribution of information and implementation of knowledge or products gained during research. A discussion on the dissemination and implementation of consortium and funded studies' results is essential to the consortium's importance, relevance, and ability to have ground-breaking influence. It also ensures that the goals and needs of the funder are met. Most academic researchers think of study deliverables in terms of scholarly publications and presentations. While these types of products are important to the dissemination of research findings, they are far from the only ways. Social media is becoming an increasingly important tool for research dissemination, for example. Additionally, specific to MSRC, the DoD expects study findings to inform clinical practice guidelines, clinician toolkits, and policy changes. Core D is essential in ensuring the broadest reach as well as providing the most appropriate deliverables for a range of audiences.

The consortium should strive to meet dissemination and implementation standards where information is reaching all stakeholders and influencing change, whether that is best practices for professionals, behavior change in individuals or the broader society, or policies. To achieve this goal, communication is necessary between all Cores and Funded PIs to the Dissemination and Implementation Management Core. Including a dissemination and implementation plan within the research proposal requirements allows for early discussions of the expectations of the consortium.

A primary purpose of this Core is to make cutting edge data and information available through white papers, screening tools, assessments, interventions, and other applicable products. A secondary purpose of this Core is to allow the consortium to better craft calls for proposals (i.e., intramural research) that will address gaps in the current knowledge base, extend existing work, or leverage in-process research.

Summary

The Cores are designed to work closely with each other as well as the Research Program to carry out the overall mission of the consortium. The Cores are interdependent to ensure the quality of the research as well as the dissemination and implementation of the research to its stakeholders, the research community, and society as a whole.

2. External Advisory Boards

The MSRC utilizes three external advisory boards to provide independent expert feedback and recommendations on its infrastructure, proposed and continuing studies, and future research priorities. The advisory boards function in three distinct capacities with the frequency with which the boards meet specific to their function.

a. Independent Scientific Peer Review Program

By subcontracting an Independent Scientific Peer Review Program (ISPRP) a consortium ensures an unbiased, rigorous scientific review in a timely manner. The ISPRP is responsible for vetting all proposals submitted to the research program. Three reviewers, from a peer review panel of 15 selected reviewers, who have no affiliation with the consortium or PI under review, are assigned to each specific submitted proposal.

The MSRC chose to partner with the American Association of Suicidology (AAS), the leader in the advancement of scientific and programmatic efforts in the field of suicidology. The National Institutes of Health scoring system was adapted for the reviews. Each proposal is evaluated in terms of scientific significance, the proposed approach (i.e., methodology), investigators and their environment, completeness and accuracy of the proposal, and the budget. After several rounds of funding, other elements of review were implemented, including:

1. *Previous research and feasibility warrant funding the project as a pilot or randomized controlled trial (RCT),*
2. *PI has contact with sites in advance and determined site's interest in participating in research. If a letter of support was provided by Command or Site Director the proposal is ranked higher, and*
3. *Feasibility in attaining recruitment numbers.*

b. Stakeholder Specific Advisory Board: Military External Advisory Board

The MSRC's stakeholders include the Department of Defense (DoD), military servicemen and women, veterans, and the scientific community. By working with the Military External Advisory Board (MEAB) under the auspices of the Director of the Military Operational Medicine Research Program, the MSRC benefits from military representation across the DoD, National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The MEAB assists in delineating research studies that are important to stakeholders. The MEAB includes two representatives from each military branch and one representative from several federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The MEAB is chaired by COL Dennis McGurk, the director of the Military Operational Medicine Research Program, ensuring seamless oversight by our sponsor. All Principal Investigators whose proposals fulfill the standards from the ISPRP process present to the MEAB and MSRC Co-Directors before a final funding decision is made. Additionally, the MEAB provides recommendations to the MSRC on proposed and ongoing research along with future research priorities during its annual meeting.

c. Senior Advisory Board

The Senior Advisory Board consists of experts in the fields of research related to a consortium and its funded studies. They provide quarterly oversight and recommendations to the Co-Directors on such items as infrastructure, specific study challenges, and future direction. Regular communication between the Co-Directors and the Senior Advisory Board allows for direction and support from other experts in the field, in this case military suicide research. The Military Suicide Research Consortium's Senior Advisory Board meets in person annually to discuss the goals of the Consortium in the upcoming years.

