

VHA INNOVATORS NETWORK

# Annual Report

2020 IN REVIEW



**Innovators  
Network**



# Welcome

Greetings,

How to even begin to recap 2020? It was the year that emphasized the importance of the pivot, not only in innovation, but in everyday life. It was the year that entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs really benefited from the “start small, fail small” mantra, because every step taken was in uncharted territory. It was the year that can be best summarized pictorially:



KC Green's 2013 webcomic *On Fire*

Unsurprisingly, however, is that the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and VHA Innovators Network (INET) were better than fine. This year, we witnessed the sheer tenacity and utter determination by frontline staff to continue to do their jobs during this unprecedented time. We worked directly with VHA employees who opted to continue to push their innovations forward during a pandemic, determined not to quit, because Veterans need a solution. We encouraged agility, which resulted in innovative pivots that kept Veterans and employees safe. This year, we worked with heroes.

Frontline employees and essential workers throughout VHA, thank you. The 2020 VHA Innovators Network Annual Report is dedicated to you. We are so honored to work alongside heroes.

Sincerely,

**Brynn Cole**  
Director of Programming  
VHA Innovators Network

**Allison Amrhein**  
Director of Operations  
VHA Innovators Network

# 2020 At a Glance

## JAN

- ▶ The Office of Emergency Management notified VHA senior leadership and began tracking a pneumonia of unknown origin with 40 cases surfacing in China



## FEB

- ▶ iNET/Veterans Experience Office (VEO) Pharmacy Human-Centered Design (HCD) project discovery phase research completed at four sites: Asheville, Biloxi, Gainesville, and Little Rock



## MAR

- ▶ World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) a worldwide pandemic
- ▶ VHA Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE) enters an memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) 3D Print Exchange to share data and coordinate on open-source medical products for the COVID-19 response

## APR

- ▶ First VHA IE/Challenge America COVID-19 Maker Challenge event takes place



## MAY

- ▶ iNET plays "Go Fish!", resulting in 17 employees, external to iNET, applying the the Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Investment Program (Spark-Seed-Spread Program)



## JUN

- ▶ Innovation Community of Practice (now known as "The Exchange") monthly video panels begin



## JUL

- ▶ FY21 Spark-Seed-Spread Program launches at iNET sites throughout the country



## AUG

- ▶ FY20 Spark-Seed-Spread Program Investees pitch for a chance to demo at the 2020 VHA Innovation Experience (iEX)



## SEP

- ▶ Ninety-two FY21 Spark-Seed-Spread Program Investees are selected from nearly 300 applications
- ▶ VHA IE receives the Gears of Government President's Award



## OCT

- ▶ iNET launches the Incubator; an opportunity for all VHA employees to learn the fundamentals of innovation
- ▶ The third annual iEX event goes virtual



## NOV

- ▶ FY21 Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Accelerator (Innovation Accelerator) officially kicks-off during virtual Bootcamp



## DEC

- ▶ FY21 Innovation Accelerator Workshops begin
- ▶ New iNET sites selected
- ▶ 2020 Annual Report published



## ANNUAL INET AWARDS

# Celebrating Homegrown Success

*This year's iNET Annual Awards were presented during the final day of the VHA Innovation Experience (iEX). Congratulations 2020 iNET Awardees!*

### INNOVATION SPECIALIST OF THE YEAR Julie Whitney



First, the Innovation Specialist of the Year award. Each iNET site is equipped with a highly trained Innovation Specialist, who facilitates each facility's local innovation program. As VA Medical Center employees backed with iNET training

and resources, Innovation Specialists are well-positioned to understand on-the-ground challenges and innovation-related competencies, which aid frontline employees in developing creative solutions. We are so proud to call the 2020 Innovation Specialist of the Year one of our own. Congratulations again, Julie Whitney, from the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System!

Julie has molded her local program into an employee engagement machine, thanks in part to her understanding of human-centered design and employee empowerment, and because of incredible local leadership support in all her innovation-related activities. She is a powerful influencer at her facility, which enables her to connect with employees on many levels and recruit them into iNET programming. She is a frontline employee who understands and listens to the problems of her peers, this gives her powerful insight into how to support employees as they travel along their innovation journey.

