







Medical Sharing/Affiliate Office (MSO) Academic Affiliate Contracting Forums

MSO Strategic Action Plan

Forum Overview

In July and August 2012, the VHA MSO and VA's Office of Acquisition & Logistics hosted a series of three Academic Affiliate Forums across the country to discuss contracting issues – July 19th in Boston, MA, by Service Area Organization (SAO East); August 2nd in Seattle, WA (SAO West); and August 9th in St. Louis, MO (SAO Central).

The purpose of these forums was to:

-  Share perspectives on service provision and associated challenges
-  Enhance awareness about processes, procedures, and tools that will help make the contracting process faster and easier for all parties
-  Develop ideas for addressing key challenges
-  Identify a clear path for follow-up





The forum executive summary identified the following areas of concern: Planning, Contracting Process, Contracting Terms, Pricing, Education and Awareness

The recommendation from the forum was to convene Strategic Working Groups to help address some of the issues that were identified at the Forums such as:

- Feasibility of umbrella contracts
- Providing benefits to staff under the eighths program
- How to include profit in contracts
- Rewrite of or new policies emerging from the rewrite of Directive 1663
- Identifying “reusable” fringe rates across different federal agencies

Strategic Action Plan

MSO evaluated the Academic Affiliate Forums Summary and Analysis report provided by Ambit and other information in order to establish an operational plan forward in response to the areas of concern identified in the Affiliate Forums. MSO considered the following information in development of the strategic action plan:

-  Academic Affiliate Forums Summary and Analysis report provided by Ambit
-  Existing and deployed MSO and VHA initiatives
-  VA OIG Reports
-  Feedback from internal stakeholders involved in the affiliate contract process (i.e. Contracting Officers)

1. **Establish areas of concern to be addressed/ scope for strategic work groups-**The following topics were identified for strategic workgroups:

- ✚ Affiliate Pricing (standardized format, profit, fringe rates & reimbursement methodology)
- ✚ Contract Performance Terms (Quality Assurance/Patient Care Standards/Credentialing & Privileging)
- ✚ Contract Policy/Information Security (Policy process, Information security, dual appointments, fee basis)
- ✚ Stakeholder Training (Affiliate tools, target topics on current areas of concern, COR, resources)

Strategic Work Group	Workgroup Lead	Membership
Affiliate Pricing (standardized format, profit, fringe rates & reimbursement methodology)	Brian Vasbinder, MSO Procurement Analyst (Price Analyst)	MSO Lead Negotiators VA OIG Representative OAA Representative CO/COR Representative(s) Affiliate Representative(s)
Contract Performance Terms (Quality Assurance/Patient Care Standards/Credentialing & Privileging)	Joanna Antolakis, MSO West Technical Advisor	MSO Technical Advisors SAO Technical Advisors PCS Representative Legal Representative Affiliate Representative(s)
Contract Policy/Information Security (Policy process, Information security, dual appointments, fee basis)	Sandra Hallmark, Deputy Director MSO	VHA Policy Director MSO/SAO Technical Advisors Legal Representative (Bill Korth and Dennis Kulish) OAA Representative - Dr Brannen Affiliate Representative(s)
Stakeholder Training (Affiliate tools, target topics on current areas of concern, COR, resources)	Caroline Peabody, MSO Training Officer	MSO Lead Negotiators OAA Representative Affiliate Representative(s) CO/COR Representative SAO Representative NCO Representative