3. Regulatory Approvals

The creation of an umbrella protocol for the entirety of a consortium creates a relationship with the Co-Directors' Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the sponsor's Human Research Protection Office (HRPO), and is a requirement of many institutions. Hiring a consortium IRB Coordinator facilitates the communication between the Co-Directors' institutions, the Funded PIs' sites and institutions, IRBs, and HRPOs (as applicable). To maintain a clear line of responsibility, Funded PIs are responsible for developing and submitting study documents on time, notifying the IRB Coordinator of approvals, adverse events, modifications or amendments, continuing reviews, and final reports.

4. Research Program

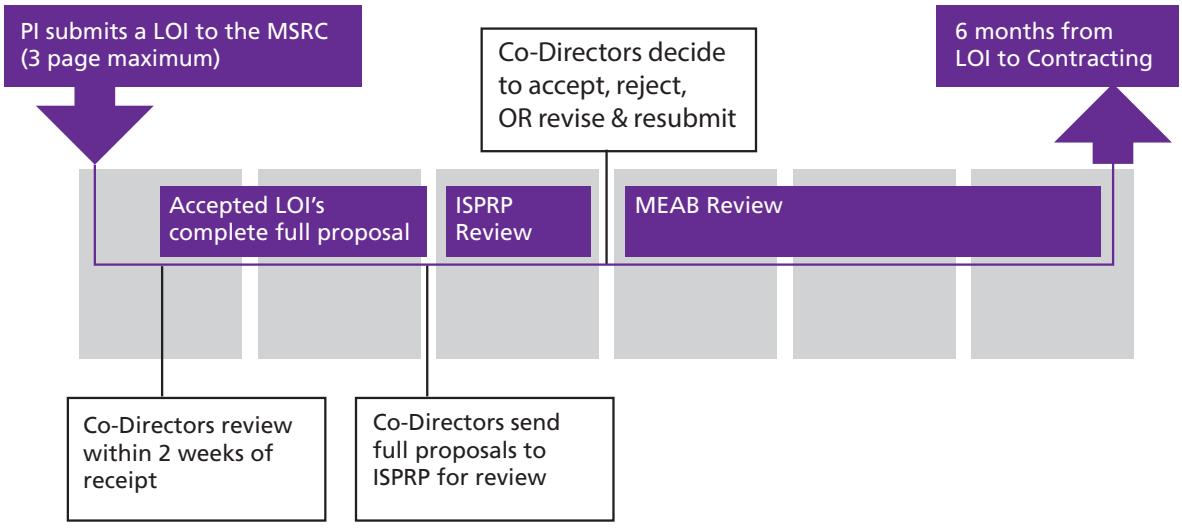
The Research Program funds cutting-edge empirical studies to further the knowledge base. Within the MSRC this includes topics such as risk assessment, treatment, and prevention, pertaining to suicidal behavior in the military.

a. Review Process

The research projects are prioritized based on information gathered by the Co-Directors and recommendations from the external advisory boards. Beyond prioritizing gaps in specific research areas, the DoD vets suicide research proposals through the Broad Agency Announcement to the MSRC. This relationship is reciprocal, requests that do not meet the criteria for MSRC funding are recommended to submit to the open call for proposals through the DoD.

Whether the researchers are approached for their expertise, made aware of funding through announcements, or relayed through related funding mechanisms, Principal Investigators (PI) submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). The decision to accept or reject a submitted LOI is made within two weeks of receipt, unless funding is unavailable in which case it is held (on an "unfunded priorities list") until such a time when funding is available.

PIs with approved LOIs are invited to submit a full proposal within six weeks. Proposals are reviewed by the ISPRP and MEAB as described in the External Advisory Boards section.