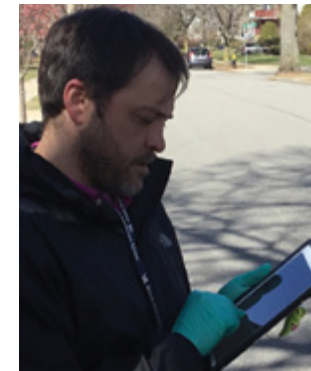
### INVESTEE OF THE YEAR Terri Ohlinger



The 2020 Investee of the Year Award went to Cincinnati VA Medical Center nurse, Terri Ohlinger. Terri's Drop Ease prototype development is the quintessential example of what iNET's mission is about; empowering employees to answer the

question "there has got to be a better way." What started with the observation of Veterans whose eyes were not responding to drops (or so she thought) and Veterans with full eye drop bottles that should have been empty led Terri to ask Veterans why and what is wrong? When they told her they could not squeeze the eye drop bottle, she was flabbergasted and began to sketch. That sketch and her passion for her patients led her to an Innovation Specialist and iNET. Now, with a collaboration with engineering students from University of Cincinnati via Quality of Life Plus and direct design input from Veterans, her Drop Ease design patent has been filed. As an FY21 Spark-Seed-Spread Investee, she will explore manufacturing and testing Drop Ease.

### TANKED AWARDEE Charles Franklin



Congratulations 2020 Tanked Awardee, Charles Franklin, from the VA Boston Healthcare System. Charles' rideshare initiative was cruising along nicely, it was originally developed to support homeless Veterans by helping them get to job interviews, find

housing opportunities, and prevent cancellations of medical appointments. Then—COVID. Due to the shutdown, many of the original uses were no longer needed. Charles and his team leveraged the Rideshare network to deliver food and other essential equipment (donated mask and gloves to families of high-risk Veterans), transport Veterans in Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to transitional housing, and move homeless Veterans out of the streets or overcrowded shelters and into hotels. Rideshare provided over 40,000 rides since March of 2020 and is still going. That is a tremendous accomplishment and return on "pivot" investment.

# VHA Innovation Ecosystem National Recognition

*This year marked two prestigious achievements for iNET and the VHA IE family.*



First, in September, VHA IE was awarded the Gears of Government President's Award. This program recognizes the contributions of individuals and teams

across the federal workforce who make a profound difference in the lives of the American people. The initial Gears of Government recognition was given to VHA IE in March, but the President's Award distinction is unique. Out of hundreds, VHA IE was one of six selected for the President's Award. Each and every individual involved in moving VHA IE forward should be honored. Thank you to our iNET site leaders, Innovation Specialists, Investees, and collaborators.

We also celebrated one of our own, Investee and Innovation Specialist alumna, Dr. Beth Ripley, receiving the highest honor in civil service—the Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal, in the Science and Environment category. The VHA 3D Printing Network developed in 2017, with support from the Spark-Seed-Spread Program, has grown from three hospitals to 30, and arguably has one of the most diverse and comprehensive hospital-based 3D printing programs in the world. It has benefited more than 1,000 Veterans, reducing surgical times by an average of more than an hour, decreasing the number of hospital visits for some services, and delivering assistive technology devices to improve Veterans' quality of life. Congratulations Dr. Ripley!

# FY20 Spark-Seed-Spread

Creating opportunities for VHA employees to turn ideas into reality is one piece of what iNET does best. iNET engages VHA employees through the three-tiered, Spark-Seed-Spread Program. The Spark-Seed-Spread Program invests funding back into VHA employees and VA Medical Centers, allowing employees to test and develop their ideas and solutions in an accelerated lifecycle. During this prototype development and pilot lifecycle, Investees receive VHA-specific innovation competency training via the VHA Innovation Accelerator. Simply put, iNET identifies deeply committed employees via the Spark-Seed-Spread Program, then trains them to design differently as they develop and implement their solution.

This year's Investees also had to navigate COVID 19 as they pushed forward with their solutions and learning. Adversity, however, can bring out the best in people and stimulate innovation. These Investees showed the grit of successful intrapreneurs and experienced first hand the importance of being agile in innovation.






## MOBILE (Mobile Optimization for Brief Integrative Learning Experiences) Simulation Cart

Cincinnati VA Medical Center  
Dr. Misoor Goueli

The MOBILE Simulation Cart is a self-contained, portable clinical skills practice station. Dr. Goueli created a 3D-printed model of the MOBILE Simulation Cart and received expert-provided quantitative and qualitative HCD feedback. The next step will be to work with designers to integrate this feedback to create an augmented reality model that can be more rapidly improved upon and widely disseminated. Dr. Goueli and team submitted this innovation to the VA Technology Transfer Office for patent review and approval.