Strategic Working Group #1: Affiliate Pricing

Objective(s)	Tasks/ Activities	Potential Approach
Develop standardized affiliate guidance and templates for pricing information required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Chart of Allowable and unallowable cost elements* Develop additional pricing templates and guides Determine documentation from affiliate needed during Acquisition Planning (RFI, etc). Publish guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compile materials from Forums and update/revise as needed. 2. Add new items – at least the SOPs/sample documents requested in action items. 3. Distribute these as a package to Forum Attendees and Contracting Staff, and post or distribute to all Affiliates – perhaps through a webinar.
Develop a consensus position/ point-of-view for all contracting operations regarding profit to promote more consistency across contracts.*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and/or determine existing policy for approach to profit in affiliate contracts. Establish consistent approach to profit in affiliate contracts. Publish findings/guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send a request to COs to provide examples of how profit has been reflected in Affiliate contracts. 2. Analyze current approach to profit employed in existing VA/Affiliate contracts against existing policy. 3. Convene an Affiliate working group to get additional perspective on the issue. 4. Assess these approaches against current policy. 5. Convene a small VHA working group (MSO, Office of Academic Affairs [OAA], OIG) to develop a consistent approach. 6. Potentially reconvene working group (with Affiliates) to get initial reactions/feedback. 7. Assess feedback, make final determinations, document approach, get approvals, and publish.
Review VA's fringe rate policy and determine whether or not some parts of fringe rates that Affiliates have used for work with other agencies can be used for its work with VA. (See page 13 of the Boston report for more information). -This Item will be in collaboration with policy group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and/or determine existing policy for addressing fringe rates in affiliate contracts. Establish consistent approach to fringe in affiliate contracts. Publish findings/guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene internal working group to review and assess current policy. 2. Convene Affiliate working group to identify specific examples of fringe rate issues to identify other agencies that they work with frequently for comparison. 3. Assess these findings against fringe rates in current Affiliate contracts. 4. Engage other agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in understanding their fringe policies. 5. Determine overlap or acceptability of other agency approaches. 6. Prepare findings, get approvals and distribute information to Affiliates. (Perhaps share with Affiliate working group first to get initial reactions/feedback).
Review the 'per physician day rate' language for use in contracts, because the current pay model may treat cost services as fixed price. *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish consistent approach to physician pay approaches using FTE reimbursement methods. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene internal working group to assess the issue. 2. Determine legal requirements and areas that may be flexible in terms of adjusting how contracts are managed. 3. Develop option(s) for managing contracts differently. 4. Vet option(s) with Affiliates and with OIG to get feedback. 5. Publish final approach and issue-appropriate guidance to Affiliates and to COs to ensure the new approach is implemented consistently.

*Action item identified in Affiliate Forums

Strategic Working Group #2: Contract Performance Terms
(Quality Assurance/Patient Care Standards/Credentialing and Privileging)

Objective(s)	Tasks/ Activities	Potential Approach
Develop standardized affiliate guidance and templates for affiliate Quality Assurance Surveillance Plan (QASP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop/Provide Sample QASP and QASP guidance for affiliate type contracts. * Publish guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compile materials from Forums and update/revise as needed. 2. Distribute to Forum Attendees and Contracting Staff, and post or distribute to all Affiliates.
Provide more consistency in terms of performance references in contracts, if possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and/or determine existing performance language/approach to standards in affiliate contracts. Identify possibility for consistent language regarding performance in affiliate contracts. Publish findings/guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review a variety of performance-related references in contracts. 2. Determine if there is a pattern or standard language for different types of services. 3. Provide a package of potential language that could be used or that VA would like to encourage. 4. Provide the package to Affiliates and perhaps review and announce through a Webinar.

***Action item identified in Affiliate Forums**

NOTES: In addition to the aforementioned items the government could do, Affiliates at the Forums also noted two things that they could do that would also improve the contracting process. These included having an Affiliate staff member who was well trained in the FAR so they could understand and “speak the same language” as VA Contracting staff. They also noted that providing a single point of contact at the Affiliate for all VA contracts had proved valuable to those who had implemented it.

