

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement Funding Opportunity

AGENCY: Department of Veterans Affairs

ACTION: Notice of Funding Opportunity

SUMMARY: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing the availability of funds for Cooperative Agreements (CA) establishing Suicide Mortality Review (SMR) processes and SMR committees (SMRC). This Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) contains information concerning SMR-CA, the application process, and the amount of funding available. Awards made for SMR-CA are anticipated to be funded by September 30, 2024. This is anticipated to be a 1-year award with an optional 1-year extension possible. This NOFO supports states, territories, and Tribal entities in establishing, coordinating, and managing SMRCs to identify and characterize suicide deaths and support the capacity to develop and implement data-informed strategies to prevent suicide, including suicide among Veterans. SMR-CA aims to establish and increase the capacity of states, territories, and Tribes to collect high-quality uniform suicide death data, expand suicide death reviews, and ultimately translate data into suicide prevention actions at community, state, territorial, Tribal, and national levels. States, territories, and Tribes may identify key counties, cities, municipalities, or other political subdivisions in their jurisdictions with whom they wish to coordinate for local SMRC development and implementation.

DATES: Applications for the Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreements must be received by 4:59 p.m. Eastern Time on July 24, 2024. In the interest of fairness to all

competing applicants, this deadline is firm as to date and hour, and VA will treat any application received after the deadline as ineligible for consideration. Applicants should consider this and submit their materials early to avoid any risk of loss of eligibility brought about by unanticipated delays, computer service outages, or other submission-related problems.

APPLICATIONS: Application packages can be downloaded from the SMR website at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/smr. Questions should be referred to the VA SMR Team at VASuicideMortalityReviewTeam@va.gov.

Submission of Application Package: Applicants must submit applications electronically following instructions found at https://hmlsgrants-va.mod.udpaas.com/s_Login.jsp. Information regarding how to obtain technical assistance with the preparation of the cooperative agreement application is available on the SMR website at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/smr.

Applications may not be mailed, hand carried, or sent by facsimile. Applications must be received by 4:59 p.m. Eastern Time on the application deadline date. Applications must arrive as a complete package. Materials arriving separately will not be included in the application package for consideration and may result in the application being rejected.

For Further Information Contact: Ms. Cicely Burrows-McElwain LCSW-C, Director of Community Based Interventions for Suicide Prevention Technical Assistance Resource Center, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention VASuicideMortalityReviewTeam@va.gov or 202-502-0002.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Funding Opportunity Title: Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: VA-SMR-SP-FY2024

Assistance Listing Number: 64.057

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. *Assistance Listing Number:* 64.057 Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement.

B. *Purpose:* This NOFO, focused specifically on SMR, will support a national approach to collecting and sharing data on suicide deaths to facilitate an understanding of the risk factors of suicide, determine what interventions at individual, provider, facility, system, and community levels will have the most impact and implement initiatives in the right places for families and communities who need them most. SMRs are systematic and comprehensive reviews of deaths that are intended to develop recommended strategies to prevent future deaths. SMRs are conducted by SMRCs, which access multiple sources of clinical and non-clinical information that provide a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding a death. SMRCs then develop recommendations for action to prevent similar deaths in the future. SMRCs work in conjunction with a location's death investigation system, which typically consists of a coroner, a medical examiner system, or both. Examples of SMRC models may include: a centralized death investigation system which consists of a medical examiner

office that consolidates cases from across the state or territory or a decentralized system which consists of county, parish, or district offices that consolidate cases from across those jurisdictions. A hybrid system typically consists of local cases being summarized and reported up to a state system. SMR-CA will establish and increase the capacity of states, territories, and Tribes to collect high-quality uniform suicide death data, expand suicide death reviews, and ultimately translate data into suicide prevention actions at community, state, Tribal, and national levels.

1. These CAs are part of a broader effort to advance SMR Programs within the *Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Program* (Governor's Challenge; <https://www.samhsa.gov/smvf-ta-center/mayors-governors-challenges>). The Governor's Challenge Program is a collaboration between VA and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) focused on bringing state, territory, and Tribal policy makers and leaders together to develop and implement a comprehensive suicide prevention plan.