## IMPACT OF THE FY20 INVESTMENTS TO DATE

-  **84,910** UNIQUE VETERANS
-  **5,294** UNIQUE VA EMPLOYEES
-  **4,852** UNIQUE VETERAN CAREGIVERS

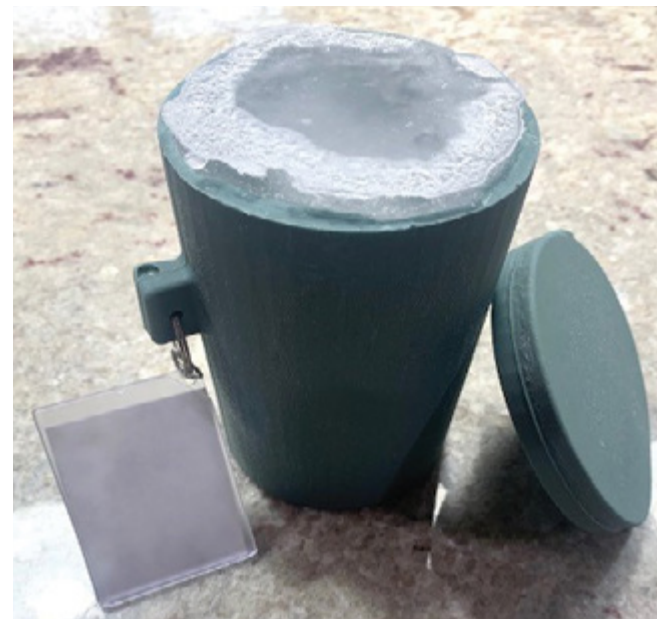


“ I really enjoyed the networking piece, and also learning about the innovation framework. This was something totally unique to what I had ever previously been exposed to.”  
 – Anonymous FY20 Investee



**Complementary Therapies in Perioperative Setting to Reduce Anxiety**  
 Albany Stratton VA Medical Center  
 Nicholee Froese

The initial intent for this program was to provide complementary therapies such as aromatherapy, weighted blankets, and music in the perioperative setting for surgical patients. Due to a sudden and drastic pandemic-induced decrease in surgical cases, the team pivoted to provide complementary therapies to staff such as Aromatabs and AromaMasks to help relieve pandemic-heightened anxiety. In the end, 600+ AromaMasks were distributed to staff, with overwhelming positive feedback about the quality construction and positive benefits of aromatherapy.



**Prosthetic Sock Management Tool**  
 Minneapolis VA Healthcare System  
 Billie Slater


The Prosthetic Sock Management Tool (PSMT) is an instructional system for clinicians to use with their patients who have lower limb amputations and use prosthetic socks with their prostheses. This two-part system is used to instruct patients on the procedures for donning and doffing the correct number of sock ply to accommodate shifts in residual limb volume and to create positive habits regarding comfort and fit checks, as well as the conduct of proper sock hygiene. Following support from Spark-Seed-Spread, this novel tool has moved from an initial concept to a product with a patent docketed for review. A prototype is currently being professionally manufactured.

**Mobile Ops**  
 VA Puget Sound Healthcare System  
 Eli Kaufman

The Mobile Orthotic and Prosthetic Services (Mobile OPS) pilot program at VA Puget Sound in Seattle, WA has been running since December 2018. Mobile OPS leverages emerging technologies with the skills and knowledge of clinicians equipped to meet each patient at a location that is safe and convenient. The program has resulted in high levels of patient satisfaction, reductions in patient travel burden, and significant cost avoidance when compared to the cost of community care. Mobile OPS has been developed as a Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN)-based model which can be modified for implementation throughout the enterprise.

**Freeze the Keys!**  
 Central Arkansas VA Healthcare System  
 Sabah Ocasio

Freeze the Keys! is an additional layer of violence prevention by simply freezing gun safety lock keys in a specially engineered prototype, creating space between an impulsive thought and a permanent tragedy. Freeze the Keys! puts in place a tangible, implementable solution that effectively deters suicide, injury, and accidents.



Go Fish! is an opportunity for employees at non-iNET sites to participate in the Spark-Seed-Spread Program. In its second year, the FY21 Go Fish! competition was riddled with COVID-19 restrictions in communicating the opportunity broadly. Still, 30+ individuals applied to be part of Go Fish! in FY21. Seven of these applicants were matched with iNET sponsors and selected as FY21 Spark-Seed-Spread Investees.

“

During a time like this, many people think of programs like innovation as extra work. But iNET participants understand that it's a key part of our work as we strive to ensure Veterans receive the best care possible.”