After several rounds of funding, the MSRC amended its vetting process by adding guidelines for the PIs on what to include in the LOI and proposal. The MSRC also began to provide templates for the budget, budget justification, statement of work, abstract, and biosketch. With an increase of submissions expected, this will allow the MSRC to continue its efficient review process.

b. Oversight of Funded Studies

i. Reporting Requirements

A consortium should request similar reporting guidelines for Funded PIs as required by their sponsor. For the MSRC, the requirements include a quarterly report, quarterly quad chart (for presentations), and a final report to the DoD. This allows a consortium to answer most questions the sponsor has regarding funded studies quarterly. The MSRC updated the quarterly reporting requirements to include items such as major findings, recruitment and enrollment numbers, recruitment issues, early results, presentations and publications, and leveraged funds, as those are of particular interest to the DoD. Eventually, to allow the MSRC Co-Directors to better support the Funded PIs, a section describing reportable events and problems and/or challenges within the study was included. For ease of reporting, the MSRC has PIs submit quarterly reports at same time as the Consortium's are due to the sponsor.

ii. Scheduled Meetings

With a large consortium, it is beneficial to check in with the sponsor and Funded PIs in person. The DoD hosts an annual in-progress review (IPR) meeting inviting all of the funded projects in its portfolio. The MSRC decided to implement this administrative requirement and create an IPR meeting of its own. The IPR meetings provide PIs the opportunity to learn from each others' successes and challenges as well as problem solve specific questions. After the success of the first meeting, a quarterly call was also instituted for the time between the in-person meetings.

Section III: Research Challenges

1. Overview

The following section discusses research challenges and recommendations on how to overcome related issues such as feasibility, recruitment, retention, regulatory, and multi-site communication.

2. Site Selection

When working with institutions such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and military installations, it is important for Funded PIs to review research and development policies, handbooks, and guidance documents.

a. Identifying Sites

If the Funded PI is not physically located where research occurs, consider hiring a Site Principal Investigator (PI) with in-depth institutional knowledge. If the Funded PI is on site he or she will have the knowledge needed to determine the study's feasibility. As with any new site, it is critical to establish relationships with Site PIs and/or Command/leadership during the LOI process, to learn about access to population, number of expected participants, other research at that site, and potential interest in collaboration. Other considerations for each proposed research site are feasibility of meeting with participants during operating hours, space constraints (build in costs if possible), and availability of staff. Regulations regarding participant payments need to be discussed with Site PIs and/or Command/leadership, to ensure that the proposed research is an approved process and feasible. Also be aware that Command/leadership may not have the best idea of the level of recruitment that is feasible at their site. It is therefore essential to have the support of local stakeholders working directly with the population from which recruitment will occur (e.g., behavioral health clinicians, unit commanders).

b. Study Staff

If the study requires study staff, such as research assistants, it important to consider how this may impact study timeline and site selection. The Funded PI should allot extra time to account for employee hiring and training processes. Again, involvement of individuals at the site with direct knowledge of these procedures, how long they can be expected to take, and how to navigate them is vital to the success of the study. Additionally, expect delays in regulatory approval and recruitment discussed in further detail below. Funded PIs should consider traveling to sites to meet with leadership in person to determine if a potential site meets the expectations of the study and its timeline.

Building good working relationships is essential to gaining access to sites. When working with Command at a military site, ask what research questions are important to this site and provide that information at the completion of the project. Often times Site Investigators and Command do not receive the findings or are not consulted in development of the research questions. This is an opportunity to receive great insight and support as well as build positive experiences for Command to allow future research at that military site.

3. Regulatory Processes

It is important to ensure that proposals allow adequate time for obtaining required regulatory approvals. Funded PIs should estimate a minimum of two months per Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, including any sponsor approval (i.e., DoD Human Research Protection Office; HRPO). Approvals for studies conducting research at military sites and multi-site studies often take six months or longer. However, it is not unheard of for the process to stretch out to a full year.

Encouraging Funded PIs to begin the protocol submission process as early as possible and walking them through the necessary steps is an effective way to avoid delays. It is important to have a well written protocol and consent form as well as a recruitment strategy to speed up the regulatory process and avoid confusion by the reviewers. Additionally, hiring staff prior to submission allows for a smoother transition once approval has been granted. If the study is greater than minimal risk, appointing a medical monitor or data safety monitoring board (DSMB) is typically required. These individuals should be lined up in advance. When working with multiple sites and multiple IRBs, it may be advantageous to have one IRB of record, if possible. The IRB Coordinator can help facilitate agreements between IRBs.

Study delays are often due to not allocating enough time for the regulatory review process. The MSRC instituted a process by which all approvals and reviews are filtered through the IRB Coordinator to streamline the process and ensure compliance.