C. *Authority:* Funding applied for under this NOFO is authorized by section 303 of Division V of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, P.L. 117-328, (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2617/text>) which states that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into agreements with states, territories, and American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes for developing and

implementing Veteran suicide prevention proposals through the Governor's Challenge Program.

D. *Approach:* The population focus for this funding opportunity is all people at risk of suicide in a given jurisdiction, with prioritization given to applicants focusing on Veterans. Veterans will benefit directly from the implementation of suicide prevention strategies based on this NOFO's support of two focus areas. Under Focus Area 1, SMR-CA recipients will prioritize planning and establishing SMRCs. Focus Area 1 recipients must conduct community outreach to educate key community organizations about the importance of SMRCs to secure participation in the work and must also provide SMRC training for its members. Recipients under Focus Area 2, which will include entities with existing SMRCs, will identify suicide deaths, (including deaths of Veterans), conduct vital records quality assurance checks, enter data into a standard case reporting system, conduct multidisciplinary reviews by committees, and enter committee findings and recommendations into the agreed upon case reporting system. The appropriate case reporting system will be determined between VA and the recipients. Focus Area 2 recipients must analyze data and share findings to inform prevention strategies that reduce suicide deaths at the local, state, Tribal, and national levels. Focus Areas 1 and 2 recipients must engage in community education and awareness around lethal means safety (LMS). Table 1 on page 6 and Table 2 on page 9 outline general logic models for each focus area to help illustrate the approach.

Table 1. Focus Area 1: SMRC Planning and Establishment Logic Model: (Italics indicate expected period of performance outcomes).¹

Strategies and Activities	Short-Term Outcomes (3-6 months)	Intermediate Outcomes (6-12 months)	Long-Term Outcomes (12+ months)
Actions that establish and develop relationships with local death investigation system.	Identify and establish relationships with local death investigation system including key organizations.	<i>Establish SMRC and committee structure.</i>	Convene SMRC to conduct reviews.
Actions that work to identify populations of focus for suicide mortality reviews (NOTE: Veterans must be included as a population of focus).	Determine and prioritize populations of focus for suicide mortality reviews.	<i>Train SMRC members on suicide mortality reviews.</i>	<i>By the end of the award period, conduct at least one community outreach and one training event highlighting the importance of LMS.</i>
Actions that explore existing suicide or death review efforts in the geographic area of focus (i.e., conducting landscape analyses).	Develop a comprehensive understanding of existing suicide or death review efforts within the geographic area of focus.	<i>Establish goals for SMRC.</i>	
Actions that lead to establishing an SMRC.	Develop a culturally appropriate community outreach and training plan for LMS education.	<i>Develop and document processes, procedures, and policies for SMRC.</i>	
Actions that lead to community education around the importance of LMS.		<i>Develop or identify culturally appropriate LMS tools and resources to be used for community outreach and training efforts.</i>	

¹ Kohlbeck, S. A., Schramm, A. T., Monroe, T., Kant, J., McLeod, E., deRoon-Cassini, T. A., & Hargarten, S. W. (2024). Implementation of a countywide adult suicide review commission: Development, lessons learned, and recommendations. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*.

1. **Outcomes:** Recipients are required to achieve the following outcomes during the period of performance:

 - a) Establish a SMRC and committee structure.
 - b) Train SMRC members on SMRs.
 - c) Establish additional goals for SMRC where applicable.
 - d) Develop and document processes, procedures, and policies for SMRC.
 - e) Develop or identify culturally appropriate LMS tools and resources to be used for community outreach and training efforts.
 - f) By the end of the award period, conduct at least one community outreach and one training event highlighting the importance of LMS.
2. **Strategies and Activities:** Recipients are required to conduct the following activities in support of the outlined strategies and identify and address barriers and challenges to implementing these activities.

 - a) Actions that establish and develop relationships with local death investigation system; actions that work to identify populations of focus for SMRs (NOTE: Veterans must be included as a population of focus); actions that explore existing suicide or death review efforts in the geographic area of focus.
 - b) Recipients will demonstrate that they have conducted appropriate landscape analyses to better understand existing

needs, processes, and infrastructure in place to support advancement of the above.