—Brynn Cole  
Director of Programming  
VHA Innovators Network



## INET PROGRAMMING:

# Finding Our Rhythm

*In the chaos of 2020, iNET programming really found its rhythm. This was the year we cemented a repeatable cadence and structure for teaching the fundamentals of innovation to the masses. Also critical to 2020 was to honor each phase of iNET— continuing our support for employee innovators and nurturing their pandemic-facing solutions. More than ever, we celebrated the resolve and achievements of those who stood up to the unprecedented challenges brought on by 2020.*

## Fundamentals

*While at times messy, there are many methods and frameworks that are leveraged to do this work. The following are the fundamentals of what we teach, preach, and practice ourselves:*

### The Three-Box Solution



The strategies and mindsets needed to create the future are vastly different than—or even at odds with—those needed to respond to the present. The Three-Box Solution teaches us how to balance it all to ensure that we keep an eye towards the future and ensure that our organization does not become obsolete.

### Human-Centered Design (HCD)



Simply put, HCD seeks to solve the problems humans experience by designing the solutions around them. Steeped in empathy, HCD is a creative, iterative approach to problem-solving that involves true human perspective at every step of the way.

### Lean Startup



Lean startup teaches us to favor customer feedback over lengthy planning processes, maintain a spirit of agility, embrace rapid prototyping, and know when to pivot, persevere, or kill an idea. With this approach, ideas are tested continuously and are able to adjust and adapt to true customer needs—before becoming too mature and potentially less agile.

### Pitching and Storytelling



Two-hour presentations have their place in the world, but generally it is not within iNET! Leaning into story evokes an emotional response while a well-structured pitch can have leaders and investors seeing value within minutes.

## Phases

*iNET Programming has a cadence! While we recognize and support innovation at all times of the year, this phased approach ensures that the pipeline is continuously maintained.*

### Ignite



Fire up the creativity and passion of the VA workforce. Lean into problem framing, ideation, and posing solutions based on HCD.

### Incubate



Nurture people and ideas that have promise. Open up access to iNET frameworks so anyone, anywhere, can participate.

### Accelerate



Intriguing ideas are resourced by Spark-Seed-Spread Program and undergo a rapid learning-by-doing process unlike any other available within VA.

### Celebrate



It is important to reflect on the achievements (including failing smartly) of the past year with iEX, local site celebrations, and annual iNET Awards.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

## Collaboration With Veterans Experience Office

*At this time last year, iNET and VEO first teamed up to solve a major pain point for Veterans using human-centered design (HCD). To all involved, this was more than a project; it was a partnership that brought together the unique strengths and resources available within each of our offices to tackle a significant design challenge: The low rate of Veteran satisfaction in response to "I knew when to expect my medication(s)" from the VEO Outpatient VSignals Survey. Once we had our multi-phase, multi-site project plan in place, we got right to work. And, dear me, that turned out to be a very good thing as there was a massive surprise waiting for all of us just a few months away.*



**Brynn Cole**  
iNET Director of  
Programming

VEO has been leveraging HCD across VA for more than five years, tackling large-scale, enterprise-wide problems and has extensive experience mapping customer journeys, gathering insights, and developing innovative products and solutions. They are also teaching while they are doing, increasing capacity among VA staff to apply HCD to improve Veteran experience through a multitude of initiatives and artifacts, such as the [HCD Guides](#), developed in partnership with the Lab@OPM.

In tandem, iNET has been embedding HCD at the frontline through the Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Accelerator and HCD workshops, trainings, and projects for more than five years, helping to both drive HCD capacity and to create an agile, creative workforce. The focus of iNET HCD work has been historically centered on employee-driven frontline innovation. While we maintain this focus, the opportunity to partner with VEO to assist in a national-level project was (and continues to be!) exciting to our team. VEO brought the data and an HCD advisor and iNET supplied a team of innovators and participating sites and a dream team was born.

HCD is an agile, iterative approach to problem solving that is steeped in empathy. The HCD approach requires viewing and experiencing problems and opportunities through the lens of the people who experience them, rather than an initial focus on the system itself. The Discovery phase is crucial to the HCD process and, due to our aggressive timeline, we were able to complete this portion of the iNET/VEO Pharmacy Project before the world flipped upside down due to COVID. Thanks to our multi-site relationships, we were able to conduct discovery research with Veterans and VA staff in Biloxi, MS; Little Rock, AR; Gainesville, FL; and Asheville, NC. Veterans shared with us the intricacies of their medications, walked us through how they do (or do not) access the MyHealthVet platform, and truly opened up to our questions and curiosity. Staff walked us through the various processes and systems they use and graciously shared their thoughts and ideas. Rounding out our learning

with Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) personnel was crucial to understanding the problem from a variety of perspectives.