In addition to regulatory approval an interagency agreement is likely required in order to conduct research at military or VA sites. The agreement may be a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Data Use Agreement (DUA), Statement of Work (SOW), or a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA). Specific requirements and templates vary across service branches and institutions. Interagency agreements can generally be submitted in parallel with the IRB protocol.

Regulatory Considerations

1. *Hire an IRB Coordinator for the consortium, if applicable*
2. *Provide clear guidelines to Funded PIs on required sponsor approvals (i.e., DoD requires HRPO approval)*
3. *Include consent and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) examples for Funded PIs that are required by consortium and/or sponsor*
4. *Expect IRB process for Funded Studies to take several months*
5. *Track the regulatory approvals required (local, sponsor, site) and continuing reviews (i.e., approval dates required on quarterly reports)*

4. Recruitment

Recruitment is a commonly cited issue for study delays and failures. One of the best ways to encourage research participation and continued retention is through compensation. This can be monetary, travel reimbursement, and/or treatment. Other important ways to increase recruitment include generating site and staff enthusiasm for the project, face-to-face recruitment meetings with potential participants, and creative advertising strategies. Also consider the popularity of the research mechanism, for example smart phone applications and web-based interventions, and how these may influence interest from potential participants.

Recruitment Advertising Ideas for Funded PIs

Many PIs advertise the same way for every study. It is important to consider specific participant attributes to meet potential participants where they are:

1. Site location
   a. *Posters and flyers*
   b. *Build relationships with other clinicians, staff, and personnel who may refer to study*
   c. *Present to potential participants (i.e., groups, inpatient units)*
2. Public advertising
   a. *Posters and flyers (i.e., bus advertising, grocery stores, gyms)*
   b. *Newspaper ads*
   c. *Presentations where population can be found (i.e., homeless shelter)*
3. Email blasts to specific groups (i.e., university alumni, student veteran groups)
4. Use social media, if permitted by IRB (i.e., Facebook, Reddit, Twitter)
5. Opt-in letters to previous research participants and/or current clients at site

Considerations for Retention Concerns

Many studies rely on several follow-ups to gather necessary data; the following are ways to support retention rates:

1. Compensation (treatment and/or pay) at each session or pre-load gift cards to act as a debit card
2. Include in Standard Operating Procedures how often and ways Research Assistants may contact participants. Be persistent, keep trying to contact participants until they either attend the follow-up appointment or specifically request to not be contacted further.
3. Participants opt-out of ways for Research Assistants to contact them. Include a list of options that the participant agrees to how the staff may track him or her for follow up sessions: additional phone numbers for participant, texting reminders, contact information for a friend and/or family, and contact places of public record such as a post office, Medicare office or Social Security Office
4. Scheduling flexibility
5. Discuss barriers (i.e., travel, relocation)
6. Staff rapport with participants. Hiring friendly staff who make participants feel welcomed and appreciated
7. Attend to potential recruitment fatigue within staff and discuss how to keep motivated and avoid recruitment burnout

Considerations for Research at Military Sites

1. Contact base Command at desired sites prior to the proposal submission
2. Check with the IRB of record during the site selection process to estimate approval times and anticipate reasons for possible delays
3. Identify two qualified Site Principal Investigators (PIs) in the event of deployment or permanent change in station (PCS)
4. Each installation has a specific in-processing procedure that can range from one to eight months. The more access the staff needs, i.e. access to government computer and patient fields in electronic medical records, the longer in-processing will take
5. Supervision of site research staff
6. Begin IRB submission process as early as possible and try to have one IRB of record, if possible
   - Policies may vary depending on the service branch and the specific site which can lead to processes taking several months (i.e. the Navy requires site command approval following IRB approval)
   - Take care in selecting an IRB of record. Whenever possible, speak with other researchers at the site to gage their experience with the IRB in terms of typical review times, clarity of policies and procedures, etc.
   - Military sites utilize a system for electronic protocol submissions. A Common Access Card and government computer is required to access the site and has proved challenging for researchers that do not have the required credentials
7. Creative ideas for recruitment
   - Military sites are often not able to provide compensation for most research studies (excluding blood draws or during personal time). Engage service members with how valued the volunteered time is and its importance to potentially their own and other service members' experiences in and out of the military
   - Discuss options with Site PIs and Command regarding active duty participating in research during tour and possible effects on responsibilities (i.e., can the service-member consider lunch outside his tour of duty to participate in research and be monetarily compensated)
   - Recruit during training (i.e., massive demobilization mission or military site annual training); with options for individuals to indicate they do not consent to the research but stay in the room to counteract possible threat of coercion
8. Consideration to Site PIs, staff, and Command compensation
   - Military PIs and Command cannot receive monetary compensation for their time
   - Ask Command if they have research questions of interest related to research that may be included in protocol
   - Answer Command's research questions first as a thank you
   - Provide Command results of the research and recommendations
   - Offer Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to staff via trainings
   - Extend consultation in area of expertise
   - Collaborate on manuscripts and other deliverables