- c) Actions that lead to establishing an SMRC.
- d) Recipients will demonstrate engagement with and education of relevant organizations, as identified through landscape analyses, to emphasize the importance and impact of SMRs with the goal of gaining buy-in and collaboration from key organizations to establish SMRCs.
- e) Actions that lead to community education around the importance of LMS.
- f) Recipients will demonstrate a written plan for developing culturally appropriate LMS trainings and materials as well as a community outreach and training plan.

Table 2. Focus Area 2: SMRC Implementation and Expansion Logic Model

(*Italics indicate period of performance expected outcomes*).²

Strategies and Activities	Short-Term Outcomes (3-6 months)	Intermediate Outcomes (6-12 months)	Long-Term Outcomes (12+ months)
Actions that improve availability, quality, and timeliness of suicide data, and specifically Veteran suicide data.	<i>Increase timeliness, accuracy, and standardization of information available about suicide deaths.</i>	<i>Within 180 days of award, conduct at least one Veteran specific SMR.</i>	Reduction in suicide deaths and attempts. Reduction in suicidal ideation.
Actions that improve multidisciplinary, population-level review of suicide deaths and documentation of recommendations for prevention.	<i>Increase availability of recommendations of the SMRCs among communities, clinicians, and policymakers.</i>	<i>Increase adoption of the SMRC recommendations and other best practices related to suicide prevention, including LMS and security practices.</i>	
Actions that improve dissemination of, access to, and use of quality data to drive opportunities for suicide prevention interventions.	<i>Increase networking and cooperation between SMRCs and communities to communicate information from data on suicide deaths.</i>	<i>Increase coordination of care across clinical and non-clinical providers, systems, and settings.</i>	
Actions that lead to community education around the importance of LMS.	<i>Develop culturally appropriate community outreach plan for LMS education and develop or identify culturally appropriate LMS tools and resources to be used for community</i>	<i>At a minimum, beginning within 90 days of award, conduct one Veteran-focused community outreach and one training event each subsequent quarter (for a total of 6 events for the</i>	

² Repp, K. K., Hawes, E., Rees, K. J., Lovato, C., Knapp, A., & Stauffenberg, M. (2019). Evaluation of a novel medicolegal death investigator-Based suicide surveillance system to the national violent death reporting system. *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology*, 40(3), 227-231.

	<i>outreach and training efforts</i>	<i>award period) highlighting the importance of LMS.</i>	
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1. Outcomes: Recipients are required to achieve the following outcomes during the period of performance:
 - a) Increase timeliness, accuracy, and standardization of information available about suicide deaths, and specifically Veteran suicide data.
 - b) Increase availability of recommendations of SMRCs among communities, clinicians, and policymakers.
 - c) Increase networking and cooperation between SMRCs and communities to share information from data on suicide deaths.
 - d) Develop a culturally appropriate community outreach and training plan for LMS and develop or identify culturally appropriate LMS tools and resources to be used for community outreach and training efforts.
 - e) Within 180 days of award, conduct at least one Veteran specific SMR.
 - f) At a minimum, beginning within 90 days of award, conduct one Veteran-focused community outreach and one training event each subsequent quarter (for a total of 6 events for the award period) highlighting the importance of LMS.

2. Strategies and Activities: Recipients will be required to conduct the following activities to support the outlined strategies and will identify and address barriers and challenges to implementing these activities.

a) Actions that improve availability, quality, and timeliness of suicide data.

(1) Recipients will identify suicide deaths, defined as identifying deaths of individuals that died by suicide within the recipient's specific jurisdiction, no later than 1 year following the date of death through, at a minimum, use of death certificates, as well as additional case identification methods.

(2) Recipients will implement approaches for improving quality of death records and for timely death record quality assurance checks. Quality assurance processes include working with jurisdiction vital records offices to establish processes and procedures for confirming suicide deaths within 12 months of the death and initiating allowable correction processes when applicable.

(3) Recipients will apply a consistent process and standardized criteria for prioritizing Veteran death reviews that will be fully available for SMRC review.

(4) Recipients will enter information from medical records, social service records, informant interviews, and

other relevant sources about deaths by suicide into the identified case reporting systems within 18 months of death in preparation for SMRC review.

(5) Recipients will document SMRC findings and recommendations or feedback in the identified case reporting system within 30 days of completing the review of a death.