Strategic Working Group #3: Contract Policy/Information Security		
Objective(s)	Tasks/ Activities	Potential Approach
Develop path to achieving optimum period of performance contracts/ determine feasibility of umbrella type contract implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strategies to move healthcare contracts to optimum period of performance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet internally to assess feasibility of umbrella type. * 2. Perhaps engage Affiliates in identifying feasibility of when and how umbrella contracts would be most useful. 3. Conduct an assessment at the SAO level of the status of all Affiliate contracts to understand where each one is in its lifecycle. <i>Note: At least one SAO representative indicated at a forum that they are in the process of doing this, and this assessment may provide a tremendous benefit to VA and to the Affiliates in terms of planning.</i>
Improve Affiliate stakeholder engagement in policy development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strategies to engage Affiliate partners early in the policy development process. <i>Note: Affiliates may be able to help increase VA awareness of potential issues. This could also include engaging them in review of standard contract clauses under consideration.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When policies need to be revised or when new policies need to be developed, determine whether Affiliate input would enhance these policies. 2. If so, determine current outreach mechanisms already in place to use, identify other appropriate avenues for engagement – Federal Register Notice and comment, Webinar, Working Group, Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) team, etc. 3. Conduct outreach in a very preliminary way – asking for input about themes, ideas concepts, things to avoid, etc. that do not commit VA to a particular path. 4. Be clear about how input will be used and how decisions will ultimately be made. 5. Share progress and drafts where possible before announcing final new policies.
Increase opportunities/ improve conditions for shared faculty/dual appointments with affiliates*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess conditions for dual appointments/ shared faculty with regard to benefits, OIG concerns, eights program and recruitment challenges. Develop improvement strategies. Publish findings/guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene internal working group, including representation from Human Resources (HR), to review and assess current policy. 2. Convene Affiliate working group to identify specific examples of fringe benefit issues, and summarize fringe benefits for Affiliates. 3. Determine the discrepancies between VA and Affiliate fringe benefits. 4. Determine the risk severity of hiring due to the lack of comparability of fringe benefits. 5. Come up with solutions to the discrepancy such as 'offsetting' to allow salaries to increase to compensate for lack of comparability of benefits or other ways to tackle in order to improve VA's ability to hire physicians. Share and receive affiliate feedback. 6. Prepare findings, get approvals and distribute information to Affiliates.
Determine feasibility of fee basis for off-site work. *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the use of fee-basis for off-site work – referrals under Title 38 U.S.C. 1703 count as a referring service 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene internal working group to assess the issue. 2. Determine potential approaches based on legal restrictions. 3. Develop potential option(s). 4. Vet option(s) with Affiliates and with OIG to get feedback. 5. Publish final approach and issue-appropriate guidance to Affiliates and to COs to ensure the new approach is implemented consistently.

*Action item identified in Affiliate Forums

Strategic Working Group #4: Stakeholder Training

Objective(s)	Tasks/ Activities	Potential Approach
Improve Affiliate understanding of Acquisition planning process/activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop acquisition planning guide for affiliates for activities (including roles and responsibilities) * Publish guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Compile and assess materials from Forums Assess existing HCR planning guide for potential modification for affiliate stakeholders. Distribute these as a package to Affiliates and to Contracting Staff, perhaps as part of the guidance package identified previously.
Identify training opportunities for Affiliate stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share a list of contracting, contracting policy, and regulation courses with Affiliates and assess joint training opportunities. * 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Work with training staff to develop course lists/descriptions. Send list to Affiliates for their information making it clear whether/which courses are open to them. OPTIONAL – Convene group of Affiliates to discuss joint training opportunities/topics (e.g., develop a potential joint training curriculum). Develop training implementation plan based on joint training curriculum.
Increase competency of CORs through training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a more tailored training course for CORs. <p><i>Note: More tailored than COR certification courses.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have a conference call or send out email to CORs to identify training needs. Assess current courses to identify gaps. Develop new course material as necessary. Announce, schedule and deliver courses.
Provide target training to Affiliate stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold brief webinars focused on specific topics (e.g., MSO structure and roles and responsibilities). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Determine webinar service provider, event design, date/time, discussion topics, and speakers. Gather an invite distribution list of Affiliate contact emails. Develop webinar follow-up and feedback method.

*Action item identified in Affiliate Forums