

# Successfully Starting a Veteran-Directed Program: What Research Can Tell Us

In January 2020, Nina Sperber, health services researcher with the Durham VA Health Care System and Assistant Professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences at Duke University, led a member-only webinar for Applied Self-Direction, *Successfully Starting a Veteran-Directed Program: What Research Can Tell Us*. Nina presented the results of a research project that looked at the elements of successful implementation of the Veteran-Directed Care (VDC) program. This was part of a larger project to evaluate the effectiveness of VDC and involved examining those programs that started in 2017 and 2018.

## Interviews

Since VDC is a partnership between local VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) and Aging and Disability Network Agencies (ADNAs), researchers interviewed staff from both VA and ADNA sides of the partnership during the planning and implementation stage of the program start-up. They used a well-known tool for implementation research and evaluation, the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), to identify important elements that facilitated or challenged inter-organizational implementation of VDC.



## Findings

Analysis of the interviews showed **considerable agreement between the organizations regarding many aspects of the program and the implementation process** including the nature of the VDC program, the Veterans the VDC program would serve, and how the VDC program would be developed.

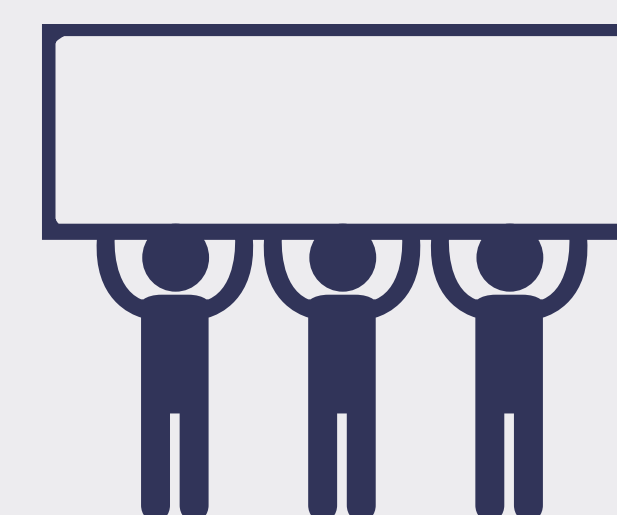
The interviews also showed some disagreement concerning aspects of their organization's readiness to implement VDC.

Building on this, the researchers analyzed what characteristics seemed to lead to successful program implementation. "Success" was defined as enrolling numbers of Veterans in the program.



They found that **developing a network and clearly communicating was essential** to a successful start-up for both organizations.

However, it was also necessary for the VAMC to have an "External Change Agent", a person or group advocating for the program, for it to be able to enter into communication with the ADNA such that a successful VDC program came about.



## Guidance

These findings offer some guidance for new ADNAs and VAMCs as to what issues to watch for on as they work together to implement new VDC programs.