(6) Recipients, at a minimum, will annually perform data quality assurance checks on at least 10% of relevant suicide data reviews.

b) Actions that improve multidisciplinary, population-level review of suicide deaths and documentation of recommendations for prevention. Recipients will maintain a multidisciplinary review committee, inclusive of clinical and non-clinical disciplines and organizations (e.g., public health) and military/Veteran representatives (e.g., local VA facility), as appropriate, as identified in the Team Composition Tool, a helpful outline of potential SMR members to include in your SMRC, that can be found on the SMR website at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/smr.

c) Actions that improve dissemination of, access to, and use of quality data to drive opportunities for prevention interventions.

(1) Recipients will fully utilize the identified case reporting system to support core SMRC functions, including entry of

vital records for all suicide deaths identified, entry of relevant case information into the identified case reporting system, abstract relevant data from the system for SMRC review, and entry of SMRC findings, determinations, and recommendations into the case reporting system for cases reviewed by the SMRC.

(2) Recipients will prioritize recommendations for action based on analyses of quantitative and qualitative data, other process tools, and iterative engagement with SMRC members and other clinical, public health, and community leaders within SMRC's jurisdiction.

(3) Recipients will disseminate data products and related information from analyses (e.g., reports, publications, presentations, briefs) at least once per year to internal and external audiences, including the jurisdiction's Governor's Challenge team, for informing practice, program, and policy recommendations. Recipients will be required to follow all appropriate laws and regulations regarding information dissemination.

(4) Recipients will develop and sustain bidirectional agreements with communities that increase the use of SMRC data. This may include activities and collaboration that increase the transparency of SMRC processes and data

or approaches that support dissemination of SMRC information, including prevention recommendations, in collaboration with communities.

(5) Recipients will leverage collaborations to inform practice, program, and policy recommendations.

d) Actions that lead to community education around the importance of LMS.

(1) Recipients will demonstrate a written plan for developing culturally appropriate LMS trainings and materials as well as a community outreach and training plan.

E. *Guidance for the Use of VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement Funds:* Consistent with section 303 of Division V of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328), only entities that are states, territories, or an American Indian or Alaska Native Tribe are eligible to receive funding through these CAs. However, recipients may use funds to support efforts by key counties, cities, municipalities, or other political subdivisions within their own jurisdiction with whom they wish to coordinate for local SMRC development and implementation, which must be noted in the application.

Funds may only be used to directly support the strategies and activities outlined within this NOFO. Applicants should include funding needs for relevant and appropriate staffing when applying (i.e., epidemiologists, coroners, medical examiners, review committee coordinators), services (i.e., postvention for survivors, outreach, and education), supplies, mailings, travel, training,

translation services, and material development. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consider requesting funding to support the development and delivery of a conference focused on secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and self-care for SMRC members and first responder audiences. Applicants will not be authorized to use funds for any costs identified as unallowable per 2 C.F.R. part 200, subpart E, or successor regulations.

II. Award Information

A. *Government Responsibilities and Involvement:* This NOFO announces the availability of funds for SMR-CAs. A CA is a financial assistance mechanism where VA anticipates substantial involvement with the recipient during the period of performance.

VA program involvement will include:

1. Assuring experienced VA personnel are available to provide their services and to participate in planning and development throughout all phases of this CA.
2. Assisting with establishing relationships with Federal agencies, state contacts, national organizations, or other recipients necessary for the successful completion of tasks and activities as identified in the approved scope of work.
3. Participating in the design, direction and evaluation of activities, meetings, and selection of SMR approaches and mechanisms from program initiation through the end of the award period.

4. Reviewing and approving a revised annual work plan, as needed but with a minimum of quarterly reviews to ensure milestones are being met.
 5. Providing technical assistance around established and emerging best practices in suicide prevention that would help to inform SMR efforts of the recipient.
 6. Providing guidance and approvals as appropriate to recipients in establishing, reviewing, and updating priorities for activities conducted under the auspices of the CA.
 7. Reviewing and providing feedback and approval as appropriate on materials procured or developed as well as meetings and conference agendas planned for SMR and LMS purposes.
 8. Providing opportunities for recipients to participate in Governor's Challenge national events, conferences, and communities of practice, as relevant to SMR work.
 9. Assuring SMR activities are integrated into VA programmatic and data reporting findings, specific to SMR.
- B. *Allocation of Funds:* Approximately \$10,000,000 is available for CA awards under this NOFO during year one of the initiative. The maximum allowable funding amount per eligible entity is \$300,000 under Focus Area 1 and \$575,000 under Focus Area 2. States, territories, and Tribes may apply for no more than two Focus Area 1 awards and two Focus Area 2 awards. This will allow entities that are focusing beyond a centralized state approach to develop and support implementation of multiple SMRs across their identified jurisdictions.