The incredible amount of qualitative data, including quotes, stories, themes, and insights gathered during the Discovery phase is the fodder for crafting potential solutions to test during the Design phase. It was during this time in the project timeline that COVID hit—and hit hard—for us all. We continued to work on the project by leveraging virtual tools, and the team developed a multitude of potential concepts to test. While the original plan was to develop and test prototypes with the frontline teams cultivated by our Innovation Specialists at each of the project sites, the reality of what our sites were facing did not allow for that. Ever embracing the pivot (practice what you preach, amirite?), our team found another way: some of the concepts that emerged from this project will be tested through this year's Spark-Seed-Spread Program.

iNET has been grateful for this inaugural partnership with VEO, especially through this remarkably trying year. Despite numerous challenges, we persevered. Despite cultural differences and a few constraints, we moved the project forward. In many ways, the massive challenge that is COVID has brought our organizations closer together—in ways that we could not have predicted, and ways that we are still exploring and experiencing. This partnership will continue as we are united in our mutual desire to spread and scale the use of HCD, foster more customer-centered mindsets, and galvanize employees' innovative spirit to solve for the problems that matter most to our customers.

This horrific pandemic has highlighted and underscored so much of what we have vocalized throughout our years together as a Network: the need for partnership, agility, friendship, flexibility, design, and true empathy for the experiences of our fellow humans. We have found all of this within our work with VEO and are looking forward to many more years of partnership and friendship with the incredible folks in that office...and seeing if we cannot move the needle on the Pharmacy Project via the Spark-Seed-Spread Program, of course. ;)

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brynn Cole".

*PS – These are the incredible folks who made this whole thing happen: VEO: Lori Baca, Paula Stokes, Erin Siminerio. iNET: Anne Bailey (Asheville), Shannon Verch (Little Rock), Julie Whitney (Gainesville), Liz Williams (Biloxi), Allison Amrhein (you know who she is). Our cross-organizational team is also grateful for the support from each site's leadership team, the Veterans and staff who met with us, the VHA IE, and all other supporting VA Central Office program offices. It takes a village, my friends, and we are grateful for ours!*



# New Opportunities

## Introducing the Incubator

iNET is dedicated to weaving innovation into the fabric of VA, making us a more agile and creative workforce. iNET's diverse experiences and unique employee perspective empowers and enables this change, and in the fall of 2020, we invited all VA employees to join our innovation army via the Incubator. The Incubator was a six-week virtual experience, (one hour per week) for any VA employees who were interested in early-stage approaches to innovation. Throughout the series, participants learned about approaches such as HCD, lean startup methodology, prototyping, the Three-Box Solution and more. Each unique session was led by one of iNET's incredible Innovation Specialists and



featured highlights and stories from VA innovators, our external partners, and a wide variety of leaders and supporters. The combination of storytelling, demos, and exercises were paired with tools and templates to assist participants in sparking, refining, and getting to work on their own ideas to tackle the problems that plague us.



**These sessions have helped me to understand what innovation is. It now gives me the ability to dream big, to become creative and develop what has not been implemented before as oppose to fixing a process."**

*-Incubator Attendee*

This year iNET also introduced a new monthly video call for all VA employees to join and become inspired by the incredible stories of innovation happening inside and outside of VA. Each month features a new panel of internal and external innovators coalescing around a specific theme; thus far we have covered Makers, Women of Innovation, Telecare + Connectedness, and even Friennovation. This monthly gathering is unique (no slide decks!), and we are growing and learning, responding to the needs of our community. While it has previously been known as the rather stuffy "Innovation Community of Practice," we are excited to announce that we are rebranding to be more inclusive of all VHA IE portfolios. If you would like



to receive an invite to join us for what will now be known as (drumroll, please) the Exchange (every third Thursday of each month, 3:00-4:00 pm ET) please send a message to [VAInnovation@atlasresearch.us](mailto:VAInnovation@atlasresearch.us).

# Introducing the Greenhouse

*iNET's mission is to empower employees to become intrapreneurs; identify frontline challenges and design the solutions to solve them, utilizing HCD and lean principles.*

HCD and lean both highlight the importance of prototyping, testing, redesigning, and repeat until the innovation is ready for implementation and replication. VA, via iNET, is positioned perfectly to execute this mission; we are the largest health care system in the country, ripe with frontline health care employee innovators eager to solve challenges. iNET exists to support employee innovators with resources (start-up funding and an education in innovation-related principles) and onsite support (Innovation Specialists) to help them solve problems and operationalize innovation. We also have nine million Veterans who are eager to engage employee innovators by co-designing these solutions.

The idea that frontline employees should play a major role in designing and developing the future of health care via these same principles is catching-on externally throughout the health care innovation community as well. What the health care innovation

community lacks, however, is a pool of engaged and equipped frontline health care professionals and millions of enthusiastic end users.