Considerations for multi-site projects

1. When choosing sites consider Site PI availability and interest, recruitment, feasibility, other research occurring at site (is this site over-saturated with research?) and space
2. Write clear standard operating procedures
3. Organize a kick-off training and meeting for all staff (if not possible, Funded PI and Study Coordinator travel to each site for in-person training)
4. Consider having one IRB of record, if possible. This can be accomplished through an Institutional Agreement for IRB Review (IAIR)
5. Schedule ongoing communication between study coordinator, Site PIs, Funded PI, and staff

5. Training Program

During the creation of the MSRC proposal, the Co-Directors acknowledged that too few scholars and scientists are trained in research on suicidal behavior in general, and in military suicidal behavior in particular. To the benefit of the sponsor, stakeholders, and research field, the Executive Management Core oversees training programs for doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars. Instituting a training program within a consortium provides an opportunity to develop the field and individuals through funding research trainings days, offering dissertation completion awards, funding postdoctoral fellowships, and awarding competitive postdoctoral pilot funding.

6. Membership Program

The MSRC created an international group of members who are established military and suicide experts to use as a resource for the MSRC. The purpose of the membership program is for a consortium and its members to have a collaborative forum to exchange ideas and resources. The MSRC leverages the membership program to support the training program by inviting members to present at its training days and supporting members' students by offering a mechanism for dissertation funding. Members also receive incentives such as notification of funding opportunities and are included in dialogues to determine gaps in research.

Section IV: Deliverables

1. Deliverables

The scientific community has specific guidelines for their institutions as to what constitutes a deliverable. Typically this includes presentations and publications in mediums such as professional conferences and peer-reviewed journals. These are important deliverables to track and disseminate. The sponsor may have additional expectations based on their goals for the consortium and it is essential to regularly check in with the sponsor and other stakeholders as to what these deliverables are and to communicate that to the Funded PIs and the staff.

The MSRC monitors presentations, publications, white papers, media participation and requests, press releases, and the creation and dissemination of products. Products may include best clinical practice guidelines, manuals, interventions, and toolkits. The scope and importance of this effort facilitated the creation of a Dissemination and Implementation Management Core.

Current and expected deliverables is a standing item on the bi-monthly staff calls and advisory meetings. By having this discussion frequently with Funded PIs, sponsors, and public affairs officers, it allows a consortium and its funded studies to have a larger impact within the scientific community as a whole.

The MSRC also tracks leveraging opportunities as another way to measure impact. Using the four categories: Financial (grants/awards), Consultation (leveraging of expertise and institutional knowledge), MSRC Common Data Elements, and the Training Program, the MSRC is able to have a clear idea of the work being done as well as its impact in other areas.

Section V: Public Image

1. Public Image

As with any venture, public image is important for several reasons. During the life of a consortium the goals surrounding public image will change. The nature of the consortium may also dictate how to handle self-promotion.

Common or typical phases associated with a research consortium's public image would include startup, research, and results.

STARTUP	During the startup phase, it is important to project that the new organization is competent, well organized, and focused. At this point there may not be much to say beyond the consortium's goals and objectives, so expressing them clearly is essential.
RESEARCH	During research, discuss with the Funded PIs what should be public versus private. The challenge of this phase is to provide evidence of progress without compromising or over-promising on results.
RESULTS	Finally, the results phase is the opportunity to promote the consortium's research findings. It is important to remember that getting the results is not the end. Disseminating the results in various formats is critical. Scientific material might be a natural product but it is also important to create media-friendly and public-friendly versions of the key findings.