Entities that have or are planning to develop a centralized SMR model will only be eligible for either one Focus Area 1 award or one Focus Area 2 award. Note: VA anticipates that in most cases, any subsequent year funding will primarily target Focus Area 2 efforts due to an expectation that Focus Area 1 recipients will advance the work in to Focus Area 2 in the following year.

C. *Award Period:* Funding awarded will be for a 1-year period starting by September 30, 2024. Awards may be extended for up to one additional year.

III. Eligibility Information Award Information

A. *Eligible Applicants:* Eligible applicants must be one of the following:

1. American Indian, Alaskan Native Tribal governments.
2. A state or territory. This may include states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.
3. Note: States, territories, and Tribes may identify key counties, cities, municipalities, or other political subdivisions within their own jurisdiction with whom they wish to coordinate for local SMRC development and implementation, which must be noted in the application.

Applicants must be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) located at <https://sam.gov>, provide a unique entity identifier, and continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information as per 2 C.F.R. part 200.

B. *Cost Sharing and Matching:* Applicants are not required to submit proposals that contain matching funds.

IV. Application Submission Information

A. *Obtaining an Application Package:* Applications are located at VA's SMR website at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/smr. Applicants must submit applications electronically following instructions found at https://hmlsgrants-va.mod.udpaas.com/s_Login.jsp. Questions should be referred to VA's SMR Team at VASuicideMortalityReviewTeam@va.gov.

B. *Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)—Required.* Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 C.F.R. 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 C.F.R. 25.110(d)) is required to: (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application, (ii) Provide a valid unique entity identifier in its application, and (iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. VA may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has completed all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully completed the requirements by the time VA is ready to make a Federal award, VA may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

C. *Submission Date and Time:* Applications for the SMRC-CA must be received by 4:59 p.m. Eastern Time on July 24, 2024. Awards made for these

CAs will fund operations by September 30, 2024. Applications must arrive as a complete package. Materials arriving separately will not be included in the application package for consideration and may result in the application being rejected. Additionally, in the interest of fairness to all competing applicants, this deadline is firm as to date and hour, and VA will treat as ineligible for consideration any application received after the deadline. Applicants should take this practice into account and submit their materials early to avoid any risk of loss of eligibility brought about by unanticipated delays, computer service outages, or other delivery-related problems.

D. *Other Submission Requirements:*

1. Submissions that are late, incomplete, inconsistent with the purpose of the NOFO, unclear in defining key sections of the applications, or an incorrectly formatted application package will result in the application being rejected during threshold review. To be deemed complete, the application packages must contain all completed sections as well as all required forms and certifications. Selections will be made based on criteria described in this NOFO (see Sections V and VI below for additional details regarding application components and scoring). Applicants must submit applications electronically. Applications may not be mailed, hand carried, or sent by facsimile.
2. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. part 200, applicants that do not have a negotiated indirect cost rate (NI CRA) may request a de minimis rate, which is in accordance with the amounts set forth in 2 C.F.R. 200.414(f).

or successor regulations, apply the NICRA established with their cognizant agency, or request to negotiate an indirect cost rate with VA. As described in 2 C.F.R. 200.403, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If a negotiated indirect cost rate is chosen, this methodology, once elected, must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time.

E. *Funding Restrictions:* Funding will be awarded under this NOFO by September 30, 2024. In addition to limitations set forth in law and regulation, the following restrictions apply:

1. Funding cannot be used for construction.
2. Funding cannot be used for vehicle purchases.
3. Funding cannot be used for food for staff unless part of per diem travel.
4. Funding cannot be used for research.
5. Funding cannot be used for pre-award costs.
6. Other than for normal and recognized executive-legislative relationships, including participation by an agency or officer of a state, territorial, or Tribal government in policymaking and administrative processes within the executive branch of that government, funding may not be used for:

- a) publicity or propaganda purposes, for the preparation, distribution, or use of any material designed to support or defeat the enactment of legislation before any legislative body.
- b) the salary or expenses of any recipient, or agent acting for such recipient, related to any activity designed to influence the enactment of legislation, appropriations, regulation, administrative action, or Executive order proposed or pending before any legislative body.