Because iNET and the VHA Innovation Ecosystem believe that through collaboration, we can deliver more, together; iNET created the Greenhouse Initiative (Greenhouse). The Greenhouse is an opportunity for the health care innovation community to collaborate with iNET sites throughout the country to:

- 1 Conduct end user discovery and ideation**
- 2 Share early-stage product designs for end-user feedback**
- 3 Conduct small-scale product feasibility testing with appropriate end users and collect feedback**
- 4 Provide an opportunity for funding support for product prototype development**

The benefit to the external health care innovation community is apparent, for VA, the Greenhouse provides the opportunity for employees at iNET sites to practice HCD theory; to learn by doing. Most importantly, the Greenhouse puts the voice of the Veteran and VA into the innovative products of the future, some of which will inevitably be used within VA someday. This collaboration allows VA to design the products of the future with little investment or risk.



# iEX

## DELIVERING MORE TOGETHER.

### VHA INNOVATION EXPERIENCE

“I was so proud of our iNET team. I know the virtual environment made a lot of folks even more nervous to share their story, but they were all amazing and inspiring, as usual.”

– Allison Amrhein  
iNET Director of Operations

# iNET AT THE 2020 VHA Innovation Experience (iEX)

In October, iEX celebrated another year of innovation at VA. This year however, iEX was held virtually. Nearly 2,000 participants registered for the event, with a steady viewership online at over 1,000 per day. As always, employee innovators represented iNET during iEX Demos and the VHA Shark Tank Competition.

## SPOTLIGHT ON... iEX Demos

**Dr. Tiffany Lange**  
Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center  
**Expanding PRIDE: Trans-Affirmative Narrative Exposure Therapy (TA-NET)** 🌱

“The supportive encouragement of the Innovation Network has remained strong this year! Even with the adjustments to a virtual world, having the connection to iNET has kept me motivated to keep my project going. The VA continues to set the standard for innovation and affirmative care, I’m proud to be a part of that process!”

**Barry Peterson**  
VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System  
**Video Virtual Reality Improves PPE Usage and Employee Engagement** 🌱

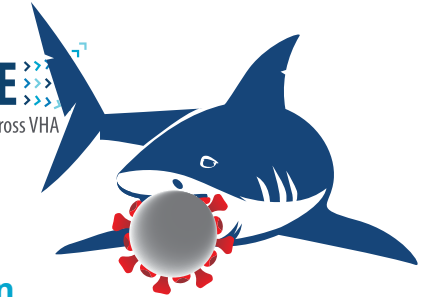
**Lifelike and Structured Role-Playing in State-of-the-Art Virtual Reality** ✨

“A heightened appreciation for the goodness inherent in VHA is the unexpected benefit I most treasure from presenting at iEX; audience members told me how iEX enhanced their view of VHA and VA, and that enhanced view affirmed the pride I take in working at VA. Additionally, my personal experience of collective rehearsing, practicing, and otherwise preparing, strengthened my connections with and respect for co-presenters and Innovation Specialists, both nationally and locally. Finally, the experience honed my ability to articulate our team’s innovation and to advocate for those innovators who may not yet see themselves as innovators.”



## SPOTLIGHT ON... iNET and the VHA Shark Tank Competition

Diffusion of **EXCELLENCE** >>>>  
Diffusing Promising Practices Across VHA



**Amanda Gillion**  
Memphis VA Medical Center  
**Beta Lactam Allergy Assessments: Saving Lives one Assessment at a Time**

“iEX is always a great chance to see what other people are doing in the VA system. I am constantly impressed by how innovative VA employees are.”

**Cody Giovannetti**  
Memphis VA Medical Center  
**Telelactation Program**

“Unfortunately, lactation services are not routinely offered through the VA. In fact, it is estimated that 80-85% of VAMCs are not providing lactation services. In 2016, I developed a Telehealth Lactation Program which provides prenatal and postnatal lactation support and has reached more than 250 Veterans thus far. To date, the total cost savings from the clinic has been \$450,000 and we have spread these services to eight VAMCs. Since FY16, results from this clinic indicate that Memphis has a 90% initiation rate for breastfeeding. iNET has created an opportunity for me to turn an idea into reality. They believe that frontline employees can design and develop innovative solutions for Veterans and VHA employees better than anyone. Presenting at iEX this year was a great honor. I couldn’t have been more impressed by the way it turned out during these unprecedented times.”