The consortium should have a brand, a logo to identify and possibly define other brand elements. The logo will provide a uniform look to PowerPoint Presentations, letterheads, and memo templates; so that whenever staff or Funded PIs present material they are representing and promoting the consortium. A few suggestions when using branded materials:

- Make sure internal staff and Funded PIs know when and how to use the brand materials for consistency of communication.
- Clearly state who can and cannot represent the consortium in a public setting.
- Outline how Funded PIs should acknowledge the consortium and all funding sources in presentations, publications, and other interventions or promotional materials.

2. Website

A website is an essential tool for any organization. It operates as the public face for external audiences, including funders, detractors, the media, and the public. Consider all possible audiences when creating the content for the site.

The site should always provide a general overview of the consortium. In addition, try to consider the best ways the website can save the consortium time. Is the area of operations contentious or controversial? The website can provide communication channels via forms so that people can voice opinions or request information, without having to handle phone traffic. Does the consortium involve numerous Funded PIs or members who are remote to each other? The website can provide secure collaboration tools.

3. Social Media

Social media can be very effective for outreach and dissemination, it can also be very time consuming. In order to save time and effort, clearly define social media goals from the start and revisit these goals as the consortium grows or changes. Important questions to ask when developing social media outlets for the consortium:

- What is the goal of using social media?
- What is the purpose of using social media?
- Who is the target audience?
- What information is to be shared or reviewed before sharing?
- In what format is the information disseminated?
- How much time should the consortium devote to social media activity?

Different social media channels are more effective for different purposes, and may or may not be of use to the consortium. Identifying one staff member or a group of staff members, to research and develop a social media plan is highly encouraged. Some minimal research into the audiences and goals provide a focus to use of social media. What phase the consortium is in, and the nature of the funded studies will also affect the use of social media.

Announcing results via social media requires thought. There are physical limitations, such as the 140 characters of Twitter, or the legal limitations of published research possibly requiring a subscription. Consider editing the message for the medium, and using tricks of the trade to draw in people. For example, "Bi-Directional Relationship between Self-Regulation and Improved Eating: Temporal Associations with Exercise, Reduced Fatigue, and Weight Loss" is perfectly suitable for journal publication but may need a much more succinct and friendly headline to get attention in most social media channels.

Similar to maintaining a website, give consideration to sustaining the social media presence. Even if a presence is limited, there is the possibility to attract negative attention, be on the receiving end of criticism, or simply miss an opportunity to answer a question if staff is not paying attention.

The consortium's niche may also have social media conventions to learn, or sub groups to try and infiltrate. It is useful to consider some of the following tactics:

- *Create some evergreen posts to maintain regular activity. (Posts not tied to specific events or dates, with content that is always relevant to the mission.)*
- *Consider a monthly calendar to create and approve content once a month and delegate the posting of it.*
- *Prepare canned/pre-written responses to expected questions.*
- *Have a clear operating protocol in the event that social media becomes bad PR for the consortium.*
- *Make sure efforts are tied to core goals.*
- *Measure activity in order to be able to judge its value (Likes, followers, shares etc.).*

Section VI: Conclusion

1. Conclusion

The value of a consortium model is to have high impact on research and stakeholders' questions in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The most important lesson of the Military Suicide Research Consortium (MSRC) is to remain thoughtful in decisions and flexible to change. The MSRC structure has changed throughout the years. Honest and regular evaluation of the infrastructure allowed for its success. This included cutting where there was a duplicated effort, such as the Monitoring Military Relevance Core whose tasks could be absorbed within the MEAB and was eventually eliminated, or adding where there were gaps. The creation of the Dissemination and Implementation Core (Core D) was determined mid-way through the MSRC after several discussions with stakeholders and advisory boards.

A research consortium is designed to facilitate information management for the funder and to maximize research efforts. By conducting research activities – ranging from information management to basic and applied research – under the auspices of a single consortium, coherence of research results is increased, dissemination of results is more rapid, and society benefits from the new knowledge generated in a more timely fashion.

Appendix A

Resources

VA Office of Research and Development Policies, Handbooks and Guidance
http://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/

HRPO Guidelines for Investigators
https://mrmc-www.army.mil

Military research participant compensation memo
https://msrc.fsu.edu/content/compensation-military-personnel-participation-research-0