V. Application and Scoring Information

Applicants must include all required documents in their application submission.

Submission of a late, incomplete, inconsistent, unclear, or incorrectly formatted application package will result in the application being rejected.

VA will use the following criteria to score applicants.

***Subsection A:* Background, Qualifications, Experience, and Past Performance of Applicant (15 points)**

An organizational capacity statement must clearly demonstrate the applicant has the necessary skills and relevant experience to successfully implement the strategies and activities outlined in a Logic Model (described in Subsection B, below) and to manage a Federal award. Applicants should demonstrate the required skills, including program planning, performance monitoring, financial reporting, and budget management, as well as administration and personnel management.

***Subsection B:* Logic Model and Program Vision (15 points)**

The applicant must submit a Logic Model relevant to the applicant's unique geographic and population context. Applicants may either use the logic model(s) presented in this NOFO (see Section I, above) as the starting point or the logic model template provided. A narrative that describes the vision for the program, the local context for where the program will be implemented (e.g., descriptions of population(s) within the jurisdiction, identification of disparities in suicide and mental health outcomes in the jurisdiction based on geography, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, insurance type, preferred language, or other relevant factors), existing Veteran-specific suicide mortality activities, as outlined in focus area 1 and 2, existing relationship with Governor's and Mayor's Challenge team(s), as well as each of the elements of the logic model in greater detail.

Subsection C: SMRC Implementation (25 points)

For Focus Area 1 applicants, this should include descriptions of the current death investigation system for the applicant's jurisdiction, how the applicant will develop relationships with the local death investigation system, how the applicant will work to identify populations of focus for mortality reviews (which, at a minimum, must include Veterans), how the applicants will develop an understanding of existing mortality review efforts, how the applicant will work to establish an SMRC, and develop education around LMS for the community.

For Focus Area 2 applicants, this should include descriptions of the current death investigation system for the applicant's jurisdiction, processes for comprehensively identifying suicide deaths of a specific jurisdiction, as well as processes for operationalization and use of SMR, including analysis and dissemination of findings.

Applicants must provide clear, specific, and referenced descriptions of the applicant's

access to clinical and non-clinical records and identify strategies to access new required data sources with solutions to address barriers to access. Applicants must describe their approach for managing and maintaining a committee inclusive of membership across clinical and non-clinical domains.

Subsection D: Work Plan and Staffing (35 points)

Applicants must provide a work plan that includes a description of specific tasks that are reasonable and feasible with realistic completion dates and identifies the responsible person(s). Work plans must detail the implementation of strategies leading to attainment of the proposed objectives and achieve the intended program outcomes. Work plans should also include a planned meeting between the recipient and VA's CA liaison to be held every other month. Work plans should also include participation in a mandatory 3-day VA-SAMHSA led conference focused on SMR. For Focus Area 2, applicants must also demonstrate by 180 days of award, that Veteran-specific SMRs are underway and document how they intend to reach this milestone. All applicants must submit a staffing plan and project management structure that will be sufficient to achieve the project outcomes and clearly defines staff and others' roles.

Subsection E: Area linkages and relations (10 points)

Applicants must discuss activities that include convening and connecting multi-sector organizations, identifying populations (including Veterans) disproportionately affected with increased risk of suicide, identifying gaps in existing programs, and identifying opportunities to strengthen existing collaborations. Applicant should describe in the narrative how collaboration with the Governor's Challenge team will assist in the implementation on SMRC work.