# 2020 Network by the Numbers



1

GEARS OF GOVERNMENT PRESIDENT'S AWARD

5

NEW INNOVATION SPECIALISTS



7

FY21 GO FISH! INVESTMENTS

18

iEX DEMO PRESENTERS

iEX



1

ALUMNI SAMUEL J. HEYMAN AWARD RECIPIENT



Spark-Seed-Spread INNOVATION INVESTMENT PROGRAM



277 FY21 APPLICATIONS



144 FY21 REVIEWERS



6 INCUBATOR WEBINARS

▶ 253 INCUBATOR REGISTRANTS



104 FY20 INVESTMENTS

▶ 84,910 VETERANS IMPACTED

▶ 5,294 VA EMPLOYEES IMPACTED



92 FY21 INVESTMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

## Look Ahead to 2021

*Just because the clock strikes midnight on January 1, 2021, does not mean that we have seen the end of COVID-19. As we look ahead to 2021, the pandemic will continue to impact everything we do. It will not, however, stop us from pushing forward towards our mission.*



Allison Amrhein  
iNET Director of Operations

We have an incredible new group of Spark-Seed-Spread Investees, including a record number of Go Fish! participants, inspired to design and develop their solutions, because Veterans, Caregivers, and fellow employees need these solutions now more than ever. The fact that these Investees, in the midst of a pandemic, still want to take the time to learn innovation theory and put it into action to create the best solution, rather than perhaps the quickest or easiest, demonstrates the power and passion frontline employees have to care for Veterans.

As we continue to pivot our programming and operations, Brynn and I are committed to making this year even more meaningful and impactful for the new cohort of Investees and the entire VHA. We are designing more opportunities for all employees to participate in iNET activities, programming, and network with us. Through the Incubator, any curiously minded VHA employee now can learn the fundamentals of iNET's innovation curriculum. Go Fish! allows any VHA employee with an idea for a potential innovative solution to be supported with both financial and human capital via the Spark-Seed-Spread Program. The Greenhouse not only allows employees throughout iNET sites to translate HCD theory into practice, but enables VA and Veterans to have a stake in designing the health care innovations of tomorrow.

In January, we will also welcome new sites formally to iNET. Due to rumblings of interest, we thought we would see what possible and open applications to join our team. We are looking forward to adding enthusiastic new members in the next year. I look forward to watching frontline employees try, feel empowered to speak their minds and create something to help others, and fail. Yes, I look forward to their failure. iNET is a place to fail and that is special. In the largest integrated health care system in the United States of America, we reward "failure" without consequence. What a radical shift. Yes, this is of course possible because of the very small investments we make and the fact that clinical care is undisturbed by these "failures," but imagine the raw power of 300K uniquely qualified individuals, given the tools and permission to make VHA better- without consequence. What an unbelievable opportunity for Veterans, Caregivers, and fellow VA employees. What a tremendous opportunity for VA; to be a place where visionaries and dreamers want to work.

It is my sincerest wish that everyone stays safe and healthy as we navigate into a new year, full of new hopes and possibilities. Thank you all for your continued support of innovation at VHA.

# Sites and Specialists

**VISN 1: VA NEW ENGLAND HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

**VA Boston Healthcare System:**

- ▶ [samantha.sissel@va.gov](mailto:samantha.sissel@va.gov)

**VISN 2: NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY HEALTHCARE NETWORK**

**Albany Stratton VA Medical Center:**

- ▶ [patricia.kidder@va.gov](mailto:patricia.kidder@va.gov)

**VISN 4: VA HEALTHCARE – VISN 4**

**Lebanon VA Medical Center:**

- ▶ [stephanie.grimm@va.gov](mailto:stephanie.grimm@va.gov)

**VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System:**

- ▶ [katie.braun@va.gov](mailto:katie.braun@va.gov)

**VISN 5: VA CAPITOL HEALTHCARE NETWORK**

**Martinsburg VA Medical Center:**

- ▶ [ann.mullenix@va.gov](mailto:ann.mullenix@va.gov)

**VISN 6: VA MID-ATLANTIC HEALTHCARE NETWORK**

**Charles George VA Medical Center:**

- ▶ [anne.bailey2@va.gov](mailto:anne.bailey2@va.gov)

**Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center:**

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**VISN 7: VA SOUTHEAST NETWORK**

**Atlanta VA Medical Center:**

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**Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center:**

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**VISN 8: VA SUNSHINE HEALTHCARE NETWORK**

**North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System:**

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**VISN 9: VA MIDSOUTH HEALTHCARE NETWORK**

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**Memphis VA Medical Center:**

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**VISN 10: VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

**Central Ohio VA Healthcare System:**

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**Chillicothe VA Medical Center:**

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**Cincinnati VA Medical Center:**

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**VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System:**

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**VISN 12: VA GREAT LAKES HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