Subsection F: Certifications and Required Documentation (0 points)

Focus Area 2 Applicants must submit the required documentation for at least one of the following items A-E listed below:

- A. State Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices. Where the State Medical Examiner/Coroner Office is not the applicant, applicants must include a memorandum of support with the State Medical Examiner or Coroner Office(s). This memorandum should detail the relationship between the applicant and the state or jurisdictional Medical Examiner/Coroner offices. This memorandum of support, at a minimum, should outline the level of access to autopsy, next of kin interview and death scene investigation reports the applicant has or will have, and the participation level of medical examiners, coroners, and forensic pathologists in SMRC processes. Recipients should include memorandums of agreement or understanding, Data Use Agreements, and letters of support, as appropriate.
- B. Authorities and Protections. Applicants must submit evidence that provides SMRC authority to access clinical and non-clinical records and confidentiality protection of data collected, proceedings, and activities. Evidence includes state statutes, regulations, executive orders, or a letter from the applicant's legal authority documenting these authorities and protections.
- C. State Vital Records Offices. Applicants must submit a memorandum of support that ensures access to death certificates and key identifiers. Death certificates that include identifiers (e.g., names, locations, dates) are crucial to identifying suicide deaths. This memorandum of support should outline the level

of access (i.e., real-time electronic access; monthly data sets, etc.) to vital records the applicant has, or will have at the time of award, and current relevant vital statistics data quality assurance and improvement initiatives.

D. State Hospital Associations. Applicants must submit a memorandum of support with state hospital associations. This memorandum of support should outline acknowledgement by the State Hospital Association that SMRC is a functioning body within the state and can request access to hospital records for the purposes of the SMRC and the level of access to identified hospital discharge data (e.g., real-time electronic access; monthly data sets, etc.) the applicant has or will have at the time of award for the purposes of increasing the identification of suicide deaths and locations of relevant medical records.

E. State Violent Death Reporting System. Applicants must submit a memorandum of support with the State Violent Death Reporting System. This memorandum of support should outline acknowledgement by the State Violent Death Reporting System authority that SMRC is a functioning body within the state and can request access to records for the purposes of the SMRC.

The Exhibit section must include an organizational chart as Exhibit I, personnel resumes as Exhibit II, and an applicant budget, to be submitted in a Microsoft Excel file using the template provided in the application (https://hmlsgrants-va.mod.udpaas.com/s_Login.jsp) as Exhibit III. The budget submission must include: 1) annual budget containing a proposed quarterly budget for the period and 2) a budget narrative, which provides a description of each of the line items contained in the

application. Failure to submit the budget will disqualify the applicant from further consideration. Optional letters of support and memorandums of understanding from the Governor's Challenge team in the applicant's State/jurisdiction are strongly encouraged.

VI. Review and Selection Process

A. Review Process: Based on the application criteria described above, applications will be divided into two groups, Focus Area 1 and Focus Area 2. Applications will be scored by a VA review committee. The review committee will be trained in understanding the program's goals, the requirements of the NOFO and the prescribed scoring rubric and will follow uniform guidance on application reviews (pursuant to 2 C.F.R. part 200). SMR-CA scoring criteria can be viewed in this NOFO and at XX.

B. Application Selection: VA will only score applicants who meet the following threshold requirements:

1. Applicant must be an eligible entity.
2. Application must be filed within the time established in the NOFO, and any additional information or documentation VA requests must be provided within the time frame VA establishes.
3. Application must be completed in all parts, including the proposed budget.
4. Activities for which the funding is requested must be eligible for funding.

5. Applicant must not have an outstanding obligation to the Federal Government that is in arrears and does not have an overdue or unsatisfactory response to an audit.
6. Applicant must not be in default by failing to meet the requirements for any previous Federal assistance.

If these threshold requirements are not met, VA will deem applicants to be ineligible for further consideration.

VA will use the ranked scores of applicants pursuant to the areas and maximum point values described in Section V of this NOFO as the primary basis for selection. VA will rank those applicants who score at least 60 cumulative points and receive at least 1 point under each of the categories: (a) Background, Qualifications, Experience, and Past Performance of Applicant; (b) Logic Model and Program Vision; (c) SMRC Implementation; (d) Work Plan and Staffing; (e) Area Linkages and Relations; and (f) Certifications and Required Documentation.

The applicants will be ranked in order from highest to lowest in each Focus Area. The highest rated applications for each Focus Area will receive an award. To ensure maximum impact of the awards for furthering the mission of preventing and decreasing Veteran suicide, VA may further prioritize awards based on Veteran populations within the jurisdiction of states, territories, or Tribal entities. VA may also prioritize awards to applicants that intend to focus on SMR activities in rural communities, territories, or Tribal lands. The maximum number of fully awarded Focus Area 2 CAs will not exceed 17 based on the current \$10 million available for funding.

VII. Award Administration Information

- A. *Award Notices:* Although subject to change, VA expects to announce funding awards in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2024. VA reserves the right in any year to make adjustments (e.g., to funding levels) as needed within the intent of the NOFO based on a variety of factors, including the availability of funding. The initial announcement of awards will be made via a news release posted on VA's SMR website at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/smr. VA will concurrently notify both successful and unsuccessful applicants. Only a CA with a VA signature is evidence of an award and is an authorizing document allowing costs to be incurred against the award. Other notices, letters, or announcements are not authorizing documents. The CA includes the terms and conditions of the award and must be signed by the entity and VA to be legally binding.
- B. *Administrative and National Policy Requirements:* VA places great emphasis on responsibility and accountability. VA has procedures in place to monitor cooperative agreements. All applicants selected in response to this NOFO must agree to meet applicable inspection standards outlined in the CA. The recipients will be required to deliver all data, meaning products such as, but not limited to, suicide prevention recommendations, reports, and training, outreach, and presentation materials, first produced under the CA with unlimited rights, in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.315(d) to VA. The other provisions in 2 C.F.R. § 200.315 shall also apply.
- C. *Reporting:* Applicants should be aware of the following:

1. Upon executing a CA with VA, VA's Suicide Prevention Program Office will provide a liaison to recipients. The liaison will provide oversight and monitor the use of funds.
 2. Monitoring will also include having recipients submitting periodic and annual financial and performance reports in accordance with 2 C.F.R. part 200. Performance reports submitted quarterly or semi quarterly are due no later than 30 calendar days after the reporting period per 2 C.F.R. 200.329(c)(1) (or successor regulations). Performance reports submitted annually are due no later than 90 calendar days after the reporting period pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.329(c)(1). The recipients must submit their final report no later than 120 calendar days after the conclusion of the period of performance per 2 C.F.R. 200.344(b) (or successor regulations). The recipient will be expected to demonstrate adherence to the proposed program concept, as described in the recipient's application.
 3. Entities receiving more than \$500,000 in awards must adhere to all post award reporting requirements reflected in 2 C.F.R. part 200, Appendix XII.
- D. *Payment to Recipients:* Recipients will receive payments electronically through the HHS Payment Management System. Recipients will have the ability to request payments as frequently as they choose. Recipients are expected to adhere to 2 C.F.R. part 200.303 and must have internal controls in place to ensure funding is allocated as approved for the full duration of the CA period of performance, to the extent possible.

VIII. Program Monitoring and Compliance

- A. The purpose of program monitoring and compliance is to ensure progress is being made towards achieving program goals and is in line with Federal requirements.
- B. As part of the program monitoring and compliance, recipients must input data monthly (at a minimum) into VA's web-based management system. VA will ensure recipients have access to the data they need to gather and summarize program impacts and lessons learned on the implementation of the program criteria.
- C. Monitoring and compliance activities may include:
 1. Regular (e.g., approximately every 8 weeks) virtual meetings with the recipient.
 2. Regular review of financial data and reporting.
 3. Reviewing recipient annual priority performance measures.
 4. Reviewing recipient annual work plans and annual progress reports.
 5. Virtual or in-person observations of SMRC processes.
 6. Discussion and observation of an SMRC meeting during a technical assistance site visit.
 7. VA examinations of de-identified recipient case-reporting data (Focus Area 2 only) on a routine basis.
 8. VA has the right, at all reasonable times, to make onsite visits to all recipient locations and have virtual meetings where a recipient is using CA

funds to review the recipient's accomplishments and management control systems to determine compliance with CA provisions.

9. VA reserves the right to take corrective action if recipients are not compliant with the agreed upon terms and conditions of their CA or any Federal regulation pertaining to the financial management and oversight of award funding.

VA will provide training and technical assistance and will coordinate with subject matter experts to provide various trainings including the use of measures and metrics required for this program.

Signing Authority

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, or designee, approved this document and authorized the undersigned to sign and submit the document to the Office of the Federal Register for publication electronically as an official document of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Denis McDonough, Department of Veterans Affairs, approved this document for publication.



Denis McDonough
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs

Date 6/20/24