**Clement J. Zablocki (Milwaukee)**

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**Tomah VA Medical Center:**

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**VISN 15: VA HEARTLAND NETWORK**

**VA St. Louis Healthcare System:**

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**VISN 16: SOUTH CENTRAL VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

**Central Arkansas VA Healthcare System:**

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**Gulf Coast Veterans Healthcare System:**

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**VISN 19: ROCKY MOUNTAIN NETWORK**

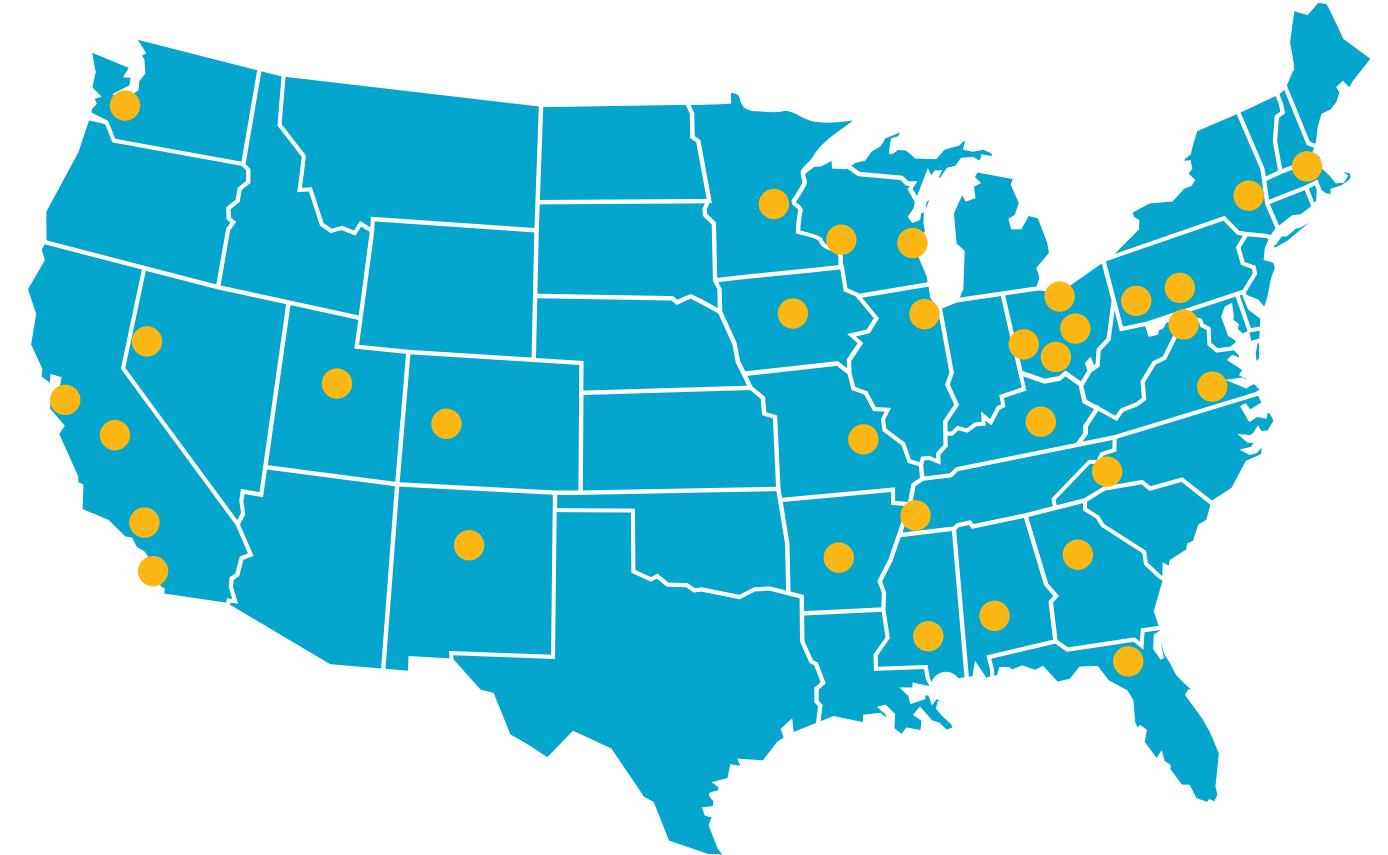
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**VA Salt Lake City Healthcare System:**

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**VISN 20: NORTHWEST NETWORK**

**VA Puget Sound Healthcare System:**

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**VISN 21: SIERRA PACIFIC NETWORK**

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**VA San Diego Healthcare System:**

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**VISN 23: MIDWEST HEALTHCARE NETWORK**

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